

# czech music

4 | 2004

quarterly magazine

**Jan Klusák**

E. F. Burian

Vilém Veverka



# Looking for new classics...

...

haydn  
mozart  
beethoven  
schubert  
dvořák  
ravel  
stravinsky  
honegger  
bartok  
janáček  
kabeláč  
shostakovich  
prokofiev  
schoenberg  
berg  
martinů  
piazzolla  
schulhoff  
krasa  
klein  
haas  
schnittke  
pärt  
rota  
fišer

eben  
havelka  
mácha  
kurz  
slavický  
filas  
matějů  
pudlák  
mařatka  
nejtek  
hybler  
hořinka  
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## editorial

Dear readers,

My deepest musical impression lately? You approach a frozen fishpond (obviously it could also be a lake, or a river), and if the ice is still relatively thin and the ice surface not covered in snow (which is quite possible in our climate this time of the year), find a stone and send it skimming across the ice. I bet that even those of you who undertook such experiments in their childhood will be mesmerised by the beauty and the range of the swishing sounds a stone makes as you send it bouncing across the ice. You can experiment with different sized stones, different angles and pointed ends, or you can rotate the stone with a different speed. The results are always different, and always beautiful. The effect is exceptionally romantic and mysterious on freezing moonlit nights, except that it may be hard finding the stones on the bank.

Another thing that fills me with a genuine (and immodest) joy is this new issue of *Czech Music* that you are reading just now. We bring you a triple portrait of Emil František Burian, the man of vital importance for the interwar theatre avant-garde in this country, whose contribution to Czech music has still not been adequately recognised. But things seem to be looking up at last. This year, proclaimed as the year of Czech music (the reason for this is fairly straightforward: many of the key figures in the Czech musical heritage were either born or died in a year ending with the number four), there has been a noticeable increase in the interest in Burian the composer. Although we could not really say that Burian the composer has all of a sudden become fashionable, a large number of concerts featuring his music this year have convincingly shown us that he deserves a bit of additional acclaim as a "newly discovered" composer of classical music – of his versatile musical output, it is his jazz evergreens that have thus far remained in the public's consciousness. This year marks a centenary of Burian's birth; let us hope that with it, his music will be revived in its full range and vigour.

All good wishes for the new year.

  
PETR BAKLA  
EDITOR

## Contents

2004

# 4

Page 2

Create – and Do What You Will  
An Interview with Jan Klusák

JAROMÍR HAVLÍK

Page 8

E. F. Burian: Sweep the Stage

VLASTA REITTEREROVÁ

Page 13

E. F. Burian: Composer

JOSEF BEK

Page 17

E. F. Burian and Faith

PETR KOFRŮŇ

Page 18

A Few Minutes with an Oboist

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# create – and do what

Jan Klusák long ago won himself a firm place among the classics of Czech music of the later 20th Century. He is a remarkable man in many respects. As a musician he is a relatively unique case of a “pure” composer, who devotes himself only to composition rather than spreading his activities over other possible musical professions. Even so, he is a many-sided person: writer, journalist, film and theatre actor, astrologer... Since November 1989 he has even

been taking a more conspicuous role in public life.

The author of a book on Klusák, Ivan Poledňák, would probably aphoristically sketch Klusák as follows: “The descendant of poor plebeian Czechs and affluent Jews hit by the Holocaust. An heir to the traditions of “Czech national music” (Klusák has a great and humble admiration for the works of Smetana) and also heir to the distinctive traditions of the „Czech-German-Jewish-Prague“ culture sym-

bolised by names like Rilke, Kafka, Brod, Meyrink, Werfel, Kisch, and Schulhoff. These are apparently very disparate areas full of internal paradoxes, and perhaps that is one reason why Klusák’s own music is so characteristically esoteric. On the other hand, he has also written fully functional music for the mass TV serial *Hospital on the Edge of Town*. Klusák honours spiritual values, but also enjoys succumbing to bodily temptations. He is a man of remarkable vitality and



you will

strong health who refuses to engage in sport on principle. He is a composer working in a strictly rational style, but at the same time he believes in a magic power that rules the world, life and creativity. Klusák is someone who never flirted with the communist regime and who even today does not let his political attitudes overshadow his vocation as an artist. Klusák is a person who avoids public jostling for position, grandeur and pomp – but at the same

time shows extraordinary toughness and principle in public matters and in matters of artistic integrity. He is an individual par excellence, the opposite of a “herd animal”, but a man who has no yen to publicly stand out above the others either. Instead he is unshowy and inconspicuous, convinced that what makes a person into a man of stature is above all his work, what he demonstrably knows how to do and what he has achieved.” In matters of music Klusák is admirably serious, admirably sober and tolerant, as will soon be apparent. In ordinary communications he has a wonderfully personal sense of humour. As with all deeply educated and many-sided people, an interview with Jan Klusák is an intellectual treat sui generis. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to talk to him in what is a personal jubilee year (he celebrated his seventieth birthday on the 18th of April).

**Let's start this interview with the present. How does a seventy-year-old feel in a contemporary musical world of which he is still a part?**

I live my life these days thinking mainly about the fundamental thing that art should be about. Recently it was formulated very well by the poet Miloslav Topinka, who published a poetic composition *Trhlina [The Crack]* (and won the Seifert Prize for it). It is one long poem divided into small parts. What Topinka constantly emphasises (and not only in this poem, but in various interviews) is the Rimbaudian (but also for example Holanian) attempt to get via art beyond some frontier, as it were to “break through” into some other dimension, to get through that “crack in the heavens” somewhere beyond this reality. Of course this can't last long, or at least can't last forever. It is something like a mystical state: either you stay there for good, and have die there too, or else you come back to

this world. I would like this interview of ours to be based on that idea, because it seems to me that music has three basic stages of development. First *monophony*, then *polyphony*, which music essentially lived by up to the 20th century, and then modern music, which has been as it were striving for some kind of self-transcendence, as if it wanted yet to change its state again and become a kind of “radiance” or better still “radiation outwards”. But this has only been achieved in a few exceptional cases. In my view Varés has managed it in some of his works, for example, or Boulez or Stockhausen – but let me emphasise that it is very exceptional even with them.

**Only the shift from monophony to polyphony meant first and foremost a complication of the texture, while in my view that quality of a “new state” in 20th-century music isn't comparable to that previous development. Modern music is still polyphonic or a type of polyphonic structure on the same level. So the transformation must have happened (or be happening) on some different level.**

You're right. One feature common to monophony and polyphony was a kind of linear development in time. What is new in 20th-century music has brought – or been striving to bring – a halt to this time movement in music, as it were, exchanging the progression for radiation from a point, emanation. This is movement as well, but of a completely different quality.

**But the radiation was certainly present in monophony as well. Gregorian chant had it almost in its job description. And so it probably can't be considered the distinguishing mark of music in the “post-polyphonic stage”.**

Once I studied Gregorian chant quite intensively and it struck me that it might be possible to create a kind of dense polyphony by linking up many melodies of Gregorian chant together. I tried this in my electronic piece *O sacrum convivium* – which is an antiphony on Corpus Christi.

**Would it not then be possible to define the characteristic features and trends in 20th-century music more in terms of material, and at the level of the musical (or more precisely acoustic) expressive techniques?**

Today that is a very complicated question and hard to answer. We don't yet have enough distance on it, or enough material that would allow us to generalise. What became very visible in 20th-century music and a far more active aspect than before is the parameter of timbre – today there are few people who would challenge that.

**What does creating music mean to you? On other occasions you have often said that for you composing is an intrinsic need, a libido. On the other hand there are composers who see their motivation differently, more as a question of the challenge of a compositional problem. This was (and maybe**



still is) one very strong and widespread motive particularly among composers of the post-war avant garde. The solution of a kind of algorithm, of some sort of previously set, often mathematically expressed project.

But the libido could be precisely in that...

**All right, but let's try and stay away from libido, perhaps below the level of libido. I would like to look more at the material and techniques by which libido is processed. In artistic creation is there a prime place for spontaneity, for intuitive emotional and who-knows-what activity – or is the priority more that of ratio, reason, the perfectly thought out calculation, which is then just “embodied in the given material” in the next creative phase?**

You see, I've gone through all those phases. At the beginning composing was the purely intuitive process for me, and it surprised me to think that you could in some way rationally calculate while composing. Gradually, however, I reached the opposite extreme – rational thinking. But it was still always “libido” with me as well. Otherwise I wouldn't have done it at all. I think that both approaches are needed. It's always a pleasant “game with notes” and at the same time a rationally motivated task. The artist sets himself a standard that he then tries to overcome. This is a natural quality we call ambition. In my own creative work I combine the two perspectives you mention. I can't say that in the process I particularly care about making the structure of the work clear and recognisable, and how the individual “cogwheels” fit with each other. I think that when someone is lucky enough to produce a work or series of works that are successful enough for him to be regarded by the outside world as a creative artist and for his products to be called art, then it does seem to have all “slotted into place” even for him, but at the same time it is a living, viable organism. I have been lucky that when I dreamt up some pattern, let us say, or some structural model to be tackled, then some composition has come out of it.

**Do you see it as a matter of chance or something that is and inevitable attribute of the “true creator”?**

I don't know how other colleagues feel about it, but for myself I think what probably happens is that what you might think of as the Socratic “daimonion” in a person keeps watch on that subconscious activity and constantly regulates and “tunes” the subconscious and conscious level of creation in line with inborn attributes, with character, with what it is that is the individual in every individual.

**What is your view of the vocation of the artist in the modern world? I'm thinking of anything from “craftsman” to “prophet sent from heaven”.**

I have never thought much about it. The role of “prophet” was definitively demolished in

the 20th century by civilians like Stravinsky, Martinů, Poulenc... But the common denominator is the example of responsible work, the striving for the absolute. You must always give it your best shot. Every artist creates with the feeling that he is creating a work of art, because otherwise it would be impossible: creating with the feeling that I am not creating a work of art would be demotivating. Of course, the process by which the feeling of a “work of art” arises in society is a more complicated matter.

Roman Berger in his reflections distinguishes between creation and production. Naturally production has the quantitative edge – it is like the relationship between the average and the work of genius. The one is impossible without the other.

**How far is your work bound up with astrology, “the harmony of the spheres” and the associated mysticism?**

On the one hand it has certainly helped me to find my “Archimedean fixed point”, without which I might well not be here at all. On the other hand I think music might come even without that. Astrology and so on has helped me intellectually, and it changes you in terms of view of the world and religious ideas – but music can be made without that. For me those ideas are the source of that fixed horizon in the cosmos. In this way I get some kind of different view from outside. I get outside the co-ordinates of music, which at the beginning, “before the music comes”, is very important. And of course there is also a mythology involved that has always been a great inspiration for art.

**Today people sometimes talk of structureless music.**

Without structure there is nothing – not even the non-European music that is often brought up when people argue the case.

**Are you in contact with the work of the youngest generation?**

To be frank, not very much. Maybe one reason is that I have never taught composition and don't intend to now.

**You are also an opera composer. Do you believe opera still has any meaning in the world today?**

I would very much wish that it did have.

Opera always has to be a little more accessible, popular, and comprehensible than that “high” concert music. Here we face the questions of whether that “radiation” I mentioned is possible in opera as well. I very much hope that opera finally achieves the radiation (certainly, Wagner tried and succeeded). In modern opera I think Messiaen achieved something of the sort in his opera about St. Francis of Assisi.

**Do you think any of your operas has the same tendency?**

No, in my operas to date I have so far only practised within the tradition. And if I ever manage to produce something more original, more mine, I wouldn't be so annoyed.

**Are you planning something like that?**

Yes, but I would rather not go into detail about it now. I'll just say that it would be a type of full-length one-acter, like Strauss's *Salome* or *Elektra*.

**Once I saw the “Bunch of Critical Blooms”, views of the critics on your work that you sent round to your friends and acquaintances on your fiftieth birthday. What's your opinion of critics and journalists today?**

I think that the members of this profession are the same as in other professions. There's an elite minority of “creators” (genuinely!!! – in the Šalda sense), and then a majority of “producers” – and also a certain (probably necessary – like everywhere) percent of greaseballs including immoral scum. But without critics things don't work. That critical reflection is necessary!

**Have you ever felt that a critic of your work was right, or even learned something from criticism?**

Certainly – I learned a lot for example from Miroslav Srnka's interesting analytical study based on a comparison of three pieces (Miloslav Kabeláč – *Zrcadlení [Mirroring]*, Luboš Fišer: *15 listů podle Dürerovy Apokalypsy [Fifteen Leaves after Durer's Apocalypse]* and Jan Klusák: *Variace na téma G. Mahlera [Variations on a Theme by G. Mahler]*). Srnka comes to very remarkable conclusions, which pleased me partly because he is a young man and partly because I don't know him well and he didn't come and consult the thing with me, and so he came to his conclusions purely and simply on the basis of information from the music itself.

**Do there exist certain typical themes in contemporary music (drugs, perversions, homosexuality, deviations, suicide, psychiatric institutions)? Sometimes I feel an absence of positive motivations here.**

The man who mistook his wife for a hat etc. Yes. This general negativism is very typical of themes of art in recent years – paranoid states, the impossibility of partnership relations, inability to find a fixed point... Certainly it relates to the state of life at the moment.

**Isn't contemporary music too easily giving up on its chances of communicability? Sometimes it seems to me that contemporary composers haven't even tried to be accessible.**

What actually is comprehensibility in music? Music is comprehensible in the same way as birdsong, or clouds merging, while “understanding nature” is a pretty strange and overblown expression. “To like” doesn't have to mean “to understand”. It's a question of what art wants. I personally hope that when my work works for me, when I understand it, then other listeners will like it and understand it as well, even if they may like it and understand it in a different way than I do. But that contact is nonetheless created.

**What about music for film – or other music “over the picture”? You wrote the music for the famous serial “Hospital on the Edge of Town” for example. Has this line of your work continued?**

Thank God no. I love film and in the sixties I was up to my ears in it (as an actor as well), but I don't like writing film music. For me it is “lost music”, where you are not your own master and have to respect the screenplay and the director... Sometimes it entertained me writing for example a brass march so that “it was indistinguishable from Kmoč”.

**On the other hand, composing in set styles is one of the skills a professional composer has to have....**

Yes, and Profesor Janeček used to tell us that a future professional ought to practice for example writing something à la Mozart. But then it becomes clear who the genuinely creative person is. The person who gets Mozart down to the last detail and is indistinguishable from him most probably doesn't have true creative talent... And that's the issue in film music as well.

**So, given this scepticism, why did you ever take on writing the music for “Hospital on the Edge of Town”?**

The reasons were the most prosaic possible. It was a decision out of necessity, I had almost nothing to live on back then, and in such a situation I didn't have much choice. Hospital (1977) didn't have any sequel as far as I was concerned, with one exception – just after the revolution in November 1989 I did the music for Jiří Menzel's film adaptation of Václav Havel's “The Beggar's Opera”. And I did it with gusto, because it was precisely that “fake Rossini”.

**Which of your colleagues and contemporaries knows how to write “supremely creative – individual” film music?**

But that's common knowledge – we all know it was Luboš Fišer, Svatopluk Havelka and a number of others... and then professionals in the field, for example of the stature of Zdeněk Liška.

**And anyway of course, film music in the past was not like it is today, when musical colouring is so easy to add to the picture and manipulate using studio equipment.**

Well yes, and let's remember the kind of highly artistically autonomous music for films written by composers of the stature of Honegger, for example. That music comes out today on CD as music in its own right... But these days I'm an old gentlemen and first and foremost I want to devote myself to “my monuments”, symphonic and operatic.

**You are a pioneer of dodecaphony among Czech composers. In your view does the dodecaphony as a system, a creative principle, a compositional technique still have any meaning at the beginning of the 21st century? Or is it an anachronism?**

Schönbergian dodecaphony probably no longer has any point, and has been exhausted. But the principle of dodecaphony can still be exploited and in a very versatile way too. One of the many possibilities is geometric manipulation, for example, which is what I work with myself.

**Can the Schönbergian principle be combined with others? Is so, with which? Won't the result of a combination like that be just an impure hotch-potch?**

My answer to the first part of your question would be yes, dodecaphony can be combined with other systems and principles. For example with micro-intervals, I could imagine a quarter-tone serial system – a kind of “double dodecaphony” – and for years now I've been intending a piece like that.

As far as the hotchpotch point is concerned, mixing different elements need not just lead to an impure muddle, but might for example create a compact alloy with completely new qualities – and that is of course desirable.

After all, even Schönberg later mixed his originally very orthodox dodecaphony with non-dodecaphonic elements and think what we could say about Berg! Even such a giant as Shostakovich somewhere wrote that *Wozzek* was a dodecaphonic work. That's the impression it gives – it's a mixture and yet it's a stylistically pure work.

**Inventions – one of the key concepts and products of your work and personality, one which forms the spine, as it were, of your work to date. Inventions are certainly at the heart of your conception of dodecaphony. Do they represent a kind of distilled out form, a world unto itself, the earliest achieved point on the road to an ideal in which the results of striving in other compositional fields are as it were recapitulated and stored, or are they tightly linked to “non-inventions”? For example, what do your famous *Variations on a Theme by G. Mahler* have in common with the following series of *Inventions*?**

The *Variations on Mahler* are naturally from the line of *Inventions* – except that they are more intuitive. I have already mentioned Srnka's analytical study that compares works of Kabeláč, Fišer and my *Variations*. Srnka writes for example that especially in *Variations* I have not achieved that ideal of complete “dissolution of the theme”, and that I still have thematically recognisable surfaces and passages – which is true. The *Inventions* differ from the *Variations*, for example, in the sense that in the inventions I gradually reached absolute serialism as it appears in Boulez, Nono, Stockhausen. In the *Inventions* “everything is dissolved” – it is simply pure seriality – there is no theme there, nor even any melody. But what makes *Variations* variations is just the fact that they keep to the theme to be varied. And they really keep to it – even if that tendency to the gradual disso-

lution and repeated decomposition of the theme is deliberate, and I think that I managed to express it quite eloquently and persuasively in compositional terms.

**The trend to that “dissolution of the theme” is a process that followed later in *Inventions*. In your view as the composer, when was the ideal state actually achieved?**

Not until the *Sixth Invention*.

**How many *Inventions* you have written so far?**

Ten. The first in 1961 and so far the last in 1992.

**Back to the issue of mixing different approaches: alea or logos?**

Those are two poles that on the contrary should not be mixed (actually, they cannot be mixed at all), but they can be combined. For me personally both are important, but logos is more important. That order is very important for a work, if not the most important thing.

**So we shall not achieve a work through aleatorics?**

But of course we shall. John Cage wrote real works, but their order is somewhere else – it is behind the structure, perhaps above it. This order has a spiritual dimension, it is in the contemplation to which the piece gives direction, which it “moderates”, in this way aspiring to be part of a higher order – like all true works of art. I remember a conversation I had a very long time ago with the painter and sculptor Jan Koblása sometime at the beginning of the sixties, when there was a growing interest in abstract art in this country. At that time Koblása had done these abstract pictures à la Pollock, which at first sight were reminiscent of printed circuits (back then this was the entirely new craze in



modern miniaturised electrical technology) and I wanted him to explain to me what the meaning of these artefacts was. Koblasa looked out of the window and pointed out the tracks left by cars in the mud. "There is an order in that," he said to me, "but you understand it only when there is more than one of these tracks and when you look at them from a long way above". I think that many composers have given their works a similar order, very strikingly in the case of Iannis Xenakis, for example. Today it is common for people to think seriously about order in chaos.

**What is your view of the possibility and productiveness of combining what is called "classical, serious" music with jazz or even rock? The young generation of composers today are very interested in this area. Has it ever said anything to you?**

Once again this problem revolves round the centre question of the creative integrity of such an approach. In principle there can be no objections to contacts between so-called serious music and jazz or rock. I have always been impressed by the brilliant way Stravinsky, Martinů, Schulhoff, Ježek and others managed to combine jazz with serious music. I must admit that it has tempted me as well, but somehow I never got round to it in practice. So in my case it's not a case of rejection, but more of a chance set of circumstances.

**Does that means that you have really never written a piece with jazz elements?**

Actually I have. For Jiří Hlaváč's Baroque Jazz Quintet I wrote something, more or less a trifle, called *Shaking Pears*. It was a reference to Shakespeare (at the time I was writing an opera on *Twelfth Night*), whose name used to be a source of jokes even with his contemporaries and especially his rivals. Anyway, to cut it short, the piece uses jazz elements, which was partly because of the group I was writing for, of course.

**I simply can't resist asking you for a brief profile of your work through your own eyes. Which of your works do you regard as milestones in your development as a composer hitherto?**

My independent composing career began with *Music for a Fountain* for wind quintet in 1954 – it's Neo-Classicism and akin to the style of Iša Krejčí. The next piece that was important in terms of my evolution was *Four Small Voice Exercises*, or *Pictures for 12 Wind Instruments* in 1960. That was the first time I got to grips with the dodecaphony.

**If I'm not mistaken, Libor Pešek's Chamber Harmonic had the lion's share of responsibility for getting you to write these pieces.**

Yes, they needed repertoire and every other I wrote some music for their every other concert.

**And then came *Variations on a Theme by G. Mahler*.**

I completed those in 1962. After the *Variations* I spent several years looking for the "formula of invention" and found it in the *6<sup>th</sup> Invention for Nonet* (1969). There I achieved that effect of "dissolution of the tone row" or "dissolution of the theme", that as M. Srnka writes, is not yet present in the *Variations on a Theme by G. Mahler*. Then I started searching again, this time for a way out of that uniformity and sameness, and I found it, I hope, in the *3rd String Quartet* in 1975. After that, my development has not involved any more branching off. There are some pieces that deviate more from the main line, like *Tetragrammaton sive Nomina Eius*, for example (which is the *10th Invention*) – and then *Zemský ráj to na pohled* [*Paradise on Earth*] when I wanted to try out some new, or more precisely different possibilities of tonality. And then *Osa času* [*The Axis of Time*], for the moment my last important composition.

**You mentioned one isolated composition, that has had no successors – that "trifle" with jazz elements for the Baroque Jazz Quintet. As far as isolation is concerned its counterpart is clearly *O sacrum convivium* – which is so far your only electro-acoustic piece. Is it really the only one and if so, why did it stay that way?**

Because just at the time I had a lively interest in electro-acoustic music came those "dry years" when I wasn't allowed into any electro-acoustic studio. And today I have different interests. I am in the middle of a symphony and also something for the theatre, and so probably now I won't get round to electro-acoustic music.

**What led you to abandon Neo-Classicism? After all, in your early period you wrote more pieces in this style than just the *Music for Fountain*. I can recall the *Concerto grosso* or the three symphonies, at random.**

There were several reasons why I suddenly felt that the old traditional forms were exhausted, for example the sonata forms that had been a support to me at the beginning. One of them could have been the fact that after finishing my studies, for a year and a half I found myself outside my real life with music, as it were, because I had to do military service. When I came back to civilian life, I suddenly saw many things in a different light. I hadn't spent my time in the Army Arts Ensemble, but with a combat unit, and in its way this had salutary effects. As relates to the *3rd Symphony* you mentioned, it definitely isn't Neo-Classical. I wrote that after my return from the army, when I had begun to look for a way out of Neo-Classicism. First I wrote the 1st, 2nd and 5th movements, which are still a kind of "halfway house" in that respect, but the 3rd and 4th movements were written later and they are already dodecaphonic. I wrote them after I had completed the *Pictures*, and quite possibly the *1st Invention* as well.

*So far you have written three symphonies and all of them fall into your early period.*

*Have you ever considered writing a Fourth, or even more?*

I'm thinking of writing a big vocal symphony in Mahlerian format. Perhaps it could be called *Song of the World*.

**Instrumental concertos are also among the traditional genres. I know you wrote a bassoon concerto in your youth. Nothing else?**

Oh yes. I also wrote a flute *Concertino* and a saxophone concerto – it hasn't been performed here yet and was written for Holland, where it was presented. And in 1995 I even wrote a piano concerto. I am not a pianist and so I don't know how to do the traditional piano stylisation. But despite that, or maybe just because of it, I had a go. It has not yet been performed here yet.

**You clearly and indisputably belong to the musical generation that we symbolically call the Sixties Generation. As a witness and joint creator of this important stage could you tell our readers something more about the distinctive features of musical life in the sixties?**

Jan Tausinger, Jan Kapr, Zbyněk Vostřák and a number of others – with these people the sixties brought a radical transformation of their style as composers. In my view the process was the most organic with Tausinger. He is a composer we ought to remember. In his case the transformation took place relatively smoothly, and in my view artistically responsibly as well, by which I mean, for example, that he didn't publicise his preparatory, study compositions in the new style for a long time, and it was only when he felt that he was "at home" with the new materials and the new techniques that he had pieces performed, ones that were already not too derivative. There were also composers for whom the transition to New Music was obviously a last resort, but that's not a specifically Czech issue. I myself did not immediately jump on all those various currents springing out of Darmstadt, which were the most influential in this country. I started from the detail and gradually worked my way through to dodecaphony.

**In the fifties where did you get information about twelve-tone and modern music in the West? Where could you hear music of this type actually played? If I'm not mistaken the official sources were nugatory.**

In fact there were some sources here. People who were well informed, included Mirko Očadlík, for example, or Jaroslav Šeda, who can take the credit for the legendary Theatre of Music in Opletalova Street. This had a relatively well-stocked and publicly accessible phonoteque with the music that wasn't officially performed. And then there were private sources: in Prague there were several private collectors and owners of good recording libraries with this attractive music. There would be private listening sessions in their flats. One was the photographer Josef Sudek, and I was a frequent guest in his flat



in the Lesser Town. Sudek had mainly Stravinsky and Honegger – and on standard records. Another source was Milan Munclinger, for instance, who also owned a very extensive record library, which musical Prague was well aware of. In the sixties we used also to meet at Eduard Herzog's place. He didn't have his own recordings but he was employed at Supraphon and used to borrow them from there. And then there was another man to whom I went only for the Rite of Spring – it was a pre-war recording on standard Columbia records (so a set of about 15 records) with Stravinsky conducting. And I listened to this recording many times with the score in my hands. That man's name was F. A. Kypta, and he knew a great deal about Stravinsky. He possessed not just recordings, but plenty of scores from abroad.

### Did you ever visit Darmstadt yourself – the Mecca of Czech modernists of the Sixties?

No, but I was definitely in indirect contact with the Darmstadt environment. Ultimately I wrote my *2nd Invention* as a commission from Darmstadt and it was premiered there in 1963, conducted by Bruno Maderna. They invited me to the premiere, but the Union of Composers was against it and so I never got there. It was one of those absurdities that seem to me today more comic than anything else. That time instead of me one of the politically correct representatives of the Union went there and his pieces were assigned to the Darmstadt curiosities department.

### How did they get to know about you in Darmstadt when you had never been there in person?

Most probably from the Polish magazine *Ruch muzyczny*, where they wrote a lot about me.

Today people often talk about a general tendency to dumbing down and vulgarisation in culture and art...

These trends are real and spreading like weeds, which upsets me. Once upon a time "vulgarisation" had a creative aspect, as a means of breaking through the rigid official and officious "white collar" culture. But today it has become something very decadent and very low, because it is often a cover for cultural inadequacy. There is only one possible defence against it and that is an individual defence: to be uncompromisingly decent.

### Can an artist do just as he or she wants? I am thinking of one of the possible slogans of post-modernity.

I would remind us of a sentence of St. Augustine: "Love and do what you will". I modify it in my own way: Create, then, have an idea and do what you will. After all, to love in the true sense of the word is a matter of genius. Love is one of the ways of breaking through into that other dimension we talked about at the beginning.

## Jan Klusák

Czech composer (but also theatre and film actor, writer and journalist), born on the 18th of April 1934 in Prague.

He attended academic high school (school-leaving examination 1953), and then studied composition at the Prague Conservatory (with Jaroslav Řídký) and the Music Faculty of the Faculty of Performing Arts (with Pavel Bořkovec). As a composer his starting-point was Neo-Classicism (Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Iša Krejčí). From the Autumn of 1959 he worked for some years with Libor Pešek's Chamber Harmonic. This gave Klusák the impulse to a new creative orientation in the direction of the then New Music. He wrote a number of pieces for the Chamber Harmonic, the most important including *Obrázky pro 12 dechových nástrojů* [Pictures for 12 Wind Instruments], *Čtyři malá hlasová cvičení na texty Franze Kafky* [Four Small Voice Exercises on Texts by Franz Kafka] and *1st Invention*.

In these pieces Klusák gradually made the transition to the dodecaphony and the poetics of the 2nd Vienna School. Following on from this shift he wrote *Variations on a Theme by Gustav Mahler* in 1960–62, which is generally regarded as Klusák's most important work so far. In the 60s Klusák also did a great deal of work in film – as a composer of film music and directly as an actor.

After August 1968 he was marginalised by the communist regime. At this time, however, he also worked with the satirical Theatre of Jára Cimrman. In his composing work he gradually developed his own individual form of the invention and in 1975 created another milestone work in the form of his *3rd String Quartet*. Following November 1989 Klusák "returned to the public" and took on several public posts (artistic board of the Prague Spring, advisor on repertoire at the National Theatre, offices in the Arts Association [Umělecká beseda]) and received a series of awards. He lives and works in Prague.

**Selection of Work:** The spine of Klusák's work to date consists of nine Inventions for various combinations of instruments and five string quartets. He has written as many as 200 pieces to date.

*Hudba k vodotrysku* [Music for a Fountain] for wind quintet, 1954

*Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra*, 1954–55

String Quartet no. 1, 1955–56

Concerto grosso, 1957

*Symphony no. 1*, 1956

*Symphony no. 2*, 1959

*Symphony no. 3*, 1960

*Obrázky pro 12 dechových nástrojů* [Pictures for 12 Wind Instruments], 1960

*Čtyři malá hlasová cvičení na texty Franze Kafky* [Four Small Voice Exercises on Texts by Franz Kafka], 1960

*1st Invention for Chamber Orchestra*, 1961

*Variations on a Theme by Gustav Mahler*, 1962

*2nd Invention for Chamber Orchestra*, 1962

*3rd Invention for Strings*, 1962

String Quartet no. 2, 1961–62

*4th Invention for Orchestra*, 1964

*1–4–3–2–5–6–7–10–9–8–11 for Solo Flute*, 1965

*5th Invention for Wind Quintet*, 1965

*Rondo for Piano*, 1967

*O sacrum convivium (Motet Concrète)*, 1968

*6th Invention for Nonet*, 1969

*Mourning Monody for I. Stravinsky*, 1972

*7th Invention for Large Orchestra*, 1972–73

*8th Invention for Small Orchestra*, 1973

*Jupiter, Duet for Clarinet and Cello*, 1973

*Sonata for Percussion Instruments*, 1974

*3rd String Quartet*, 1975

*Lev [The Lion], Duet for Flute and Piano*, 1977

*Luna v zenitu [Luna at the Zenith]. Four Poems by A. Akhmatova for Mezzo Soprano, Clarinet, Viola and Piano*, 1981

*4th String Quartet*, 1980

*10th Invention "Tetragrammaton Sive Nomina Eius" for Large Orchestra*, 1992

*5th String Quartet "Great passacaglia"*, 1994

*Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, 1994–95

### Stage Music (selection):

*Bertram a Mescalinda aneb Potrestaná věrnost* [Bertram and Mescalinda or Fidelity Punished]. Opera-pasticcio, 1974–82

*Dvanáctá noc aneb Cokoli chcete* [Twelfth Night or What You Will]. Opera in 2 Acts, 1985

*Povídka o Aucassinovi a Nicolettě* [The Tale of Aucassin and Nicolette]. Singspiel, 1986

*Král se zlatou maskou* [The King with the Golden Mask]. Ballet, 1986

*Héró a Leandros* [Hero and Leander]. Ballet, 1988

*Dybuk aneb bludná duše* [Dybuk or the Wanderin' Soul]. Play with singing, 1995

*Zpráva pro akademii* [Reports for the Academy]. Chamber Opera, 1992–96

**"E. F. Burian (11th June 1904–9th August 1959) was what you might call a 'total' artist. Composer, writer, actor, singer, theatre and film director, theoretician, politician, bon vivant, prisoner, communist in uniform. He was one of the first in Czech culture to pursue the idea of certain kind of gesamtkunstwerk, an approach that was later to be taken up in *Laterna magica* (Black Theatre), or Czech experimental film, for example. Burian's music is almost entirely forgotten in this country today, although it deserves to be valued in the context of the international avant garde between the wars. His purely musical output was vast (perhaps 200 opuses – several operas, a series of orchestral works, many chamber pieces, dozens of stage and film compositions).**

**Today it seems incredible that one man could have done so much, directing his theatre (which according to witnesses he hardly ever left), while yet managing to produce an enormous amount of work in pretty well every branch of art. Particularly after 1948 his output as a composer was remarkable, including a great quantity of new works, and the revision of a series of earlier works that he now cast in final form. Many of his works (for example his string quartets) he wrote in a strange solitude, despite the conventional view of Burian as a bullying politician – director. Burian's pre-war music is characterised on the one hand by a kind of neo-primitivism and neo-folklorism foreshadowing the movement in Czech music in the 1950s, but on the other by admiration for jazz, the two strands often pit together in a weird hybrid that would most probably upset today's purist serious composers."**

**It is with these words that the conductor of the Agon Orchestra, Petr Kofroň, introduced a concert that this year effectively re-ignited interest in the music of E. F. Burian, who was born exactly a hundred years ago. In this number we bring you three articles – among them an essay by Kofroň –, which will, we hope, give you at least a basic idea of how extraordinary E. F. Burian was.**

# e. f. burian: sweep the stage!

VLASTA REITTEREROVÁ

*"Once as a small girl I was going for a walk with my father when he said, 'Look, that's the singer Emil Burian coming in the opposite direction.' I had only been to the National Theatre once to see a fairytale and I had huge respect for anyone that acted or sang in the theatre. I stared admiringly at Emil Burian, but I couldn't help noticing the girl on one side of him and the boy on the other. The little boy in short trousers and cap made an indelible impression on my memory. To this day I can still summon up a vivid picture of him walking beside his father with his hands in his pockets. I couldn't have had any idea, of course, that this boy was one day going to play such an important part in my work."*  
This was how the later "Děčko" ("D") Theatre actress Lola Skrbková remembered her first encounter with her future director. It was not only Lola who could have had no inkling of what the young son of the great baritone would become. His famous father could have had no inkling either, although he must have known that his son might well have musical and theatrical talents. He would definitely not have pre-

dicted, for example, that Emil the younger, brought up to honour the great tradition of Czech music represented by the legacy of Smetana, would one day fall madly in love with jazz syncopation. On that summer day described by Lola Skrbková, Emil may not have been very interested in being gawped at by worshippers of his father's art, but at 21, while still a pupil at the conservatory, he was already embarking on a major musical career himself as the National Theatre presented his opera *Před slunce východem* [*Before Sunrise*]. He had even written the opera, based on Maeterlinck's play *Aladdin and Palomid*, two years before. "E. F." was everywhere something was happening in music, poetry and theatre. His name made his life easy and difficult at the same time. He knew the glamour and the pitfalls of fame from his home and family. He must have been aware of the envious voices that could not forgive his uncle Karel (even more celebrated than his brother Emil, younger by six years) his successes abroad, and must have understood the tragedy of this great tenor, often compared to



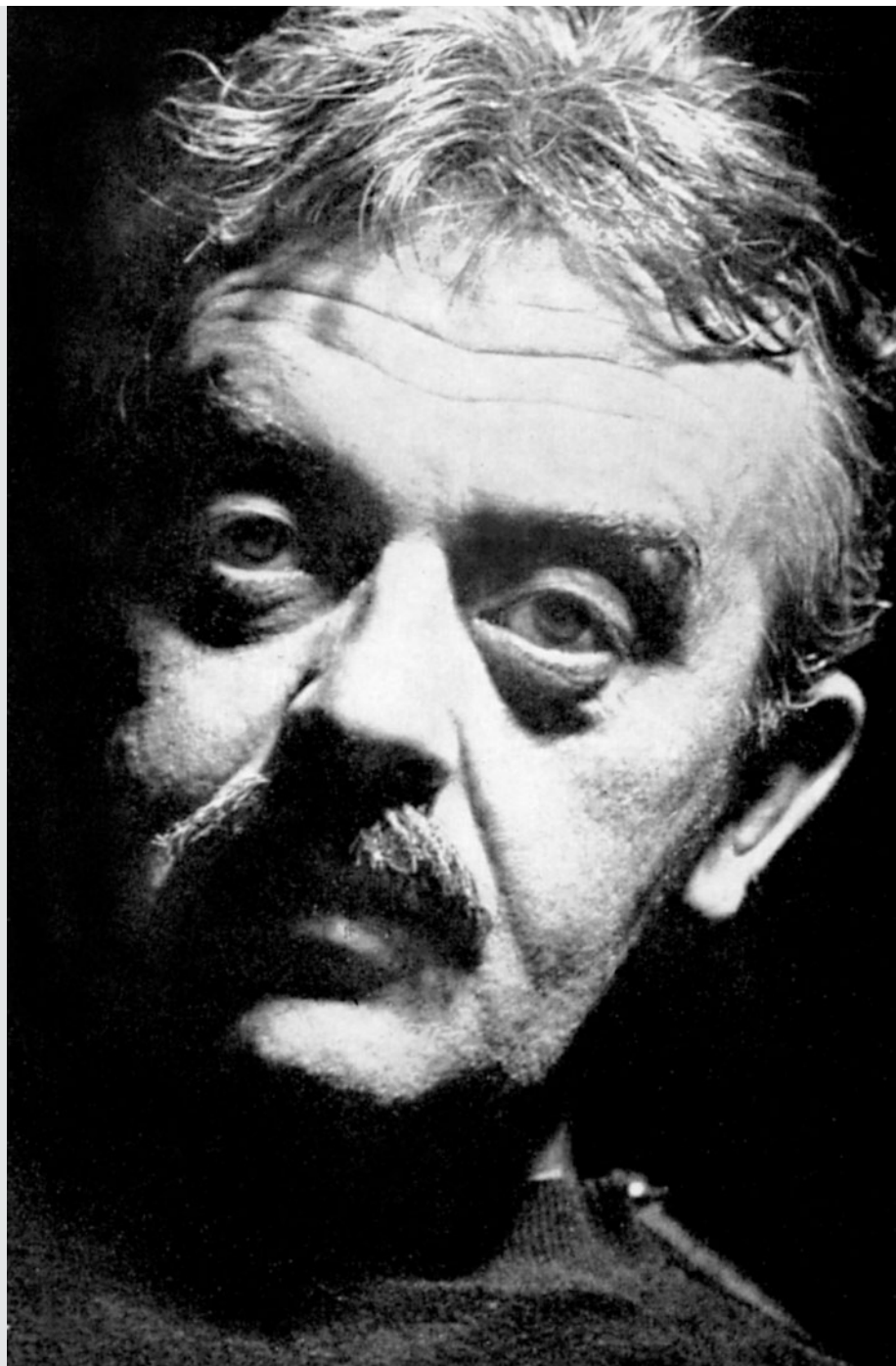
V. E. Meyerhold and E. F. Burian  
(by A. Hoffmeister)

Caruso, who lived out his life in serious illness and deprived of the stage. But anyone who is born with the theatre in their blood is condemned in advance.

**“On St. Camile’s Day my wife hopes you will come, and meet Emil, who is my son”**

Thus Emil Burian welcomed his son, and left his friends in no doubt of his paternal pride. It was not only thanks to his uncle and father that Emil’s home was full of music. His mother was a singing teacher and young Emil naturally grew up surrounded by all kinds of resonant voices, speaking or singing. Did he wonder even back then how all these voices would sound together, rhythmically arranged according to his direction? The year 1920 saw the founding of the arts group “Devětsil” [meaning “Butturbur”, a plant, but also literally, “Nine Forces”] that brought together writers, painters, architects, musicians and theatre people, but also critics and arts journalists. Burian became involved through his friendship with the poet Vítězslav Nezval. Here he met Jiří Frejka, and with him and Jindřich Honzl came to form the “trio of the most audacious” as it was later called. Burian joined “Devětsil” as a musician, but it was here than his taste for theatre came to the fore. It was here that the Osvobozené divadlo [Liberated Theatre] was born, in which Burian started to develop his versatility: he played on the piano, composed and sang, but also acted and nursed a longing to be a director – the one who puts together and sets in motion that clockwork mechanism of interlocking wheels that is theatre. Here as a musician he worked alongside Jaroslav Ježek who, for example *“full of humour marvellously parodied famous musicians on the piano, and E. F. Burian recited, played at jazz accompanied by gramophone and sung his proverbs, and did all this with great gravity,”* as the daily Lidové noviny reported on the 2nd of March 1927. A remarkable formulation: Ježek *“parodied on the piano”* and Burian *“played at jazz”*... The performance was something between cabaret, revue and poetic belts, with many elements of ordinary practical jokery, delight in combinations of words, sounds, objects and individual ideas. Gradually, however, a more serious note crept into what were still performances for “letting one’s hair down”.

The European avant garde identified with left-wing thinking, partly as a reaction to the tradition-loaded bourgeois culture in which the younger generation had grown up. Just as the new bourgeoisie had once defined itself against the aristocracy, so the contemporary generation of artists took up the call for social revolution, which it saw as the condition for the birth of a new kind of art. It was only logical that this political conviction came hand in hand with enchantment with the modern Russian theatre, Alexander Tairov and Vsevolod Meyerhold, and also with the left-orientated theatre of the West – Bertolt Brecht, Erwin Piscator. The Burian – Frejka – Honzl trio finally parted company and went off to different theatres. Burian went via the “Dada” and “Modern Studio” companies to Brno, Olomouc and back to Brno. The “Dada” and “Modern Studio” (where Burian was still



working with Frejka), were ephemeral ventures, but it was in these companies that Burian developed his highly individual approach to theatre. It was in Brno that in 1929 Burian’s voice-band was formed. Burian was not the only one to be searching for a new relationship to the stage word at this period, but he was the only one to develop ensemble recitation into orchestral score and to found a distinctive theatrical poetics on the genre. In 1929 he presented a Czech classic romantic poem, “May” by Karel Hynek Mácha. It was one of the best voice-band presentations, one that he was to return to twice with his own Děčko company and which its member Nina Jirsíková was to stage at the Terezín concentration camp. One year before “May”, in 1928, Burian pre-

sented his ensemble at the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Siena. Here the Voice-band created a sensation and of course had its critics, as is usual and desirable with every new development. Burian was conscious that the audience would be international, and so the programme was put together from Italian, French, English, German and Czech texts. One of the Italian reviewers gave a charming account not just of the performance but also of Burian himself: *“A kind of spirit, a medium, presented himself as cappelmaestro; not the sort we would have expected. No directorial full beard, no glasses, no prim frock coat. Just two searching magnetic eyes shining with intelligent sympathy and – malice. It is hard to imagine the private life of this universal man.”*



*After so many attempt to break up old forms, after so many sonatas and quartets 'at any price', it is a magnificent experience to meet someone who ultimately doesn't care about any of it, learns directly from the birds and sings – can one put it like this? – the most beautiful free song of the last fifty years."*

Burian defined his "patent" invention like this: *"The libretto of voice-band is the poem. The text is not reproduced in the same way as in the old kind of recitation ensemble, but is transposed into the ensemble key in such a way as to allow the beauty of the ensemble union to stand out as much as possible. The word and its latent musicality constitute the building block in rhythmic harmony. [...] The word is rhythmised freely."* The melody of voice-band also flowed from the latent musicality of the word, with harmonies created by division according to the natural registers of female and male voices. Nonetheless the ensemble remained a set of individuals, with each performer interpreting the text as she or he wished.

Burian's ensemble changed venues, appearing at the Umělecká beseda [Arts Association], in the Na Slupi Theatre and in the Mozarteum: its performances included for example the Old Czech *Mastičkář* [The Mountebank], Havlíček's *Křest svatého Vladimíra* [The Baptism of St. Vladimir], *The Song of Songs* (with text arranged by Max Brod), and a Hans Sachs farce, but also Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Collaboration with Frejka, however, ultimately led to claustrophobia and "cabin fever". Burian resigned and left for Brno, while Frejka went to the National Theatre.

In the drama Studio in Brno, Burian was reunited with Jindřich Honzl, and staged Macchiavelli, Maeterlinck, O'Neill, and Šalda, for example, but the company did not have the funds to survive. After a year of frustration in Olomouc, Burian tried again in Brno. Here he directed Nezval's *Milenci z kiosku* [Lovers from a Kiosk] in 1932, effectively engaging in polemic with Frejka, who had just directed the same play at the National Theatre in Prague. The final verses of the play caused both directors problems with the censor: *"I know a land near the pole, I know a land of strange beauty, and to this land we shall go together and forever. It is not America, land of deluding mirages, where the black slave sobs in a sea of plantations. [...] That land is strangely beautiful and full of sweetness, Oh, there you would be happy. It is the land of freedom."* Shortly afterwards the rebel Burian, persona non grata in Brno, returned to Prague.

### "Sweep the Stage!"

*"Old Richard Wagner, or to go even further back Monteverdi, or as far as we can, the Ancient Greeks, dreamed of the theatre that is only today starting to be a reality. They dreamed of creating a form that would be neither music nor speech, neither sculpture nor dance, that would be neither poem nor picture, but everything together. They dreamed of that synthetic form that was discovered for us when the first electric ray fell on a boulevard, and which offers itself to us with each new technical invention. Today for the first time we can realise that theatre in which the frontiers of misunderstanding*

*between the arts would fall."* In 1936 Burian published the slender booklet entitled "Sweep the Stage!", dedicated to the memory of his father. It is a summary of his views on theatre, his hopes for the future and what he had managed to achieve with his own company over the last two years. The "D 34" company was launched on the 16th of September 1933 with a performance in the concert hall of the Mozarteum in Jungmannova Street. The changing number of the company, always indicating the year in the second half of the current season, meant a journey ahead, and symbolised unending searching. The first production was symbolic as well: Erich Kastner's *Life in Our Days*. The other plays in the first season also showed clearly the social groups Burian was gunning for, and this inevitably meant that his audiences were composed mainly of young workers and students. In his manifesto "Sweep the Stage!" he underlined several passages that formed the axis of his programme: *"The modern theatre director serves, but is not a servant", "Theatre must be taken into the hands of those who create it", "The time has come when it will be necessary to shoot for beautiful art. He who shoots first will be the winner", "For us the nation is the working people, and the culture of the working people is the national culture for us".*

### Director Musician

In the autumn of 1936 Vsevolod Meyerhold visited Prague and saw Burian's production of the *Barber of Seville* at the Děčko: *"E. F. Burian is a director very close to me in approach. He composes his productions like a musician, and I regard that as the only correct method in dramatic art,"* he said. Music always played an irreplaceable role in Burian's theatre. His direction was really a musical score, and he used to call the scripts the librettos. Burian's "polydynamics", as he called the mutual interlinkage of all the dramatic elements, was based on the principles of musical form; he kept to a sense of proportion in the deployment of all elements, and respected the laws of gradation and contrast as in musical composition. It was not a case of music accompanying the dramatic performance, but of ensuring that all the dramatic methods employed "resonated together". For Burian every theatre production was the composition of an opera (the complete opposite of the general tendency today, which is for opera to be directed like spoken drama). In Burian's concept, the musical element was already contained in the essence of drama. *"If music is already latently contained in drama, this does not mean that the normal ear has to hear it just as music, i.e. as a series of notes and harmonies produced in time and space using instruments and the human voice. Music is above all the hidden law of the stage. [...] We say 'this space has rhythm', for example, or sometimes we say, 'the dialogue has tempo'. Or else people say, 'this or that actress has a melodious voice'. The trained ear recognises the pause the goes on too long. The individual deployment of the actors in dialogue has its musical law."* Commenting on his presentation of Mácha (a poet) he said, *"Czech music has one of its best composers in Mácha."* His treat-

ment of lighting, movement and other elements (Burian was one of the first in this country to use film as part of the stage design) was also based on a musical feeling for rhythm and its changes.

Himself a musician, Burian knew how to choose excellent musicians as colleagues. Those who worked in Děčko included Karel Ančerl, Karel Reiner and Rafael Schächter. The three were later interned in Terezín, where all of them helped to maintain faith in life through music. The conductor Rafael Schächter, who directed Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and Verdi's *Requiem* in Terezín, did not survive. Nor did Hans Krása, whose music for Adolf Hoffmeister's *Mládí ve hře* [Youth at Play], presented at the Děčko on the 19th of February 1935, was the first case of Burian using stage music that he had not composed himself (apart from the use of Kurt Weill's songs in *The Threepenny Opera*, in which Burian himself played Mack-eath).

Burian's avant garde company was soon confronted with fascism and Nazism. During a tour of Switzerland in 1935 the company was faced with protests from fascist-influenced sections of the public provoked particularly by Burian's *Vojna* [War], a production based on folk poetry from Erben's collection with a clearly pacifist message. Other sections of the public were more understanding: *"We don't understand the words but a forsaken mother is always understandable, not only in Czech,"* someone wrote in Berne. There were attacks on Burian at home, too. In May 1937 the company held a spring festival linked to an international theatre conference and an exhibition of the fruits of Czech (Czechoslovak) culture from Bedřich Smetana to the current young generation. Rightists branded Burian as a Jew-Bolshevik, and Czech nationalists were outraged by the fact that the exhibition included several works by artists from the German minority. The company continued to play, however, and the number of premieres in a season never fell below five, not even in the first year of the occupation.

In the company Burian was not only head, author, repertory director, and director (including involvement in stage design), but also the main composer of the music. Productions involving his own music included Nezval's *Lovers from the Kiosk*, Mácha's *Kat* [Hangman], Musset's *Les Caprices de Marianne*, Viktor Dyk's *Krysař* [The Ratcatcher], Nezval's *Manon Lescaut*, and with Karel Reiner's music Klicpera's comedy *Každý něco pro vlast* [Everyone must do something for his Country], Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, and Büchner's comedy *Leon and Lena*. Děčko's last season provided opportunities for young composers: Václav Dobiáš (An Old History by Julius Zeyer), Jiří Sternwald, and Václav Kašík. Zbyněk Přecechtěl wrote the music for Nina Jirsíková's ballet *Pohádka o tan-ci* [Fairytale about Dance].

Shortly before the war, Burian as composer took a new path that he was to be prevented from continuing. After a long interval he turned

once again to opera. *Maryša*, based on the story by the Mrštík brothers was completed in 1938 and premiered on the 16th of April 1943 in Brno. Its subject and treatment have led to frequent comparison with Janáček's *Jenůfa*. It is an exceptional work, but one that in the context of Burian's creative legacy tends to be wrongly regarded as a kind of "excursion" into a field uncharacteristic for him. Who knows the direction that Burian would have taken had it not been for the war?

*The Fairytale about Dance* was the penultimate premiere at Děčko. In it a wood nymph teaches people to dance and is sent to her death for it by a wicked queen, but the people who have learnt to dance keep on dancing. The allegory was explicit and unambiguous. On the 12th of March 1941 the theatre was closed and Burian, who from the start of the occupation had been a constant target of attacks by the Czech fascist movement, "Vlajka", was arrested, and with him Nina Jirsíková and Zbyněk Přecechtěl, although the latter was finally judged the least guilty and released. Burian was sent to a series of concentration camps and was one of the few to survive from the ship the *Cap Arcona*, loaded with prisoners by the Nazis who wanted to remove the traces of their crimes in the camps. The absurdity of all wars was apparent when on the 3rd of May 1945 the boat was sunk by the victorious allies. Thousands of its involuntary passengers were drowned or shot as soon as they reached the shore (official sources speak of eight thousand victims, Burian spoke of twenty thousand).

### The Theatre that was Left

Burian returned to Prague in June of 1945. *"In the concentration camp I dreamed of the Theatre of Work. I believed with complete certainty that when I returned to my liberated country, the workers of all nations would create the conditions for the creation of a Theatre of Work as the consequence of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie, and that I would be able to serve my homeland and people within it"*, Burian wrote in 1953. His initial enthusiasm cooled somewhat when he discovered that the technically equipped buildings had already been taken apart, *"And so all that was left for me was a hall that no one wanted, a rat hole under the U Rozvařilů Restaurant"*. Burian finally resigned himself to the situation and started activities in D 46. For a short time he also led the theatre in Brno and the Karlín operetta theatre. The first production of the new "D" – Děčko was *Sen jednoho vězně* [*The Dream of a Prisoner*], Burian's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. *"A three-dimensional and interesting example of how people succumb to chaos. E. F. Burian, this distinguished director and unpleasant repatriatee, has come back from the concentration camp with some kind of psychological injury"*, wrote Ferdinand Peroutka. People didn't want to be reminded of the war or the camps, and didn't want to see *Romeo* with a prisoner's number. Burian had no better success with operetta, and his adaptation of Friml's *Král tuláků* [*King of Tramps*] was branded a mistake of the same



E. F. Burian and Marie Burešová (B. Brecht's *Beggar's Opera*)

kind. The turbulent times resisted reminders of the inter-war period even in the name of the theatre company. In the period 1951–1954 it operated under the title Army Arts Theatre. These words written by Burian in 1947 could have been addressed to himself. *"It's not that we want to deny talent and destroy what is known as creative freedom. The point is whether people can be found among us who will use their creative free convictions to find a relationship with today's reality, with the man of today and his life, and whether they will have the courage to get rid of the superstition that prevents them getting into the heart of the man of today."* One of the most audacious of the inter-war generation turned to propagating the ideas of socialist realism, the marks of which were *"concreteness and clarity, unambiguous message and aggressiveness of content"*, rejection of the formalism that *"copies the superficial signs of reality"* and *"experiments at any price"*. In 1957 he mused on how to fire the young artists of the day and remedy errors, *"caused by the unhealthy development of policy towards youth since 1945"*. He did not wish to criticise the regime; on the contrary his essay was entitled *Lenin has Taught Us* and used the consequences of the October Revolution as

arguments. It is hard to recognise the former theatrical experimentalist in the words, *"The National Theatre was once built from the will of the people and it is by the will of the people that it stands today. This means that the management of the National Theatre has a duty to respect the will of the people who built it and who allow it to live. [...] The Bartered Bride cannot be other than as Bedřich Smetana wrote it. What some artist or director dreams up to add to it is of no consequence at all. [...] Our workers, our working people don't ask whether Mr. XY is so highly artistically educated that he can discover Smetana on stage in a different way to some discoverer ten days ago, but whether he has a right to Smetana's Bartered Bride. It is the architect or director who vanishes from the stage as quickly as possible in respect for a great classic work that is the genius!"*

### Barriers between Us

An overview of the repertoire of the postwar Děčko is testimony enough to the way artistic ideals were adapted (yielded, pandered) to the times, how they helped to create (supported) them, how they resisted them, dodged them, succumbed to them and sometimes found their



original power again, but only temporarily. In the first season Burian revived his old productions – *Věra Lukášová* based on a story by Božena Benešová, Klicpera's *Každý něco pro vlast*, Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, Máchá's *May*. Reactions were very mixed, as in the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, so in the case of Klicpera, Burian was even accused of propagating bourgeois ideology despite being a communist. Convinced of his theatrical ideal, in the next season he presented his adaptations of Coster's *Eulenspiegel*, Čech's *Excursions of Mr. Brouček to the 15th Century*, Maeterlinck, Tristan Tzara, Dostoyevsky, but also a "platform" for his own ideas in the form of productions of *Jeden ze všech, zpověď autora* [*One of All, the Author's Confession*] and *Hráze mezi námi* [*Barriers between Us*]. Even before the war, adaptations and dramatisations of folk texts had formed a significant part of his repertoire. *Vojna* [*War*] had been followed by another five pieces based on folk inspiration and after the war he returned to these sources. He presented the Old Czech comedy *Esther* with his own music and then the dramatic belt *Láska, vzdor a smrt* [*Love, Resistance and Death*]. A *Folk Suite* consisted of his revived pre-war production of the *Hry o svatě Dorotě a Saličku* [*Play about St. Dorothy and Salička*] and he then rehearsed the medley *Vánoční hry českého lidu* [*Christmas Plays of the Czech People*]. In March 1949, however, he premiered *Parta brusiče Karhana* [*The Team of the Grinder Karhan*] by Vašek Káňa (which "showed how to represent today's struggle for better methods of work and socialist competition"), in February 1950 Alexej Pluděk's *Případ Modrá voda* [*The Case of Blue Water*] (roles like the small farmer Šimek, the worker from the patron factory Vaněk and the Chairwoman of the Agricultural Co-operative give a fair idea of the direction of the company's repertoire), and in November of the same year Burian's adaptation of *Sirény* [*The Sirens*] by Marie Majerová. These productions were followed by *Spring Waters* by Sergei Michalkov, Surovov's *Dawn over Moscow*, Pogodin's *Man with a Rifle*, and Gorky's *Vassa Zheleznova*. Meanwhile the theatre company had been renamed the Army Arts Theatre and the pacifist Burian had acquired an officer's uniform. On the occasion of Burian's fiftieth birthday there were calls for a new Czech drama, "that would resonate hugely through the time and its chaos, but also light it up and help to find a way out of it", the kind of drama that would give Burian the chance to "take the entire measure of the creative maturity of his whole personality and test its entire development". From the autumn of 1955 the company was again allowed the title D 34, but its position did not become easier. The revived *Vojna* became the subject of debate in the press. For some it was a "creative polemic against the impoverished, simplified and monastic interpretation of socialist realism", while for others it was "formal wilfulness, nothing but stylisation, no truth of life", "excessive avantgardism". The spectator was said to get "a feeling of cramp, a strange ecstasy, in which ideas are conjured up and connected in the way usual for the avant-garde movements of the

thirties, a way that is basically alien to us today. This impression is underlined by the music. The preponderance of the rhythmic element, the often dogged repetition of a few harmonic connections, a few rhythmic figures and a melodic line that is for the most part suppressed or deformed have a crushing and stifling effect on most of the audience, even those who are used to listening to modern and experimental music." When *Vojna* was published in book form, the publishers Orbis were accused of devoting too much care to the publication, while taking a miserly approach to works that were "of vital importance for the life of the theatre." Burian still, however, had enough strength to try something new. In the 1955/56 season a small opera ensemble was established in Děčko. In 1956 it presented Burian's *Opera z pouti* [*Fairground Opera*], "a great romp in three acts". It was directed by Libuše Čechová with stage design by Zdeněk Seydl, and the cast included Libuše Havelková and Vladimír Menšík. While the production was extremely popular, the critics asked, "Is there anything more here than 'great romp'? We think there isn't. In particular, the play no longer seems to contain the idea [...] of celebrating a good boy who wants to live by the labour of his own hands and become a peerless master of his craft, and the fact that he emerges victorious over a devious court good-for-nothing. While the original idea of the folk play is proclaimed here in the author's preface in the programme, it is hard to find in the production itself. [...] Doesn't this work of Burian's offer us rather too little? [...] A great romp and the glitter of a fairground spectacle has this time seduced E. F. Burian away from most valuable aspects of the folk tradition." Not even his new production of *Eugene Onegin* in 1957 pleased the critics. Unlike his pre-war version, this new treatment was entirely based on music. Here Burian once again trusted in himself and his faith in the musical laws of the theatre. The result, however, was criticised as a simplification of the story, and the creation of "too clear and predictable a line [...], *Onegin* is simplified into a repulsive villain, smooth and courageous, but an unfeeling, selfish and conceited tyrant." Burian was also criticised for forced rhymes and vulgarisms in his version of the text, and it was argued that while the adaptation brought more than one new and healthy element, the treatment of the material was in some cases excessively subjective. The final premiere at Děčko came in 1959 with Burian's own play *Rozcestí* [*Crossroads*], a highly symbolic title since Burian himself stood at a crossroads. Prematurely exhausted and defeated, however, the journey he took in the autumn of the same year was to the land "from whose bourne no traveller returns." The theatre that was to play under his name until 1990 identified with his legacy in more than name alone. Many actors whom he had trained played in it, and the company from time to time returned to some of the titles in his repertoire, further generations of directors and composers rising to the challenge each in his own way. Music remained an inseparable element in the Divadlo E. F. Buriana productions. Burian's *Věra Lukášová* was staged with his

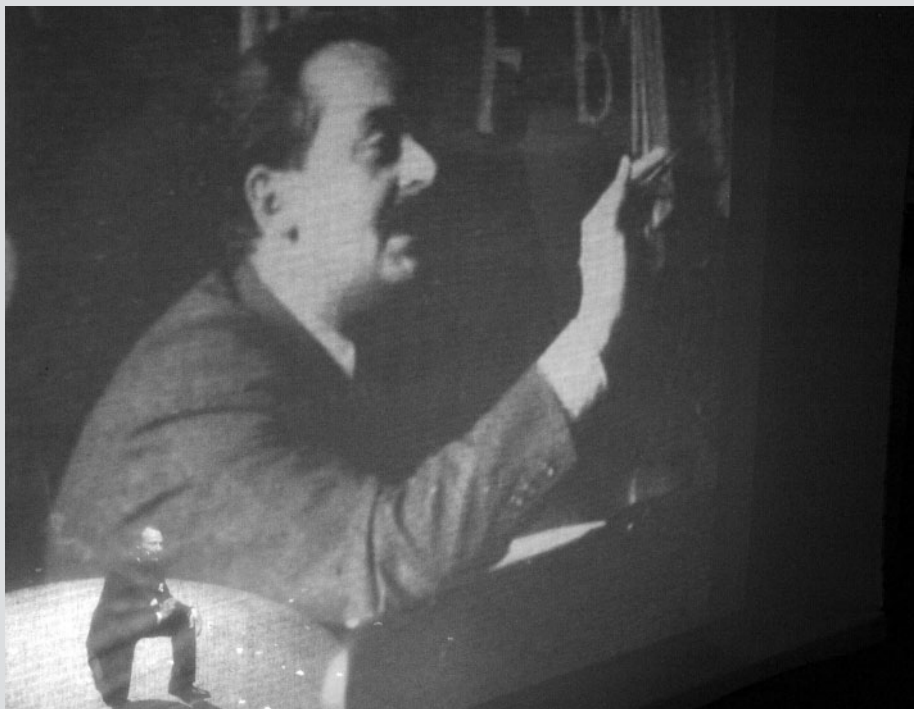
music directed by Jaroslav Dudek, with choreography by Pavel Šmok and with Burian's daughter Kateřina in the title role (1974). His adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *White Nights* was presented with music by J. O. Karel (1971), and Burian's repertory legacy was kept alive with the production of Büchner's *Leon and Lena* (directed by Petr Scherhauser, 1969), Brecht and Weill's *Threepenny Opera* (directed by Garyk Císař, 1969), Nezval's *Manon Lescaut* (directed by Karel Novák with music by Jiří Srnka in 1961, and directed by Josef Palla with music by Ladislav Simon in 1969), Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* with music by Jan Novák (1968 resp. 1970), and even a reconstruction of the Terežín production of Máchá's *May* in Nina Jirsíková's version, directed by Petr Novotný and with music by Milan Svoboda (1975). Throughout his life the composer Emil František Burian remained unjustly overshadowed by Burian the director and dramatic author. His legacy as composer is considerable and very diverse. Apart from stage music for the needs of his theatre he composed a number of chamber and orchestral pieces, individual songs and song cycles. His early opera *Bubu of Montparnasse* had to wait to be premiered until 1999, seventy years after it was written, at the State Opera in Prague. It was the best production of the season, a major surprise with its multiplicity of styles and dramatic unity. The opera *Maryša* was recorded for television, directed by Eva Marie Bergerová in 1984, and the *Opera z pouti* [*Fairground Opera*] was presented a few years ago by the Disk Theatre, while outside the Czech Republic Burian's inter-war music has been rediscovered by the Dutch group Ebony Band. In comparison with his huge output, however, these are for the moment mere drops in the ocean.

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# e. f. burian: composer



JOSEF BEK

*vocal parts sing, if it is not otherwise specified, the vowel "a". Where 'in a suppressed way' is specified, the parts should be sung with lips closed (singing through the nose).*

*2. The musical reciter should not sing. The notes here should not be understood as signs to determine the sung line, but as signs indicating the fall and rise of the voice during recitation."*

These instructions are the first suggestion of the future voiceband that was to astound the musical public five years later.

In 1922 he also started to compose an opera based on the play *Aladdin and Palomid* by Maurice Maeterlinck. Burian's interest in this author was undoubtedly inspired by Claude Debussy, who had composed his opera *Pelleas and Melissande* on one of Maeterlinck's works. The latter opera had its Czech premiere in 1921 and made a strong impression on Burian. In order to come as close as possible to Debussy, he even found a particularly similar play by Maeterlinck. Burian was still searching for his own style at the time and so did not conceal the fact that he had been inspired by the French master both in overall musical dramatic concept and in the composition technique in the details. Thus, for example, he abandoned vocal melodiousness in favour of a declamatory style derived from the cadence of ordinary speech, renounced duets, ensembles, choral passages or simultaneity of vocal parts. He linked up short scenes arranged in mosaic form using several-bar orchestral interludes, and gave the whole score a subdued mood. His choice of compositional techniques also reflected French inspiration. These include, for example, frequent, sometimes even tedious, chromatism, a use of the whole-tone scale, pentatonic scales, fourth-fifth and seventh-ninth chords, fifth and octave parallels and richly colourful and finely differentiated orchestration with conspicuous use of the harp and celesta. Although he soon freed himself from dependence on Debussy, he retained many of these techniques and they became the basis for the creation of his own style.

During his studies Burian composed other pieces in Late Romantic or Impressionist style. In 1924 he wrote a one-act opera, *Před slunce východem* [*Before Sunrise*], that involved the biblical characters Adam and Eve, a choir and orchestra. This mystical symbolist and very secularly conceived story of the birth of mankind

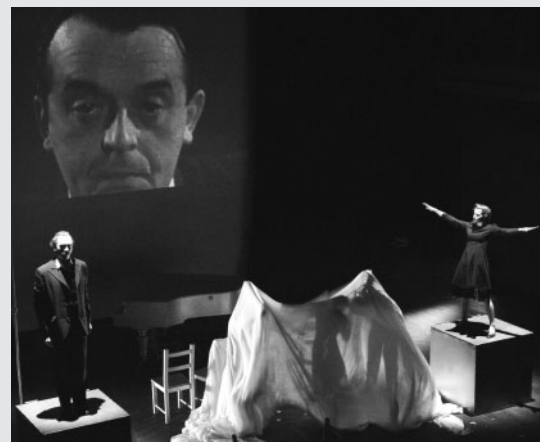


Although Burian grew up in a family that was hugely and indeed famously musical, he took a relatively long time to decide on systematic musical studies. Towards the end of the 1st World War the boy went through a stormy, disturbed period, and even lived on the streets for a while. His father, an opera singer, was at that time working in Pest and the mother couldn't cope with her son. It was only with the post-war stabilisation of conditions that he saw sense himself and embarked on studies at the Prague Conservatory with passionate commitment. After finishing his studies there in 1924 he went on to master's school in the composition class of J. B. Foerster, graduating in 1927. His first surviving composition, *Variations for piano op. 1* (1920) is still very clumsy. By contrast his opus *2 Beznadějná samomluva* [*Hopeless Soliloquy*] (1922) for vocal quartet, speaker, violin and piano is already worthy of note: not only is it skilfully mastered from the point of view of composition, but it is notable for the balance it strikes between classical music in accordance with the stylistic conventions of the turn of the 19th/20th century, and lighter music (operetta and Anglo-American musical revue – "sweet music"). Furthermore, here Burian emerges as a pioneer of the new way of using the human voice in music. In his instructions for the performers he requires, for example, "1. The



differed from the previous work only in its more audacious polyphony and permanently modulating harmonies, moving in the direction of Schönbergian atonality. What is more important, however, is that here for the first time Burian presents himself as an innovative director of sound with a well-developed feeling for acoustically effective use of theatrical space: the choir, having the function of the ancient chorus, has a precisely stipulated position (on or behind stage, at other times to the back of the auditorium, or revolving etc.), selected instruments (3 French horns, harp and celesta) playing backstage and so on. The one-act opera was premiered at the National Theatre in 1925; it was directed by the head of the opera Otakar Ostrčil and the role of Adam was sung by the composer's father Emil Burian. The critics, however, were disappointed. They knew the composer from programme articles as a combative radical and were expecting something avant garde. Burian was unlucky in the fact that he had changed direction fundamentally between the completion of the opera and its performance. Prague had opened to the world and Burian found entirely new sources of inspiration in Stravinsky, Satie and also in jazz, to which he succumbed entirely. No less important was his increasing involvement with the arts circle of Prague Dadaists and Surrealists known as "Devětsil" (meaning "Butterbur" or "Nine Forces"), with whom he shared in the birth of the new movement Poetism. The leading figures in this purely Czech movement were the poet Vítězslav Nezval and the art theorist Karel Teige. Poetism, akin to the Paris avant garde, did not want to be a purely literary affair and sought to become "the art of life, the art of living and enjoying" (Teige). Poetism was modern Epicureanism, "a method of looking at the world that changes it into poetry". It found supporters among both poets and people in theatre (for example in the directors Jindřich Honzl and Jiří Frejka, with whom Burian worked closely), painters and also composers (apart from Burian himself, Bohuslav Martinů, Jaroslav Ježek and Erwin Schulhoff). Jazz, which best corresponded with their art programme, was at the centre of interest for the Poetist composers. The integration of jazz elements into serious music undermined the musical grammar of esoteric Late Romanticism and helped Burian to make a fundamental break with tradition. Unlike other "serious" composers he did not merely use jazz to refresh and vitalise music, but put it on him-

self in its original entertainment functions. He had a talent for singing that he exploited with gusto as a jazz singer, cabaretier or musical clown; he sang his own popular hits with perfect charm, played in film as a jazzman, and was a versatile jazz instrumentalist – a brilliant percussionist, for example, as well as having his own jazz orchestra (1931), put together following the model of Walt Whitman. In his free autonomous music he used jazz inspirations with more caution than in his film or stage music. He subjected jazz dances to a process of stylisation and adapted them to his needs in the same way as composers had stylised and adapted the mazurka, polka, or furiant in the 19th century. He first incorporated foxtrot into his string sextet *Z mládí* [From Youth] (1924), and then into a number of other pieces. In the later twenties he composed a series of jazz chamber pieces. Most, alas, have not survived but one of the exceptions is *Americká suita* [American Suite] (1926), which was published in the author's own arrangement for two pianos in 1948. In the original, however, it was designed for a jazz ensemble consisting of violinophone, cello, saxophone, piston, piano and drums. We know some of the other pieces only from secondary sources. Sextuor, for example, was composed for three saxophones, piston, trumpet and trombone, *Dva koncertní tance* [Two Concert Dances] was for piccolo, piston, saxophone and drum set, while opus 45 was a *Concertino* for drums and piano. In 1927 Burian's jazz *Requiem* for soprano, tenor, voice-band, saxophone, drums, two pianos and harmonium was exceptionally well received. All these pieces were most probably destroyed by the composer himself. In addition to the instrumental pieces he also wrote (and surprisingly it has survived) a jazz cycle for voice and jazz orchestra on the words of Vítězslav Nezval's *Cocktaily* [Cocktails] (1926), which is the quintessence of Poetism in music. It consists of three suggestively erotic but also charming and highly imaginative bar chansons, in which the composer starts from the then lightly decadent bar production and raises it with great refinement to the level of serious music. It was in the period of his greatest enthusiasm for jazz that Burian started to compose his opera *Bubu of Montparnasse* (1926–29). The story – by Charles Louis Philippe – like the music has much in common with the *Threepenny Opera* by Bertold Brecht and Kurt Weill





(1928), and in part with *Jonny spielt auf* by Ernst Krenek (1927) as well. Philippe attracted Burian's attention mainly because his work offered the theme of the underworld of the big city together with a critique of modern society, i.e. something that had been unusual in previous (especially Czech) opera repertoire. Burian did not write a jazz opera in the strict sense, but just used individual jazz numbers, and sometimes certain jazz elements in the rhythm, instrumental profile and so on. The basic dramatic structure is produced from a chain of short, cinematographically conceived scenes and has certain elements in common with epic theatre, and sometimes theatre or film revue. In this composition Burian already shows a highly developed feeling for theatre and its specific features, which he fully respects, thus greatly strengthening the musical dramatic impact of the opera. It was not to be premiered until 1999 in the State Opera in Prague. Apart from jazz, another influence that helped the composer to overcome the residue of Late Romanticism (or Impressionism) was the programme of the Paris Six and Stravinsky – or to put it more broadly, Neoclassicism. Its direct influence on Burian was short-lived but it nonetheless helped him to create the foundations of his own musical style, which later acquired other innovative elements by a process of organic development. The new pieces that he was composing from the later twenties have much in common: their formal arrangement is clear and economical, the individual movements are short and rich in musical content, no note is superfluous, and the individual movements in the chamber and orchestral pieces (especially in the series of *Poetic Suites* 1925–51) give an aphoristic impression and are full of musical surprises. Burian also takes great pains with the structure of composition and the equilibrium of musical form, and the flowing and logical unfolding of musical ideas (the nine string quartets 1927–58 are good examples). He most frequently used the form of the suite, which corresponded best to his natural musical instincts. Burian was an impulsive person, who felt the need to use his musical ideas fast and as effectively as possible. In any case he was so taken up with theatre and other activities that he had to steal time for composing, which was an inner necessity for him. The suite form made it possible for him in most cases to make do with just one theme, which he knew how to vary or treat in some other way

with great ingenuity and then wrap up and clinch it to good effect and in good time. His preference for suites also, however, had another rationale in the aesthetics of Neoclassicism, some principles of which Burian adopted as his own. Not that he avoided more complex musical forms. His *Sonata in C Major for piano* (1937), *Sonata romantica* for violin and piano (1938) or *Symphony with Piano Solo* (1948), for example, are pieces that show great creative power and are among Burian's best works.

Non-traditionally conceived village and urban folklore, and specifically its theatrical, dance and musical forms, were a permanent source of inspiration for Burian. These could be jewels of folksong or products of the cultural periphery, folk art, pupils' plays and other legacies of the distant Middle Ages, Baroque folk culture, patriotic songs from the period of the National Revival, broadside ballads, workers' songs and semi-popular music from the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Burian first embarked on this territory with more than a touch of practical jokery as a member of the Dada theatre. He was much taken with surviving fragments of the student satire *Mastičkář* [*The Mountebank*] (also *Mistr Ipokrast, mastičkář drkolenský*), which had originated in the Middle Ages, but was a favourite on popular stages right up to the 18th century. Burian's first version of the material (1928) was a purely Dadaistic, self-consciously bizarre trifle based on improvisation, which did not even try to engage with original, but Burian returned to the play twice – once producing an incomplete treatment in 1949 and finally an opera version in 1956 with the changed title *Račte odpustit* [*Be so good as to forgive*]. The new, very updated libretto by Radovan Krátký was a complete failure, and Burian's musical arrangement, making striking use of folklore elements, was not particularly effective. The opera was soon consigned to oblivion.

In the context of Burian's use of folk inspiration, a work that deserves a great deal more attention is *Vojna* [*War*] with the subtitle "a folk play with songs and dances on the texts of folk poems collected by K. J. Erben for solo, male and female choir and wind and percussion instruments" (1934). Burian created a dramatically powerful libretto from folk texts using the technique of montage and then composed sophisticatedly primitive music in which we can hear the kinship with Stravinsky's Russian Period or the music of Carl Orff. The composer did not use a single quote from folk melody, but there is no doubt of the folklore basis. This anti-war piece had a very strong musical dramatic impact at its Prague premiere in 1935 and also made a deep impression on the Swiss audiences when Burian toured with his theatre in the same year. *Vojna* has retained its power to this day.

Several other musical stage works belong to the same creative line as *Mastičkář*. The most successful include the *I. lidová suita* [*1st Folk Suite*] (1938), made up of three folk plays, and the similarly conceived *II. lidová suita* [*2nd Folk Suite*] (1939), the Old Czech folk comedy with songs and dances *Esther* (1946), *Láska, vzdor a smrt* [*Love, Resistance and Death*] (1946) and finally the whimsical *Opera z pouti* [*Fair-*

*ground Opera*] on the text of the folk play *O Františce, dceři krále anglického a Honzičkovi, synu kupce londýnského* [*Of František, the Daughter of the King of England and Honziček, Son of a London Merchant*] (1956).

The high point of Burian's music drama output is undoubtedly his opera *Maryša* (1937–39). The Mršítk brothers' realistic-naturalistic drama of tragic love in the Moravian countryside has much in common with the libretto of Janáček's *Jenůfa*, and it is no accident that Janáček had turned to the same work not long before his death. Burian was aware that he had to be careful not to copy Janáček and he confessed that when composing *Maryša* he continually heard *Jenůfa* sounding in his ears. He did not, however, succumb to Janáček's influence, but instead created a masterpiece which seen in the context of Czech opera developed Janáček's legacy in the most thorough but at the same time in the most highly original way. Using his experience hitherto, Burian arrived at a type of "stageplay opera" in which all the musical events are derived from the spoken word and from the dramatic stage action. Thus, for example, the melodic ductus is based on the intonation of the spoken word in the Moravian dialect of the libretto. At the same time the musical rhythm strictly follows the cadence of the spoken word. The operatic treatment is based on short and economical dialogues: arias, duets and ensembles have no place in Burian's opera conception primarily because they hold up the stage action and reduce the dramatic tension. To characterise the main figures the composer used several quasi-leitmotifs, but only treated one systematically throughout the opera – the *Maryša* motif. It appears many times, always in a different light depending on the dramatic situation on stage and in pronounced, unmistakable form. According to Burian, *Maryša* is the central character and so her motif is almost permanently present, thus ensuring the musical coherence of the opera's overall structure, which is otherwise based mainly on non-musical principles. The obligatory large orchestra is expanded to include piano, celesta, bells, deep tam-tam and a wind machine. The music is strictly diatonic and modally anchored. In addition to a melodic line agitated in its intervals, the sharp bitonality (often in the interval of a minor second) and polyrhythms create a complex of expressive techniques that is characteristic not only of *Maryša*, but of Burian's other work in the period 1937–48, interrupted in 1941–45, when by some miracle the composer survived imprisonment in a series of concentration camps. *Voiceband* occupies a very special place in Burian's output. It originated from the borders between music and the stage speech, often choral recitation, which came into fashion after the 1st World War in avantgarde theatres, workers' clubs and in schools. Burian began to experiment with it in 1927 and found the primary impulse in music. In one of his first articles on the theme he wrote, "With voiceband we have created for ourselves a special field of musical exploration. The vibration of the vocal chords, the natural accents of speech, the movement of phrases, the rhythm of form have



all expanded our normal tonality (from whole tones to sixteenths tones) adding a tonal absolute, waiting like everything being born to be assigned its rightful place" (see *Voiceband – nová tonalita*, the magazine Zvon 27, 1927, no. 40, p. 560).

As the name *voiceband* itself suggests, it was jazz, and specifically the American vocal jazzband the Revellers, that stood at the beginning of the whole experience in a new way of reciting verses (which was the original aim). From the Revellers, *voiceband* took the principle of improvisation, syncopated rhythm and the exploitation of all the possibilities of the human voice, such as whispers, sighs, calls, cries, hissing, whistling, growling, shrill falsettos, glissandos and naturally also articulated singing or the spoken word, and in addition various aids like megaphones, playing on combs and so on. For instrumental accompaniment Burian liked to choose all kinds of percussion, including the futuristic "intonarumori", but also when the content suggested it, a mouth organ, children's trumpet etc.

Burian also found inspiration in strictly classical modern music. Examples included the "tied melodrama" of Arnold Schönberg's *Gurre-Lieder* (1900–11) and Pierrot lunaire (1912), Alois Hába's experiments with quarter-tone and sixth-tone music, Janáček's study of the melodies of speech and also his male choral pieces and the art of the Choral Association of Moravian Teachers, who performed them to complete perfection.

The basis of a *voiceband* piece is usually a poetic text that can be of various lengths (from a few verses to a large piece taking up an entire evening performance). Burian treated the poetic word entirely freely. The semantic function of a word was often left in the background, yielding to its acoustic qualities (colour, rhythm, melodic cadence etc), which could be treated on the basis of musical principles. Performance moved within an acoustic universe that moulded it according to musical forms, with metrorhythmic arrangement of the text material, determination of the proportions between *solí* and *tutti*, leading and accompanying parts, homophony and polyphony and so forth.

The first *voiceband* performance on the 22nd of April 1927 in the Prague Dada Theatre involved only six performers (four men including Burian and two women). Burian recited, directed and also played various instruments. The ensemble was then to grow until it had several dozen members. At the beginning Dadaist grotesques and witty improvisation were the most successful elements, but gradually longer and more serious compositions began to attract attention. Among the most important were *Křest sv. Vladimíra* [*The Baptism of St. Vladimir*] by Karel Havlíček Borovský (1928), the two-part Old Testament *Song of Songs* (1928) and the cult poem *Máj* [*May*] by the great Czech Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha, presented as a complete evening production in itself. The first version of the latter (1929) involved eight soloists and a recitation choir a hundred strong. *Voiceband* caused a real sensation at the ISCM Festival in Sienna in 1928, in North Italy on a tour a year later, and then in Switzerland and naturally

at home as well. Unfortunately we have no way of accurately reconstructing the *voiceband* pieces, since Burian did not employ a notation for *voiceband* and so we have little to go on. Nonetheless, there are a few surviving radio and gramophone recordings and also quite precise scenarios of key *voiceband* pieces which throw a vivid light on the direction Burian's imagination was taking.

Throughout his life Burian devoted the greater part of his creative energy to music theatre. He was happiest when in 1933 he managed to get his theatre company, since only then could he make full use of his versatile talent. In addition to his own work he presented plays by other authors (which he usually modified radically, and to good effect) or dramatised novels and tales by older and contemporary authors. He also wrote stage music for almost all the plays that he produced and personally directed. In these productions music had an important position and more than once influenced the structural arrangement of the other elements of the dramatic performance in accordance with its internal principles (e.g. in accordance with three-movement song form, tempo, rhythm, dynamics and so on). Music poeticised the theatrical production, and this was considered one of the most remarkable marks of Burian's dramatic art, and "poetic theatre" became an established term among drama theorists. One original example of Burian's exploitation of music is *Věra Lukášová* (1938) based on the short story by Božena Benešová. Here Burian used a string quartet, with each instrument representing one of the four characters in the drama and the musicians being present on stage themselves. Another time, in his post-war version of *Eugene Onegin* (1957), he improvised on the piano on motifs from Tchaikovsky's opera of the same name. He always managed to find an original approach that employed simple techniques to put the finishing touches on individual productions.

With these abilities, which he had honed and tested long before setting up his own theatre (for example in plays for the National Theatre in the twenties), Burian was also of great use to film producers. The first film for which he wrote the music was the very commercial *Zlaté ptáče* [*Golden Bird*] (1931) with the jazz chansons *Má panna je v Panama sama* [*My love is alone in Panama*] and *Kdybych se byl nenarodil* [*Hadn't I been born*]. For the next film *Před maturitou* [*Before the Leaving-exam*] (1932) the ever-green *Chlupatý kaktus* [*Hairy Cactus*] was written. Burian continued to work for film in the postwar years as well, most successfully with his music for the socially critical film *Sířena* [*The Siren*] based on the novel by Marie Majerová, which was awarded the "Golden Lion" at the Venice Film Festival in 1947 with explicit reference to the music. His orchestral suite of the same name, outstanding for its expressive power and tightly constructed form, is one of Burian the composer's most important works. Burian's stylistic development took a contradictory turn after 1948, when his hitherto leftist avant garde aesthetic credo came into conflict with the official cultural programme of the state. To this day it is unclear whether he disowned

his own artistic past voluntarily or under pressure, and why he went as far as to destroy some of his works from avant garde times. The truth is probably that he wanted of his own will – driven by negative experiences from the pre-war period – to become a pioneer of a new socialist art. In music as well, with affirmatively propagandist celebratory cantatas, mass songs and so on, he tried to bring to life a socialist realism derived from literature. Burian's situation in this fortunately not too long period was ambivalent, for on the one hand he was shifting to musical populism (for example like Aaron Copland in the USA), to closer identification with national tradition, from the logic of his own development, but on the other hand the required grandiose spirit and pomposity was alien to him, and whenever he tried for it the result was failure, if not a total fiasco. One can, however, identify some positive examples even from this rather schizophrenic period, such as the orchestral *Předehra socialismu* [*Prelude to Socialism*] (1950): this politically engaged work, musically constructed on several variations of the Soviet anthem, is distinguished for spontaneous musicality and classical tightness of form. In Czech music we can find a certain analogy in the prelude to Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*. Music was not the field, however, on which Burian had to tackle ideological and artistic disputes (often with himself). These confronted him mainly as a theatre director and public figure, and so at the turn of the forties / fifties music became a refuge in which Burian he could feel relatively free.

In 1957 Burian found the courage to criticise official cultural policy publicly and openly to confess his own mistakes. The main idea of his more than three-hour speech to representatives of all the arts unions was the rehabilitation of the pre-war avant garde. For over a year beforehand he had realised that he by distancing himself from his own avant garde principles he had brought on himself a crisis, from which the only way out was to renew the integrity of his own creative identity. Burian genuinely took steps in this direction, but there was too little time for this to become conspicuous in his work. He died unexpectedly on the 9th of August 1959. The period in which Burian lived was full of upheavals and social cataclysms. In many respects this is reflected in his work, and this is surely the fate of any artists who lives his own time with intensity. Over his lifetime he experienced periods of crisis and periods of creative upsurge. For all his contradictions, his deep responsibility, tenacity, creativity and extraordinary talent mean that Burian's is still a living legacy, through its power to stimulate, and through its beauty in the purely aesthetic sense.

Photos (p. 13-15): E. F. B. - *Kladivo na divadlo* [*Hammer on the Theatre*].

A play about E. F. Burian by Jiří Pokorný premiered at Archa Theatre (Prague) in Autumn 2004

# e. f. burian and faith

PETR KOFRŮN



When several events were held to mark the E. F. Burian anniversary, I was puzzled by the way the living witnesses of his era sometimes maintained a strange silence, or gave ambiguous answers and contradictory accounts, while the speakers who had no personal experience of him insisted on sitting in judgment on his communist "aggression". Paradoxically, on both sides the atmosphere seemed dominated by faith: on the one hand faith in a legacy (and a mysterious legacy), and on the other faith in judgment after death (and a rather presumptuous identification of that judgment with the speaker's own opinion). Meanwhile, what was remarkable about Burian was precisely his faith. When we look at the "history of faith" it is generally clear that the earlier faith (linked with Christianity), which believed in a "great cause" and was even strong enough to change reality, declined in the course of time into faith in mankind (the Renaissance) and progress (the 19th century). Burian not only believed in a great idea (communism), but a kind of metaphysical faith saturated his entire life's work. He himself believed he was capable of doing world theatre, and capable of making Czech a world language. He simply had a hundred-percent belief in everything he was doing and wanted to do, even when they turned out to be complete trifles. Yes, Burian had absolute faith in every kind of apparently secondary thing. So he believed both in communist ideals, and absolutely, but also in the idea that he could create revolutionarily vertiginous theatre with two headlights that the actors would keep rejigging during the performance. And he gain he had absolute faith in this banality. For us it is all rather ridiculous, but our sense of the ridiculous is based on our completely different disposition and completely different historical context.

I recall Burian's speech to the company at the re-opening of his Theatre D after the Second World War. Rationally, the only real content in the speech was that they would "be faithful to the legacy of dead comrades" and would be "a communist avantgarde in every respect", but Burian nevertheless talked for maybe 40 minutes and the speech conceals several pieces of guile. On the objective level we simply can't understand him today. We can't grasp the point of all this endless relating of the self to history (this says something symptomatic about the way the post-1989 period has come to terms, or rather not come to terms with our history). We can't grasp what all this faith in an "absolutely perfect theatre" is about, when most Czech theatres today could be nicknamed "U Nejdů" (i.e. most things "nejde" – in English "don't or won't work"). We don't understand what faith in the "communist avantgarde" is, since we ourselves don't believe in anything, and are only concerned with getting by in the profane day-to-day world. We are incapable of seeing the meaning of Burian's speech, which is partly to the point, but partly unprecedentedly (in expression) poetic and also often escapes logic and "clear thinking" as if Burian was sometimes wrenching himself away into a curious world of pataphysics. We don't understand why he goes on talking so long, when today we live in a world of photography and short slogans that convey nothing.

In the present period, which tends to be characterised by absolute doubt about everything, nobody can understand it. But this is of course the stumbling block of all histories of the 20th century that cannot comprehend how anyone could have believed in the idea of national socialism or communism. Yet national socialism actually represents one of the greatest onslaughts of faith: the idea of the birth of the "Third Reich", "the new man", "the next world",

into which forces and civilisations still concealed in the underground world will break through. And communism is similar in its great faith in an absolutely "just society" where everyone will receive what he needs, making it paradoxically akin to another breakthrough faith of the 20th century, satanism, with its slogan of "do what you will". These three circles of ideas were paradoxically the final wave of vision in the 20th century. No vision has come after them. If for example we ask an American President about his vision today, we shall evidently get the answer "the war on terrorism" and "increasing the gross national product". Yet few people today are capable of saying what that terrorism springs from, if they have a duty to "fight" it, how and why and in the name of what vision, and why society ought to be rich and not for example "happy" or "wise".

From this perspective we can understand the embarrassment of the living witnesses, who naturally in today's unbelieving age tend to keep their head down. But what we can't understand is the fury with which contemporary people without faith want to stand in for the Christian God and call E. F. Burian before "the eternal court". These people should instead be doing something else. They should be humbly gathering Burian's legacy, ensuring that it is presented and so trying to set Burian in the context of 20th-century art.

For the moment, however, this field is left grievously unploughed. For example Burian's musical work sits with his heirs unnoticed by any publisher, recordings of his work do not come out, and the existing recordings at the Czech Radio contains only 5% of his output. With the exception of the admirable work by Bořivoj Srba nobody pays any attention to Burian's theatre work and there is a glaring absence of any comprehensive Burian biography, which would look at Burian's work in relation to all aspects of his activities. Such a work would, for example, bring to light that in the Fifties, when we have classified Burian as a decadent theatre director in a colonel's uniform writing "Seedbed", he actually wrote a series of very intimate and we can even say deeply tragic string quartets, and so on, and so forth.

Today's task in relation to E. F. Burian should then be to construct a kind of historical psychology that would attempt to grasp by empathy and then to explain what faith has meant in the 20th century (in the Third Reich, in the Communist Empire, in the Absolutely Individualist Empire...), and that would explore the meaning of the sudden fulfilment of this faith (which Burian lived to see in some form immediately after the war and again after 1948), and the meaning of doubts about that faith (undoubtedly the case with Burian in the Fifties). Otherwise we shall just be forever materialistically circling around certain associated phenomena (how many people fell in the 2nd World War as victims of the Nazis, how many nations Stalin deported and so on), without ever understanding what it means to sacrifice anything for a vision. If I am not mistaken, the slogan "the end sanctifies the means" comes from the Jesuits, i.e. from an environment of absolute faith convinced that any kind of sacrifice is justified to attain the goal. When we are aware of this, we can finally grasp why given the approach we have, part of the Nazi elite sat silent through the Nuremberg trials, sometimes with a mysterious smile, and why the living witnesses to E. F. Burian behave in the same way. All of them knew and still know something about faith and sacrifice, but nobody understands them. (When during the Nuremberg trials there was talk of the occult roots of Nazism, the materialist jury rapidly backed away from the theme and once again played at being "Last Judge") In this unbelieving age another task is to bring Burian's work

objectively into the present, especially his musical and literary work, because the theatre work is temporal and has historical significance (although in at the time Burian's drama was in no way inferior in stature to that of his German fellow-traveler Bertold Brecht, for example, whom the Germans elevated to the world theatrical pantheon). It is the sad lot of the theatre that what we most associate with Burian, i.e. his voiceband, is today a dead genre, which awaits some – as yet unsuspected – resurrection in a new artistic context.

When I and the Agon Orchestra presented some of Burian's works for the first time in 2004, we discovered a remarkable thing. For example when playing the 1922 piece Šlapák, we were groping about as to where to place it in the development of 20th-century music. It is slightly reminiscent of Frank Zappa in its strange mingling of musical idioms, recalls Mauricio Kagel in its peculiar treatment of banality, and is influenced by jazz but with such a strange, perhaps ironic, overview. It looks as if, confronted by a musical work that is not presented and does not work in the context of the period, you cannot say anything – if it revived after a long interval – at all. We don't know what Burian meant by it; we don't know how the lay and professional public perceived it, and so the piece is hard to fit into the picture of the 20th century...

Of course, the only way forward then is to turn the whole question around: to publish the whole work in note form and in recordings and to make it into a new canon, against which to measure up the whole development of music in the Czech Lands and Europe in the 20th century. But that of course is an impossible task for the small Czech nation. And so we shall most likely just going on hearing drivel about his communist orientation, even though this reversal would be the only way of coming to terms with Burian's work, and avoiding the complete disorientation in values so peculiar to Czechs with their tendency to alternate self-denigration and self-overestimation.

This inferiority / superiority complex obviously relates to the smallness of our nation and its disturbed history (an artificially hot-house forced nation with a history of defeats). The nation therefore absolutely lacks a kind of conscious core, as a basis for self-evaluation. This core has to be gradually built out of fragments, and one of those fragments must be the absolute rendering present of Burian's work. This will mean we can stop going round and round in meaningless claims that Burian was either a local unimportant director, or on the other hand a visionary paving the way for the comprehensive theatre of the future.

But how should we approach Burian's life? Today we can only gather information about the dead and create our own picture, i.e. by individual interpretation. But by doing so we get nowhere near the issue of what Burian was like. We would just be producing a new art work about E. F. Burian. We shall now never uncover E. F. Burian's inner motivation, the social pressures upon him, and we shall never know what sprang from his faith, what from his personal life, what were covering manoeuvres and so on. Often E. F. Burian himself did not know. All the influences combined in him in a strange way and no one has the right to judge. All that remains is to act a new play about his life, which will tell us something about ourselves, but not about E. F. Burian.

# a few minutes with an oboist

MAREK KOPELENT

**The oboist Vilém Veverka (1978) is emerging as one of the most striking performers of the coming generation. He is all the more interesting as a musician for the fact that he systematically devotes much of his energies to the expert performance of contemporary music, which is still far from usual even among young performers. In the following interview, V. Veverka talks with one of the most important of living Czech composers, Marek Kopelent (1932). This was not their first meeting – it was Veverka appeared as soloist for the Czech premiere of Kopelent's oboe concerto *A Few Minutes with an Oboist* (1972), and gave a marvellous performance. It is typical of the Czech Republic, in which the communist regime systematically suppressed practically all expressions of modern art, that two musicians apparently divided by a generational gulf can easily find a common language. This is because they share a continuing degree of marginalisation. Not even in today's free society is the place of contemporary music assured and automatic either in music schools or elsewhere...**

**We were brought together when we met at the guest seminar given by Heinz Holliger at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (HAMU) in 2001. He recognised your great talent and you astonished me too with your performance of Baroque music. But you are captivated by contemporary music. Why?**

There are several important factors at work here. Above all, playing contemporary music is something related to my education and profession, it is something I should get to know.

Second, the music of the 1950s and 1960s involved an extraordinary advance in technique, and you have to get to grips with it. It develops not just your capabilities as a play-

er, but your personality. And I think my generation is the first that can play these pieces here freely and publicly.

Finally, performing contemporary music I have a virtually absolute degree of freedom, and I'm not bound by conventions and traditions. In fact I can take this approach to Baroque or any other music as well, but of course on the condition that I know and respect the rules of style, of the time.

**The pianist Radoslav Kvapil says that through performing my *Ballade* he reached a new understanding when interpreting the classics, and he found that getting to know contemporary music opened up entirely new horizons in terms of sound, technique and ideas. I sometimes ask myself how musicians who have no experience with the modern can be creative. Do you agree?**

Yes. But the fact is that some people find it enough to know the alphabet up to the letter T and don't need to know what comes next, because ultimately they can get by even without higher musical education.

**Do you think HAMU [The Prague Music Faculty] provides sufficient training for the performance of modern music, by which I mean from the 1950s-1960s onwards?**

For me personally HAMU did provide space for performance of modern music, and not just at my final concert, where I presented the Czech premiere of B. A. Zimmerman's concerto. I appreciate that because on academic soil there is an educated and critical public. On the other hand, in trying to get to know this area of music a student can sometimes feel like an autodidact, with the teacher simply offering alternative approaches to the piece, and acting as its first critic.

**I was thinking of technical training – whether Berio's *Sequenza VII* and suchlike were in the study plan?**

On the face of it not at all, but when you go in for international competitions you obviously can't avoid it. And by the way, the Wind Instrument Department is the best in terms of attitude to contemporary music.

**I have heard that a teacher had no idea what to do with the notation of multi-phonetic sound in a part...**

I think it very much depends on how keen a student is – whether he or she can manage to draw the teacher into the study of contemporary pieces.

**How do you see the current relationship between the conservatories and HAMU, or what should it be ideally?**

The conservatory is something like the first stage, the take-off strip for a musical career, but it is only at HAMU that the process of maturing as a musician begins – as if you were starting again from the beginning but the rate of progress is much faster. And you could say that conservatory is a sort of luxury training and I very much dislike it that some disciplines start at 15 years, since this tends to make young people one-sided, if not to lead to professional idiotism.

**Is it possible to get by with only conservatory training?**

There are cases like that. Those people usually end up in orchestras or teaching at basic music schools.

**But I believe HAMU graduates predominate in orchestras as solo instrumentalists?**

Oh definitely. But I was thinking more of string players. And real life is different from what is often proclaimed. In fact HAMU is not just a training for a soloist career.

**Let me come back to contemporary music. Can I then deduce that the conservatory is not equipped to teach the new techniques, and that if HAMU is not equipped either, then this kind of learning will drop out of the educational process?**

In a way yes. It's up to the student to provoke the teacher, and we can't expect the teacher to take the initiative. I played Stockhausen's *In Freundschaft* while still at the conservatory, but you go to HAMU and there nobody expects that from you. On the other hand, when I was defending my diploma dissertation on the new technical possibilities of the oboe I was told that everyone knew what I was writing about, that it was already known here in the 1960s, but since the public had no interest in it, people stopped trying to do it...

**They said everything had been played here? Berio's *Sequenza VII* for Solo Oboe is from the end of the 1960s. So what kind of answer was that?**

I was told it had just vanished. They said the public didn't want to listen to this music and we are no pioneers...

**That's unbelievable. To be hiding the fact that during the repressive "normalisation" period (1970s and 1980s) such music was forbidden, and that it wasn't the public but the regime that didn't want it. And this is the sort of thing teachers are supposed to say to young musicians!**

Absurd. But still I could present my teacher with your concerto, for example, and meet with interest and support. Of course it could happen that someone else would say – we're not going to play that... But that was more in other disciplines. The pianists, for example – given the amount of older repertoire they mostly never even get to modern music. They don't even get up to the present at HAMU in the history of



music. So how can you expect graduates to find their way in the music of the last fifty years? Tell me about your experiences working with the Berlin Philharmonic.

The orchestra is absolutely top in the field, if I can just sit among members of an orchestra like that it is the best school I could have – the chance to take look into “the kitchen” and have direct contact with first-rate players.

**And what does it mean, exactly, being “top in the field”?**

The orchestra has unusually good work conditions, and top conductors. The players are rewarded accordingly and the main thing is they so much enjoy the work. In this country some musicians, mainly ensemble orchestral players, act as if they thought that working in an orchestra was not a real, proper career for musician. The truth is the opposite.

**Do you feel, for example, that Germans have less “musicality” than Czechs?**

They are educated so that each knows more about music individually, and perhaps that actually gives them more “musicality”...

**I can see you hesitating over that term – it’s bandied about a great deal in this country – what should we understand by it?**

Maybe being able to translate the record of the composer’s idea, the notation, into sound as effectively and authentically as possible.

**Here we think of it more as meaning a higher level of spontaneity, emotionality...**

Yes, people tugging at the heartstrings...

**...and at the same time it is emphasised as a symbol of Czechness – isn’t it that myth?**

Most probably.

**Have you had experience of music education in Germany?**

I studied my main field and associated subjects for four years in Berlin at the Hanns Eisler Higher Music School. The kind of music that is a very exclusive thing here (for example the music of Isang Yun), is normal in Germany, even if this doesn’t mean that everybody plays it there. There are a number of similarly good pieces still waiting for their Czech premieres and unfortunately I’m not in a position to get them a hearing myself, while the people who could have other cares or interests.

**How long will you be in Berlin?**

My scholarship with the Berlin Philharmonic ends in September 2005.

**And what then?**

I don’t yet know. I shall certainly try to get a place in an orchestra. You can’t make a living with solo playing, as is clear from the careers of the leading European oboists.

**And at home?**

At present there are no vacancies, and I don’t even know whether there would be interest in me. Actually I have already tried several times... Even though, if you work hard, even in this country you could achieve high-level goals. The situation here is very complex – a very small market and an unprepared public. But sometimes interesting opportunities still turn up...



**What specifically?**

Recently I recorded Berio’s *Sequenza* for Czech Radio, and now I’m going to record your concerto (*A Few Minutes with an Oboist*). The young composer Martin Hybler is writing a new concerto for me. I should be playing it in the spring of next year. These are great projects that are worth coming back for.

**Do you want to leave?**

I’m not thinking about it for the moment. It will depend on circumstances and opportunities. At the moment I don’t see many here.

**Do you make excursions into other musical genres?**

Not really. I must confess that in that respect I’m conservative.

**Do you agree with some of your contemporaries that music is one, just good or bad?**

That’s an over-simplification. What do we consider music? What the media presents isn’t something I can’t take seriously, and in any case the public thinks of modern music as something quite different. And I myself don’t want to include everything under the heading “music”.

**You are probably talking about commercial music, but there is also music “between the opposite poles” – alternative, jazz...**

I accept jazz, certainly, especially when top musicians play it.

**Good, so what about that “one music”?**

It depends on quality – yes, even if it isn’t serious music but I can still judge it through the lens of serious music.

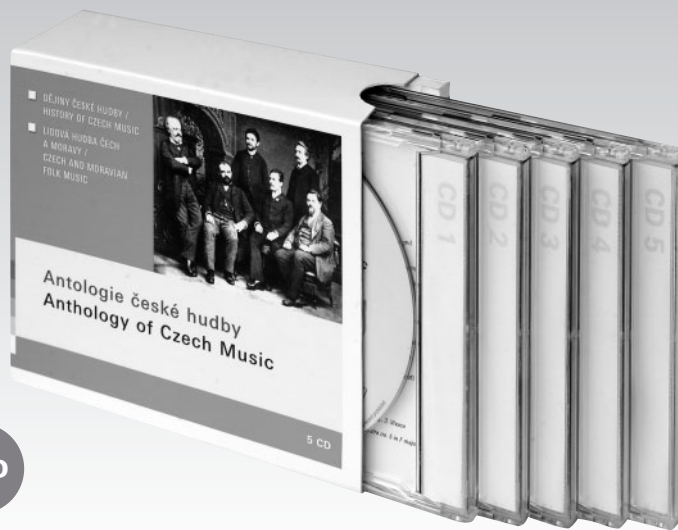
**Vilém Veverka**

born on the 5th of February 1978 in Prague. After studying at the Prague Conservatory he started studies in 1999 with Liběna Séquardtová at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (HAMU), where he graduated this year. Concurrently, from 2000, he has been studying at the “Hanns Eisler” Hochschule für Musik in Berlin with Prof. Dominik Wollenweber. He has been solo oboist of the Gustav Mahler Jugend Orchester, and in 2003 won a scholarship with the Orchestral Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (“the Karajan Academy”). His most important awards in competitions include 2nd Prize in the international Concertino Praga competition (1995) and 1st Prize in the 7th International Oboe Competition of Tokyo (2003).

He has been responsible for a series of Czech premieres of important pieces, including Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *In Freundschaft*, Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s *Concerto for Oboe and Small Orchestra*, Isang Yun’s *Rondel* etc. He has been working with Czech Radio, for which he has recorded a series of important pieces of oboe repertoire.



Marek Kopelent



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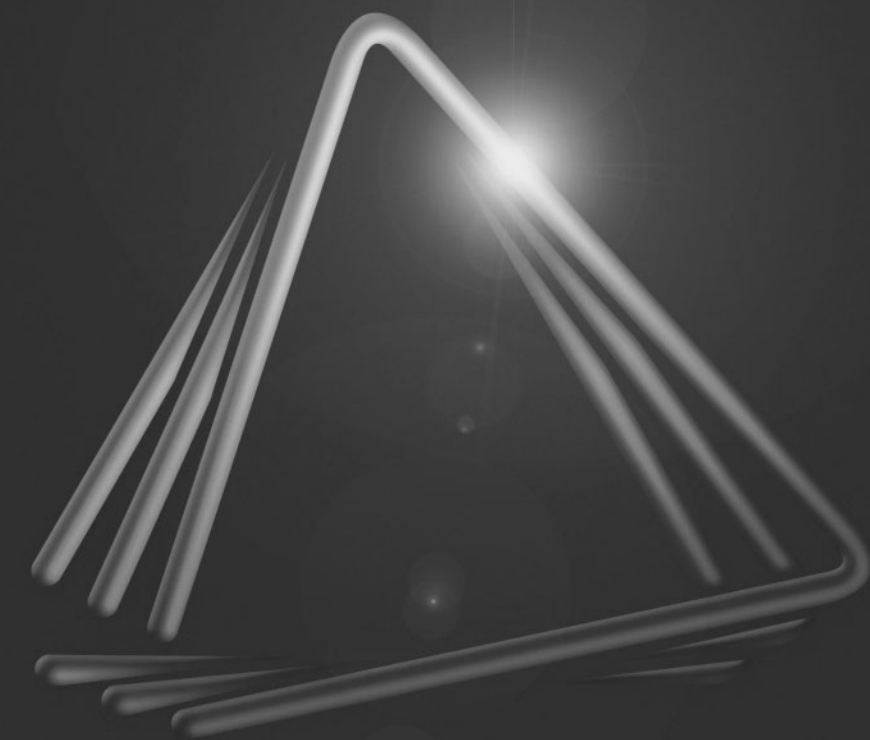


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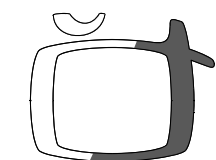
Milada ŠUBRTOVÁ (1924)

Eva OLMEROVÁ (1934 - 1993)

Prague Symphonic Orchestra FOK (1934)

Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra (1954)

### Main partner:



ČESKÁ TELEVIZE

### Medial partners:

ČESKÝ ROZHLAS

MEZZO

Zlaté stránky  
MEDIATEL

UPC

THE PRAGUE POST

Prager Zeitung

RESPEKT

Xantypa

HARMONIE

un  
učitelské

czech music

TIME IN

CzechTourism

PRAGUE  
EVENTS

### Partners:

JCDecaux

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střevce

místní  
kultura

ČESKÁ KULTURA

ČESKÁ CENTRA

sat

rencar

AVENIR

# kryštof harant of polžice and bezdružice and pecka

1564 – 21<sup>st</sup> june 1621

Kryštof Harant of Polžice and Bezdružice and Pecka (1564–21st June 1621) remains to this day one of the best-known figures of the Bohemian Renaissance. A Czech aristocrat, he became famous in his own time for many actions that expressed his restless soul, but also for his many-sided gifts, pre-eminent among them his talent as a composer.

His abilities were much encouraged and cultivated in the years 1576–1584, which he spent at the court of the Archduke Ferdinand of the Tyrol in Innsbruck. The art-loving atmosphere of the court awoke in him an interest in painting, jousting, travel and also music. During his period at the chateau of Ambrass he also gained an excellent education, including a knowledge of languages.

At the beginning of the 1590s he served in the imperial army in the Hungarian Lands. After returning from the battlefield he made the arduous journey to the Holy Land, which he carefully described in a travelogue that was printed ten years later. In the summer of 1599 he made the personal acquaintance of the Emperor Rudolf, with whom he had many common interests and who made him a court chamberlain. On the emperor's recommendation Kryštof Harant was raised to the nobility in 1607. After the emperor's death, which grieved him greatly, Harant remained formally in the service of the ruling dynasty. He even undertook a diplomatic mission to Spain, although no written record of his travel experiences has survived in this case.

In 1618 Harant took an active part in the anti-Habsburg Revolt of the Bohemian Estates as the President of the Bohemian Chamber and Commander of the Estates Artillery. At the same time he converted from Catholicism to Utraquism. As commander of the artillery he advanced as far as Vienna and bombarded the Hofburg, where the imperial family was in residence. This was ultimately to seal his fate,

since after the defeat of the Estates rebellion he was captured, and together with other rebel leaders condemned and finally beheaded on Old Town Square in Prague.

A period portrait of Harant by the celebrated engraver Aegidius Sadeler has come down to us, and this portrait has inspired a series of artists to various different variations. Of Harant's musical output, the only pieces to have survived in their entirety are the outstanding five-part mass on motifs from a madrigal by L. Marenzio – *Missa quinis vocibus super Dolorosi martir*, the moving Latin motet *Qui confidunt in Domino*, which he composed during his stay in Jerusalem, and the German motet *Maria Kron*, printed in an anthology of Marian pieces in 1604 in Dillingen. The other pieces have survived only in fragmentary form.

Harant was a typical *uomo universale*, a Renaissance man of wide interests, tastes and abilities. His travelogue is written in a lively style in which the author's humanist education is combined with a native practicality. The following text, which recalls important features of Harant's life and work, has been written in the spirit of Harant's own literary idiom.



## To see is more than to tell

*"Oh, my dear God, what lands I have travelled through, in what perils have I been, seeing no bread for days, sheltering myself once under sand, and out of all this my dear Lord God brought me with his aid, and now in my own dear homeland I am to die, innocent. Lord God, Forgive my enemies." And at that they called for him. And full of wrath we went close to see that grievous spectacle and noble antichrist.*

Pavel Skála ze Zhoře, *The History of Bohemia, The Capital Court and Execution on Old Town Square in 1621*, ed. K. Tiefertunk, Prague 1870, p. 110

## Preface to the Reader

The scrupulous observer of Czech society in the pre-White-Mountain period and writer of remarkable memoirs Mikuláš Dačický of Heslov noted in 1608 that "Lord Kryštof Harant has published a book printed in the Czech tongue on his journey to the Holy Land and back again, which he has dedicated to His Grace the Emperor Rudolf." The travelogue was printed at the Prague printing house of the heirs of Daniel Adam of Veleslavín, and aroused the interest of a large public. Its author – imperial counsellor, chamberlain and musician Kryštof Harant of Polžice and Bezdružice – described in it the journey to the Holy Land, Judea and Egypt that he undertook in 1598.

## Chapter I

**In order that I should not forget my fellow-countrymen in my silence.**

"Travelling is a keen removal of ourselves to places foreign, with purpose to see then, to learn and achieve something good the which may be of special advantage to our country,

our friends or ourselves", writes Kryštof Harant in the preface to his travelogue. These reasons apart, the main motive for Harant's long and in many ways dangerous journey laid in his restless Renaissance soul. In his time the pre-White-Mountain society in Bohemia had already emerged from the period of "Hussite" isolation and was opening to inspirations and impulses from all over the world. For the higher ranks of the society of the time travelling therefore became an important aspect of self-education. In the preface to his Travels recalls his predecessors Martin Kabátník of Litomyšl and Oldřich Prefát of Vlkanov, who had made a similar journey in the earlier 16th century, but he also considered his contemporaries Zdeněk Vojtěch Popel of Lobkovice and Vilém Slavata of Chlum as models. The latter had not journeyed so far – Popel had travelled mainly through Southern Europe and Slavata had made a study trip through "Italy, Galicia, and gone through the lands of France, England, the Low Countries, Denmark and the Empire". Harant was, however, impressed with the fact that "soon after their return to their homeland" they were appointed to high land offices. This was because they could use the experience and contacts gained on their journeys in such posts.

## Chapter II

### A Diary of My Adventures

The travelogue is divided into two parts. The basis of the narrative is a chronological account of the adventures that Harant experienced with his companion Heřman Černín of

Chudenice during his second journey. He also devotes space to relatively detailed descriptions of the places that they visit. In the spirit of Renaissance humanism the text is sprinkled with quotations from ancient and modern authors as a way of showing the author's breadth and depth of learning. The narrative is illustrated by a series of woodcuts made by Jan Willenberg on the basis of Harant's drawings. In the first part Harant describes the journey from the Kingdom of Bohemia to Jerusalem. The two friends embarked on their travels "on Thursday morning on the third day of April" 1598 and covered the first section of the route, from Bohemia to Venice, on horseback. On the way they visited a series of towns in Bavaria, Austria and Northern Italy. From Venice, where they purchased supplies "of good wine, almonds, figs, Parmesan cheese, smoked tongues and twice baked bread", they continued by ship. On their voyage across the Mediterranean they visited the islands of Kandia (Crete) and Cyprus. On the 31st of August "after several dangerous episodes on the sea" they reached the Holy Land and by the 3rd of September they were already in Jerusalem. In a spirit of genuine piety they visited "all the holy places, both in the city itself and in its environs all the way to Jericho and Jordan". Harant could not, however, suppress his universal Renaissance temperament and interspersed his accounts of the holy places with completely secular adventures, which often highlighted his sporting prowess, for example. Recounting his expedition to Jordan he writes that "At the time there was little water, but it was still deep, and so when I swam across for

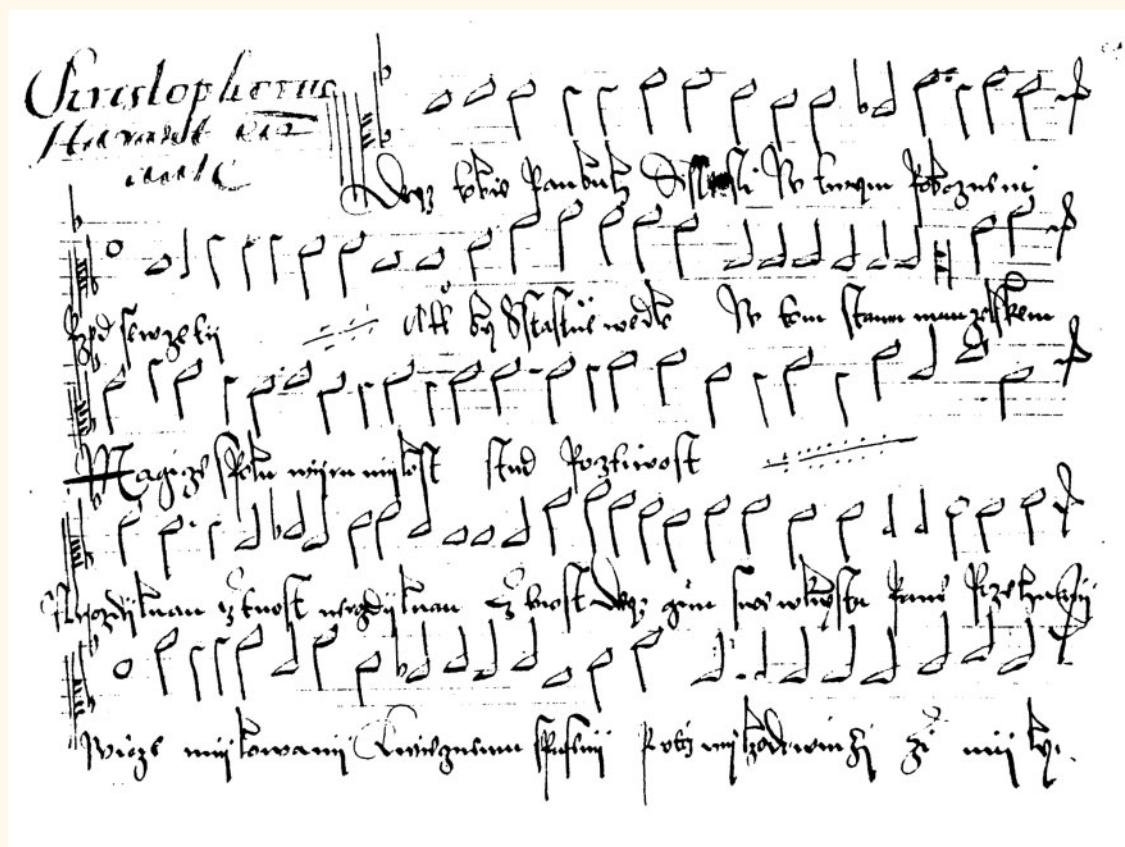
the sixth time and dived down under the water in the middle, I could not reach the bottom." The first part ends with the six-part piece that Harant composed in Jerusalem "on the text of Psalm 124, which at that time came constantly to my mind".

The second part is devoted to his journey to Egypt, and from there "further into desert Arabia... to Mount Sinai, Oreb and the Holy Virgin Katherine." Returning from this mountain the travellers narrowly escaped with their lives when attacked by "eight miscreants with Arab spears, bows and Turkish knives." By a miracle they got away, although Harant was robbed of everything and left "without a thread on my body". They returned to Europe by ship, embarking from Alexandria on the 12th of November, and reaching Venice at the end of 1598.

## Chapter III

### You forgot neither music vocal nor music instrumental

Thus the burgher of Prague Old Town Jonata Bohutský praised Kryštof Harant in the dedication to his treatise *Politia historica*. He was among those contemporaries who were aware of Harant's unusual musical talent, expressed not only in fondness for music, but in active music-making and original composition. Unfortunately only a very few complete examples of Harant's music have survived: the Wroclav University Library has scroll containing a transcription of his five-part mass. Two of Harant's motets were printed: the six-part *Qui confidunt in Domino* is printed as a sup-



*Dejž tobie Pán Bůh štěstí*  
Fragment of the only  
Harant's czech composition  
which has been preserved



# Missa, Quinis Vocibus, Super Dolorosi martir & Christoph: Harantis. Baro: a Polschitz Basis &

The image shows a page from a handwritten musical manuscript. It features several staves of music written in a historical style, with large, ornate initial letters (K, L, R) marking the beginning of new sections. The lyrics are written in a Gothic script below the staves. The text includes 'Kyrie eleison', 'Christe elei. son, y.', 'In terra pax hominibus bone voluntatis; Ado.', 'ra. mus te; Gracias agimus ti. bi pro:', 'per ma. gram gloriam tuam. Domine Deus Rex caelestis, Deus', 'Pater omni. potens. Domine Fili; Jesu Chreste. Domine', and 'Deus Agnus DEI Filius Patris.'.

plement to his Travels and the five-part Maria Kron appears in a collection of Marian pieces printed in 1604 in Dillingen. His other compositions have survived only in fragmentary form. All the works reveal a very capable and skilled composer, who stood out from his Czech contemporaries in all respects and bears comparison with the masters of the High Renaissance.

In his music Harant undoubtedly made full use of the inspirations and influences to which he had been exposed in his adolescence, which he spent at the court of the art-loving Ferdinand II of the Tyrol in Innsbruck. He was connected to the Habsburg family by a number of other ties, as well. In the 1590s, shortly after his return from the Holy Land, he had won the favour of Rudolf II and become chamberlain at his Prague court. After the emperor's death and the court's move back to Vienna, he was entrusted with occasional tasks. In 1615, for example, he undertook an imperial diplomatic mission to Spain to convey to the Spanish monarch the Order of the Golden Fleece, of which Rudolf, as head of the Central European branch of the Habsburgs, had been the bearer. He did not, however, use this journey as a basis for a travelogue. He was to end as an enemy to the Habsburgs, since at the latest in April 1619 he actively joined the Rebellion of the Estates. After its defeat he was captured, tried and found guilty.

## Epilogue

### A Grievous Spectacle

dominated by the by the executioner Mydlář's block on the Old Town Square... That was the place where one of the most remarkable phenomena of the Bohemian Renaissance, Kryštof Harant, ended his earthly life on the 21st of June 1621. There he was one of 27 Czech lords suffering exemplary punishment for their part in the rising against the Habsburgs. The prosecution had found him guilty of accepting the position of supreme commander of artillery in the Estates army, and the position of President of the Bohemian Chamber under Frederick of the Palatinate. As he embarked on his last journey he was once again in the company of his old fellow traveller – Heřman Černín of Chudenice. But this time Černín, a zealous catholic, supporter of the Habsburg dynasty and imperial sheriff of the Old Town, was watching his execution from a raised platform nearby.

PETR DANĚK

*Missa quinis vocibus super Dolorosi martir*  
(bass part)

Next page: *Rosetum Marianum* (1604)

Bassus partbook, title page.

Anthology of Marian pieces which contains Harant's German motet *Maria Kron*

# ROSETVM MARIANVM.

Unser lieben Frauen Rosengeteilein /

Von drey vnd dreyßßig lieblichen schönen Rosen oder  
Lobgesangen Gott dem Almechtigen / vnd dessen würdigsten Mütter  
vnd Junckfrauen Marie / durch drey vnd dreyßßig berieimbte Muticos vñ Com-  
ponisten / mit sonderm fleiß auff ein Subiectum, mit fünff Stimmen  
Componirt, vnd festlich zusamen getragen.

Durch

**BERNHARDV M KLINGENSTEIN**, hohen

Stiftt Augspurg / *Chori Musici praefectum.*

BASSVS.



ROSA

MYSTICA

Gedruckt zu Dillingen / durch Adam Weiser.

1604

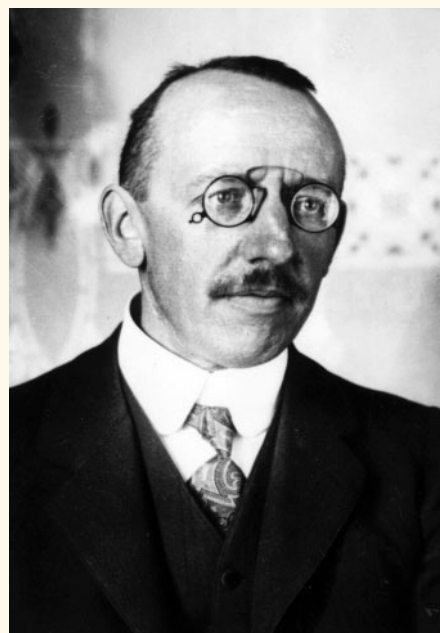
## profiles

vítězslav  
novák5<sup>th</sup> december 1870 – 18<sup>th</sup> july 1949**Life and Work**

Following the founding generation of composers of new Czech music (Bedřich Smetana, 1824–1884; Antonín Dvořák, 1841–1904) a group of other important composers came to the fore in the last decade of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Throughout Europe programmes and individuals were emerging all loosely linked by various concepts of modernity, involving reflection on all areas of life – politics, economics, technology, science, the position of man, culture and art – and critical reaction to change in the past century. In the Czech Lands one aspect of the new wave was a new philosophy among poets and writers (known as the Manifesto of the Czech Modern Movement, 1895), who believed that the main imperative of their art should be to overcome traditional idyllism and narrow patriarchal nationalism through freedom of creation, critical thinking and stress on individualism: *“artist, give your work your blood, your brain, your whole self – you, your brain, your blood will live and breath in it, and it will live through them...”* The idea of constant progress, expressing itself in the conquest of ever new areas of subject-matter and spirited innovation in technique, was also elevated to a principle by the aesthetician and musicologist Otakar Hostinský (1894).

In this process of reorientation **Vítězslav Novák** was in his way a central and (together with Josef Suk, 1874–1935) leading figure. It also, of course, involved the older composers Josef Bohuslav Foerster (1859–1951), who joined the movement in a rather more traditionalist spirit, and Leoš Janáček (1854–1928), who at a late age (essentially not until after 1916) surprisingly became a trailbreaker in 20th-century Czech music. (The younger Otakar Ostrčil (1879–1935) only matured in the years after the 1st World War). Nonetheless, at the very least up to the end of the 1930s it was Novák who fulfilled the special function of “axial personality” of the Czech modern movement in music in the sense that it was he who was the meaningful epicentre of the polarisation of the Czech composers of the day. To put it in simplified terms, we might say that Novák’s friendly rivalry with J. Suk, “friendly antagonism” with L. Janáček and persevering parallel efforts in the field of vocal music with J. B. Foerster etc. has deeper meaning for the three-dimensional relief and dynamics of the music of the time. By comparison, the Suk – Janáček – Foerster relationships are mutually tangential and tell us little.

Novák’s **biography** is not particularly dramatic in any way, and perhaps we can simply note that his path to music and musical edu-



cation was rather more complicated than that of Suk or Foerster, whose own father was a musician and a composer.

Vítězslav Novák was born on the 5th of December 1870 in Kamenice nad Lipou in South Bohemia. He was christened Viktor (Augustin Rudolf), and only later adopted the name Vítězslav as a professional “pseudonym”. He grew up in the not very affluent family of a small-town doctor (his father Jakub Novák died in 1882). He attended academic high school 1881–1889 in Jindřichův Hradec, and in 1882 his mother and two siblings moved there as well. His first attempts at composing songs and piano pieces, more or less just sketches, probably date from 1886. After he completed his schooling in 1889, the family moved to Prague, where Novák was to live in various places until his death. Novák studied first at the Law Faculty (1889), and then the Philosophical Faculty (1890–1893), where he attended the lectures of O. Hostinský in particular; he graduated without a doctorate. At the same time, however, he was allowed to enter the conservatory where he



studied composition (1889–1892) and piano (1891–1896 with Josef Jiránek). Two years of composition studies with very conservative theoreticians (K. Knittl, K. Stecker) left Novák an unsuccessful and disillusioned student, but Stecker seems to have noticed his talent and in the autumn of 1891 recommended him to the class of Antonín Dvořák. Dvořák understood and respected his new pupil, and Novák soon became (alongside Josef Suk) one of his favourite students, although there were often clashes of opinion between teacher and pupil, given their very different personal and creative temperaments. After graduating in composition (1892, *Sonata in d minor for Violin and Piano*) and from the Philosophical Faculty, Novák, who had been living on various modest grants and scholarships, had to support his whole family. He therefore gave private lessons in piano, and later in harmony, counterpoint and composition, and in time – with his growing successes as a composer – became the leading teacher of composition in Bohemia. He was appointed professor of a master class at the Prague Conservatory in 1909 and worked there until his retirement in 1940. (In the years 1920–1921, 1921–1922 and 1927–1928 he was rector of the conservatory, which became a state institution in 1920) Novák, who had a thorough knowledge of all music written (at the least) from the 18th century, and of music theory, was famous as a strict teacher who was nonetheless tolerant of the different creative directions of his pupils. During his almost forty-year teaching career he taught roughly 100 musicians, and most of them later occupied important positions in musical life. These included leading Czech composers (e.g. V. Štěpán, L. Vycpálek, A. Hába, V. Kaprálová) and after 1918 composers from Slovakia (e.g. J. Cikker, E. Suchoň, A. Moyzes and others), the then Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Rumania and the Ukraine. Novák's school also produced many musicologists, music theorists, conductors and pianists.

From his youth, then, Novák's life was moulded by "the rhythm of the school year" during which he systematically taught and then composed every afternoon. In the time that remained he keenly followed the theatre, concert and opera season, made music himself (in the form of the then popular four-handed play with various partners, and more ambitiously, from 1901 with discussion of the pieces played in a circle of close friends known as the "Podskalská Philharmonic"), studied music, languages and liked to read fiction. (In 1912 he married his former student Marie Prášková, which seems to have been the reason why he refused a professorship at the Academy of Music and Drama in Vienna. In 1914 his only child Jaroslav was born.) Summer vacations, right up to his last years (up to the beginning of the 2nd World War) he would devote to intensive travel with friends – from 1896 he would take regular trips to Moravia and Slovakia, and gradually extended his tourist adventures (and mountain climbing!) to the Tatras, Alps and Dolomites, and to the main cities of Europe

where he admired the architecture and art. He travelled to all the European countries with the exception of Russia.

From the beginning of the 20th century to his death Novák was a generally known and respected figure in Czech (later Czechoslovak) culture. In 1906 he was appointed a member of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Arts, and in 1907 a member of the jury in its 4th Class. His works (especially his lengthier works) were regularly honoured with awards and state prizes, and many were published by distinguished European publishing houses (from 1895 on Brahms's recommendation by Simrock, and from 1911 in the Vienna Universal Edition). In 1928 he was given an honorary doctorate by the Comenius University in Bratislava, and in 1945 he was awarded the title "National Artist" before these titles of honour were profaned by the communist regime. Vítězslav Novák died on the 18th of July 1949 in Skuteč in East Bohemia, where he had often spent his summer holidays in the last years of his life. He left several incomplete pieces on his desk... At this point the encyclopaedias usually start on a catalogue of **works**. We could easily do the same here, commenting that Novák made contributions to more or less all the musical genres of his time. He composed four operas (e.g. *Karlštejn*, 1916), two ballet pantomimes (e.g. *Signorina Gioventù*, 1930), two cantatas (*Bouře [The Tempest]*, 1910; *Svatební košile [The Wedding Shirt]*, 1913), two symphonies (1934, 1943), twenty or so orchestral works, a dozen chamber works, a series of piano pieces and cycles, and several dozen choral and song cycles... A list of this kind cannot, however, capture the basic character and continual stylistic transformations of his work over a half century. We shall try a different approach in the following sections, which have rather metaphorical titles.

### Poetry in Tones

In terms of creative temperament Novák was supremely the subjective romantic – with very few exceptions his compositions are programmatic and practically all his major works are sui generis autobiographical. Of course, we are aware that at least from the beginning of the 19th century (for example from Beethoven's *Eroica*) composers did not write symphonies or quartets "by the dozen" to external order, but from impulses deriving from their lives and internal reflections. On the other hand, in Novák's mature works this trend acquired "extreme" form in the sense that what we find here are not inspirations broadly spread out on interesting literary themes (Liszt, R. Strauss), but most often a kind of direct "musical arrangement of the self" in which the basic role is played by Novák's personal and immediate relationship to the theme (the symphonic poem *O věčné touze [On Eternal Longing]* op. 33 based on Hans Christian Andersen) or a covert, and later sometimes explicit "personal programme" (2nd String Quartet in D Major op. 35). It is in this light that we have to understand Novák's response to his key sources of inspiration –

eroticism, nature (in all aspects of the term) and later the fateful moments in the history of his native land.

On the other hand, Novák's creative approach is at the same time strikingly rational, as is very clear from an analysis of his melodic (treatment of themes that is akin to the "entwickelnde Variation" type, conscious monothematism), the distinctive structuring of pieces and intensive exploitation of polyphony in a way that is not so much a matter of complex use of familiar forms (fugue, passacaglia), but often of virtually spontaneous methods of imitation and canonical development. Novák's harmony underwent important transformations, but in general his pieces are anchored in tonality (in his later period expanded tonality or sometimes polytonality).

Given the autobiographical character of Novák's music, an outline of its development over time is essential. In his earliest period Novák in no way deviated from the stylistic current of Late Romanticism. Romantic literature (e.g. Lord Byron) is the source of inspiration for his first student experiments (the *Korzár [Corsair]* Overture, the piano ballade "*Manfred*" in e minor). His chamber pieces, piano music, and songs (the *Pohádka srdce [Fairytale of the Heart]* op. 8) are full of weltschmerz and youthful exaltation, and the old adage *cherchez la femme!* applies everywhere. Autobiographical inspiration is very obvious in the piano cycle *Vzpomínky [Recollections]* op. 6. However strange it may be for a twenty-four-year-old youth to be engaged in recollections, the cycle reflects Novák's joyless childhood without comfort and the warmth of home (*Triste*), restless adolescence (*Inquieto*) and a poetic evocation of juvenile platonic love (*Amoroso*). Elsewhere the composer on the contrary shows a lightly sentimental diction on the borders of the salon production of the time (*Serenade in F major* for small orchestra, the piano *Serenades* op. 9 and *Barquerolles* op. 10), although technically these are very accomplished compositions, which make inventive use of the possibilities of chromatics in the harmonies.

Chance opened up a path for Novák to develop a more distinctive and individual style. In the summer of 1896 he was invited to a distant corner of Eastern Moravia, Velké Karlovice in Moravian Wallachia, and here the hitherto "urban man" was spellbound by nature, the rural people and their music and song. Back in Prague in the autumn he immediately embarked on a detailed study of collections of Bohemian, Moravian and Slovak folksongs, analysing them from every angle and undoubtedly exploring the "distinctive" and even "exotic" features of their melody, rhythm and modality. (Let us not forget that at the same time Debussy, Ravel Janáček and later Bartók were all finding a way out of cosmopolitan Romantic musical thinking via such "exotic" folk music!) These studies and further trips to the Moravian and Slovak regions enabled Novák to transform his musical idiom. First he arranged songs, and then he tried to imitate them (*Songs*

on *Words from Moravian Folk Poetry* op. 16, 17, 21 dating to 1897–1898). The then influential musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý condemned it as “faking folk songs” but he failed to understand that the experiment was a creative workshop in which the composer was bringing a new form of musical expression to birth. Novák soon found a deeper way of integrating elements of Moravian and Slovak song with his own melodics and (ever more individual and audacious) harmonic imagination, directly quoting only rarely, and instead simply finding inspiration in particular melodic phrasing, modality or rhythm. While initially his pieces “overtly and unashamedly” mirrored folk sources (twice in the *Two Ballads on the Words of Moravian Folk Poetry* op. 19, 23), in the years 1900–1911 his new style developed in the direction of new forms and subject matter. Around 1900 he was using folk ballads to tackle his internal crises and disappointment in personal and love life – as if appeal to timeless national (!) poetry made it possible for him to objectivise these crises and carry out a kind of psychological auto-therapy through all these themes of ruin, pain, unhappy love and so forth... We still find pessimistic tones of despair in his song cycle *Melancholy* op. 25 (1901) and in the *Balladic Piano Trio* op. 27 (1902). The song texts here are taken not from the “classics” of Czech poetry but from Novák’s modern contemporaries, and some of their decadent features reflect – in a way that is unique for Czech music of the time – a *fin de siècle* atmosphere, although at the same time a new symbolist view of nature. In the *Balladic Trio* Novák tackles the problem of the monothematic four-movement cycle in one sonata movement in a highly individual manner.

We can be certain, however, that not even in this period were the horizons of Novák’s music permanently clouded and gloomy. Already in 1900 a melodics close to his balladic works provided the basis for his piano *Sonata Eroica* op. 24, in which he contemplates the sufferings of the oppressed Slovak people and evokes their heroic resistance and future victory. The popular *Slovácko Suite* op. 32 (1903) represents characteristic episodes of a Sunday in a Moravian village. Nature played an ever more frequent major role in Novák’s music, whether in dramatic forms (the symphonic poem *V Tatrách* [In the Tatras] op. 26, 1902) or lyrical forms – the 2nd *String Quartet in D Major* op. 35 (1905) is an idyllic summer meditation (in the form of a fugue), interrupted for a moment by memories of the sorrows and small joys of ordinary days, while the song cycle *Notturmo* op. 39 (1908) glows with all the shades of nocturnal moods in the texts of German Romantic poets...

In the culminating works of this period Novák’s key inspirations are conjoined. Unfulfillable erotic longing lights up the Symbolist song cycle *Údolí Nového Království* [The Valley of the New Kingdom] op. 31 (1903) and forms the main idea of the symphonic poem *O věčné touze* [On Eternal Yearning] op. 33 (1905), which – but only on the surface – is the moon’s story about sea and an exhausted



swan (H. Ch. Andersen). In the same way a “folk” ballad by F. L. Čelakovský provided Novák simply with the frame for a tragedy of jealousy, betrayal and self-destructive passion in his symphonic poem *Toman a lesní panna* [Toman and the Wood Maiden] op. 40 (1907). Nature here is not a self-sufficient “impressionistic” image, but an important element of the expressive drama: in the long cantata (“sea fantasy”) *Bouře* [The Storm] op. 42 (1910) the stormy ocean finally swallows up all the actors with their pure devoted love and sexual obsessions, the boy at the mast and the defiant sailors. The hymnic conclusion is transcendent in its awareness of the fleetingness of life, but also of the eternal renewal of hope and the regeneration of nature. Novák’s declaration of faith in natural pantheism crowns the cyclical piano “poem in notes” *Pan* op. 43 (*Prologue, Mountains, Sea, Forest, Woman*; 1910).

When the latter works were premiered Novák’s music was very much in line with the mood of his time and was favourably, even enthusiastically, received by the public. After 1912 the situation began to change. Novák suppressed the autobiographical element in his works and was perhaps seeking for a new idiom based more on “Bohemian melodics” (as opposed to those of Moravia and Slovakia) in his cantata *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt] op. 48, and first two operas. But in the period of the “fights over Dvořák”, whom Novák then supported, these works were ruthlessly and harshly rejected by Z. Nejedlý and his anti-Dvořák “camp”.

Later, in the post-war years, new stylistic principles and movements that were in many respects contrary to Novák’s musical temperament were emerging all over Europe. (Perhaps in a somewhat autobiographical





spirit he sought inspiration in the „world of childhood“, which was the subtitle of his song cycle *Jaro* [Spring] op. 52, and also an impulse in the *Six Sonatinas for Piano* op. 54 and minor piano piece *MLádí* [Youth] op. 55; these are all compositions in the utterly distinctive Novákian style, but „moderated“ and shorn of his former passionate combativeness.) Not until 1930 is there a new creative surge in Novák's work, once again subjectively motivated by his „farewell to Youth“ (the ballet pantomime *Signorina Gioventù* op. 58, 1928; the vocal-orchestral *Podzimní symfonie* [Autumn Symphony] op. 62, 1934 with original Moravian-Slovak „scherzo“; the *3rd String Quartet* op. 66, 1938). In all these pieces Novák was also in his way coming to terms with contemporary music: once again we find the echoes of Moravian song and also plentiful self-quoting, but these are treated on the basis of a rougher dissonant harmony and complex polyphony. He returned to his native landscape in his *South Bohemian Suite* op. 64 (1937) and during the Nazi Occupation reacted to the tragic situation of the Czech nation with a symphonic poem *De profundis* op. 67 (1941) and the organ *St. Wenceslas Triptych*, which he later instrumentated (1942).

This glancing view of the world of poetry in Novák's music (and its interior poeticism) is inevitably incomplete. He arranged a huge

number of poems in his vocal compositions – in so many song cycles and dozens of male, female and mixed choir compositions that I have not even mentioned. A vast range of poets provided the impulse for Novák's musical poetry, from the unknown authors of folk texts to the older and in their time „classic“ Czech poets (Mácha, Neruda, Sládek, Čech, Vrchlický and others) to the German poets (Lenau, Dehmel, Uhland and others) to the Czech Modern movement (Sova, Machar, Březina). He did not simply passively clothe this poetry in notes. On the contrary, it became a life-giving element in his own original poetic music. To appreciate the point, you must just listen to it.

JAROMÍR ČERNÝ

#### Vítězslav Novák – Selected Discography

*Eternal Longing*, symph. poem op. 33 – *In the Tatras*, symph. poem op. 26 – *Moravian-Slovak Suite*, op. 32  
Czech Philharm. Orch., Brno State Philharm. Orch., cond. Karel Šejna; Supraphon 1992

*South Bohemian Suite*, op. 64 – *Lady Godiva*, ouv. op. 41 – *De profundis*, symph. poem op. 67  
Brno State Philharm. Orch., cond. Jaroslav Vogel; Supraphon

*String Quartet no. 2 in D major* op. 35.  
(+L. Janáček, *String Quartet no. 1*)  
Janáček Quartet; Supraphon 2000

*The Storm, the Sea Fantasy... for Soloists, Mixed Chorus and Orch.* op. 42  
Czech Philharm. Orch., Czech Philharm. Chorus, cond. Zdeněk Košler; Supraphon

*Slovak Songs – Piano Quintet in A minor* op. 12 – *Songs of a Winter Night for piano solo* op. 30  
M. Kožená (mezzo-soprano), Radoslav Kvapil (piano), Kocian Quartet; ASV Ltd. London 1998

*Pan. A Poem in Tones*, op. 43.  
(+B. Smetana, B. Martinů)  
František Maxián (piano); Supraphon 1998