

czech music

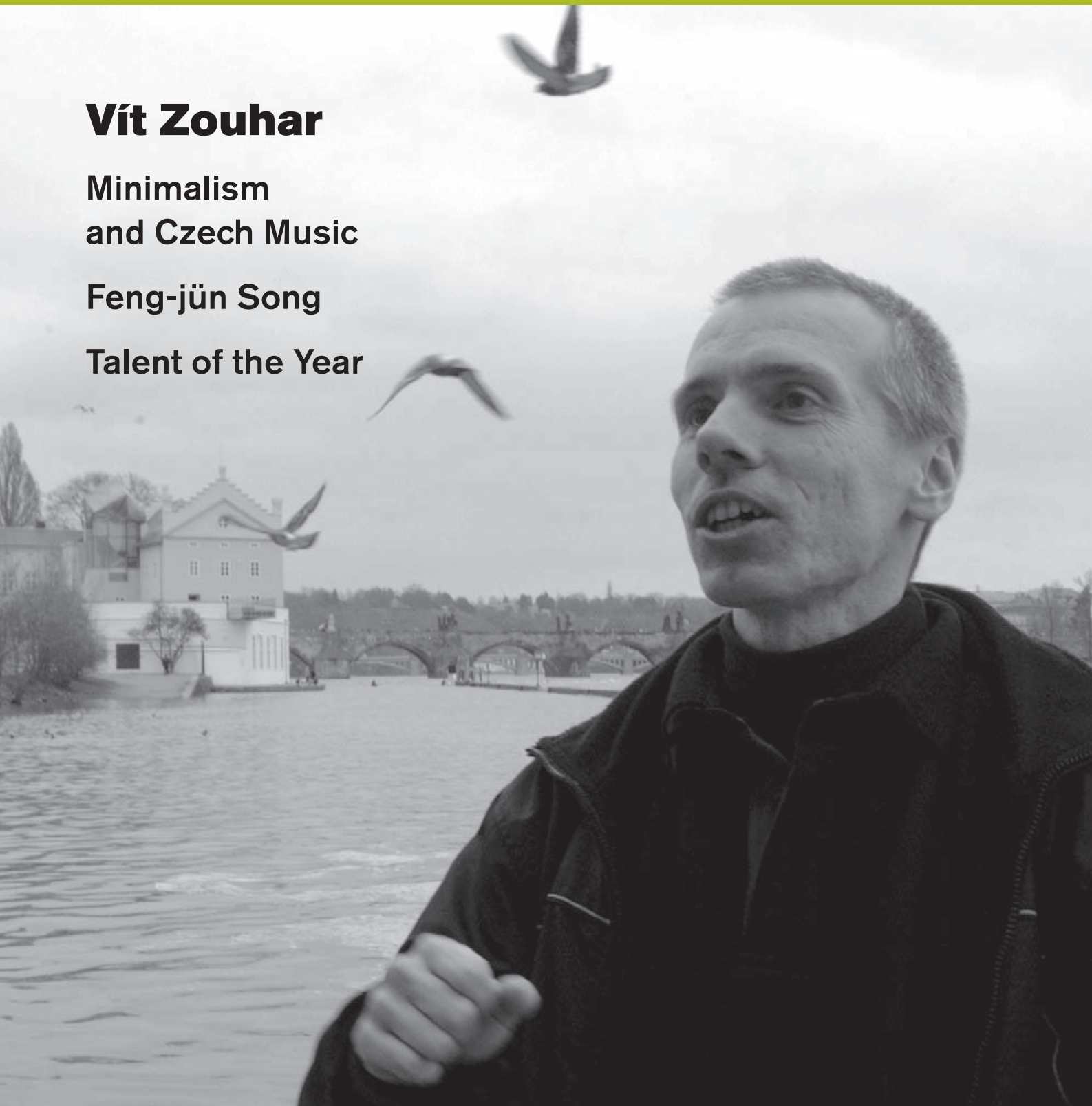
2 | 2002 bimonthly magazine

Vít Zouhar

**Minimalism
and Czech Music**

Feng-jün Song

Talent of the Year





editorial

Dear Readers,

Let me introduce this issue by apologising for the delay in sending you the last issue. The many changes in our magazine naturally took their toll and only now is everything beginning to work smoothly. One of the themes of this issue is minimal-music. You can read a study of the spread of this movement here and the reactions of Czech composers to the new ideas, and you can also read an interview with one of these composers Vít Zouhar. There are plenty of other subjects of course, for example a singer trained in Peking Opera who lives and sings in the Czech Republic. For those of you who are interested in earlier music there is also news of Czech music treasures in Swedish libraries. And of course, reports of new recordings. I wish you pleasant reading and fine Spring days.

Matěj Kratochvíl
MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL
EDITOR

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the inconceivable in combination vít zouhar on the post-modern

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

Vít Zouhar is active in several fields of music. A composer, he also works as a teacher at both the Palacký University in Olomouc and the Institute for Electronic Music in Graz in Austria. He writes on the theory of music, particularly contemporary music, and is the author of articles on Arvo Pärt, minimalism and postmodernism. He is sometime labelled the one and only Czech minimalist composer, but for Zouhar minimalism has always been linked with other influences, historical or exotic.

Most of your pieces are written for specific performers. Does that have an influence on your work?

When I look back over the last ten years, I can see that actually all the pieces I've composed in this period were written for specific performers. They are a great inspiration to me. On the one hand I know their characteristics, and on the other the way they interpret music and communicate with is something that speaks to me. All these aspects are the invisible boundaries that mark out a space for new compositions. Whether we're talking about DAMA DAMA, the Damian Ensemble or other groups, I find the collaboration very beneficial and pleasant.

Is that the case with your orchestral pieces as well?

When I was writing Brána slunce (Gate of the Sun) or Blízká setkání zběsilostí srdce (Close Encounters of the Wild at Heart), I knew what kind of orchestra would be playing these pieces, who would be conducting and where and in what circumstances they would be presented. All this together had an effect on their form. By the way, both pieces were premiered by the conductor Petr Šumník and both were performed first in the same place.

The second pole of your own original music is electronic music. Do you think in different ways when composing for instruments and for electronics?

I would tend to say no. The basic material is completely different, but my approach is very similar in both cases, especially recently. I want the same things – energy charge, emotional experience and direct communication – from both media, I mean from acoustic music and electro-acoustic music. The creative process is very much the same in both cases, and it's only the means of production that is different. The concept naturally has to be a little different given that with electronic music I'm responsible for the final product. Whereas with instrumental music I create a score that will be interpreted and performed by someone else.

Do you use acoustic instruments in combination with electronics?

In a sense. In my electro-acoustic pieces there are recycled layers of both acoustic instruments and other sounds. I don't in fact have anything purely electronic, with all the sound materials created just by electronic methods. On the contrary, I enjoy finding points in common between things that seem apparently quite unrelated to each other. This is why I use both concrete but also in

some way shifted sounds, and also electronic sounds that distantly resemble concrete sounds. I choose from both these worlds, or rather I try to adapt them to make it clear what they have in common, so that electronic sounds acquire associations with something very concrete, and conversely, the acoustic sounds take on a more abstract form, even though their source is very concrete. It is precisely this inter-penetration and ambiguity that I enjoy. It's the same with acoustic music, where again I often use the same kind of ambiguities, with the concrete material going beyond its context. In one context it works, but in another it is inconceivable, or conceivable only as contrast or conflict. And what interests me is just the inconceivable in combination and not in conflict.

What is your view of the problem of concert performance of electronic pieces?

Just last week in Graz I listened to a new presentation from students of the Institute for Electronic Music and Acoustics. In the institute there's a place called the Cube in which you can simulate any kind of acoustic space with any number of acoustic sources. Nonetheless, when some pieces were played there they seemed to be missing some other medium. Maybe it was because they were played in an entirely dark room, where the almost absolute darkness excluded any visual element and concentrated all attention on the sound production. By saying this I definitely don't mean to claim that electronic music should always be presented in some visual context, but this specific experience reminded me that there are certain pitfalls associated with purely reproduced music, whether acoustic or electro-acoustic. Certain types of music can undoubtedly benefit from visualisation, while elsewhere such interaction can interfere with one element or even both elements at once, but the same is true of absolute rejection of the interaction. It's something that



interests me, but that I have only thought about on a conceptual level. When making sound material for some pieces, for example, I was also interested by what was going on the screen. I planned these programmes to flash, light up and function like a very simple animation of what was happening in the sound. On the other hand these were just games and experiments with mainly comic results and for the time being I have left the problem there.

Electronics in music seems already to have reached a very high level of perfection. Do you expect something more from the next phase of technology?

To be frank, I don't know, but I don't really think so. The equipment I use is about five years old and I'm still extremely satisfied with it. Generally I have the slight feeling

that the whole situation in the field has changed since the end of the Eighties and beginning of the Nineties, when every new model meant a very fundamental step forward in quality and the opening up of new possibilities. Now the changes are less visible. My feeling is that now our expectations are all focussed on what is being done or can be done with the equipment and how to exploit it. The status of technology is changing and it is turning into a natural medium. In any case, very interesting things have been created even on very simple pieces of equipment. Another consideration in my case is that my existing equipment makes it completely possible for me to do the things that I want to do.

You work in the Czech Republic and in Graz in Austria. What is the difference

between the Czech and the Austrian approaches to contemporary music?

Diametrically opposite. I never stop being surprised at how completely different the two cultures and aesthetics are. When I arrived in Graz in 1991 Professor Preßl took one look at my pieces and said: "das ist eine ganz andere Ästhetik". I wondered what he was talking about, but he meant it in a very friendly spirit. This doesn't mean that a Czech performer cannot play their music or that an Austrian performer can't play what is written in this country, but it indicates the difference between the two cultures. In Austria the whole microworld of contemporary Austria is utterly different. It is also differently organised, differently financed, and differently perceived. This is not just a problem peculiar to contemporary music, but relates to

the whole concept of the artist, as it is perceived in Austria and the Czech Republic. In this country if I go around claiming to be an artist, people will think I've escaped from some psychiatric clinic or that I'm trying to create some weird image for myself. If I say that I'm an artist in Austria on the other hand, it is taken as a completely natural statement and nobody wonders about my motives, since an artist is just the same as a teacher, a doctor or a butcher. The Austrians see the field of art quite differently. One consequence is that when a festival of new music appears, it is covered in the media and are regarded as real events. We also have festivals of contemporary music that have acquired a reputation, but they have had to fight for it, and the public response to the whole scene is quite different.

Is the difference also obvious in relation to music students?

In Graz I have taught composers computer music on an individual basis, while in Olomouc most of my work is collective teaching of the history of 20th-century music or analysis, and so the two groups are not entirely comparable. On the other hand I was surprised by how similar the atmosphere was at the end of the Nineties, when students in this country - and here I am thinking more of the JAMU students (The Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno) - and in Graz all had the same feeling of a kind of over-saturation with technologies. In Graz this resulted in protests against compulsory practice in electronic music, and in Brno to a preference for acoustic music.

You are a composer, teacher and musicologist. Are the three people compatible?

Certainly. These roles often complement each other well. For example, thanks to the students the courses I teach in Olomouc give me a more complex and refined view of the themes that interest me as a musicologist. And when I am working on Arvo Pärt, for instance, his work obviously also speaks to me as a composer. The duality of his pieces, their acoustic form on the one hand and complex structure on the other - two diametrically opposed worlds - are all very inspiring for me. And so I talk about it in my courses and my different activities feed each other.

One of your themes is the post-modern. How would you define it in music?

I have been interested in the post-modern since roughly the end of the Eighties. At the beginning I made intense efforts to discover what exactly the post-modern means in the music context, but of course I never reached any clear and definitive conclusion. The idea was naturally naive, but it was a useful process for me. Today the concept of the post-modern in relation to music is understood as a package of certain characteristics and features each defined in ways that are often contradictory and diametrically

opposed and all to a great extent derived from other fields where the post-modern was defined earlier and rather more precisely. It therefore seems to me more useful - and here supporters of the Lyotardian concept will be furious with me - to see the postmodern primarily in terms of time, as a period of roughly the last three decades of the last century that runs without a break into our century and brings with it certain changes in West European and North American musical thought. It is associated above all with the loss of the historical perspective, as Helga de la Motte-Haber puts it, for example. Any kind of material is becoming equally accessible and equally appropriate, which is a state of affairs never possible in any earlier historical age. Earlier the use of alien material worked as a gesture of elevation, alienation, caricature, irony or the expression of distance. In the post-modern these different kinds of material can be used side by side and create an entirely natural whole without summoning up mutual confrontation. Even though - and here we hit a problem: there is hardly a postmodernist theorist, with the exception of Charles Jencks, willing to admit the possibility of the continuing viability of the whole...

In what sense is your music post-modern?

I would rather not get too involved in that question. Still, the fact is that I became interested in the theme of the post-modern precisely because the post-modern, at least for me, has brought so many conceptual impulses and new connections and seemed to me much more open than anything that preceded it. By taking this view I was of course being very un-post-modern - strictly modern one might say - but I didn't care in the slightest. Nonetheless, ambiguity and multiple meanings interested me and still interest me, and this is definitely directly related to the post-modern. Things that work in different contexts and that when placed next to each other neither mutually exclude or confront each other but on the contrary emphasise common points. This is a theme of my piece *Close Encounters with the Wildness of the Heart*. The title combines the titles of two films, David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* and Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. What was important for me here was not these two specific films but the combination of the different aesthetics, which these films represent and which are very strong in their contexts but mutually hardly compatible. In the music this was expressed for example by common points between neo-Baroque elements, the sound quality of a Berliozesque orchestra and minimalist techniques.

Do you still find minimalism interesting even today?

Rather than saying "still" interesting, I would almost say interesting "once again". I was always captivated by pieces such as *It's Gonna Rain, Come Out* (Steve Reich),



and *Music In Twelve Parts* (Philip Glass). What fascinated me was not so much the minimalist techniques in themselves but above all the particular pieces and the effect they had on me (and still do). They have surrounded me for almost twenty years and still continually speak to me again. Of course, this could be proof positive of my rigidity.

What are your plans for the near future?

There are going to be more performances of the opera *Coronide* at various festivals including the Janáček May festival in Ostrava, and in May *DAMA DAMA* will be presenting my *Gates of the Sun* again with conductor Tomáš Hanus and the Karlovy



Vít Zouhar with the actors of his opera Coronide

Vary Symphony Orchestra. I'm also working on a CD of Gates of the Sun with Dan Dlouhý, My most recent completed piece still has last year's date stamp. It was Dan Dlouhý, leader of the DAMA DAMA ensemble who asked me to write it, and I was delighted to accept. The piece is called Petite sirène. It is for four drummers and indirectly refers to the novel Sam's Fall by the Irish, post-modernist (of course!) novelist Richard Kearney. It was successfully premiered last year and this year it should be performed again by DAMA DAMA. My most recent project is musicological rather than a matter of composition. It is a reconstruction of the original three-dimensional form of Poème électronique by Edgar

Varèse, and I am collaborating on it with Robert Höldrich and Josef Gründler. The technological resources of the Cube hall that I mentioned earlier in the Institute for Electronic Music in Graz are making it possible for us to realise the original spatial conceptions offered by Xenakis and Le Corbusier's Pavillon Philips. The results of the project will include a live performance, a publication incorporating source materials previously unavailable and a DVD recording. Poème électronique is one of the fundamental compositions of electronic music, but has only been presented in its original spatial form at EXPO '58 in Brussels. There are a number of stereo versions, but not a single spatial presentation corresponding

to the original plan. At the end of the Eighties the piece was reconstructed in Den Haag, but only with a limited number of acoustic sources. The original version with roughly 350 loudspeakers was last presented in 1958. This is one of the motors behind the project. Furthermore our colleagues from Karlsruhe are planning a virtual reconstruction of the original Philips Pavilion from EXPO 1958, and we are aiming to put the two projects together.

minimalism and czech music

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

The spread of Minimalism to Czech republic, or more precisely to the former Czechoslovakia, was not a process with a clearly defined beginning. Although news of musical developments in the outside world reached the country only with a time lag, this was not as long as one might think given the political isolation. If a number of works were known here at the beginning of the Seventies, this was a situation similar to the rest of the world and the difference between the “Eastern Bloc” and the outside world was more a question of the relative quantity of information. Here it was impossible to procure notated material, and recording and information from the press reached us only on an accidental, haphazard basis. We find what was probably the first use of the terms “minimal music” and “Minimalists” in the Czech press around 1984.

Contacts with the new movements in music were also made in music schools, even though the schools tended to be centres of conservatism, to which they also led the students. Those composers and teachers who managed to visit western countries had an opportunity to find out about current developments there and then relayed the information to their colleagues and students.

The available sources suggest that the first recordings to become available here included mainly the works of Reich, i.e. *Music for Large Ensemble* and *Music for 18 Musicians* and that Glass's opera *Einstein on the Beach* aroused great interest here. Some compositions by Louis Andriessen were also known. His ensemble “*Hoketus*” had appeared in 1979 at the Warsaw Spring festival, which was an important source of information for Czechs interested in contemporary music and an opportunity for them to go to concerts that were unthinkable in the Czechoslovakia of the time. At the festival it was also possible to purchase various books, including the writings of Reich.

The first minimalist composer whose music was demonstrably performed here was Michael Nyman. His *1-100* for four

pianos was presented in 1978. According to the critics of the time Nyman's piece was as “almost indigestible for an unprepared public”.

The first ensemble to include minimalists more frequently in its repertoire was the Prague Agon Orchestra. At one of its concerts in Prague in 1989 the programme included *Strung Out* (1968) by Philip Glass. Less than a year later the group performed Reich's *Violin Phase* (1967) and Riley's *In C* (1964).

A number of composers encountered minimalism from various directions and responded to it for shorter or longer periods and with different degrees of intensity. Quite naturally it aroused the most interest in the generation that was studying around the mid-Seventies and for whom it was all the more seductive for being “forbidden fruit”. We can, however, find minimalist inspirations even among their then teachers. Different composers took different elements from minimalism. Miroslav Pudlák and Václav Kučera were more interested in technical aspects and work with detail. Vít Zouhar and Martin Smolka focussed more on striking rhythm, overall communicability and the effect on the listener.

Minimalism in its pure form cannot be found in Czech music. The reason lies in the situation of Czech serious music at the time. The official mainstream was still geared to continuing the classic-romantic tradition while cautiously adding elements from more recent movements. While American minimalism emerged (partially) as opposition to the New Music, in the Czech environment the New Music was only a little better known than minimalism itself and shared the same suspect status. This meant that among young composers interest in Reich or Glass combined with the influence of Penderecki and Lutoslawski, Stockhausen and others.

In 1976 Václav Kučera wrote the electronic piece *Spartacus*. He used tape loops in a way similar to the early works of Reich. The piece is built up on previously recorded models – the phrases of a choir, trumpet, percussion instruments and recitation of text. These were then overplayed again and again like loops and layered onto each other. The musical dramaturgy and construction of the work is, however, classical European in the arrangement of contrasting passages and overall dramatic quality of the work. In other compositions of the Seventies we can perhaps identify minimalist inspirations, but not with any certainty. With a little exaggeration we can call the Eighties the golden age of minimalism in this country. With increasing knowledge of the style and its exponents (although information was still limited even at this period), there were increasing numbers of attempts by composers to get to grips with minimalism in their own work.

On the 12th of April 1983 a “Concert of Minimal Music” was held in the hall of the Bedřich Smetana Museum. All the pieces were composed by Miroslav Pudlák (born 1961) and Martin Smolka (born 1959), then students of composition. Today both composers regard the music presented as student work of no great value, but they nonetheless represent an extremely valuable sample of what was regarded here as minimalism at the time. Martin Smolka composed the piece *Quod licet bovi* for percussion and wind instruments. A simple model is played on the wind instruments above an ostinato base played by the percussion instruments. Individual parts join in in canon and the distance between the parts is reduced until they are in unison. After achieving the unison all the parts repeat the model together several times and then start once again to draw apart and gradually become quieter. Out of the pianissimo there suddenly rings a chord of D Major from strings supposed to be scattered through the audience for the whole of the performance.

One of Miroslav Pudlák's contributions to the concert programme was a piece called *Rotace a kánony* [Rotations and Canons], for wind sextet. It is in several parts that can be repeated ad infinitum while continuously changing. The effect is

Vít Zouhar: *But Then I Dream Every Time*

achieved by the combination of models of different lengths that the individual players repeat so creating ever different combinations. The public is warned in advance that whoever gets bored first can give a previously agreed sign (a clap) and the musicians will move on to another part.

In 1983 Martin Smolka wrote yet another piece, *Slzy* [Tears] for string trio. The violin, viola and cello play the same motif but with each instrument using different rhythm values so that the regular rhythmic pulse becomes less distinct. The basic motif is composed of only two notes and is gradually expanded. After approximately nine minutes the process is reversed, with the sound fading and the melody being reduced back to the original two-note motif.

Another piece by Miroslav Pudlák – *Kolo-toč* [Carousel] for six flutes was played for the first time at the same concert as Smolka's *Tears*. The players did not stand on the podium in front of the public but were placed at regular intervals in a circle around the audience. Small rhythmic figures are repeated and shifted around between the players in a way that produces the illusion of circling snatches of melody. The melody changes in direction, and at certain moments moves in both directions at the same time.

Martin Smolka's *Hudba, hudbička* [Music, Sweet Music] is based on a simple idea. This is that harmonic development takes place by the addition and subtraction of the notes of chords – one note is always added to the harmony and one taken away. This principle was maintained in the version for chamber ensemble and was enriched

with other elements. The orchestra includes a voice that sings without text, not as a soloist but just as one of the instruments. The rhythmic pulse is created by prescribed rhythmatised articulation – in some plays the performers are left free to choose how to produce this articulation.

Vít Zouhar (born 1966) aroused public attention still in the Eighties. In 1987 to 1989 he wrote his *Brána slunce* [Gates of the Sun] for concertante percussion instruments and orchestra. The title was inspired by a building of the South-American Tiwanaco culture from the 8th century AD. The piece is divided into three parts. The first is entrusted only to the percussion instruments, and the second only to the orchestra. In the third both groups combine. The introductory part in particular, in which in a passage of two hundred and sixty bars we hear only the rhythm of the drums accompanied by the exalted cries of the players, evokes the atmosphere of some kind of ritual. The rhythm of this part is unchanging, and transformations are produced only through the use of differently tuned drums.

The piece *Otisky* [Imprints] of 1985 is the last in which Miroslav Pudlák works systematically with the techniques of minimalism. It has only one movement, but there are three distinct parts related to the processes that take place within it. The overall form is determined by smooth transformation from homophony to polyphony and back again, in the second case mainly by additive and subtractive steps in work with melodic phrases. A fundamental difference from the original concept of minimalism is evident in a retreat from multiple repetitions. Almost no form is

repeated in the same form more than once. Nevertheless, even when listening without a score one can follow individual processes in the sense of Reich's *Music as a Progressive Process*.

The revolution of 1989 changed the situation of Czech society and of Czech music culture within it, allowing free access to international musical life. Czechs have had the chance of direct experience of concerts by Steve Reich (1994) and Philip Glass (1996).

Those composers who were inspired by minimalism in the Eighties are continuing to return to some of its features, but they are beginning to take up different aspects of the movement, and above all the strong rhythm of minimalism. One typical example is Smolka's *Euforium* (1996). It is based on repeating "loops" with a rhythm that is terse and reminiscent of rock. The overall sound is markedly aggressive and dissonant thanks to the combination of wind instruments (baritone saxophone, euphonium, trombone), percussion and modified piano. Even here there is a final long diminuendo with the individual instruments falling silent until all that is left are the quiet notes of the piano sounding and ever longer intervals.

The piece *Remix, Redream, Reflight* (2000) depends on a similar technique of repeated models. Its basic material consists of individual chords taken from difference classical and romantic works. These are alternated cut and repeated in "stuck needle on the gramophone" style. In 1994-1999 Peter Graham (real name - Jaroslav Šťastný) created a recording called *Minimal Pleasures*. It is an organ improvisa-

tion processed by computer. The processing mainly consists of cutting short extracts which are then used to make repeating loops. The extracts are finally layered on top of each other. The resulting sound and form of the work, a combination of improvisation and thought out composition using electronic techniques evokes associations with Terry Riley's Keyboard studies.

Vít Zouhar is today the only composer who works systematically as a minimalist. His approach can be characterised as a synthesis of minimalism with elements of historical music and the music of exotic cultures. In 1992 he wrote *Je všechno* [It is All] for two guitarists and *Zdá se mi zato pokaždé* [But Then I Dream Every Time] for violin, clarinet and piano.

But Then I Dream Every Time creates an uninterrupted curve from piano to fortissimo and back. A continuous regular pulsation in an unchanging tempo continues throughout this development. Figures on the violin and clarinet emerge and then disappear above the ostinato piano. The periods of their repetition are defined not by bars but by minutes and seconds.

The only vocal piece influenced by minimalism is Zouhar's chamber opera *Coronide*, written in 2000 on a libretto of 1730. Its style could be described as "Baroque minimalism". The composer was also inspired by the Baroque theory of emo-

tions and uses the rhetorical figures that were conventional in Baroque music. In some cases he also uses the technique of "tintinabuli", associated with the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. This technique works with the reduction of harmony to a single chord, usually a fifth, which runs through the whole or most of the piece even in places where it clashes with the melodic parts in dissonances.

In 1993 Zouhar wrote *Blízká setkání zblýlostí srdce* [Close Encounters of the Wildness of the Heart]. The name was created by combining the titles of the films *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* by Steven Spielberg (1977) and *Wild at Heart* by David Lynch (1990) and is meant to be an expression of the "combination of the incompatible" which Zouhar seeks to explore in music. The piece represents a synthesis of traditional form and historicizing material handled using minimalist techniques. The whole piece is dominated by a strong regular rhythm, extensive repetition and mainly diatonic and static harmony.

Close Encounters of the Wildness of the Heart is a telling example of the way the current trend in music is responding to the legacy of minimalism. Above all it is a question of the use of strong rhythm. Minimalist techniques are also used here in treatment of musical structure, in this case treatment of accents, and the way they are made denser or shifted. The melodic material of

the work and its form are, by contrast, linked with European music tradition and musical thinking. In fact, it is just this combination of minimalist techniques and historicizing material that has been typical of trends in the Eighties and Nineties throughout the world.

The influence of minimalism can be detected in most of Zouhar's works. Let us just briefly name a few more: *Duny* [Dunes] (1995) for two marimbas, *Jako voda je* [Like Water] (1994) for piano, bassoon and clarinet or *šest klavírů* [Six Pianos] (1992) for piano and tape.

The influences left in Czech music by minimalism have in recent years been combining with the newer influences and transcending the borders of styles. Further developments will show which among once radical ideas will continue to find application and which will fade into obscurity or remain on the margins of interest.

(The text is an extract from a dissertation)

Miroslav Pudlák: *Imprints*

feng-jün song an ambassador of multicultural pluralism

TEREZA HAVELKOVÁ

When she won a prize for a joint project with Alan Vitouš in the prestigious “Golden Bell” radio competition in Shanghai back in 1995, nobody even noticed, but today the leading Czech dailies and magazines (MF Dnes, Lidové noviny, Týden) are queuing up for interviews with her, and she has started to present the multicultural programme “Conversations” on Czech TV. Admittedly, she has been very visible on the music scene in the last year. She played the leading role in the production “Futile Questioning of Heaven” at the Archa Theatre, appeared in Alan Vitouš’s project “My Homeland” commissioned by the Prague Castle for its Strings of Autumn Festival, and released two CDs almost simultaneously (Horská karavana [Mountain Caravan] and Sun Meets Song, for reviews see last page). She herself, however, attributes the media interest more to change in the cultural-social climate in the Czech Republic. Above all, she seems simply to be happy that she can devote herself wholeheartedly to what she enjoys. When you interview her, she bubbles with an infectious energy and optimism. She often emphasises that she is an open person. That is beyond doubt. She is a direct embodiment of multicultural pluralism. And it looks as though here is the Czech Republic – at least in the media – we are at last beginning to appreciate the fact.



I know you studied Peking Opera as a child. Did you ever work professionally in opera in China?

I never made a living with opera. I studied it intensively for 10 years, but after my final school exams I got a place at a different university, and went to Peking to study languages.

Is it usual for little Chinese girls to learn Peking opera, or were you rather an exception?

The truth is somewhere in between. I wasn't any great exception, but it is true that not every child studies Chinese opera. It's the same as here. Not every little Czech girl goes to ballet classes.

Is there very tough competition in Chinese opera? Maybe you felt that you would have to fight too hard... Or was the decision to study languages a natural one, and made for other reasons?

I really did opera for love, as an inner compulsion, because I needed it. A career...? As a little girl I didn't actually experience it

much that way. For the whole time I was studying Peking opera I was mainly just concerned with doing it better and better, with continuously improving. And then all at once, when I was faced with choosing a path in life, I came up against the reality. But I didn't hesitate very much. I knew perfectly well that I would do opera wherever I was.

Why did you decide for languages?

It's very simple. And it's not so far from opera. When I was choosing another “life-long” field, language seemed the nearest to music for me. I don't mean Chinese, although I had always enjoyed that as well, but foreign languages, and above all various kinds of pronunciation. .

Which languages did you study?

At secondary school I studied English, which I did well at and which actually led me to foreign languages in general. It's a melodious language, more so than Czech for example. But before the entrance exams I decided that I would do languages other

than English, but English is rather an everyday choice. Somebody recommended the languages of Central Europe and I chose Polish, but at university they put me into Czech.

Do you go to the opera in Prague? Do you like Western opera?

In my first years in Prague I went a lot. Partly because I love it and partly because I saw it as a part of my education and getting to know Czech culture. I went to Smetana, Dvořák, the classics. I have to admit that in recent years I haven't had much time.

Do you see any points of contact between Chinese and Western opera?

I don't like dividing art into higher and lower, but in this case I don't know how to describe it otherwise. Peking and Western opera have one thing in common: loftiness. It is an elevated art, disciplined, and for this kind of art audiences need to be equipped with a certain basic amount of knowledge. When you go to a pop or rock concert, you can just let yourself be carried along by the



atmosphere. But if you go to Peking opera you have to acquire a bit of information beforehand, to be initiated into its works, and to have at least some basic knowledge.

What sort of knowledge?

When you go to the Magic Flute, in German for example, you don't need to understand German, but you should know in advance what the opera is about. You should know the content, the story, the plots, and know who is singing soprano, alto, tenor. It's the same in Chinese opera. You need to distinguish between the individual types – the old lady, the clown and so on.

Does the ordinary Chinese person understand the sung words in the Peking Opera?

If he or she doesn't have any special interest in the field, then no. The language of Chinese opera is the preserved historical dialect chung-chou-chua. Chua is speech, chung-chou is the historical name of the locality, which is the surroundings of Peking about two hundred years ago.

Some people, especially the young, see western opera as a rigid, dead

genre. Does Peking opera have similar problems? How does it try to address the younger generation?

Peking opera is in roughly the same situation as Western opera. Both are noble genres, and when something is elevated, it is divorced from the masses. And so quite logically it loses popularity. But the artists in Chinese opera are always trying, really fighting, to preserve this venerable traditional art. They are trying various methods of innovation. They are creating a new repertoire because the traditional repertoire of the Peking opera is all about emperors, concubines, historical stories, and so it is not up-to-date. To get the attention of people today the Peking opera is using contemporary stories, and adapting costumes and make-up. This means that the Peking opera is becoming more congenial, and the time difference between the audience and the opera is getting shorter. There are also often audacious reforms on the musical and vocal side. The opera is using more modern rhythms and electronic music, and trying non-traditional instruments. In the Seventies they were already using the European violin, for example, piano or wind instruments. Certain elements from Peking opera are

also being used today at fashion shows or at big shows – where they usually sing only the arias – and so people are developing a relationship with opera.

When you sing folksongs do you use an operatic stylisation?

Yes. I'm a singer of Peking opera and this is my training and background and it helps me a great deal. In China today there are a lot of pop stars. Some of them are male and female singers who were originally actors of Peking opera, and they are particularly successful. It's a different level of quality. The training and studies are visible and audible. The foundation is really terribly important. Male and female singers who were originally from the Peking opera and sing folksongs also understand them and perform them better. This is because there is a very close connection between folk music and Peking opera.

The two CDs of East Asian music that you recently released are very different in musical approach. Mountain Caravan is "made to measure" the songs, while the CD Sun Meets Song freely combines them with very dissimilar

“ethno” material. Do you see the two approaches as equally valid?

I find that a very interesting theme. But first I should say something about the fact that the two CDs came out at the same time. This was a coincidence, and the result of my not coping with the schedule (I recorded Mountain Caravan much earlier than Sun Meets Song). But on the other hand in the depths of my soul I secretly wanted it that way. Not the particular situation, but to try out different possibilities. I am an open person. Martin (Smolka, editor's note.) sometimes pokes fun at me and says “You would sing with a brass band!” And I say “Why not?” I would try singing with a Romany band. Why not? The world is open and we have to try out different possibilities. Mountain Caravan is a way of presenting folksongs in a very traditional form. It shifts authentic folk music a few steps on, but the approach is one of great sensitivity to the authenticity of the music. I feel a slight lack of dynamics and life there. It is very much a chamber style. This was why I wanted to give folk songs that absent dynamics, life, and more striking energy. I wanted the effect to be more elemental. I hope that perhaps I managed this with the Sun Orchestra. The sun CD is something completely different. I don't quite agree with your view that they are playing their own kind of music and my songs are floating along between them (Song is referring to the CD review). There is something in it, but it's not quite like that. The arrangement emerged very spontaneously – the boys listened to my songs and tried playing something with them. Of course, they were originally rock musicians. They have a completely different experience of music and practice and they automatically use it as a starting-point. They tried adding reggae, for example, or bossa nova but it isn't true that bossa nova and Chinese folk music have nothing in common. South America and China may be very distant from each other, with entirely different cultures, but the rhythms fit together. The Sun Meets Song project is based mainly on rhythm and mood. The only bass player Freda (Frederik Janáček, editor's note) plays harmony, and there is really very little that links harmony with Chinese folk music. But what links us is something else – energy. The mood I can conjure up at concerts with the Sun Orchestra is something I could never summon up with Caravan. It's a completely different environment.

Do you know the direction you will want to take in the future, and which approach suits you best?

Just at the moment I am having a spiritual music siesta. I am an intense person and sometimes there's a risk of my going over the top. I have to have a rest. I'm always singing and rehearsing, but as far as a new project is concerned I must wait for a while, so that it can become clear to me where

I'm going. But one thing is clear. I shall be doing more improvisation. This is another area of my musical experimentation. I like trying out new things and with improvisation I have more freedom and space for musical expression.

In the project “Má vlast” with Alan Vitouš you used various singing techniques, including guttural singing. Can you tell us which techniques you have mastered? Have you ever tried western operatic singing?

I tried singing classical European music while I was still in China, but at that point it was only a kind of student experimentation. But I love it. I am trying it now (sometimes I am a little ashamed of it) and teaching myself arias, Dvořák's Biblical Songs and I've also tried to sing Baroque arias. Various friends of mine are helping me. I find classical European music very sympathetic. As far as techniques are concerned, I have to say again that my background is Peking opera. I am trained as the “old lady”: type and guttural singing also comes from that. I also mastered another type of female role, the young woman, and that is sung in a high voice, a soprano. Currently I am practising and learning other things: Africa, jazz,... Sometimes I put on some rock music, Queen for example – they use interesting vocal elements – and try to sing along with them, but in my own way, improvising. As far as guttural singing is concerned, I draw a lot of inspiration from Mongolian and Tibetan song. African and Indian singing are also big sources of inspiration.

What in European musical culture is inspiring for a Chinese person?

Let us keep to the subject of European opera. I've already said that in China I tried all kinds of things as a student, for example I learned Rusalka from tape...and I liked it! It was Peking opera a la Rusalka. But now that I live here and meet Czech experts I discover how different the two techniques really are. The breathing is different, and the setting of the voice is different. It fascinates me and is a great source of inspiration for me.

Does European music have something that Chinese music “doesn't have”?

In Europe the rhythms are more complex. That's the reason why I study them the most, since it's something remote from me. I also spend a great deal of time learning Czech and Moravian folk songs. I sing them at concerts as well. The vocal techniques of folk songs are very interesting.

When I talked to Alan Vitouš about the “Má vlast” project, he said he was pleased that Czech society was so open that a Chinese woman like you could take part in musical life here. Do you agree that Czech society is open?

Only three years ago it would still have been impossible for foreign artists living in this country to take major parts in such a big project. But now the time has come.

So you have the impression that we're talking about a change in the attitude of the Czech public over the last two or three years?

Yes, it's a development of the last two or three years.

You returned to a more intensive engagement with music only after the revolution, in the Nineties. Why was that? Were the conditions not right for it beforehand?

I'm a person who does everything spontaneously, and I don't plan anything. I do everything according to intuition, and I act according to the way I feel. I had never actually given up singing, but while I was singing before the revolution I was also studying Czech language and literature, finishing my first degree at the Philosophy Faculty and then going on to postgraduate study. There was not much time for singing. I only performed on a few special occasions, such as exhibition openings, Chinese weddings and so on. In 1992 I accepted an invitation from Jaroslav Dušek to teach author-acting with him at the Ježek Conservatory. There I had more time for art and music. In 1994 I finished my doctorate and suddenly I was free! I was terribly happy that at last I could devote myself to music whole-heartedly.

Do you still continue with Czech literary studies, or are they now on the back burner?

On the back burner. It's a question of a certain stage in life. Every stage has its priorities and at the moment singing is my priority.

You have been living in this country for 16 years. Is there anything that you find culturally uncomfortable here, that bothers you and with which you can't come to terms? Czechs always seem pretty xenophobic to me...

It may sound unnatural, but nothing has ever really bothered me at a deep level. I do something that I enjoy and that I feel like doing. The people I know and meet are people who want to talk to me and I want to talk to them. We have interests in common. There is xenophobia in every society. Every society is a closed group with shared pressures. And when a foreigner comes along... It's like a group of friends. It takes them a bit of time before they accept someone else too. It's the same, if on a rather larger scale. The important thing is sincerity. To be sincere, to believe in oneself and to trust.

music from czech lands in swedish archives

LUCIE BERNÁ, MARTINA STRATÍLKOVÁ

There is still considerable awareness of Bohemian treasures to be found in Swedish archives. In June 2001 on a three-day professional visit we had the chance to test this claim in the field of historic musical materials. We headed for the collections in the Royal Library in Stockholm and the Carolina rediviva University Library in Uppsala. Our aim was to establish whether these two important Swedish archives contained any important musical treasures taken from Central Europe by the Swedish armies during the Thirty Years War. Unlike in the field of literature and history, there has been no comprehensive work on identification of music sources of Bohemian and Moravian provenance in Sweden. Before we report our findings, we need first to recapitulate the basic facts and results of earlier scholarship.

The Swedes attacked the Bohemian Lands from Silesia, and the main battleground became Moravia, which the Swedish forces reached under the command of Lennart Torstenson in 1642. The main aim of the Swedes was to take Olomouc, then the Moravian metropolis. While the town had been saved from the attacks of Hungarian and Danish forces in 1623 and 1626, the imperial garrison headed by Antonín Miniati surrendered after five days of siege. For eight years Olomouc was to be an involuntary camp for the enemy in the heart of the imperial dominion, and Swedish regiments led by Colonel Paikul undertook pillaging raids in the surrounding country. The Swedish garrisons did not withdraw until 1650, two years after the signing of the Peace of Westphalia. In the interim Olomouc had lost its position as capital of Morava, and after the war the much smaller town of Brno became the administrative centre. Under the Swedes the character of the city as stronghold was enhanced by improvement of the walls and fortifications, and the plundering of houses, churches and shops was a common occurrence.

The Swedes also seized the riches of the libraries of Olomouc's schools and monasteries. The library of the Jesuit College was confiscated (at that time it was the largest library in Olomouc, and following the founding of the college in 1566 by Vilém it had grown largely due to numerous major donations), and then the monastery libraries of the Augustinians, Dominicans, Cappuchins and remonstratensians were thoroughly searched. Particularly valuable manuscripts and books were taken from the old cathedral library. The canons of the local chapter were driven out, the cathedral remained empty and catholic masses were



said only in the Church of St. Michael. Another place where book collections were seized was Mikulov. The town was taken by the Swedish forces headed by Commander Mortaigne in April 1645, and the invaders seized one of the richest collections in Moravia, owned by the Cardinal and Bishop of Olomouc, Franz von Dietrichstein. At the time the collection boasted around 100 manuscripts and 10,000 prints. Although in Jiří Sehnal's view we have no grounds for thinking that any permanent music ensemble was active at the cardinal's court, it is known that Franz von Dietrichstein was an active organiser of musical life. He particularly admired Italian music, composers and artists, some of whom accepted invitations to his court.

Apart from Olomouc and Mikulov, no other libraries from the other occupied Moravian towns (from 1643 Kroměříž, Šternberk, Vyškov, 1645 Jihlava, Velehrad, Znojmo, Rajhrad, the Monastery of Louka) reached Sweden. The only exception was a printed volume from the Carthusian Monastery of Královo Pole near Brno and some books from the Jesuit College in Brno.

The rich Swedish booty came not only from Moravia, however, since many cultural and material treasures fell into Swedish hands in Bohemia as well. In July 1648 General Königsmark got as far as Prague, and with his soldiers seized the valuable collections kept in Prague castle. Apart from

art objects they removed the book collection of the Rožmberk noble family (its founder had been Duke Petr Vok Ursini, and after his death it fell to the Schwanbergs whose property was confiscated by Ferdinand II in 1620.) Ferdinand III had ordered the library to be transferred to Hradčany a year before the Swedes took Prague.

The Swedes confiscated books and cultural treasures on the orders of Queen Christina. The choice of treasures for transport home was entrusted to war commissioners, who also created a list of all confiscated items on the spot. A catalogue of all books seized during the military campaign was compiled by Queen Christina's librarian Isaac Vossius in 1649. It is interesting that his model for the task was the catalogue of the Rožmberk collection made by Wenzel Brežan.

Some of the sources described in the catalogue are today kept in the Royal Library in Stockholm. Far more, however, have been destroyed in fires or lost. During a major fire in 1697 more than 300 items were lost. Queen Christina also gave many books to her closest subjects (she was generous in her gifts to the Chancellor Magnus de la Gardie and the librarian Isaac Vossius mentioned above) or donated them to Swedish libraries in Lund, Linköping, Strängnäs and Västerås. After her abdication in 1654 the queen took around 140 books with her to Rome. Currently there are about 80 manuscripts to be found in the Royal Library. It should be stressed that most of the books in the collection have already been returned to the countries from which they were taken.

The idea of the great riches of the Swedish libraries always lured Czech scholars and the whole problem acquired a more

contemporary political dimension in the period of the Czech national revival of the 19th century. As far as we know, the first person to travel to Sweden for the purpose of looking for Czech literary treasures was Josef Dobrovský. He undertook the journey in 1792 with funds provided by the Czech Society of Sciences. Dobrovský visited not only Sweden, but also libraries in North Germany, Denmark and Russia. In the report that he published on his return he described sources from the libraries in Uppsala and Linköping, and a more extensive section is devoted to books kept in Stockholm. Dobrovský's attention was most engaged by a large bible from the Monastery in Podlažice known as the *Kodex gigas*. The other sources mentioned were not of a musical character. The writer's interest was primarily in literary works and sources of Czech history.

Beda Dudík provided a far more complete and detailed report on his journey to Sweden in 1851. He stayed there for four months and went through the archives in Stockholm, Uppsala, Västerås, Strengnäs, Linköping and Lund. Dudík relied on data in the library catalogues and in his report, published in 1852, he presented lists of Czech sources from the pillaged collections. He gave the most detail on the sources from Stockholm, dividing them into sources written in Czech, Latin, German or Italian. Apart from a long description of the *Kodex gigas* he also reported on musical sources – two books of Utraquist songs. These, however are no longer to be found in the library. For us Dudík's work is so far the most complete source on the theme of the Swedish archives.

We should now turn to the current state of the archive materials. First let us mention the Royal Library in Stockholm, where after looking through the available catalogues we chose just three sources for closer study. These were two medieval manuscripts and one incunabulum. The Royal Library in Stockholm contains the collections of the Swedish kings of the 16th and 17th centuries. Since 1661 the library has by law received a copy of every book printed in Sweden.

The building is from the 1880s. The monument mentioned above and linked with Czech history, the *Codex gigas*, is on public display. The richly illuminated manuscript 90x50 cm in dimension was written at the beginning of the 13th century in the Benedictine Monastery in Podlažice near Chrudim and in 1648 it was taken by the Swedes from Prague. The bible is also known as the "devil's" after the picture on the last page of the manuscript. According to legend a monk was supposed to have called on the help of the devil when finishing the work.

Among sources of Moravian provenance we naturally did not overlook the important musical monument of the 12th century known as the *Horologium olomucense* (sign. Theol. Mss. A 144, pergamene, 161 fol. 28,5x21 cm). Although its method,

place of origin and precise date are the subject of scholarly disputes, it is certain that the *Horologium* is one of the oldest manuscripts of the Olomouc cathedral chapter, which Bishop Jindřich Zdík most probably founded after his return from Jerusalem in 1138. Jan Bistřícký considers that it was produced on the occasion of the completion of the Cathedral of St. Wenceslas and the transfer of the bishopric from the Church of St. Peter. This puts the date of the manuscript at 1136. The manuscript served the needs of the chapter, which was

the reconstruction of the Olomouc liturgy in the first phase of the bishopric.

Also from Moravia is a manuscript entitled the *Psalterium cum canticis ferialibus et festivis* (paper, 105 fol., size 14,5x10 cm). This is a non-notated psalter with evidence on the last page that allows us to identify when and for whom it was made. The scribe calls himself Johannes de Noua Plzna and his work is for Father Petr Freytag, a monk of the Benedictine Monastery in Třebíč. The manuscript of paper is from 1472, and was therefore written four years after the Bene-



Codex gigas

initially composed of twelve canons. According to the founding charter of the chapter they were supposed to spend night and day in the church, praying and singing hymns.

The *horologium* has so far been the object of detailed interest primarily from historians and researchers in art history. Their interest has been focussed on the full-page miniature (depicting St. Gregory, Jan I Bishop of Prague, the Bishop of Olomouc Jindřich Zdík and Prince Soběslav I.), authorship of which is attributed to the important 12th-century painter Hildebert and his assistant Everwin, who worked on the *Horologium* around the year 1140.

The liturgical content of the codex has been studied by František Pokorný, who came to the conclusion that the manuscript could have been made as a collectiary. The *horologium* contains passages in nondiastematic neum notation of German type. Antiphones, invitatoria and responsoria are recorded in notation on a total of eighteen pages. For us the *Horologium olomucense* is an important source of the few preserved fragments of neum notation on our territory and at the same time a valuable guide for

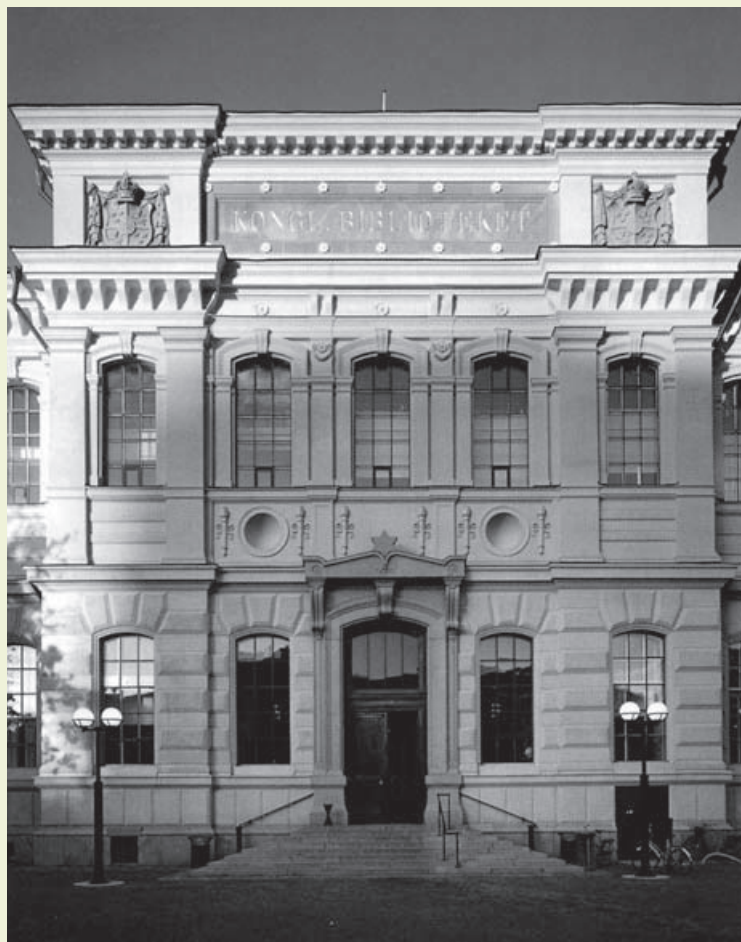
dictine monastery in Třebíč was dissolved. It contains all 150 psalms in the same wording and order as in the Vulgate. In the psalter we find no orations or antiphones, but only short extracts from the Credo and Ave Maria. The psalter ends with a canticle. At some points in the manuscript there are text links in old Czech, for example on folio 28v *Buď Bohu chwála amen*, f. 29v *Wsse-mohuocy mocny bozye*, f. 71v *pomni panno* and so on. These glosses are always to be found at the end of a psalm and according to Beda Dudík simply fill up empty spaces in the lines. Although these glosses have no significance for the organisation of the text of the psalter, they may refer to sacred songs or prayers.

The next source of Moravian origin which is lodged in the Rozal Library in Stockholm is one of a group of incunabula. These made up a large proportion of the seized libraries. We based our approach on data on the provenance of the incunabula set out in catalogues made at the beginning of the 20th century. Relating to music we found only one item from the Olomouc cathedral library and entitled *Arithmetica, Geometria et Musica Boethii* (sign. 237). It was printed in

1492 in Venice and is the first printed version of Boethius's work, the basis of medieval musical theory. A note in the book - *Scholae cathedralis Olomucensis* - shows that it was meant for pupils of the cathedral school, which was in operation at the time. Apart from Boethius's treaty on music and arithmetic the book contains a treatise on astronomy written by Georgius Peurbachus. There is a noteworthy precision of design and ingenuity in several diagrams of complex descriptions of the modes and divisions of scales, all showing an advanced printer's technique.

The University Library in Uppsala is a library of no less importance. The university was founded here in 1477 as the first in the northern countries and today it is still associated with the names of such distinguished scientists as Karl Linné and Andreas Celsius. The university library, known as *Carolina rediviva* after the educational ideal of the Carolingian Renaissance, was founded in 1622 and its basis was a gift from King Gustavus Adolphus - the remains of the medieval monastery library in Vadsten and books from the Franciscan Church in Stockholm. The collection grew with the books looted during the Thirty Years War and many further gifts from rich donors.

The source that we studied in the Uppsala University Library reached Seden from Bohemia in the Middle Ages and is not one of the sources carried off during the Thirty Years War. The archives of the university library contains a collection of medieval manuscripts. After looking through the extensive catalogue we found that despite quite an abundant representation of manuscripts of Bohemian provenance (around 20, but the authors of this catalogue merely guessed at Bohemian provenance in the case of nearly half of them), there was only one relating to music. This was a musical treatise of the 14th century and had probably been written at Charles University. Entitled *Tractatus de musica mensurabilis et musica ficta*, the treatise is part of a codex with the signature C 55, which is made up of 129 parchment pages of size 15-17x11-13 cm bound in wooden boards with leather. It corresponds to the character of works of the same period on music theatre and is based primarily on the treatise *Ars cantus mensurabilis* by Frank of Cologne. The exposition focuses on types of harmonies (the definition of consonances and dissonances), the rules of the phenomenon of *musica ficta*, and the explanation of the notation of polyphonic music, especially the reading of ligatures. The treatise also contains pictures of well-known medieval solmization aids - *Quidon hand*. The Swedish scholars I. Milveden and T. Kleberg agree that the manuscript was written at the end of the 14th century and was brought to Sweden from Prague. Both base their arguments on the contacts between Sweden and Bohemia in the 14th century. At that time Swedish students frequently attended Charles University in Prague, which after the decline of interest in studies at the Sor-



Royal Library in Stockholm

bonne in Paris became popular with students from North Europe together with universities in Germany. Once again this raises the question of the importance of Charles University in the Middle Ages and the question of contacts between Swedish students and the Bohemian Lands. It can be reasonably assumed that the treatise came into Swedish hands as a purchase or a gift. It is not known whether the author of the treatise was a university professor teaching the foundation of the disciplines of the quadrivium at the time.

The rich Dübén collection has already been studied in Czech musicology. Several years ago Jana Slimáčková, then a Brno musicology student, drew up a concordance of the Dübén Uppsala and Liechtenstein Kroměříž Collection. One of her findings was that despite its extraordinary size (more than 2000 manuscripts of 1640-1718, 1500 of them vocal and 300 instrumental pieces) the collection did not contain works by Czech authors. The question of the origin of the composer Flixius, however, remains unclear. He could have been Johann Josefus Flixius (died 1704), an organist from Česká Lípa, but evidence is lacking for proper identification. Apart from the collection the Uppsala University Collection also contains one piece by Kryštof Harant of Polžice (of 1604) and the works of a number of 18th-century composers associated with the Czech Lands. These pieces are also to be found,

however, in the archives of other important European music centres.

In conclusion we have to admit that at the end of our stay we felt a certain disappointment. It is clear that during the Thirty Years War the Swedes carried off a rich collection of literary and art works from Bohemia and Moravia, but only a small fragment were concerned with music. Moreover, there have been many losses in transit, as a result of fires, or simple loss and disappearance into the hands of different owners. Thanks to the activities of Beda Dudík 21 manuscripts were returned to the State Archive in Brno in 1878. While a wide open field of research stretches before the literary historian (we have in mind the collection of incunabula), the musicologist in the Swedish archives finds only a few sources, although their value is correspondingly great. Further attention should be directed to the *Horologium olomucense*, since it is clearly the most valuable musical source in the Swedish libraries and represents one of the few manuscripts with German neum notation of the 12th century. When we have acquired a microfilm we shall be continuing our research in collaboration with specialist musicologists.

(The authors are students of musicology at the Philosophical Faculty of Palacký University in Olomouc.)

czecho-slovak talent of the year

MILOŠ POKORA



Václav Vonášek

Every year dozens of performers' competitions are held in the Czech Lands, but only one of them is a multidisciplinary contest that respects the former federal arrangement of the state. This is the ambitiously conceived Talent of the Year Competition, in which young Czech and Slovak pianists, violinists, viola players, cellists, flautists, clarinetists, bassoonists, horn-players, trumpet-players and trombone and tuba players all contend together. The number of entrants is imposing – in the first round there are almost two hundred, in the almost thirty go through to the semi-final, and four make it to the final. The prizes for the best are also exceptional. The absolute winner is awarded a scholarship for a year's study at the Royal College of Music in London, and finalists receive prizes to the value of twenty to fifty thousand crowns. The generous funding of the event suggests that here we have a rare symbiosis between a cultural environment and an entrepreneurial philosophy. This is the only way to explain why young Czech and Slovak musicians should be the people benefiting from the favour of someone like the spiritual father of Talent of the Year, Adam Bager (who, as I found in my work on the jury, is not only an outstanding manager but a sensitive musician capable of admirably critical insights) and why the musical tournament should receive such generosity from the sponsors. The specific rules of the Talent of the Year contest stipulate that to ensure more objec-

tivity in assessment there must be different juries for the different instrument groups in the 1st round, semifinal and final, and these juries should be composed not only of well-known concert musicians, but also of music critics and musicologists. To the question of whether it is really possible to make a serious comparison between performances on very different musical instruments and so often in a completely incommensurable repertoire, the founders of the competition answer that it is possible, but only when the focus is on seeing not just the achieved level of maturity but the force of the young personality behind the performance. The course of previous years of the competition shows that such personalities can indeed be found. In four cases results have even been confirmed more than once by different juries; twice in four years the finalists have included the trombonist Robert Kozánek, the violinist Jana Nováková (winner in 2000), the Slovak pianist Jordana Palovičová (winner in 2001) and the Slovak pianist Ladislav Fancovič. It is interesting that representatives of all the instrumental groups reached the final of Talent of the Year 2002, which was broadcast by Czech Radio 3 – Vltava and watched in a packed Smetana Hall by a mainly young audience. All the finalists radiated instrumental brilliance (which is already taken for granted, however unbelievable given the age of the performers), but also profound musicality. To choose a victor was tru-



ly just a question of judging nuance. The twenty-three year-old double bassist Petr Ries (a student of the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts in the class of Prof. Jiří Hudec), showed in his performance how sincerely he loves the long drawn-out string cantilena so caressingly used in Koussevitzky's Double-bass Concerto that that time seems to stand still. The twenty-two year-old Slovak pianist Ladislav Fancovič (a student of Bratislava's University Of Performing Arts and the Vienna Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst), who was in the final for the second time as we have noted, once again astonished us by the courage and the very individual thinking behind his decision to demonstrate his youthful art in a dominating classic of repertoire – Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto in B Minor (viz the judicially modelled approach to the introductory movement, quite unlike any previous interpretation). The two performances after the interval both brought exquisitely natural musical experiences – Hummel's Grand concerto in F Major as played by the twenty-one year-old bassoonist Václav Vonášek (a student at the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts in the class of Prof. Jiří Seidl and František Herman) spoke to us as if born right on the stage and at the same time with wonderfully elegant classicist phrasing (with a literally ideal flow in the 3rd Movement). The last finalist, the only nineteen-year-old tuba player Marek Filla (a student of the Military Conservatory in Roudnice nad Labem) also knew how to enchant with his performance. He took on a difficult modern piece in the form of Vaughan Williams's Concerto for Bass Tuba with a marvellous ease and lack of affectation, as if he had grown up with the music. The verdict of the jury (Jill White from Great Britain, Dr. Janet Ritterman from Australia, conductor Libor Pešek, Prof. Miloš Jurkovič, Prof. Ivan Klánský, Prof. Zdeněk Pulec and Prof. Milan Škampa), who in line with the resolutions of the competition founders gave precedence to the spell-binding force of young personality, awarded the title Talent of the Year 2002 to the bassoonist Václav Vonášek, was not a surprise. It is not without interest that those who attended the concert and the listeners to the live radio broadcast voted the same way. That too is an appealing advertisement for Talent of the Year.

rhapsody

Jitka Hosprová - Rhapsody
Arco Diva, 2002

Total Time: 65:29



An album of recordings of 20th-century music for viola, and mainly solo viola, is not exactly a major commercial prospect, and this makes the debut CD of the young Czech violist Jitka Hosprová all the more appealing.

Furthermore, it does not present the viola in conventional mode as the "instrument with the velvet tone", but as an instrument capable of a very dramatic sound.

Most of the music is by Czech composers of the second half of the 20th century. Also included, and outside the period by only three years, are Three Madrigals for violin and viola by Bohuslav Martinů, in which Veronika Jarůšková adds her violin to the viola. Two members of the composers' group Quattro are also represented. Zdeněk Lukáš (1928) wrote his Sonata for Solo Viola directly for Jitka Hosprová. Gila Rome – Meditations for Solo Viola by Sylvie Bodorová (1954) was inspired by Romany folk music (Gila Rome means "Sing Gypsy") and quotes Romany melodies in some places. Technically and in terms of expression the most difficult piece is Rhapsody for Solo Viola by Klement Slavický (1910 – 1999).

As a "guest from abroad" here we find Lachrymae by Benjamin Britten in an arrangement for viola and harp, although unfortunately there is no indication whether this was the composer's own arrangement. Kateřina Englichová provides the harp accompaniment. She also plays in the final piece, which is the only major flaw in an otherwise attractive whole. While Csárdás by Vittorio Monti is a famous virtuoso piece and is meant as proof that the viola can aspire to violin repertoire successfully, it makes a very incongruous impression beside the other pieces.

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

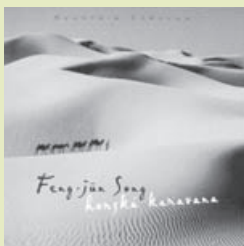
sun meets song

Faust Records 2001
Total Time: 44:18

feng-jün song

Horská karavana [Mountain Caravan]
Black Point Music 2001

Total Time: 49:54



Feng-jün Song, a Chinese singer living in the Czech Republic, is ever more frequently to be seen on our music scene, and she has recently been involved in a number of quite exceptional projects.

These include the production Marné tážení nebes [Futile Questioning of the Heavens], "a Baroque Chinoiserie" from the Archa theatre repertoire, and Alan Vitouš's project "Má vlast" ("My Homeland") presented as part of last year's Strings of Autumn Festival. Last Autumn Feng-jün Song also released two CDs. The solo Horská karavana [Mountain Caravan] with Black Point Music and a collaborative album with the Sluneční orchestr (Sun Orchestra) Sun Meets Song with Faust Records.

These two projects seem almost designed to demonstrate how different European approaches to traditional non-European material can be, even though in both cases the albums can be labelled as "world music".

Both CDs present a selection of East Asian folk music, mainly Chinese but also Tibetan, Korean and Mongolian. There is also a considerable overlap between the songs included on the two albums. On the one hand this is a pity, since theoretically two recordings offered the chance for twice the number of songs, but on the other hand it offers a better basis for comparison.

Sun Meets Song, a project with a witty title and an unusually well designed sleeve (it invites comparison with the high aesthetic standard of CD jackets such as Winter & Winter), unfortunately offers the kind of showy but very superficial version of world music that consists in taking an "authentic" ethnic foundation – in this case the singing of Feng-jün Song – and adding an accompaniment that adapts the authentic base to elements familiar to the usual Czech ear – a mixture of folk guitar, flute à la Jethro Tull or saxophone derived from the popularised form of jazz with rhythmic drumming that at best owes something to Africa if to any kind of ethnic music. As a listener I cannot avoid the feeling that absolutely anything could be played above this accompaniment, which is actually self-sufficient music, and if in this case the top line is from Feng-jün Song, then this is only to produce a desired and so marketable ethno effect. Not that I have anything at all against attempts to combine the apparently incompatible. It is just that in this case the combination is not on equal terms and the effect is of a kind of violation and devaluation – the accompaniment entirely overwhelms the subtleties of rhythm and intonation of traditional Chinese music and turns it into an "ordinary" song.

The team involved in the CD "Mountain Caravan" chose a completely different approach. It was obviously very important that Feng-jün Song and her "accompanying" musicians – the supra-genre multi-instrumentalists Helena and Jiří Vedral, composer Martin Smolka and percussionist Tomáš Ondrůšek – came together specially for the purpose of recording this album and searched for a common language. Above a delicate, unobtrusive and sophisticated accompaniment the singing of Feng-jün Song suddenly emerges as extraordinarily polymorphous and colourful, creating finely shaded moods and genre drawings evoking Chinese silk-painting. It is clear from the accompaniment that the musicians respect Chinese music, are open to its inspiration, do not attempt to mimic it and approach it in a spir-



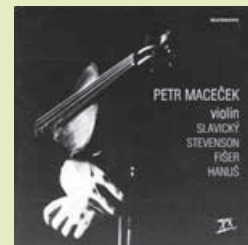
it of receptive creativity. They play with micro-intervals, tone colours, soft accompanying vocals and rhythm, and the result is a unique "Czech chinoiserie" which is a delight to the ear and offers new depths even when heard many times over. And by the way, the sleeve with the caravan in the sand dunes is not bad at all.

TEREZA HAVELKOVÁ

petr maceček

Petr Maceček - violin, Pavel Polívka - timpani
[K. Slavický, R. Stevenson, J. Hanuš, L. Fišer]
Waldman, 2001

Total time: 67:20



In terms of choice of music, this independent project by the second violinist of the Talich Quartet, Petr Maceček, represents quite a refreshing departure from convention on the Czech classical recordings market.

On this CD we encounter pieces for solo violin by four 20th-century composers. Three of the pieces are by the Czech composers J. Hanuš, K. Slavický and L. Fišer and one is by the Scottish composer R. Stevenson (Crux by Luboš Fišer is a piece for violin with timpani accompaniment).

The album opens with a partita for solo violin by Klement Slavický (1910-1999), which is a virtuoso composition in which all the acoustic and expressive possibilities of the instrument are displayed.

The author's admiration for the harmonically rich and entirely self-sufficient sonatas of the old masters is clear in this piece, especially in the ingenious exploitation of chord play and the elaborate architecture of the work as a whole.

In contrast the Scottish Suite by Ronald Stevenson (b.1928) is based more on the combination of the principles of the traditions of modern serious music with the use of characteristic elements of the folk music of the composer's home country (the final movements bear the names of traditional Scottish dances – reel, jig etc.) In this context Stevenson is referring to the art of the Scots folk musicians playing on the fiddle, the local variant of the violin.

The short piece by Luboš Fišer (1935-1999), entitled Crux, is one of the composer's most cogent works. Its expressive music unfolds from the regular beats on the timpani that accompany the violin part and the tension rises until the climax when the beats change into the sound of a bell.

The concluding Variation Fantasy for Solo Violin op. 127, which Jan Hanuš (b. 1915) dedicated to Petr Maceček, was (in the composer's own words) inspired by the ideas of the anthropologist, philosopher and priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. It is a piece that makes abundant use of the singing lyrical tone of the instruments, and the performance underlines the high standard of the whole CD.

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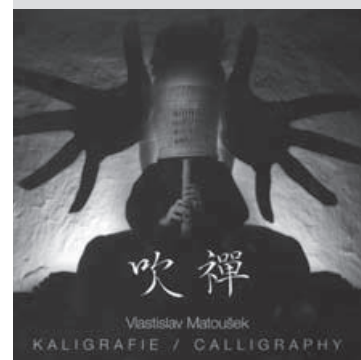
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