

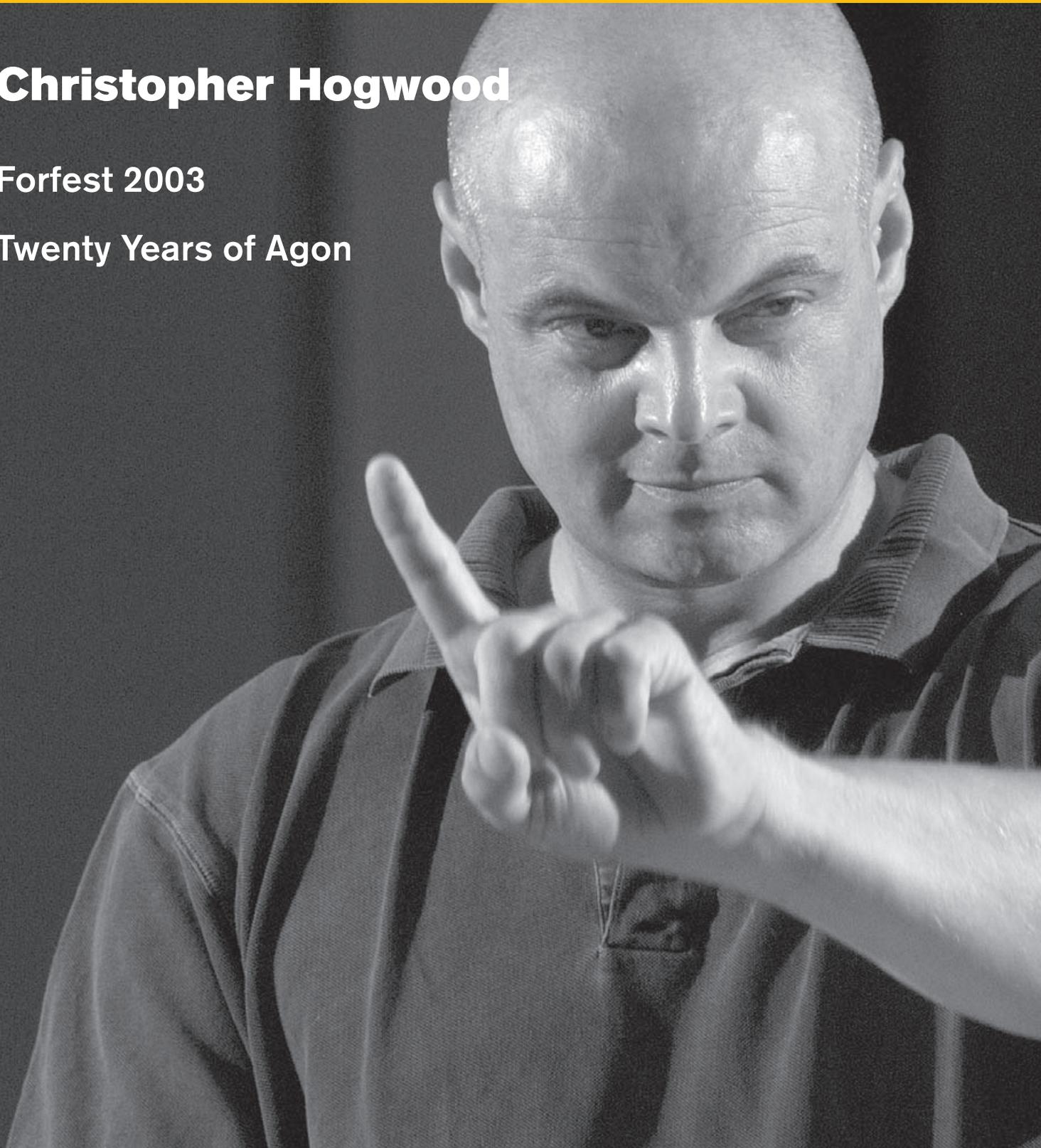
czech music

4 | 2003 bimonthly magazine

Christopher Hogwood

Forfest 2003

Twenty Years of Agon



O STRAVA CENTER FOR NEW MUSIC

Ostrava Days 2003 *Institute* August 11 – 31, 2003

Composers: Olga Neuwirth (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)

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

Ostrava Days 2003 *Festival Program*

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

Thomas Buckner, Voice; Roscoe Mitchell, Saxophone

Petr Kotik and Zsolt Nagy, Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Petr Kotik *Variations for 3 Orchestras***

Olga Neuwirth *Locus...dublure...solus*

for 3 Orchestras**

Phill Niblock *Three Orchids for 3 Orchestras***

Roscoe Mitchell *Surface Covered in Cracks***

*Non-Cognitive Aspects of the City**

Tristan Murail *Gondwana*

Earle Brown *Available Forms II for 2 Orchestras*

Monday, August 25:

4:30 pm Janacek Conservatory in Ostrava

Hana Kotkova, Violin; Monika Streitova, Flute; Eniko Ginzery,

Cymbalom; Andrea Mudronova, Piano;

Igor Frantisak, Clarinet

Soloists of the Ostrava Center for New Music

Jean-Yves Bosseur *Cordes***

Vladimir Bokes *Capriccio**

Marian Lejava *Nocturno No. 3**

Gyorgy Kurtag *8 Duos**

Gyorgy Kurtag *Tre Altre Pezzi**

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

8:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

Chris Nappi, Laszlo Hudacsek, Percussion

Petr Kotik, Flute

Christian Wolff *Trio 5***

Roscoe Mitchell Ensemble:

Roscoe Mitchell *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 in Ostrava

WORKS BY RESIDENTS OF OD 2003 INSTITUTE

Ensemble OCNM

Gabriela Eibenova, Soprano; Theresa Salomon, Violin

Zsolt Nagy, Michel Galante, Nathan Fuhr, Conductors

8:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra

Hana Kotkova, Violin

Petr Kotik, Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Morton Feldman *Violin and Orchestra**

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

Wednesday, August 27:

5:30 pm Janacek Conservatory in Ostrava

MUSIC BY COMPOSERS FROM BRNO

Central European Percussion Ensemble DAMA DAMA

Ars Incognita Ensemble

Ensemble Marijan

Dvorakova, Kavan, Medek *Problemy komunikace*

Dan Dlouhy *Turbulence*

Vit Zouhar *Petite Siréne*

Alois Pinos *Stella matutina*

Peter Graham *Moens*

Ivo Medek *Triax*

9:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

THE NIGHT OF THE PIANO

Joseph Kubera, Piano; Frederic Rzewski, Piano; 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 in Ostrava

Ensemble OCNM

Petra Saverova, Soprano; Jitka Bliznakova, French Horn; Joseph

Kubera, Piano; Marilyn Nonken, Piano;

Thomas Buckner, Baritone

Zsolt Nagy, Michel Galante, Nathan Fuhr, Marian Lejava, 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; Joseph Kubera, Piano

Petr Kotik, Zsolt Nagy, Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Frederic Rzewski *Scratch Symphony**

Christian Wolff *Spring**

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 and Guests

Under the patronage of Hon. Pavel Dostal, Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic; Hon. Evzen Tosenovsky, President of the Moravian-Silesian Region; Hon. Ales Zednik, Mayor of Ostrava City; Hon. Walter Persche, Counsellor of the Austrian Embassy; Hon. Didier Montagne, Director of the French Institute in Prague. The participation of composers and performers from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia was made possible by a grant from International Visegrad Fund. In cooperation with: Trust for Mutual Understanding, European Commission, Moravskoslezsky kraj, Hotel Maria, Embassy of U.S.A. in Prague, Nadace Cesky hudebni fond, Rakouske kulturni forum v Praze, Mestsky obvod Moravská Ostrava a Privoz, Foundation Zivot umelce, Epona

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Friday, August 29:

St. Venceslas Church, Ostrava

NOTATION AND INTERPRETATION

3:00 pm pre-concert talk

4:30 pm Concert:

Dana Simickova, Soprano; Tatana Roskovcova, Mezzosoprano;

Petra Kohoutova, Alto; Marta Marinova, Alto; Theresa Salomon, Violin;

Barbara Willi, Harpsichord; Petr Kotik, Flute;

Soloists of the Ostrava Center for New Music and members of the

Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra

Jean Henri d'Anglebert *Prélude non mesuré in g*

Jean-Philippe Rameau *Allemande-Les trois mains*

Johann Sebastian Bach *Chromatische Fantasie und Fuge*

Louis Couperin *Prélude non mesuré in a*

H. I. Fr. Von Bieber *Selection from "Rosary Sonatas"*

Louis Andriessen *Overture to Orpheus (Donemus 1982)*

Jon Gibson *Equal Distribution**

Petr Kotik *B. L. & R. for Four Voices and*

*percussion***

8:00 pm Philharmonic Hall, Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

Vishnu Sanju Sahai, Tabla; Fida Hussain, Harmonium

Saturday, August 30:

3:00 pm Janacek Conservatory in Ostrava

WORKS BY RESIDENTS OF OD 2003 INSTITUTE

Dorikos Quartet, Ensemble OCNM & Guests

7:00 pm Philharmonic Hall,

Dum kultury mesta Ostravy

Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra

Central European Percussion Ensemble DAMA DAMA

Canticum Ostrava, Yuri Galatenko, Director

Zsolt Nagy, Yuri Galatenko, Petr Kotik,

Petr Vronsky, Conductors

Petr Kotik *Asymmetric Landing*

Luigi Nono *Cori di Didone**

Alvin Lucier *Sweepers**

Morton Feldman *The Swallows of Salangan**

Works by residents of OD 2003 Institute TBA

Program subject to change

** World Premiere * Czech Premiere

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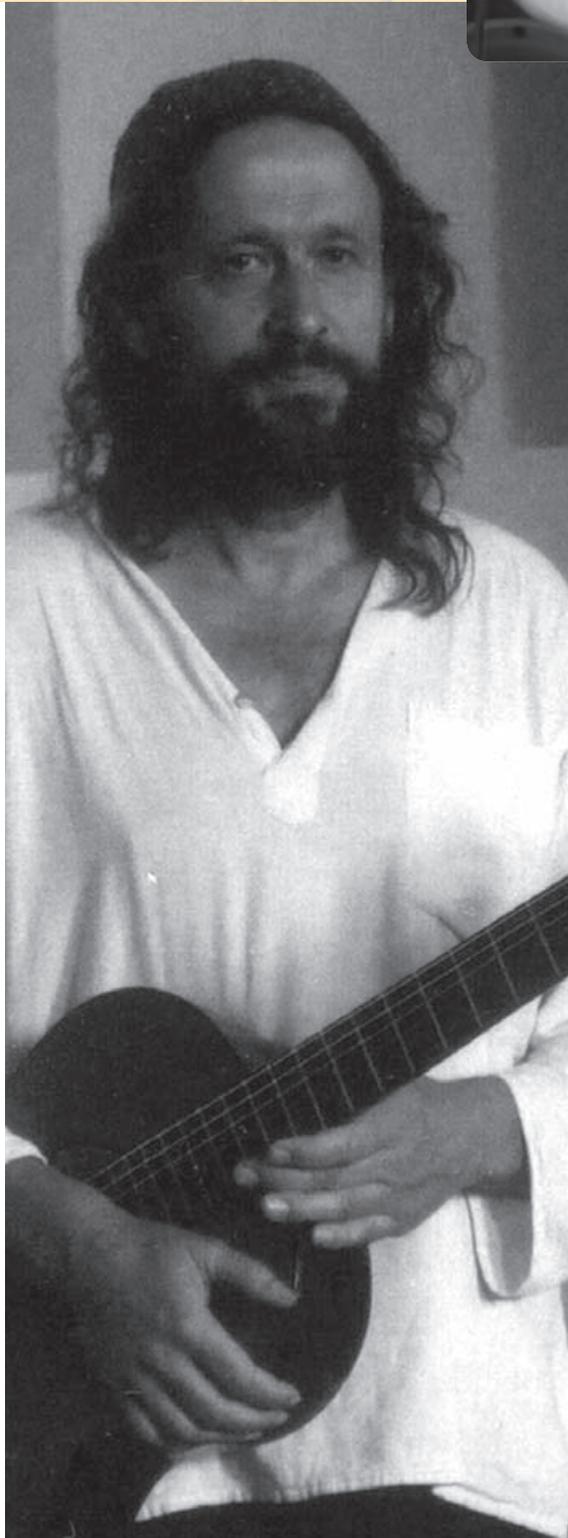


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Boskovice - Exhaustion?

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there are

After an interval of a year the famous English conductor Christopher Hogwood arrived in Prague once again. Over a few days here he recorded a CD of Bohuslav Martinů's ballets of 1927 with the Czech Philharmonic for Supraphon. It was just one of many Christopher Hogwood projects concerned with the music of Martinů. The first was a Martinů CD for DECCA, and the most recent were recordings with the Basel Chamber Orchestra for Arte nova and the first of a CD series covering the complete works of this composer for violin and orchestra.

The world keeps on loosening up, but many people in the music public still have you pigeon-holed as a specialist on baroque music and classicism, even despite that fact that for years now you have been systematically devoting yourself to earlier 20th-century music and conducting combined programmes with pleasure. How do you feel about it, and what do you think is the reason the impression is so persistent?



many

things to finish

interview with christopher hogwood

ALE, BŘEZINA

more modern records they aren't such a big proportion in about 250 discs. But I think more and more people are gradually getting the message nowadays. Today I do less and less old music and more and more neo-classical and neo-baroque music.

What fascinates you about the music of neo-classicist composers (of various kinds)?

I think the first thing that I liked was that it's made for some very interesting programming with modern instruments. Because I cannot see any real advantage if you are playing Händel or Corelli to use modern instruments. But if you are playing exclusively Händel and Martinů or Corelli and Stravinsky than there is a very strong reason to use modern instruments and show they can play two styles. And the etiket, the grammar of the two repertoires is very connected. So to the public it makes it a slightly didactic programme, which, I think, is more valuable for me.

How and why did you come to Prague in the 1960s and how did you react to it as someone coming from the free world?

I came 1964-1965 as a graduate scholar on an exchange scheme organized by the British Council. And to tell the truth I came to Prague because I was very late in planning my future. By the time I had planed it nearly every scholarship was finished except, I think, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria or something like this. So I thought maybe Czechoslovakia is just a little bit closer. And also I knew a little bit about Czech music, but not a great deal. But [still in England] one of my friends came to visit me – it was Jasper Parrott and his father Sir Cecil Parrott was Ambassador here and I spoke with him. He translated Švejk for example for Penguin Books. He was very interested in Czech music, he was collecting materials for a biography on Dušek and Jasper introduced

me to all these names and gave me some good recordings that were helpful to me and also he gave me an introduction to some of the music recorded by Ladislav Vachulka. That gave me an idea about what the repertoire was that I would find here. And another contact I had was with Zuzana Růžičková who came to play at the Aldeburgh Festival in England the year before I came to Prague. So when I knew I was planning this trip I went to see her and she was very nice and said: oh, you must come and see me when you are in Prague. I had been intended to come here as a musicologist and my scholarship was to study at the Charles University. I was put to study with Milan Poštolka who was very good, and also met Petr Eben. My connection with them was very one-to-one so I came to see Poštolka and otherwise I worked in the archives so there were not real lectures and we spoke either in German or in English. And also all the people I met here wanted to speak western languages because it was a much more closed country than I had realized. I discovered that not everybody was a communist, which I didn't know, and that a lot of them were very anxious to hear about the West. And speaking English was a very useful thing.

So I met the Špicka family, Daniel and Hilar and their parents. Hilar was studying musicology, about the same stage to me. So we became good friends. They both spoke individual English, all their friends spoke some English, Poštolka spoke very good German and good English, so there was really no need for me to become very good in the Czech language (which is a pity). The second thing here was that Zuzana quite independently arranged for me to become a member of AMU. I could see Páleníček and people like that doing their teaching, it was extremely free. Zuzana arranged for me to haww double personality, so I got one set of mensa tickets because I was at AMU and I got another set

I really feel that it's not my fault. It's the fault of two things. One is that a lot of people tend to listen to their favourite music only, so that there is often no reason why they should have heard me doing the music of Stravinsky or Bartók or Martinů. On the other hand they are people who form their opinion out of the recording catalogues and in the recording catalogues it's very true, the majority of records are early music because of my orchestra. Although there are some 15 or

of tickets because I was at the Charles University. For all the time I spent in Prague I become double – I was two people! I did lot of work in the archives. The project I was working on was Vaňhal, but in fact I was working more generally. I went to Brno and I went to Krumlov and to the other archives to look at what they have. I was working basically on classical repertoire that survived. It wasn't particularly keyboard music that I was working on. I wasn't working on religious music. I developed a basic interest in different people that I have realized were completely unknown in the West – people like Koželuh, Vejvanovský, J. J. Ryba – we went to hear his Mass and, you know, nobody in the West has heard this Mass by Ryba. The concerts were very cheap so we went every night with Hilar who knew all the wardrobe people so we had a very privileged life. I learned to drink Czech beer – I never drank beer before. So it was a very formative year with no advance plan. But the plan came because of the three things – reading at the University, AMU with Zuzana Růžičková and then the Špicka family because they adopted me. So I was very lucky.

You've anticipated my next question on your first friendships in Bohemia – Daniel Špička, Mrs. Eliška etc.?

Yes it was Eliška Fučíková because she was an art historian and she was also teaching one of the other English graduates who was here and worked on gothic art, gothic statues. Eliška was terrifically friendly, wonderful cook, living in very close circumstances. I met lot of architects because of Daniel Špička. I even met Václav Havel – it was at Viola. He was there as a jazz enthusiast. I never knew what was going to happen to those people. Quite a lot of painters, certainly not the official artists. In fact I think that many of the painters I met were actually architects or sculptors, but the most were probably architects. I bought quite a lot of their pictures. I knew them from drinking with them at Trojka on the corner of the Old Town square, near the bridge. It used to have a wonderful man who was every time sitting at the head of the group, who was exactly the man whose picture you see on Myslivecká – that hunting man. We went to see quite a lot of theatre, opera, and dance theatre, we went to the Tyl theatre. We went to every interesting concert of the Prague Spring. So I think my musical diet was bigger than anything I heard before or afterwards. Which was a very good time to do it. Because all the music was almost all done by Czechs it was all within the same type of vocabulary. The style was very much a Czech style, the attitude was very much middle European attitude. Old music and modern music, chorus singing and operatic singing, string quartets and... I used to do some translating for Křižka, the son of the composer, a very elegant man, who ran the Supraphon records. I met Milan Munclinger and his group, Venhoda ... At Christmas. David Munrow came to see me – he was very interested to see what was happening here and they all came to talk to him because

he was already quite known for medieval music playing. So we did a little show on radio. It was very mutual exchange. **You mentioned Viola, jazz concerts – how did you come to like jazz and what has it meant to you?**

I wasn't interested in jazz at all. I went there only because some journalists I knew and people that were a little bit critical about the situation were there. And they said: come here. I in fact never really liked jazz. The atmosphere is not good to my eyes and to my nose, because there is almost always too much of smoke and also the noise is a little bit too much. Now I am more interested in jazz more than I was than when I was I am afraid a big snob. I went to Viola out of political interest.

That surprises me, because you do a lot of neo-classical music with jazz elements...

I know, I came to it the other way round because of that neo-classical composers. This is how I have become much more interested and much more civilized about jazz. When I was a student I have regarded jazz as I have regarded Beatles, you know? As something you didn't go to. When the Beatles came to Cambridge we went to the cinema instead! We didn't go to see them because we thought it was extremely vulgar.

Why did you get so intensively involved in the music of Martinů at a time when Janáček mania was just beginning? Did you know friends of Martinů?

I of course knew Janáček because of the work of Charles Mackerras. One of the other students that came with me was Jimmy Porter who came to study Janáček. It was because of him that I learned a lot of early Janacek recordings by people who worked with Janáček like Bakala. He explained to me lot of the difficulties with doing the Janáček editions. I didn't really knew Martinů when I came. My acquaintance with Martinů came mostly that I knew about 4-5 pieces of him on record that I listened to before I came to Prague. When I came to Prague I first went to the Prague quartet playing the whole series of Martinů quartets. I went to the library and then to the concerts of Czech Philharmonic doing all Martinů symphonies – this was the time of Karel Ančerl. When I came to Prague I didn't know that he wrote any opera, for example. I went to theatre to see Juliette and it was exciting and terrific. It was a wonderful production by Krombholc, which is on record and it was a wonderful staging by Kašík. From friends of Martinů already mentioned Páleníček. I also spoke with Zrzavý who used to live at the castle steps. I said hello to him once or twice. But the painter I was more interested in was Tichý. I was very intrigued by him because he looks so much like Miró. I knew a bit Šafránek, since I already had his biography on Martinů since the English edition just appeared the year before. What was very nice in 1964 were all the music shops with a lot of very cheap music.

Shops like the German culture centre, Russian culture centre. I bought at the German culture centre the Neue Bach-Ausgabe to a knock down prices. Many scores I use still I have bought than for almost nothing because the rates of exchange were very preferential.

What is the usual shape of your season – is there some sort of regularity about it?

It has a sort of balance between conducting and musicology. And also it has a sort of balance between travelling and staying at home which is in a way the same thing. At present I try to make my season much more European based and less American. Now that I have passed sixty I think I have finish lot of things I have promised to publishers, editions. So I think I have become a more organized about finishing of long term projects, both books and music that I promised to people a long time ago. And now I plan to have them done before I am 65. And then if I am still alive I can plan to do some more but it would be silly to keep these things always waiting. My calendar tends now to be many more European orchestras and nice cities, because I spent lot of my life working in cities, which I didn't like. Whereas I do like Granada, I do like working in Denmark, I do like working in Prague, I do like working in Paris. And I decided that I may plan now to go to nice places to do projects which are for those places. I am not very evangelical any more. I will choose Haydn and not Mozart, Händel and not Bach, Martinů and not Strawinsky, if there is a choice. If not I will do what is suitable for the programme. But I am interested in the less promoted people. For instance I am on the Board of the Terezín Foundation, lot of the Entartete Musik programme is very interesting. I am even interested in people like Skalkottas who don't a very strong press for a moment, but I think he is terrific. I am always looking for the less known ways. Rather than playing Schoenberg I would look for the arrangements that Schoenberg made of Mahler and other for his musical evenings. I am very interested in small groups rather than large groups. I like big orchestras but only sometimes. And I do like large chamber orchestras in a social sense – you can speak with them and they can speak with you whereas with the very big orchestra nobody can speak to you – too many voices. So that is the tendency at the moment which leads me more to musicology. I am doing now a Mendelssohn project for Bärenreiter. Certainly Mendelssohn becomes very interesting to me whereas I never knew anything about him before. And now I want to do Mendelssohn everywhere. So it's a question of capturing an idea and running with it and doing what you can both musicologically and practically and then handing it on to somebody else to do something more and to find a new project. Yes, working in nice places and finishing off my existing projects is the essence of it. I have a very nice office with Heather Jarman and two assistants there who are doing what is called servicing, which is making the things

I do work. But none of them are employed really for musicology. I use an assistant for each project. So I have one person who helped me to start the Mendelssohn project. I am just taking another assistant at the time because I am writing another book on Händel. I have an edition of the Fitzwilliam virginal book coming so I need an extra assistant. Each time I am looking for somebody who is already working in that area.

My main edition projects are keyboard music of Henry Purcell for the Purcell Society, the Fitzwilliam virginal book for Musica Britannica, a big book on the clavichord for Cambridge University Press. Editions which are ongoing are the Salomon arrangements of Haydn symphonies for Bärenreiter (chamber transcriptions), the Mendelssohn overtures project with Baerenreiter, and at the moment starting with Bärenreiter things like Bizet L'Arlesienne (the original theatre score), and even they have a scheme to do Elgar. It tends to be connected with the particular publisher. With Eulenberg's I have two Odes. By Purcell, which I am working on. With a small company HH Editions I have just published a book of keyboard music that I have the manuscripts of – 17th century keyboard music. It's curious that although I am a keyboard player I am not doing a lot of keyboard editing which is a pity.

I am also doing the edition of the full score ballet La revue de cuisine for Leduc. I did the piece a lot in the version of a suite and I have found the score quite difficult and inaccurate. Then I discovered through your help that there was the complete ballet in Basel - I have decided to give the people the choice. So the new edition for Leduc is the whole ballet but you can also use it as a suite. It is edited in a way that you can extract the suite from it because they are differences. So I hope that people will do the suite from more accurate edition but I also hope that people will play the complete ballet. And also that some people will treat it as a ballet and they will do a stage production or a television production of the suite and the other three pieces which we are recording this week. I am going to see Michael Lochar from Editio Bärenreiter Prague because I would quite like to do things like Koželuh keyboard sonatas, which I like very much. I used to go to visit Šetková when I was here as a student and she had all the material on Koželuh. This is a repertoire I would like to promote, the early piano repertoire. Stefan is great, Koželuh is great, Voříšek, Tomášek – the Eclogues – these pieces are fantastic. Dušek itself is not very well edited, nor is Dusík – they are none of them very well served by editions at the moment. So these are all projects. There is no foundation behind this and that makes a big difference – I am now the chairman of the Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach edition in America and it's quite clear that you need to have a lot of money and good organization before you get these editions going. We start publish this year and we were working on it for nearly five years. It's all founded by David Packard, who likes C. P. E. Bach.



What does working with B. Matoušek and the Czech Philharmonic on the complete recordings of the works of Martinů for violin and orchestra mean to you?

Well this was a big surprise to me because although I knew his playing from recordings I have never met him. A very nice man, I think. He started this project running with his own money and the money of the Martinů Foundation in Prague – it was not a Supraphon scheme in the first place. So I worked with him and he is terrific because he is such an agreeable and modest person. The repertoire is to me all exciting because from all the pieces we are going to record on 4 CD's I only knew 3 or 4. I like the idea of doing a complete set of something because you can make a comparison to learn how the idiom developed.

How is your work with the Czech Philharmonic going? The Matoušek project is the first time you've met the orchestra, professionally.

Exactly. Now I see some familiar faces and they have their own style of working, their own style of dealing with conductors. When I was a student they were my favourite orchestra. I liked the sound they made when playing together, the easiness of it – it didn't sound difficult or driven in a bad way. I didn't feel that they were sweating. And still when I see those string players playing it's still quite surprising that I don't see any evidence that they are hot. I think it's the control being in command. Frankly it is quite clear that they could play very nicely without a conductor. They are not an orchestra, which needs a conductor – their playing make this quite clear. But the way they are under control is sympathetic and friendly. I am impressed by what they do in the repertoire I am doing with them which is Martinů. Basically I am learning from them how they play Martinů and just occasionally I say something, which represents my view on it. I think they have a very natural and very experienced instinct on how to play this music. And they respond to suggestions very well. You suggest a gesture, a phrase and everybody makes it. You don't have to stop and say to everybody: do this. So you could let things develop just naturally and lot of rehearsing I find is just playing and indi-

cating a little bit. Saying: Good, that's nice. I am also very helped because the engineers with whom I have worked on the previous record and also on this are very sensible. They hear lot of staff and have good suggestions.

You collect porcelain and musical autographs. How did this come about and why do you do it?

It's not only musical autographs. I do collect manuscripts and old prints. This is musicological instance. I rather have the original material to something, which I would like to secure. So the musical side is to do with scholarship. The ceramics side is because I like decorative things like a lot of English people. I like decorative two dimensional things – just surface, surface design. And also from the point of view who is interested in the 18th century – we are trying to a sort of discover what the music was like at older time. Maybe we are right, maybe we are wrong. When you pick up a piece of ceramic decorated in 1780 - it's perfect! Nothing has changed. It's glazed surface is fixed. So there is nothing to experiment with. You don't have to discover how to interpret it because everything is there. It's the alternative side of something very fixed and objective about a period you can't dispute. Whereas if you try to play music of 1780, you have many alternatives without being sure about this, about the way they may it liked in 1780's. But I pick up a piece of porcelain or just an ordinary dinner plate – its basic has not changed. Painting you see in the art gallery are all for very grand people with a very special taste and lot of money. Maybe it doesn't represent normal people. Normal people bought cups and plates to eat and they kept them on their table for 20 or more years. So they must have been serious about it. It's definitely bourgeois taste, rather than aristocratic taste. That subject is extremely difficult, very exciting a lot of it very modern. And these people who were buying these things were also going to listen Mozart or Beethoven and Schubert. I think it's nice that we cannot discover the way they did Mozart or Beethoven exactly. But we can discover the cups and the dinner plates, the decorative war. That's how I fill that gap.

spiritual art at the forfest

RADIM BAČUVŮÍK

The fourteenth annual Forfest, a festival of contemporary art with a spiritual focus, took place in the week from the 21st to the 29th of June this year in Kroměříž.

As you might expect from the name, it's the town of Zlín that is the capital of the Zlín Region, but the region's cultural centre is without a doubt the town of Kroměříž. Unlike the regional capital, an insignificant village until the beginning of the twentieth century, the region's second largest town is an

ancient centre that can boast a genius loci favourable to the spirit of art. Its superb Baroque architecture, above all the Archbishop's Chateau and adjoining Under-Chateau Garden, and the whole charming townscape are magnets for people with an artistic sensibility, and so it is no surprise to find that it is a lively centre of musical education (there are two conservatories in Kroměříž) and above all of all kinds of more or less formal arts activities. Among the most important is the Forfest Festival. Forfest's subtitle is "An international festival

of contemporary art with a spiritual focus". If we ask how far the festival lives up to the adjectives in its title, we would have to answer that it does so to a different extent in each case. The Forfest is indeed a truly international festival, and its reputation seems to be greater in Europe and overseas than in our republic. Every year many visitors come to the festival from all over the world and it is not unusual to find there are more guests from abroad than from the Czech Republic. This goes not just for the performers but for the composers who are featured in the pro-

Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic



gramme. The share of home and foreign artists is practically the same at the Forfest. Although Forfest defines itself as a festival of contemporary arts in the broad sense it is in fact mainly a music event. This year the imposing exhibition of work by Californian artists called *Mind Trips*, which opened the festival, was the only presentation of visual art except for the exhibition of Milivoj Husák's *Drawings from a Larger Cycle*. Poetry was represented simply by two authorial readings by Marek Toman and Roman Szpuk, drama by a play called *Days Nights* performed by the Prague Miriam Theatre and contemporary film solely by Petr Baran's multimedia project *Creation*.

The question of how far the Forfest programme presents genuinely spiritual art if one that I shall ask the reader's forgiveness for ducking. The theme is too subtle and subjective to write about usefully here. A whole range of the works at the festival were clearly inspired by spiritual or sacred subjects, but as far as those with less obvious spiritual content were concerned, I leave defence of their inclusion to the organisers of the Forfest, namely the Kroměříž Arts Initiative run by the husband and wife team Zdenka and Václav Vaculovič.

Forfest for Composers

Forfest is not just a primarily musical festival, but very definitely a festival of composers and premieres. Every year it features several world and Czech first performances of works by composers from at home and abroad. This year's Forfest was no exception. Just the opening concert brought a whole harvest of premieres: works by the American composers William Toutant and Daniel Kessner (*Hommage of Orlando Lasso* and *River of Time* respectively), *Dějá Vu* by the Rumanian composer Liviu Marinescu and a shortened version of Pavel Zemek's Second Symphony "the Passion". The opening concert was also the only symphonic concert and enjoyed the largest audience. The Zlín Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic conducted by Milan Kaňák gave a very respectable performance, and in the Zemek symphony it was joined by an imposing octet of soloists and the combined forces of the Kroměříž Moravian Madrigalists and the Brno Ambrosian Choir. The other particularly impressive item on the programme was *River of Time* by the Forfest's permanent guest composer Daniel Kessner. It showed an immense sense of musical dynamics and melody with such a strong appeal to the audience that one might even call it pan-European.

The concert featuring the works of František Fiala offered an experience of a quite different kind. A composer who is also director of the Kroměříž Conservatory, Fiala manages to combine a progressive very modern spirit with great musical openness. With his extraordinary inexhaustible melodic invention and immense musical imagination his music is highly evocative and at the same time accessible, making the him this year's Forfest discovery. Fiala's music evidently has the



Michal Kaňák

potential to speak to a larger audience that is usually resistant to contemporary music and to do so without cheap effects. It will certainly be interesting to watch this composer in future.

The organisers scored a great success in ensuring that most of the composers whose work was presented at the festival were actually there in person. Not only the composers already mentioned, but also, for example, the British composer David Matthews, who brought his composition, the *Flying of Marsyas*, inspired by a visit to the Kroměříž Archbishop's Chateau where he saw Titian's picture of Apollo Punishing Marsyas and decided to give it musical expression. Other composer celebrities at the festival included Antonín Tučapský, whose musical profile was presented by the Kroměříž Moravian Madrigalists conducted by Radek Dočkal at the final concert, Alois Piňos, with two pieces performed by the male vocal quintet QVox at the launch of the opening exhibition, Rudolf Růžička, who presented his electro-acoustic compositions by himself and in combination with a film by Petr Baran, and Richard Mayer, who draws inspiration for his music from several stays in Iceland. The line-up of composer profiles was completed by a cross-section of the work of the late Jan Novák, who was forced into exile against his will.

Forfest for Performers

Apart from meeting contemporary composers, Forfest festival-goers encountered a while range of brilliant performers, whether soloists or ensembles.

The Qvox male vocal quartet and its interpretation of Piňos's *Psalms 71* and *Invocation*

has already been mentioned. They also sang *In morte del eccellentissimo Monteverde* by Miloš Štědroň and *Three Madrigals* by Jan Hanuš, and overall it seems that contemporary music is their special domain. While in contemporary music and in the Gregorian chant *Salve Regina* or the organum *Primo tempore* the quartet sounded very convincing, in the Renaissance pieces they adopted a tone very similar to that of the Janáček *Male Choirs* on their CD and so were a great deal less distinctive, while not actually disappointing.

On the subject of brilliant performers, we should certainly mention the British ensemble, The Fibonacci Sequence, which apart from presenting David Matthews' *Flying of Marsyas* premiered the Brno composer Jaroslav Štastný's *Fibonacci fantasias (without Titian)*, written specially for them and for their concert at the Forfest. In Štastný's timbre jeux d'esprit with their aliquot tones and in the virtuoso passages in Matthews' pieces the string quartet with oboist gave an unusually precise performance, perfectly mastered in terms of expression.

Visitors to two concerts on two successive days given by the cellist Werner Taube and the pianists Renata and Milan Bialos respectively had an opportunity to hear just how different the principles of contemporary music and approaches to its performance can be. While the German cellist performed very avant-garde pieces that placed huge demands on listeners, the father and daughter Bialos duo had chosen music with rather more immediate listener appeal. There need be no odious comparisons of skill, of course, since all the musicians concerned are truly excellent. On the other hand, Werner Taube

was wholly absorbed in his music and quite unconcerned as to whether the listeners were coping with it (and it should be added that most of them only started to get the idea when the Forfest organiser Zdenka Vaculovičová in her accompanying commentary started spontaneously to talk about the images that Taube's music conjured up in her mind), while the Bialas duo allowed clapping after every piece and for unknown reasons always kept back in the wings for a time while the audience had to wait. Pavel Blatný made a contribution to the latter concert not so much with his commentary, which he might have done better to have with him on paper, but much more with his *Water Music* using elements of his own arrangement of Erben ballads, which in terms of invention and evocative mood were many times more impressive than the other pieces played. From the performance point of view the high point of the Forfest was probably the concert given by the young Spanish pianist Ricard Descalz. He played the Czech premieres of



William Feasley, Pavel Ciboch



Werner Taube

pieces by Jesús Rueda, Sofia Gubaidulina and other composers with immense southern temperament and a virtuoso bravura that brought out the great colour of the music. It is only to be regretted that the American guitarist William Feasley, who gave a recital the night after Descalz, had not devoted more attention to getting on the same musical wavelength with Pavel Ciboch, his partner in several duets. Their lack of common rhythm was in places disturbingly obvious and rather undermined the impression not just of Feasley's solo play, but of the whole evening.

Forfest for Experiment

It is of course walking on thin ice to talk of any one element in the Forfest as experimental since from a certain point of view all contemporary music has a somewhat experimental character. Nonetheless, there was something interestingly experimental about a concert

called *Between the Years 1953 - 73*, at which recordings of music written by Jan Hanuš, Roman Berger and Miroslav Kabeláč in the years mentioned were played in a Gothic church. Paradoxically, it turned out that while a recording of orchestral music was inadequate in such a setting, electro-acoustic music – in this case Roman Berger's *Epitaph for Nicholas Copernicus* – worked interestingly well, since by its nature it absorbs and can even be enriched by the sounds floating in from the street or the birds singing in the church tower. Another intriguing item was a recording of work by the composers association of HAMU students known as *Konvergence*, i.e. Tomáš Pálka, Roman Pallas and Ondřej Štochl, whose music was highly stimulating and provoked a lively discussion among those present. Again, there were very contradictory reactions to Morthon Feldman's *Piano and String*

Quartet performed by the Corona Ensemble, in which the three students mentioned play; it is a piece that lasts for nearly an hour and a half using only one gradually varied motif and it is based on the denial of the perception of time. The last event from this kind of experimental barrel was the appearance of the Kojetín Industrial Philharmonic conducted by Petr Samlík and a presentation of his proposal for principles of industrial notation.

Multigenre Forfest

As has been pointed out, despite the proclaimed inter-disciplinary nature of the festival, the Forfest remains largely a music event. The most interesting item from the other arts fields was the exhibition *Mind Trips* – An exploration of inner space put together from the works of artists in Southern California by curator Louise Lewis. The exhibition title is taken from New Age vocabulary and presents the intimate reactions of artists to the contemporary world, in which everything is subordinated to financial interests and media monopolies. This year film was represented by a multimedia project from the photographer and artist Petr Baran. Entitled *Creation*, it is inspired by the Book of Genesis and interestingly combines film shots with the electro-acoustic music of Rudolf Růžička. The theatre performance of the Prague Miriam company, *Days of Night – the last months of St. Teresa of Lisieux*, was included in the Forfest programme mainly thanks to the music of Martin Dohnal, in this case close to song-writing. The play itself slightly lacked dramatic development and conflict, since it turned only on St. Teresa's expression of acceptance of death as the culmination of illness and her faith in the love of Christ.

Colloquium

As part of the festival there was also a week-

Forfest Puts the Emphasis on the Individual Testimony of the Composer

long academic colloquium on the theme of Spiritual Currents in Contemporary Art. Invited speakers presented different aspects of spirituality in contemporary music, art and theatre. It is a pity that much of the colloquium was not chaired or directed in any way, and so many questions were ignored or left hanging in the air. Probably the liveliest response was provoked by Libor Mathauser from the Rosa publishing house with her comments on the question of spirituality in non-classical music.

Spiritual Forfest

Having mentioned the colloquium let us return once more to the question of spirituality in art. Although many different opinions were voiced on the theme and all the works presented had something to do with it, no clear answer crystallised in response to the question of how that spirituality might be defined. Many sides of spirituality were presented, but it turned out that where spirituality is too obviously striven for and foregrounded, it may even disappear, while appearing in most powerful form in places where few would ever expect it. A composer can use a liturgical text and set it to music, but that doesn't make the resulting work spiritual unless the inspiration has been internalised and experienced. Conversely, it can be astonishing to discover the depths contained in a music that seems as if it must be a priori cold and void of feeling, for example the music created from computer generated and modified sounds, as demonstrated in the work of Rudolf Růžička.

There is no alternative but to leave the identification of spirituality in art to the subjective feelings of each individual, since one person can perceive great spirituality where another finds it entirely lacking. We can adduce a thousand arguments for why we see or don't see spirituality in a work of art, but no one can guarantee that anyone else will share our feelings. This is because spirituality perhaps does not even reside in art or a work of art in itself. Spirituality is in the people who create it and receive it, and it is questionable whether it is at all possible to transmit knowledge of spirituality, to point at it and to define it without ambiguity.

Zdenka and Václav Vaculovič are the husband and wife team that has headed the Forfest's organisational committee since the festival's birth fourteen years ago. The future paths that might be taken not just by the Forfest but by contemporary music in general in the future are the subject of this interview.

What do you see as the greatest success of this year's Forfest? And what didn't work so well, what caused you problems?

It would probably be impossible to imagine a festival of contemporary art without problems. Usually there are so many that we don't even want to talk about them... So I prefer to talk about the good sides, and the performance of Zemek's *2nd Symphony "the Passion"* was – you could say – a satisfaction not just for the composer but for us as well. Of course, with such a monumental work, which in its uncut form represents ninety minutes of music for large orchestra, choir and soloists, you could hardly expect there to be no problems at all putting it on, but all the performers and listeners felt that it was a great idea, and that's no small achievement.

Forfest is characterised as a festival of contemporary art with a spiritual focus. But from a certain perspective any kind of artistic work is spiritual, if it springs up from the spirit of the author... How would you define spirituality in art and what are your criteria, from this point of view, for the choice of works for the festival?

You're right. Every creation arising from the spirit can be considered spiritual, but contemporary art is dominated by anything but the spirit. Of course we don't want to play at being referees who "unerringly" separate the wheat from the chaff. To put it a little frivolously, our activities might be better characterised by paraphrasing the famous voice crying in the wilderness "Prepare ye a way for an art that has not yet lost content and meaning". It is in this spirit that we praise and encourage every author who doesn't want to contribute to the general devastation of human values. But back to your question: naturally the problem has many different lev-

els, and that is why we've started a colloquium, which every two years provides space for the opinions and visions of leading musicologists and art historians from this country and abroad. There is no answer to your question that would fit into one paragraph in a magazine...

Although the Forfest also involves visual art and poetry, it remains above all a music festival. Do you intend to



carry on giving priority to the music element, or will you be trying to give the other fields of the arts a more balanced share in the event?

Today it's also a financial question, since a good exhibition, with good advertising, costs at least 2-300 000 crowns. Also taking into account the well-known inflexibility of fine arts funds and the „caution“ of curators, it seems to us that the music festival model is really more feasible for the moment. Internationally speaking, the music world is linking up much faster, all kinds of things are discussed, and the position of the composer isn't determined by the incredible caste system that prevails in the art world especially in this country. On the other hand, in the history of art the linking-up of different disciplines has always been enriching for all of them, and that is a direction we want to move in....

Unlike last year, this year there was no opera. Was its replacement this year

with a play deliberate or is it difficult to find a good quality opera production?

The Forfest is first and foremost a composers' festival. In recent years the operas *Coronide* by Vít Zouhar and *Endymio* by Tomáš Hanzlík have appeared on the programme as particular kinds of innovative development in music. Similarly, this year's "deviation" into spoken drama was a decision based on the fact that the play in question had music by Martin Dohnal. Our primary concern was to follow the line of the middle generation of Czech composers. Our having operas is therefore a matter of exceptions – we leave systematic mapping of this area to others.

At the colloquium there was talk of the spiritual element in non-classical music. What is your attitude to the possibility of extending the musical range of the Forfest and for example presenting alternative or jazz ensembles that have an accent on spirituality in their music?

Today the term "alternative" includes almost anything you can think of. It's an area in which you can find plenty of marvellous and inspired music, but also plenty of toothless music as well. Even so-called "relaxation music", with its very obvious commercial subject, flirts with spirituality – so how can one get one's bearings? Obviously the existing labels aren't much help here. We need to take a case-by-case approach. In the course of the years we've had groups here from the MCH Band to DAMA DAMA or AGON, and soloists like Iva Bittová and Jessicy Karraker from the USA. And for example we should like to invite Ensemble Jouissance from Australia, Aleph from France, the British Hilliard Ensemble – the list would be a long one and there's no need to weary readers. We don't think this area of contemporary music can reproach us for ignoring it.

As far as Jazz is concerned, that first needs some definition of terms. For example Emil Viklický's career leaves us wondering what jazz actually still is today. In principle of course we've nothing against jazz, but we want to prevent a certain commercialisation of the festival.

At this years Forfest a recording of the student composers' group from AMU known as Konvergence was a great success. Have you considered giving more space to students and graduates of the academies and conservatories, including the Kroměříž schools, and perhaps opening workshops for the musical public and for composers who are not yet established?

Together with Andreas Kröper and Vít Zouhar we're thinking of holding simultaneous composing and performance courses focused on contemporary music. The orientation of the festival could give such courses the necessary distinctive identity, but for a project like that to survive given the huge competition, it has to have an international

dimension from the very beginning. And that's no easy matter, as I'm sure you can imagine.

The prestige of the festival has been growing from year to year. Have you thought of prolonging it or expanding it to include other towns?

In fact this year we held the exhibition of works by Californian artists, *Mind Trips*, in the chateau in nearby Chropyň, which is part of the Kroměříž Museum Complex. The local town hall was very forthcoming and so the collaboration was a pleasant experience and shows the possibility of further projects in future years. The participation of the Zlín Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic in the opening concert is a sign that future premiere concerts could be held in Zlín as well. Here we could also mention the rather curious offer we have received from Mr. Theodore Wiprud of New York, who suggests that his festival of spiritually orientated music, *Beyond Words*, could play host to some Forfest concerts in America.

Generally it seems to be the case that anyone who thinks and plans in more than purely regional terms sooner or later has to start considering co-operation between more than one town or country. The possibilities could be fantastic - who wouldn't be interested in something like that? On the other hand, looking at several mega-projects in Western Europe based on the same principle, we've noticed that they often doesn't work. Ideas can be transmitted, but they can't be blown up like airbeds. Our primary concern is not the prestige of the event, but just putting across a diametrically different view of contemporary art. Large concerns are self-congratulatory and pay no attention to the quiet whisper of the muses. In contrast, however, contemporary arts projects would immediately collapse if dependent only on local sources of support. It is quite clear that international link-up is essential and the direction of the future, and by the way it is already the only argument that all the funds, local authorities or ministries listen to everywhere in Europe. Practice has taught us how to economise, and we are beginning to have an inkling of how such a thing might work without the unnecessary bureaucratic ballast...

The problem of contemporary serious music is the very limited response it gets from the public. What in your view could music do to succeed against the competition of the lighter muses and given the media pressures?

One might have an interesting argument about what it is really is today that gets public response. And is the indifference of the broader public a problem for people who honour good art? If tens of thousands of fans come to a stadium to see a football or music star, then the television population of the country is interested for a few short minutes. And let us not be mistaken – such phenomena have one interesting characteristic – they are not linked up in time or space.

After a week they don't interest anyone at all at home or abroad. But Shostakovich's *Seventh Symphony* flew round the whole world in an incredibly short time after it was written and every time it has been performed since then it has been a major event. What does it matter that it is for a supposedly negligible percent of the public? Genuine art is interesting even after centuries – that is how the optimistic conclusion should sound more or less. We are well aware that the television programme planners are giving themselves headaches night and day over today's depressing reality. How can the chain of all possible dependences be broken? Does the consumerist majority really have the right to push the cultural minority to the margins of broadcasting time? And looked at from the point of view of decades maybe the minority of today is not such a minority, because what remains as generations pass is neither football nor pop music

Many world class composers and performers have been coming to the Forfest for more than a decade. In your view where is contemporary music moving today? In the last decade do you think there have been signs of any general trend, for example to a new wave of minimalism, regional inspirations of a return or tonality? Or has creation become an entirely individualised matter? Would you say that there is a more pronounced spiritual element in contemporary serious music today than there was a decade ago?

Your questions, which are all very complicated, also contain a ready answer. Yes, although these returns testify to a tenacious search; 21st-century man urgently needs something, lacks something, and his hunger has the proverbial hundred heads. We are evidently the witnesses of a turning point, a period in which the borders of time, space, styles and genres are all breaking down. In the concept behind our festival it is the composer who has the key position. Emphasis on the entirely particular individual personality, truly authentic testimony free of media pressures and tendentious distortions necessarily reveals the spiritual "reverse face" of contemporary art.

As far as your last question is concerned, one certainly can't ignore the enormous growth in spiritual themes. Of course, one can ask whether the interest wasn't in fact there before, and hasn't only come to light as a result of the more rapid communications of contemporary globalisation. But you will find hidden or open allusions to the spiritual practically everywhere. And so this hunger for something else will certainly grow....



agon

on the road from music, sweet music to discreet music

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

This year the Agon Orchestra is celebrating its twentieth anniversary – or not, depending on how you look at it. If you were being pedantic, you could point out that the group only started to perform under the name Agon in January eighteen years ago, but in fact it had first appeared two years before on the 24th of January 1985 in the Prague City Library. The twenty years of its real existence have seen huge changes: Agon has lost its founders and attracted audiences both at home and abroad, and a group that couldn't function officially in the Eighties is now engaged in the production of a National Theatre opera.

Student Beginnings

The Concert of Minimal Music held on the 12th of April 1983 in the Museum of Bedřich Smetana was an event conceived by two composition students, Martin Smolka and Miroslav Pudlák, who were fascinated by a music so unlike the content of their curriculum at school. Few people in this country, composers included, had any clear idea what was really meant by the term "Minimal Music". The student string orchestra augmented by other musicians was at this point conducted by Ondřej Kukul. Thus Minimalism left its mark on Agon even in its prenatal phase of existence and in later years too was an important element of its repertoire. In the first years Agon almost exclusively played pieces by its two initiators, and occasionally their similarly orientated colleagues Pavel Kalina, Vítězslav Janda and Vojtěch

Havel. From 1984 Petr Kofroň was involved, first as a composer, but gradually more and more as a conductor. In 1987 Ivan Bierhanzl began to play with the ensemble and gradually took on the role of organising spirit of the group. In 1991 the founders of Agon presided over the birth of the Society for New Music, which among its other achievements can today boast its tenth annual Marathon of New Music. There was once a rumour that rockers brought the philosopher Egon Bondy to Agon. According to Miroslav Pudlák it wasn't true, since in the cultural vacuum of the time people were active in seeking out interesting music.

Musical Enlightenment

In the Eighties and Early Nineties it wasn't hard to put together interesting programmes. The public was hungry for everything and there were plenty of

gaps to be filled. A major part of Czech premieres went precisely to the Minimalists. Philip Glass (Strung Out), Steve Reich (Violin Phase) and Terry Riley (In C) were only known from recordings and live performances were a reliable audience draw. This was also true of other representatives of the American avant-garde (Cage, Feldman) and of European New Music (Scelsi, Berio). Certain Czech composers of the older generation also found their place. Jan Klusák and Marek Kopelent had been the alternative to the official line and for the younger generation they represented teachers in both an indirect and sometimes a literal sense (this was particularly the case with Kopelent). Striking figures from the Sixties were also discovered, such as Josef Berg, Zbyněk Vostřák, Rudolf Komorous. In the early Nineties the need to fill in



Young Academics, Old Rockers

"The climax of this period was obviously our appearance at BANG ON A CAN in New York in the spring of 1995. It was the definitive rebirth of the band into something peculiarly rock." (Petr Kofroň). Although they came out of academic classical music, Agon always had an affinity to the rock scene. This kind of gravitational attraction was wholly natural in a group which included many members with a rock past or present. The double bassist and bass guitarist Ivan Bierhanzl currently plays in Plastic People of the Universe, while Miroslav Šimáček, guitarist and composer, was a member of the groups Expanze and Kilhets in the Seventies. From the beginning Agon also shared a public with the Rock underground, a fact that didn't change when the underground came out from underground. There was a link up on the composing side, as well. On the 20th of April 1993, for example, *Exodus* by Mikoláš Chadima and *Tři písně k meditaci* [Three Songs for Meditation] by Oldřich Janota were performed at the House at the Stone Bell. Other similarly orientated foreign composers were also progressively included in Agon concerts. Behind the the Bang on a Can festival mentioned above there was a group of composers – Michael Gordon, David Lang and Julia Wolfe – whose way of linking up genres proved an inspiration for Agon. In the later Nineties the Agon programme also came to include the other New York "Down Town" composers John Zorn and Elliot Sharp, both figures who cut across frontiers in music, while Europe was represented by Heiner Goebbels, who had also originally come out of alternative rock. This inclination to fusion was one reason for the departure of the founding fathers". In 1995 Miroslav Pudlák and

the gaps led to the creation of thematic cycles, such as *Počátky dodekafonie a mikrointervalové hudby* [The Beginnings of Dodecaphony and Micro-Interval Music], and *Počátky České Nové hudby* [The Beginnings of Czech New Music]. These cycles were followed up by two CDs: *Česká nová hudba 60. let* [Czech New Music of the 60s] (1994) and *Grafické partitury a koncepty* [Graphic Scores and Concepts] (1996). The second title in particular was an exceptional achievement, it was released to go with a book that described the realisation of the pieces and offered the score. The composers involved included Milan Grygar, Anesthis Logothetis, John Cage and even Milan Knížák.

From 1990 to 1998 Agon released five CDs. The first with pieces by Pudlák (*Otisky* [Imprints]), Smolka (*Hudba, hudbička* [Music, Sweet Music]), Kofroň (*Alfa a Kentaur* [Alpha and Centaur]) and Adamík (*Tance labilní a nepravděpodobné* [Unstable and Unlikely Dances]), summarised the initial phase of its development. The first two CDs were published by Arta, and the Audio Ego company was set up to publish the others, but releasing CDs at the group's own expense proved too costly and sponsors and grants were not forthcoming. The album *Red and Black* was therefore put together from previous concert recordings (Kofroň, Smolka, Šimáček, Graham). In 2001 Indies together with the Archa Theatre published the CD of AGON with Filip Topol. The material has already been recorded for a profile CD featuring Petr Kofroň (planned as 3 CDs) and a recording of Anesthis Logothetis's ballet *Odysseia*, although no one knows if

it will actually be released.

Agon became known to a rather wider audience in 2000 with the production of Philip Glass's opera *The Fall of the House of Usher* at the State Opera, although the orchestra had already played the opera in concert form in 1996. At present final rehearsals are underway for the premiere of another Glass opera, *Beauty and the Beast*. Since 1993 the Marathon of New Music has been held annually under the aegis of the Society for New Music, with Agon always getting plenty of the spotlight. Thanks to this festival the Czech public has had the chance to see many performers of contemporary serious music from traditional chamber bodies like the Silesian String Quartet to the electronic/noise improvisations of Elliot Sharp.



the clarinetist Kamil Doležal founded the Mondschein ensemble, which plays the music of its authors, and also contemporary music conceived (if one can risk the word) in a more traditional way, this forming a counterweight to Agon. (Ultimately, however, even these "conservatives" felt the need for something else and created the group Why Not Patterns, linking jazz, rock, composed and improvised music.) In 1998, after the release of a CD of his pieces, Martin Smolka also left Agon.

In 2000 a concert was held in the Archa Theatre at which Agon alternated with the rock group Psí vojáci [Dog Soldiers] and at the end Filip Topol sang the song *Kruhy* [Crosses] in an orchestral arrangement by Petr Kofroň. A year later a whole concert programme of these arrangements had been put together, later a CD. The initiative for the collaboration came from Ondřej Hrab, the director of the Archa Theatre. At the end of 2002 Agon joined with a partner again, this time the Plastic People of the Universe. The story goes that it was the eccentric Jaz Coleman who first showed interest in an orchestral version of the music of this legend of the Czech Underground, just as he had previously picked up on the songs of Čechomor, but the Plastic People had abandoned the project after differences of opinion on the form it should take. Since the project was still in the air, however, Agon, with personal ties to the Plastic People, took it up instead. The result was a performance at the Roxy Club, with the arrangements signed by Michal Nežtek. At the Prague Spring Agon joined the Pražský Výběr rock band in "third of all things rock", with a programme of Frank Zappa's music. An appearance with Blixa Bargeld, the head of the industrial band Einstürzende Neubauten in an arrangement of one of their oldest songs, was an interesting intermezzo.

The joining of genres aroused great hopes when it was proclaimed, but reactions to the music were mixed. A certain sloppiness of performance could be detected both at concerts and on a CD with Filipem Topol. This may be a feature that belongs to rock, but in Kofroň's arrangements (e.g. Razors [Žiletky]) lack of rhythmical precision had a disruptive effect. The concert with the Plastic People was undermined by bad amplification, thanks to which Michal Nežtek's ideas could only be identified in the quiet passages. But this performance is to be reprised several times in the Autumn, so there's a chance for rehabilitation.

At the turn of the century Michal Nežtek, together with Marko Ivanovič and Ivan Acher brought "new blood" into the Agon composers' circle. Fresh

graduates of the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (HAMU), they too had affinities with all kinds of "non-serious" music, Acher as a singer in the VRRM band (with Vladimír Václavěk), Nežtek as a member of the fusion group Why Not Patterns (with Miroslav Pudlák and Kamil Doležal). On the other hand they take sound and energy, rather than simplicity, from the rock scene.

In June 2003 striking red posters went up all over Prague bearing the face of Brian Eno, a synonym for sound experiments and arguable the father of ambient. Michal Nežtek and Petr Kofroň divided up Eno's *Discreet Music* of 1979 and arranged it for chamber orchestra and electronics. The programme also included pieces by Petr

Kofroň (*H. R. S.*), Zbyněk Vostřák (*Trias*) and Ivan Acher (*Sur la terre, ...*), all augmented by electronic sounds and modulations of the sound of acoustic instruments. The adaptation of Eno's music raises new parallels with Bang on a Can. In 1997 they arranged (and later also played in Prague) his *Music for Airports*. The originally announced participation of a DJ came to nothing, since nobody could be found on the Czech dance scene who would be capable of this kind of collaboration. Ivan Acher therefore manned the samplers and effects. Nor did electronics do any harm to older pieces by Kofroň and Vostřák. It doesn't look as though this potential line of Agon's development is any kind of blind alley.



de__constructing myths or how to organise a concert

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

Contemporary serious music (the phrase has not yet lost all meaning) is written for a very specific, narrow public that is becoming ever more specific and narrow as time goes by. This is reflected in the fact that its concert presentations ever more frequently take chamber form, and works for larger-scale ensembles have no chance except at festivals. It is a natural development that isn't hard to understand. But in the Czech context it is as if the narrowness of the public has become an excuse for a lack of imagination and commitment on the part of organisers. And when neither the broad, nor even the so-called professional musical public even gets to hear of a forthcoming concert, then naturally the resulting public becomes even narrower than it need be. The same limited circle of faces appear in the auditoria, all of them known to each other. What is more, the halls where the concerts take place are not venues with attractive or interesting atmosphere.

In this dismal context, the concert held in the Monument on Vítkov Hill was a promising ray of light. The posters with the huge silhouette of Jan Žižka on his horse were to be seen all over Prague and definitely helped to ensure that the two reprises of the Dekonstrukce [Deconstruction] project were not played to an empty hall.

The civic association SHOCK was founded by young composers and musicologists to support contemporary music. They already have several concerts to their credit and are currently setting up an Internet portal to provide information and a platform for discussion. Miroslav Srnka and Michal Rataj, two of the SHOCK composers, presented their pieces on Vítkov.

The Vítkov monument is a building with a curious history. The idea for its construction was born at the end of the 19th century, it was built between the two world wars as a monument to Hussites and legionaries, but the middle and older generations know it as

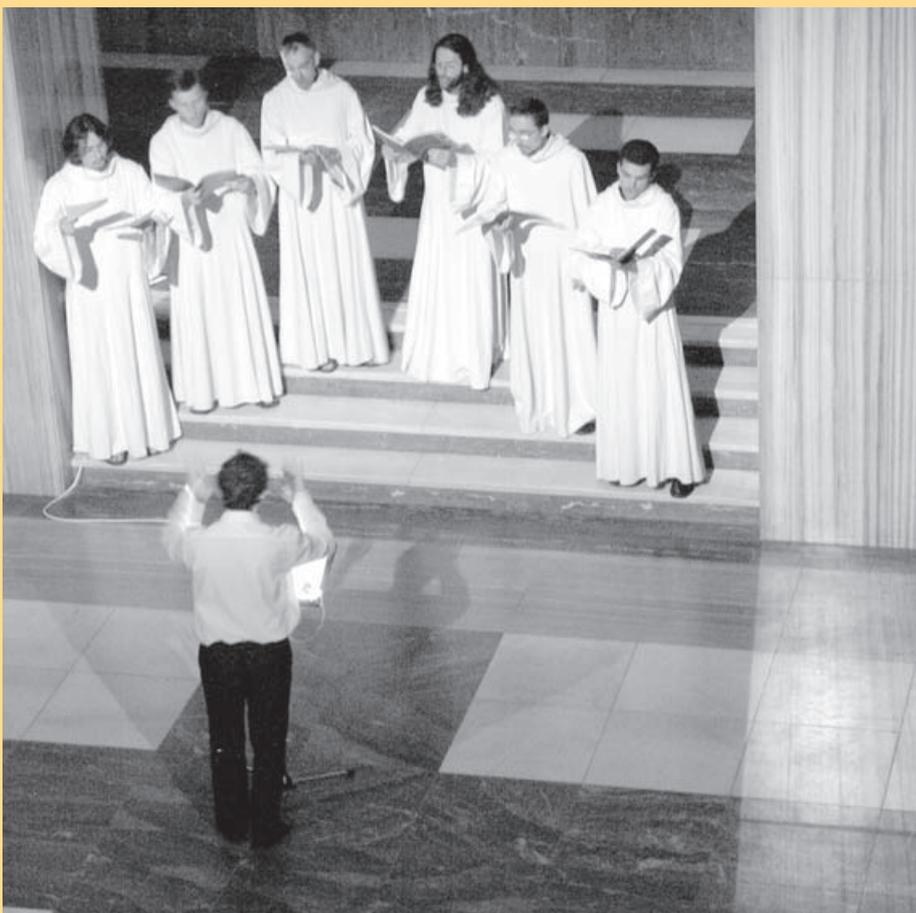
the mausoleum of the communist leader Klement Gottwald, and the younger generation as a bizarre object on the city skyline, and usually closed. The choice of theme of the works on the programme fitted in well with the historical ambiguity of the setting. Although its purpose is secular, the monument is conceived as a gigantic church and is therefore acoustically ideal for medieval unison singing. Schola Gregoriana Pragensis opened the concert with chants dedicated to Bohemian saints. The contrast between the unison melody sung first by three and then by six singers was suddenly more powerful than instrumental magic in an orchestra. For his piece Podvrhy [Forgeries] Miroslav Srnka had chosen texts with the same peculiar atmosphere as the Vítkov Monument itself. The forged Zelenohorský and Královédvorský Manuscripts (supposedly ancient Czech epics) were for almost a century a source of national pride, only to become a source of national disgrace. Srnka

arranged three songs and two incipits from the Manuscripts and entrusted the performance to the Schola Gregoriana. The soprano Irena Houkalová joined them for one song. At the time when doubts began to be voiced about the authenticity of the Manuscripts some 19th-century patriots claimed that even if they didn't really have the patina of the centuries, they would still be works of poetic genius. One can speculate that the composer shares the view. Forgeries definitely isn't some squaring of accounts with the forged past, but more a new approach to the poetic images that inspired Jirásek and Smetana. But of course it is informed by the ironically amused view that is also the reaction of the modern reader to the sound and turns of phrase of Old Czech (or the forgers' Hanka and Linda's idea of Old Czech). Each part of the piece is built on a strong idea and none are so long that the idea becomes stale or overused. The intermezza between the songs are called "incipits" and accordingly "cut off" halfway through. The music was written specially for the singers of Schola and with their typical singing style in mind. Compared to the choir the performance of the Soprano did not strike one as bad, but definitely as less expressive.

The interval, used to shift the relative positions of podium and auditorium, was followed by Michal Rataj's *Vítkov Oratorio*. It had been created by expanding an originally purely electronic composition and it deconstructs the text of the psalm, *Lord, Have Mercy Upon Us* [Hospodine, pomiluj ny]. The new version involves not only electronics but once again the Schola Gregoriana and Irena Houkalová, and also the chamber group Tuning Metronomes (with a relatively large number of their musicians) and organ played by Lukáš Vendl. Rataj has been composing electronic music for some time now and the electronic form of his oratorio shows the interesting way he manages to combine the human voice with electronic rushes into a homogenous and effective composition. At the concert this part was reproduced quadrophonically; the sound flew around the audience in all directions, creating a really



Tuning Metronomes



Schola Gregoriana Pragensis

strong effect in the ghostly space of the former mausoleum. The acoustic part of the oratorio also worked with the space, with the entry of the organ striking the audience in the back, and the Schola singing in different parts of the hall. As a whole, however, the piece was not so powerful. The instrumental and singing parts seemed to be too heterogeneous and refused to cohere into a single whole. Long passages based on work with the timbres of instruments would have worked well in a separate piece, but here they lacked a rationale. The Oratorio also lacked the light overview of the Forgeries and its sense of appropriate length, and the audience is faced with a serious "meditation on Old Czech chorale".

The music is the main thing at any concert, but of course evaluating the music is always difficult, because subjective. The organisation of a concert is (rightly) considered the auxiliary side of the matter, and few people pay much attention to it. But here (unlike in relation to the music) one can objectively say what has worked and what has not. Deconstruction showed that it is possible to get support (financial and otherwise) for contemporary music, to find an interesting venue and performers and to conduct an effective publicity campaign. Let it be an inspiration to other organisers before they start lamenting the sad situation.



Činna

appearing. It turned out to be dangerously high. Which of the bands is supposed to offer us something fresh in the way of dramaturgy? Phil Shöenfelt, Znouzectnost, Činna or Michal Prokop, for goodness sake! The organisers Unijazz have even already presented us once before with the main star, the Hungarian Trottell Stereodream Experience. The name should be changed slightly and used as a subtitle for the festival, i. e. Totally Stereotypical Experience.

My criticism has nothing to do with the standard of performance of the musicians I've listed. All that bothers me is the very high number of familiar faces. The only novel aspect of the music section of the festival was the programme in the synagogue, where visitors could successively listen to Oldřich Janota, Dagmar Andrtová and Ridina Ahmed. Admittedly the first two are hardly newcomers, but in this threesome they turned the synagogue into a special musical islet built on quietness, careful treatment of every note, and allowing the place to imprint itself onto the music played there.

Lack of ideas in festival planning is not a problem unique to Boskovice. You could say the same about Litoměřice Roots, Mikulov and other festivals. Nonetheless there is at least one event that could provide a model for organisers. Paradoxically it is not primarily a music festival, but the Summer Film School Uherské Hradiště. The accompanying music programme included, for example, the famous foursome of "ordinary" Sardinian farmers and artisans Tenores di Bitti, representatives of the traditional raw style of su tenore. There was also an appearance by the highly rated Mexican tropipunk band Los de Abajo and several thematic concerts focused on poets – concerts for Wernisch, Kainar, Kryl and Bondy.

One of the basic signs of a good festival is that it tries to bring visitors into contact with new music. Too many events have gradually abandoned this task. The main lesson of the eleventh year of Boskovice is the fact that it has become a classic example.

ADAM JAVŮREK



Dagmar Andrtová

boskovice - exhaustion?

When the Boskovice Festival began eleven years ago, its mission was clear: to draw the attention of the public to the town's Jewish quarter and to help towards its restoration. It was not so much a question of direct financial gain. What the organisers wanted was to hold an unconventionally conceived festival, scattered at various locations and appealingly cutting across the arts, as a way of increasing the interest of the public in the town.

This year's walk through Boskovice showed that the idea had succeeded with flying colours. In deliberately giving visitors more freedom, the festival has even become a model for many other cultural events. You don't have to be imprisoned for several days in one fenced enclosure. Instead you are always on the move. You run down from the theatre castle to the photographic exhibition in the museum, then you head for the acoustic concert in the synagogue maior, nip out for an authorial reading in the Sokol sports centre and finally stroll down to the main music performance in the summer cinema. And I haven't even mentioned the wonderful morning fairytales.

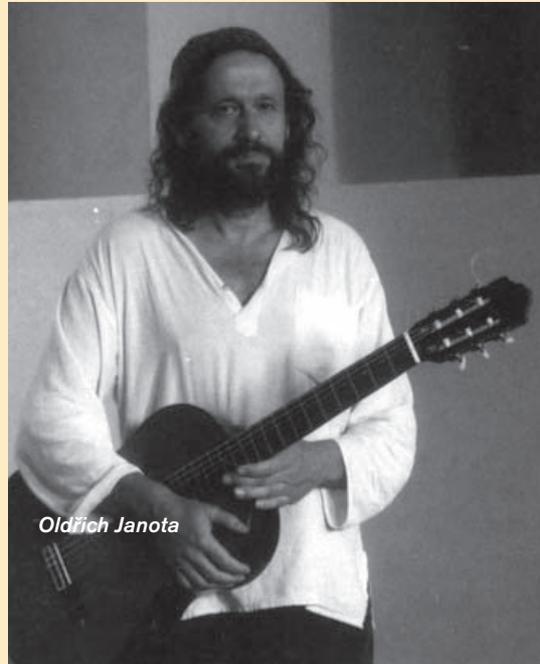
It's a model that still works reliably, but it has entirely reversed the relationship between the festival and its town. Earlier the festival drew attention to the town, but now it is Boskovice that serves the festival. In many ways it is a happy end for the town, but it can be a little disappointing for the visitor. Why? The reason is that the festival is suffering from stagnant choice of acts. Somebody tried to calculate the average age of performers, i. e. the age of the groups



Boskovice Castle



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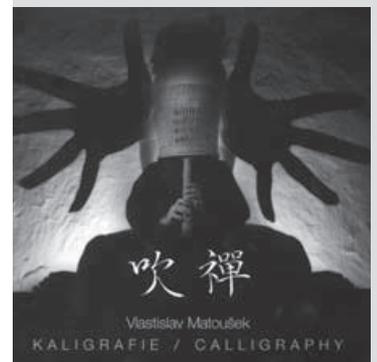
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