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Barbora Horáková Joly
Martinů's Correspondence
Tomáš Šenkyřík
Vladimír Tichý

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DEAR READERS,

we greet you from these pages as spring finally arrives in our Prague offices, and with it a new issue of Czech Music Quarterly. It contains not only another CD in our Composer Portraits series (the eighteenth, now!), all of which are available on our Bandcamp page, too, but also an interview with Czech superstar opera director Barbora Horáková Joly and another conversation with one of the principal exponents of field recording and acoustic ecology in Czechia, Tomáš Šenkyřík. The rest of the texts turn towards the past: a look back at the career of a leading Czech music theorist, an overview of the massive editorial project that is the collected Bohuslav Martinů correspondence, and an introduction to Ludwig Grünberger, a relatively unknown Jewish composer of the 19th century. Wherever you might be reading these texts, we hope they prove inspiring and musical to your ears.

Wishing you a pleasant spring,
Ian Mikyska
deputy editor-in-chief

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THERE IS NOTHING MORE EXHAUSTING THAN HALF-HEARTED WORK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BARBORA HORÁKOVÁ JOLY

Theatre director Barbora Horáková Joly was born in Prague and now lives in the Swiss city of Biel. She knows the theatre from inside out: she has been an orchestral musician, a singer, an assistant director, a stagehand, a stage manager, and a stage designer. She studied singing in Basel and Geneva before deciding to exchange a singing career for one in stage directing, which led her to study at the Bayerische Theaterakademie August Everding in Munich. Today, she is among the most successful and sought-after opera directors in the world. She regularly collaborates with the National Theatre in Prague, where she has recently presented new productions of *Rigoletto* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Last season, she directed *Lear* by the contemporary German composer Aribert Reimann and will return to the State Opera in May 2027 with a new production of Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*.

Do you consider yourself a woman who has managed to break through in a male-dominated world?

My perspective has always been that what matters are my work, my inspiration, and my ideas – not my gender. However, in theatres, you encounter challenges for which you must be better prepared as a woman. Firstly, female directors are paid less than their male counterparts – and this is true everywhere. When I worked as an assistant director, I observed how directors communicated with the technical staff. There is a deeply ingrained belief that men are technically minded, while women cannot understand theatre plans. As a woman, you have to work twice as hard to prove that you comprehend matters at the same level.

I assume that, given your experience as a set designer, this did not pose a problem.

Perhaps not this particular issue, but there are other examples, too. For male directors, it is usually sufficient to raise their voice and establish order but when



PHOTO: WIENER STAATSOOPER

a female director does the same, she is often perceived as hysterical. That is why I have learned to rephrase certain things. Nevertheless, I don't want it to seem as though I am frustrated – after all, I am one of the few female directors in the world in this position.

Yet one is always aware – and not only in the world of opera – that inequality exists...

Yes, men generally get away with more. But I believe that men cannot get by without women, and vice versa. Many institutions have hired me because I am a woman, implying that I was expected to shape a scene from a female perspective. Yet this viewpoint pigeonholes me into a category I am not comfortable in. I feel that men can direct many feminist themes more effectively than women. Should only LGBTQ+ directors approach *La Cage aux Folles* simply because it directly concerns them? I want to be hired for what I can do, not because of the introduction of gender quotas. The initiatives at some theatres to base their seasonal programming solely on inviting female directors seem to me to be superficial and calculating.

Why are there so few female stage directors in opera?

In this profession, it is often assumed that men automatically occupy these positions, while women are considered exceptions. Until this changes, the situation will remain the same. This is why I believe reason and balance are two essential qualities in this matter. A woman can be just as capable a set designer or stage director as a man. It is always about perspective and creative invention.

Are you happy to be a director?

I am so far, I enjoy the work. It is true in every profession that the better you are, the more friends and enemies you have, and this is especially true in directing. Even as a little girl, I would do a hundred things at once. Later, as a student, I earned some extra money tending bars, which I enjoyed very much. After all, there is much more to life than theatre directing. I feel fortunate not to be dependent on it.

Today, we often hear about a director's signature – how would you describe yours?

It is important to me that the singers truly feel their characters, as the narratives in opera are profoundly powerful. The stage, the lighting, the costumes – these are all supplementary. My foundation lies in a tradition where theatre can be produced with a single table and two chairs, with everything else left to the actors. On a large operatic stage, the set design should complement the narrative, not create it. However, this approach undoubtedly requires greater courage. The director must not hide behind a mask – both the director and the singers must open themselves to one another. Only then is the emotion genuine. Consequently, I base my work on acting and emotion. I enjoy exploring Lynchian worlds-within-worlds, creating parallel, dreamlike realms on stage. With some productions, people tell me they need to see it again, as it is impossible to take it all in at once...

You can recognise some directors as soon as the curtain rises on the very first scene. Is this the case for you as well?

I have a bit of a problem with this thesis, as we often confuse a director's signature with a visual style, such as a uniform white set design. However, this is not really the mark of an author. That lies primarily in how the director interprets the narrative, which situations they emphasise, and how they work with the singers. I do not believe it constitutes a "signature" if you keep working with the same stage designer and creating similar visual worlds. I enjoy working with different people – I have several teams, each of which brings a distinct aesthetic. Yet it is clear from the result that this is my production, thanks to how I interpret the characters and how I have them act. Perhaps that is why I am invited to work on contemporary pieces. The composers want the characters to truly come to life, to breathe on stage, rather than be confined within beautiful or historical set pieces.

Who should have the final say: the director or the conductor?

The eternal debate. I believe the best results are achieved when they work together and one respects the other. But this is not always the case – sometimes, conductors can be dictatorial, and then it becomes a struggle.

What is the most complex aspect of this kind of collaboration?

I enjoy blending various styles. In addition to classical musicians, I work with DJs, underground musicians... It has to be well done and balanced; otherwise, there is a risk of producing a mere mishmash of elements. When creating something entirely new, a reliable and strong partner is essential.

You originally studied voice and only later chose to pursue directing. Did you not enjoy being a singer?

I didn't enjoy it, and it did not fulfil me. It is also an extremely demanding profession; singers always have to be cautious, as they struggle with allergies and the weather. It takes a toll on one's mental state, since the voice and the mind are powerfully connected. That would be too restrictive for me. When I studied in Basel, it was the first time I saw opera being done in a modern manner. There was a strong emphasis on non-singing classes: we were taught improvisation, dramaturgy, song analysis, and choreography, among other subjects. I was interested in everything and could not choose a specialisation. That is partly why I have four university degrees (*laughs*). In any case, they opened my eyes, and I fell in love with the entire world of theatre, not just opera. Everything began to fall into place. I understood where a character begins and ends, and I collaborated with drama directors. That was when I decided I wanted to do more than just sing.

I assume it's an advantage for a director to have an understanding of the singers' craft.

Certainly, I understand music better than most directors. However, an even greater advantage is knowing the theatre inside out. I used to play in the orchestra, I've sung on stage, I've been an assistant director, stagehand, stage manager, and a composer of incidental music for drama, I've produced videos and designed sets... When you experience the theatre from the basement to the roof, you can get into the flow of things much more quickly.



PHOTO: WIENER STAATSOBER / SOFIA VARGAIOVA



The Magic Flute at the Vienna State Opera

How is an opera production created? Do you propose projects to theatres, or are you approached to stage a specific piece?

It is generally one of two options: either the theatre plans to stage a particular piece and approaches a director they have selected, or they simply choose a director first, and then we go through the selection process together. Sometimes I am also asked what I would like to do – in any case, the selection is always the result of a dialogue between partners and takes place within the context of the season's programming.

When the project is confirmed, I begin with the music. The music is key – it evokes the initial emotions and meanings. Only then do I read the libretto and develop a dramaturgical outline with which I can identify. The narrative starts to take shape when I focus on the characters, their strengths and weaknesses, and create a new world with them – usually around two years before the premiere.



PHOTO: SERGHEI GHERCIU

*Rigoletto
at the National Theatre
in Prague*

And then you assemble a creative team?

I have a group of collaborators with whom I have worked for years. I choose the team based on the concept. We then spend several days developing the stage model and searching for the shape of the performance. The artistic management at the theatre usually respects our vision; more often, it is the budget that imposes limitations. This is followed by a technical rehearsal and four to six weeks of rehearsals. Only once the performers are on stage can you truly see how the singers work. I take care to find a natural form of acting – emotions must come from within; they cannot be forced. The costumes are produced concurrently, with the resultant form of the production gradually taking shape.

Many singers, directors, and conductors in Czechia feel that they are regarded as cheap labour in Western theatres. What is your opinion?

This model is not unique and does not pertain solely to opera or classical music – it is, regrettably, part of a broader social context. Just as people from countries to the east work in Czechia, Ukrainians, for example, we seek employment in Norway, Germany, or France, where we are often viewed in a similar way – as a cheaper alternative. Furthermore, institutions abroad are well aware of the financial conditions offered by Czech theatres. When they offer our artists slightly better terms, it is difficult to refuse such an opportunity. This often results in theatres reducing their budgets, as they know they can still attract high-quality artists from Central and Eastern Europe. The world remains divided into East and West, albeit only latently. On the other hand, I would like to emphasise that despite these inequalities, one has the freedom and opportunity to work one's way up, find one's own voice, and establish oneself.

*Two years ago, you directed *The Magic Flute* at the Vienna State Opera, which received a very positive response. What are your memories of it?*

The Magic Flute is considered a national treasure in Vienna, so I was, of course, concerned about the reactions. The premiere took place on Mozart's birthday, a major holiday



PHOTO: PETR NEUBERT 2x

This spread: Lear at the State Opera in Prague

in Vienna. However, my fears were dispelled when I observed the excellent level of communication between the various sections of the theatre. I don't mean to boast, but I was told that Vienna had not seen a premiere like that in thirty years. What's more, Vienna and La Scala in Milan are supposedly the last two opera houses where you can still hire a "booing clique". In this case, apparently, they had to return their wages, as there was no booing at the end. I don't know if this is true, but it made me happy.

Your Lear was a breath of fresh air in last year's season at the State Opera in Prague. Could you share some memories of this experience as well?

That production of *Lear* was crucial for me – perhaps my most raw work to date. I emphasised the king's inner world and the Shakespearean question concerning the end of the stage illusion and the beginning of real life. Aribert Reimann's music is very intense, full of percussive energy and existential depth – and also part of the reason behind my deep admiration for the singers, who learned their demanding parts in record time.

For me, *Lear* is a work about decay – of the state, the family, and the individual. The central theme is old age and decline. I understand Lear's fatal decision



as the result of a progressive loss of judgement. His behaviour is marked by symptoms of neurodegenerative disease, specifically dementia. Shakespeare's portrayal of the degradation of personality is, I believe, exceptionally accurate. The storm scene with Edgar is then the core of the opera: all that remains is a person stripped of all masks, raising the question of what it means to be. The production thus blurs the boundaries between the stage and real life. In *Lear*, I was primarily interested in depicting destruction: the decline of both the individual and society. Ageing itself is a process of gradual dissolution; we lose our memory, orientation, and certainty. This can occur within our minds but also externally, across our social systems. I incorporated this motif into the stage design. We begin in a palace, with the walls gradually crumbling and structures disappearing, until only the human being remains – and then he, too, falls apart.

I wanted the space to reflect this decay. We did not require anything beyond what the theatre itself offers – lighting and simple technology. I used old theatre lamps, as their light has a unique quality: warmth and a gentle imperfection that cannot be replicated by modern systems. Even as a student, light was a profound fascination for me. I believe that if you work solely with a chair and lighting, you can learn a great deal – how to create atmosphere, tension, and poetry without superfluous effects.

*What did you think about the responses to *Lear*?*

I do not actively seek out reviews, nor do I read them unless they come to me directly. This is not because I am indifferent to them, but because I have confidence in my work and am best placed to judge whether a production was successful. The most important feedback for me comes from the audience's responses – especially from those who do not regularly attend opera performances. When someone without "operatic

experiences” leaves my show moved and understands the production, that is what truly matters to me. Equally important is my collaboration with the singers – whether they genuinely understand what we are trying to communicate to the audience. This dialogue has to work in order for the idea to resonate and be transmitted.

I am often saddened by the fact that some critics do not know my conception in detail and are not even interested in it. I spend months working on my characters, trying to understand their inner motivations. I then build my concept on this foundation. When someone superficially dismisses my conception without taking an interest in what lies behind it, I find it stupid.

And yet, most opera librettos are not exactly based on complex narratives...

Yes and no – operatic characters are not merely models or superficial figures. Take the character of Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*: he is no caricature of power; he is a complex individual with his own inner conflicts. An ageing man who has spent most of his life beside a frigid, infertile woman who drowns her sorrows in alcohol. Then a young girl appears, and the Count is not only capable of igniting tender feelings and pure emotion in his soul, but he is even able to justify this relationship. Lorenzo Da Ponte knew exactly what he was writing about. The great works possess many layers that must be interpreted with sensitivity and an understanding of the context.

I would like to touch on one more recent production: Sergei Prokofiev's Fiery Angel in Bremen.

This was powerful work. I am very pleased that the lead protagonist received the Kammersängerin award for it – similarly, Petra Alvarez Šimková was honoured with a Thálie Award for our production of *Lear*. It seems I am drawn to dramatic female characters experiencing great inner turmoil. The suffering, lyrical heroines of the classical repertoire, on the other hand, do not suit me as well. In Bremen, I chose to avoid a historical setting – this was not about the world of knights, but rather a contemporary drama. I set the story in a hotel, where the protagonist's trauma is gradually uncovered: abuse and epilepsy (which those around her interpret as possession). I wanted the brutality of the music to come through, particularly the percussion instruments, which reflect the demon within her mind. The resulting production was raw, both musically and directorially – it was almost painfully direct.

Let's move on to Dialogues of the Carmelites and its two essential challenges: the dialogical form and the interrupted structure. How do you approach these two elements?

Dialogues of the Carmelites always demand a high degree of concentration. The work is challenging in its combination of music and drama – the dialogues must be genuinely experienced; otherwise, the characters lose their depth. I feel that, at first glance, some motivations are insufficiently developed: Why does Blanche run away from home? Why does she enter a convent? What is happening offstage? The opera primarily concerns the fear experienced by all the characters. Take Blanche – at the beginning, she experiences a truly existential fear of the chaos and violence outside. However, her opening aria is often staged as if she has just returned from a walk in the park, making her seem almost joyful, when in reality, she is escaping turmoil. Her relationship with her brother is strong but also toxic; they are each other's only support. She is scared

of the world; he is scared of life without her. Blanche enters the convent believing that the fear will disappear there, but she gradually discovers it is present within this community too. The convent's Mother Superior dies in fear, without the certainty of faith. The work asks whether faith can be born of fear – and suggests that it can, through interpersonal relationships. Faith is not born as an abstract idea – it is born between people, in dialogue, through sharing. An energy that cannot be precisely named is created. It is this space between the characters that I consider the core of the piece – the power of sisterhood, with women giving each other courage and hope.

The opera is composed of twelve individual scenes, which disrupts the continuity of the narrative. How do you intend to achieve unity; prevent the work from falling apart?

My unifying elements will be found in the sound and the intermezzos. I use sonic motifs to link the individual scenes – screams of terror, the voices of the revolution, and acoustic traces of violence and tension. The sound creates a continuum that holds the structure together. I was partly inspired by *Bílá voda* (White Water), a novel by Kateřina Tučková, and by my family's history. I wanted to give the nuns a human dimension, so they are not simply anonymous figures in robes, but women with specific pasts, motivations, and questions. This is why I work with the intermezzos, which allow spectators to glimpse their stories and connect with them on a human level.

Do you leave the narrative in its original form, that is, set during the French Revolution?

I have set the story in 1950s Czechoslovakia, a period marked by persecution, and we are collaborating with archives to explore this theme as authentically as possible. The stage design is not a closed-off space; it is a living world. At the beginning, we see sixteen gardens – each character has their own space and clothing, and they can dance and work. They are working the land, but symbolically, they are also digging their own graves. Labour is conceived as the Carmelites' essential philosophy – activity, concentration, rhythm. The sounds produced by their labour become part of their inner world and the overall dramaturgical conception.

Does the State Opera provide you with adequate conditions and support?

I believe so, although the deadlines are very tight, sometimes pushing the limits of the possible. I don't know how it will all come together, but I try to convey as much as possible during rehearsals. I feel that the team and I are in tune, including the chorus. This is actually my first time working with a female choir, and it has been a new and inspiring experience. These ensembles can quickly sense the right direction and energy, though, of course, more time would be welcome. There is nothing more exhausting than working without full commitment. When you can't rehearse at "full throttle", when you are only "present" but not truly immersed in the process, it is very demanding for everyone involved.

What are your experiences in overcoming technical limitations that prevent you from realising your vision?

In the opera, technology is both an eternal ally and adversary. Sometimes it reveals unexpected possibilities; at other times, it forces you to keep your feet firmly on

the ground. In *The Magic Flute*, we spent a great deal of time devising the death of the king, who bequeaths his power to Pamina. He was lying on a bed on the upper level of the stage set, and his body was meant to disappear, leaving only the crown – no descent into the underworld, no visible trickery. We devised a sophisticated solution involving mirrors, a genuine “magician’s” effect. It worked, but we ultimately decided to cut it. Sometimes, less truly is more. In Bohuslav Martinů’s *Greek Passion*, by contrast, I felt we succeeded in finding a powerful stage symbol. Manolius, a simple shepherd who accepts the role of Christ, is beaten to death by a mob at the end. I did not want a realistic death. We covered him with a blanket, and when the blanket was lifted, the body had vanished. He disappeared. The question lingered in the air: had they just killed the true Messiah? And what had that destroyed within them? I consider this one of the moments of greatest dramaturgical precision I have been able to achieve.

Another powerful experience for me was an early production of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. We had remarkable technical and financial resources. The stage literally breathed; an intimate corner magically became a garden, and the space was transformed by gentle “zooms”, with the structures coming apart and the spectators only realising the change when the world before them was completely different. This is the ideal situation: when technology does not serve as a spectacle but as the silent, organic breath of the story.

And which stage idea proved to be technically impossible to realise?

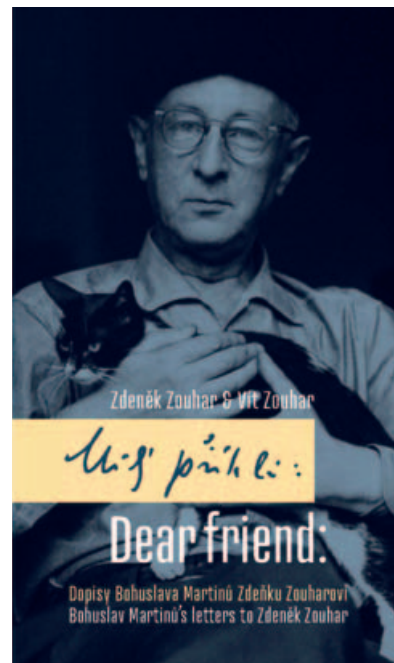
I was doing a production of Alfredo Catalani’s *La Wally* at the Theater an der Wien, and I had a very specific idea: from the start of the performance, a silicone figurine of the protagonist encased within an enormous ice block was to be placed on stage, gradually melting as the evening progressed. Its fate would be literally measured by thaw – time, cold, inevitability. However, a theatre is not a laboratory environment. There are too many variables on stage – the temperature of the lights, the movement of equipment, the flow of air. We were unable to ensure that the ice would melt precisely when we needed it to, and without exact timing, it would simply become a broken tableau. Ultimately, we opted for a more moderate symbol: a bird trapped in the ice. A quieter solution, perhaps, but the meaning was pure. Sometimes one must accept limitations and transform them into a different, more concentrated symbol.

If you could share a glass of wine with any composer or operatic character, who would it be?

I would most like to have a glass of wine with Gustav Mahler – I love his music; it possesses enormous depth and genuine emotion, for me. And I would gladly have a shot with Mozart – I think he would be a fascinating companion, with a lightning-fast intellect and a sharp sense of humour. Characters are more complicated, as I am often fascinated by those on stage who have a darker psychology – psychopaths are very rewarding characters in the theatre. However, I must admit I would rather not share that drink with them. If I were to choose a single character, it would be Benjamin Britten’s *Peter Grimes*, who remains an enigma to me. I would love to understand what is truly going on inside him, how it all really was...

On the Complete Edition of Bohuslav Martinů's Correspondence

For years now, the Palacký University in Olomouc has been releasing the correspondence of Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959), in several volumes organised by addressee – for example, letters to his family or to specific friends, including the composer Zdeněk Zouhar, father of Vít Zouhar, co-editor of the series and author of this introductory text.



The Database of Sources of the Bohuslav Martinů Institute, supported by the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation in Prague, records more than 3 000 outgoing documents related to Bohuslav Martinů from 1905 to 1959 and more than 1 300 letters received between 1912 and 1959.¹ In the vast majority of cases, the received documents have not been preserved, mainly because Martinů did not live at a permanent address for a large part of his life and only sent some of the documents he received to his sister Marie Martinů in his hometown of Polička for safekeeping. These are now stored principally in the Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička, together with other manuscripts by the composer. Approximately 4 000 other documents in this database of the Bohuslav Martinů Institute constitute related correspondence.

Since 2005, the Martinů correspondence has been systematically processed and made accessible by a team of researchers from Palacký University Olomouc, supported by the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR). In twelve volumes

of the Czech-English critical collection, more than 700 Bohuslav Martinů letters have been published. This complete edition includes correspondence to the Martinů family in Polička,² to his first biographer Miloš Šafránek,³ poet and collaborator Miloslav Bureš,⁴ conductor Zdeněk Zouhar,⁵ publisher Karel Šebánek,⁶ and musician and friend Frank Rybka.⁷ The edition is based on a diplomatic transcription of the correspondence, supplemented by a detailed footnote apparatus. Parallel to this, all the edited letters are also available in the Martinů database.

These letters give us extraordinary insight into the ideas and events that inspired various compositions, such as the *Double Concerto for two string orchestras, piano and timpani*, H 271:

I will send you the Double Concerto, which was written in September 38 during the events you know about,⁸ and it is a sensational thing, really powerful; if accompanied with a little bit of talking, it would be a propaganda work of the highest order, just like the [Field] Mass.⁹



Bohuslav Martinů and Charlotte Martinů, Darien, 1943 (CBM, PBM FBM 170)

They also tell us something about his method of composing at the piano:

I have my room downstairs with the piano, so I can work in utter peace, it's a Pleyel piano, small, Clara Schumann played on it, but it's still good and so I'm writing the last piano concerto on it, I've started the final movement and I think it will be good.¹⁰

Various letters are testimony to the astonishing speed at which he composed. He completed the first of the four cantatas he wrote to texts by Miloslav Bureš, *Otvírání studánek* (*The Opening of the Springs*), H 354, in just nine days. On 4 July 1955, Martinů assured the poet Bureš: "I will certainly write music to it, since a text as wonderful as yours does not appear every day."¹¹ And on 12 July, he informed his family in Polička that he had completed the twenty-minute cantata: "I have finished the Well [*Opening of the Springs*] and I will send a copy to Brno."¹²

Many letters deal with Martinů's attempts to find and secure manuscripts that got lost through the years of war, travel, and exile. To Frank Rybka he wrote:

I've wanted to ask you for a long time, whether I stored any manuscripts with you, I can't find them, although I have almost everything from N.Y. here¹³ and can't remember who I left them with. I thought it was that painter Davis,¹⁴ but it's not there either.¹⁵

Like many composers, Martinů had to strive for financial arrangements that would allow him to survive, and many letters are devoted to that mundane but absolutely necessary task. For example, the composer also asked Frank Rybka to arrange a soloist for the premiere of the *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra No. 2*, H 304 who would pay at least 1 000 dollars for the right to play the premiere and wrote:

I also don't have a reply from Schuster,¹⁶
I think that he also feels it's expensive, none of them wants to hand out money, only cash it in! Which is no wonder, I'm the same!¹⁷

Although Martinů was not politically active in a specific party and did not champion a particular ideology, he often commented on the political situation in Europe and the United States, and his letters are filled with observations, sometimes ironic and other times more careful and weighty. For example, he spoke seriously about the Hungarian Uprising in November 1956, and strongly condemned its bloody suppression in letters to Rybka and other recipients in Western Europe and the United States:

It's all messed up again and cost human lives, in short everyone has earned a medal and especially the distinguished higher-ups who brought in an army of tanks, what a lovely feeling for us and for them, who considered each other civilised nations. Dammit. I'm



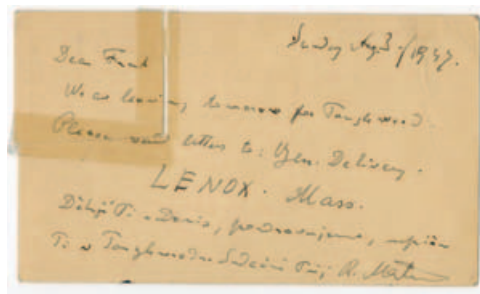
Charlotte Martinů, Bohuslav Martinů, and Miloš Šafránek. New York, 1945. (ZZ, No call No)

*so mad I'd rather smash the typewriter to get back at someone, but then my common sense tells me not to, because of my sore hand.*¹⁸

Martinů's letters are also a testimony to his clearly formulated aesthetic views. During the 1950s, when the influence and position of dodecaphony, serial music, and New Music was growing, he repeatedly criticised its composers, compositions, movements, and reviewers.

*My position will probably be pretty difficult now, because here and primarily in Germany the latest musical system for modern music is popular, it's all Schoenberg and Berg and the young folks, it's unlistenable, but they say because it's modern then all the other things with C-major chords are now out of fashion.*¹⁹

In editing this correspondence, it was necessary to address Martinů's linguistic idiosyncrasies. His accelerated style of writing heavily influenced the spelling, punctuation, and syntax of his letters. Whether written by hand or later on a typewriter, in Czech or French or – starting in the 1940s – in English, his letters and postcards functioned much like today's emails and text messages, as quick sketches. Uniform spelling was not the norm for him in any language. This does not mean that his spelling was riddled with mistakes. The punctuation, however, does bear certain common features. For

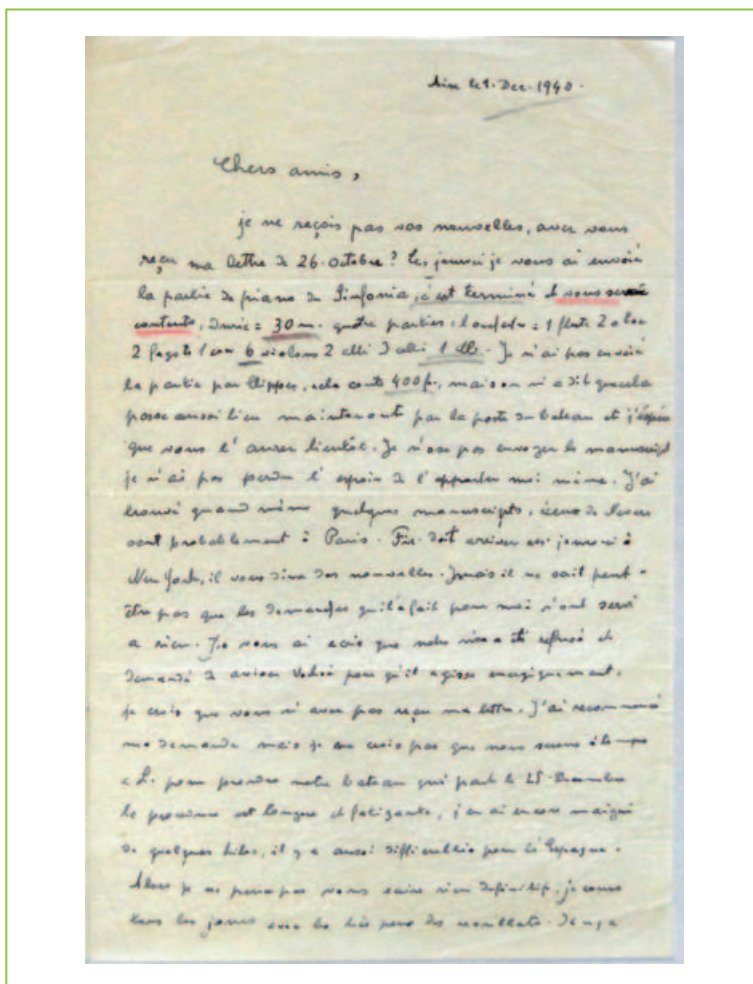


Letter card from Bohuslav Martinů to Frank Rybka, 3 August 1947 (CBM, PBM Kfr 1235a,b)

example, in Czech letters, he hardly ever puts a comma before the conjunction *že* (if), although in Czech this comma is normal.

Martinů's inconsistent way of marking and naming compositions, people, and places often complicates their identification. Compositions underwent development and revisions in title, language, and text, and our edition seeks to make such things clear. For example, Martinů at first considered the 1956 cantata *Legenda z dýmu bramborové nati* (*The Legend of the Smoke from Potato Tops*), H 360, a "romance," because Miloslav Bureš originally called his poetry cycle *Romance from the Smoke from Potato Tops* and changed the title when the cantata was completed. Another example is the cantata *Romance z pampelišek* (*The Romance from the Dandelions*), H 364, which he refers to differently in different letters, its original title being *To the Old Mother's Song*. In many other cases, Martinů uses different names for the same composition, or alternates between upper- and lower-case letters. When referring to people, in some instances he used only initials or the neutral designation "friend," for fear of attracting Nazi or, later, Communist censorship.

Martinů also liked to create puns similar to the humorous drawings from his youth. For example, he addressed Frank Rybka variously as "Franconetti", "Franconnini", or "Rybi", sometimes in connection with their joint holiday trips



*Letter from Bohuslav Martinů to Miloš Šafránek, 1 December 1940
(CBM, PBM Kmš 755)*

to Italy. In a similar vein, he Italianised the surname of the cellist Gregory Piatigorsky as “Piattigrossi.”²⁰ In some letters in Czech, he produced entire humorously stylised passages, particularly in his correspondence with the diplomat Vladimír Vaněk.²¹

Martinů’s correspondence also reflects the linguistic influence of the places he lived. From the 1920s, he employed French words and neologisms, as well as the circumflex accent. After arriving in the United States, his correspondence in Czech contains a large number of English expressions and neologisms, even though, or perhaps because he only learned the language once he had arrived. Similarly, in the second half of the 1950s, when he lived for a long time in Switzerland with Paul and Maja Sacher, sporadic Germanisms appeared in his writings.

Martinů approached his own and received correspondence pragmatically, spontaneously, and unsystematically. He usually did not keep incoming correspondence and did not make copies of his own documents. Nevertheless, with the help of family, colleagues, and friends, he created and accumulated an extensive collection of materials, which are an important source for understanding the composer’s work, life, and time. He sent selected letters to his family in Polička, where they were kept by his sister Marie Martinů.

It is obvious that he cared about preserving the letters for the future and gathering them in one place. However, the complicated political situation, the impediments around communications across the Iron Curtain, and the strict censorship that not only checked but also withheld documents,



Bohuslav Martinů: *Legenda z dýmu bramborové nati* (*The Legend of the Smoke from Potato Tops*), 1956, autograph (CBM, PBM Ab 106, 3)

required careful security measures so that the letter would not endanger the addressee. That is why Bohuslav Martinů repeatedly urged his siblings not to keep his letters and to destroy them: “I hope you are not keeping my letters, use them as kindling for the stove.”²² That this was not just a joke was confirmed by the composer’s next call to destroy the documents, which he sent shortly after the first one:

*So I advise you again to make a little fire out of my letters, sometimes I write what I think and it could sometimes cause bad blood and not unnecessarily, burn them all.*²³

Fortunately, the Martinů family did not respond to these instructions and the letters have been preserved.

The composer was aware of the importance of these writings, and therefore he also commented on the binding nature of the information contained in the letters. This is also why he wrote to Miloš Šafránek:

*Now as regards the quotation from my letters and articles, that’s quite important. The articles written for revues, etc. are well considered, so they can be quoted. Most of the letters are correct, at least to you or musicians, yet sometimes the more-or-less and more private letters are not decisive, and when it comes to the articles in programmes, I would give it a second thought since, as you know, articles for programmes are the worst thing that a composer, I in particular, can be asked to do. They are delayed until the last possible moment and when you can put it off no longer some sort of argument is sweated out, but generally c’est la blague, so I would be more cautious there.*²⁴



PHOTO: JOSEF POLEHNA

Left to right: Vít Zouhar, Gabriela Žatková, Gabriela Coufalová, and Jaromír Syněk – the editors of the Bohuslav Martinů correspondence

A frequent reason why we read Bohuslav Martinů's correspondence is to seek information about the composer's work and life. Detailed knowledge of the composer's correspondence was the starting point for the monographs by Miloš Šafránek (1944, 1961, 1979),²⁵ Jaroslav Mihule (1974, 2002, 2017),²⁶ Zdeněk Zouhar (1957, 2001),²⁷ Harry Halbreich (1968, 2007),²⁸ and for many papers and articles. Correspondence is also a key source of information for the Bohuslav Martinů Complete Edition and is the starting point for every critical edition of Martinů's compositions. It is particularly significant in terms of musical sources.

Through a systematic study of Martinů's correspondence, we gain knowledge about the composer's time, socioeconomic conditions, political situation, aesthetic influences, social stratification, and the technological and cultural parameters within which he lived and worked. Through the composer's letters, we get to know both him and his time and thus they complement the mosaic of the known.

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Please note: CBM is the Bohuslav Martinů Centre in Polička, formerly called the PBM or Památník Bohuslav Martinů Memorial. The abbreviation PBM is retained for all shelf marks signatures.

- 1) Database of Sources of the Bohuslav Martinů Institute (IBM), available at <https://database.martinu.cz>
- 2) Jaromír Syněk and Gabriela Všeticková Žatková, eds., *Dear All (I): Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to His Family in Polička until 1931; Dear All (II): Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to His Family in Polička in 1932 and 1933; Dear All (III): Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to His Family in Polička in 1934 and 1935; Dear All (IV): Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to His Family in Polička in 1936 and 1937; Dear All (V) Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to His Family in Polička in 1938 and 1939* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2023, 2024).

- 3) Vít Zouhar and Gabriela Coufalová, eds., *Dear Miloš: Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to Miloš Šafránek* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2019).
- 4) Vít Zouhar and Gabriela Coufalová, eds., *Dear Friend Bureš: Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to Miloš Bureš* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2017).
- 5) Zdeněk Zouhar and Vít Zouhar, eds., *Dear Friend: Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to Zdeněk Zouhar* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2008).
- 6) Gabriela Coufalová, ed., *Dear Karel I: Bohuslav Martinů's Letters to Karel Šebánek from 1931 to 1949* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2025).
- 7) Jana Honzíkova and Vít Zouhar, eds., *Dear Frank (I): Bohuslav Martinů Letters to Frank Rybka from 1941 to 1954* (Olomouc: Olomouc Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2023); Jana Honzíkova and Vít Zouhar, eds., *Dear Frank (II): Bohuslav Martinů Letters to Frank Rybka from 1955 to 1959* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2025).
- 8) Martinů completed the composition on 29 September 1938 in Switzerland (Harry Halbreich, *Bohuslav Martinů: Werkverzeichnis und Biografie* [Mainz: Schott Music, 2007], 275) one day before the Munich Agreement between Nazi Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Fascist Italy, which enabled the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Nazis and was the starting point for World War II.
- 9) "Pošlu Vám Double concert, který byl napsán v septembu 38, při událostech o kterých víte, a je to věc senzační a opravdu silná, s trochou mluvení okolo by to musela být propagacní práce I. řádu zrovna jako [Polní] mše." Martinů to Miloš Šafránek, Paris, 3 June 1940 (CBM, PBM Kmš 748; copy at IBM, ŠafM 1940-06-03; Zouhar and Coufalová, *Dear Miloš*, 160). See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/2631.
- 10) "[...] ja mam svůj pokoj dle s pianem, takže mam uplný klid k práci, je to piano Pleyel, male hrala na nem Klara Schumann ale je jeste dobre a tak radim [řádím] na tom poslednim klavirnim koncerte, zacínám poslední vetu a myslím ze bude dobry." Martinů to Frank Rybka, [Schönenberg], 7 December 1957 (CBM, PBM Kfr 1303; copy at IBM, Ryb 1957-12-07; Honzíkova and Zouhar, *Dear Frank (II)*, 276, 277). See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1823.
- 11) "Ovšem že na ni [Píseň o studánce rubínce] napíšu hudbu tak krásný text se nenajde každý den." Martinů to Miloslav Bureš, [Nice], 4 July 1955 (CBM, PBM Kb 639; copy at IBM, BurM 1955-07-04; Zouhar and Coufalová, *Dear Friend Bureš*, 29, 30). See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/4883.
- 12) "Tu Studánku jsem dokončil a pošlu kopii do Brna." Martinů to his family in Polička, [Nice], 12 July 1955 (CBM, PBM Kr 497; copy at IBM, Mar 1955-07-12). See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1320.
- 13) Martinů sent the letter from Schönenberg, Pratteln, near Basel in Switzerland, where the Martinůs had lived in Paul and Maja Sacher's house since 1957.
- 14) Gerald Vivian Davis (1899-1987), American painter, author of portraits of Bohuslav and Charlotte Martinů.
- 15) "Chtel jsem te uz davno zpetat zdali jsem u tebe neulozil nejake rukopisy, nemohu je najít ac uz tu mam skoro vsechno z N.Y. a nemohu si vzpomenout u koho jsem to nechal. Myslel jsem u Davise toho malire ale tam to take neni, tak si vzpomen a napis." Martinů to Frank Rybka, [Schönenberg], 3 March 1959 (CBM, BM Kfr 1320; copy at IBM, Ryb 1959-03-03; Honzíkova and Zouhar, *Dear Frank (II)*, 428, 429). See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1842.
- 16) Joseph Schuster (1903-1969), cellist, during 1936-1944 a member of the New York Philharmonic.
- 17) "Od Schustera také nemám odpověď, myslím že se mu to zdá drahé také, on žádný z nich nechce peníze vydat jenom brát! Což se nedivím, ja taky!" Letter from Martinů to Frank Rybka, [South Orleans], 11 July 1945 (CBM, PBM Kfr 1228; copy at IBM, Ryb 1945-07-11; Honzíkova and Zouhar, *Dear Frank (I)*, 138, 139). See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1781.
- 18) "Je to zase zvorané a stalo to lidské životy, zkratka kde kdo se vyznamenal a hlavne ti Velici Mocipani kteří na to šli s armádou tanků, moc příjemný pocit pro nas i pro ně, kteří jsme se považovali za civilisované národy. Pro kočku. Mam takový vztek, že bych nejraději rozbil typewriter abych se na někom pomstil, ale zase rozum mi říká abych to nedělal k vůli té bolavé ruce." Martinů to Frank Rybka, [Rome], 28 November 1956 (CBM, PBM Kfr 1293; copy at IBM, Ryb 1956-11-28; Honzíkova and Zouhar, *Dear Frank (II)*, 198, 199). See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1816.
- 19) "Budu miti asi dost tezkou posici ted, neboť zde a hlavne v Nemecku je ted v oblibe ten poslední hudební system moderní hudby, je to samý Schonberg a Beck [Berg] a i ti mladí, není to sice k poslouchani ale protože je pry to moderní tak vsechny ostatní veci, které mají C dur akord uz jsou out of Fashion." Martinů to Frank Rybka, [Schönenberg], 7 December 1957, CBM, PBM Kfr 1303; copy at IBM, Ryb 1957-07-12; Honzíkova and Zouhar, *Dear Frank (II)*, 276-79. See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1823.
- 20) For example, Martinů to Frank Rybka, [South Orleans], 11 July 1945 (CBM, PBM Kfr 1228; copy at IBM, Ryb 1945-07-11; Honzíkova and Zouhar, *Dear Frank (I)*, 138-39). See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1781.
- 21) For example, the letter from Bohuslav Martinů to Vladimír Vaněk, [Schönenberg], 21 October 1957, copy at IBM, VanV 1957-10-21. See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/8295.
- 22) "Doufám že neschováváte moje dopisy, zapalte si s nimi v kamnech." Martinů to his family in Polička, [Rome], 14 March 1957, CBM, PBM Kr 559; copy at IBM, Mar 1957-03-14; Zouhar and Coufalová, *Dear Miloš*, 8. See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1382.
- 23) "Tak vam znovu radim abyste si z mých dopisu udelali Ohynek, nekdy tak pisu co si myslím a mohlo by to nekdy delat zlou krev a zbyte ne, spalte je vsechny." Martinů to his family in Polička, [Rome], 5 June 1957, CBM, PBM Kr 569; copy at IBM, Mar 1957-06-05. See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/1392.
- 24) "Ted co se tyce quotation z mých dopisu a clanku, to jest dosti dulezite. totiz clanky psane do revue atd jsou premyslene, mohou byti quotovane. Dopisy jsou ve vetsine spravne alespon tobe nebo hudebnikum, dopisy vice mene a vice privatni jsou ovsem nekdy ne smerodatne a co se tyce clanku v programech, zde bych se zamyslel, neboť jak vis clanky do programu jsou ta nejhorší vec která skladatele muze potkat a hlavne mne a tak jsou odkladane az na poslední chvíli a když už vyhnuti není tedy se vypoti nejaky ten argument ale v celku c'est la blague, tak tam bych byl opatrný." Martinů to Miloš Šafránek, [Schönenberg], 20 April 1958, CBM, PBM Kmš 872; copy at IBM, ŠafM 1958-20-04; Zouhar and Coufalová, *Dear Miloš*, 2019, 596. See https://database.martinu.cz/emails/public_view/4687.
- 25) Miloš Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů: The Man and His Music* (New York: Knopf, 1944); Miloš Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů: Život a dílo* (Prague: Státní hudební vydavatelství, 1961); Miloš Šafránek, ed., *Divadlo Bohuslava Martinů* (Prague: Editio Supraphon, 1979).
- 26) Jaroslav Mihule, *Bohuslav Martinů: Osud skladatele* (Prague: Karolinum, 2002, 2017).
- 27) Zdeněk Zouhar ed., *Bohuslav Martinů. Sborník vzpomínek a studií* (Brno: Krajské nakladatelství, 1957); Zdeněk Zouhar, *Sborové dílo Bohuslava Martinů* (Prague: Academia, 2001).
- 28) Harry Halbreich, *Bohuslav Martinů: Werkverzeichnis, Dokumentation und Biographie* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1968); Halbreich, *Bohuslav Martinů: Werkverzeichnis und Biographie*, op. cit.

Adventures in the Microworld

– *An Interview with Tomáš Šenkyřík*

Lately, the Czech sound artist Tomáš Šenkyřík has been on a roll. His albums, usually created in collaboration with other artists, have piqued interest both at home and abroad. *306*, published by okla records, *1m²* and *Vsta!* with Manja Ristić, both released by the Brno label Skupina, serve as aural invitations to worlds of sound that are often overlooked and seemingly unassuming. Tomáš, always passionate about such sounds and the means to capture them, can easily draw listeners into his vision and poetics – if they allow him to. In our video interview, we discussed his recent projects, his upbringing, his work at the Museum of Romani Culture, and his consistently curious and sensitive approach to both music and ecology. But first, we spoke about Tomáš's second life – that of a local politician.

You are calling from your office in the town of Židlochovice, near Brno, where you serve as deputy mayor. What's new in your political life? What projects are you currently working on?

There are too many things to mention, but what I personally find most interesting are projects related to water – we are currently discussing a water treatment plant. The standard procedure is for the purified water to flow directly into rivers, where it disperses like cars on a highway, as a friend of mine described it. This is a nationwide practice that concerns me greatly, because in many cases it would be better to retain the water within the landscape – particularly when the plant is near a drying floodplain forest. This is precisely our situation: we lose around 250,000 cubic metres of water each year. That is why we have developed a project to help us retain the water. We have purchased a plot of land where we plan to create pools and meanders so that some of the land can remain waterlogged. We are also addressing legislation and intend to propose an amendment to the existing laws.

What does the amendment specify?

Even when water undergoes an advanced purification process, the law still classifies it as wastewater, which cannot be retained. In collaboration with MENDELU, the Mendel University in Brno, we will be working on quaternary water treatment, as opposed to the standard tertiary treatment.



PHOTO: SONA SOMMEROVA 5x

This fourth stage removes micropollutants such as antibiotics, anti-epileptic drugs, and similar substances. The aim of the amendment I mentioned is to allow the retention of water that has undergone quaternary treatment in the landscape.

My role in the project involves conducting a time-lapse observation of biodiversity. I will use field recordings to map the terrain, which will gradually accumulate increasing amounts of water. I hope this will enable us to clearly demonstrate how water influences biodiversity and how this is manifested in the soundscape.

This is not the first time you have created new bodies of water near Židlochovice. Do your fellow citizens welcome these projects?

A few years ago, we created a small marsh. At the time, there was significant opposition – people complained about how many mosquitoes there would be and so on. However, once it was completed, people realised how that previously inhospitable plot of agricultural land had been transformed into a welcoming space. The project's fiercest critics now take their dogs for walks there. Following this experience, the larger project has encountered no resistance; we even have mayors from neighbouring towns visiting to seek inspiration. It truly makes a difference when you can see and experience the results. I really cannot complain about our region – all the mayors are supportive of ecological projects.

Would you get involved in projects like this one even if you didn't have experience with field recording or a fascination with sound?

Probably. If you are a thoughtful person, when presented with data and laboratory results, you cannot remain indifferent to what is happening to nature, or, in this case, to our water. Without a background in field recording, I would probably miss a broader context that allows me to understand these issues, and I am very grateful for that.



The Long Struggle

Do you remember your earliest formative experience related to sound?

What I heard on the radio, including the noises and buzzes between stations, and tapes, of course – we didn't have a record player. I would record the theme songs from various TV shows and, later, some of my own tinkering. I was fascinated by how the sound seemed to “dip down” when I played it back.

Where was this? Where are you from?

I am from Holešov, near Zlín. I also grew up in Rusava and, naturally, was drawn to the surrounding nature. It is all forested, and as children, we spent all our time outdoors. It was there that I first began making field recordings, although I had no idea how to go about it and lacked the appropriate equipment.

So your teenage years were occupied not with microphones and gear, but with a traditional musical education?

I studied flute and later started playing guitar and electric bass. I only began experimenting with sound and field recording when I was hired as an ethnomusicologist at the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno.

Was that while you were a student of aesthetics and musicology at the Faculty of Arts at the Masaryk University in Brno?

It was later than that. In 1997, I finished school and then did my military service, which was still

mandatory at the time. I didn't feel like strutting around with a machine gun, so I managed to arrange civilian service at the Husa na provázku Theatre, which of course made me very happy at the time.

What was your official job title there?

I was a prop manager, but at Provázek, everyone does a little of everything – the stage manager was putting together an opera, I wrote the songs. One time, I even had to go on stage wearing a wig, but I was awfully embarrassed – that's not for me... The theatre had a wonderful, friendly atmosphere. One time on my way home, I met a friend who told me that the Museum of Romani Culture has a huge sound archive and no one to manage it. It caught my attention and I offered myself up for the job. I ended up staying for almost a decade, from 1999 to 2008.

Was it in this job that your attraction to field recordings began?

Exactly. I worked with Eva Davidová, the most significant Roma scholar in Czechia, collecting Romani music. When I then listened back in my office, I was fascinated by how the environment they play and sing in is inscribed in their music. When we recorded Wallachian Romani in Kendice in the east of Slovakia, I realised how three-dimensional the situation is. Marinka Hlubová sang a slow Wallachian song, glasses clinked, a bin was closed – a complex sonic narrative began developing, something you can hardly ask Romani musicians to reproduce in the studio. The multi-sensory experience, in the field, so difficult to replace, seemed more truthful (though we know what a fickle



thing truth is). For this reason, I always carried two or three recording devices. This allowed me to be quick in resolving unexpected situations – this isn't a context in which anyone is interested in "sorry, I forgot to press record".

During these expeditions, I was often covered in spillages of various vodkas and spirits, but the atmosphere was always excellent, and thanks to Eva, we were warmly welcomed everywhere. It would often happen that the local white people would warn us not to visit the camp, but as soon as the local Roma saw Eva, they accepted us immediately. They knew from their elders that this was "our Eva", and I could pretty much start recording in five minutes.

You began making your own work while you worked at the museum?

I'd try something here and there, but to tell you the truth, I spent years recording only for myself and had no plans to share the results on the internet or anything of the sort. I was often frustrated, as I was unable to transfer the feelings connected to attentive listening and experiencing of the given site into the resultant recording, which I would listen to at home after the fact and be disappointed by. At the time, I began reading lots of texts by and interviews with my personal heroes, Chris Watson and Jana Winderen, but that provided little encouragement when I found out how much all their equipment costs. It seemed unattainable and the results incomparable to my walks in Rusava, during which I was unable to capture how the wind rustles the leaves of a birch tree as I didn't have any

protection against the wind. Without it, I just had leaves knocking into my microphones. It was a long struggle.

When did you break through?

My first proper recording device, for which I saved little by little from my wages at the Museum, was a Fostex FR-2 from the United States, brought over by my friend, musicologist and music therapist Petra Gelbart. That was around 2009. I had made some sonic attempts a little earlier – sometimes, I would have the museum equipment at home overnight due to travel arrangements for our field research, and before I brought it back in the morning, I would record some material I later used in music for theatre. The museum had a higher quality "dead cat" and the quality of the material was reasonable.

I have a feeling that these forays into original sound might have come about because someone approached you and said "try it".

You're right, I've just had a hidden memory resurface – Ladislava Košíková, choreographer and founder of the dance sector of Hradištan, a folk music ensemble, approached me and asked me for sound to accompany a choreography, composed entirely of sounds of the wind, because she knew I was exploring this territory. That was the start of it all, around 2011, 2012.

Friendship, Beer, and Photosynthesis

I'd now like to skip ahead to the present. You've collaborated on many interesting projects

in recent years. In 2024, you released *Vstal*, an album created with Serbian sound artist Manja Ristić. It's something of a sonic conversation between the wetlands of South Moravia and the Adriatic Sea. How did this communication take place?

We agreed that each of us would explore a particular soundworld within our respective environments. It was all made possible by CENSE, the Central European Network for Sonic Ecologies, an informal network of similarly minded artists principally in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. CENSE was established in 2018 at a conference in Budapest, which is where I met Manja. We struck up a conversation on the staircase on our way to one of the seminars and hit it off right away. We've been in contact continuously since then.

She later suggested we could do a project together, but we spent around a year just writing emails, sending photos, updating each other on our lives. One Easter, which I always spend in Rusava, I spent the period between Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday making recordings – hence the title, “*vstal*” (“he has risen”), in the sense of the resurrection. This led to the eponymous track on the album. Then it continued in the way you described: we sent each other the soundscapes we found ourselves in and created a new, fictional soundscape.

And how did you mix long distance?

We shared sounds on the cloud. At first, I wasn't sure how it would work, so I was surprised at how fruitful this mode of collaborating was. This constant sharing of and commenting on our recordings also contained a lot of friendship, too. I consider the dimension of the affection people have for each other very important.

What else have you gained from the CENSE initiative?

I am currently not active at all due to limits on my time, but I am watching from a distance – the conferences are tempting; there is one coming up in Poland soon. Miloš Vojtěchovský did a great deal of work for CENSE. And even now, when I am not so active, I consider it a great inspiration in my everyday life: I get an email occasionally and you can see that people who think alike are being connected and it works great. In addition to Manja, I should also mention Anamaria Pravencu, a sound artist from Bucharest who prepared a collective CENSE release I also participated in: *CENSE Dawn Chorus, 2021*, which included recordings by artists based in Czechia (Šárka Zahálková, Polina Khatsenka,

Michal Kindernay, Ladislav Železný, and myself) and elsewhere in Europe.

Another recent success is an album titled *306*, which you made with Brno-based saxophonist Pavel Zlámal. It was recently praised, among others, by The Quietus. The genesis of this recording seems to have a lot to do with Bedřich Smetana and drinking beer...

Pavel approached me in 2018, when the centenary of the independent Czechoslovak state was approaching. He liked my recordings and wanted to find a way of approaching the event sonically and creatively. He mentioned my underwater hydrophone recordings, so we decided to start with a liquid – we went with beer. I immediately thought it would be wonderful to record it foaming. Pavel came up with a happening: numerous members of the symphony orchestras in Prague and Brno came to Besední dům, as well as some members of the Brno Contemporary Orchestra. They brought their instruments, but they didn't play. Instead, they had to drink one hundred beers, one for each year since the republic was established.

And you recorded it.

I distributed various microphones throughout the space. The result is a fascinating sonic image: everyone arrives sober, but in the second half, the recording features a rising intensity of laughter, shouting, the tap whirring, and so on. And as everyone liked it, Pavel decided to repeat the event in 2024, with 306 beers drunk in 90 minutes: 106 for every year since Czechoslovak independence, and 200 for the bicentenary of Bedřich Smetana. On this occasion, the musicians were really a little tipsy by the second half, but in a good way – the atmosphere was excellent. Although I think there was only a single audience member in attendance.

When I listened back at home, it seemed like a series of sonic photographs. I heard in them the history of Besední dům, echoes of visits by Janáček and Dvořák... I called Pavel and told him we should turn it into a release. We made around five versions, we chose one and decided it was finished. But soon, I began missing something and realised that Pavel, the soul of the project, should be audible too. And so we went to the “Besedňák” one more time and I recorded Pavel's saxophone improvisations in a highly unusual manner.

But if I understand correctly, the saxophone was originally not a part of the project?

Right – though Pavel was the anchor and driving force behind that somewhat Cagean happening,

but he didn't use his saxophone at all. When we went there together, he roamed freely throughout the space. It was important for me to capture not only his playing, but, especially, the acoustics of the spaces he was moving about in. If a sound engineer had seen my setup, he would have thought I was mad – it wasn't conventional, but it worked for our purposes. I needed to manipulate the recording in various ways so that they worked well with the happening documentation. These recordings featured not only Pavel, but also a common wood pigeon who followed us around and cooed at us from various trees. We created a sonic collage that we liked, but we didn't expect much from it. I was very surprised by the responses, many of them from abroad.

In contrast to both *Vstal* and *306*, *1m²* is a solo project, related closely to underwater sounds.

I have long had a propensity towards underwater sounds. I bought my first hydrophones in 2016 and have since been trying to achieve one specific goal: to capture the sound of photosynthesis. This is something that field recordists in Sweden and Great Britain have done, but no one in Czechia has explored this in depth to date. I had all but up on that dream, when I went to a marsh on a beautiful sunny day thinking it might work out. At the time, I was reading David Haskell's highly regarded book *The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature*, in which he develops a relatively banal but I found amazingly inspiring: a detailed exploration of a small area. I decided to transfer this principle to the marsh, where I selected a portion of the water and spent two months recording there. In contrast to my other project, this one was very biological, non-aesthetic.

What do you mean by that?

I barely did anything to the recordings – no modification or layering. It's not very musical, more raw. In hindsight, I think I could have intervened a little more, but there was so much material – miles upon miles of recordings to process. It was a bit much and I was starting to get lost in it.

Can you please explain how recording photosynthesis works?

When you hear the pitch slide lower, this means that the sun is behind clouds and the organisms are responding to that. I am currently trying to come up with a sound installation that would also capture photosynthesis visually, because it adds a lot and could work well in a gallery.

You mentioned galleries: you recently presented an exhibition called *Zvukové krajiny Brna* (*Soundscapes of Brno*) at the Brno House of Arts, featuring both human and non-human sounds – a unique project in the Czech context, and very well received.

I am very grateful to curator Lenka Dolanová, who does a lot of work in this field. We met at lectures she organised in Jihlava at IGLOO, a sound gallery she ran at the Regional Gallery of Vysočina where Miloš Vojtěchovský was also curator. I presented an installation at IGLOO and liked the medium. I find field recordings in an exhibition space very powerful. A few years later – by this time, me and Lenka knew each other quite well – I tried to approach her with a bigger project, which turned into *Soundscapes of Brno*. I didn't really expect it to lead to anything, as I know how busy the space is and the kinds of artists that exhibit there. But, to my surprise, they liked the idea and the exhibition took place the following year.

I wanted to discuss various projects to capture the breadth of your work. We've spoken a lot about field recordings, but you also make electronic music and record saxophones and violins. How would you describe your approach as an artist and composer to someone who doesn't know your work?

I'll try to unravel it all. When I start working on something, it often begins with field recordings. By going into an environment, selecting it, setting up microphones before tying them down – all this is already part of the process. There is also a personal element: I often record for my own pleasure, like when I suddenly feel like listening to a Eurasian blackcap, whose vocalisations I find entrancing. I know well where in Rusava they are, and I am happy when I set up a parabolic mic and hear their song in my headphones. And now it looks as though these spontaneous recordings of mine will be used in a project I am making with a friend in Berlin, Jan Solčáni, curator of the Skupina label. The vinyl is set to be released in June. You could call it an ornithological album. We follow the idea of how birdsong develops as an evolving loop and can put one in mind of electronic music. Oslo-based drummer Michaela Antalová is also involved in the project, and her husband, Adrian Myhr, is a brilliant double bassist, which should add a more musical dimension.

That is one approach, focusing purely on field recordings. Sometimes I feel like working with them in a more compositional manner, connecting them

to other sounds. My compositional approach is based on the character of the sound I recorded. 306, the album we made with Pavel Zlámál, contained highly manipulated material, but the manipulation was based on the principles of the sound and the acoustics of the space. Non-manipulated material then worked as an excellent contrast – like the pigeon I mentioned. Although the pigeon itself sounds like a musical instrument – as if someone were playing a bass flute. These are the kind of inspiring contrasts I enjoy working with.

Some of your other projects, like the older album *Hajú*, feature the violin. Who is playing it?

My good friend Pavel Rajmic. His father is Jan Rajmic and his uncle Karel Rajmic, both legends of folk music in the Uherské Hradiště region. Pavel is a wonderful, clever guy, a violinist, folk music scholar, and also a maths professor. He's the type of musician I can connect with quickly. He is able to join me in my search for the resultant form, and when I fail to find it, he's never blocked; never takes it as an affront that I try and direct him in a particular direction. He also brings his own into the process and you can feel a little folkish phrasing in his playing. We also play for the joy of it, and that was also the case with *Hajú*. Of course I am delighted that James Murray, curator at the London-based Slowcraft label, wanted to publish it. I consider him an important figure in British ambient music.

Drawing Attention

When you make field recordings, do you feel more like a witness or an agent who is communicating with the environment?

When I arrive in an environment for the first time, my recordings are more or less tests. The first recordings are usually not very good – you can tell I don't know the environment and maybe the environment doesn't know me: it doesn't open up to me fully, does not reveal certain sounds. But I have some experience and, in a way, I feel you have to deserve it a little. And of course, I try to disturb as little as I can – the organisms always know about you. Sometimes, I practice listening without pressing record – just getting to know my surroundings. My primary aim is to listen in and find my way around the sonic material and think about what the given environment is saying, what I can hear and what I can transmit to those who might listen to it later. Sometimes it happens – and the decision is usually intuitive – that I decide to record something using conventional stereo microphones, other

times, I choose microphones whose pattern is omnidirectional and balanced. I also frequently press record and go for a walk. Sometimes, this allows me to hear the flapping of wings or the movement of various animals very close to the microphone.

To summarise, I feel like a person who loves nature and reveres what goes on inside it: someone who asks what all of this is telling us, what a heavenly gift it is, a beautiful symphony that is played every morning. I feel like an admirer. I hope it doesn't sound too esoteric!

Definitely not – it's an inspiring spiritual perspective. By the way, I asked that question in order not to use the term "sound hunter", which evokes something aggressive and invasive.

We were talking about *im*² earlier, and your question put me in mind of something I heard from a professor, who, as a scientist, is incredibly excited by the existence of hydrophones, as it is one of the few non-invasive methods of measuring biodiversity. In the past, you would simply go there, walk in the marshes. Even today, I sometimes see photographers moving around in places where moor frogs breed; a species of frogs that turns blue during their mating period. I was recently surprised by an amateur ornithologist in Rusava, who saw me and asked me if I played recordings and sounds to force the animals to act in some way. Such approaches are totally foreign to me.

You once mentioned in writing an experience with a yellow-bellied toad and an aeroplane. You weren't interested in the sound of the plane at first, but you ultimately discovered it creates an interesting dialogue with the toad, and have since then been more open to sounds that many consider intrusive. This anecdote brings us to the dangerous term "authentic". How do you experience the tension between recording a sonic reality and manipulating it?

It is important to say that over ninety percent of the recordings sound like a disappointment when I listen to them in the studio. It is impossible to evoke the atmosphere of the place, where you can smell the grass, the humidity; a fly might buzz past your ear; you hold on to something. It's a whole range of sensory data and it's just never as good on speakers. You then have to search for an information channel through which to communicate it and what to find in it, a third dimension that is able to bring listeners closer to what I experienced on site. At a lecture I once gave, a lady asked me why I am even recording these sounds if she can hear

them in the forest. This was an apt remark and entirely true – my only response is that I consider these recordings a kind of photograph. When you look through photographs, you can become aware of many new contexts you might not have noticed in the real world. This is how I think about the activity: I want to use my recordings to capture and draw attention at the sonic level to contexts that most of us miss when we go for a walk in the woods. Like the interaction between a blackbird and the sound of a bell, with the blackbird changing pitch a little as the bell is struck, which you only hear when listening back. It's about searching for adventure in the micro-world and in the tiniest details.

That brings us to one more question. How do you think about the balance between the documentary aspect of your field recordings and your own artistic production.

Like I said earlier, there is some stylisation even in how you set up your microphones. When you put two microphones in the water, you are working with stereo, which determines the character of the recording. And then you place them further apart, which creates a delay – a kind of rhythm, an accelerated pulsation. I often think about this and I realised I cannot say what a dry, documentary field recording is and how it sounds. Even when listening to ornithological documentation I made, which has descriptions such as “Eurasian blackcap, common chiffchaff in the background”, I hear my decisions about where to mark the edit, which frequencies to cut to get rid of unwanted sounds, and so on.

To what extent do you interact with animals? Do you think there can be interspecies communication purely on a sonic foundation?

There is certainly a form of communication – with the birds in my garden rather than during recording sessions. We had a lot of apples last year, so I left some of them out and I had many blackbird visitors – I saw as many as eight at once. I also put out sunflower seeds – recently, they ate up a whole bucket in about ten days. And I believe that they know that I put this out for them. When I open the window into the garden, I immediately notice the blackbird starts singing more distinctively, signalling to the others that I am approaching or that the cat is gone.

It seems you are an adept communicator. We began our conversation talking about local politics. It is clear that your job as deputy mayor influences how you think about sound and

vice versa, but I am interested in whether you consider your art political?

It's hard to say what we define as politics, because as a local politician, your work is very different from that of parliamentarians – you are dealing with practical issues and every decision means getting grilled in the pub for hours. You have to be able to explain your decisions responsibly, and no ideological talk will help you there. So there is that.

If my work has a political dimension, it probably consists in drawing attention to the fact that even the smallest effort you make for the landscape you live in can lead to positive results. I consider my recordings possible inspiration for such ideas or actions. Going back to the marsh we spoke about earlier, it was their lived experience that made people change their minds. Through my recordings, I offer a listening experience through which sound tells us something about our behaviour. And that probably does have a political and social dimension.

Vladimír Tichý the Systematist

A Profile of the Music Theorist and Composer on his 80th Birthday



An important figure in Czech music theory, lecturer, and composer Vladimír Tichý is celebrating his eightieth birthday this year. Better known to the general musical public thanks to his now iconic textbook *Harmonicky myslet a slyšet (Thinking and Hearing Harmonically)*,¹ Tichý presented himself as a successor to the great names of Prague music theory from the very start of his career. This profile focuses on his work in music theory, although it is clear that Tichý himself regarded all his activities as part of a unified whole.

Education, Position, Institution

Vladimír Tichý was born in 1946, and his introduction to music was through the accordion, which he played as a child. Even at a young age, he showed a keen interest in music theory and composition; however, his studies did not continue at a conservatory but at a technical high school. He graduated in 1964 and worked as an independent constructor until 1975.² He often summarised this period of his life with an anecdote that began with a question from one of his teachers: “My dear colleague, please explain to me how composition and the assembly of electrical machines go together?” To which Tichý replied, “It’s simple – I spend some time as a constructor of machines, then switch to a constructor of music!”³ Only after graduating from the department of constructing electrical machines and devices did he apply to the People’s Conservatory in Prague (now

the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory), where he studied composition, later continuing his studies with Jiří Pauer at the Music and Dance Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (HAMU). At that time, music theory was only offered as a postgraduate programme.⁴ Tichý studied this course under the leadership of Karel Risinger, the bard of Czech music theory, who later also supervised Tichý's doctoral thesis, *K systematické kinetice v novodobé evropské hudbě* (*On Systematic Kinetics in Modern European Music*, 1989).⁵

Tichý's professional career is also closely linked to HAMU. He began teaching at the school in 1978, initially at the Institute of Music Theory, which later became the Music Theory Department. He remained at the school for a full forty years, retiring in 2018. He also held several administrative positions, including Vice-Dean for Artistic and Pedagogical Activities and Head of the Department of Music Theory from 2004 to 2017. Another important institution for Tichý was the Gymnázium a hudební škola hl. města Prahy (Grammar School and Music School of the City of Prague), where he started in 1994 and played a key role in shaping the teaching style of the school's musical branch.

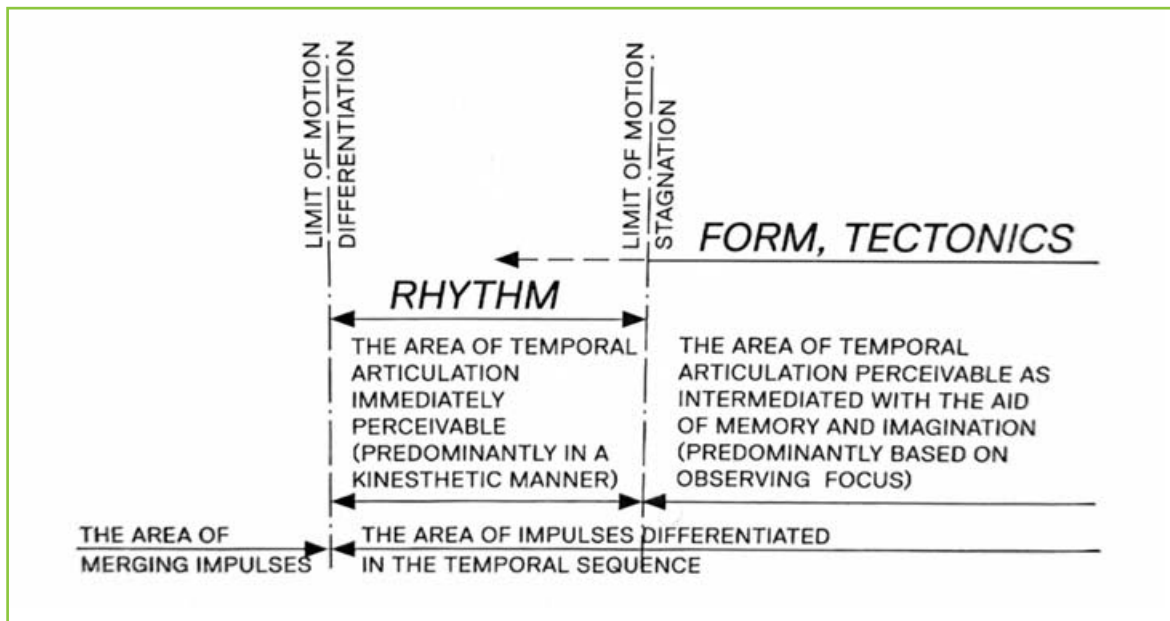
Overview of interests

It follows from the above that Vladimír Tichý was able to integrate the fields of music theory, pedagogy, and composition into a symbiotic relationship throughout his career. In hindsight, it is clear that the influence and significance of his work as a music theorist extend beyond those of his compositional output. Nevertheless, these two fields were interconnected for Tichý. In an interview with Jiří Bezděk (another former head of the Music Theory Department at HAMU), Tichý states: "I believe deeply that music theory and musical practice (not only compositional) are not two opposing poles, but rather the same facts seen from two perspectives",⁶ and they clearly influenced each other in his work. However, he never became what Karel Risinger called a "theorising composer", for whom subjectivity and a description of their own methods overshadow any effort to formulate more general truths.⁷ On the contrary, as we shall see later, Tichý's work is characterised by a considerable degree of systematic perspective.

In the field of composition, Tichý was most inspired by the greats of the 20th century: Stravinsky, Honegger, Prokofiev, Hindemith, and, with the greatest intensity, Dmitri Shostakovich. He was also fascinated by Johann Sebastian Bach and would often mention in lectures

that he had brought Bach fugues on every holiday he had taken for years. These influences – particularly the idioms of the first half of the 20th century and expanded tonality – can be clearly traced in his musical language. Tichý never became a radical composer; his music reveals a clear relationship to tradition. This is evident in his harmony (and chord construction), where he never fully discarded tonality and forms related to tonal harmony, and in the aspect of form itself, where he often worked with tried and tested formal schemas. He devoted great attention to the consideration of musical tectonics, reflecting his closeness to the theoretical oeuvre of Karel Janeček (1903–1974). Pieces that serve as useful illustrations of Tichý's style include the *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra* (1977–78), written in memory of Shostakovich and a prizewinner in a young composers' competition organised by the Ministry of Culture.⁸ It demonstrates a preference for traditional forms and a clear inspiration from Shostakovich's own cello concerto. Also worth mentioning are Tichý's four symphonies, the last of which was composed in 1998. His second symphony also won him first prize in the Ministry of Culture competition.⁹ There are also works the composer himself considered important for their incorporation of theory into practice: his two string quartets, the *Nonet*, and the *Piano Sonata*, among others.¹⁰ Tichý's oeuvre is predominantly instrumental, with a few vocal-instrumental pieces and works for unaccompanied voices, generally a choir. He did not write any stage works.

In music theory, Vladimír Tichý directly continued a lineage of Czech (or rather Prague-based) music theorists, including Karel Janeček, Tichý's mentor Karel Risinger, and, to some extent, Jaroslav Volek – who, as he also engaged with aesthetics and other fields, is only partially included in this lineage. Tichý had a keen interest in concepts from Karel Janeček's "superstructure" disciplines (primarily his *Tektonika*¹¹, as well as *Základy moderní harmonie – The Foundations of Modern Harmony*¹²). "Even as a student, my attention was primarily drawn to issues of musical time – kinetics, and its relationship to the other disciplines of music theory, harmony, melody, tectonics," Tichý stated.¹³ He was also influenced by the prominent topics of discourse at the time, including the number of harmonic functions¹⁴ or the nature of music theory. Tichý's contribution lies in the fact that he rarely stopped at merely adding his own arguments to a debate – far more often, he would organically develop and even complement existing conceptions. One example is his work in musical kinetics, which he understood



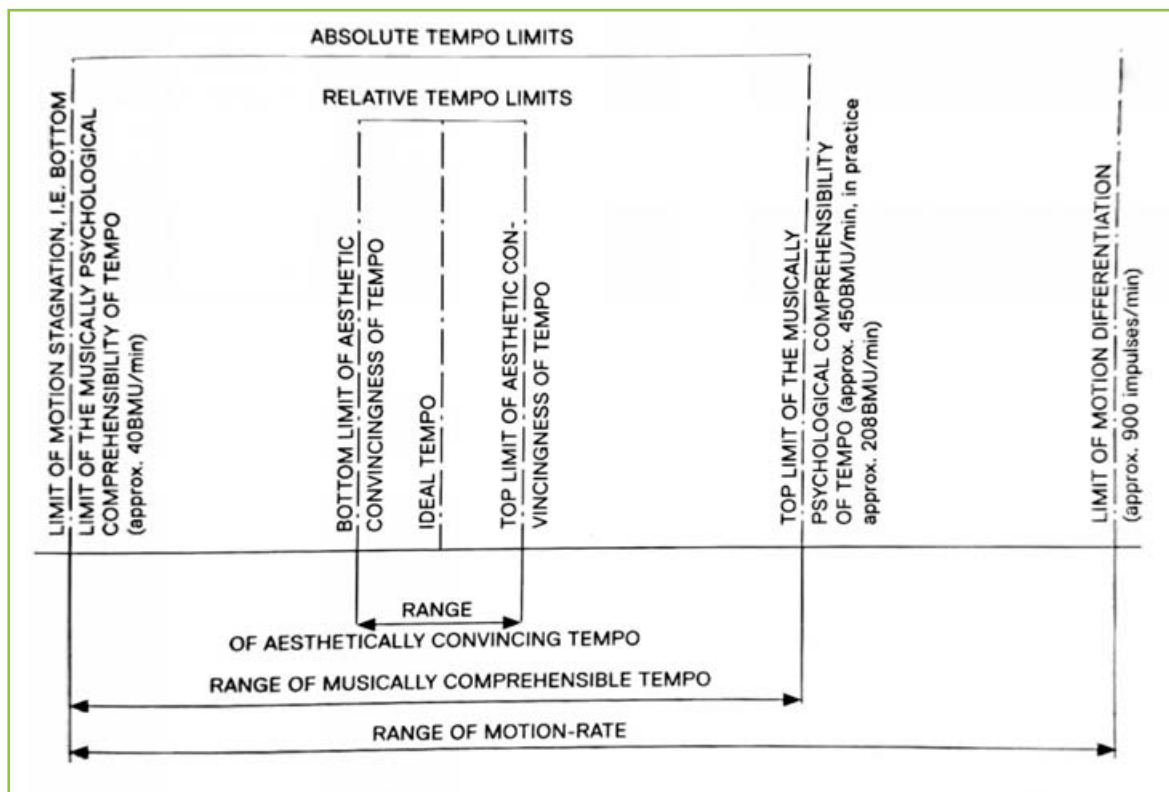
Music stream: Area of musical kinetics and tectonics according to Vladimír Tichý. Musical Kinetics, p. 27

as a supplement to Janeček's concepts. Tichý's texts are highly systematic, capable of generalisation and abstraction without becoming divorced from reality. We can also discern his attempts to formulate and exhaust all the possibilities and aspects that the topic at hand can offer – this is where Karel Ríšínger's influence is most apparent. However, unlike Ríšínger's texts, Tichý's actively engage with musical practice, and the phenomena discussed are more frequently illustrated with real musical examples.

Tichý developed his teaching activities within the field of music theory and its various sub-disciplines. Consequently, he naturally taught subjects he was exploring himself at the time. His lectures focused primarily on Czech (or Prague-based) music theory. In his teaching, this tradition prevailed over other approaches from abroad. This is also how the current head of the Music Theory Department, Iva Oplířilová, describes Tichý's teaching, while also highlighting what made it highly relevant. "We can learn a great deal from Tichý's approach to students. He had an enormous repertoire of examples and situations – he could guide students towards 'aha!' moments that reinforced what he taught. During practical exercises, he welcomed mistakes, as they allowed him to tailor his lecture directly to the individual student," Oplířilová explains.¹⁵

A Systematist with a Practical Sensibility

In Czech music theory, Karel Ríšínger established a division into systematic, analytic, and synthetic music theory. He understood the systematic "branch" as the one that provides the field with an organised set of terms; the analytic branch offers a framework for recognising the principles of musical language across various periods,¹⁶ while the synthetic branch focuses on modelling musical language itself.¹⁷ Vladimír Tichý was proficient in all three branches of his field, but his *modus operandi* primarily employed methods from systematic music theory. When we describe Vladimír Tichý as a systematist, we mainly refer to the fact that he provided a generalising theory with appropriate terminology for numerous topics. Iva Oplířilová concurs that Tichý's most influential works were his systematic treatises: *Úvod do studia hudební kinetiky* (*Introduction to the Study of Musical Kinetics*)¹⁸ and *Modalita* (*Modality*)¹⁹. Further examples of such texts include his *Pojednání barvy zvuku hudební teorií a její místo v soustavě současných hudebněteoretických disciplín* (*The Concept of Tone Colour in Music Theory and Its Place Within the Framework of Music Theory Disciplines*)²⁰, a rare topic in the Czech context, or *K systematickému clustru* (*On the Systematics of Clusters*)²¹. Such approaches can then be applied to a broader field of specific topics and tasks, though, as we will show later, these applications also have their limits.



Tichý's definition of tempo and its limits. Musical Kinetics, p. 67

Before focusing on several specific concepts delineated by Tichý, we will first clarify their foundations. The emphasis on the systematic form of music theory can be understood as closely related to Tichý's conception of the field as a whole. Music theory itself, along with the specification of its subject, method, or internal hierarchy, is a frequent topic among Prague's music theorists. Tichý contributed his own perspective, once again closely following that of Karel Risinger. Risinger regarded music theory as part of a broader stream of the theory of music, which he divided into music theory and music aesthetics.²² He then defined the principal focus of these two branches: music theory concentrates on form – the syntax of musical language – while musical aesthetics prioritises the content of music.²³ This division reflects a long-established view of music theory, also popular beyond our borders, according to which music theory should focus exclusively on musical structure, without excessive overlap with musical psychology, sociology, semantics, and so forth.²⁴ Vladimír Tichý's perspective was similar. His works are almost entirely focused on phenomena observable directly within the musical structure – phenomena we can describe as essentially objective.

Nevertheless, this objectivity is not cold or divorced from audible reality. Although Tichý included musical perception in his work only to a limited degree, he still took certain of its facets into account, as evidenced in his introduction to musical kinetics. He then conscientiously took listening into account in his own teaching, as is made clear by the handbook *Thinking and Hearing Harmonically*²⁵.

Tichý also explored the nature of music theory in several texts – most notably in his essay *Hudební teorie jako vědecká disciplína kontra hudební teorie jako nepominutelná součást odborného vybavení praktických hudebníků* (*Music Theory as an Academic Discipline vs. Music Theory as an Indispensable Skill for the Practical Musician*²⁶). From the title alone, Tichý suggests a dichotomy that had been proposed for the field as early as Hugo Riemann. One branch is research itself, of which he states that “music theory as an academic discipline follows and, with a certain degree of hindsight, reflects the process of the development of musical language,”²⁷ while the second is the application of music theory – a body of knowledge that a professional musician should²⁸ have at their disposal.²⁹ Tichý's perspective on

music theory remains largely consistent today: “The relationship between music theory and musical practice is similar to that between linguistics and literature. It helps us understand and interpret musical language; new musical phenomena – it discovers relationships, connections, and meanings. Music theory research helps us reach the deeper layers and structures of musical language. Music theory disciplines play an indispensable role within the study of music in general.”³⁰ Tichý’s view of the relationship between theory and practice is more descriptive and speculative. Iva Oplištilová further notes that Tichý emphasised the importance of music theory for composers and the fact that, through systematic exploration, theorists can discover new paths.³¹ This perspective does not rely on prescriptive theoretical rules but rather on cooperation between the two branches of musical discourse.

Essential Writings

We have already seen that Vladimír Tichý was a Prague theorist par excellence. He avoided merely duplicating tradition, focusing instead on filling in the white spots on the map. Although Tichý penned many such texts, the importance of some (measured primarily by their lasting impact on discourse) naturally stands out. In the following section, I will focus precisely on these texts, with a certain degree of subjectivity.

Three Modalities

The oldest text in this group is the essay *Modalita (systematika) (Modality – Systematics)*³². In this work, Tichý offers a firm and sufficiently generalised definition of modality, delineating it as “a manner of organising pitches on the basis of a set of tones (the mode) defined *a priori*, and the free use of this pitch set with regard to the stylistic norms of the style in question”.³³ He identifies three main types of modality: Ancient Greek, Mediaeval, and modern.³⁴ These fundamental premises are still upheld in Czech music theory. Tichý also explores the relationship between medieval modality and tonality: although he acknowledges that modes were not constructed on a complex system of tonal thought, their *finalis* must surely have been perceived as a kind of centre. He also understands the *finalis* as the prototype for the fundamental. He draws attention to the blending of tonal and modal thought, where the major-minor system can “borrow”³⁵ from the medieval modes. In the field of modern modality, to which he devotes

the majority of the text and for which he applies the broadest possible interpretation of the principle of modality, he also devotes part of his analysis to the number of pitches appropriate for such modes, emphasising the importance of hierarchy, as he claims that in the extreme case of the twelve-tone mode, a hierarchy cannot be established.³⁶ An interesting addendum explores modes in microtonal systems, as well as microtonal tunings themselves: here, Tichý’s preference for systematic thought and exhaustive explanation is evident. He even briefly mentions tunings that would be created “as a consequence of giving up on the fact of octave identity”, though he was rather sceptical of them, given the strength of octave identity.³⁷ This opinion has been more or less disproved by the existence of numerous non-octave-repeating microtonal tunings, though tunings with octave equivalence remain dominant in microtonal music.

Limits of Motion

Perhaps Tichý’s most significant work today is his *Introduction to Musical Kinetics*.³⁸ This book is the culmination of years of research in the field, complementing Janeček’s framework of the higher disciplines of music theory. It also laid the foundation for future research: Vlastislav Matoušek, in his book *Rytmus a čas v etnické hudbě (Rhythm and Time in Ethnic Music)*³⁹, developed Tichý’s ideas and applied them – with some modifications – to the music of non-European cultures.⁴⁰ For Tichý, kinetics concerns the division of structure at the lowest levels; those levels at which we perceive kinaesthetically, in an embodied manner.⁴¹ Tichý then considers observation another form of perception, but one that the listener applies at higher levels of structure. He defines the field with relative exactitude by the limits of motion differentiation and stagnation. Below the limit of motion differentiation (1/15 of a second), impulses blend together; above the limit of motion stagnation (1.5 seconds), we do not perceive kinaesthetically but adopt an observational focus, shifting the situation from kinetics to form and tectonics. This demonstrates two things: where Tichý continues Janeček’s tectonics and how he takes into account the factor of perception and experience, although this concerns only a few selected principles. In his *Kinetics*, Tichý presents an overview of the elementary phenomena we relate to musical time, such as rhythm, metre, the measure, and tempo, while also considering the relative presence or absence of these phenomena in music of the 20th century – he also mentions polymetre, ametric music,

atempo, and the like. In addition to “cleaning up” established terms, Tichý also introduces some new terminology, such as “basic metric unit” (BMU) and “basic metric formation” (BMF), which generally correspond to the terms beat and measure, though in a slightly more general sense. Tichý’s proposed terms are not self-serving; he uses them to define other concepts – he defines tempo, for instance, as the ratio between the BMU and the duration of the section.⁴² Another inspiration from Janeček is the division of time into musical (structural), measured in bars, and physical, astronomical time, measured in “classical” temporal units. Tichý’s *Introduction to Musical Kinetics* now represents a foundational tome in the library of Prague music theory. It is also beneficial, however, to consider it in the context of the international literature,⁴³ though it is beyond the remit of this text to explore this context in more detail. Nonetheless, let us at least mention Justin London’s book *Hearing in Time*,⁴⁴ which offers different perspectives on some of these contexts – often perspectives that can be applied to a broader range of styles.

Harmony

Harmony was one of the themes most intensively explored by Prague’s music theorists in the 20th century. A popular question concerned the number of harmonic functions: Janeček developed the ideas of Otakar Šín and identified five functions, including the Lydian and Phrygian;⁴⁵ Volek added the mediant for a total of four, while Risinger’s most radical proposal extended this number to as many as fifteen. Vladimír Tichý did not propose a hypothesis of his own but instead found value in both Janeček’s and Volek’s approaches. *Thinking and Hearing Harmonically* makes clear what he adopted from the both of them. As this is a textbook, it maintains the traditional notion of three harmonic functions. However, as soon as he reaches the chapter on alterations, he relies on the Phrygian and Lydian chords as “requirements for alteration” and “auxiliary functions”.⁴⁶ His understanding of alterations is markedly different from that of, for example, Jaroslav Kofroň – he also abandons Šín’s terminology, though the Phrygian and Lydian chords are still used in this context. For Tichý, alterations (especially dominant-sounding altered chords) primarily represent a combination of the primary and auxiliary functions. This interpretation does an excellent job of explaining the nature of such chords, but its terminology and designation can prove somewhat complex, and it is clear that it has not supplanted previous interpretations. Tichý also does not explicitly

include the mediant function, but Volek’s perspective follows a chapter on chromatic mediants,⁴⁷ in a section titled “Appendix on Classical Harmony”. Here, Tichý also adopts Volek’s designation of mediants. A rare section of the book is that dedicated to 20th-century harmony, which comprehensively catalogues elements frequently employed in the harmonic language of the 20th century: quartal harmony, clusters, and (modern) modality, among other topics. The volume combines the systematic, analytic, and synthetic approaches outlined above. It emphasises the need for students not simply to master the necessary progressions but to be able to apply them in analogous situations. It is also worth mentioning that this textbook is not Tichý’s only contribution to the study of harmony – his concept of the harmonic field has also proven useful, if not fully appreciated.⁴⁸ The harmonic field sees Tichý develop the idea of a less static conception of harmony, one that would also be useful for music following the Tristan crisis. He understands the harmonic field as a process in which a knowledge of harmony is created gradually and in which pitches and their relationships are interpreted against the background of the temporal progression of the piece.

Evaluation

From the perspective of contemporary music theory, particularly within the Czech tradition, Tichý’s works brought order to several areas that had previously received only marginal attention in the Czech context. Crucially, he established a terminological foundation: terms from his *Introduction to Musical Kinetics* found their way into the everyday vocabulary of Czech music theorists. Tichý’s work continues to be developed and expanded. In the cases we have examined in detail, his concepts have become an integral part of local discourse and are also employed in teaching, especially for music theory students. In many instances, Tichý’s work serves as a foundational basis for the field of study. However, it is important to remember that this foundation should be critically evaluated, considering current perspectives and, importantly, the international literature. By adhering to these principles, Tichý’s concepts can remain valuable, both in their substance and their form. They stand as evidence of exceptionally robust systems that, at the same time, retain a strong sense of (musical) reality.

The author is employed at the Music Theory Department of the Music and Dance Faculty at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and was one of Vladimír Tichý’s last students.

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- 20) TICHÝ, Vladimír. “Pojednání barvy zvuku hudební teorii a její místo v soustavě současných hudebněteoretických disciplín” (The Concept of Tone Colour in Music Theory and its Place Within the Framework of Music Theory Disciplines). *Živá hudba*, 2002.
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- 23) Ibid., p. 194.
- 24) This conception is now changing, and connections with cognitive science and phenomenology, in particular, have been crucial for music theory over the last few decades. This shift is also becoming apparent in Czech discourse. See, for example, Thomas Christensen’s essential history of music theory – *The Cambridge History of Music Theory* (CHRISTENSEN, Thomas, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Patrick McCreless has explored music theory across a broad range as Tichý, but reflecting on a greater number of approaches (MCCRELESS, Patrick. *Rethinking Contemporary Music Theory. In Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, ed. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997, pp. 13–53).
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- 33) Ibid., p. 117.
- 34) Ibid., pp. 117–118.
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- 40) The texts were published in English by NAMU in a compendium titled *Musical Kinetics, along with a text by Tomáš Kuhn*. Prague: NAMU, 2014.
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- 42) Ibid., p. 11.
- 43) OPLIŠTILOVÁ, Iva. *Hudební čas: jeho odklon od času fyzikálního (Musical Time: Its Deviation from Physical Time)*. Doctoral thesis. Prague: HAMU, 2013.
- 44) LONDON, Justin. *Hearing in Time: Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 45) In Czech classical harmony, the term “Lydian” is usually used to designate a triad built on the seventh degree of a scale that contains a Lydian fourth, while the “Phrygian” chord describes a triad built on the lowered second degree; the Phrygian second.
- 46) TICHÝ, V., *Harmonicky myslet a slyšet*, p. 180.
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Ludwig Grünberger, important Jewish German-Bohemian composer, 1839–1896

Though he is almost entirely forgotten today, the composer Ludwig Grünberger was an important musical figure in the cultural life of Prague during the nineteenth century, with premieres of his works reviewed regularly in the German-language press of the day, extensive biographical sketches published in Prague in 1883 and in Vienna in 1890, when he would recently have marked his fiftieth birthday.

A third article (1893) focuses in extensive detail on his compositional output. Though discreet, the indication in the 1883 biography that Grünberger was the child of wealthy parents let the reader know that Grünberg was Jewish, and thus a member of the surprisingly large cohort of Jewish pianist-composers from the earlier nineteenth century who began their successful careers with an education in Prague.

Ludwig Grünberger was the oldest of seven children, born on April 23, 1839 to Josef Grünberger (born 1810, died before 1872) and Katharina Grünhut Grünberger (1809–1872). Josef Grünberger was not originally from Prague, but was born in the relatively small city of Nový Bydžov, northeast of the capital. Ludwig's mother was born in Prague, as was his maternal grandmother, Adela Stern (1782–1861). The Grünberger family business, the production

of liqueurs, alcohol, vinegar, and related products, can be documented as far back as 1847. The business was in operation until at least as late as 1892 in what was then a factory-district in an independent town, Karolinenthal, since then gentrified, incorporated into Prague, and now known as Karlín.

The two extensive biographies both mention Grünberger's wealthy parents, but provide no details about the family business. His earliest musical instruction came from the Jewish piano teacher and composer Josef Kisch, who operated a private music school in Old Town at Kreuzherren Gasse (Křížovnická), no. 86-1; he also studied composition with František Škroup. Next, Grünberger relocated to Dresden in order to study composition with Julius Rietz – Rietz, who eventually became general music-director there, had been appointed conductor

*Grünberger's portrait,
Österreichische Musik- und Theaterzeitung,
October 1, 1890, p. 1*



of the Dresden opera in 1860. Grünberger also studied counterpoint with Adolf Reichel (active in Dresden between 1857 and 1867).

Grünberger's name first appears in the press in 1857, when he performed the Schumann piano concerto in A minor at a benefit concert in Prague (the report estimates his age as fifteen – he would have been close to eighteen at the time). Four years later (1861), he is one of more than thirty composers, most of them, if not all, based in Prague, who are listed as contributors to the collection *Feuillets d'Album* ("the newest original salon compositions for piano") published in Prague by Schalek in a set of twelve volumes (apparently his intended composition was not included). Among the other composers present is his teacher, Josef Kisch.

Though Grünberger is usually described as a German-Bohemian, the earliest surviving published composition from his pen is apparently the *Chansons bohémiens: 4 české písně* issued in 1862 as the composer's op. 3 by Josef Šálek (Schaleck) (both as individual songs, and as a set). Grünberger sets four poems by Gustav Šálek (Schaleck; Schalek) between 1837 and 1889: *Odkvětlé* (*Out of Bloom*), *Národní* (*National*), *V mne důvěřuj* (*Trust in Me*), *Vzdálené milence* (*To the Faraway Lover*). Gustav is Josef's son; Gustav is also the father of the noted artist Malva Schalek, deported to Theresienstadt, and from there to Auschwitz. The Schalek family was Jewish.

Grünberger's op. 4, a set of four characteristic pieces for piano solo, is already published in Dresden; an 1862 review for op. 4 describes the composer as a "young musician living in Prague". The 1883 biography states that Grünberger spent four years studying in Dresden; this would likely be the period 1862 (or 1863) to 1866/1867.

By 1876, Grünberger is publishing piano works in Hamburg with Berens; Berens also published his first set of "Mirza-Schaffy" songs as op. 12. This set is mentioned in an article (1875) on Grünberger in the news magazine *Bohemia*, based in Prague; it mentions that these songs are dedicated to Rietz. Grünberger went on to have a very productive relationship with the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel based in Leipzig; the 1883 biography states that this was due to a personal recommendation from his teacher Julius Rietz, specifically for "his first song compositions". However, the first set from our composer to appear with Breitkopf is his op. 13, *Seven Songs of Mirza-Schaffy*.

Business Activities – A Digression

We mentioned above Grünberger's artistic connections with the music publisher Joseph Schalek and his son Gustav Schalek; it is worth mentioning that the Schalek family was also in the same business as the Grünberger family, that is, distilling. The Schalek brothers, Mathias



*Grünberger's tomb
in the Evangelical Cemetery in Strašnice,
Prague*

and Eduard, brothers of Joseph, and thus uncles of the poet Gustav, were operating a “factory for the preparation of sweetened spirituous liqueurs” as early as 1859, at Ring-Pl 156. In addition to the factory, there was a tavern also operating at this address – “Zum Tempel”.

Grünberger and his brothers were bereft of their mother, Katharina Grünberger (née Grünhut), who died on 4 November 1872, and was buried at the Olšany Israelite Cemetery. The death notice describes her as “Widow of Landlord and Manufacturer”. This meant that her properties then passed on to her heirs, Ludwig being the eldest. The family distilling factory had been in business at Poříčer Strasse 30 since as early as 1863; the owners and operators in 1878 are the deceased Josef, along with Ludwig, and his brothers, Simon and Julius. Simon and Julius are still the proprietors in 1892.

The Schalek Brothers are still the proprietors of Ring-Pl 156 at some point in 1875, but it is

transferred to Grünberger in that year, and continues to be listed in his name in subsequent.

These activities provide an unusual window onto a composer from this period who, in addition to his musical activities, was able to rely on other income to support his social position, unlike many pianist-composers who had to rely on lucrative tours marketing their virtuoso skills.

Musical Development

Though Grünberger's focus during this period seems to have continued to be works for piano and songs for voice with piano accompaniment, there are more ambitious projects as well. 1874 sees the premiere of three movements from a *Symphony in D*, performed at a benefit concert played by the orchestra of the Prague Conservatory under the direction of Josef Krejčí. Other works on the programme included an arrangement for small orchestra of the Gounod/Bach Prelude, a poem from the cycle “*Lásky boji*” by Adalbert Hřimalý, and the *Sakuntala Overture* by Hungarian composer Karl Goldmark. Another important orchestral work, from much later (1889), is the *Nordic Suite*, op. 43, published in Prague by Jacob Fischer, and even later (1891) there is the *Derwischstanz (Dervish Dance)* op. 61, a humoresque for orchestra. Grünberger also produced two string quartets, op. 31 and op. 37. More typical of his output are the many collections of songs, almost all published by Breitkopf, including settings of poems by Heine (op. 17), Petöfy (op. 28), and Peter Cornelius; his choruses, particularly *Stark wie der Tod die Liebe*, op. 46, from 1890; and many works for piano two hands, and four hands, not only published by Breitkopf, but also by publishers in Wrocław, Bremen, and Berlin. Grünberger tried his hand at a one-act opera, *Die Heimkehr*, with

1) Poem in five sections. This is the fifth and concluding poem, with nine stanzas.

Prager Familienblatt,
vol. 2, no. 7, 1883



a libretto by Rudolf Christoph Jenny, the gestation of which began in 1892, and the premiere originally scheduled for late 1893; it finally premiered at the New German Theater in February 1894 with “reasonable success”.

Grünberger apparently had an early marriage which ended in divorce; his marriage to “a young singer Miss Isabella Anita Fuchs from Hamburg” is reported in the press in April, 1892; it took place in the German Protestant parish church of St. Michael’s in Prague. There are no reports of professional activities for this singer in the contemporary newspapers. This union may, however, be a partial explanation of some perhaps anomalous facts in his life-story in the next several years. First, after a lifetime spent in Prague, with the exception of vacations to places like Capri and Helgoland, he relocates, apparently permanently, to Weimar, in early 1895. Secondly, Grünberger dies in Prague on December 12, 1896, at the age of fifty-seven, “after a long and painful illness” [lung disease], and is buried not in a Jewish cemetery, but at the new Lutheran cemetery in Strašnice in Prague. The wedding and the funeral are the only public evidence that he had moved from his Jewish family and social circle to an identity as a convert to Lutheranism.

Grünberger was remembered after his passing by a memorial event the following spring (May 1897), organized by “Concordia”, the Association of German Writers and Artists in Bohemia, a group that had been involved in presenting various works of his over the course of the previous twenty years. The celebration included performances of a *Prelude*, two *Dance Burlesques*, and a *Waltz* for piano, as well as twelve songs from his large production, and concluded with gypsy tunes for piano four hands. With this, Grünberger, his life and works, passed into obscurity.

CZECH MUSIC EVERYDAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

IN THE SPRING OF 2026

During the winter months, Czech audiences had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the music of several successful Czech composers of the youngest generation. There were two premieres by Darja Kukal Moiseeva (born 1998), laureate of the International Rostrum of Composers 2025 in the under-30 category. At the "Tribute to Mozart" matinee at the Estates Theatre, tenor Ondřej Holub and pianist Lucie Pirochová presented her *Mozartiana, Otázky v nás (Mozartiana, Questions Within Us)*, a song cycle on poems by Vladimír Holan. In late February, the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra in Ostrava presented her first purely orchestral composition, *Prostor barvám (Space for Colours)*, which the orchestra selected from its open call for young composers.

There were also two premieres by Kateřina Horká (born 1993): *Spring Meadow* for wind symphony orchestra and – by remarkable coincidence – another song cycle for tenor and piano setting poems by Vladimír Holan, *Když růže přestaly chrlit krev (When the Roses Stopped Gushing Blood)*. Moreover, the cycle was performed with the composer accompanying the same tenor, Ondřej Holub.

10 January 2026, the Estates Theatre, Prague. A Tribute to Mozart. **Darja Kukal Moiseeva: *Mozartiana, Questions within us* on texts by Vladimír Holan (world premiere).** Ondřej Holub – tenor, Lucie Pirochová – piano.

15 January 2026, Reduta, Olomouc. **Kateřina Slaběňáková: *Jedním tahem za vztahem (One Stroke for a Relationship)* (world premiere).** Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor: Kento Satsuma.

15 January 2026, Imperial Spa – Atrium, Karlovy Vary, **Lukáš Sommer: *Phoenix – Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* (world premiere).** Anna Paulová – clarinet, Karlovy Vary Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Kryštof Koska.

7 February 2026, Academy of Music and Performing Arts – Martinů Hall, Prague. Czech Chamber Music Society. **Lukáš Hurník: *Conspiration, Sonata for Four Guitars* (world premiere).** Prague Guitar Quartet.

8 February 2026, Maison de la Radio et de la Musique – Auditorium, Paris. Festival Présences. **Ondřej Adámek: *Thin Ice, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra II* (world premiere).** Christian Tetzlaff – violin, Orchestre National de France, conductor: Cristian Măcelaru.

18 February 2026, Atrium Žižkov, Prague. Bridges of Contemporary Music. **Jan Kotyk: *Mateníky* (world premiere).** Tereza Horáková – violin, Matthias Lorenz – violoncello, Miroslav Beinbauer – piano.

21 February 2026, KD Plzeňka, Beroun. Talichův Beroun: Fateful Women. **Kateřina Horká: *Spring Meadow* for wind symphony orchestra (world premiere).** Czech National Concert Band, conductor: Marek Prášil.

26 February 2026, Kino Vesmír, Ostrava. **Darja Kukal Moiseeva: *Prostor barvám (Space for Colours)* (world premiere).** Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, conductor: Jakub Klecker.



PHOTO: MATĚJ KOMÁR

Ondřej Adámek: *Thin Ice*
(Czech premiere, 23 February 2026; Jonathan Nott, conductor; Christian Tétzlaff, violin, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra)

3 March 2026, Church of St. Lawrence, Prague. 677th Tuesday of Umělecká beseda. **Kateřina Horká: *Když růže přestaly chrlít krev (When the Roses Stopped Gushing Blood)*, a cycle of three songs for tenor and piano based on texts by Vladimír Holan (premiere).** Ondřej Holub – tenor, Kateřina Horká – piano. **Miloš Haase: *Madrigali su poesie di Sandro Penna* for voice and piano (premiere).** Irena Troupová – soprano, Tomáš Víšek – piano. **Jindra Nečasová Nardelli: *The Little Mermaid*, a melodrama for recitation and piano based on a text by Tomáš Víšek (premiere).** Kateřina Seidlová Hrušková – recitation, Tomáš Víšek – piano.

5 March 2026, Church of St. Anne, České Budějovice. **Milan Svoboda: *Wizard of Oz*, orchestral suite from the ballet (world premiere).** South Czech Philharmonic, conductor: Milan Svoboda.

7 March 2026, the Estates Theatre, Prague. Impressionism and Symbolism in Music. **Vojtěch Dlask: *Il cardillo addolorato*. Song cycle based on lyrics by Anna Maria Ortese (world premiere).** Anna Moriová – voice, Martin Levický – piano.

7 March 2026, Spanish Synagogue, Prague. Everlasting Hope. **Pavel Duda: *Světlo na konci vln (Light at the End of the Waves)* (world premiere of the winning piece of the composition competition).** Johanna Haníková – piano.

12 March 2026, Blahoslav House, Brno. Konvergence. **Pavel Nesit: *Co je pevné, není bez chvění (That Which Does not Tremble Is Not Solid)* (world premiere).** Jiří Mráz – clarinet, Egli Prifti – piano, Diversa Quartet.

17 March 2026, Studio of Švanda Theatre, Prague. Prague Philharmonia, Contemporary Music Series S: Pavel Trojan and Pavel Trojan Jr. **Pavel Trojan Jr.: *Moondance Séance* for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, violin, viola, cello, double bass, accordion, and piano; Pavel Trojan: *Wind Quartet* for flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon (world premieres).** Jiří Ševčík – flute, Barbora Haasová – flute, Lenka Filová – oboe, Jan Brabec – clarinet, Václav Fůrbach – bassoon, Pavla Tesařová – violin, Stanislav Svoboda – viola, Lukáš Pospíšil – cello, Maximilián Heinrich – double bass, Markéta Laštovičková – accordion, Martin Fila – piano.

19 March 2026, Reduta, Olomouc. **Emma Parisi: *Krůpěje (Drops)* (world premiere).** Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor: Eduard Kostelník.

21 March 2026, Pracovna café bar, Prague-Žižkov. NeoKlasik Orchestra: Opening concert celebrating the 120th anniversary of Jaroslav Ježek's birth. **Štěpán Rak: *Tmavomodrý svět (Dark Blue World)* (world premiere).** Štěpán Rak – guitar.

25 March 2026, Museum and Gallery of the Northern Plzeň Region, Mariánská Týnice. **Daniel Forró: *Valse B-A-C-H* arranged for theremin; *Palimpsest* for theremin and chamber orchestra (world premieres).** Martin Jaroš – theremin, NeoKlasik Orchestra.



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