

czech music

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A black and white portrait of Jiří Barta, a man with dark hair, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a dark, long-sleeved shirt. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a stage or concert hall with lights and musical equipment.

Jiří Barta

Apocalypse of Luboš Fišer

Josef Berg

EuroArt Praha 2002 / 2003

FESTIVAL PROGRAMME



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Bohuslav Matoušek,
Viola
Jan Čech, Piano

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June 10, 2003 **The Stamic Quartet**
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editorial

Dear readers,
Sometimes, one could get an impression, that there is nothing more interesting in Czech music, than Leoš Janáček, Antonín Dvořák or Bohuslav Martinů. Nothing against these masters, but on the other hand there is plenty of other composers, that world should know more about. Often they were (and are) personalities which got little known because of their search for their own musical path. In this issue, we bring you two portraits of such personalities. One of them is Luboš Fišer, who sought balance between experiments of New music and the traditional heritage. His *Apocalypse* is one of the most impressive works of the second half of the 20th century. The other one is Josef Berg. He was a solitaire and for some maybe too excentric. Field of music was too narrow for him and so he sought its connections with the theatre. The title of this issue brings portrait of cello player Jiří Barta. He is trying to divide his time between the classical masters of past and exploring the new names and sounds. In our interview you can read about this. Few pages further you will find an interview with French musicians, who discovered for themselves the beauty of Czech music and are playing it for couple of years. I hope that you will find the beauty of our music, too, and I wish you a pleasant reading about it in our magazine.

Matěj Kratochvíl
MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL
EDITOR

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i can imagine all kinds of things

an interview with Jiří Bárta

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

The cellist Jiří Bárta came to wider public attention with his recording of the solo cello suites of Johann Sebastian Bach. Some years have gone by since then, and Bárta has become a performer with an impressive stylistic range. His repertoire includes Antonín Dvořák and György Ligeti, Richard Strauss and Sofia Gubaidulina. At the opening concert of the Prague Strings of Autumn Festival he also appeared as a member of an unconventional group – a cello quintet. This concert was remarkable in other aspects as well: the stage and lighting were the work of the internationally recognised designer Bořek Šípek, otherwise the main architect of Prague Castle, and the music of the live artists was combined with prerecorded sounds from the street or birdsong in the forest.

I interviewed Bárta a few days before the concert, and pressure of time meant that it took place by e-mail between Prague and Athens.

Your repertoire ranges from J. S. Bach to music by contemporary composers such as Marek Kopelent or Arvo Pärt. Is it necessary to find different approaches to music when you are studying Bach, Dvořák or Lutoslawski? Do you play Baroque and contemporary music on the same instrument?

I play the music of all periods on the same instrument, and just change the strings. For Baroque I use lighter strings, and a different tuning. But I try to ensure that the instrument sounds different in Lutoslawski, and different in Bach, and so forth. In principle my approach to pieces is the same whether they are by Bach, Ligeti or Eben. It is an attempt to interpret the composer's record as faithfully and at the same time as creatively as possible. Working with composers has taught me how much they appreciate the performer's individual investment in a work, but it is true that it is easier for me to penetrate into the world of modern composers than for example the world of people like Beethoven. Playing classics of this kind is perhaps a bigger responsibility that presenting the premiere of a new work. Even though that sounds strange, I admit.

For the moment it appears that your interests are distributed fairly uniformly between music of the past and present. Do you ever think about focusing more on one than on the other in the future?

Probably not. Variety in repertoire suits me. I love changing styles and I try to differentiate between them as much as possible. Still, I have to say that performing Baroque and contemporary music has influenced my interpretation of Romantic music. It's a matter of the use of vibrato, and sometimes of phrasing and articulation and so forth as well.

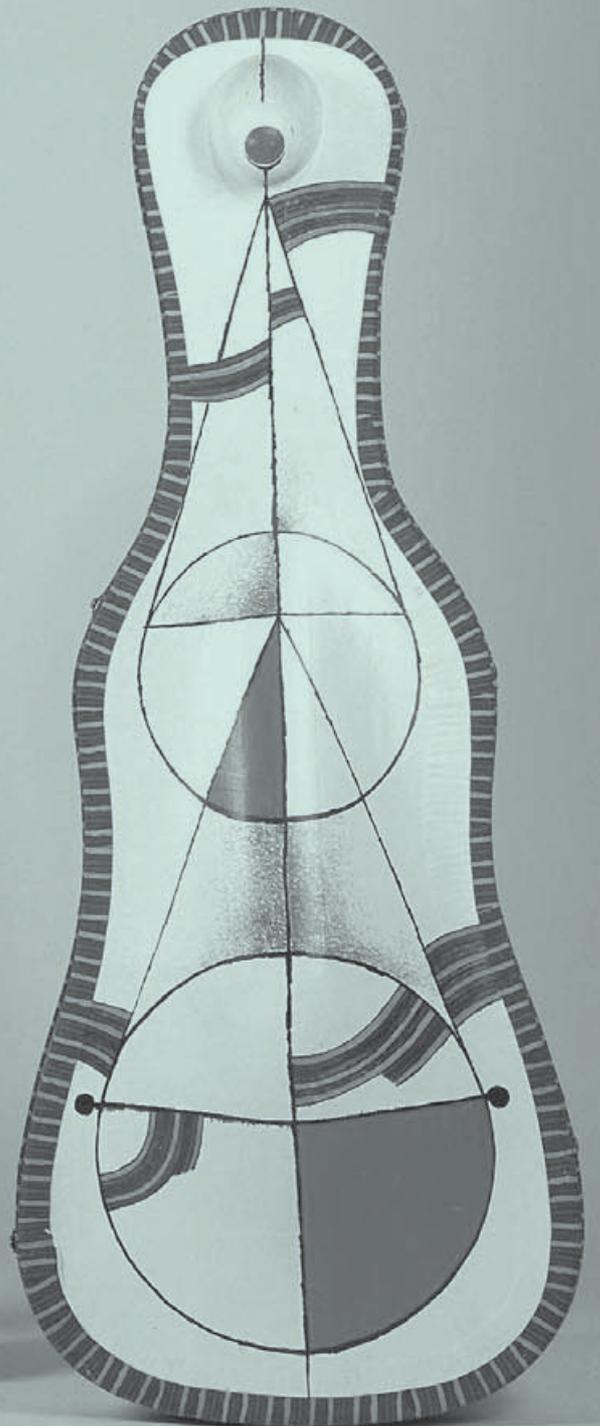
In the early Eighties you worked with the Agon Ensemble. What was it like and what did you gain from it?

You're very well informed! It was Vojta Havel who first started to play with Agon, and at the beginning I was engaged just for some solo pieces. But then I started to play ensemble pieces with Agon quite regularly. Thanks to Agon I got to know Kopelent, Pärt, Gubaidulina, Cage, Reich, Feldman, Szymanski and others. And what is more, it brought my friendships with Mirek Pudlák, Petr Kofroň and Martin Smolka. Agon was a sort of revolt

against official contemporary music. The concerts were mostly held in venues that were unusual for classical music, like clubs and churches. In the end it developed a cult status, and was in its way a snobbish affair. But we didn't care about that (I certainly didn't) and we just played our music and dreamed of a better world.

The most recent addition to your discography is Dvořák's Concerto in A Major in the original version for cello and piano, which is overshadowed by the popularity of the more famous second concerto. Does this early work have any chance of finding its place in repertoire or was it more a question of producing a document of the composer's early period of creative growth?

Dvořák himself probably didn't have a high opinion of the concerto, since otherwise he would have taken care to get it orchestrated and published in note form. The work is played in two different arrangements, and both had been recorded. What I wanted to do was to record what Dvořák had written, at any price, without leaving anything out. By the way, I had played the concerto twice in public,



once in the States and once in the Czech Republic, and in both cases with great success. Of course, it is a dreadfully long piece, and definitely not technically fully worked out, but the abundance of ideas, surprising form of construction, and superb free movement, compensate for many shortcomings. It is certainly worth hearing and worth studying and playing. I took it up as a tremendously honourable task and tried to fall in love with the piece as best I could. Whether it could become a repertoire piece is questionable. Admittedly, the Concerto is extremely technically difficult and long.

What are your future recording plans?

That's not a question that depends so much on me. Finances are the deciding factor today. It doesn't matter much how many prizes or wonderful reviews you've got for your recordings – the main thing is how many CDs you've sold. And so I do have plans, but the question is whether or not they will come to anything. Still, I must say that currently I have finished a recording of the Kodaly solo sonata, one of the most difficult and pivotal pieces ever written for cello. The contents of my next CD should develop from this sonata.

You have a series of Czech and world premieres to your credit, and some composers have written pieces specially for you. Do you have any unfulfilled wishes in this context?

I would like to find a sponsor and set up a foundation that would commission new works from composers. So that they wouldn't have to spend so much time composing just for a good word and thanks. Otherwise I'm not so ambitious. I'm just not the type that badgers leading composers into writing pieces (ideally with orchestra). Of course that's a good way of getting a reputation as a performer, since you are then always the person for whom composer xxx wrote the concerto and so on. But this sort of calculating spirit goes against the grain with me.

How does it work when composers (Kopelent, Novák) co-operate with you when writing a piece?

With Marek the situation was that I asked him for a piece for the Reflections album, which was just at the planning stage. I just described the idea of the whole disc to him, and of course he knew me very well as a performer. I played the piece straight off Marek's part, and had no reason to make any kind of change. Cantus Rogans is immensely powerful music. Pavel wrote the sonata completely spontaneously, after I had played his first sonata. A marvellous and strong piece. I've now played both pieces many times.

Many performers are trying to find a way of appealing to a wider public. Some try to do it through video clips and a distinctive image, and others add jazz and rock to their repertoires. What do you think about these efforts? Would you consider anything of the kind yourself?

As far as image is concerned, I don't like calculation. I behave according to the way I am inside, and dress that way as well. Sometimes I have an urge to put on evening dress, and so I just put it on and I don't care if that means disappointing some of the public who want to see me as a tousled romantic in a shirt. But I would like to play real rock for crowds of wild fans somewhere in a stadium. Quite seriously.

On the Reflections album your signature is under arrangements of pieces by Richard Strauss and Olivier Messiaen. Do you have any ambitions to write something for yourself?

I do have ambitions like that, and when I was a teenager I used to compose. It doesn't have to be just for cello, and certainly not just for

me. We'll wait and see when I start to fulfil these ambitions and whether the result will be worth it.

Can you imagine becoming a member of an ensemble again?

Life is full of surprises, and I can imagine plenty of things. I would quite like to found a string quartet that wouldn't play often, but just when the musicians had the inclination and the interest. There is such a vast amount of superb repertoire for string quartet and it is hard to accept that I might never have a chance to take part in this beauty directly.



the apocalyptic visions of luboš fišer

JAROSLAV PSZCZOLKA

It is now more than three years since the death of Luboš Fišer (30.9.1935–23.6.1999), a distinctive and distinguished figure in post-war Czech music.

Fišer's path to the fulfilment of his destiny in life was not direct, since his mother did not regard composing as a respectable trade and wanted her son to become an engineer. Fortunately, however, after failing the entrance examinations for middle industrial school and a short episode working in a chemical plant, he was able to study at the Prague Conservatory and later at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (AMU).

There he drew attention as early as 1960 with his graduation piece – the one-act opera *Lancelot*, for which Eva Bezděková wrote a libretto on motifs from a medieval Flemish legend. That he showed great talent, richness of invention and outstanding ability as a musical dramatist in his very first major work will be clear enough from the fact that the piece has remained in opera company repertoire to this day.

According to Fišer's old friend, the composer

Otmar Mácha, the success of *Lancelot* was one of the reasons why film makers soon noticed and exploited the composing talent of the young Fišer (let us remember that the composer's first film and television music was written in the early 60s). His huge melodic inventiveness and sense of the dramatic secured Fišer, alongside Zdeněk Liška, for example, a leading place among the creators of Czech film music.



Several of his more than three hundred works for film won prestigious awards (e.g. *Bludiště noci* [The Labyrinth of Night] – Prix d'Italia 1969, *Zlatí úhoři* [Golden Eels] – Prix d'Italia 1980, *Golet v údolí* [Golet in the Valley] and *Král Ubu* [Ubu Roi] – Czech Lion 1995 and 1996). In 1986 his television opera *Věčný Faust* [Eternal Faust] (1983–85) on a libretto by Eva Bezděková and Jaromil Jireš, won 1st Prize at the International Television Opera Competition in Salzburg. Nonetheless, despite the mastery he achieved in the field of film music, the real core and originality of his personality as a composer is to be found in his concert music.

Let us look at least briefly at the vivid palette of his pieces for his favourite instrument, the piano, for which he wrote inter alia eight sonatas that continue to enjoy popularity. The often performed one-movement 4th Piano Sonata was dedicated by the twenty-nine-year-old Fišer to the memory of his former fellow student, friend and first performer of the 1st Piano Sonata – Antonín Jemelík. In 1962 the latter had died tragically (coal gas poisoning, which at the time was unfortunately not so unusual a death – the popular artist and

tutti arco

ff sul ponticello

Viol. 1.

ff sul ponticello

ff sul ponticello

ff sul ponticello



comedian Jiří Šlitr and the poet Václav Hrabě, for example, died this way).

The shared musical loves of Luboš Fišer and Antonín Jemelík had included the work of Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin, and Fišer chose a three-bar quotation from the Russian master's 10th Piano Sonata op. 70 as a motto for the dedicated sonata. The whole piece opens with it and returns to it several times. According to another of the composer's friends, the pianist František Maxián, the special relationship that Fišer had with Scriabin's music was also summed up in his enigmatic comment, "We are all Scriabin", with its many possible meanings.

Much of Fišer's other work in the field of pure music also deserves our attention. As an example let us at least mention *Crux* for violin and timpano and its nearly cancelled premier at the Prague Spring Festival in 1970. For ideological reasons the managers of the festival tried to prevent its performance, since on the one hand its title used the motif of the Christian cross, a religious symbol incompatible with the ruling ideology, and on the other it followed on, with direct musical quotation, from Fišer's preceding piece – *Requiem*, also looked on with disfavour (it had been finished in 1969 and was considered to be clearly the composer's reaction to the invasion of August 1968. It involved the use of long passages of classical text, with strikingly frequent emphasis on the Latin word "libera" – free). The violinist Gideon Kremer, who was to perform *Crux*, stood up for its musical quality, however, and declared that if he were not allowed to play it he would immediately cancel his further

appearances at the festival. The piece was performed, therefore, thanks to the personal courage of a Soviet musician.

In the field of chamber music we might also mention the sonata for violin and piano *Ruce* [Hands] (1961), *Reliéf* for organ solo (1964), and the string quartet *Testis* (1980). We should also remember the outstanding melodrama *Istanu* (1980) written on an ancient Hittite text for a recitor, alto recorder and four players on percussion instruments.

In this short account of Fišer's pieces we must certainly not forget the chillingly powerful and visionary *Lamentation over the Destruction of the Town of Ur* (1970) inspired by a Sumerian text, for solo baritone, three reciters, children's mixed and recitation choir, timpani and bells.

Among Fišer's orchestral works we should mention at least *Double* – a witty musical "dialogue" between Luboš Fišer and his Baroque namesake Johann Fischer. Of his orchestral pieces that have been premiered abroad, we might mention the *Serenades for Salzburg* (Salzburg 1978) or *Report* for large wind orchestra (New York 1971).

Fišer first began to win an international reputation with his orchestral piece *Patnáct listů podle Dürerovy Apokalypsy* [Fifteen Leaves based on Dürer's Apocalypse]. It was written in 1965 and in the same year won third prize in the International Prague Spring Composition Competition, but reaped much greater success a year later (1966) in Paris, where it was awarded first prize in the UNESCO International Composers Platform competition. In 1967 the piece won yet another award in the form of the Union of Czechoslovak Com-

posers' Prize. Fifteen Leaves was premiered by the Czechoslovak Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Václav Neumann on the 15th of May 1966 at a Prague Spring Festival concert.

There is obviously a strong connection between this piece and the later composition for chamber and mixed choir á cappella – *Caprichos* (1966), inspired by Francisco Goya's print cycle of the same name, and the vocal-instrumental *Requiem* (1969), that has already been mentioned. Luboš Fišer himself confirmed the connection (*Hudební rozhledy* 1969, p. 133), when he said that he „conceived [his] Requiem as end and culmination of a triptych“, the first and second sections being Fifteen Leaves based on Dürer's Apocalypse and Caprichos.

The Fifteen Leaves turned out to be a crucial work that for some years determined the composer's development. The fundamental importance of the piece in his output is indirectly confirmed by the testimony of the musicologist Marie Kulijevyčová, Fišer's wife at the time, that in 1964 he stopped composing entirely for about six months. Only after this pause did the new orchestral work emerge. It is a work in which Fišer's highly individual style came to maturity, but which also clearly shows the influence of the aleatoric and timbre compositions characteristic of the development of New Music at the time. Jaroslav Smolka (in his study-Skladatel Luboš Fišer) notes that precisely at the time the piece was written Czech musicians were able to follow and study contemporary developments in New Music on the world scene much more easily and systemati-

cally than before. The reason was the political thaw of the early Sixties and the revival of musical contacts with the West via the Warsaw Autumn festivals. Smolka identifies stimuli for Fišer's work primarily in the Polish school, in the music of Witold Lutoslawski (the melodic with a predominance of second, fourth and fifth intervals in his Mourning Music) and of Krzysztof Penderecki (the timbre passages and proportional notation in Tren – a victim of Hiroshima). We might also find some connections in the timbre compositions of György Ligeti (Atmosphères, Lontano).

Fišer devoted great attention to the preparation of the note material on which he built his triptych. In the international context we might find parallels, for example, in Olivier Messiaen's ideas on modal composition in the Fifties. The whole structure of Fifteen Leaves and Caprichos is developed exclusively from the symmetrically arranged six-tone mode B, C, C sharp, F, F sharp, G. The remaining identically structured group of D, D sharp, E, G sharp, A, A sharp, called negative in line with the theory presented by Karel Janeček (Základy moderní harmonie, Praha 1965), is never heard in the pieces at all (nor any singly note of negative). It is only in the Requiem that Fišer extends the note material, in order that „after the night of the Apocalypse and the terror of Caprichos, and the lamentations for the dead at the beginning of the Requiem, the daybreak should come“ (Hud. rozhledy 1969, p.133). This „daybreak“ is achieved precisely by the extension of tone material. Fišer closes the whole Requiem, and so the whole triptych in which not a single consonant harmony has been heard, with a quiet Amen set into a C Major chord. In the context of the whole triptych this chord is extremely dramatic and brings the necessary catharsis to the work.

Although with its semi-tone construction Fišer's modus hardly provides much space for the development of melodic line, in the Fifteen Leaves the composer builds up a number of motifs from which the structure of the composition emerges. Immediately in the very first, rhythmically simply constructed motif (32nd notes), which will resound in the 1st Leaf together with the sound of the harpsichord and the claves, Fišer is exhausting all the notes of the mode. The most striking characteristic of this motif is the sinkingly rising movement, and it is this movement that points most forcefully to affinity with the motif that first appears in the 3rd Leaf in the string section, although this latter motive is strongly rhythmicised. Both motifs are composed of both the trichords of the mode, i.e. of both B, C, C sharp and F, F sharp, G. Apart from the motifs constructed in this way, roughly in the middle of the whole composition, in the 7th Leaf, we find another motif that differs from the earlier ones primarily by its movement within a single trichord (B, C, C sharp). All motifs appear in the piece unchanged and the economy of motif material is also projected onto the vertical level of the work, thus strengthening the overall asceticism of the approach to composition. There is not a single linking transition in the whole piece. The

entrance of a new element is always entirely a matter of cutting in, with no interconnection. Unchanged in terms of melody and rhythm, the motifs are clearly identifiable and directly create the closed character of the form (the harpsichord like motif with the sound of the keyboard in the 1st and 15th Leaf works most conspicuously to this effect).

As far as the inspiration Fišer drew from Albrecht Dürer's print cycle is concerned, the author commented as follows in the preface to the score of the work (Supraphon, Prague 1967): „Apocalipsis cum figuris must not be misleading for the interpretation of the work. Its influence on the work is purely as a source of association, It is expressed in the internal structure of the composition, i.e. acoustic strictness, classical tools and a certain order corresponding to the graphic purity of Dürer's idiom.“ Fišer's old friend František Maxián believes that while this claim is truthful, it deliberately reveals little about the real character of the inspiration. The reason was perhaps that the composer may have felt himself forced into a situation, a little against his will (Fišer's distaste for discussing his own pieces was well-known) in which following the success of the piece he had to say something about it. And so he deliberately commented in the most ambiguous way.

We can only speculate on the real connections between Fišer's and Dürer's Fifteen Leaves, but it is hard to ignore a strong and urgent sense of affinity when looking at Dürer's print cycle while listening to Fišer's music. There are several immediate connections between the two. Both artists, roughly thirty years old, here created the culmination of their work so far. It was in the Apocalipsis cum figuris that Dürer's style as an engraver matured, that he fully capitalised on the knowledge of contemporary developments in art that he had acquired on his Italian travels while also laying the foundation for the development of free pictorial prints. Likewise Fišer's individual style came to maturity in the Fifteen Leaves, and like Dürer he was drawing on contemporary developments – the New Music – in his own discipline.

Another significant aspect is the symbolism of the number 7 and 12 to be found both in the New testament Revelation of St. John and in Dürer's cycle (for example, the book in the right hand of the Father sealed with 7 seals, the way that the sacrificial lamb receiving this book has seven eyes and seven horns – Figure II, the seven trumpets of seven angels – fig. VI, the dragon with seven heads – fig. IX, XI, XIII, also the twelve and twelve elders on thrones around the throne of the Father – fig. II, the twelve times twelve thousand designated servants of God, who will be spared – fig. V, the twelve gates with the names of the twelve generations of Israel guarded by twelve angels – fig. XIV) We also find this symbolism in Fišer's work. In the 7th Leaf there is a conspicuous calming passage in which all the orchestral instruments fall silent and the solo flute brings what is the very first projection of the motif (which consists of seven notes) that works in contrast to the earlier motifs pro-

duced within the framework of the single tri-chord B, C, C sharp. Every time one of the motifs is quoted in Fišer's work, this motif is repeated two or three times. This repetition occurs regularly in the piece and forms sections that together occupy the space of twelve leaves (after Leaves 1 and 2 and before the 15th Leaf).

A much less obscure connection is evident in the harpsichord motif with the sound of the claves in the last of Fišer's leaves. The total deployment of all the instruments of the orchestra in the 15th Leaf in two short verticals is disquieting. Events from the 1st Leaf are then repeated. In the ninth second the harpsichord enters the sound of the claves once again playing the fallingly rising motif composed of all the notes of the six-tone mode. It is a situation similar to that of Dürer's last leaf: the Archangel Michael binding the devil, with whom the fight has just ended. Above this scene the angel shows John the "New Jerusalem", but instead of the city described in Revelations we see only a town of Dürer's time, which is far from shining with the precious stones and gold seen by St. John. One of the walls of the town is even in a state of collapse. In the same way in Fišer's 15th Leaf we hear nothing that might remind us of the beauties of the "New Jerusalem". Everything has been said, and we are waiting for it to be said. We are at the beginning, and again feel time slowly dripping away with each strike of the claves. Time, which none of the walls of Dürer's "New Jerusalem" will resist.

A certain indeterminacy in the relations between kinds of art is not a shortcoming, but something more like a special quality. By juxtaposing the determinacy and indeterminacy of certain relations, by testing and searching, we can find a new and surprising effect in the old. With this brief glance at Fišer's key orchestral work of the 1960s we can pose the question whether it is even possible to analyse a work of art definitively. We can of course fairly reliably conduct a technical analysis, and give a detailed account of how the piece is constructed, but this may give only a very partial sense of the real character of the music. Every layer of meaning uncovers a new layer, which invites further analysis. And every analysis is in the end only one version of the inexhaustible quantity of interpretations of the work. In this sense we can find no satisfactory answer to our question and we need to give up the idea of any final decipherment of the work. Neither the person who tries to analyse the piece and understand its mechanisms, not even the composer who worked with those mechanisms, can ever entirely understand all the levels of the work. We should, however, stress that this is one of the most important aspects of art and that which helps to make art what it is. A magical ritual of hidden and partially revealed meanings.

josef berg

JAROSLAV ŤASTNÝ

Josef Berg was a very sharp solitary on the Czech musical scene of this period and his early death made him a legendary and cult figure. He was not only a composer, but also a prolific writer, playwright, critic and commentator – even though these latter areas of his work had a mostly private character and were rarely published. For younger generations he became the embodiment of an uncompromising artist who was, above all, searching for authenticity of creation.

The “reality” of Josef Berg’s life was only the visible tip of the iceberg. It was actually his dreams and unrealised plans which were at the core of his life. His inner life flourished through creativity and he experienced creative ecstasies. Yet, he dispersed his energy into so many different areas, resulting in lack of completion of most of his work. Expressing himself

through writing was definitely easier for him and by all accounts also more pleasant. He pretended to compose when his mother was around – he bashed nonsense on the piano while making literary notes. He dreamed about great success, a complex work, and pictured himself as an admired hero as well as a leading personality of his day. However, by comparison with (for example) his contemporary Boris Vian whose lifetime was even shorter, Berg was not able to realise these “parallel lives” and most of his work was left as incomplete sketches.

Josef Berg’s life is linked with the town of Brno: here he was born and it was here that he worked. He was active in several circles – musical, literary, theatrical – and even though he had rather modest, even shy manners, he succeeded to a large extent in influencing the cultural atmosphere of Brno. He introduced some principles and characteristics that took root and became a part of the Brno mentality as well as the stylistic foundation of later Brno artists, many of whom were unfamiliar with Berg. His influence went well beyond the field of music itself and became a phenomenon defining the general cultural climate. Irony, self-irony, inclination towards quaintness, eccentric links, jumbles of styles, specific humour, primitivistic wordings, astute philosophic covert meanings, unexpected poetry and unintentional charm: all these characteristics are still found today in the work of Brno artists. The hidden roots of multilateral influences can be found in the work of Josef Berg. In his day, Josef Berg was a big name in artis-

tic circles; yet he was not that well known. After his death his work was rarely mentioned. Nevertheless, he was not forgotten and even in years highly unfriendly to contemporary music, Berg’s work was occasionally performed. In 1988 a collection of his texts was published. His personality must have been charismatic in a way because there has always been someone interested in his legacy. His work, to a large extent enigmatic, has attracted and called for research. By comparison with other non-living protagonists of Czech contemporary music, attention given to Berg has in fact been the most extensive. The great breadth and variety of his work definitely played a part in ensuring this continuous interest – his activities ranged from composition and theatre projects to intimate poems and newspaper columns.

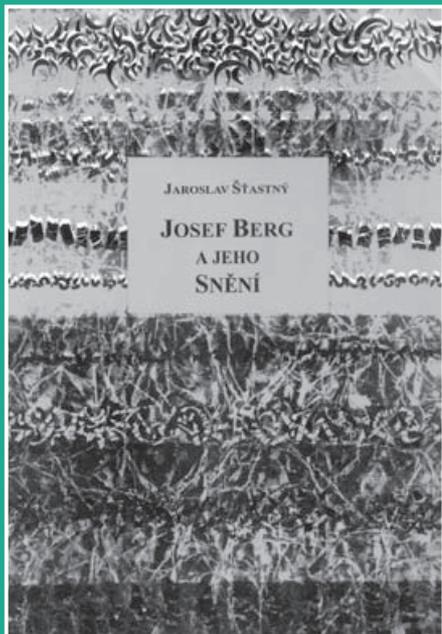
For this rich scope of creativity and for not falling into easy categorization with current trends, Berg is not classifiable, and thus still interesting, provocative and inspiring to this day. Presently kept at the Music Department of the Moravian Land Museum in Brno, Berg’s legacy so far has not been researched and there are many blank areas. We have no idea what could be the content of the collection of his letters and texts since his mother sealed them and they cannot be opened until the year 2021. However, it must be noted that even his published works also generate enigmas.

Josef Berg was born March 8, 1927, to Josef and Marie Berg, both office workers. He spent his early childhood in public housing whose courtyard was a safe place for children’s games. Here he experienced his first companionship and the atmosphere of a certain solidarity among different generations of peculiar, original, mostly proletarian types.

When he was five years old he moved with his parents to a small villa in an outlying and more peaceful part of Brno. He suddenly lost his brother and was left an only child. Berg, enclosed by this new, more comfortable yet isolated environment, experienced nostalgia for live interpersonal contact, for the colourful variety of a wider fellowship, a feeling that would accompany him to the end of his life.

As a schoolboy, his hobby was reading and he covered an enormous range including in particular authors whose works convey anxiety, such as Dostojevski, Flaubert, H. G. Wells and Franz Kafka. He also read a lot of adventure and trash literature. It was during this time that his musical talent was discovered, supported by his mother whose own artistic inclination had been frustrated by difficult life circumstances.

Berg’s crucial moment came sometime during his studies in high school when he and Bruno Cempírek, his schoolmate, established “New Humour”, as they named their particular mode of expression. These adolescent commentaries on life and his juvenile literary attempts developed into a style in which Berg truly found himself. The “New Humour” was a specific conglomerate of disparate influences –



from Méliès's and Chaplin's films through Flaubert's "Bouvard et Pécuchet" to dialect localisms of suburban people. Berg and Cempírek wrote to each other and collaborated in this style which Berg, in particular, viewed as a universal method of creation.

It must have been a determining life experience for an adolescent to discover his "own" way of viewing the world. All his life Berg would return and reattach to this source but he always sank into depression when he realised that obviously, over the course of years, this "source of life" would run dry.

For Berg, Bruno Cempírek was probably the most important person in his life. After graduating from high school, Cempírek moved to Prague which limited their contact to correspondence and occasional visits during which they organised private "Festivals of New Humour". Even though their life styles diverged over the course of time, their correspondence continued up to Berg's death.

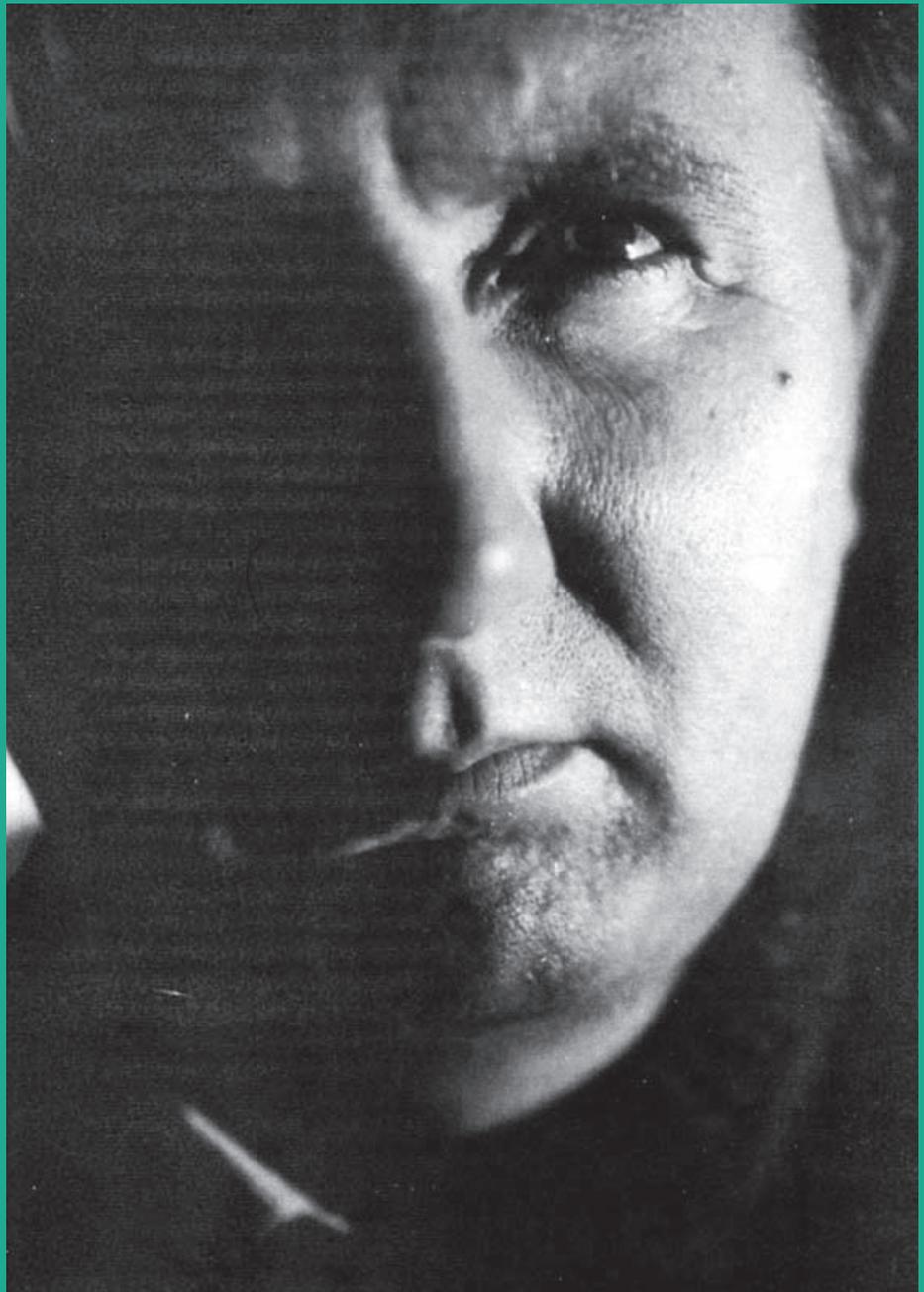
After high school Josef Berg studied composition at Brno Conservatory as a pupil of Vítězslav Petrželka. Concurrently, he studied musicology at the University in Brno. There he began to study Leoš Janáček's theory in which he became an expert. For Berg, Leoš Janáček was the first paradigm for a composer, and in fact he seemed to be the only one.

During his Conservatory studies Berg became familiar with modernism in music, thanks to the very good archive founded during the time of the First Republic (1918-1939). He learned about Debussy, Schönberg, Stravinskij and the members of the Parisian "Les Six". He was educated in the style of late romantic music, which was his teachers' language of expression. Here he also met his contemporaries – Miloš Ištvan and Alois Piňos who later became his close friends.

After a short period of enchantment with the communist ideology (1948–53) he left the communist party as well as his regular job of a radio producer and he became a freelance composer earning and living mostly on incidental music. In 1963 he organized the "Group A" (together with Ištvan, Piňos and other Brno composers), an attempt at an independent association of composers and musicologists. He also formed a unique orchestra called "Studio autorů" (Studio of Composers).

His life was devoted to the creativity of mostly private character which still waits for discovery. Josef Berg died after a long illness February 26, 1971.

Because of his enormous sensitivity, Berg began to follow strange interests, which were considered odd by his contemporaries, to say the least. These interests represented the starting points for his own concept of art. Berg's orientation towards the past, which found expression in his interest in disappearing dialects, reading old newspapers and magazines, collecting various historical curiosities, and in particular, a special interest in 18th century Czech classical music, communicated the nostalgic orientation he had felt since his childhood. Reflecting some folk publications of ancient Greek legends, later mentioned in

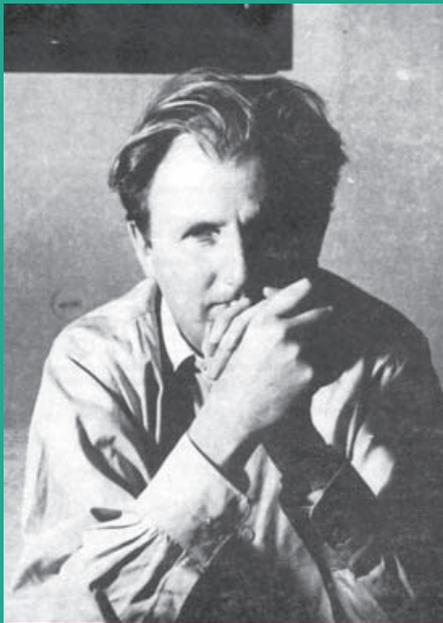


many of his texts, his experiences from childhood transformed into a deep interest in the ancient world.

Ancient world themes were quite common in Brno circles thanks to the work of the composer Jan Novák who was the most distinctive musical figure during the post war period in Brno. Jan Novák was also a big promoter of Latin and he supplied his colleagues with a wealth of neo-Latin poetry. Though there were differences among Brno's composers and their approaches towards ancient themes, each approached antiquity from the outside, from the position of the contemporary artist and used it as a source of inspiration to be dealt with through original, modern means. For Berg, however, antiquity (in fact just the Greek!) became an important part of his personal poetics. He approached it somehow from the inside and tried to understand its

means of expression and to assume them into his creative arsenal. An example: the parodied metrical prosody in his opera *The Return of Odysseus* (1962).

His Homer-like pathos of expression was very unusual in the sixties. He was looking for a kind of model to give shape to his "new rhapsody feature". Antiquity inspired Berg and played an important role mostly in the early and middle period of his work and culminated in the opera *Eufrides in Front of the Gates of Thymenae* (1964). Homer-like pathos penetrated many of his texts, even those which were not linked with antiquity and we can say that especially at the beginning of Berg's composing this was one of the substantial characteristics of his style. His admiration for ancient culture, however, gradually began to interfere with his critical thinking. "Antiquity – it was thousands of slaughtered oxes, all those altars



had to stink appallingly of blood”, Bruno Cemřířek used to say to him.

In the course of time Josef Berg accepted Brecht’s demythologizing conception of history and in his chamber opera *The Return of Odysseus* (1962) he unmasked this famous hero interpreting him as a killer carrying the weight of crime.

Josef Berg was a real character in many respects. One of the strange “hobbies” of this peaceful man was his collection of documents concerning terrorism, fascism and violence, which he studied with never ending and unbelieving astonishment regarding human nature. He also wrote a theatre piece entitled *History of Assassination* (1966), which depicts the world full of terrorists. It’s a rather funny play, but it ends when the actors hide and the audience sees only guns leveled at them to the sound of time bombs. In spite of his humoristic style there are some moments which sound, from our perspective, rather serious. On one of his “advertisements”, we find “An underdeveloped country is looking for a skillful and inventive organizer of terrorist actions”...

Josef Berg was rated among the protagonists of Czech New Music and he himself did not hesitate to defend it with aggressive articles. In spite of this fact, his relationship towards New Music was rather ambivalent. Already from his youth he had accepted modern art in its entirety from a critical distance. It is interesting, however, that in concept he came close to the ideas of New Music long before his actual exposure to New Music and thanks to this fact it was not so radical discovery for him as it was for other Czech composers of his generation. By the end of the 1950’s and at the beginning of the 1960’s, information about new musical thinking had arrived in Czechoslovakia, though with difficulty and within limits. Czech composers began to work on

these new suggestions and tried to plant them in the local soil. Berg, who felt strongly attached to the local tradition, gave a hesitant, “common-sense” reception to the new ideas. Eventually he began to understand New Music as a foreign equivalent of his New Humour. He was partly attracted by the novelty, which was provocative and inevitably raised a liberating laugh in the context of local tradition. He also found the excitement of his friends, Piřnos and Iřtvan, alluring. He let himself be enchanted by rational, compositional processes, towards which he was already heading on his personal winding path. Berg did not come to terms with “modern”, i.e. abstract art. In his conclusions he insisted that “music is never abstract”. He never gave up his traditionally conceived striving for musical depiction and basically romantic programme music. On the other hand his intellect forced him to think about various compositional techniques, methods, processes and concepts that appeared in his notes much more frequently than spontaneous musical inspirations. Thus he lived in permanent tension between two sources (spontaneous improvisation versus rational calculation) and two aims (emotional stream versus elaborated structure). The final form of his music was created in this oscillation (“trembling”, as he used to say).

Berg’s own aesthetics originated in “astonishments”. When observing the world he remains struck not only by the obvious absurdities of human action, but he is also inspired by “archaic forms”, in which he feels “joy from primary qualities – movement, colour, sound”. One of his lists of sources:

the bounds of craft and mechanical technique
fireworks
toy barometer
tableau vivant
Christmas tree
Holy Mass
rite of lovers’ advance (Shklovski)

execution
haunted house
waxworks
festive march
gathering

musical picture
astronomical clock
Christmas cręche (unmoving, with music, and also mechanical)
puppet theatre (all types)
shadow theatre
panorama
peep hole
Purkynę’s cinema
kaleidoscope
grotesque
music for silent movies
orchestration
archaisms (New Humour, grotesque, collage)
archaic period of WHATEVER (art, science of thought, dreamers)
eternally beloved archaisms (circus, clowns, horoscope, relics, there anything else?)

silent film
folk-play
Epiphany, Christmas carol, wedding, folk-customs
shop-sign
naive art
sensation
sale of patent articles
Technical Museum (archaic age of machines)
speech archaisms

All these phenomena were the breeding-ground from which his work was to grow. They refer to the child’s sense of enchantment, which Berg kept throughout his life and which he resisted giving up. Contrary to utopian visions of the avant-garde, looking optimistically into the future, all these sources of inspiration cherished by Berg lie under the veil of nostalgia. These archaisms, relics and “outdated remnants” – according to Picabia’s instructions – were changed, over the course of time, into a certain type of poetry. With this observation Berg comes close to the aesthetic category of the traditional Japanese term *sabi*, which designates “the changes in human work caused by nature and time”. As an antipode to the “coldness” and “desolation” of the modern, especially abstraction and experimentation, the *RETURN TO THE HEART* leads not towards great art, but towards eternal, archaic and “primitive” creations. Thus Berg seems to put himself in conflict with modern art. In fact, the sense and goal of every new work of art is an endeavour to get to the roots of creativity, to the original foundation of art, “to the heart”, to the “eternal, archaic creations”, etc. Berg didn’t realize that modern, abstract art was itself a departure from the renowned patterns of “great art” by searching for support in so called “primitive” expression of various types and provenance. The only distinction between Berg and modern artists was in the choice of particular sources, from “eternal and archaic creations”. However, Berg is credited with searching for his “archaic sources” independently of the trends of the period. In this respect he truly tried to beat his own path.

Berg’s creative poetics had developed over time. He moved from neo-primitivistic, folkloric beginnings (anticipating the later “New simplicity”) towards more sophisticated methods and techniques. With these he filled his notebooks. As notes they usually served him as a springboard for his compositions, the logic of which is not that easy to follow. Each composition was regularly created on the basis of an entire, verbally formulated concept for which he tried to find various techniques.

We will discuss here the following categories invented by Berg as a part of his *modus operandi*. It is important to remind the reader that Berg’s meanings for these terms often differ from conventional meanings.

- 1) analogies
- 2) fragment composition
- 3) dependencies
- 4) materialization of the “neutral”
- 5) phase composition

His *ANALOGIES*, actually used romantic *Tonalerei* for a musical description of entirely

unromantic facts. fragment composition is a compositional technique notably reminiscent of the "brick construction" method of Eric Satie (and anticipating Stockhausen's "Formelkomposition"). According to Berg's original idea, even a short melodic line or harmonic progression is divided into fragments that become the initial material and the basis of composition. These fragments are used in transpositions, augmentations and diminutions, possibly also as slightly different variants, but they preserve the characteristic shape. Combinations of "fragments" are very rich and can bring about quite interesting results.

Another compositional method which he suggested, he named artificial DEPENDENCIES. In musical material, certain elements are joined together and these always appear together in a certain "dependence".

Berg took delight in inventing very refined dependences, the system for which is imperceptible. It is very difficult to prove whether or not he actually used these in his work.

Berg was unconsciously bound to Satie through the technique which Berg called "materialisation of the neutral". Satie usually started his compositions with short passages of a four-voice "chorale". These were in fact small harmonic exercises, usually in whole

notes with careful calligraphy, that were gradually modified and ornamented and formed the initial material of the composition. Similarly, the "neutral" signified for Berg a harmonic idea that "materialised" through various rhythms, type-setting, ornamentation and variation. The result obtained through this process could again be considered "neutral", something which could then undergo further operations.

A quite interesting principle was phase composition. The original idea (1958) consisted of the transposition of certain elementary graphic forms into sound. The heart of this principle was the idea of using various co-ordinates for separate "phases" so that the sound could take on endless forms. This principle was more or less derived from late romantic monothematism and Berg devoted a lot of time to its theoretical elaboration. He used, as always in his private theories, very poetic, metaphoric language. This rather inspirational text requires proper explanation.

A special feature of Berg's taste was his dislike for the "modern, rich sound". His fondness for archaisms and the past would not let him accept results to which he was led by his curiosity and logic. Therefore he quite paradoxically tried to apply his unusual techniques to very trivial material. His ideal was classical

sound and his music sounds rather "neoclassical" – in spite of the fact that he never used classical forms – and his imagination was markedly different from the composers of the "neoclassical group". His lecture (with Alois Piños, Darmstadt, 1966), describing his view of new music theatre, was received with enthusiasm. Following the screening of the television film *The Return of Ulysses* (1962) the same audience was left completely bewildered. Unfortunately for Berg, his lack of success was in large part due to the fact that performing musicians misunderstood his music and performed it too conventionally. His music still awaits interpreters with proper insight and commitment.

Leoš Janáček Anniversary Prize 2004

The Leoš Janáček Foundation, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Leoš Janáček, is organizing a prize competition in the field of composition for orchestra. Its aim is to support orchestral composition and call attention to the artistic legacy of Leoš Janáček.

Competition rules

- The competition is open to composers from all countries and is not limited by age
- The competition is non-anonymous. Each author may submit one work not more than 25 minutes in length, which has not been performed or won a prize in other competition.
- Maximum parameters of orchestra: 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons – 3 trumpets, 6 French horns, 3 trombones, one tuba – 5 percussionists – one piano – one harp – strings (12, 12, 10, 10, 8). Other instruments or parts of concert type are not allowed. The 3rd flute, 3rd oboe, 3rd clarinet and 3rd bassoon may be replaced by piccolo, English horn, bass clarinet, and contrabassoon.
- Each participant will send to the organizer a score of the composition which may be accompanied by a demo recording, and fill out the application form available at www.janacek-nadace.cz (in case of technical problems with the form we will send it upon request).
 - The composition will be judged by an international jury named by the contest organizers no later than 31. 12. 2002.
 - The jury will award the following prizes:

1 st prize	10,000 EUR
2 nd prize	5,000 EUR
3 rd prize	3,500 EUR
- Upon agreement with the organizer the jury has the right not to award any prize or to award more than one with the exception of the 1st prize, which is indivisible. In case more 2nd or 3rd prizes are awarded, the total number of those two categories will be added and according to the decision of the jury the individual prizes will be divided. The jury also has the right to propose to the organizer that a special premium be given to a work not awarded a prize in the competition; however the overall amount of money available must be adhered to.
- The scores, with completed application form, must be sent to the **Leoš Janáček Foundation, Marešová 14, 602 00, Brno, Czech Republic, by 31. 8. 2003.** The date of postmark is decisive.
- The results of the competition will be released in December 2003. The prizes will be awarded at 2004 Moravian Autumn International Music Festival, and the work will be recommended by the jury for performance. Necessary materials for performance will be supplied by the author by 31. 5. 2004.

interview with the “trio des iscles”

JANA POSPÍŠILOVÁ

TRIO DES ISCLES (PIERRE-OLIVIER QUEYRAS – VIOLIN, VÉRONIQUE MARIN – CELLO, FRÉDÉRIC LAGARDE – PIANO) WAS FOUNDED IN 1988. THROUGH THE MUSIC OF BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ THEY DISCOVERED OTHER CZECH COMPOSERS. IN 2003 THEY WILL RECORD THE COMPLETE TRIOS OF ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK. IN NOVEMBER THEY APPEARED IN PRAGUE IN TWO CONCERTS.

How long has the “Trio des Iscles” existed?

The trio gave its first concerts during the festival in 1988. This festival, called “Les Rencontres musicales de Haute-Provence” (Musical Meetings of the Haute Provence region) is the true “meeting point” of the “Trio of Iscles”, because that is where we first met each other in music, and we are now its co-directors.

So, the trio has existed for 14 years. Why the name, “Trio des Iscles”?

The major part of the festival takes place in a place called “The Iscles”, which is a big provincial country house that looks as if it has just come out of the pages of “Grand Meaulnes”, Alain Fournier’s novel. This ancient house, loaded with history, is our constant source of inspiration. The musicians live there during the festival, and the house echoes with the sounds of rehearsals and keeps traces of each person’s individual practice. In this house we feel good, we find new energies and share much more than just music... The name came to us as a revelation, we simply couldn’t call ourselves anything else!

And what about your previous musical experiences?

We graduated from Paris and Lyon National Conservatories and participated in numerous master-classes led by Menahem PRESSLER, Maurice BOURGUE, Janos STARKER... Later we won 6 international competition awards in France, Italy, Austria, Canada... Since then we have been regularly invited to give concerts in many countries, especially in Europe and North America.

What is your favorite repertoire?

We play all types of music, from 18th century to the most recent compositions. We should mention that we regularly work in collaboration with contemporary composers. Kryštof Mařatka, your compatriot, provides a good example of this. It was for us that he composed his “Horoscope”, which we played in

world premiere last year in France. This work is dedicated to our trio. We are very happy to play it in Prague this year for the national premiere.

Do you enjoy playing this work?

Yes, we like it very much. This is the music that evokes the infinite beauty and strangeness of the Universe, the music of stars, the poetry of cosmos. Its world premiere took place at our festival in a magnificent 14th century Cistercian abbey. Since then we have played it with a great deal of pleasure on numerous occasions in France, USA, Canada...

What is that you, a French trio, have in common with a young Czech composer, such as Kryštof Mařatka?

First, this is a relationship based on our common passion for music in the large sense of the word, and for sharing this music. From this point of view our meeting with Kryštof MAŘATKA has been very fruitful. We learn a lot from working with him. It is very interesting to see what kind of relationship he has with his music, and in what manner he allows (or does not allow!) his music to change in the course of our interpretation or due to our different suggestions...

You seem to be familiar with Kryštof Mařatka’s music?

This is true. We play his piano quartet “Exaltum”, his duo for cello and violin (“Poeme”), his sonatas for solo violin... We are very often in touch together and have become close friends thanks to his music, which is really connecting us quite tightly.

Can one say that you play all of Kryštof’s work...?

Not far from it, in the area of his chamber music.

Do you also perform contemporary music written by other French or international composers?

Yes, actually we often perform contemporary music, some of it as world premieres. Apart from regular cooperation with contemporary French composers we also, for example, perform contemporary music written by young Canadian composers. Our CD devoted to the contemporary music of young Canadian composers (Andrew Peter Mc-Donald, Chan Kah Nin, Brent Lee, Barbara Monk-Feldmann et Owen Underhill) was a real success and encouraged us to further work in this field. The CD was awarded the prize – “Classical Music CD of the year 1998” given annually to the best CD of the year by the biggest Canadian media institution Globe and Mail. In any case, contemporary music is part of our lives even outside the activities of Trio des Iscles. The violinist Pierre-Olivier Queyras and cellist Véronique Marin both cooperate with l’Ensemble Intercontemporaine under the direction of Pierre Boulez and you probably know that this famous French ensemble is purely focused only on contemporary music. Obviously the more experience you have with contemporary music, the more you find it natural to engage yourself for these kinds of programme.

And apart from contemporary music?

Generally speaking our programme is of course very international and represents all styles of classical music, but for the past several years we have to say that Czech music has had a privileged place in our programmes. In 1997 we recorded the complete trios of B. MARTINŮ. This CD received very good reviews in all the French professional music press (Repertoire, Telerama, Diapason, Le Monde de la Musique) and the music of B. Martinu basically launched our total passion for Czech music.

What was the next development in this first “Czech music experience”

We were absolutely taken by the beauty of this music and decided to engage ourselves to perform other chamber music by Martinů. Soon we started to co-operate with other excellent musicians and our concert programs are now often varied. We want to promote Martinů music, and at our concerts we sometimes alternate trios with various duos and quartets written by Martinů. Not only that, for example this year we initiated a performance of “La revue de cuisine” and it was really well received by the audience. I have to say that despite the fact that Martinů lived in Paris for such a long time, his music is still not as well known in France as it deserves to be. We really try to promote his music as much as we can. But it is not just Martinů. This wonderful music just opened the door to other Czech music jewels. Working more and more in the Czech music repertoire we were absolutely taken by the musicality, long warm phrases and such distinctive lively rhythm. Now we are preparing the complete trios of A. Dvořák, which we will record in 2003 as our next CD devoted purely to the Czech music. On the other hand, another great Czech music project for this year is a concert series of the complete trios by the Czech composers Smetana, Martinů,

Dvořák and also K. Mařatka. These concerts will take place in Paris and additionally also in various festivals in France (Saint-Denis, Angoulême, Saintes, festival in Val d'Isère), in Innsbruck and also in Banff-Centre in Canada. Concerts in Paris will be broadcast live by Radio France, the biggest radio station focusing on classical music, and we are delighted to be preparing these concerts in co-operation with the Czech Culture Centre in Paris. We would also like to mention that this year we have also had occasions to perform several chamber music works written by Janáček and Josef Suk and we were again quite taken by the beauty of this music. It looks as if Czech music jewels are really endless.

That makes your visit to Prague this year even more long-awaited. Are you coming here for the first time?

No. We have all already played here even if not as a trio. We want to enlarge our "Czech experience" and get to know Czech republic and Czech culture as much as we can, and so we decided to visit Prague just as tourists this year. We know and appreciate Prague very highly. It is one of the most wonderful cities in Europe. We are terribly sorry about the floods in the summer.

In November the Trio des Iscles will perform for the first time in Prague, at two concerts. Considering your dedication for Czech music and your efforts to promote Czech music in France, how do you feel about your first concert experience in Prague?

Well, what can we say... we are very happy to be finally playing Czech music in Prague... Our first concert will be on November 6th in the concert series at the "Salon of Zdenka Podhajska" organized by the "Foundation of Zdenka Podhajska". Here we will play a Czech music programme including the national Czech premiere of the trio "Horoskope" written by K. Mařatka. The other concert will be on November 9th at "Sál Martinů" with a programme devoted to Czech and French music of 19th and 20th centuries.

Well you already anticipated my next question... you also play French music at your concerts, don't you?

Of course we do! Czech and French music is a world of poetry, nostalgia, and imagination... it is really a very particular music among other world musical cultures. For 2003 we are preparing a kind of musical spectacle that will evoke this particular spirit of French music via three great trios (those of Fauré, Chausson and Ravel) with the accompaniment of texts, images, sculptures... We also want to give the public some sort of general survey of this poetic universe, which is one of the great foundations of French culture.

Could you clarify ?

Yes, gladly. The Melancholy of Gabriel Fauré, is a very particular, very intimate feeling, and very important in our French artistic behaviour. Generally speaking, we can say that French



culture is intimate by nature. The gigantic size, the grand is only very rarely present in the French works, especially in this period. In painting, for example, Impressionism, which emerged so fully at this time, is a very subtle art, where the palette of colour, rarely lively, does much more for the picture than the object or person represented. A very light gliding of red towards rosé, and the emotional universe of the work overflows. We are indeed far from drums and trumpets! With his fantastic, unreal worlds, Maurice Ravel, whom I mention because we are also going to play his trio in Prague at "Sál Martinů", is one of the lights of this universe. People often speak about colour in music: we can say that French music has created that fact. We think the combination of French and Czech music on a concert program is really unforgettable and we try to devote our time and energy to both in the same way.

Your enthusiasm is contagious. Do you teach and pass your love for music to your younger colleges?

Yes, all three of us are music professors at the Conservatories, and we regularly give master-classes in Spain, Canada, and now – a new development – in the Czech Republic! The pianist of the trio – Frederic Lagarde – gave lessons and played a solo recital at The International Piano Master Courses organized this summer for the first year at Týn nad Vltavou in the South of Bohemia. For all of us to teach and to share music is a privileged relationship, a complex moment, like all human relationships. A real passionate enterprise!

Mr. Lagarde, it was your first experience of teaching young Czech pianists. What could you say about their professional

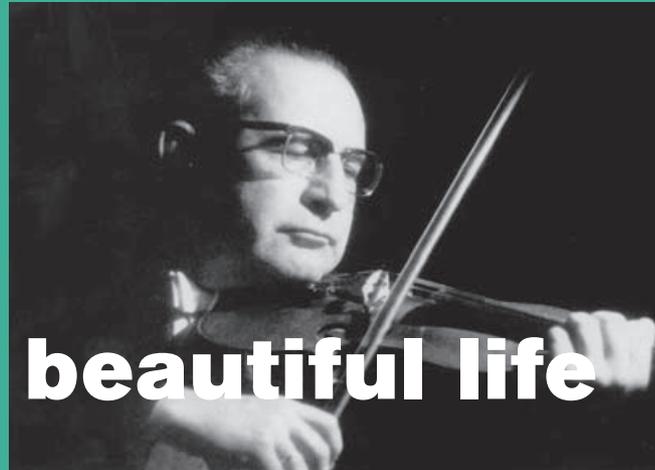
level in comparison to the French young pianists of the same age?

It was my very first opportunity to get in touch with young Czech piano talents. I really didn't expect their professional level to be so high. They are very musical, very open, seriously focused on their work. I was several times surprised by their discipline at concerts and also their interest in learning new things. I was also pleased to see their interest in French music. In France the professional level of young pianists is really very high and honestly I didn't expect to find the equivalent here. Unfortunately I didn't know much about young music talents in the Czech republic. When you listen to them playing at concerts you can feel a very special warmth coming out of their play. I think this is very significant for all Czech musicians. It was a wonderful experience for me and I have already accepted the invitation to play a recital and to participate as the teacher again next year.

And just so we cover all your professional music activities... I know that apart from all your concert activities you are also organisers of music festivals in France. Could you kindly tell me more about it?

Yes, it is true. We love to meet other musicians and to make music together. We organize two music festivals – the already mentioned "Rencontres Musicales de Haute-Provence" that now has a real 15-year tradition. The other festival "Les Classiques de Val d'Isère" is organized every year in March in the famous ski center Val d'Isère in France. By the way this tells you something more about us at the end. We are all passionate skiers as well.

to make the best of this beautiful life



I first heard something about Petr Rybář some time in 1994. It interested me so much that I telephoned him and he invited me to visit him at his home in Caslana. We immediately hit it off. Petr was happy to be able to speak in Czech, and we had a great deal in common, especially love for music and a close relationship to the music of Bohuslav Martinů, whom Petr had known personally and whose music he loved very much. Very soon Petr had brought the whole of my family including my mother, wife and children into our friendship – after a return from the maternity hospital we always found a huge bouquet and congratulations waiting at our door.

Petr was a fascinating person full of marvellous contrasts. He was a tremendously kind man, but also capable of very caustic judgements. He would immediately accept kindred souls into his universe, but give the others no chance of getting beyond the smiling facade. This was certainly a reflection of his long years of work as a concert master, used to producing fast and efficient solutions to all kinds of complex human and musical situations in an orchestra. He was one of the best concert masters of his generation, with conductors trying to secure his involvement in important projects in advance, but he was also an outstanding soloist, a much sought after chamber performer and a beloved teacher. He was a living legend, but while he was still with us, he never sought to give that impression at all. This was probably mainly because he was always more interested in hearing about other people than about talking of himself and his successes. Another of his unusual characteristics was his absolute precision in everything that he did – in the planning of an event, in the performance of music, in teaching, in preparing for a television interview, or in using any of the seven languages that he spoke with complete fluency. This precision was never, however, the result of pedantry or impatience – Petr was always relaxed and had an ocean of time for anyone that he liked.

Petr was a born citizen of the world, who felt at home everywhere and easily acquired friends and admirers. For the Swiss he was a Swiss, for the Italian an Italian, for Czechs a Czech... But I think that his favourite language was Czech, to which he had an attitude based on discovery. Although he had not been born in Bohemia and had spent only a very short period of his life there, he cared a great deal about his Czech origin in an unsentimental way – in its August issue the famous magazine “Strad” published a long portrait of Petr, characterised in the subtitle not only as a “guru of his instrument” but also as a Czech violinist.

In 1998 the publisher Joachim Krist gave him great joy when on the occasion of Petr’s 85th birthday he released a CD of Petr’s historic recordings of works by Bohuslav Martinů produced by his company TELOS. The Bohuslav Martinů Foundation organised the christening of this CD in the Zdenka Podhajska Hall. The originally modestly planned christening turned into a marvellous celebration of Petr Rybář, his last triumphal visit to Prague in the presence of many figures in Czech musical life.

Throughout his life Petr was a passionate traveller, but in the last four years of his life he preferred not to travel because of fears for his health. At our last meeting he held a glass of champagne in his hand, smiled broadly and explained why he no longer travelled, “I don’t want to die yet, I still want to make the best of this beautiful life.”

ALEŠ BŘEZINA

THE LIFE OF PETR RYBÁŘ

29th of August 1913 – 4th of October 2002 (recorded by Aleš Březina on the basis of conversations 1996–2002, with additions from the booklet to the CD In memoriam Duo Rybar).

My Parents

I was born on the 29th of October 1913 to Czech parents in Vienna. My father was killed at the very beginning of the 1st World War and so I was brought up just by my mother Virginie, an outstanding violinist. Playing the violin was a family tradition, since my maternal grandfather had been an excellent violinist and my father, even though his main profession had been as a builder of railway bridges in the K.u.K. Army (Oberstleutnant) had been a violinist with a European reputation. Every year the emperor had give him 4 months, leave so that he could tour, with his wife Virgínie, also an excellent pianist, accompanying him on the piano. Virginie had originally studied under Ševčík, but with her “more or less revolutionary temperament” she rebelled against Ševčík’s methods, said to herself that “this beautiful life is too short for those thousands of exercises written by Ševčík” and went off to Brussels to study under César Thomson. She also studied in Hamburg, where she met her future husband.

Mother came from an old Prague family, while there are Hungarian roots deep in Father’s genealogy. In Prague mother’s family was considered Czech by Czechs and German by Germans. For a time mother was president of the German literary club in Prague whose members included Franz Kafka and Max Brod. When I later gave recitals, I was often advertised in the press as a Czech-German violinist.

Life

Three days before the outbreak of the 1st World War my mother took me to England, where we to spend nine years. That’s why my native tongue is English – it was only later that I learned to swim in seven languages (Czech, German, French, Portuguese, French, Italian, Swiss Dialect). My mother’s brother Fred lived in England; he promised Virginia he would organise a “Ševčík-School” but he never did. Mother therefore put together a benefit orchestra that played at concerts for the war wounded – everyone played free of charge, she conducted, and she managed to get soloists like Szigéti, for example, a whole three times. Jacques Dalcroze, the famous creator of the rhythmic astounding method, came to one of her concerts to hear her and invited her to teach at his institute onm Geneva, where Virginia spent a year (1922).

In 1923 we returned to Prague because grandfather – mother’s father – was ill. Here I started to attend Czech general school, but I only went for three weeks, because I didn’t understand a word (I learnt Czech later in Paris from my flatmate, the painter František Reyn). Anyway, my mother then sent me to a school in Leipzig for a year (1924), where I learnt German with such a strong Saxon accent that it drove my mother, who hated dialects, right

up the wall. In 1925–1931 I studied in Prague again, this time at a German gymnasium, and also took private lessons in Czech. But I just couldn’t get anywhere with the Czech and so everyone thought I was a chauvinist who didn’t want to learn the language.

In 1931–1934 I attended the Masters School in Prague – before then my only violin teacher had been my mother, a very strict teacher. I studied with all the members of the Czech Quartet – violin with Hofmann, composition with Suk, chamber music-sonatas with Herold and string quartet with Zelenka. For a joke I and some friends founded a “Group of Six” there, like the Six in Paris. Its members were Dalibor Vačkář, Rafael Kubelík, Rudolf Firkušný, Hans Walther Süsskind, Frank Polák-Pelleg and me. In Prague I was already giving solo recitals, in which for example I presented the Czechoslovak premiere of Igor Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto (at a New Year concert in 1932), and the world prelude of Bohuslav Bohuslav Martinů’s Rhythmic Etudes. In 1933 and 1935 I played the Tchaikovsky Concerto with the Czech Philharmonic.

After graduating from the Conservatory I left for Paris in October 1934 to study under Carl Flesch – and there I stayed until March 1936. Through the soprano Charlotte Osuská, wife of the Czechoslovak ambassador, I got to know the painter František Reyn, with whom I immediately rented a flat and with whom I first fell in love with Czech. I gave recitals in Paris too. At one of them I again played the Stravinsky Violin Concerto in the Salle Pleyel in the rue St. Honoré – the composer himself accepted my invitation (he lived in the same street) and afterwards came to my dressing room to congratulate me on my great success. But I didn’t recognise him, and he had knicker bickers on and I thought, “a sportsman and he understands music”. Only after he had left did my friends tell me it was Stravinsky.

I got to know Martinů sometime in 1935, or perhaps the beginning of 1936. I played his music and often visited him in his tiny little flat in the Malakoff quarter – well known for its thieves and jailbirds. We would sit in his flat chatting and drinking red wine, and just having a good time. After one time when I played his Arabesque on the Paris Radio Martinů came to get the part back off my pianist and then wrote a small dedication into my part.

In 1936 I left for a tour of Portugal. Meanwhile the Spanish Civil War broke out and I remained in Portugal for a year and a half, up to 1918. On a tour of England I met Amelia Roentgen – Trevelyan, who invited me for three months to Winterthur to visit her brother Joachim, the concert master of the orchestra there. After one concert I was sitting with all the musicians from the orchestra in some bar and Joachim asked me to play on the violin. I did so, and then a man came to me – it was Werner Reinhardt – and asked me whether I wanted to be concert master after Joachim, who was soon to leave Winterthur to go and teach in the conservatory in the Hague. I had never played in an orchestra, but in the end I accepted because this orchestra only played for six

months of the year and the rest of the time played in Karlovy Vary, and so it gave me enough time for solo play: I presented – often in premiere or as the first performance in a particular country – works by Bartók, Stravinsky, Martinů, Prokofiev, Hindemith, Honegger and Schibler. Apart from that I played all six Bach solo sonatas and partitas a total of fifteen times (always in two concerts one after the other). I performed the Bach Triple Concerto ten times – my partners were Edwin Fischer and Antonio Tusa. I appeared regularly in many European countries at all kinds of festivals with outstanding conductors – in Paris I was often the soloist at the New Year concerts of the Czech Philharmonic, at which I always played Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto. Among the musicians with whom I performed were Clara Haskil, Joseph Keilbert, Rudolf Kempe, Géza Anda, Edwin Fischer, Henryk Szeryng, Rafael Kubelík, Carl Schuricht, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Aurele Nicolet, Peter Lukas Graf, Frank Pelleg, Wolfgang Sawalisch, Fritz Busch, Charles Münch, Hans Rosbaud, Wilhelm Backhaus and others.

I spent 28 years in Winterthur and it was a beautiful time. Winterthur people are a wonderfully educated public, who have just three kinds of activity: working, eating, and going to concerts. The duties of the concert master also included leading the string quartet and teaching at the conservatory. Apart from that I was also often concert master of the Luzerner Festspielorchester – the orchestra of the Luzerner Musikfestwochen – and I continued with solo and chamber work. As a member of the jury I took part in competitions in Geneva, Pretoria, Sion and Vercelli, and taught at master courses in Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Italy. In 1966 I said goodbye to Winterthur and then devoted myself entirely to chamber music, especially with my wife Marcelle Daepen (from 1956), appearing as the Rybar Duo, but also with Clara Haskil and others. In 1970, however, the conductor Wolfgang Sawalisch persuaded me to become concert master in the Orchestre de la Suisse romande in Geneva. I stayed there with him for the whole period of his engagement there – up to 1980, and having come with him I also left with him. In Geneva I also led the Classé de virtuosité at the conservatory there.

Four television portraits of my life have been made for Swiss Television (Plans Fixes Genève – a fifty-minute documentary, which exists in German (Rita Wolfensberger) and in French (René Schenker) versions, an amateur film Ein Tag mit Peter Rybar) and one documentary for Czech Television. I have recorded records for Philips, Westminster, Whitehall, Concert Hall Society and Le Chant de Mond of many chamber pieces and violin concertos (Vivaldi, Viotti, Nardini, Tartini, Mozart – The Haffner Serenade with Fritz Busch, Bach’s Concerto for Two Violins with Henryk Szeryng, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Goldmark, Suk’s Fantasia (with the Wiener Symphoniker), Hindemith, Martinů and others. Some of my recordings are now being released again in new editions.



Muziga: O lásce [On Love]

Indies Records

The Muziga group was formed in 2000, but Helena and Jiří Vedral have been arranging folksongs since 1992 and had already made several recordings (Jaborové husličky, 1995; Hej lesem, 1998). On last year's album Horská karavana [Mountai Caravan] they took on the folk music of Asia together with the singer Feng-jün Song. Apart from the Vedrals in the role of singers and players on all kinds of stringed instruments, Muziga is made up of the double bassist Jan Dvořák and the French percussionist Cécile Boiffin. The album "On Love" draws its repertoire mainly from the Valach region. Most of the songs have a common story – a love story. It is an element enhanced by ingenious arrangement, which transforms some of the songs into small dramas. The presence of a percussionist makes it inevitable that the rhythmic side of the music should be more prominent. The most room is given to the marimba, an instrument that at first sight seems remote for Valachia. On the other hand, the rhythmic figures with which Cécile undercolours the songs are not far removed from dulcimer playing. The song Ej hora [Oh, mountain] (which has also taken the fancy of Zuzana Lapčíková and Emil Viklický) is a rather unfortunate case. The melody of this long drawn out, rough hewn song resists the attempt to peg it onto a regular rhythm. With all the other songs greater emphasis on rhythm is more positive in its effects, whether on a wild piece like "Valaši, Valaši" or lullingly in "Vím já zahrádku trněnú" [I know a Garden of Thorns]. The choice of guests is also happy. On three tracks colour is added by the trumpet player Jan Doležal and on one by singers Jan Dzurko and Roman Horváth, who bring a dash of gipsy fire to the song "Za hora-ma za dolama (sú tam cigáni...)".

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL



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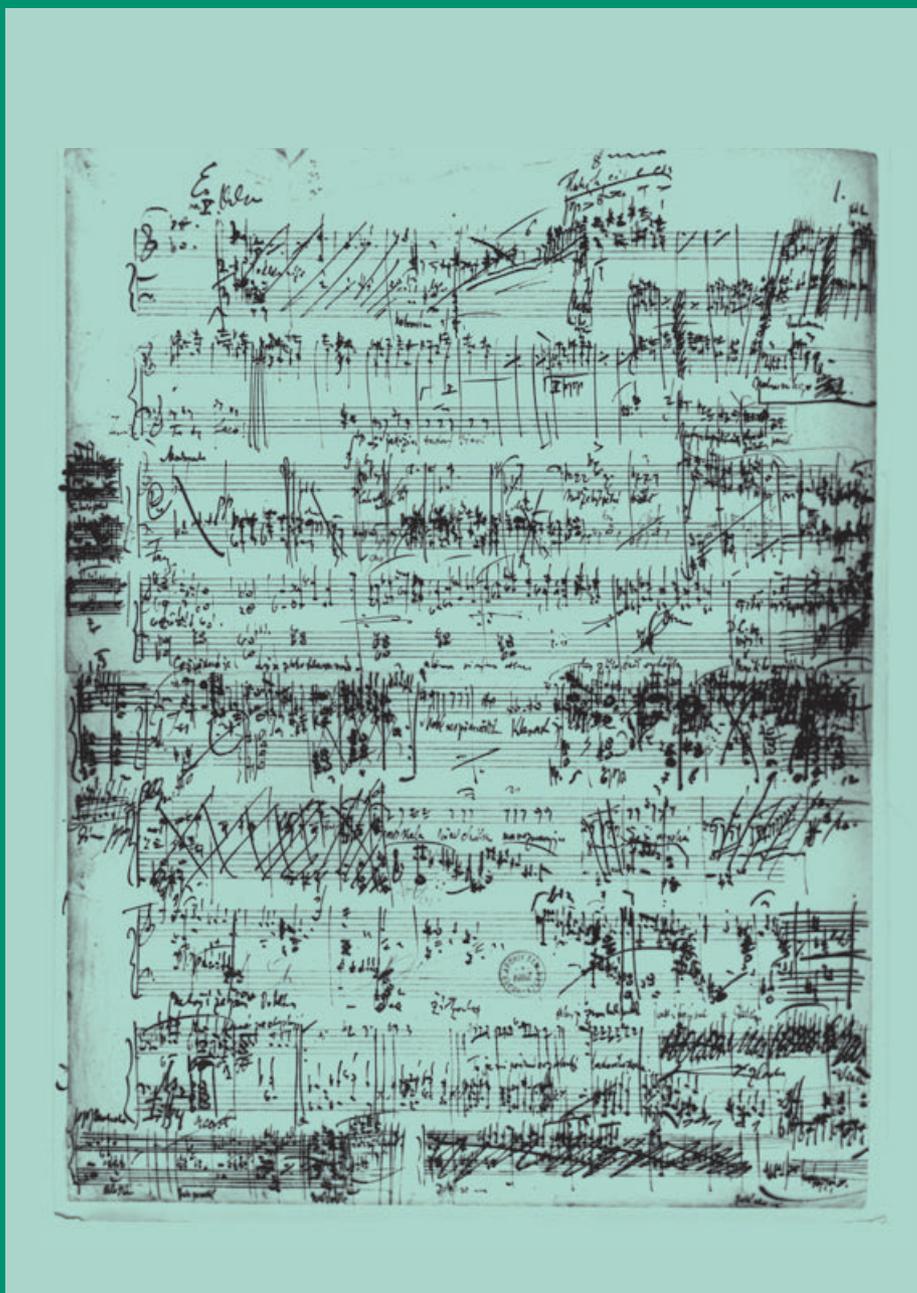
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