

# czech music

1 | 2004

quarterly magazine



**Zdeněk Mácal**

**Czech Orchestras**

**Miroslav Pudlák**

# The Czech Music Fund

## Music Materials Hire Library

A wide range of scores and parts of music by Czech composers, both contemporary authors and classical masters.

VISIT THE ELEC-  
TRONIC CATALOGUE  
ON THE WEB

[WWW.MUSICBASE.CZ](http://WWW.MUSICBASE.CZ)



Contact address:

Radlická 99  
150 00 Prague 5  
Czech Republic

Tel.: +420-251 556 642 or 251 550 609  
Fax: +420-251 553 982  
e-mail: [chf-phm@cbox.cz](mailto:chf-phm@cbox.cz)  
internet: [www.musicbase.cz](http://www.musicbase.cz)





## editorial

Dear Readers, and friends of Czech music. The magazine Czech Music enters the new year in a new format. We have decided that a quarterly with a larger number of pages will be better suited to our goal, which is to present articles and information about Czech music and partially compensate for the lack of sufficient literature on Czech musical culture in English.

The face of this issue is Zdeněk Mácal, who has been appointed principal conductor of the Czech Philharmonic from this season. Our interview with the conductor is complemented by an article on the history and present situation of Czech orchestras.

We also offer two longer articles on Leoš Janáček, this time from a slightly unusual point of view. Folk music and the rhythms and melody of speech were important sources of inspiration for Janáček and it is these that are our subject in the current issue.

We return to the contemporary music scene with an interview with the composer Miroslav Pudlák and a review of the premiere of Martin Smolka's opera, Nagano.

In this issue you will find the first of a series of supplements called Profiles, designed to mark the Year of Czech Music and introduce some of the composers whose jubilees fall in this year. We have chosen those who in our view had a major influence on the development of Czech music but who are not always so well known in the rest of the world. This time it is Bedřich Smetana, usually considered the founder of Czech national music in general and opera in particular. The second figure is the much lesser known Václav Jan Tomášek, Smetana's predecessor, who is important primarily for his compositions for piano.

I believe you will find a great deal of interesting information in this issue and I look forward to our meeting at the next issue of Czech Music.

*Matěj Kratochvíl*  
MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL  
EDITOR

## Contents

2004

### Page 2

The Hardest Thing Is to Make the Right Decision at the Right Time  
An Interview with Zdeněk Mácal

AGÁTA PILÁTOVÁ

### Page 6

Czech Orchestras

LENKA DOHNALOVÁ

### Page 9

Balancing on the Edge of Kitsch  
An Interview with Miroslav Pudlák

TEREZA HAVELKOVÁ

### Page 12

The Case for Speech Melodies, Reopened

JONATHAN G. SECORA PEARL

### Page 16

Respect for Tradition, and Creative Visions

JARMILA PROCHÁZKOVÁ

### Page 19

Gesamtkunstwerk on Ice

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL

**Czech Music Information Centre,**  
Besední 3, 118 00 Praha 1,  
Czech Republic,  
fax: ++420 2 57317424  
phone: ++420 2 57312422  
e-mail: his@vol.cz  
<http://www.musica.cz>

Czech Music is issued by the Czech Music Information Centre with the support of the ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, Bohuslav Martinů Foundation, Leoš Janáček Foundation and the Czech Music Fund  
Editor: Matěj Kratochvíl, Translation: Anna Bryson  
Graphic design: Ditta Jiříčková, Photos: Jaroslava Šnajberková (p. 2–5), Karel Šuster (p. 9–11) and archives  
DTP: HD EDIT, Print: Tobola  
ISSN 1211-0264  
The subscription fee is 25 for Europe,  
\$ 30 for overseas countries, or respective equivalents.

What have your returns home been like since 1989?

Always pleasurable. In the mid-nineties I was invited to conduct the Czech Philharmonic, and then appointed as principal conductor, but I actually first worked with the Philharmonic in 1965, and it's an orchestra that continues to play an important role in my life. Perhaps the word "returns" isn't quite right, and it would be better to talk of the continuation of a journey, a continuation of our work together, even if with longer or shorter intervals.

When you first stood on the podium in the Rudolfinum after so many years, was it a moving experience?

It's hard to say, because I have moving experiences several times a day. I often feel an internal thrill, and it doesn't have to be just on the podium. For instance when I look out of the window of my office in the Rudolfinum and see Hradčany lit up by the sun, or when I'm walking down a street that appeals to me, I'm usually moved too.

A recently broadcast television portrait of you was called "Between Heaven and Earth". Why?

You know, when I stand in front of an orchestra I often genuinely feel as if I were between heaven and earth. At that moment I'm not even aware of standing on a podium; it's as if I am vanishing somewhere, internally dissolving into the space. What is flowing between my hands is just music. And it is as if I am forming the symphony with these hands and trying to be spiritually as close as possible to the composer who wrote it. I converse with it. At that moment it is the only important thing – this dialogue, and the music that flows. I lose the sense of my own personality. I find myself in some other place, most probably up on high. It's hard to describe but it's a fascinating feeling. How do you manage to be alert to the players in front of you?

It's interesting, but I'm perfectly alert to them. If there is a problem, if something happens like an instrument not making an entry on time, it brings me back in a fraction of a second. Otherwise when I'm conducting I usually have my eyes closed and I don't let anything disturb me, but in case of need I'm immediately back on earth, looking at the player and giving him his entry. It's remarkable how quickly the brain can react when it has to, how precisely it works. Before I make a single movement of the baton at least three possible ways of tackling the situation have flown through my head and I have immediately chosen the best. If I didn't know it from experience, I would find it hard to imagine that speed. After all, you normally think much more slowly, at about the same speed as you talk. But when it's necessary, it's much faster. As if the brain knew that now – right now – it's crucial to make a lightning decision and do this or that – and I only have this instant to do it.

It must be very exhausting, but at least the need for lightning reactions isn't too frequent.

No it isn't. I always try to prepare the orchestra as well as possible, so that I won't be disturbed when conducting a concert. Because nothing can compare with those moments on the podium. It's because of them that you do it all, and during those moments you are aware of the meaning and beauty of life.

Some religions promise that after we die we shall go to heaven, but I think we are already in heaven at certain moments. It's just that we don't realise it.

There's a kind of mystical ardour in your approach to music.

It has nothing to do with religion, and it's more a philosophical question. In music there's a great deal of philosophy and subtexts hidden in the notes. For example when you listen to a Brahms slow movement and perceive his spiritual world, your thoughts move onto a quite different dimension. Perhaps if everyone were a musician or at least loved music, people would be better and wouldn't be able to be enemies.

It's a pity not everyone has a capacity for it. Yes it's a pity. There might be fewer wars.

I truly believe in music. When I am preparing for a concert I spend a lot of time by myself, with just the score. There's nobody in the room but me, the notes and the composer. And the point is for me to make contact with him. Sometimes I'm afraid of wasting the chance, messing up that right moment, that possibility of connection. I've had the privilege of conducting so much beautiful music and so many brilliant orchestras, and meet-

she said, that I'm sure you could compose as well. But I've never composed music and I never shall. I can't write a single note, I'm incapable of creating on paper. I have a talent for picking up a score, opening it and getting inside the composer through the music I read there, and for saying something about it to the musicians I conduct and the public we convey the music to. Maybe I have an ability to get to the heart of a composition.

You have an unusually high-profile "media image" here. Not many people are the subject of a feature documentary only a few months after taking on the leadership of a cultural institution.

And I should add that Czech Television has broadcast not just the documentary, but also a New Year evening programme and my inauguration concert in October. Of course I'm very satisfied, who wouldn't be? I'm actually used to contact with the media, since apart from music and organisational questions associated with conducting orchestras it has always been part of my work.

So it's a professional necessity for you.

Not at all, it's a professional pleasure! One of the reasons for my media success is probably that I don't meet journalists just to exploit them, but treat them as partners and friends. When I meet a pleasant journalist, I find it delightful, and almost have the same sense of pleasure as I get from conducting.

Were you satisfied with the documentary about yourself?

Very much, but then I worked very hard on it myself too. I arranged with the director Mudra that I would give him as much time as

## zdeněk málal:

AGÁTA PILÁTOVÁ

ing so many beautiful people, who have enriched my life, that if I died tomorrow my life would still have been fulfilled. I don't regret anything, not a minute of it. And since music is my job, I can live for that moment. I respect the past and I have to plan the future, but what is important for me is what is here and now. That moment on the podium. Not everyone has that kind of luck. It's luck, but to meet it and feel it you have to do a lot for it. Have you ever thought of writing music yourself?

Many people have asked me that, most recently the violin virtuoso Ida Händel during a tour of Japan. You conduct so beautifully,

he needed. In the end he shot 28 hours worth of material, and we spent further long hours discussing the concept and selection. I contributed to the result, and I have to praise it.

You are very open in the film, and reveal a lot about your temperament and your tastes, for example your fondness for cars.

And why not? Cars are another passion of mine, after all, and there was a time I even had four cadillacs at once. It's true that some friends told my wife that I shouldn't say that on television, because envy is so rife in the Czech Republic, but I bought those cars with my own money, which I earned outside the country, and so – so what? The passage



# **the hardest thing is to make the right decision at the right time**

Zdeněk Mácal (b. 1936) – today a citizen of the United States – studied at the Brno Conservatoire and the Janáček Academy of Music in his native Brno. He first began to make a name for himself when he won two important music competitions: the International Conducting Competition in Besancon in 1965 and the Dmitri Mitropoulos Competition in New York in 1966, whose jury was chaired by Leonard Bernstein. After the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, Zdeněk Mácal emigrated and immediately became involved in the international music scene. From the 2003–2004 season, he is Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic.





about the cars is there chiefly because it expresses my pleasure in large and small things, for example in the fact that I can earn enough for a better new car. In Germany when they commented on my BMW that every first violinist has the same, I reacted like a true Czech – I'll show you I can afford a better one. It's not snobbery, more a desire to prove something to oneself, maybe to improve one's own opinion of oneself. Have you managed to promote Czech music on the international concert scene? How prominently has it featured among your achievements?

I have always presented Czech music and shall do so in the future. I'm quite proud of the fact that with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra I recorded all the Dvořák symphonies and symphonic poems, and in New Jersey I continued by recording his great choral compositions: *Saint Ludmila*, the *Requiem* and the *Stabat Mater*. There I had an outstanding choir to hand, one of the best in America. And so I published almost the whole symphonic and choral works of Antonín Dvořák on CD with two American orchestras, and so I may say that years ago I already had this year's Czech musical jubilee year ending in "four" in mind. Apart from that, regardless of any anniversary I did a festival of Czech music in New Jersey that lasted three weeks, and there we played not just Dvořák, but other Czech composers as well. Now a similar project is underway with the Czech Philharmonic, and within the year we should have recordings of all the Dvořák symphonies.

How did music managers receive your Czech projects? Didn't they have a tendency to try to push through their own, more commercial requirements for a programme?

I always put my concert programmes together myself. I was tough enough to get what I wanted. These days I probably behave in a more gentlemanly way, but at thirty I was a wild man, and perhaps a little arrogant too, since after all I had won important conducting competitions in Besancon and New York, been asked to conduct the Czech Philharmonic... my career looked promising. And so I didn't lack self-confidence, and I made the fact plain.

But then you went into exile and at first people abroad didn't know much about you. I was lucky in that one of the first orchestras that asked me to conduct after I left Czechoslovakia was the Berlin Philharmonic, the best orchestra in Germany, where many of my colleagues never get an engagement in their lives. It turned out well, the reviews were terrific, and so from the beginning I had no problems finding work. Also I wasn't dependent on anyone financially, and so I could insist on the repertoire I wanted. In fact I've never conducted anything against my will. True, there was a risk that when I rejected something, they could have told me to take a walk, but luckily no one ever said anything like that. In fact, when I refused something, they often met my demands or even doubled my fee.

For the programme of your first concert with the Czech Philharmonic as its principal conductor last autumn you chose Novák's *Slovácko Suite* and Gustav Mahler's *5th Symphony*. Why these pieces? In recent years the *Slovácko Suite* has been performed only rarely, and the Philharmonic hasn't had it in repertoire for ages. Usually only parts of it are played, but I think it worth hearing as a whole. It is beautiful music.

And Mahler?

He has always been close to my heart, and one reason is certainly that he was a Czech and it shows in his music. He came from the same region as I do. He was born only fifty kilometres from my native Brno, in Kalište, and then in Jihlava he lived near the barracks. The sounds of military music must have stayed in his subconscious and they echo in his own music. Once I told Leonard Bernstein about it, since before then he hadn't known why there was so much brass in Mahler's music. But the main thing is that Mahler's music is terribly strong; it really eats up listeners and performers, and sometimes the pressure is very hard to take. Just imagine how emotionally and physically demanding it must have been for the composer! It attracts me because it is consuming, and I am working on it all the time. But I don't know how long I shall be able to keep going. Sometimes I feel extremely exhausted by it. The music is a huge physical and mental burden. It has so many contrasts, such emotional charge and such beauty that it could even kill you. And he had to live with it. So now we have to struggle with it over and over again.

Do you think Mahler would like the performances of his symphonies today?

I believe he would. I'm sure that during his lifetime he could never have heard the sort of performances we have today. Although there were many outstanding orchestras in his day, I think most of them were unable to meet the technical demands he places on musicians. After all, even today with the wonderful standard of symphony orchestras we have to work hard on his pieces, despite the fact that orchestras have most of Mahler's symphonies in their repertoire and so when the Czech Philharmonic, for example, starts rehearsals, the musicians all know the parts and I can immediately start on interpretation. In Mahler's time the orchestras first had to learn the notes. Gustav Mahler once said that he felt like a foreigner everywhere. You too have spent years living in different parts of the world, but I'll put the question in a different way: where do you feel at home?

It's hard to answer that. I have been almost everywhere in the world, and there are many places that have given me brilliant memories, experiences and also moments when I had the feeling of being at home. Probably the truth is that I feel at home wherever I happen to feel good. I adore New York, and I love Paris. For a long time I have felt good in Paris. But to your question about home I have to reply that I'm at home everywhere and nowhere. I could easily mention one or two specific places, but it wouldn't be the whole truth. And I don't like saying things that are not true.

On the other hand, when you became principal conductor of the Czech Philharmonic you said, "The wheel is coming full circle, I am coming back". Do you have any plans to settle permanently in Prague?

It's not a simple decision. Here in the hotel

I have all the comfort I need, perfect service and the Philharmonic around the corner. My wife has been on the lookout for accommodation in Prague, but why should I have to go to and from the Rudolfinum in a taxi or tram and traipse back again whenever I forget something in my office? All our lives we've had at least two residences. I still have a place in Switzerland and another in America. We are thinking about getting a third, and it's not to be ruled out. When we were twenty years younger it was easier to take care of places. In any case I think that a "permanent residence" isn't the most fundamental thing. When they ring me from the Rudolfinum because of some problem it's not important whether I sort it out on the phone from Lucerne or from Florida. The main point is that they can always reliably find me. Today where I live isn't an issue as far as running an orchestra is concerned.

If you could put together a concert of your favourite pieces, how would it be?

Last October I would have said Novák's *Slovácko Suite* and Mahler's *Fifth*. Now it would be Martinů and Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*, a month later something else again. Because I'm always completely captivated by what I'm actually doing.

Does the Czech music public differ in any ways from audiences elsewhere?

I wouldn't want to make distinctions. If a public is different, better or worse, then it's usually my fault. I look for the responsibility in myself, just as I do when assessing the performance of an orchestra. If it doesn't play well, I never blame the musicians, I blame myself. It is my task to prepare the orchestra so that the concert is good.

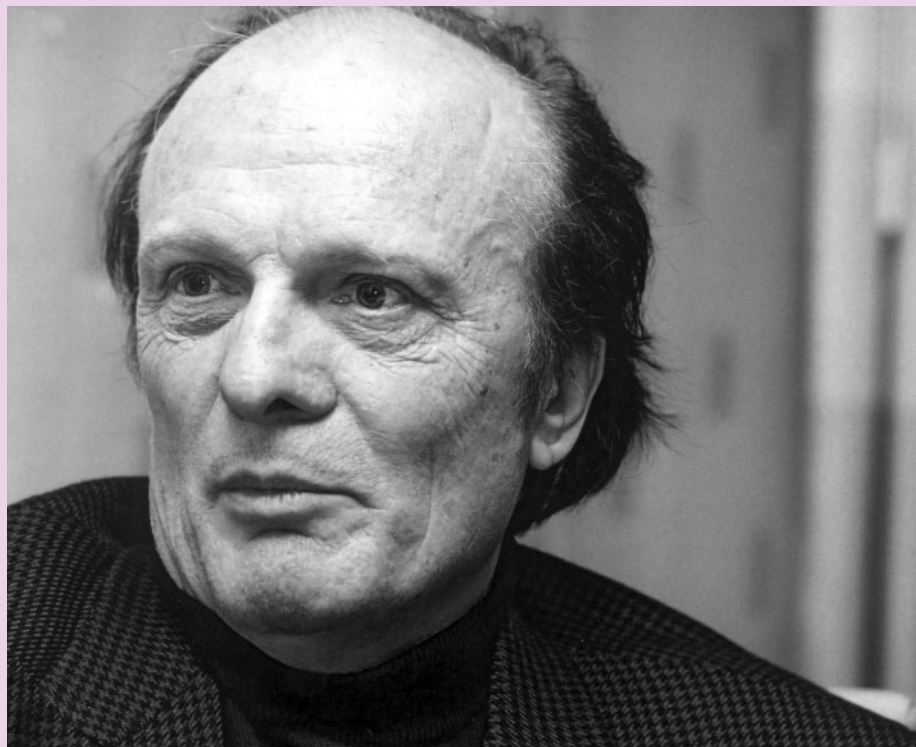
Music publishers complain that the market in sound recordings is in decline. What is your experience?

I can't really judge how well CDs sell in the Czech Republic, but I think that there isn't a sufficient range available, and we lack the core repertoire of Czech music. Novák, Suk, Fibich and others are very poorly represented. When I went to the shop in Můstek that I was told was the biggest in Prague, I found that the classical music department was relatively small and poor, and when I asked about Suk, they scarcely knew how to spell the name.

Is the market supply better elsewhere?

Yes, and more flexible. For example my October Mahler concert in Prague was recorded by a Japanese company and when I was touring Japan with the Philharmonic in November, they were already selling the CD there. They had brought it out in a month! After every concert there was a queue of people wanting their CDs signed. When the musicians had changed clothes and were long gone I was still signing and signing...

Is Czech music still highly rated in Japan? Yes, they love Dvořák most of all, but they also respond warmly to music that isn't well-known there. For example we played *In the Tatra*s by Vítězslav Novák, and Janáček's *Symphonietta*. This year we shall be going for a three-day tour of Japan with the



Prague Philharmonic Choir and apart from Dvořák's symphonies we shall be presenting his *Stabat Mater* and Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*.

Why did you actually leave Czechoslovakia?

The communists were hardly preventing you from living and making music. In classical music and in fact in classical music alone, you could do what you wanted, couldn't you? You aren't entirely right. Above all, the external conditions of a totalitarian system have unpleasant effects on a person's life. It prevents him breathing freely, doing what he would like, going where he wants or where he is invited. How many times I had to go to Pragoconcert and have some endlessly humiliating debate about whether my wife could come too on some tour or other, whether I wasn't getting too many invitations to the west and neglecting the Soviet Union and so on!

But with a little skill you could get around all that, couldn't you?

Except that all that was only one side of things, the external side. Then there were more complicated inner questions. Certainly, I could have thought what I liked and told the authorities what they wanted to hear, and in some situations I could have kept quiet – although I had always been accustomed to saying what I thought, I could have made compromises. But you need to be clean in your own eyes. And there was always the danger that if I was quiet too often, if they even managed to force me to pay them tribute, I would lose my identity. I used to imagine my life in the form of a pyramid in which there were many rooms. Gradually I would get the keys for them, mount higher and open those doors. But what if one day I didn't deserve the keys to the highest rooms? In

that case I would no longer have the right, or even worse, I would no longer have the capacity to get to the essence of Mozart, Beethoven or Dvořák's music. The last chamber would close in front of me forever.

If you had stayed, would the highest rooms have been locked to you?

Exactly. It would always have been possible to fix things somehow, to stay polite, to say "yes yes Comrade Minister", to suit Pragoconcert, while inwardly telling them where they could stuff themselves. Only this sort of spiritual prostitution is only possible for a week or so. If I had done it for years, I would be frightened that I no longer knew the difference between what I was saying to keep up appearances and what I really thought, who I really was. Some people can live like that, but for me as an artist it's a critical matter, because I always long to open the next door. It's the meaning of my life.

I want to leave this world with a feeling of satisfaction and tranquillity. They say that in your last moments the whole of your life passes before your eyes like a speeded up film. At that moment I wouldn't want to have a feeling of frustration, because if something completely bad turned up on that film, I would know there was no more time to put it right. And that is hell.

Probably many people left precisely because they were afraid of losing their identity.

Perhaps. We can get a lot of information and treat it in one way or another, but everyone has to decide for himself. Human beings have free will, the possibility of choice. And making the right decision – it's the hardest thing in the world.





# czech orchestras

The oldest still existing orchestras in the Czech Lands are the spa orchestras (Teplice from 1831, Karlovy Vary from 1835). At the time when its orchestra was founded, Teplice was known as “the salon of Europe” and many leading cultural figures visited the resort (including Goethe, Beethoven, Wagner, Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, and Smetana). At the end of the century the Teplice Orchestra was already presenting symphonic cycles on a regular basis. Some of its concerts were conducted by Eugen d’Albert, for example, or Richard Strauss. The Karlovy Vary Orchestra

performed Dvořák’s *“New World” Symphony* in the Post Court in 1894, a year after it was formed. The heyday of this orchestra was during the period when it was directed by R. Manžera (1911–1941), and worked with Richard Strauss and Pablo Casals, for example. In Prague, Smetana and the orchestra of the Provisional Theatre introduced public philharmonic concerts from 1896. The Czech Philharmonic, the most important Prague and Czech orchestra, appeared before the public for the first time on the 4th of January

1896 with a gala concert conducted by Antonín Dvořák. G. Mahler, E. Grieg, S. Rachmaninov, O. Nedbal and others soon began to work with the new orchestra. Leading figures who have directed the orchestra include Václav Talich, Rafael Kubelík, after the 2nd World War Karel Ančerl, after his departure for Canada (1969) Václav Neumann, from 1990 Jiří Bělohlávek, later Gerd Albrecht, Vladimír Ashkenazy and currently Zdeněk Mácal. The history of the Brno symphony orchestra goes right back to the plans of the young Leoš Janáček, and later his pupil





LENKA DOHNALOVÁ

B. Bakala, whose Brno Radio Orchestra in 1956 created the basis for what today is the Brno State Philharmonic. The second important Prague orchestra, founded after the Czech Philharmonic, is the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra (founded in 1926): Its main function was and remains to record Czech (and contemporary) music. This has always made the orchestra a body with interesting and adventurous programmes and important guest musicians. S. Prokofjev, O. Respighi, A. Honegger, A. Khachaturian, and K. Penderecki have all

presented their music with the Radio Symphony Orchestra. The FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra was formed in the autumn of 1934. Its founder R. Pekárek defined his goals with the words Film-Opera-Koncert (i.e. FOK). In the 1930s the orchestra recorded music for the majority of Czech films. Its standards were built up particularly by the conductor V. Smetáček, who headed it for 30 years from 1942. In 2001 S. Baudo, who has worked with Czech orchestras for many years, was appointed its principal conductor. Socialist Czechoslovakia had a policy of developing and maintaining the network of so-called state orchestras in such a way that every region would have at least one professional philharmonic. This cultural network, financed by the state, operated for the whole period of the socialist regime up to 1989. The biggest regional orchestras are the Janáček Philharmonic in Ostrava (from 1954, by the transformation of a radio orchestra) and the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic (founded in 1946 as the Symphony Orchestra of the Bata State Concern). The orchestras all had relatively balanced professional quality and a good core repertoire, although it tended to be very traditional.

There was no significant difference in standards between the professional musical culture of the centre (or centres, i.e. Prague, Brno and Ostrava) and the provinces. This remains the case and is definitely a positive phenomenon. A major problem under the communists, however, and one that has not yet been overcome today, was continuous slight underfunding of the orchestras, which caused problems with supply of instruments, copyright payments, and sometimes with getting hold of new scores and parts. These factors were and are the main reason why unusual interesting pieces are sometimes excluded or dropped from orchestral programmes. Ideological interference related only to a number of so-called "non-recommended" composers of Czech contemporary music, and in fact as far as possible the state required a ten-percent representation of contemporary repertoire in overall orchestral programme planning. Regional orchestras with a particularly striking profile in this period were the Pardubice Chamber Philharmonic led by conductor Libor Pešek in 1970–77 (currently by Douglas Bostock from Great Britain), The Brno State Philharmonic, directed at various times by B. Bakala, O. Trhlík, J. Bělohlávek, P. Vronský, A. Cecca-



to, and from 2002 by P. Altrichter) or the Ostrava Janáček Philharmonic. After 1990 there was major reform in cultural administration. The orchestras (apart from the radio orchestras and Czech Philharmonic) were taken under municipal authorities, a move that has aroused fears for their continued survival. As it has turned out, the most endangered orchestras are the oldest, i.e. the spa orchestras. Since 1990 the orchestra in Poděbrady has ceased to exist, and the Karlovy Vary orchestra has very serious problems. On the other hand, a number of new private orchestras have been formed. The most important include the Prague Chamber Philharmonic (from 1994) set up by the former head of the Brno State Philharmonic and then the Czech Philharmonic, Jiří Bělohlávek. Orchestras with a core of permanent employees and regular concerts are still partially subsidised by the state through a special programme of support but most of the costs are borne by the promoters, – municipalities, with consideration now being given to the idea of support from the newly established regional authorities as part of multi-source funding. In comparison with the situation abroad, the orchestras are able to cover a relatively substantial proportion of their costs from their own earnings (20% or in exceptional cases 30%), and concert attendance is still high, partly because ticket prices remain compara-

ble with cinema tickets, except in the case of the Prague orchestras. A number of new agency orchestras have been formed, which essentially work on commission (specifically recordings, foreign tours, festivals) under a permanent name but without permanent employees. Most of them are recruited from the players in stable orchestras or members of chamber groups. This activity, motivated primarily by the relatively low pay among players, on the one hand cultivates their skills and abilities, but on the other is drawing off the creative potential of the permanent orchestras. It can also create a misleading impression for the unwary, for example in figures that show an apparent striking rise in the number of professional symphony and chamber orchestras in the Czech Republic since 1990 (up to around 45). In comparison with the EU, the situation here is also exceptional in that even top bodies such as the Czech Philharmonic or the Prague FOK Symphony Orchestra are made up of employees of a single nationality. Charles Mackerras regards this as an influential factor for the characteristic interpretation particularly of national music. The expectation that there would be major changes in overall programming was not fulfilled, for various reasons. Funding and market pressures are leading to further limitation of the classic repertoire and many bodies have abolished the independent post of “dra-

maturge” – programme director. Performance of contemporary music remains exceptional, even of the names that were earlier politically non-recommended (Kabeláč, Kapr, Kopelent, Fišer and others.). What is decisive is once again the question of the playability of pieces and their accessibility to audiences, and the availability and cost of scores and parts. Thanks to the state grant system the number of festivals has risen, however, and festivals are the traditional terrain for greater adventurousness in programmes. Here it becomes clear that if presentation of new music is properly thought out and promoted with verve by high-profile musicians, there are no a priori problematic pieces. This is demonstrated, for example, by the growing interest in contemporary music in the Ostrava Janáček Philharmonic thanks to the composer P. Kotík, who lives in the USA but has started International Composing Courses in New Music here (the orchestra rehearses and plays the compositions at the end of the courses), the rise in the standards of performance and repertoire of the Hradec Králové Orchestra under the leadership of conductor O. Kukul or the recent outstanding performances and imaginative programming in the case of the Czech Philharmonic that are associated with the new principal conductor Z. Mácal.







# miroslav pudlák – balancing on the edge of kitsch

TEREZA HAVELKOVÁ

**Miroslav Pudlak studied composition at Prague Conservatory and musicology in Charles University, Prague and Université Paris VIII. He was a founder and artistic director of contemporary music ensemble Agon (1985 - 1990). From 1995 - 1996 Pudlák has been active at California and Oregon universities as visiting composer and lecturer. He teaches music theory at the Academy of Performing Arts (AMU) in Prague. He is a conductor of a contemporary music ensemble Mond-schein. His music has been performed in contemporary music festivals and concerts in the US, England, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Poland, Finland, Luxembourg, Ukraine, Mongolia and France and recorded on CDs by Arta Records label. He is also director of Czech Music Information Centre.**



**For many people your name is still associated with the Agon Ensemble. When did you actually leave the ensemble and why? Do you sometimes regret it?**

I was closely linked with Agon between 1985 and 1990. Then I left for a year's fellowship in France and it somehow became clear that the group could work even without me. When Kamil Doležal later left Agon too, we together founded a smaller group (Mondschein — today MoEns), because it suited us, the way you can get more done in a smaller group. As far as Agon in the Nineties is concerned, I'm sorry that it didn't do more for Czech contemporary music abroad, which it could have done, given its popularity. Instead it became a narrowly specialised ensemble dedicated to its own compositions.

**In contrast to the old Agon programmes the MoEns repertoire selections gives the impression of being “toned down”, maybe to the point of compromise. Do you feel that you’ve had your corners smoothed over? Or has your approach to new music changed?**

The MoEns line in programmes isn't what the group is really all about. You can build publicity on effective choice of repertoire, but not the musical reputation of the ensemble. Music today is very diverse and you can learn something from anything. I wouldn't see a loss of focus in that, but more curiosity and open-mindedness.

**Together with Michal Nežtek you have formed the group WNP (Why Not Pat-terns). Although you play from written music and most of the group's pieces are entirely composed, it looks as if you are trying more for a rock atmosphere than for contemporary “serious”. Or am I mistaken?**

In WNP we are compensating for what's lacking in serious concert music. Offbeat rhythms and a certain wildness of expression. But despite ourselves we keep on writing over-complicated knotty pieces for it. And so it's not for rockers, and it's not really for “serious” people either. It's for collectors of curiosities.

**Recently your chamber opera *Ve stínu klobásy* (In the Shadow of**

**a Sausage) was premiered, and in May another of your operas, *Sasíci v Čechách* (Saxons in Bohemia) will be staged in the Estates Theatre as part of the Banging on the Iron Curtain opera cycle. Where did this sudden and evidently intense interest in opera come from? When did opera start to tempt you? What attracts you to it?**

The impulse was entirely from the outside, but when it came, I took to it pretty gratefully. Opera is an absurd world where people sing instead of speaking. That in itself is so charmingly comic to the point of embarrassment that you absolutely have to try it. Opera is something you can't bear or fall in love with. At the moment I'm going through the second phase

**Have you any views on what contemporary opera ought to cut out and what it should try and make work for audiences who are sceptical about the classical opera repertoire?**

There is a great deal of interest in music drama among composers today. Contemporary music is desperately trying to latch on to any kind of art that it can parasite on. But opera is a special case. It is mainly theatre, but the composer believes that the music is surely the main thing (the people staging it put him or her right on that one!). Composers invest great ambitions in writing operas, even though the chance of getting a modern opera into ordinary opera repertoire is tiny. At

the moment the only exceptions are American Minimalist operas, that have the standard level of success. Otherwise there's no recipe, everyone tries something slightly different and we shall see what takes off. I welcome every experiment. The only things I no longer enjoy are precisely those Minimalist operas and everything that veers towards musical (that has enough space elsewhere). Personally, I am tempted by the idea of taking all that historic baggage opera brings with it, from belcanto mannerisms to the various orchestral clichés, and getting them involved in the game. After all, there is no point in pretending that you can avoid them when all around us are those plush and gilded boxes and everything is reminiscent of *The Bartered Bride* and *Rusalka*. That's what I would do if writing for large-scale theatre. Chamber opera is a different matter, of course. There you already have more freedom and a chance for a much more progressive approach.

**You write music that is in my view distinctive for its peculiar poetic timelessness and evokes the impression of even calm to the point of a sort of melancholy. Are these characteristics that you would see in it as well? What kind of emotion is important when you are creating them? What sort of effect do you want them to have?**

I always try to construct a piece of musical material and then I explore its expressive qualities. In this way I collect supplies of







musical passages with different expressive qualities and then put them together into a sort of narrative. I don't think that music should be forcing the listener into emotions, or ecstasy, but when it manages to create some hypnotising experience of a change in the perception of time, I regard it as having the right sort of effect, the effect music should have.

**To me your music seems not to have changed much since the 1980s, and from an outside view it definitely hasn't changed strikingly or radically. In what ways do you think it has developed, shifted or undergone transformation?**

Earlier I sometimes enjoyed creating empty structures. Today I am in search of more expression and less style. Also at my age now I'm no longer trying to make myself famous, but just to amuse myself. There is more freedom in doing that and ultimately the results are more satisfactory (at least for me).

**Recently at a MoEns concert I was surprised by your virtuoso violin *Encore* – is it just a sideline, or the sign of a real change of direction?**

I have several more pieces like that. Once again it's the conventional baggage of the thing that I enjoy. After all, violin and piano is now such a silly combination that you can only do it in one of two

ways. Either play on altered instruments and with such deformed sounds that almost nobody realises that it's a violin and piano, or stop pretending, and do it with all the frills (with numerous historical citations and clichés). Sometimes my preference is not to do violence to historical instruments like the violin and not to force it into doing something basically different to what it has been suited to doing for centuries. (It's like forcing a good actor to play a role that isn't physically right for him). And when you decide to use an instrument in its characteristic style, then historical consciousness – the music that we know for that instrument – necessarily comes into the equation. You can then play with this consciousness (rather like when a writer makes indirect reference to classical authors). In this respect one of my inspirations is Mauricio Kagel, who brings his own ironic perspective to the whole thing and draws the whole of the 20th century into play.

Recently it has actually seemed to me much more musically courageous to play with conventions and even with kitsch than to play safe and create a piece of atonal or constructivist music what can't be faulted for anything, but that's about all you can say about it. When you work with emotions and expression, you risk more – that it will be embarrassing. But you need to take the risk and stick your neck out.

**You are director of the Music Information Centre that strives to promote contemporary Czech music. Its present**

**state is generally considered very unsatisfactory in this country, at least in circles with a real interest in it. What do you see as the main problems, and how might the situation be improved?**

That's a subject for a whole issue of the magazine. In a nutshell: the problem is the low prestige of new music production in this society, which is a hangover from the former regime, and is reflected in state subsidy policy to this day. This affects the conditions of creating new music and its performance and by extension the level of public interest – it's a vicious circle. Comparisons with the situation abroad turn out very unflatteringly for us. If society is to start realising the importance of this branch of national culture, a great deal will have to change and the state will have to provide systematic aid, otherwise there is no way out. The problem isn't perhaps in the total level of funding, but in its distribution. What we need is a new system of support for composition of new work and its presentation, the reform of music schooling, investment in music infrastructure (construction of modern concert halls, study equipment, purchase of instruments), subsidies to professional ensembles and international festivals of new music, legislative change, encouragement of sponsorship, and a few other such trifles.

# the case for speech melodies,

JONATHAN G. SECORA PEARL

## Janáček and language

Leoš Janáček was a musician, trained in the practice of his era, and entrenched in the traditions of his time and locale. Like most of us, he exhibited both conservative and radical tendencies, and these found form in his music. He was a proud Moravian Czech, a subgroup of a minority. His was a language disdained by many, even his wife's relatives, as suitable only for use with servants.

(Zemanová 2002: 42) Yet to Janáček there was more to the difference between languages than their words and grammar. syntax. The sounds themselves of them contained subtle yet powerful information. And though he was fluent in German, he vehemently preferred the melodies and rhythms of his native tongue.

In the 1880s, the linguist and ethnographer František Bartoš recruited Janáček to assist

him in the field. While compiling a description of regional dialects, Bartoš sought also to preserve the flavor of local culture, in particular folk music and dance. For this he sought the expertise of a musician who could better record the melodies and rhythms they found encountered. But Janáček was not satisfied to merely notate down the music. He became fascinated by the variations he heard in speech. Thus began a love affair, much less controversial than his others, with speech melodies, that lasted a lifetime. In 1906, Janáček published an article in the magazine *Hlídky*, entitled "The Borderline of Speech and Song," (Stědroň 1955: 91; Straková & Drlíková 2003: 346) in which he proposed a dictionary of these melodies of speech, to "preserve the sound of the Czech language for future generations," suggesting that it might contain "melodic phrases for everything which the Czech language is able to express". His focus seemed therefore to be the ability of these speech melodies to carry meaning, beyond the meaning contained in the words themselves. For nearly forty years, Janáček gathered speech melodies from everyday events. He was the consummate eavesdropper.

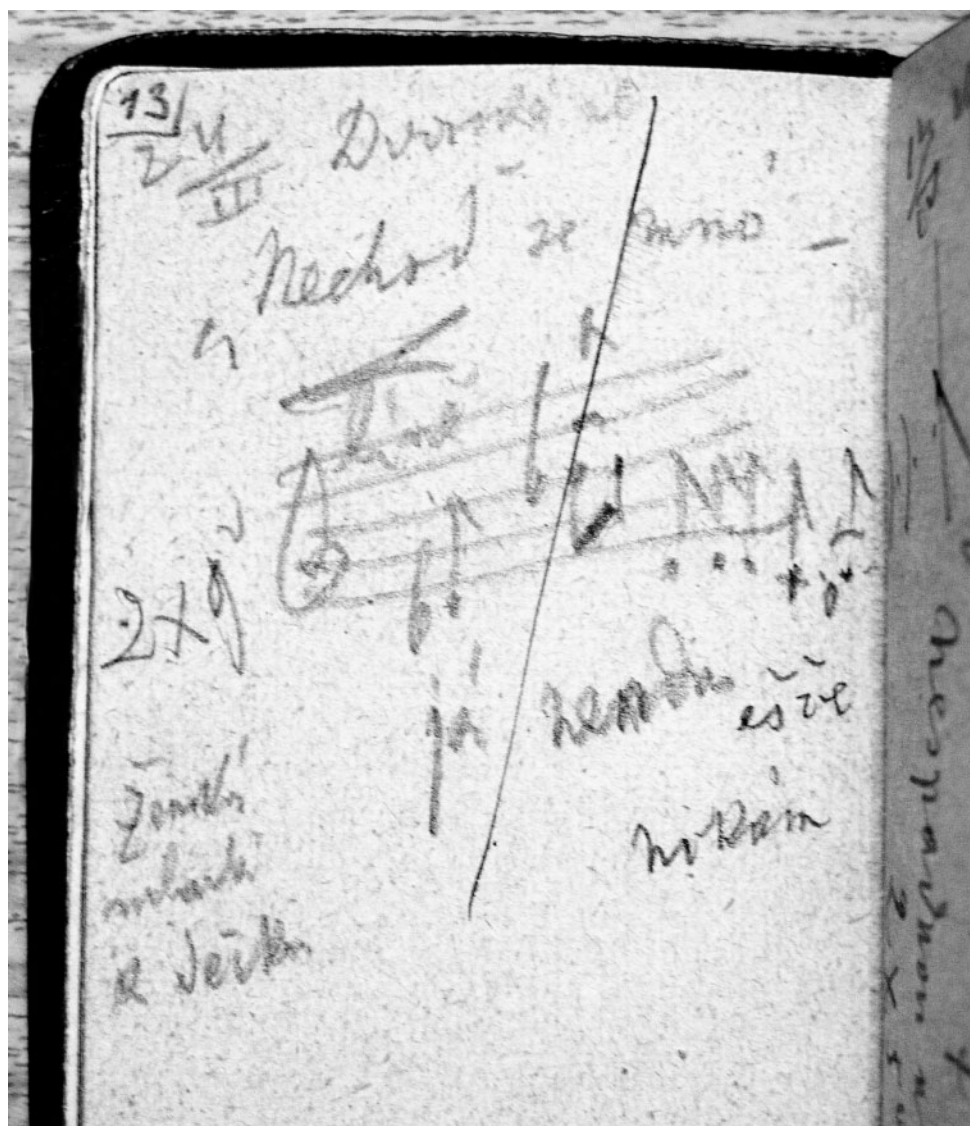
At times this took the form of an obsession. In 1924, he noticed Smetana's daughter at a fruit stand in the spa town of Luhačovice, and proceeded to sketch her as she spoke to the shopkeeper then to the composer himself, hoping to capture a glimmer of the vocal inheritance from her father. He recorded sometimes the most mundane of utterances: "Dobrý den!" (Good day); "Prosím?" (Excuse me?); "Ano." (Yes).

He filled notebook pages with the final utterances of his daughter Olga, as she lay dying, in 1903. As Mirka Zemanová records it in her recent biography:

Janáček notated everything she said; the pages of his notebook which describe her anguish and pain during her last three days are the most heart-rending document imaginable. Eventually she became delirious; Janáček notated her last sighs. (Zemanová 2002: 86)

## Music and language

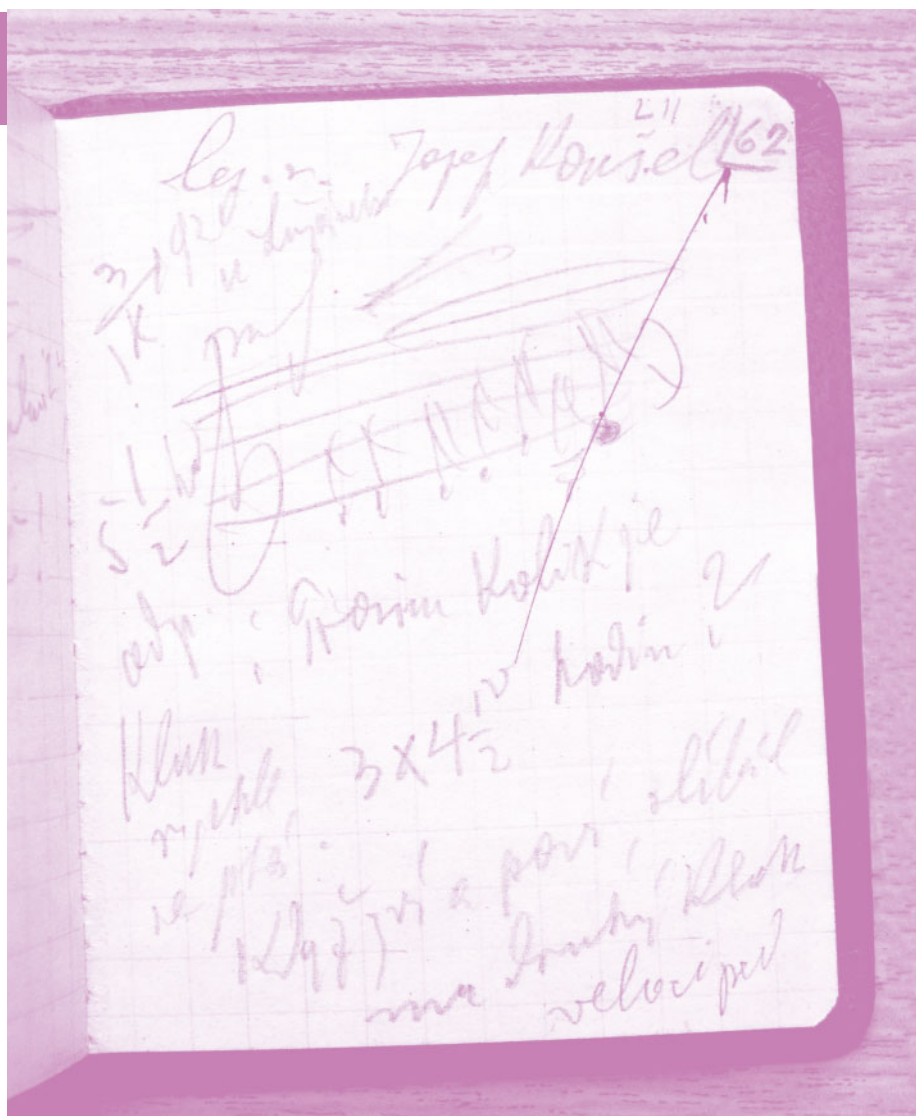
Although this fascination might at times astound us as bordering on neurotic, Janáček





remained philosophical about the enterprise, citing Plato as having considered speech the basis for song. (Zemanová 1989: 49; Straková & Drlíková 2003: 530) Although he well understood the power of language to divide—having memorialized the 1905 bayonet murder of a young laborer, František Pavlík<sup>1</sup>, whose only crime was to sing patriotic songs in support of a Czech-language university in Brno—he saw in the melodies and rhythms of speech, and in the purest of folk music, a sort of universal humanity. And in this, he may not have been so far off. It is well-established that all known human cultures throughout place and time contain spoken language. It is a curiosity that they also contain music. This curiosity grows when we consider that singing is the most ubiquitous form of music. For though instrumental playing is a skill acquired through practice, singing at least initially, like speaking, is one that comes to us by nature, and that we often engage in unconsciously, as any parent who considers their own interactions with an infant can attest. Parents, in particular mothers, throughout the world sing to their babies, as often, perhaps more often, than they talk to them. That, in addition to the well-documented case of infant-directed speech, or motherese as it has been called. Many researchers have argued that these singing behaviors, as well as the sing-songy nature of motherese, contribute substantially to children's later acquisition of language and to their socialization, an implicit understanding of the norms of their own culture. One very strange aspect to this is that speaking and singing are produced in essentially the same fashion, and we use the same auditory mechanisms to perceive and process their inputs. Yet the first is unreflectingly dubbed language and the second music, without any explanation how they differ. There are certain assumptions, by the general public and scholars alike, regarding the differences between music and language, that remain unchallenged, despite their undoubted or likely falsehood. An individual with no less prestige than the psychologist Steven Pinker has written:

*The building blocks of a musical idiom are its inventory of notes—roughly, the different sounds that a musical instrument is*



*designed to emit. The notes are played and heard as discrete events with beginnings and ends and a target pitch or coloring. That sets music apart from most other streams of sound, which slide continuously up or down, such as a howling wind, an engine roar, or the intonation of speech. (Pinker 1997:530)*

The first argument I have with his statement is that instrumental music is not quite so clean in actual performance as theory allows. Pitches are not as absolute as notation implies. A score contains music no more than written language contains a complete description of speech. Just consider the difference between email or letters and carrying on a conversation face-to-face. Surely the nuances of spoken expression are lacking, or they have been replaced by conventions of writing that find no equivalents in speech. The same is true of music. But more importantly, Pinker's description of music, and not uncommonly, fails to accommodate singing, which shares so much with speech, for surely intonation, like music, is more subtle and meaningful than an engine roar.

## Speech prosody

It is quite interesting to note that Janáček's views regarding the effects of prosody on meaning jive quite comfortably with much of today's research in that domain of knowledge. His intention to "preserve the sound of the Czech language for future generations" is an intriguing one because now, a century later, there is still no established practice of studying what might be termed diachronic change in speech prosody. No one has yet developed a means of comparing the changes in intonation that take place over time, from one generation to the next. Janáček's writings and transcriptions from the 1880s and beyond may indeed help provide some foundation for this practice as it develops.

Despite the fact that Janáček's work is little known among linguists, much has been made in the musicological literature, both in his day and in ours, over Janáček's use or non-use of speech melodies in his compositions. But just what were these speech-melodies like, and how does one properly translate between language and music?

Unfortunately, musicians have tended to point a somewhat uncritical eye to the notations themselves, seeing musical notes and little more.

Remarkably unremarkable

Remarkably to me, the melodies themselves are unremarkable from a musical standpoint. But this shouldn't surprise us. Whereas many composers have been known to gather bird-song for instance, because of its beauty, Janáček makes no claim that the speech melodies are musically aesthetic. Rather, it is their ability to express subtleties, to convey hidden attitudes that struck him; as he put it "these speech melodies are windows into peoples' souls." (Zemanová 1989:122; Straková & Drlíková 2003: 616) And it was this that he tried to capture. But he brought with him, in his approach to the melody and rhythm of language, a life's training in music, as well as his desire to develop his own angle on the realism popular in contemporary opera, to find his own voice, one true to his pride in the Czech language. (cf. Katz 2000)

#### Discussion

What we find is not so much a composer's sketch pad, containing ideas for musical development (as for example Dvořák's notebooks in America), but rather a series of anecdotes, each containing an auditory image that goes along with the story. It's as if Janáček sought to remind himself of the scene, in order to capture its drama, using the shorthand most familiar to him, namely music notation. It is interesting to observe his propensity for jotting down such things as the age of the speaker, the time of day, and context of the utterance. These are procedures familiar to those engaged in ethnographic study, but not usually expected of performing musicians. Clearly his intent was that of a director, setting the scene. What must have captured Janáček's ear was an appreciation for the amount of information expressed through the sound of an utterance. He sometimes noted that the speakers' dialect was removed from the location in which they found themselves (as for instance a Hanacký dialect spoken in Prague), yet the cues he must have relied on for such judgments were undoubtedly auditory. The act of classifying the speaker was one of discrimi-

nating one class of people from another, in the same way, though more fine-toothed, as a Czech speaker was divided from a German. There was therefore a social aspect to the procedure. It reveals a certain world-view in which individuals are defined by the language they use and how they use it. Yet, it reveals more than social attitudes and questions of identity. What Janáček's methods bring to the fore are questions of how we construct melody and rhythm from our perceptions. Recall Steven Pinker's comment from above: "notes are played and heard as discrete events". Even assuming he's right on the first count that they are intentionally performed that way, how do we know to perceive them that way? He argued that, in contrast to music, intonation in speech slides continuously up or down. Yet acoustic analysis of music reveals that the discreteness of pitches are not so much a feature of the sounds themselves but appear to be created in our minds. Just as with spoken language, reality presents a great deal of overlap and ambiguity in the auditory signal for music. It's a wonder that we are able to pull out of a chaotic surface organized and meaningful sounds.

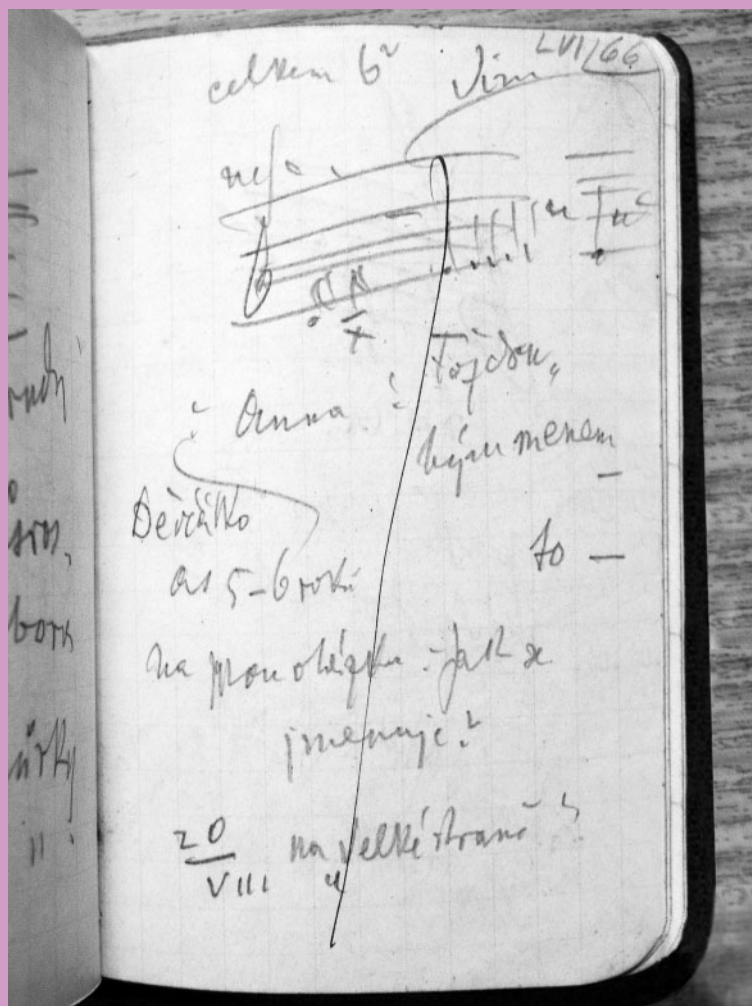
So Janáček's attempts to capture in notation a snapshot of the music of speech was an exercise in abstracting salience. It reflects the trends of notation of any variety, where the richness of lived experience is summed up in a few visual gestures on a page. Early Western music notation for instance lacked specific descriptors for the length of notes. It was only later, as polyphony emerged in earnest and synchrony became more difficult, that musicians decided durations should be specified. In written language, there are a variety of procedures each that codifies different aspects of the spoken language, alphabetic writing giving the most weight to phonological information, and ideographs, like in Chinese, providing more weight to conceptual information. But no system can supply a complete description, nor would we likely be able to grasp one that did. The process of listening (whether it be music, language, or other sounds) is a filtering exercise, through which we abstract relevant bits from a mass of information. It is these bits that we codify in writing. Yet the means through which we determine relevance

remains a mystery at this point.

#### Conclusions

We come full circle from modern assumptions regarding the difference between music and language, through the historic case of Janáček's speech melodies, back to the question of cognitive processing. If Pinker were right, it would be easy enough to distinguish speech from singing, for only the latter would be comprised of discrete pitches. Yet, as we have seen, our friend Leoš Janáček was quite capable of discerning not only discrete pitches but also rhythms in the speech of his contemporaries. Modern linguists engaged in the study of discourse (essentially language-in-context) have found that we are keenly sensitive to variations in tempo, and that as a general rule syllables that begin an utterance are shorter than those that end one. In fact it is in large part these timing cues that signal the end of one speaker's turn and the beginning of the next—just as subtle variations in tempo, which are usually not in the score, cue to an audience that a musical phrase or section is coming to an end. Linguists speak of timing along with what is termed pitch reset, the return to a baseline pitch level (in musical terms a tonic, or more likely akin to the recitation tone of chant melodies, a more middling pitch). (cf. Gardiner 1980: 36) And these features hold across languages (though pitch plays a more subtle role in tonal languages). In discovering these musical aspects of language, and their importance for furthering the art of communication, we find ourselves enmeshed in the confusing ambiguity of speech and song, a netherworld between music and language. While some have attempted to bridge the gap between these domains by examining aspects of structure, comparing the formalities of music with those of language, what I propose, and I'd like to think Janáček would agree, is that more fruit shall be gleaned from examining the sounds themselves, than by assuming beforehand we know how they differ. By splicing the minute details, and uncovering the features that give salience to expressions—both musical and linguistic—we'll do a greater service to human understanding of music and language than has so far been accomplished.





#### Works Cited

Chafe, Wallace. "Punctuation and the Prosody of Written Language," *Written Communication* 5/4 (October 1988): 396–426.

Gardiner, Duncan B. *Intonation and Music: The Semantics of Czech Prosody*. Bloomington, Indiana: Phylsardt Publications, 1980.

Katz, Derek. "A pen filled only with my own passion": *Leoš Janáček and the Grand Operatic Traditions*. [Dissertation]. University of California, Santa Barbara, 2000.

Pinker, Steven. 1997. *How the Mind Works*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Straková, Theodora a Drlíková, Eva, ed. *Leoš Janáček: Literární dílo*. Brno: Editio Janáček, 2003.

Štědroň, Bohumír. *Leoš Janáček: Letters and Reminiscences*. Prague: Artia, 1955.

Zemanová, Mirka, ed. & trans. *Janáček's Uncollected Essays on Music*. 1989. Rizzoli International: New York.

—. *Janáček: a composer's life*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002.

1 His piano work "1. X. 1905: Z ulice" was written as a memorial to the events that culminated in Pavlík's death.

JARMILA PROCHÁZKOVÁ



We are used to seeing Leoš Janáček as a composer who had a highly distinctive and positive attitude to folk culture. Sometimes, however, the influence of folk lore on composers at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries has been exaggerated and we forget that there has always been an inter-relationship, admittedly sometimes closer and sometimes looser, between what is known as serious (classical) music and folk music. The precursors of the so-called avant garde clearly strengthened this relationship and Janáček's contemporaries simply emphasised the trend. – as one example to stand for all we shall mention Vítězslav Novák and his admiring love for Moravian folk songs. Elsewhere in the world we find striking parallels: Maurice Ravel was enchanted by Basque folklore, Béla Bartók made a name as collector, composer and performer, and the most frequently performed part of Igor Stravinsky's legacy is precisely from his folklore period. Some members of Janáček generation seem to have as it were sacri-

ficed their potential careers as composers and chosen the collection of folk songs as their main activity – remarkably, Ludvík Kuba even took this work further than the frontiers of the Bohemian Lands. Where should we place Leoš Janáček in this context? In his early childhood he could not have fully developed a response to folk music since at this stage he had neither time nor space for it. His father was an undoubted authority on music in the church, but it is hard to guess the extent to which the family followed the musical performances of the other inhabitants of Hukvaldy. At eight, Leoš entered the Old Brno Monastery and his main employment there was church music. Perhaps only a holiday visit to South Moravian Vnorovy (Znorovy) to his uncle, the priest Jan Janáček, gave him a chance to encounter live folk music. But in his letters he never mentioned it, any more than he did in his famous feuilleton *Moje děvče z Tater* [My Girl from the Tatras]. The greatest piece of luck for the future composer and folklorist was

his meeting with two Brno figures, Pavel Křížkovský and František Bartoš. Křížkovský, who took the small Leoš under his patronage as a mentor, was the composer of a series of choral works drawing inspiration from the collections of František Sušil. It was under this influence that Janáček later wrote his first choral compositions, for which he found materials in the same source. The young composer had strongly developed musical ambitions of his own, and so he drew inspiration in most cases only from the text, citing the melody only in rare cases. His activities as choirmaster in the Svatopluk Choir (1873–1876) and from 1876 in the Brno Beseda Choir, gave him unique opportunities to introduce his compositions into Brno musical life. Long-standing and repeated conflicts of opinion with members of the Beseda committee culminated in 1888 in his parting company with the biggest Czech music institution. This may be considered one of the key moments in Janáček's musical career. In the scales of destiny, however, this painful loss was abundantly made up for by a meeting that determined the composer's later direction. František Bartoš, first only a colleague and later a superior at the 2nd Old Brno Gymnasium, brought the young hothead to a specific project. It was precisely in 1888 that his attempts to publish a second collection of Moravian folk-songs and dances were coming to fruition. Bartoš, a specialist on dialects, needed an expert to supervise the musical side of the project, and asked his friend to help. Concrete problems with editing the music side of the songs and dances gave Janáček the chance to tackle a theme that he had earlier had the audacity to criticise when others attempted it.

During a holiday stay in Hukvaldy in the summer of 1888 he started to make his own records, to use local informants and seek out folk musicians and singers in the area. Up to 1906, when this activity was institutionalised (see below) he had collected more than three hundred pieces, the most in the Lašsko region (Kozlovce, Petřvald, Kunčice pod Ondřejníkem, Tichá, Kosatka, Mniší), from 1891 also in Slovácko (Moravian Slovakia) localities (Velká nad Veličkou, Strážnice, Lipov, Kostice, Březová), and a few from Silesia, central Wallachia, in the Luhačovice Zálesí and in Slovakia. From the start he saw folksong in the context of



# and creative visions

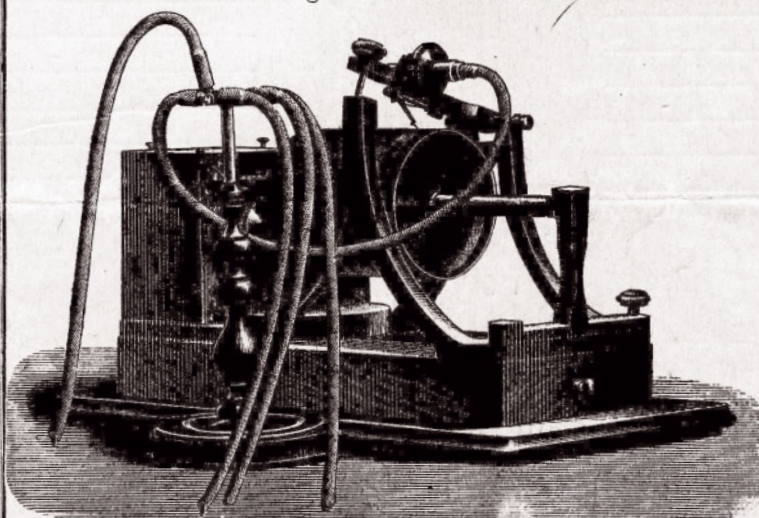
a whole complex of social and psychological questions and organically linked his records of dance songs with elements of choreographic description. He asked questions about the channels by which the phenomena he studied spread, described folk teaching of play on musical instruments that he tried to document in detail and so forth. He immediately created orchestral or piano arrangements of some of his first records of folk-songs. The contrast between these new and powerful musical-social experiences and the petrified concert life of Brno was all to the advantage of the former and the composer's efforts were crowned with substantial success. The ballet *Rákos Rákoczy* made up of Janáček's orchestral arrangements was repeatedly staged at the National Theatre in Prague during the Jubilee Exhibition in 1891. Immediately after this event, Czech cultural circles were asked to prepare for the Czechoslovak Ethnographic Exhibition. Janáček was officially appointed chairman of the Moravian-Silesian committee in April 1894 and after that events in Moravia gathered an unprecedented momentum. During the preparations the composer capitalised on his experience in the terrain and on concert and theatre podiums. The stylisation needed for any kind of performance of the repertoire outside its original environment had its specific needs and principles and Janáček was already very well aware of them. He himself had learned the importance of preparation of the public and the programme when in the Autumn of 1892 he had invited folk musicians from Horňácko to Brno and organised a "Folk Concert", in which he tried to integrate the performances of the folk musicians and the classically trained musicians in the programme. Over several Autumn days in 1895, which were reserved at the exhibition for what was known as the "Moravian Day", representatives of a number of ethnographical areas appeared in Prague and the programme presented the basics of their song and dance repertoire.

In 1902 the Austrian Ministerium für Kultur und Unterricht launched preparations for the *Das Volkslied in Österreich* (Folksong in Austria) festival. As part of the preparations a Working Committee for Czech National Song in Moravia and in Silesia was set up in Brno, and its first meeting took place on the 7th of January 1906 under Janáček's chair-



# Der neue Excelsior-Phonograph.

Neueste Errungenschaft deutscher Industrie.



CA.  $\frac{1}{10}$  NAT. GRÖSSE

## Manufactur mechanischer Musikwerke

und

### Sprechapparate (Phonographen).

manship. From the start the committee concentrated on the collection of folksongs and dances, inviting tried and tested collaborators to co-operate while new ones appeared in response to appeals in the press. In the context of the committee activities, the chairman himself recorded almost three hundred further folksongs and dances from the Brno, Hornácko, Wallachia, Lašsko, and Luhačovice areas, and from Slovácko, Silesia and Slovakia. He set out the principles of collection, which placed on the collectors the highest professional demands, sometimes bordering on the impossible. He appealed for comprehensive documentation of music and all the objects and phenomena that accompanied it – musical instruments, important phases in dance expression, the people who performed, their life environment and so forth. For these purposes he made vain efforts to acquire a camera of his own, but for the most part collaborated with the Brno Rafawel Studio. In 1909 the Working Committee managed to purchase an Edison phonograph, with which sound recordings of folksong largely through the personal efforts of the composer but also thanks to the most productive members of the committee, Františka Kyselková and Hynek Bím. After the death of Otakar Hostinský in 1910 Janáček was delegated on behalf of the Czech side onto the main committee of Folksong in Austria and at its meetings in Vienna he met and had discussions with colleagues from the

other lands involved. Even on this platform he didn't give up his ambitions to push through new ideas and initiatives. He took an uncompromising stand against plans to publish the song material of all the nations only in the German language. In 1917, after agreement with the Czech committee in Prague and in the name of the Moravian-Silesian committee, he strongly rejected the demand of the Austrian leadership that all the collected songs be sent to Vienna. As a result collections that at the time already included ten thousand items remained on our territory and became the basis for the work of the new State Institute for Folk Song. In 1919 the composer became the chairman of the Moravian-Silesian working committee and the vice-chairman of the main committee in this new institute. He continued in his academic and publication activities and once again proved of great assistance on the committees with his experienced advice on methodology and organisation. He also acted as an intermediary for Béla Bartók, when he reported on the possibility of taking over his collection of Slovak songs (1921) or on a proposal for further collaboration (1925). As notes in the composer's diary show, folksong and the need to publish the results of the collecting activities of the folklore institutes was a theme of his conversation with President T. G. Masaryk, when he was invited to the castle for afternoon tea on the 3rd of

March 1927. According to the record, on this occasion he had a first and last chance of several minutes personal contact with the legend who was the moral and intellectual idol of his whole generation. In 1928 Janáček was still making remarkable efforts in the interests of the edition prepared for publication. At the beginning of the year he realistically pondered the lukewarm approach of the main committee of the State Institute for Folksong, in which Zdeněk Nejedlý in particular (later a notorious culture supremo under the communists) was the embodiment of rancour towards the submitted work of the Moravian side, and decided for an individual strategy. In February 1928 he involved the Brno MP Jaroslav Stránský in the issue, and thanks to him gained the ear of the Minister of Education Milan Hodža and subsequently funding as well. In this article we have outlined the key and characteristic features of Janáček's attitude to folklore. It is a close relationship not only in the light of his distinctive musical treatment of folk inspiration in opera and a series of orchestral and chamber works. What is remarkable is the breadth of the composer's interest, revealing an unusual personal passion and commitment. He himself went through various different stages and forms of reflection on folk culture, which may be summarised in the following points: – basic research and recording of folk songs and dances in the field,

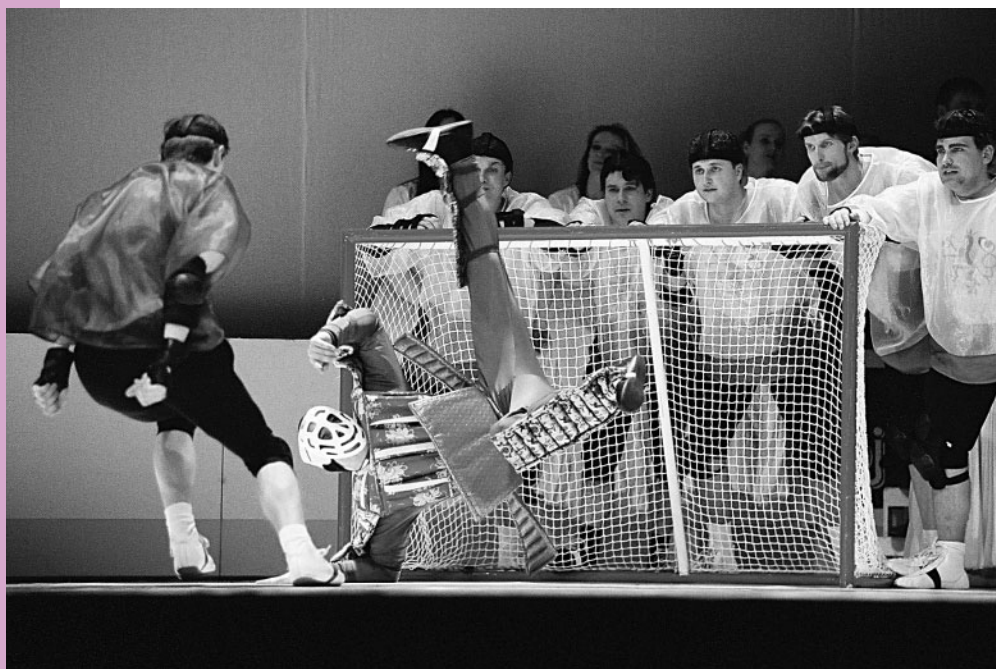


- the tackling of methodological questions of recording musical form,
- editing of the musical side of the songs and commentary on the music in printed collections,
- organisation of folklore activities including programme design and management,
- his own arrangement and composing activity,
- organisation of collection on a large territory,
- pushing through and applying the most modern recording methods,
- scientific treatment of the results of these activities, extensive publication activity,
- constructive projects for domestic and supranational organisations.

Ironically his crowning work of musical folklore was to be posthumous, since publication of the collection of Moravian love songs started two years after the composer's death. Even today, when a similar project is being pursued in the framework of the grant system, it still seems impossible for us to cope with the huge scale of Janáček's legacy. There are simply not funds available for the prepared three-volume critical edition of Janáček's records of folksongs and dances accompanied by extensive photographic materials, sketches and commentaries. But this is a theme that does not deserve so depressing a postscript. Let us therefore at least hint at the possibilities of a positive updating of a great heritage. Today we can follow with delight and of course varying levels of sympathy the work of performers of various different genres and age groups for whom folk music remains attractive for its multiple layers of meaning, musical value and authenticity. The credo that Janáček expressed in 1922 in his lecture *On Folksong*, which is often remembered by his heirs, is one that remains attractive and capable of interpretation in many different ways: Do not overvalue – do not undervalue – get to know.

*Jarmila Procházková works at the Ethnological Institute of Czech Academy of Sciences, Brno centre. She wrote her dissertation on the theme and has published a number of academic articles.*

## gesamtkunstwerk on ice



"I've got some quite big opera plans as well" – That was how Martin Smolka ended an interview with us two years ago (Czech Music 12/2001), but nobody could have dreamed just what sort of plans they were. It was not until about six months ago that the opera, already in the final stages of preparation, became a sensational topic provoking all kinds of speculation. The dailies and weeklies all carried reports, although these rarely mentioned the name of the composer let alone the kind of music that could be expected. With all the press massage all sorts of questions were raised that couldn't really be answered until the premiere.

It is a piece in which the rules of opera are combined with the rules of ice hockey, and both are broken. Each third has a different form. The first third is reminiscent of a rondo, with preparations for the arrival of the hockey god "Hašan" [Dominik Hašek – the biggest Czech hockey star] against the background of the hectic rush of the dressing room and gym. The second is divided into three matches with the USA, Canada and Russia respectively, each of them narrated in a different way. The most notable is the semi-final with Canada, with only the extra time presented and the assaults on the goal becoming the impulses for variously conceived combats (danced and sung). The last third of the opera is the Olympic ceremony with an inserted dream about Hašek ascending to the castle as president. The action has a commentator in the form of Milan Hnílčička, a goalkeeper substitute who didn't ever actually get to go on the ice at the Olympics. He himself is the object of commentary by his parents, who sit in front of the TV in the back of the stage throughout the performance.

Anyone who has followed Smolka's output in recent years will discover that several different approaches that have lately crystallised in his work are combined in *Nagano*. There are rhythmically striking passages deriving from Minimalism, but a fondness for bizarre and out-of-tune noises at odds with the purity and rhythmic precision of the American composers (one of the most frequently played of Smolka's pieces – *Euforium* – may serve as a prototype here). The chanting of the fans



and the panting of the players in the gym are a source of inspiration for rhythmic models – Smolka uses these “tunes” to create complex polyrhythmic constructions. They are so interwoven that at a first listening one does not hear the occasional imperfections of orchestral play, and the composer may even have reckoned with a certain imperfection, although in recent years he has been “spoilt” by the frequent performance of his works by top foreign musicians.

The second stylistic approach is almost romantically tranquil – for example in Jágr’s duet with the ice, Hnilička’s scene with a Japanese woman fan or the final departure of the heroes for their homeland. Although this might seem a matter of parody

and mickey-taking, lyricism has been a natural part of Smolka’s expressive repertoire since the 1980 (Slzy [Tears], Hudba hudbička [Music, Sweet Music]) and is to be found in his more recent work as well (Walden). The third element consists of citations or references to various different styles: when the hockey go Hašek is raised up on high we here a distorted fanfare from Also Sprach Zarathustra, and the following Shamanic Dance evokes a coupling of The Rite of Spring and Jesus Christ Superstar. At the defeat of the Russian team a dumka (contemplative elegy) in emerges in tremolo strings, and when Švejk appears on the stage he is accompanied by suggestions of brass band music.

Opera singers are not usually much inclined to horseplay and experiments, but the subject and perhaps the charisma of the authors brought out the playfulness in the soloists. The hockey players really enjoyed their roles and didn’t seem forced or affected, even in the gym scene. Milan Hnilička (Václav Sibera) and the trainer (Luděk Vele) are both excellent, but the other soloists don’t lag behind. The demands placed on them are substantially greater than in some romantic piece and they have to cope as dancers as well as singers. Jan Mikušek’s Dominik Hašek deserves a special mention. The authors interpreted the modern slogan “Hašek is god” in their own way, creating a hybrid of an ancient god from Baroque opera and a Japanese samurai. The slight figure (in contrast to the expansive dimensions of the other players) sings counter tenor Latin declamations and really looks more like help from above than a member of the team. Singing “Coeli coelorum” he goes into combat like David against the huge Goliath of the Canadian striker with his “Hell, go to hell”. Ondřej Havelka was an unknown quantity as a trained but not a practising opera director. This made it all the more of a pleasant surprise to find that he had been able to contribute his own view and many effective ideas to the material by Smolka and Dušek’s. Martin Vraný’s choreography is also a striking element. The engagement of someone from the modern dance sphere was one of many good choices. The combination of break dance, martial arts and modern expressive techniques has the lion’s share particularly in the matches in the second act (Tomáš Veselý, the dance double of Dominik Hašek deserves special praise). Nagano is a spectacle in which there is always something to watch and something to laugh at. Some people argue that this will help audiences to accept music that would otherwise be too complicated for them. Others think it that it draws attention away from the music and so it actually doesn’t matter what sort of music is accompanying the show. In some of the reviews appearing just after the premiere it was suggested that the music keeps in the background of the production, but while there is certainly plenty happening on the stage, in my view the music definitely does not hang back in the wings. Without the music or with different music the whole spectacle would lose its point. It is obvious that all four main authors of the piece must have worked very closely from the start and many of the good ideas derive precisely from the interplay of all the elements. If we want to demonstrate the concept of “gesamtkunstwerk”, Nagano can serve as a good example.

MATĚJ KRATOCHVÍL



VISIT THE FIRST SPECIALISED

# CD SHOP

SPECIAL

exclusively Czech contemporary music

VIRTUAL

<http://www.musica.cz/cdshop>

AND ALSO VERY

REAL

at the Czech Music Information Centre

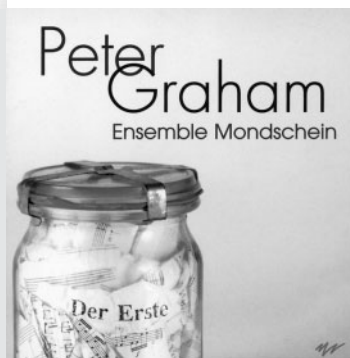
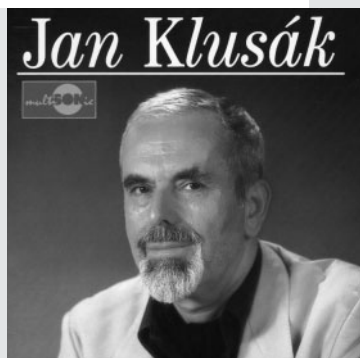
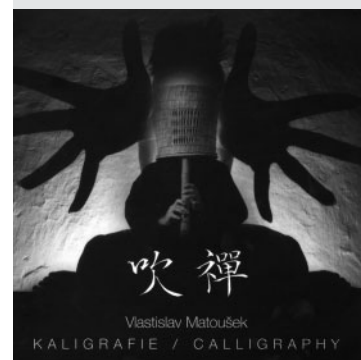
Besední 3, 118 00 Prague 1

Czech Republic

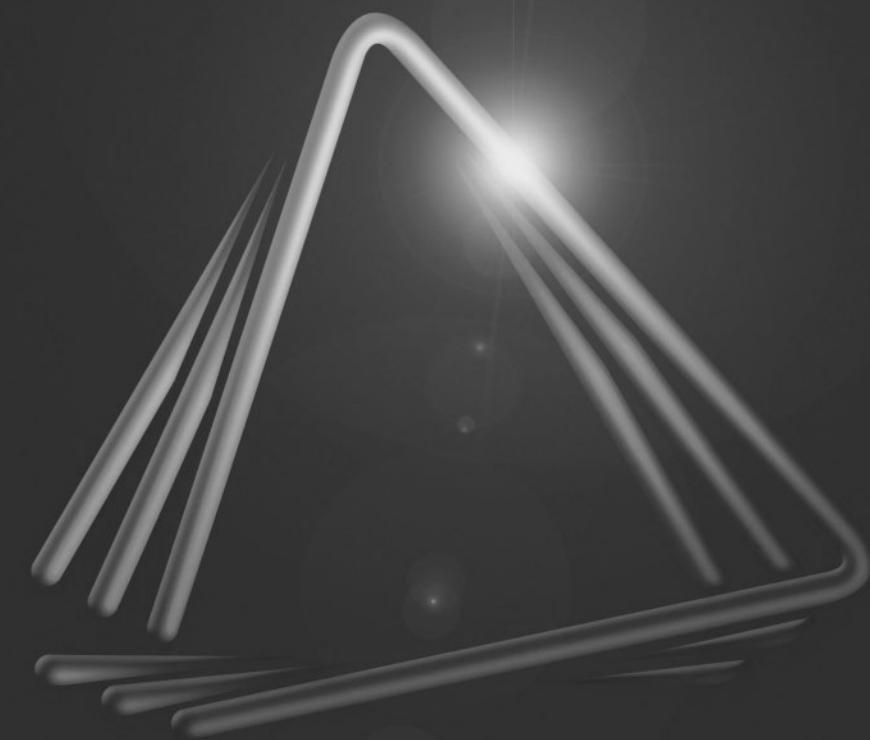
fax: +420 2 5731 7424



MAREK KOPELANT



CZECH MUSIC  
INFORMATION  
CENTRE  
BESEDNÍ 3,  
118 00 PRAGUE 1  
CZECH REPUBLIC



# czech music | 2004

## *An integral part of European culture*

A Czech Ministry of Culture project that aims to support important music anniversaries in 2004, with a special focus on presentation of the Czech Republic during the year of its accession to the European Union

Under the auspice of president of the Czech Republic, Mr. Václav Klaus, and Mrs. Viviane Reding, an European Commission member responsible for education and culture

### Patrons:

Gabriela Beňačková – *soprano*

Petr Eben – *composer*

Sir Charles Mackerras – *conductor, GB*

Jiří Stivín – *flautist*

Josef Suk – *violinist*

Miloš Štědroň – *composer, musicologist*

### INFORMATION CENTRE

Theatre Institute, Celetná 17, 110 00 Prague 1

Phone: + 420 224 809 195, Fax: + 420 224 811 452

Internet: <http://www.czechmusic.org>



Bedřich Smetana



Antonín Dvořák



Leoš Janáček



Josef Suk



Bohuslav Martinů



Jiří Štěrba



Eva Olmerová



Karel Král

In 2004, the Czech Republic celebrates more than sixty anniversaries of outstanding Czech composers, some renowned performers as well as several music organisations. Traditionally, the musical public immediately recognize that years ending in the numeral four are considered to be a “years of Czech music”.

### SELECTIVE VIEW OF ANNIVERSARIES

František Václav MÍČA (1694 - 1744)

Bedřich SMETANA (1824 – 1884)

Leoš JANÁČEK (1854 – 1928)

Antonín DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Bohuslav MARTINŮ (1890 - 1959)

Rafael KUBELÍK (1914 - 1996)

Milada ŠUBRTOVÁ (1924)

Eva OLMEROVÁ (1934 - 1993)

Prague Symphonic Orchestra FOK (1934)

Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra (1954)

### Main partner:



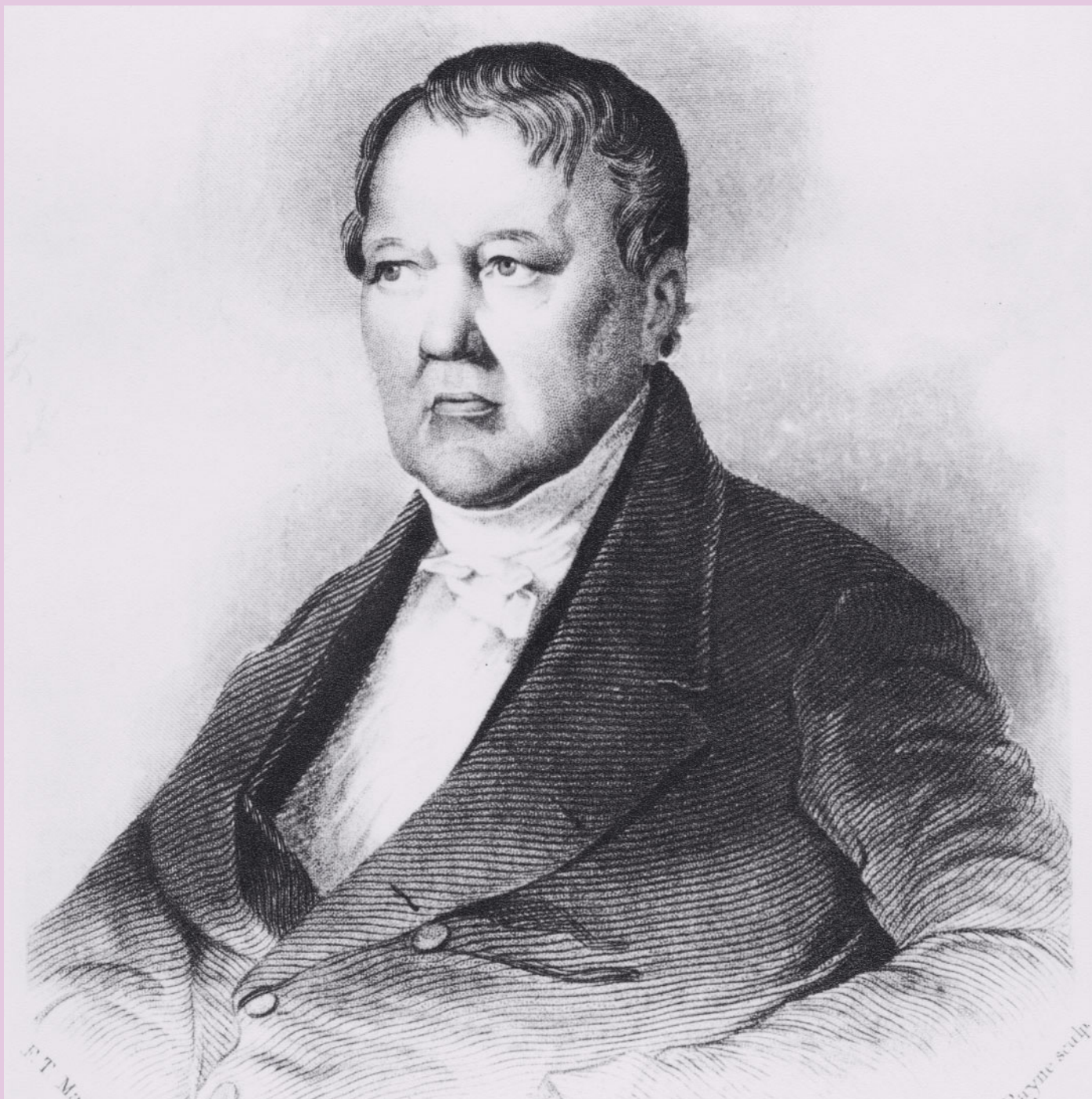
### Medial partners:



### Partners:







# **„the pope of prague music in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century“**

**václav jan tomášek (1774–1850)**

The important role of Václav Jan Tomášek in the development of Czech and by extension European music as well remained relatively undervalued for many years after his death. It was only in the field of music education that his achievements were recognised as undeniable. As a composer he appeared too conservative and deeply rooted in Viennese (or more precisely Mozartian) Classicism. His output – above all the piano pieces – began to be appreciated only in the course of time as an increasing number of analyses showed Tomášek's contribution to the emergence of Romantic piano poetry, despite the fact that he never de facto liberated his aesthetic from the influence of Classicist "dogmas". Tomášek also began to be understood in his relationship to the formation of a national music (as one of the divergent signs of Romanticism). Although his national sentiments did not go beyond provincial, territorial local patriotism, he nonetheless prepared the ground for the founders of Czech music in many aspects of his work, thus effectively earning for himself the status of one of the most significant figures of the pre-Smetana era.

Václav Jan Tomášek was born on the 17th of April 1774 in the little town of Skute\_ (only recently, in 2000 has a museum been opened there in the house where he was born), as the youngest of the 13 children of a linen merchant. When he was 11 years old his father sent him to nearby Chrudim to the regenschor of P. J. Wolf, who initiated Tomášek into the mysteries of singing and play on the violin. Thus equipped with the musical basics, two years later Tomášek took the recently vacated place of alto in the Minorite Monastery in Jihlava. The first important milestone in Tomášek's came in 1790, however, when he moved to Prague, where with financial (and psychological) support from his brother Jakub he attended gymnasium (academic high school) and intensively taught himself musical theory and continued with piano exercises. With its abundant concert life Prague also offered him a chance to get to know the music trends of the time at first hand. In fact the first performance that he saw here, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, had a major effect on his later direction as a composer, since the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart became his lifelong model.

It was at the time that Tomášek attempted his first compositions on the basis of the knowledge and experience he had acquired. He was extremely self-critical, as is clear, for example, from that fact that he later destroyed most of these juvenile works. It was for the same reason that for the time being he gave up the idea of arranging the well-known ballad *Lenore* by Gottfried A. Bürger. He was to return to the idea with a sense of greater maturity a few years later,

in 1805, when he already had behind him law studies and several inspiring meetings with important musicians or music scholars who came to Prague (the theoretician G. J. Vogler, the opera composer and Saxon court capelmeister J. G. Naumann, the historian J. N. Forkel or the pianist of Czech origin J. L. Dusík). With his ballad *Lenore* Tomášek experienced his first serious success in the field of composition, and this piece had a beneficial effect on his career. Tomášek's piano pupil, the Count Georg Buquoy, was so impressed with it that he decided to engage his teacher as court composer. This contract provided Tomášek with lifelong material security and greater freedom for composing and studies of his own. In his autobiography he says that the second chapter of his life began when he entered the count's service.

During the following period Tomášek stayed in the various seats of the Buquoy family (in Prague, Nové Hrady in South Bohemia, Červený Hrádek in the North of Bohemia). He also made a journey to Austria, on which he visited Beethoven in Vienna, met Louis Spohr and others, and tried to increase his knowledge of Viennese cultural life. Back in Prague he often visited his old friend from his gymnasium years, the talented aesthetician Jan Jindřich Dambek, and it was Dambek who encouraged Tomášek to compose the opera *Seraphine*, for which he himself wrote the libretto (based on a text by Giovanni Bertatti *Leamore per leamore*). The opera was premiered on the 15th of December 1811 in the Estates Theatre in Prague and received a favourable response (later however it fell into oblivion). Success spurred Tomášek on, and soon he started writing another opera entitled *Alvaro* (on a libretto by C. A. Herbst). When, however, he heard about the applause that greeted *Tancred* by Gioacchino Rossini, whose music Tomášek found completely unbearable, he abandoned completion of the opera and left it as a fragment. Even so it is a piece in which he managed to express his musical soul...

An ever more troublesome illness (the gout that was common at the time) forced Tomášek to take the cure several times at spas. Two of these spa episodes were spiced by fulfilment of the composer's dream of meeting Johann Wolfgang Goethe, whose poems he admired. Even earlier, in 1815, he had successively published seven instalments of his arrangements of Goethe's texts, and when he sent them to the poet he received an answer full of praise. In 1822 Tomášek was taking the waters in Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) and when he found that Goethe was staying in nearby Cheb, he did not hesitate to drive out to see him. There was a second meeting a year later, this time in Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad). Tomášek's admiration for Goethe never wavered, and when celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the poet's birth were held in Prague in 1849, Tomášek performed some of

his Goethe arrangements despite the advanced stage of his illness.

In Mariánské Lázně Tomášek also got to know the German but in sentiment pro-Czech family of Michael Ebert. He was particularly captivated by one of the daughters, Vilemína. He decided to teach her singing, but his interest was more than pedagogical. Before he left the spa he became engaged to her in 1824 he married her. He moved to a flat in Tomášská Street (in the Lesser Town in Prague) which he made into an important cultural centre where a society drawn from the nobility and artists of both Czech and German nationalists (among them František Palacký, one of the fathers of the Czech national revival), would gather for discussions and musical evenings. At the same time he headed his own educational institution here, and taught the piano and composition. The institute soon became famous and was largely responsible for the fact that Prague joined London, Vienna and Paris as a leading centre of European piano culture at the turn of the 18th/19th century. In Prague itself, Tomášek's institute to a certain extent formed a counterweight to the other three local institutions, i.e. the Prague Conservatory (where a separate piano department was not to be opened until 1888), the so-called organ school and the music institute of Josef Proksch (one of whose students was Bedřich Smetana), founded in 1830.

His marriage with Vilemína Ebert was not among the happiest, as a result of the large age difference and evidently other problems as well. It ended with Vilemína's premature death in 1836. Tomášek then almost completely shunned society and concentrated wholly on his composing and teaching work. In 1844 he started to write his autobiography in German, and printed it in instalments in 1845–1850 in the almanac *Libussa*, published by his friend Pavel Alois Klár. Somewhat symbolically, he did not take his account up to the present, but finished it with his engagement to Vilemína, i.e. in 1823. The autobiography, which is one of the basic sources for study of Tomášek's life, work, aesthetic views and so on, was later translated into Czech by Zdeněk Němec and published under the title *V. J. Tomášek: Vlastní životopis [Autobiography]* (Prague 1941).

In his last years Tomášek became completely reclusive, at least partly as a reaction to criticism, especially of his conservative and unyielding opinions, from many culturally active figures. Long-term illness finally led to the death of Václav Jan Tomášek on the 3rd of April 1850. He was buried in the cemetery in Prague-Košíře.

#### Tomášek the Composer

Tomášek's legacy as composer consists of 114 numbered works, most of them in the favoured genres of the period, i.e. symphony, overture, sacred music (*Te Deum*, mass,





Tomášek's business card

requiem), chamber music and so forth. Of his longer works, the most favourably received in Tomášek's lifetime were the *Requiem in c moll*, op. 70 (1820) and *Missa solennis*, op. 81 (1836). The latter was written for the occasions of the Prague coronation of Ferdinand the 5th "the Benignant" and it remained part of the repertoire of many church choirs for a long time. The temporary success of the opera *Seraphine*, op. 36 has already been mentioned. Most of these pieces however have today fallen into complete oblivion. It is in other areas of composition, in songs and above all in piano pieces, that Tomášek has won himself a permanent place in the history of music.

Tomášek composed a large number of song cycles, mainly with piano accompaniment. He chose both German (mainly Schiller and Goethe), and Czech texts (*Six Songs by Václav Hanka*, op. 50, *Ancient Songs from the Královédvorský Manuscript*, op. 82 and so on, since he moved both in German aristocratic and bourgeois society and in the circles of leaders of the Czech revival movement. Of all his songs, the seven cycles of arrangements of Goethe texts (op. 53–61), written in a single year (1815) have proved to be the most durable.

Tomášek would probably scarcely be known today as a composer at all, however, had it not

been for his piano works. Even in this respect, however, recognition of his achievements was not an easy process. One of the most important milestones on the road to recognition was Willy Kahl's pioneering essay *Das lyrische Klavierstück Schuberts und seiner Vorgänger seit 1810*, which was published in the journal *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* in 1921, and argued that Tomášek was one of the most significant sources of the romantic lyrical piano pieces. Of course, not all Tomášek's piano output can be regarded in this light, since its first phases are dominated by pieces composed in a spirit of pure Classicism (a series of variations and sonatas). New ideas, anticipating the arrival of Romanticism, appeared only in the cycles for which Tomášek used terms borrowed from Ancient Greek poetry: eclogues, rhapsodies and dithyrambs.

The largest group is made up of *Eclogues*, which are conceived in seven cycles of seven pieces each. In these we can discern the gradual transformation of the composer's style: op. 35 (1807) and op. 39 (1810) are more on instructive in character, while op. 47 (1813) and op. 51 (1815) represent pieces that are already more concentrated and refined in terms of composition. Op. 66 (1819) and above all op. 83 with the subtitle *Dances pastorales* (1823) may be regarded as culminating works of this type. Their characteristic fea-

tures are a generally simple piano diction (Alberti base in the left hand and so on), unity of mood (created on the basis of a passing idea), three-part song form, folk elements (frequent sequences, empty fifths, doubling of the melody in thirds, dance rhythms), generally fast tempos and so on.

"These musical compositions, which soon became very popular, are a sort of pastorate, but they differ significantly in melody, harmony and rhythm from older pastorales (...). I thought of a shepherd, whose manner of life is simple, but who still faces tests like all human beings. Finding musical expression of his feelings arising from various different events was the difficult task that I set myself (...). The eclogues require a simple but emotionally deeply felt performance if they are to carry the listener into the idyllic life, and so the easily tackled but interesting places here and there should not be overlooked. Above all, however, the precisely indicated tempos and expressive shades should be followed with the greatest attention."

V. J. Tomášek: *Vlastní životopis*. Praha 1941, pp. 82–83.

*Rhapsodies* – op. 40 (1810), op. 41 (1810) with six pieces in each and op. 110 (undated) with three pieces – stand in in expres-

sive and compositional contrast to the Eclogues. They are technically much more demanding and in a certain sense follow on from the late piano style of Mozart and Beethoven. They are distinguished by a more extensive and differentiated form, greater concentration of energy and an undeniable pathos.

"I also wanted to try to write the kind of pieces in which the prevailing tenderness would be conjoined with strength and masculinity. Like a magic touch, Antiquity rose up vividly in my soul with its rhapsodies; in my imagination I heard them, how stirringly they brought forth whole passages from Homer's Iliad. Then I thought why should not music, too, as the queen of the world of emotion, express individual sensual affects, if only by suggestion?"  
V. J. Tomášek: Autobiography. Prague 1941, p. 101.

Finally the *Three Dithyrambs*, op. 65 (1818) combined the tenderness of the eclogues with the energetic charge of the rhapsodies.

"The first dithyramb is rough in expression like the Romans, while the second is reminiscent of the Greeks in its subtlety and charm; in the third both are merged together."  
V. J. Tomášek: Autobiography. Prague 1941, p. 196.

All these lyrical piano pieces stand out very clearly as different from the rest of Tomášek's output. They are the expression (perhaps only unconsciously) of a pre-Romantic atmosphere, which highlights the detail of the musical idea and unmediated imagination at the expense of the tectonic mediated character of form. Above all through an original concept of expression Tomášek here managed to create a highly individual genre that directly influenced Romantic piano poetry. Of course he was not the only composer to contribute to the birth of the characteristic piece. The ground had been prepared for him by a whole series of composers, such as Jan Václav Hugo Voříšek, Jan Ladislav Dusík, John Field and many other less well known. Tomášek, however, in his Eclogues, Rhapsodies and Dithyrambs is one of the most important, stimulating and also straightforward of the inspirers of

Romantic piano poetry. At the same time he should be regarded as one of the main intermediate links between the piano music of Czech Classicism and Bedřich Smetana.

#### Tomášek – the Teacher

Tomášek took up music teaching while he was still studying at gymnasium himself, but at this early stage just as a means of making money. Gradually, however, with tenacious effort peculiar to him he turned himself into a teacher of European standard and a respected authority (it was evidently no accident that in his time he was known as „the Pope of Prague music“) The broad range of Tomášek's interests clearly made a strong contribution to the formation of his character in this respect. It was not just music in which he continually strove to acquire more and more knowledge through strenuous autodidactic efforts. He was also interested in art, poetry and philosophy and his thirst for versatility is clear, for example, from his attendance at surgery and anatomy lectures. All this helped to mould a strong personality, independent in opinions and creatively distinctive. Tomášek also drew much inspiration from long-term cultivation of personal contacts with a whole range of leading representatives of the European culture of the time. We shall give just two examples: after a meeting with the Bach and Scarlatti scholar Johann Nikolaus Forkel he introduced Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier as instruction music for his pupils, while as far as pianist's touch was concerned he was greatly affected by a visit from Jan Ladislav Dusík (to the extent, indeed, that we could speak of the continuation of the Dusíkian piano tradition in Tomášek's school).

A pleiad of outstanding pianists, composers and also people who later made a name in other fields, grew up under Tomášek's pedagogic guidance. They included for example Jan Václav Hugo Voříšek, Alexander Dreyschock, Julius Schulhoff (uncle of the well-known interwar composer Ervin Schulhoff), Ignác Tedesco, Jan Bedřich Knittl (the second director of the Prague Conservatory), Eduard Hanslick (later an influential Viennese critic), Hans Hampel and many others.

A quote from the autobiography of Eduard Hanslick (*Aus meinem Leben*), published in two volumes in Berlin in 1894 offers a good idea of Tomášek's teaching practices:

"Each week there was one hour devoted to the piano and two to music theory: harmony, counterpoint, fugue, instrumentation and

composing experiments. Tomášek only gave piano lessons to the advanced students. He used Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier as the essential foundation with all of us. I was always assigned one prelude and fugue which I would then have to play without faults and from memory at the next lesson. (...) Apart from Bach we studied mainly Beethoven sonatas (except for the last), Tomášek's rhapsodies and sonatas, all the études of Thalberg, Chopin and Hensel, and even something from Liszt. It is clear that Tomášek was not at all the pedantic antiquated teacher that he as usually been painted as. He was well aware that young pianists needed to master works with the most modern piano technique."

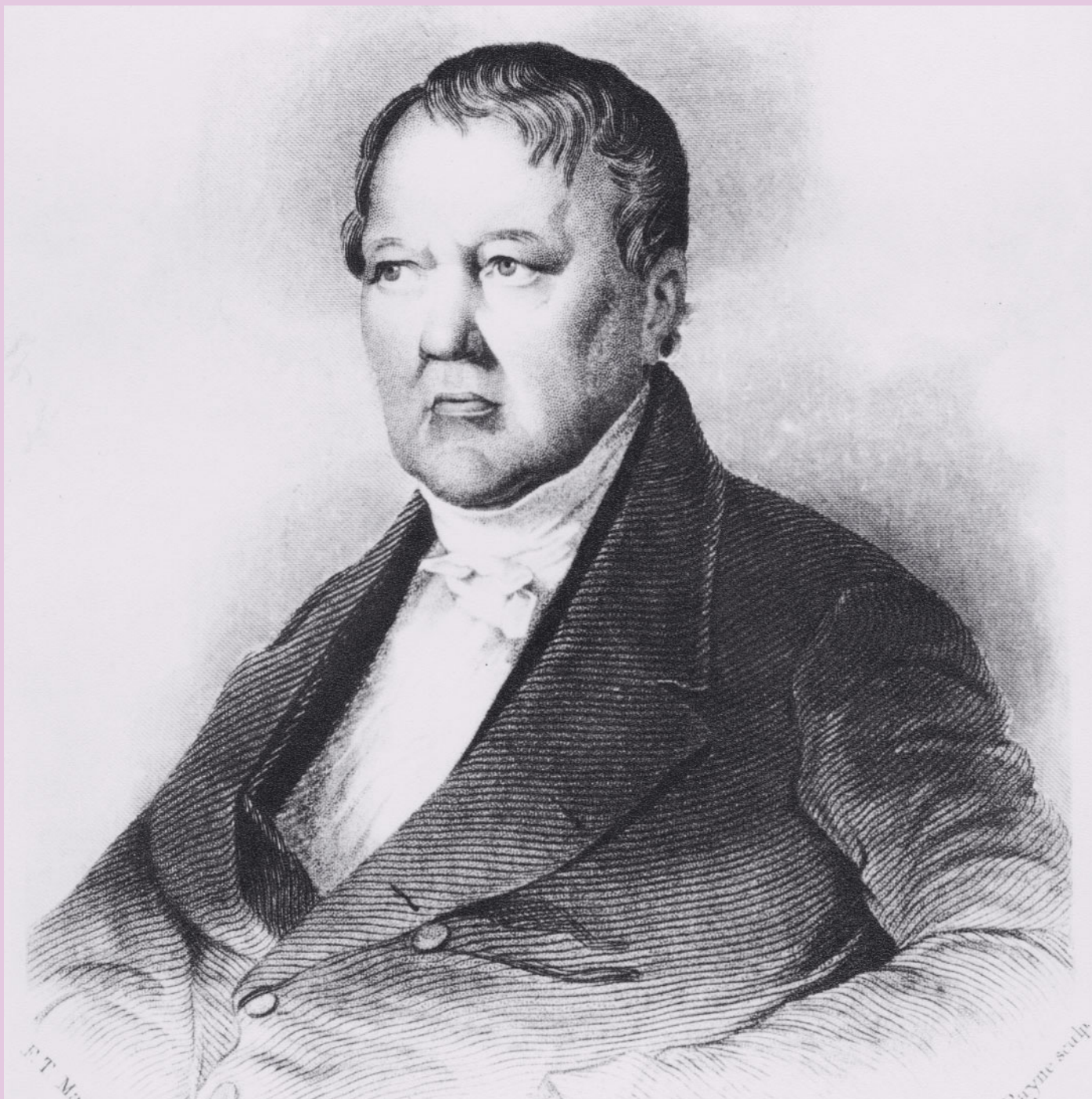
Cited from the translation of Jitky Ludvová: *Dokonalý antiwagnerián [The perfect Anti-Wagnerian]* Eduard Hanslick. Prague 1992, p. 51.

Although Hanslick praises Tomášek as a teacher (and as a composer), he criticises him (in view of his "character with its thirst for knowledge") for the absence of exposition of the "historical and aesthetic side of music", and excessive "focus on purely musical problems". This had its rationale, however, since for his whole life Tomášek tried through independent study of all kinds of contemporary theoretical writings to achieve the deepest possible knowledge of theoretical musical disciplines, above all harmony, and then to think this knowledge through. His *Codex der Harmonielehre* would probably have provided a great deal of testimony on his theoretical interests, but it has not survived.

From the account we have given, however, the secret of Tomášek's success in teaching will already be clear. He managed to channel and regulate the fiery youthful elan of his pupils through his strict professional seriousness, but without suppressing their natural spirits. On this basis he created a strong school of composers, pianists and others, with a tradition that had wide-ranging effects on the development of music in the 19th century.

VÍTĚZSLAV MIKEŠ





# **„the pope of prague music in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century“**

**václav jan tomášek (1774–1850)**

The important role of Václav Jan Tomášek in the development of Czech and by extension European music as well remained relatively undervalued for many years after his death. It was only in the field of music education that his achievements were recognised as undeniable. As a composer he appeared too conservative and deeply rooted in Viennese (or more precisely Mozartian) Classicism. His output – above all the piano pieces – began to be appreciated only in the course of time as an increasing number of analyses showed Tomášek's contribution to the emergence of Romantic piano poetry, despite the fact that he never de facto liberated his aesthetic from the influence of Classicist "dogmas". Tomášek also began to be understood in his relationship to the formation of a national music (as one of the divergent signs of Romanticism). Although his national sentiments did not go beyond provincial, territorial local patriotism, he nonetheless prepared the ground for the founders of Czech music in many aspects of his work, thus effectively earning for himself the status of one of the most significant figures of the pre-Smetana era.

Václav Jan Tomášek was born on the 17th of April 1774 in the little town of Skuteč (only recently, in 2000 has a museum been opened there in the house where he was born), as the youngest of the 13 children of a linen merchant. When he was 11 years old his father sent him to nearby Chrudim to the regenschor of P. J. Wolf, who initiated Tomášek into the mysteries of singing and play on the violin. Thus equipped with the musical basics, two years later Tomášek took the recently vacated place of alto in the Minorite Monastery in Jihlava. The first important milestone in Tomášek's came in 1790, however, when he moved to Prague, where with financial (and psychological) support from his brother Jakub he attended gymnasium (academic high school) and intensively taught himself musical theory and continued with piano exercises. With its abundant concert life Prague also offered him a chance to get to know the music trends of the time at first hand. In fact the first performance that he saw here, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, had a major effect on his later direction as a composer, since the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart became his lifelong model.

It was at the time that Tomášek attempted his first compositions on the basis of the knowledge and experience he had acquired. He was extremely self-critical, as is clear, for example, from that fact that he later destroyed most of these juvenile works. It was for the same reason that for the time being he gave up the idea of arranging the well-known ballad *Lenore* by Gottfried A. Bürger. He was to return to the idea with a sense of greater maturity a few years later,

in 1805, when he already had behind him law studies and several inspiring meetings with important musicians or music scholars who came to Prague (the theoretician G. J. Vogler, the opera composer and Saxon court capelmeister J. G. Naumann, the historian J. N. Forkel or the pianist of Czech origin J. L. Dusík). With his ballad *Lenore* Tomášek experienced his first serious success in the field of composition, and this piece had a beneficial effect on his career. Tomášek's piano pupil, the Count Georg Buquoy, was so impressed with it that he decided to engage his teacher as court composer. This contract provided Tomášek with lifelong material security and greater freedom for composing and studies of his own. In his autobiography he says that the second chapter of his life began when he entered the count's service.

During the following period Tomášek stayed in the various seats of the Buquoy family (in Prague, Nové Hrady in South Bohemia, Červený Hrádek in the North of Bohemia). He also made a journey to Austria, on which he visited Beethoven in Vienna, met Louis Spohr and others, and tried to increase his knowledge of Viennese cultural life. Back in Prague he often visited his old friend from his gymnasium years, the talented aesthetician Jan Jindřich Dambek, and it was Dambek who encouraged Tomášek to compose the opera *Seraphine*, for which he himself wrote the libretto (based on a text by Giovanni Bertatti *Leamore per leamore*). The opera was premiered on the 15th of December 1811 in the Estates Theatre in Prague and received a favourable response (later however it fell into oblivion). Success spurred Tomášek on, and soon he started writing another opera entitled *Alvaro* (on a libretto by C. A. Herbst). When, however, he heard about the applause that greeted *Tancred* by Gioacchino Rossini, whose music Tomášek found completely unbearable, he abandoned completion of the opera and left it as a fragment. Even so it is a piece in which he managed to express his musical soul...

An ever more troublesome illness (the gout that was common at the time) forced Tomášek to take the cure several times at spas. Two of these spa episodes were spiced by fulfilment of the composer's dream of meeting Johann Wolfgang Goethe, whose poems he admired. Even earlier, in 1815, he had successively published seven instalments of his arrangements of Goethe's texts, and when he sent them to the poet he received an answer full of praise. In 1822 Tomášek was taking the waters in Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) and when he found that Goethe was staying in nearby Cheb, he did not hesitate to drive out to see him. There was a second meeting a year later, this time in Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad). Tomášek's admiration for Goethe never wavered, and when celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the poet's birth were held in Prague in 1849, Tomášek performed some of

his Goethe arrangements despite the advanced stage of his illness.

In Mariánské Lázně Tomášek also got to know the German but in sentiment pro-Czech family of Michael Ebert. He was particularly captivated by one of the daughters, Vilemína. He decided to teach her singing, but his interest was more than pedagogical. Before he left the spa he became engaged to her in 1824 he married her. He moved to a flat in Tomášská Street (in the Lesser Town in Prague) which he made into an important cultural centre where a society drawn from the nobility and artists of both Czech and German nationalists (among them František Palacký, one of the fathers of the Czech national revival), would gather for discussions and musical evenings. At the same time he headed his own educational institution here, and taught the piano and composition. The institute soon became famous and was largely responsible for the fact that Prague joined London, Vienna and Paris as a leading centre of European piano culture at the turn of the 18th/19th century. In Prague itself, Tomášek's institute to a certain extent formed a counterweight to the other three local institutions, i.e. the Prague Conservatory (where a separate piano department was not to be opened until 1888), the so-called organ school and the music institute of Josef Proksch (one of whose students was Bedřich Smetana), founded in 1830.

His marriage with Vilemína Ebert was not among the happiest, as a result of the large age difference and evidently other problems as well. It ended with Vilemína's premature death in 1836. Tomášek then almost completely shunned society and concentrated wholly on his composing and teaching work. In 1844 he started to write his autobiography in German, and printed it in instalments in 1845–1850 in the almanac *Libussa*, published by his friend Pavel Alois Klár. Somewhat symbolically, he did not take his account up to the present, but finished it with his engagement to Vilemína, i.e. in 1823. The autobiography, which is one of the basic sources for study of Tomášek's life, work, aesthetic views and so on, was later translated into Czech by Zdeněk Němec and published under the title *V. J. Tomášek: Vlastní životopis [Autobiography]* (Prague 1941).

In his last years Tomášek became completely reclusive, at least partly as a reaction to criticism, especially of his conservative and unyielding opinions, from many culturally active figures. Long-term illness finally led to the death of Václav Jan Tomášek on the 3rd of April 1850. He was buried in the cemetery in Prague-Košíře.

#### Tomášek the Composer

Tomášek's legacy as composer consists of 114 numbered works, most of them in the favoured genres of the period, i.e. symphony, overture, sacred music (*Te Deum*, mass,





Tomášek's business card

requiem), chamber music and so forth. Of his longer works, the most favourably received in Tomášek's lifetime were the *Requiem in c moll*, op. 70 (1820) and *Missa solennis*, op. 81 (1836). The latter was written for the occasions of the Prague coronation of Ferdinand the 5th "the Benignant" and it remained part of the repertoire of many church choirs for a long time. The temporary success of the opera *Seraphine*, op. 36 has already been mentioned. Most of these pieces however have today fallen into complete oblivion. It is in other areas of composition, in songs and above all in piano pieces, that Tomášek has won himself a permanent place in the history of music.

Tomášek composed a large number of song cycles, mainly with piano accompaniment. He chose both German (mainly Schiller and Goethe), and Czech texts (*Six Songs by Václav Hanka*, op. 50, *Ancient Songs from the Královédvorský Manuscript*, op. 82 and so on, since he moved both in German aristocratic and bourgeois society and in the circles of leaders of the Czech revival movement. Of all his songs, the seven cycles of arrangements of Goethe texts (op. 53–61), written in a single year (1815) have proved to be the most durable.

Tomášek would probably scarcely be known today as a composer at all, however, had it not

been for his piano works. Even in this respect, however, recognition of his achievements was not an easy process. One of the most important milestones on the road to recognition was Willy Kahl's pioneering essay *Das lyrische Klavierstück Schuberts und seiner Vorgänger seit 1810*, which was published in the journal *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* in 1921, and argued that Tomášek was one of the most significant sources of the romantic lyrical piano pieces. Of course, not all Tomášek's piano output can be regarded in this light, since its first phases are dominated by pieces composed in a spirit of pure Classicism (a series of variations and sonatas). New ideas, anticipating the arrival of Romanticism, appeared only in the cycles for which Tomášek used terms borrowed from Ancient Greek poetry: eclogues, rhapsodies and dithyrambs.

The largest group is made up of *Eclogues*, which are conceived in seven cycles of seven pieces each. In these we can discern the gradual transformation of the composer's style: op. 35 (1807) and op. 39 (1810) are more on instructive in character, while op. 47 (1813) and op. 51 (1815) represent pieces that are already more concentrated and refined in terms of composition. Op. 66 (1819) and above all op. 83 with the subtitle *Dances pastorales* (1823) may be regarded as culminating works of this type. Their characteristic fea-

tures are a generally simple piano diction (Alberti base in the left hand and so on), unity of mood (created on the basis of a passing idea), three-part song form, folk elements (frequent sequences, empty fifths, doubling of the melody in thirds, dance rhythms), generally fast tempos and so on.

"These musical compositions, which soon became very popular, are a sort of pastorate, but they differ significantly in melody, harmony and rhythm from older pastorales (...). I thought of a shepherd, whose manner of life is simple, but who still faces tests like all human beings. Finding musical expression of his feelings arising from various different events was the difficult task that I set myself (...). The eclogues require a simple but emotionally deeply felt performance if they are to carry the listener into the idyllic life, and so the easily tackled but interesting places here and there should not be overlooked. Above all, however, the precisely indicated tempos and expressive shades should be followed with the greatest attention."

V. J. Tomášek: *Vlastní životopis*. Praha 1941, pp. 82–83.

*Rhapsodies* – op. 40 (1810), op. 41 (1810) with six pieces in each and op. 110 (undated) with three pieces – stand in in expres-

sive and compositional contrast to the Eclogues. They are technically much more demanding and in a certain sense follow on from the late piano style of Mozart and Beethoven. They are distinguished by a more extensive and differentiated form, greater concentration of energy and an undeniable pathos.

"I also wanted to try to write the kind of pieces in which the prevailing tenderness would be conjoined with strength and masculinity. Like a magic touch, Antiquity rose up vividly in my soul with its rhapsodies; in my imagination I heard them, how stirringly they brought forth whole passages from Homer's Iliad. Then I thought why should not music, too, as the queen of the world of emotion, express individual sensual affects, if only by suggestion?"  
V. J. Tomášek: Autobiography. Prague 1941, p. 101.

Finally the *Three Dithyrambs*, op. 65 (1818) combined the tenderness of the eclogues with the energetic charge of the rhapsodies.

"The first dithyramb is rough in expression like the Romans, while the second is reminiscent of the Greeks in its subtlety and charm; in the third both are merged together."  
V. J. Tomášek: Autobiography. Prague 1941, p. 196.

All these lyrical piano pieces stand out very clearly as different from the rest of Tomášek's output. They are the expression (perhaps only unconsciously) of a pre-Romantic atmosphere, which highlights the detail of the musical idea and unmediated imagination at the expense of the tectonic mediated character of form. Above all through an original concept of expression Tomášek here managed to create a highly individual genre that directly influenced Romantic piano poetry. Of course he was not the only composer to contribute to the birth of the characteristic piece. The ground had been prepared for him by a whole series of composers, such as Jan Václav Hugo Voříšek, Jan Ladislav Dusík, John Field and many other less well known. Tomášek, however, in his Eclogues, Rhapsodies and Dithyrambs is one of the most important, stimulating and also straightforward of the inspirers of

Romantic piano poetry. At the same time he should be regarded as one of the main intermediate links between the piano music of Czech Classicism and Bedřich Smetana.

#### Tomášek – the Teacher

Tomášek took up music teaching while he was still studying at gymnasium himself, but at this early stage just as a means of making money. Gradually, however, with tenacious effort peculiar to him he turned himself into a teacher of European standard and a respected authority (it was evidently no accident that in his time he was known as „the Pope of Prague music“) The broad range of Tomášek's interests clearly made a strong contribution to the formation of his character in this respect. It was not just music in which he continually strove to acquire more and more knowledge through strenuous autodidactic efforts. He was also interested in art, poetry and philosophy and his thirst for versatility is clear, for example, from his attendance at surgery and anatomy lectures. All this helped to mould a strong personality, independent in opinions and creatively distinctive. Tomášek also drew much inspiration from long-term cultivation of personal contacts with a whole range of leading representatives of the European culture of the time. We shall give just two examples: after a meeting with the Bach and Scarlatti scholar Johann Nikolaus Forkel he introduced Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier as instruction music for his pupils, while as far as pianist's touch was concerned he was greatly affected by a visit from Jan Ladislav Dusík (to the extent, indeed, that we could speak of the continuation of the Dusíkian piano tradition in Tomášek's school).

A pleiad of outstanding pianists, composers and also people who later made a name in other fields, grew up under Tomášek's pedagogic guidance. They included for example Jan Václav Hugo Voříšek, Alexander Dreyschock, Julius Schulhoff (uncle of the well-known interwar composer Ervin Schulhoff), Ignác Tedesco, Jan Bedřich Knittl (the second director of the Prague Conservatory), Eduard Hanslick (later an influential Viennese critic), Hans Hampel and many others.

A quote from the autobiography of Eduard Hanslick (*Aus meinem Leben*), published in two volumes in Berlin in 1894 offers a good idea of Tomášek's teaching practices:

"Each week there was one hour devoted to the piano and two to music theory: harmony, counterpoint, fugue, instrumentation and

composing experiments. Tomášek only gave piano lessons to the advanced students. He used Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier as the essential foundation with all of us. I was always assigned one prelude and fugue which I would then have to play without faults and from memory at the next lesson. (...) Apart from Bach we studied mainly Beethoven sonatas (except for the last), Tomášek's rhapsodies and sonatas, all the études of Thalberg, Chopin and Hensel, and even something from Liszt. It is clear that Tomášek was not at all the pedantic antiquated teacher that he as usually been painted as. He was well aware that young pianists needed to master works with the most modern piano technique."

Cited from the translation of Jitky Ludvová: *Dokonalý antiwagnerián* [The perfect Anti-Wagnerian] Eduard Hanslick. Prague 1992, p. 51.

Although Hanslick praises Tomášek as a teacher (and as a composer), he criticises him (in view of his "character with its thirst for knowledge") for the absence of exposition of the "historical and aesthetic side of music", and excessive "focus on purely musical problems". This had its rationale, however, since for his whole life Tomášek tried through independent study of all kinds of contemporary theoretical writings to achieve the deepest possible knowledge of theoretical musical disciplines, above all harmony, and then to think this knowledge through. His *Codex der Harmonielehre* would probably have provided a great deal of testimony on his theoretical interests, but it has not survived.

From the account we have given, however, the secret of Tomášek's success in teaching will already be clear. He managed to channel and regulate the fiery youthful elan of his pupils through his strict professional seriousness, but without suppressing their natural spirits. On this basis he created a strong school of composers, pianists and others, with a tradition that had wide-ranging effects on the development of music in the 19th century.

VÍTĚZSLAV MIKEŠ