

czech music

3 | 2003 bimonthly magazine

Kryštof Mařatka

The Exposition
of New Music 2003

Kamil Doležal



OOSTRAVA CENTER FOR NEW MUSIC

Ostrava Days 2003 *Institute*

August 11 – 31, 2003

Composers: Olga Neuirth (Berlin/Vienna), Petr Kotik (New York/Prague), Alvin Lucier (Middletown, USA), Tristan Murail (Paris / New York), Christian Wolff (Hanover, USA), Frederic Rzewski (Brussels), Roscoe Mitchell (Madison, USA), Somei Satoh (Tokyo)

Guests: Zsolt Nagy (Budapest/Karlsruhe), Petr Vronsky (Prague), Joseph Kubera (New York), Robyn Schulkowsky (Berlin), Chris Nappi (New York), Hana Kotkova (Lugano), Vishnu Sanju Sahai (London/ New Delhi), Marilyn Nonken (New York), Eniko Ginzery (Bratislava), Peter Graham (Brno), Thomas Buckner (New York), and others. **Resident Orchestras:** Janacek Philharmonic and Ensemble OCNM.

Ostrava Days 2003 *Festival*

August 24-30, 2003

Sunday, August 24:

7:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

MUSIC IN SPACE: WORKS FOR MULTIPLE ORCHESTRAS

Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra & Guests

Petr Kotik and Zsolt Nagy, Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Petr Kotik

Variations for 3 Orchestras

Olga Neuirth

new work for 3 Orchestras

Earle Brown

Available Forms II for 2 Orchestras

Phill Niblock

3 Orchids for 3 Orchestras

Monday, August 25:

4:30 pm Janacek Conservatory

Monika Streitova-Popelarova, Flute; Eniko Ginzery, Cimbalom;

Andrea Mudronova, Piano; Igor Frantisak, Clarinet

Jean-Yves Bosseur

Breath for Strings

Vladimir Bokes

Capriccio

Marian Lejava

Nocturno No. 3

Gyorgy Kurtag

8 Duos

Tre Altre Pezzi

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

8:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

Robyn Schulkowsky, Chris Nappi, Percussion

Christian Wolff

Solos & Duos

Roscoe Mitchell Ensemble

Selected I

S.E.M. Ensemble

Morton Feldman

Instruments I

John Cage

Ryoanji

10:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

Marilyn Nonken, Piano

Morton Feldman

Triadic Memories

Tuesday, August 26:

4:30 pm Janacek Conservatory

Ensemble OCNM; Zsolt Nagy, Conductor

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

8:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra

Hana Kotkova, Violin; Thomas Buckner, Voice Petr Kotik, Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Roscoe Mitchell

Non-Cognitive Aspects of the City

Morton Feldman

Violin and Orchestra

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

Wednesday, August 27:

5:30 pm Janacek Conservatory

Dama Dama Percussion Group, Ars Incognita Ensemble

Music by Composers from Brno: Peter Graham, Ivo Medek & Guests

9:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

THE NIGHT OF THE PIANO

Joseph Kubera, Frederic Rzewski, Marilyn Nonken, Piano

John Cage

Music of Changes

Frederic Rzewski

Part V of The Road

Tristan Murail

Terroires de l'Oubli

Thursday, August 28:

4:30 pm Janacek Conservatory

Ensemble OCNM

Joseph Kubera, Piano; Marilyn Nonken, Piano; Thomas Buckner, Baritone

Zsolt Nagy, Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Christian Wolff

Exercises for 2 pianos

Alvin Lucier

Kirilics for Baritone, French Horn and Electronics

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

8:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra

Theresa Salomon, Violin; Frederic Rzewski, Piano; Robyn Schulkowsky, Percussion

Petr Kotik, Zsolt Nagy, Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Tristan Murail

Gondwana

Frederic Rzewski

Scratch Symphony

Christian Wolff

John, David

Michal Trnka

Violin Concerto

10:30 pm Nightclub Parnik, Ostrava

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Vishnu Sanju Sahai, Tabla; Fida Hussain, Harmonium; Frederic Rzewski, Piano;

Janko Ferenc, Saxophone; Stefan Ziga, Accordion & Guests

Friday, August 29:

4:30 pm St. Venceslas Church, Ostrava

Martina Jankova, Soprano; Theresa Salomon, Violin; Barbara Willi, Harpsichord;

Robyn Schulkowsky, Percussion; Petr Kotik, Flute;

Soloists of the Ostrava Center for New Music

Music by Louis Couperin, Georg Philipp Telemann,

Elisabeth-Claude Jaquet de la Guerre, Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber,

Roscoe Mitchell, Jon Gibson, Petr Kotik

8:00 pm Philharmonic Hall

Vishnu Sanju Sahai, Tabla; Fida Hussain, Harmonium

Indian Classical Music

Saturday, August 30:

3:00 pm Janacek Conservatory

Ensemble OCNM & Guests; Petr Kotik, Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

7:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra

Canticum Ostrava; Yurii Galatenko, Director

Zsolt Nagy, Yurii Galatenko, Conductors

Petr Kotik

Asymmetric Landing

Luigi Nono

Cori di Didone

Alvin Lucier

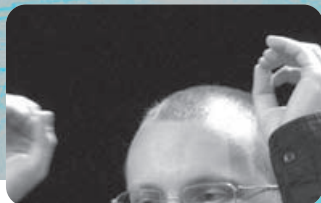
Sweepers

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

*Program subject to change

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editorial

It is summer and we are leaving the cities and looking for quiet places. In our age, which is dominated by machines, also many artists look their way back to the roots. This year's Exposition of New Music in Brno has as its title "Echoes of the Nature". How can be this motto reflected in music, you can read in our report. Another way to the roots found Kryštof Mařatka. This composer, who now lives in France, searched through the folk music of nations of the whole globe and transformed their melodies and rhythms into his own language. From this, his Clarinet concerto was born, which was performed on this year's Prague spring festival. The interview, of course, does not concern only this piece. Another person in this issue is also connected with clarinet. Kamil Doležal is leader of the Mondschein Ensemble (or MoEns) and also member of group Why Not Patterns, which crosses the borders between classical and rock, between composed and improvised music. I wish you pleasant summer and look forward to greeting you again in the next issue of Czech Music.

Matěj Kratochvíl
MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL
EDITOR

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wading in the stream and strolling in the meadows

interview with kryštof mařatka

MIROSLAV PUĐLÁK

Only a few Czech Composers have managed to make a successful career in France. The most obvious examples are Antonín Rejcha and Bohuslav Martinů, but recently there has been ever more talk of a young Czech composer who has been living in Paris since 1994 and has already attracted attention on many occasions not just in France but also at festivals elsewhere in Europe, in the United States and Australia. Kryštof Mařatka was born in Prague in 1972 into a family with strong cultural interests and traditions. He studied piano and composition in Prague at the conservatory and the Academy of Performing Arts. He went to France first on a French government scholarship, studied at IRCAM and won further scholarships. He also married in France and works there today as a freelance composer. He has received commissions from festivals including Festival Présences, Dresdener Musiktage, and the Korsholm Music Festival in Finland. His pieces have been played by leading performers like Patrick Gallois, Michel Lethiec, Franz Helmerson, Gustavo Romero, Raphaël Oleg and Vladimir Mendelssohn, by ensembles such as the Talich Quartet, Quatuor Ysaïe, Quatuor Kandinsky, the Mozart Piano Quartet, Ensemble Fa, and the Grieg Trio, and by orchestras including the Orchestre de Radio France, the St. Petersburg Camerata, the Brno State Philharmonic, or the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra. He has also written a piece as a commission for the Czech Season in France and one of his pieces was played at this year's Prague Spring Festival.

Your piece for clarinet and orchestra premiered at the Prague Spring was surprising for its synthetic conception. What led you to folk music and non-European musical culture and its integration into a contemporary composing idiom?

Folk music is a living form that reflects reality and through tradition captures time, and so the mystery of existence as well. For as long as I can remember this fact has bothered and excited me, drawing me towards folk. If we have the chance (thanks to professional recordings) to enter the world of ethnic music, we find an ocean of fascinating kinds of musical expression, so diverse, contrasting and structurally complex that we realise that "western" classical music forms a mere fragment of the whole.

In my clarinet concerto "LUMINARIUM" I wanted to give up my own initiative as much as possible and accept the particular musical fragment as it is itself formed by rhythm, harmony, tempo, dynamics and so on, since the mere fact of transcription for orchestra is a recasting and a deformation. The piece is composed in the spirit of a documentary film that follows different cultures independently of each other and tries to illuminate their characteristic signs, the distinctive identity of different kinds of music and so of different peoples.

In the piece this synthesis results in the inter-penetration of atonal music, tonal music, modal, pentatonic, micro-interval and so on, and their "universal" location then naturally shifts the different musical aesthetics to a single level and relativises them by juxtaposition.

Numerous commissions and performances are a sign that your music enjoys considerable success in France, but in terms of style it is not part of the French musical mainstream. How



would you characterise your position as a composer in France?

Let's underline the word mainstream. It means that one form of musical thinking (which is neither better nor worse, and doesn't represent the majority anyway) is in fashion and dominates certain music institutions that have some kind of power and media impact on the public, i. e. a few contemporary music festivals, a few ensembles that present the pieces of selected composers and so on.

But that is just one side of the coin. There are also many organisers and institutions who don't have a clear and often dogmatic attitude towards the music of contemporaries, "non"-contemporary music festivals or just Music festivals, musicians, conductors and various funds and foundations, and now there's also the Presences Festival in Paris, probably the biggest French festival of contemporary music, which is becoming very democratic, and so on. The situation is paradoxical, then. My pieces are not in the hands of so-called "specialists" on contemporary music, but in the hands of simply and unique musicians, who stand up for it. I find this attitude natural, and it strikes me as healthy.

What's your experience when it comes to comparing the two music cultures, Czech and French, from the point of view of the composer?

The difference comes from the difference in national character.

France is a country where many cultures mingle. This encourages a certain openness and courage for confrontation with the

unknown. It can also be a temptation to competitiveness, a predatory attitude and careerism, but it can nonetheless be a motor force for seeking out and discovering new techniques, methods and forms, although then again that sometimes makes for excessive conceptualism, an exaggerated need for theoretical backing and compartmentalisation. People have a strong sense of responsibility, they're serious but sometimes too self-important. And also they talk too much.

In Czech what's important is a quiet life and easygoing approach. There's a far freer and informal atmosphere, which is a temptation to slowness, not really pushing things through to the finish and to delays. Czech humour, irony, scepticism... is a unique spice of life, but in destructive form it can result in lack of genuine seriousness, trivialising important things, irresponsibility and philistinism. Then of course there is the fact that there's just one people here and one culture, which means a tendency to introversion, ignorance, and fear of the "big" world, but on the other hand creates a unique cultural inheritance and tradition that sustains unity and a sense of a whole moving through time. In France I feel as if I'm in a metropolis, which offers a mass of possibilities, new discoveries, events, and spurs to action. In Czech I'm in the woods, wading in the stream and strolling in the meadows where I at last feel a fresh wins, a kind of authentic inclination to nature and the foundation of things.

You've had the chance to work with outstanding performers. What does contact with performers mean to you and how does it affect your work?

In my eyes an outstanding performer isn't

just a musician who is a master on his instrument. He is its soul and creative imagination, and so shares something with me. The composer and performer meet at the level of fantasy and imagination and that is where you find the key to most of my pieces. To bring music to birth I need a musician who is himself born with the music, who regenerates his musical experience with new discoveries, thirsts for exploration, and realises that in their time the pieces that are "repertoire" today were once contemporary, new and so unconventional music. In my experience it's the performer who has the real executive power over new pieces. He's someone who can push to get them performed and persuade people that they are worthwhile, and so we need to ensure that a creative approach to music is cultivated in schools and conservatories.

For me when I came to Paris (1994) one of the pleasant discoveries was this hunger for knowledge on the part of musicians.

What are your plans for the future? Do you have a particular dream?

At the moment I'm working on a composition called "OTISK" ["PRINT"], a 30-minute piece for large symphony orchestra which follows traces of the origin of musical instruments, above all from the early stone age. It is a fascinating view of the cradle of music. The piece is a co-production commission from a number of orchestras and institutions, which is interesting from the financial point of view for the organiser and from my point of view because it will be played by different ensembles in several different places. Currently the institutions involved in the project are the Toronto Philharmonic (its principal conductor Peter Oundjian is the initiator of the project), the Caramoor Festival in the USA, the St. Louis Philharmonic, the Colorado Philharmonic and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. My great wish is that one of the Czech orchestras would join in the project and so the piece would get played in what for me is still my home. I don't know how to explain, exactly, but despite my travels it's here in Central Europe that I feel at home, and I'm a Czech to the marrow of my bones.

echoes of nature - the 15th exposition of new music 2003

PETR BAKLA



Tuning Metronomes

POLEMIC

My reservation concerns the video projection on the back of the stage during the concerts. And since the issue is a more general one, and the ENM is far from the only event concerned, I permit myself to go into it in a bit more depth. Essentially there are two alternatives. The first is that the composer himself supplies a visual accompaniment to his music, and it is part of the effect he wants. In this country it is an approach that has been adopted by Vít Zouhar and Daniel Matej, for example. We might interpret the matter as a case of composers feeling a need to illustrate their music in some way. At bottom therefore we are talking about a kind of programmatic music. The composers involved would most likely object to this classification on the grounds that they were trying to achieve a synthesis of musical and visual experience, and not some "explanation" of the piece (the videos tend to be abstract in style), but the fact remains that while visual associations are definitely a part of the experience of listening to music, presentation of a visual accom-

paniment necessarily occludes the range of possible associations by pointing the audience in a particular direction. And there is also a problem in the marked disproportion (at least in terms of professionalism) between the quality of the music and the visuals, which are often amateur and banal. Finally, one cannot help the suspicion that what the composer is actually saying is that he doesn't trust his own music enough to be convinced that it is interesting enough on its own. But that is his problem. The second alternative is worse, involving the presentation of a visual accompaniment without the composer's knowledge, and at the will of the performers or organisers of a concert. Unfortunately this was the case at this year's Exposition, and many of the concerts were accompanied at least by video of the performers, often perhaps without their knowledge either. Furthermore, the image was often distorted in the cheapest possible way, and so Catherin Tunnell, for example, looked like a banshee. What is the point of it all? I must say I can see none. I assume that

*"For me personally the task since 1993 has been to create awareness of contemporary serious music in world context."
"Only quixotic aims are worth anything."*

I have rather mischievously taken these two statements from an interview with Jaroslav Šťastný, the programme director and organiser of the Exposition. They give a good idea of the almost missionary enthusiasm Jaroslav Šťastný which generates around him, and which breathes through the copious and carefully prepared publicity materials

the idea this time (as it usually is) was to try and make the concerts in some way "more interesting" (as if they weren't interesting enough in themselves), and "more accessible" (was someone getting in the way?), and perhaps to convince the less enlightened members of the audience that even serious music can "keep up with the times" and isn't just a museum art (but this is something that must be – and was – hearable). I fear that it is far more likely to give people the idea that music in which there is no singing, which lasts longer than three minutes and is generally utterly weird is something inferior, and naturally no one could believe anybody could bear it, let alone listen to it without visual distractions. If I am right, the projections are quite obviously counterproductive, and unless we are already so postmodern that we claim, for example, that Cage's music is on the same level as operating a digital effect, we must also admit that screenings of this kind are contaminating, if not degrading. The giggling of the audience during particularly puzzling distortions of the wretched musicians showed that the projections were not simply ignored.

HIGHLIGHTS

In content this year's ENM was rather more conservative than last year's (see Czech Music 4/2002), but the more coherent as a result, and in my view better as a whole. There was no repeat of the situation last year when much above average and unusual music was immediately followed by fairly poor and conventional stuff. Within the limits of possibility different movements in contemporary serious music were equally represented, and so the festival definitely fulfilled its

for the festival. (By the way, the whole interview is worth reading, and you can find it with the programme materials on www.enh.3web.cz.) Such an explicit striving to change anything, and such an urge to spread enlightenment are rare indeed in this country. Šťastný simply refuses to reconcile himself to the idea that supporters of New and Other music are a small sect destined for extinction, and he tries to attract potential new recruits “from outside” in the hope that the music they hear will take them beyond the point of “no turning

back”. I can’t judge how far he is managing to achieve this goal. To be honest, I am much more interested in the way that he tries to achieve it, and the way he ensures that the result is a professionally run festival of high quality. On the other hand, it needs to be said that efforts to spread enlightenment may be slightly risky in the sense that they may over-simplify, offer up pre-digested fare or cheapen. Naturally this isn’t what really happens at the exposition – it’s not an educational concert, but one small doubt remains, and I think it worth discussing.

informative, initiation function. There were pieces by the “textbook reader” composers (Cage, Brown, Ligeti, Reich, Scelsi), a number of names from home (although it would admittedly be possible to raise questions about how representative they were...), and the music of composers who have been unfairly neglected (Josef Adamík, James Tenney; both by only one piece each, unfortunately).

Rather little known in this country, the spectralist **Horatiu Radulescu** (born 1942 in Rumania, living in France) came to Brno with his wife, cellist **Catherin Marie Tunnell**. Apart from three pieces by Radulescu she played one piece by M. Mark and one by T. Demenga. Radulescu is a composer who in orthodox “spectralist” fashion plunges into the interior of sound, but his electrifying music is quite the opposite of similarly motivated “aesthetics of long notes”. We shall be publishing an interview with him in the next number.

The concert by the **Veni Ensemble** is worth mentioning mainly because of the realisation of Brown’s famous visual score December ’52 (here the projection of the score was meaningful), the inclusion of the early Adamík piece *Stínování* [Shadowing] and above all an exemplarily disciplined performance of Cage’s *Branches*, which draws sound from plant materials, mainly dried. Although the piece is a temptation to vaudeville, it was performed with no sensational effects, and with a concentration worthy of the laboratory.

It is interesting that some of the composers on the Slovak scene have a fondness for amateur pub music effects (see e. g. New Music Marathon, and this year in Brno

Messrs. Zagar and Matej). If I have to return once more to the educational impact of the festival, then I should just like to note that the pieces of this type won the most enthusiastic applause. It seems that more educational efforts will be necessary.

There was a great performance from a **Nora Škutová** – there would definitely be a case for recording her interpretation of Cage’s huge cycle of *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano. The stupid video-projection was the only flaw, and of course the performer was guiltless. A note for experts on the conditions in Czech art and music colleges – working up the piece for performance was part of dissertation work at the University of Performing Arts in Bratislava...

The international recorder ensemble, the **Malle Symen Quartet**, was formed in 1994 at the Amsterdam conservatory, where the under-valued recorder can be studied as a separate discipline. The character of the instrument means that the quartet devotes itself on the one hand to early music (Renaissance and medieval) and on the other hand to contemporary music, generally written directly for Malle Symen. The contemporary repertoire therefore consists mainly of pieces by Dutch composers, but the declared hopes of the quartet to find composers from other countries to work with them can be taken as a challenge.

Apart from the fantastic sound and brilliant integrated play, the instrumental range of the Malle Symen ensemble was remarkable in itself. They brought about 30 recorders to Brno, including many types hardly ever seen (the quartet owns about 50 recorders). Particular attention was attracted by the monstrous four-sided bass and contrabass recorders created by the German instru-



Malle Symen Quartet





Catherin Marie Tunnell



ment-maker Petzold, who was inspired by the form of wooden organ pipes. Of the six pieces that they performed at the Exposition, I would like to mention the transcription of Reich's *Nagoya Marimbas*, which may even have sounded better than the "original" and Jacob Veldhuis's *Jesus is coming*. Constructed on an essentially minimalist (or perhaps more a rock) base, the latter piece contained samples of the cries of a New York religious fanatic and the chattering of a child, and according to the composer it was inspired by pop-culture. Despite this ominous profile, the piece turned out to be not bad at all – there's no postmodernism like postmodernism, I guess.

The **Tuning Metronomes** from Prague (see Czech Music 5/2002) are gradually turning into an extremely worthy performing (and composing) group. What's more, with their regular concerts in the Atrium in Prague they can take the lion's share of the credit for the fact that some major 20th-century composers are played in this country at all, and don't "live" here purely in recordings and textbooks. At the Exposition the group presented a programme to mark the G. Ligeti's 80th birthday (*1st String Quartet*, *10 Pieces for Wind Quintet* and *Etude No. 4*), ending up with *Déjà vu*, by the leader of the ensemble Michal Trnka.

I was rather puzzled by the festival's inviting **David Matthews** and his "court" violinist **Peter Sheppard**. Academic Neo-Classicism à la Britten doesn't seem to me to fit in much with the festival philosophy. But the performance was first class.

The concluding appearance by the **AG Neue Musik** ensemble fulfilled a direct "meta-educational" function, i. e. it was a lesson in how to teach music teaching.



Tuning Metronomes

AGNM

In 1970 Manfred Peters founded the Working group for New Music (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Neue Music) at Leiniger Secondary School in Grünstadt. The aim was and is to create an alternative to standard school music education, which mainly consists in the passive reproduction of music by other people, often bad music, and in making approving nods towards mass culture ("close to the kids"), all of which is only giving up on the educational mission.

It is precisely the idea of lifting music from

the level of passive consumption to something that children can and must think about that is the main starting-point of AGNM, as well as mediating active experience and pleasure in creation. The means adopted are the approaches, sound apparatus and above all the free expression of an undogmatically conceived New Music (we should remember the time when AGNM was born), and a theatrical element is a natural part of it all. During its long lifetime AGNM has made many appearances, worked with famous composers and made several recordings.



David Matthews



The basic working method is play, play that is collective but in no way suppresses individuality. It is a question of responsibility to a common work and the finding of one's own place and "function" in a piece. The sociological and "educational" aspects would provide food for long debates, but in terms of composition technique we can describe the typical AGNM composition as a the controlled aleatoric realisation of a (musically and didactically simple but cleverly thought up concept. Every single pupil (from 12 to 19 years of age) has to think independently about how it should be filled. Silke Egeler-Wittmann, who has led the group since 1996 and is herself a graduate of the secondary school and work in AGNM, refuses on principle to tell anyone what they ought specifically to be doing, and she only co-ordinates the overall result. The main instrument used is simply the voice, which is logical since it is available to everyone and makes unmediated ("barrier-free") musical creation a possibility for everyone. Don't start imagining amateur attempts at choral singing! One of the key principles is precisely to reveal that music can use sounds other than the conventional ones easily digested by the masses. Sometimes the use of melodic phrases is actually forbidden for educational reasons. The result is often a layered effect analogical to certain types of minimalism – it was graphically obvious how natural human beings find it to think in patterned formulae and in vocal expression.

“some music assumes that the performer will become its joint creator”

____interview with kamil doležal

EVA VELICKÁ



The clarinet is an instrument with huge possibilities, since it is what is called “flexible” and usable in almost any kind of chamber ensemble. In terms of sound it never sticks out in a way that upsets the integrity of the whole, but nonetheless has a colour that is always clearly identifiable. Contemporary composers and in fact what is called “modern music” in general are very fond of using it, but of course this makes corresponding demands on the

performer, who must ideally be highly competent, technically perfect and at the same time capable of individual input into compositions and improvisation.

One such ideal clarinettist is Kamil Doležal, whose studies with the legendary Milan Kštohyr might be said to have predestined him to an interest in contemporary music from an early stage. He attended the Conservatory in Prague and the Musical Academy of Performing Arts, and in 1975 won 1st Prize in the Dušek-Mozart Competition in Prague. From 1987 to 1994 he was a member of the Agon Ensemble, and these days he is involved in performance of contemporary music as a soloist at his concerts, as the music director of the Mondschein Ensemble and as a member of the alternative group Why Not Patterns. He has played on a number of CDs, and in 1995 recorded his first solo CD “Czech Contemporary Clarinet Music”.

You are a versatile performer, and many compositions have been written for you. How would you characterise yourself, your way of playing the clarinet? Do you have your own special style or tone or something similar?

It's hard to characterise yourself, but for me it has always been the music that is the main consideration, and that's why I like listening to piano, violin and symphony orchestra, and I've learned from that. Otherwise every player has a specific tone and style, but the layman usually doesn't recognise it. What is certainly recognisable, however, is whether you play well or badly, in an interesting way or boringly.

How did you come to decide to focus on contemporary music? When did it happen?

I've been involved in contemporary music since the time I was at the Prague Conservatory, where I was studying in Prof. Dr. Milan Kostohryz's class, and he made that path very much easier for me. He was one of the few teachers with an active interest in the performance of contemporary music and he initiated his students into it in an enlightened spirit.

But the fundamental turning point came later, when I was collaborated with the AGON Ensemble and as a result attended the summer courses on contemporary music in Darmstadt in 1988, where I was taught by Rodger Heaton.

Is there a big difference between playing classical repertoire and what is called the "modern", and if so what exactly is it?

From the point of view of the performer, we can divide contemporary music into two currents to answer the question. One current follows on closely from classical music and simply makes increased demands on the performer in terms of the technical possibilities of play on his or her instrument. This music is popular among performers and is often played. Essentially these increased technical demands were the only difference between playing contemporary music up to 1960 and the classical repertoire.

The second current is concerned with different possibilities as well, most of the aesthetic (changing the quality of the note, certain deformations of tone--frullato, smorzatto, multiphonics, playing in extreme registers and with extreme dynamics and so on). Some of this kind of music assumes that the performer will be a joint creator, and so of course here you need to know what is going on in this music and what you can and cannot do.

What attracts contemporary composers to the clarinet? What is the specific character of the instrument?

What principally attracts contemporary composers to the clarinet is its range, its dynamic and colour possibilities, mobility and its capacity to deform notes in various ways.

Why Not Patterns



These are all qualities that are often used in contemporary music.

It's said that an interpreter matures with every piece, and learns something new. Which music has been fundamental or a turning point in your development?

The music and the composers that have had a basic influence on my view of contemporary music and my play on the clarinet are these. John Cage, who in his pieces gives the performer the chance to decide quite freely which version to use at any moment, but at the same time his music has consistent rules. His music makes extreme demands on the interpreter both technically, and in various different ways of playing, tone and so forth. The situation is a little different as regards other pieces that have had a fundamental influence on me, since in these cases everything is written down and fixed and the performer can't change anything in the music. For me these key pieces are: K. H. Stockhausen: In Freundschaft, M. Kopelent: Canto Espansivo, H. Lachenmann: Al Niente.

Do you play pieces written directly for you in a different way?

That depends. Sometimes there can be a problem when you know the composer personally and you want to oblige him at any price but in your heart of hearts you feel that it's not the right thing. But mostly it's an advantage to know the composer personally and be able to discuss the piece with him. I call that authenticity, and it's important primarily for the performers who will come after you. But I also personally think that some contemporary music is so specific that standard musical notation isn't enough, and the piece needs to be equipped with guidelines on how to perform it correctly, since otherwise the composer risks having performers interpreting his aims in an entirely opposite way to whatever was intended.

You have played a great many contemporary pieces, and premiered quite a number of them. In your view does there exist some kind of Czech school of composers today?

There isn't any Czech school of composition at all today, which is both an advantage and a disadvantage.

You yourself try to promote the clarinet with young composers. How do things look at such courses?

Today most composers know nearly all the possibilities of the clarinet and so the main need is to demonstrate the possibilities in reality, so that composers can check that their compositions aren't operating in the world of science fiction.

What happens for example at a MoEns rehearsal when you get a new piece? Do you take any kind of controlling line?

Each member of the ensemble prepares his part at home and then we look for a common starting point at our rehearsal. The personal comments and suggestions of each player are more than just desirable, so long as they don't diverge too far from what the composer wanted. If so, then I have to intervene.

Apart from "serious" music, you are also at home with what is known as alternative music (or just non-serious music). Are you very much aware of some difference, or is it something you take for granted?

Yes, I play in the WNP (Why Not Patterns) group, which plays its own pieces (M. Pudlák, M. Nejtek, R. Pallas etc.) and this music might be described as something between minimal music, rock, classical and alternative. I'll leave it to you to come up with your own opinion about it, or better, why not come and hear us? You won't regret it. Performing this music is a kind of creative quest. In some of the pieces the demands and form of play are the same as in classical music except that the performer has much greater freedom and can enrich the music with own personal input.

Do you think that you can influence the atmosphere at a concert in some way? I mean in some way change the mood of the public? Or is it something that no one can do much about and essentially the old equation applies – serious music = stiff public, non-serious music = more relaxed, accessible public?

Of course the performer can affect the atmosphere at a concert. It depends on many different things, such as how he is dressed, his manner, how he communicates with the public, what kind of charisma he has and above all what he plays and how well he plays it. The difference between serious and other kinds of music is clear as day, and so is the difference between the audiences. But by saying that I don't mean that someone who passionately listens to serious music can't also passionately listen to other music.

art nouveau: parallels in the piano music of _____ v. novák, j. suk and _____ m. k. čiurlionis

VÍTĚZSLAV MIKEŠ



Vítězslav Novák

As the 19th century gave way to the 20th century European music experienced a multiple branching of aesthetic and intellectual principles and values that in many ways reflected various kinds of social change. In simplified terms, it is usual to identify three stylistic movements as dominant at the Fin-de-Siècle, and in a continuous process of development (although each was naturally in a different stage of its development). These movements are late Romanticism (in fact its tail end), Impressionism, and Expressionism, which was fast gaining ground. Regrettably, however, treatments of the music of the time often forget its relationship to Art Nouveau in the visual arts, although in fact within the context of the general aesthetic climate an Art Nouveau influence was to a greater or lesser extent expressed in the work of many composers.

Art Nouveau (Czech *Secese*, German *Jugendstil*, French *Art Nouveau*, English *Modern Style*, Russian *модерн*) was a European-wide style that emerged at the turn of the 19th/20th century de facto as a reaction to the luxuriant historicism and eclecticism

of the period. At the beginning Art Nouveau was associated primarily with architecture (P. Behrens, O. Wagner, J. Kotěra), where it meant the vanguard of several later constructivist trends, and the fine arts (e. g. the French group Nabis, G. Klimt, A. Beardsley, M. A. Vrubel, and in the Czech Lands A. Mucha, J. Preisler, V. Preissig or F. Bílek). It was defined primarily by fondness for broken colours, linearity, two-dimensionality, the unbroken undulating curve representing unforced movement on a surface, and concern for ornament, considered not just as decorative function, but as symbol. Art Nouveau influenced all the other arts and also had an effect on everyday life. Indeed, a convergence between poetry, music and the visual arts was one of its characteristic features.

The term “musical Art Nouveau” was employed only later, retrospectively, when books and articles were written on the whole subject. In the Czech Lands, Art Nouveau took a very distinctive form in all spheres of the arts, and so there has been interest in the problem from a specifically Czech angle. As far as Czech music is concerned, the names most often mentioned in connection with Art Nouveau are those of two composers whose similarities in many respects are balanced by their huge differences in others. They are Vítězslav Novák (1870-1949) and Josef Suk (1874-1935). Art Nouveau elements in the early work of Novák have been the subject of Jaroslav Volek's article *Vítězslav Novák a secese* [Vítězslav Novák and the Secession] (Opus musicum 1970, no. 8), and Suk's debt to the Secession is explored in Jarmila Doubravová's analytical essays *Secesní rysy díla Josefa Suka* [Secession Elements in the Work of Josef Suk] (In: *Česká hudba světa – svět české hudby* [Czech Music of the World – The World of Czech Music]. Praha 1974) and *Symbol stromu: secese, J. Suk a současnost* [The Symbol of the Tree: J. Suk and the Contemporary] (In: *Dialog a imaginace* [Dialogue and Imagination]. Praha 1998).

In the spirit of Asafjev's concept of music

as an intonational art, in which composer and composition interpret the “intonational awareness of the age”, I want in this text to draw attention to certain “Art Nouveau” parallels, certainly not based on direct mutual influence but nonetheless very striking, between Novák's early piano compositions, Suk's piano compositions, and the piano music written by the founder of Lithuanian national professional music, Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875-1911), who is better known in the world today as a painter, but who produced an original and quite large corpus of music. All three of the figures mentioned were not just inventive composers but good pianists. This was no doubt one reason why they quite frequently composed for the piano (in Čiurlionis's case piano is the main source for any understanding of his composition style), another being the considerable popularity enjoyed by piano music as a genre at the turn of the century. How did the influence of Art Nouveau manifest itself in their piano music? What in the piano music of Novák, Suk and Čiurlionis can be identified as typically Art Nouveau?

Volek believes that Novák's work displays a parallel to Art Nouveau for example in the “power of the principle of variation (...), which affects the very shape of the pieces, transforming it in Protean fashion, and so is more than the mere use of one or other tectonic form.”. He also talks about Novák's close contact with Václav Vítězslav Moravský, which in his view explains “the apparent contradiction between the ‘romantic’ elevation of Novák's aims, musical ideals and notions and at the same time his ever emphasised (...) rational craftsmanship, and sensitivity, down-to-earth attention to material”. Finally Volek identifies an “Art Nouveau” colour, not obscuring contours in the manner of Impressionism but fitting with them exactly, and led by the supple curve. We could hardly deny that these features are present in Novák's first major piano piece, *Variations on a Theme from Schumann* (1893) and *Ballade*, op. 2 (1893), inspired by Byron's Manfred, in which there are still obvious typi-

cally romantic glints, such as the inwardly torn tragic aesthetic of Schumann and Lisztian virtuosity and theatricality. By contrast, the three pieces that followed, put together in the cycle *Vzpomínky* [Memories], op. 6 (1894), clearly suggest a gradual rebirth, which culminates in the cycles of 1895–1896: *Serenades*, op. 9, *Barcarollas*, op. 10, *Eclogues*, op. 11 and *Za soumraku* [At Dusk], op. 13. Each of these cycles contains four miniatures, intimate lyrical confessions in which the themes of nature and passionate eroticism are in first place. Here Novák turned to a small, mainly three-movement forms, usually based on a single idea, or perhaps two excessively contrasting ideas. Expression comes to the fore, with structure subordinated to its needs and compared to the preceding pieces much more sober, for example sometimes limited to a duet of thirds framed by a lightly applied fermata (the third *Eclogue*). More use is also made of polyphony (most often an imitation technique) and polymelodics, affecting the whole colour pallet of the pieces, and so on.

These features of Novák's first piano cycles bear the mature signature of the composer and are the key to the later, "Moravian period" (e. g. the piano cycle *Můj máj* [My May], and *Sonata eroica*) and the crowning period 1900–1912, when Novák combined the influences of literary symbolism and musical impressionism in a highly individual modern musical language (in terms of piano works this period is represented by the "poem in notes" *Pan*).

Josef Suk's style as a composer for piano was something that developed over his entire productive career, but in this context the most fertile phase was the last decade of the 19th century and first decade of the 20th century, since thereafter Suk composed only occasionally. The piano works form a counterpart to his symphonic output and thus present us with a kind of microcosm of Suk's musical thought, developing from the first more distinctive cycles *Piano Compositions*, op. 7 (1893), including the famous *Píseň lásky* [Song of Love], *Nálady* [Moods], op. 10 (1895) and *Piano Compositions*, op. 12 (1896) to the mature *Jaro* [Spring], op.

22a (1902) and *Letní dojmy* [Summer Impressions], op. 22b (1902), right up to the cycles affected by the tragedies in his life and his subsequent efforts to come to terms with them: *O matince* [About Mama], op. 28 (1907), *Životem a snem* [In Life and Dream], op. 30 (1909), *Ukolébavky* [Lullabies], op. 33 (1912). In essence this development involved the gradual abandonment of regularity and symmetry in melodic ideas and new leaning to irregularity, the thickening and chromatisation of the harmonic structure, narrowing of form, and associated increasing accentuation of expression, moving towards an exalted subjectivism.

The Art Nouveau spirit is much more intensively represented in Suk's work than in Novák's. One reason may well have been that as a member of the Czech Quartet Suk made concert tours throughout Europe and so had a better chance to encounter and explore modern trends in the arts. Probably more important, however, was his subjectivism, expressed in the deep lyricism and autobiographical qualities of his music. This subjectivism was behind another characteristic mark of Suk's style, which was his tendency to symbolism, fully developed particularly through the use of numerous auto-citations (quotes of his own works - let us recall the "death motif" as one example to stand for many) modified depending on programmatic intention. The symbolism often affected the musical structure itself, for example in the use of ostinata or fermata. Thus in the 5th piece in the *O matince* [About Mama] cycle, called *Jak zpívala matinka za noci chorému děťátku* [How the Mother Sang in the Night to the Sick Child], in places the irregular ostinato rhythmic figure on single note evokes the breathing of the sick child, while the rhythmic-melodic figure is repeated in low register in *K uzdravení mého syna* [The Recovery of my son] from the cycle *Životem a snem* [Through Life and Dream] suggests the peal of bells. To sum up, we can define the most important elements of Suk's work that can overall be linked to Art Nouveau. They are stylised hedonism, fondness for symbol, autobiographical quality, and temperamental lyricism. (J. Doubravová).

In the Czech Lands the conditions for the



Josef Suk

infiltration of Art Nouveau features into music were obvious enough, being based on the general cultural climate, and so there seems nothing odd about looking for Art Nouveau echoes in the work of Novák and Suk. In the case of Čiurlionis the whole question is rather more complicated, since at the turn of the 19th and 20th century Lithuania was in a very different situation. From the point of view of the social and cultural conditions of his work, therefore, we need to look at Čiurlionis first and foremost in terms of Romanticism.

The phenomenon of the rise of national music schools (Bohemia, Poland, Russia, the Northern lands etc.) and the search for nationality in music is known to have been one of the divergent features of Romanticism. Čiurlionis lived and worked at the time of the formation of Lithuanian national culture and took an active part in the process. This meant he was hardly likely to be attracted to impressionism with its "niggardly attention to social problems", still less the Expressionism that had parted ways with any kind of positive moral and social idea. Obviously more to his taste was "progressive Romanticism, which encourages the pursuit of a positive idea, the development of optimism, love for ethnic culture and the goal of founding a national culture" (J. Bruveris). We should not forget, of course, that the historical circumstances of Lithuania (the repressive measures taken by Tsarist Russia including a ban on printing Lithuanian books in Latin script in 1864–1904 and a general policy of seeking to suppress Lithuanian national consciousness) meant that the Lithuanian national revival lagged behind other European revival movements. Subsequent attempts to "catch up with" Europe then led to a rather surprising development, i. e. an "organic synthesis of folklore with modernity", from which "distinctive artistic forms and poetics emerged" (R. Parolek). This situation was fully expressed in the musical output of Čiurlionis. On close study it is ever more evident that it reflects many trends in modern music (see for example V. Landsbergis's

M. K. Čiurlionis: Prelude



attempt to show that some of M. K. Čiurlionis's piano pieces contain the germs of serial work with themes). It thus makes perfect sense to interpret Čiurlionis's musical (above all piano) legacy from the point of view of Art Nouveau, especially if we remember that the composer himself studied in conservatories in Warsaw and Leipzig, later travelled through Europe and so certainly had the chance to get to know the spirit of the new style.

In terms of form Čiurlionis was not an innovator in his piano music but merely gave an individual content to the traditional forms: polyphony, the variational and small three-part form with reprise. The latter was his most characteristic form, since it became the basis for the shorter "Klavierstücke" – above all the prelude or quasi prelude –, through which Čiurlionis in his distinctive way built on traditional the Romantic lyric poem, especially those of Schumann and Chopin whose influence he had naturally soaked up in his places of study. In his emotional attitude to form Čiurlionis is very close to Suk. We even find them both using a comparable large cycle form in their work (in the case of Čiurlionis the *Sonata in F major*, according to Landsbergis's catalogue VL 155 of 1898, and in the case of Suk Suite, op. 21 of 1900, based on the earlier *Sonatina in G minor*), but both soon abandoned this path and concentrated their ideas in a much smaller form, although here we should note that Čiurlionis expressed himself much more laconically than Suk. In general, however, the following description of Suk's approach can also be applied to Čiurlionis: "The suite was too objective for him, too much a technical musical composition, whereas he ... desired instead to deepen his creative expression on a small canvas and sharpen it in a small form" (O. Filipovsky).

Čiurlionis subordinated all the elements in his piano pieces to the attempt to achieve power of expression. Achievement of the maximum expression affects every aspect of structure, so that the mannerisms of the late Romantics, such as showy virtuosity, melodic decorativeness, pomp in terms of sound or overstrained chromatic density are given up, and replaced by simplicity, purity, lightness and the sculpting of expression. Another characteristic of Čiurlionis's compositions is a lyricism derived from Lithuanian folksongs, which are almost entirely lyrical (a fact sometimes explained by the dominant role of women in the national folk music).

Čiurlionis strengthened the macrotectonics of his pieces with monothematism, either by having a common core of motifs or thematic heart, or by fragmenting the ideas. The latter method is closely connected with one of the most important components of Čiurlionis's musical thinking – ostinato, although he based it on a different principle than did Suk. We can demonstrate this principle in the



M. K. Čiurlionis

Lithuanian composer's *Prelude in D minor* (VL 239) of 1903. Its two-bar primary is distinguished by a convex form and in character it is rooted in Lithuanian folk music, see for example the extract from the song *Anoj pusėj Nemuno* (On the Other Side of the River Nemunas), which, incidentally, Čiurlionis harmonised for choral singing. The introductory, rhythmically and melodically rather unstable motif of the fifths is important for the whole structure of the piece. Its function in the Prelude and the way it is developed are more or less typical especially for the early phase of Čiurlionis's piano output. The little motif is split up by the method of fragmentation, (i. e. by the method of the leitmotif), which is freely turning into the method of de-thematization. The latter essentially manifests itself, in the words of Ch. S. Peirce, as the "index substitution of the theme". The figure produced by the dethematization process then "weaves through" the whole piece and evokes the impression of ostinato. We might compare the motif itself and the way it is developed with the concept of Art Nouveau ornament as both decor and symbol at the same time.

In the later, culminating phase of his creative development, Čiurlionis pushed the ostinato principle even further to the fore, but usually worked in a different way. He would compose the ostinato figure as a relatively independent phrase and elaborate it right from the beginning of the piece as the linear opposite pole of the other parts. In this he was to some extent getting close to a bimelodic conception of the musical flow.

As in his paintings, in his music too Čiurlionis made elaborate use of symbolism. He applied it in a conventionalised sense, a method linked to self-citation based on symbolic reminiscence of an earlier work (see e. g. the kinship of motif between the symphonic poem *Jūra* [The Sea] and the *Prelude in D minor*, VL 340, *Nocturne in F sharp minor*, VL 178 and the symphonic poem *Miške* [In the Forest] and elsewhere.), but also in the non-conventionalised sense (e. g. variations on cryptogram themes *Sefaa*

Esec, VL 258 (1904) a *Besacas*, VL 265 (1905).

The Art Nouveau character of Čiurlionis's music is evident as it were in a nutshell in the *Fugue in B minor*, VL 345 (1909). The already peculiarly expressive theme of the Fugue, in which, with the exception of G, all the notes in the chromatic scale are contained, could be compared to the undulating Art Nouveau curve. Nowhere in the entire piece does this theme appear in shortened form, not even in the connecting links, and the only transformations are inversion, diminution and at the "golden cut" of the Fugue a quasi folk diatonisation, which creates the veiled impression of a second theme.

The entry of the second voice on the Lydian fourth (tritone interval) is not spontaneous and perhaps has a symbolic subtext: in the series of twelve fifths the relations of the augmented fourths have an important meaning, because they create a kind of central "point" in the fifth circle, in earlier and more recent times as the image of the creative power of the zodiac (it is no coincidence that Čiurlionis painted a cycle of twelve pictures *The Zodiac*) and brings from the past the symbolism of "world, fate, character and other contradictions" (A. Hába).

Also interesting is the creation of the individual counterpoints. All three counterphrases appearing in the exposition are based on the material of the theme, modified on the basis of successive variation in which one counterpoint always represents its preceding variation, leading to an apparent "annihilation of the identity" of the theme, which we might also think of in its possible relation to Art Nouveau stress on ornament.

With the benefit of hindsight it appears that the piano music (and by extension whole musical output) of both Novák and Suk, and also of Čiurlionis, displays a whole series of features that could be considered typically Art Nouveau, although of course this is no reason to label them purely Art Nouveau composers. It will in any case be obvious that many of the parallels pointed out in this text could also be found in the work of E. Satie, E. Grieg, A. N. Scriabin, K. Szymanowski and others. But this has been our point. The piano music of our three composers reflected the colour pallet of the times and despite the undoubted originality of each, taken individually, they also share much of "whatever was simply in the air". In this article we have talked about that "whatever" in terms of Art Nouveau, but of course this does not mean it could not be explored under various other titles.

the prayers and czardas of _____**á gnes kutas**

ADAM JAVŮREK



The end of last year turned the spotlight on three Czech women singers (or more precisely “three women singers living in Czechia”), who seek and find inspiration in folk music. Iva Bittová outshone the acclaimed Netherlands blazers ensemble, and as they tried to get a grasp of her music and Janáček’s, she gave them a lesson in spontaneity. At the request of the Partnership Foundation, Zuzana Lapčíková recorded an album about trees, *Strom života* [The Tree of Life] – and managed to breathe life into it with a highly individual folk mythology based on humility and a sense of deep connection with nature.

But these are two very well-known and even quite famous names, of course, and what is interesting is that a new face is appearing beside theirs. It belongs to a woman who has already been living here for twenty years, but has not yet attracted so much attention. As her Internet page puts it, her music is “free of ingratiating looks and fluttering eyelashes and seasoned with hot Hungarian paprika... Her pieces are quiet prayers, but sleeping in those prayers is a fiery czardas, which when it wakes devours everything in reach...”

Late Developer

On a first meeting with the Hungarian from Břevnov Ágnes Kutas, you may well be inclined to compare her with Iva Bittová. It's a comparison to which she is used. “It's very natural – I'm a woman, I sing and I accompany myself on the violin,” she says. Both of them also have the blood of more passionate and fiery nations running in their veins. On the other hand, Ágnes Kutas goes on to stress that “I love Iva Bittová, but I don't think that she's directly influenced me.”

In her music she derives free inspiration from Hungarian folk music. Sometimes she simply sings in traditional style, or sometimes she simply uses a text to which she composes her own melody. At other times she borrows a particular motif, but then builds her own composition on it with her violin or viola, or even uses the text of one folk song with the melody from a completely different piece. For Ágnes Kutas folk music is a building material, which she uses with complete freedom. Interestingly, however, she came to music quite late.

Ágnes Kutas decided to come to Prague when she was twenty one. Before that she had studied applied graphic art in Budapest, but it had failed to engage her. She turned to the idea of studying puppet theatre, but since there were no courses on the subject

available in the Hungarian capital, she applied to the Prague department of stage design.

Not surprisingly then, her first musical performance was associated with the theatre. Live music was needed for a production of Gogol and Ágnes let slip that she played the violin. Later she joined the Tuju theatre company, established by the stage designer Tomáš Žižka, whom she later married. For their production of *Kleopatra* they created a whole music ensemble and Ágnes wanted to add singing to playing. “When I asked in the group if they knew anyone who would teach me, they recommended Jana Lewitová.”

She started to take lessons with Lewitová, and at the end of each lesson she was always supposed to have worked up something to sing, “I was getting bored always singing the same songs, and so I started to look for others.” Gradually she built up a repertoire by arranging folksongs and adding her own.

Her relationship with Jana Lewitová ceased to be just one of student and teacher, and the two musicians began to perform together. The results are recorded on the album *Halé dítě*, for which Ágnes also designed the jacket, but recently there have been very few joint concerts. “We try, but we are terribly badly organised people”, Ágnes confesses.





Live Life as it Comes

Her husband co-founded the Roxy Club, and so it was there that she made her solo debut. And once again it was Tomáš Žižka who recommended Ágnes to drummer Jaroslav Kořán (see a profile in Czech Music 5/2002), with whom she currently plays. "At that point we still didn't start to play together, actually," Kořán remembers. "The time wasn't yet ripe for it. Before then I had been playing much more chamber-style music on the Horologe of Dreamers and in another group on the pot, and I was too absorbed in that almost ambient music. And Ágnes was also playing rather different songs, and so we only come together much later..."

That "later" happened when Jaroslav recommended Ágnes to the "Neighbourhood in Progress" festival in Vienna. The organiser and already agreed one joint performance of violin and percussion and she wanted to line it up with something similar. In the end she persuaded Jaroslav Kořán to have a joint concert with Ágnes. It was a case of the festival absolutely living up to its name: in November 2001 the Austrian capital saw the premiere of collaboration between a Czech drummer and a Hungarian violinist.

Album in the Waiting Room

Since then, Kutas and Kořán have performed together ever more frequently and this year they he recorded material for a first joint album at Jaroslav's cottage in the Šumava Forest. It includes Ágnes singing both ballads and very forceful songs, their impact strengthened by Kořán's rhythm. She sometimes replaces Hungarian with an appealing if rather lisping Czech. Ágnes sings her own arrangements of poems by Jakub Deml, Jaroslav Seifert, and of texts by her husband. The violin interludes have been moving away from folk motifs and the music has been shifting somewhere in the direction of free improvisation with slight suggestions of minimalism. So what about Ágnes Kutas's musical models in general? "I listen to absolutely everything. I love Laurie Anderson, and even named my daughter Laura-Andrea after her. I like the Portuguese singer Dulce Ponte and also Nerve Net by Brian Eno. I put that on when I need calming down," she says, and admits that she is a little tempted by the idea of trying out some similar music herself. Readers will have to wait a little longer for the release of the album, which will apparently be called *Láska mě mučí* [Love Tortures Me]. "There are several different possibilities

in play", Jaroslav Kořán says about the fate of the album. He may offer it to a record company, or he may try to publish it himself. "We intend to have it out by December whatever happens, even if hush on computer and with a xeroxed jacket... At the moment the most important thing for it is that it should simply exist, just like the other titles from Pagoda (Note: Kořán's label), that I'm gradually finishing off."

You can at least find Ágnes Kutas's music on an album by her colleague, Kateryna Kolcová, from a *Něžné knoflíky* [Tender Buttons] performance, *Blízko je den...* [The Day is Near], released by Supraphon at the end of June. Meanwhile Ágnes can concentrate on her next steps. "Now I want to try some faster pieces. But I'm not sure yet how to go about it – I don't know whether to take folk music again." Playing with percussion is something she enjoys, but she might like to add something else to it. "I would like it to be even fresher. People usually react to the fresher songs."

růžena dostálová – aleš březina:
řecké pašije. osud jedné opery
(korespondence nikose kazantzakise
s bohuslavem martinů)
[the greek passion. the fate of one
opera (the correspondence of nikos
kazantzakis with bohuslav martinů)]

Prague, SET OUT Press 2003

This new book is designed for all admirers of Bohuslav Martinů or the writer Nikos Kazantzakis. Bohuslav Martinů's last opera, The Greek Passion is a work that was long and difficult in the making. One proof of the obstacles is the fact that today two versions of the opera are being staged in parallel. As a basis for his last opera, Martinů chose Nikos Kazantzakis's novel Christ Recrucified. The present book illuminates the complex birth of the opera, and also the development of the professional and personal relationship between Martinů and Nikos Kazantzakis, by offering their complete mutual correspondence from the years 1954-1959. A total of 69 letters are presented in Czech translation, together with facsimile reproductions. Apart from the correspondence, published here in Czech for the first time, the book contains photographs, both versions of the libretto in Czech and English, two articles by the historian Růžena Dostálová and an article by Aleš Březina on the two scores the Greek Passion.

EVA VELICKÁ



maraca: longe

NM Code



Gabriela Plíšková

The Zlín band Maraca has until now been a rather secret affair. Of course, there are more and more bands mixing what are (for Central Europeans) in some way exotic influences with jazz, rock, or electronic. Since the results aren't always coherent or impressive the adjectives "ethnic", "exotic" and so on are beginning to arouse the reviewer's automatic suspicion, just like the use of instruments like the didgeridoo or various oriental drums. But this just makes it all the more delightful to be pleasantly surprised. The texts for the album *Longe* are chosen from the works of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa and are sung in the original with the exception of two sung in English. Melancholy and dreamy texts are quite frequent in Portuguese music, and one cannot but remember the Portuguese group *Madredeus*, whose influence is occasionally pervasive on *Longe*. The music of non-European cultures is definitely a major influence on Maraca (the band's previous eponymous album included treatment of themes by the Nubian composer Hamza El Din), but this does not lead to some meaningless mishmash and is not even the most important aspect of the music (as you might think from the publicity materials). Above all what you can hear are "echoes of Arabic songs" and the Arab connections with Portuguese music are in any case fairly obvious. Considerable use is made of the oud lute, but although the didgeridoo turns up here as well, it is so integrated into the layered music that it is easy to miss.

A relatively large range of instruments (including cello, clarinet, saxophone, violin, viola, French horn,) offers potential for interesting arrangements and fortunately the band take full advantage of it. Few of the pieces take the form of a simple song. Good examples include *I am the Escaped One* with its "Gollumish" distorted voice and the instrumental *Berima*. *Intervalo* and *Nuvens* are simpler in structure, both with a debt to Spanish folk music, while *Meu triste coração* has associations with the songs of the medieval *trouvers*. The sampler is used soberly, only occasionally producing an interesting noise in the background. In places the scales tip more towards jazz, thanks to the rhythm and some of the solos. The singer Gabriela Plíšková keeps mainly to a "Portuguese" dreamy style, but is capable of considerable verve.

It would be misleading to call this pop. Pop may be an element in it, but the inventiveness of composition and arrangement has shifted the whole thing one stage further.

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

radůza: při mě stůj [stand by me]

Indies



It's impossible not to ask the obvious question with this singer. Her previous album (*Andělové z nebe* [Angels from Heaven], viz Czech Music 6/2001) was highly played, and her concert performances have only increased her reputation. So now will the second CD be better than the first? It has the same producer (Zuzana Navarová), and the same guest musicians (guitarist Omar Khaouaj, double bass player František Raba). Spot the differences... and luckily there are some. With two more years behind her *Radůza* has evidently gained experience and self-confidence, and so gives less space to her "overseer producer" and guests. While on the previous recording she regularly alternated between accordion and band, now in most cases the accordion dominates. In the two pieces where guitar and bass are added, one cannot help getting the impression of listening to a rehash of Navarová or Nerez. She herself plays the guitar in two songs, especially well with a bow in *Polož mě* [Put Me Down]. The risk of acoustic "monochrome" as a result of limited variety of instrument is balanced by melodic open-mindedness and the distinctive characters of the individual songs. Accompanying herself, she can be freer in her phrasing. Between the fast and jaunty *Jedem* [Let's Go] and the lullaby quiet *Ať není mi líto* [Let me not be sorry] there is plenty of room for various shades of emotion and disguises of style.

In terms of melodic invention, several tracks, for example *Žlutý gladioli* [Yellow Gladioli], *Až kočka zapfeďe* [When the Cat Purrs] have hit potential and could certainly succeed with a broader public. One of the main reasons why this won't happen, however, is the rawness of the solo accordion (even Nohavica only became a star when he surrounded himself with other musicians). An atmosphere of forgotten urban pub ballads is *Radůza*'s hallmark, however, and one of the things that lifts her above the ballad-singing average. She is also remarkable for the song texts, which combine the attributes of cabaret from the beginning of the last century, the realities of contemporary Dejvice and the resonance of folk poetry. When she ventures into more lyric areas the texts are perhaps more interchangeable but she still manages to breathe life into most of them and not to slide into kitsch. What is more, she has a voice of quite unique colour, which is also highly versatile in terms of expressive range.

There's no alternative. I have to say that the new album is better than the one before. It will be interesting to watch where its author goes now.

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

poslední věci anděla [last things of an angel]

Michal Kořán
NM Code

Kořán's latest album is a choice of the music for a stage play by Miloš Karásek, *Perón* (The search for Identity) and was recorded by the Richter Band in its current line-up (Pavel Richter, Michal Kořán, Bharata Rajnošek). One piece has Ondřej Smeykal guesting on the slide PVC didgeridoo.

Composer of the music Kořán is the only one who performs in all the pieces. Many of the items make do just with his sampler, keyboards and noises and keep to lazily flowing lower registers. Striking characteristics of the album include a certain soft focus of the individual tracks, and the only sporadic use of strings. Where strings are used at all, they are processed, and provide regular respiration rather than a rhythmic pulse. One example is *Vězni vlastní nehybnosti* [Prisoners of Their Own Immobility] with its serene entrances in the form of a romanticising flute sample (a distant ball in the opera), always immediately covered up by a bubbling surface of electronic hums. The creeping Kornel and Vincent is the only track to contain an extract of theatre dialogue. It is damped and integrated in the overall mix in a way that allows us to make out most of the text and enjoy its linguistic charm while giving us space to imagine what is indistinct, and even to imagine the whole text of the performance. Our only clues, of course, will be this track, the fragment of Kornel's monologue on the cover and the cover design.

Wherever all the performers pick up their instruments together, the meditative mood of the album acquires another dimension – playfulness. The introductory *Neúprosné světlo poznání (part 1)* [The Merciless Light of Knowledge (Part 1)] starts with a number of quiet beats only to have the echo ultimately take over as main bearer of the rhythm. In his guitar motif Richter takes equal measures from Robert Fripp and David Gilmour, probably making the whole piece the most acoustically powerful of any on the album. The second and third parts of *The Merciless Light* are shorter and more economical with sound.

The surprise for me was *Sebevrah* [Suicide]. Here Richter uses the guitar, bass and electric percussion, and manages to extract from the combination a dark bass track with almost no sign of repetition. The middle register is almost forgotten and in the upper registers the trumpet and piano toss around scraps of orthodox jazz moods apparently independently, I last heard something at least close to the resulting atmosphere on post-jazz recordings from the Scandinavian stable of Rune Grammofon. Kořán employs the same approach in another track *Znaky v jízdním řádu* [Signs on the Timetable], Rajnošek's trumpet playing a number of brief melodic little motifs that are echoes and layered on a flat bass background. Minimal means, maximal effect, and a sense of unbounded space. The wind duet from Rajnošek (saxophone) and Richter (clarinet) in the concluding *Láska přijde po kolejkách* [Love will Come Down the Tracks] is a little new age and doesn't achieve the same effects, but that is my only criticism.

There is no point in looking at all the pieces here – the album keeps up a unified mood, the different atmospheres of the tracks follow on from each other coherently and nothing sticks out as inappropriate. There's also no point in trying to classify the album in terms of style. Let's just say that it's one of those rare disks that fill you with a kind of graceful enjoyable sadness. I definitely recommend headphones.

PETR FERENC

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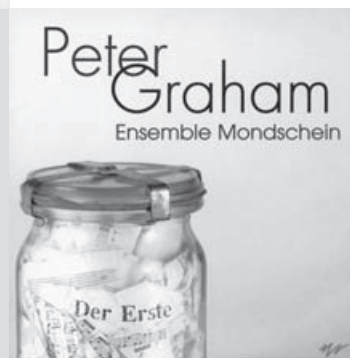
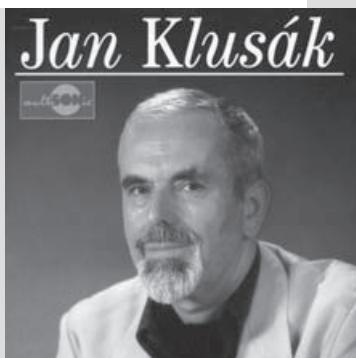
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