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Miloš Štedroň
Alois Hába
Martin Smolka
I. koncert
Pondělí 17. 10. 2005, 19.30 hodin
SKRJABIN, RACHMANINOV, LISZT, ČAJKOVSKIJ
ČNSO/Daniel Raiskin
Enrico Pace & Yingdi Sun, klavír

II. koncert
Středa 9. 11. 2005, 19.30 hodin
MITCHELL, BAKER, BRAHMS
ČNSO/Paul Freeman
Jiří Novotný, trombon

III. koncert
Sobota 17. 12. 2005, 19.30 hodin
LA PARADA
Jan Hasenöhrl & hosté
Paul Freeman, Václav Hudeček a další

IV. koncert
Středa 11. 1. 2006, 19.30 hodin
BEETHOVEN, ČAJKOVSKIJ, RACHMANINOV
ČNSO/Paul Freeman
Jaroslava Pěchočová, klavír

V. koncert
Středa 1. 2. 2006, 19.30 hodin
VERDI, BRITTEN, ROSSINI, RESPIGHI
ČNSO/Marcello Rota
Jaroslav Březina, tenor
Zdeněk Tyšar, lesní roh

VI. koncert
Středa 1. 3. 2006, 19.30 hodin
„MOZART GALA“
ČNSO/Jan Chalupecký

VII. koncert
Neděle 2. 4. 2006, 19.30 hodin
RAVEL, RIMSKIJ-KORSAKOV, MUSORGSKIJ
ČNSO/Marcello Rota
Lubomír Legemza, klarinet

VIII. koncert
Středa 3. 5. 2006, 19.30 hodin
MARTINŮ, BERNSTEIN, BEETHOVEN
ČNSO/Paul Freeman
John Walz, violoncello
Chicagský dětský sbor/Josephine Lee

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editorial

Dear Reader,

Alois Hába certainly deserves the amount of space we have devoted to him in this issue. He was a highly distinctive experimental composer and music theorist and a no less important teacher. One of the few 20th-century Czech composers to have entered „major“ musical history as a matter of course, Hába is a respected figure especially in the German-speaking world and was so even in the period before the Second World War. His name is traditionally linked primarily with microtonal music. This was a field in which together with a number of other composers Hába was an undoubted pioneer, but his importance cannot be reduced to this activity alone.

In this issue we have also included a portrait of the contemporary composer Martin Smolka, who is likewise intensely interested in microtones and uses them in his work. It would however, be rather too simple to present Smolka as some - albeit distant - successor to Hába. Smolka is a „child“ of the post-war avant garde, for which work with microtones was already quite an ordinary phenomenon and which came to them first and foremost through interest in the timbre element of music. If there is any respect in which Smolka is a successor of Hába’s, it is probably simply that his work is gaining ever greater respect abroad. We are pleased that we can contribute to this with our magazine.

Wishing you a beautiful autumn

Petr Bakla
Editor
every era has to give new substance to the ritual
Conservatory of Europe? which is essentially complicated, more lucid. When it became clear that what most suited with the breakthrough into Late Baroque, metaphorically, came with the Baroque, people. Another moment “in the stars”, to put such an advance in literacy among ordinary and secularisation on the same scale, or that time there had never been laicisation. In this sense Marxist interpretations were partly correct, since before the poly-choral element but in fact in Italy considerations of melody always prevailed and were always the clearly dominant factor. The Italian approach suited the Czechs better and it is interesting that Italian influences have been more in evidence here than French influences, even back in the reign of Charles IV when you would have thought that the Luxembourg connections would have meant the import of the musical culture of France.

Let us go back to the Baroque. What happened then?

Here what is important is the transition from the Baroque to Classicism. Someone once said that Classicism is Baroque without ornament, that all the decorations were stripped off the façades so that only the strict lines remain… This may mean on the one hand create something like a barracks, but it may also be very light, airy architecture — and if I compare music to architecture, which is an old idea, architecture is music in stone. In my view the model of the Late Baroque and Classicism particularly suited the Czechs. All over Europe the Baroque was attractive in music because the basic line of the melody, two violins or two trumpets, could be immediately reproduced and communicated by ear and to do so didn’t require any great education or skill. This was why initially “Czech musicality” expressed itself in a rather mediocre way and only after 1600 did the phenomenon acquire features that made it comparable with the major musical diasporas. I mean that after the Netherlanders and Italians Czechs become the biggest group of musical migrants. In this sense Havlíček was right when he said that they filled up every corner of the world. But Czechs do not create great concepts, or do so only in exceptional cases. For example J. V. Stamic, who revolutionised High Classicism period by pushing through the sonata form and modern orchestra. J.A. Benda was another Czech who made a contribution of this magnitude. But generally Czechs have been migrating musicians who adapt perfectly to the local style, are in no way provocative but simply develop that style. A model 1.B Class, in fact, marvellous musicians, skilful composers and excellent fillers of the norm.

Which are the other periods when Czech music reaches a peak?

If we are going to talk about national Czech music, then it is something that emerges from the second phase of the Czech national revival, after 1848. All this is perfectly described by Vladimír Macura in his absolutely epochal book Znamení zrodu [The Sign of Birth], which shows how the National Revival had two phases. In the first phase it was a kind of game developed by a few dozen intellectuels, but after 1847 the masses became involved, and this produces crucial episodes such as the “discovery” of the Zelená hora and Králův Dvůr Manuscripts, the supposed cycles of Old Czech poems from the 9th and 13th centuries that were unmasked as forgeries at the end of the 19th century. The wheels of nationalism start to turn because the tracks have already been laid. At first the Austrian government smites, because it believes on past form that the phenomenon is trivial. But the smile on its face disappears when it sees the funeral of Rubeš. A poet whom everybody knows from his Mlynářova opička [The Miller’s Monkey] or Čech a Němec [The Czech and the German] or some little verse dies, and František Palacky gives the order, more or less a political appeal, for his memory to be honoured. Suddenly forty thousand people turn up, the rain is pouring down but Palacky speaks for a whole hour and everyone listens. Suddenly ideology, something completely new, enters the game. And we might perhaps see that as the fateful moment for Czech music as well, which becomes national in spirit. Czech musicians cease to be migrants, and are now people very much bound to a particular cultural instance. Smetana is a tragic but great example of this kind. Here we have a phenomenal world talent, and if he had chosen
the path of the Romantic composer freely travelling and spending five years in Paris, and maybe ten years in some German centre, he would certainly be three times more famous than he is today. But he chose the path of Czech opera and gave himself up wholly to the nation. He devoted himself completely to the services of something that he didn’t actually understand very well. This is crystal clear if we look at the ideas that inform his music, I mean his view on what he was actually setting to music. Significantly these we noticed by Adolf Hitler with his distorted vision, who praised Má vlast [My Country] and considered it absolutely the most perfect chauvinistic glorification of landscape, history, nation, race and so forth. He wanted to hear it played authentically; he got his way, and the conductor Václav Talich was later nearly charged with collaboration. But what could he have done?

How has Czech music developed since the later 19th century?

Interestingly, in music there was no great break at the end of the 19th century. How has it developed since then? What happens to a composer like Dvořák and what happens to Janáček, who was later nearly charged with collaboration? He wanted to hear it played authentically; he got his way, and the conductor Václav Talich was later nearly charged with collaboration. But what could he have done?

What were your student years at JAMU [The Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno] like?

First I completed studies at the Philosophical Faculty, then I went to Pardubice for a year and did my national service as a signals man, but even before I went for a talent test at JAMU. By that time in 1961 and 1962 I was already in touch with the composers Miloslav Ištvan, Josef Berg and Alois Piňos, who kept encouraging me in the idea that I just had to go to JAMU. When I came back from military service I already had a place in the Moravian Museum as an assistant in the music department and I directed the Theatre of Music [Divadlo hudby]. On the basis of the talent test I was admitted to the Janáček Academy and became a regular student of composition there up to 1969. But I have very happy memories of the Theatre of Music too. It was an institution that I made in my own image. I got my friends involved with it, the Brno Surrealists, Pavel Rezníček, and Jiří Veselsky appeared in it as well, and Arnošt Goldflam, Karel Fuka, and of course that cult figure of Bohemian Brno life Jan Novák. I invited Mirek Kovalík, too, who produced a sort of mini-festival of poetry.

At JAMU you experienced a very potent set of teachers. The composition teachers were Miloslav Ištvan, Josef Berg, and Alois Piňos. Ludvík Kundera was rector at the time...

It was a truly starry period. But Berg wasn’t at JAMU. He taught for just a short time, because teaching caused him such serious physical problems – a kind of stigma – that he had to stop. He always overdid the preparations for his classes and it took up too much of his time. Ištvan and Piňos were complete revelations and it was very good that Ludvík Kundera, Milan Kundera’s father, was rector. He was an unusually educated and cultivated man. He had studied in Germany and admired Beethoven, but Janáček was a huge influence on him. Then he had been in the Czechoslovak Legions in the First World War and had gone through the whole legion experience in Russia. For me he was always a classic example of the syndrome of the Czech nation, combining German culture and Russophila. He had a perfect mastery of both languages. He also wrote a book in Russian, The History of the Music of the
A worker demonstrating for a university?

He was demonstrating for a Czech university.

Worker Pavlík, who was killed in 1905 when the last straw in Brno was the carpentry trade. The last straw is the law of quantity changing into quality. That's the law of quantity changing into quality.

That last straw that breaks the camel's back; came late, only after 1900. There is always the place. So clear national polarisation was forced into bilingualism by the German owners. There was only one Czech school in Brno.

Was it forced into bilingualism by the German owners?

Yes, but it was marked by what you might call the “curse of Brno”, which is hard to explain. Usually I say it is a matter of the relationship between Czech and German identity in the area. In Prague the polarisation of Czechs and Germans was unambiguous. After the October Diploma there were Czechs and Germans in Brno and there were Germans, and anyone who wanted to be both at the same time was denounced by both sides. In Brno it was more complicated. Up to 1890–1900 there were Czechs living here but the German town hall tried to stop more Czechs moving in from the suburbs. Brno had ninety thousand inhabitants at the time and wanted to protect the German majority of around fifty thousand.

In Prague the turning point had come in 1880 – the Germans and Jews suddenly realised that they were surrounded by Czechs. The Josefine doctrine effectively went off the stage of spoken drama.

What effects did this have for the atmosphere in Brno, what you call the curse?

Generally a kind of embarrassment about the fact that actually there is a double or triple culture here. It is most obvious in the architecture, because in order for Brno to be given a Czech face something absolutely new had to be found. That was the reason for Functionalism. It was clear that this was something new, Czech, beautiful. This is the principle on which I would explain the specific character of Brno. The modern started here practically from scratch, much more so than anywhere else.

At the end of the Sixties you were part of the birth of another Brno legend – the Goose on a String Theatre [Divadlo Husa na provázku], where you created the stage music for many productions. How can music influence a stage production? Or what generally is the relationship between the dramatic and musical element?

Music can of course have great psychological power, but in theatre the main problem is that it is stigmatised by being used for the transitions. When there's a scene change, then there’s music. There's a constant danger of someone talking while it's playing, the audience chatting, in short, a danger of the audience being “stuck” to music being just a backdrop. Or else it's the accompanying element to movement, to dance, which then turns into ballet or mime. But today musicians, and also directors and ultimately even actors want there to be a song or something more. So music is being liberated from the stage of spoken drama and becoming something that is moving in the direction of opera or musical. At the Goose on a String Theatre [later Theatre on a String] each director had his own approach to music. Zdeněk Pospíšil cared a great deal about music and wanted to do musical. Of
course he didn't know quite how to do it, but he created Balada pro banditu [Ballad for a Bandit], which was a work of genius in its time. Peter Scherhafer on the other hand needed music as rhythmic emphasis, as atmosphere. But it was Scherhafer who had the idea that the Theatre on a String might do opera. Of course – a peculiar sort of opera, but Chameleón at the Theatre on a String meant more to me than an opera I would do in a classic opera house. The atmosphere there was marvellous, and it was a joy to write for people like Mirek Donutil, Mojmír Madenič, Jirka Pecha who couldn't read music. I realised how superficial my operatic music was.

I founded myself voluntarily, was historically inclined towards historicism. Not that we developed anything new there, but I had never written Country, and suddenly there was a yelling director who didn't want me to do opera. Of course I felt the contradiction with doing songs for the theatre, but I took the prospect of theatre songs as a new sort of reaction to the avant-garde, and thought I would try it, since I had never done it before. I had never written Country, and suddenly there was it with Ballad for a Bandit, and Pospíšil shouting, “Do you know how to do a Western?” So first I listened to all the westerns and then I produced my own idea of a western. Naturally I know that as soon as something is too popular or too easy on the ear, it's dangerous. And so in the case of Ballad I haven't succumbed to some great enthusiasm. In fact I tend to be suspicious and tell myself that it is very odd that it is so catchy and still remembered. But you must remember that Ballad for a Bandit aspired to be a musical. If – but neither Pospíšil nor I myself realised it – if there had been more dancing. A musical needs to be very much dance drama, and that element is rather lacking in Ballad.

Now that we talk of musical – what is your view of the boom in musicals in the 1990s in Czech Republic? What is the basis of the appeal?

It’s a matter of visual appeal. It’s the visualisation of music. If you look back on the last 20 years, what you see is that music has become terribly visualised. Every group must have clips, and if they don’t they might as well not exist. They have to present themselves in some way, and so they put on different costumes and create an image, which then determines fashion. But musical is above all a huge commercial commodity – as I’ve often written – it is instant opera for the poor. Nobody can get into the grand opera these days. Just take a look at what happened in Britain when the Labour Party, after winning the elections, wanted to get their new MPs their traditional seats at the opera. It was impossible because the seats had already been taken by the lords. Sometimes you can get into a matinée there, but no one has a chance of getting into the premières. The rise of the musical was an attempt to somehow exploit the financial capacity of the middle- and lower classes, to get money out of them. Rock’n’Roll achieved the same thing starting in the sixties. The young had plenty of money, because after the war they were in apprenticeships and had regular incomes, and so they could buy a record every week or at least every month. Everything is perfectly calculated. A lot of smart people in this country grasped the opportunity and started to do musicals. Amazingly this merry-go-round is still turning and making money, which is something I can’t understand. Yes, I can see a number of attempts at innovation, one cannot write it all off as mindless, and there are some major artistic and what you might call intellectual or text investments. But the mortal sin of Czech musical is that it lacks irony about itself. I am an admirer of Webber’s Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, for example, where at one point the action stops and the protagonists entirely challenge the principles that they embody. Joseph is supposedly dead and his father weeps for him, he is comforted by a girl and together they dance in front of the curtain, and suddenly Joseph takes off his dark glasses and says, “Let’s get on with the plot. I’m dead, but nothing is happening.” It is a tremendous lightening up of the atmosphere, and if someone did it in Dracula (successful Czech musical – editor’s note), half the audience would definitely understand and the piece would acquire another dimension. But in this country musical is treated like an opera around 1800, except that opera around 1800 was done a little better. Perhaps it is the revenge of history. In history it what usually happens is that once grand styles come back in lightened up and boiled down forms. This can be the case with musical as well, following the rule that what comes first as tragedy comes back a second time as farce.

Let us take the situation from the opposite side now – what is the situation of classical music today?

Naturally it is a minority genre, but what isn’t a minority genre? Only mainstream pop. Rock music and folk rock are already minority affairs today. Jazz is very definitely in the position of a minority genre. Unless it goes for something of the kind that Jaromír Hnilicka tried, for example, when he did a jazz mass at Petrov. Ordinary believers came too, and people who were interested in paraliturgical music, but they were not jazzmen of course. In other words, I think we are seeing a huge process of syncretism, which reminds me of Late Antiquity and the Early Christian period. Those were times when religion didn’t exist in pure form, many people believed in various different cults and combined them in all kinds of ways. Today the media throw so much information at us that we couldn’t actually be non-syncretic if we tried. This is why classical music no longer exists in pure form. When I look at the young generation of composers I can’t see even one who is a purely classical composer. Earlier, composers used to come out of the conservatory or studies with some master and if then Mr. XY wrote an operetta, they would want to banish him from the avant-garde. Today everyone says, yes, he has to make a living. Of course he studied at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts, but now he plays in a band or makes clips or ten different things at the same time. And occasionally he writes a symphony. His intentions are serious, but he thinks on five different tracks. And so we get synthesis.

Can one say what the classical music public of today is like?

Probably not, because the public changes. It is a complete minority, but if some appealing external element is added, classical music
can attract a lot of people. One example might be the Ostrava Days, a festival of avant-garde music that the well-known avantgardist Petr Kotík, born in 1942, decided to hold. He deliberately held it in industrial Ostrava, in an environment we might consider completely acultural. But it worked perfectly. He combined avant-garde music with industrial conditions, which was a terrific idea and the response was very good. This shows that it is possible to get a broader public to listen to classical music, but the music must have some new, non-traditional packaging.

You mean by providing the audience with some key to interpretation, some potential explanation that will make the music more accessible? Yes, or else a special performance. For example when a cellist like Jiří Bárta plays, or violinist like Pavel Šporcl. Šporcl attracts a certain public that admires him because he is an excellent violinist, looks unconventional, doesn’t play in black tie and so on, and so basically he can play anything, and his public will swallow it, to a certain extent. I say to a certain extent, because if he decided to play the Schönberg’s violin concerto he would have problems in the long term, because people would start complaining everywhere that he was playing something peculiar. Or he would have to play in some exclusive setting, package it in some special way. I think the same thing can be observed with “high-brow” literature, which today seems to need a “para-story” if it is to appeal to a broader readership. But does classical music still retain an odour of exclusivity, snobbery? Of course, old people who behave as people used to behave in the concert hall come to see the audience and learned when to applaud and when not to, and it was the same at concerts. Many people have ritualised it to the extent that concerts have become a social imperative for them – we just have to be there. Naturally at JAMU it is different. When there is a concert there, the students form another kind of audience. Probably what is important is to mix environments. To do concerts among pictures and so on. Every era has to give new substance to the ritual, there is no permanent recipe.

Could one generalise and say that the perception of art is an essentially ritualised matter? To a certain extent yes, because when a perception is collective, everyone is going to watch how his neighbour reacts. With individual perception the situation is slightly different. There I don’t have to make any pretence, and I am not bound to any external response. One example: I went to a musical that I averagely enjoyed and I was averagely satisfied. The performances were quite good. And the people who were there, probably businessmen because the tickets were very expensive, expressed crazy enthusiasm corresponding to the price of the tickets. The enthusiasm was enormous. And so you see that even para-stories like this influence the perception of a work.

You spoke about syncretism, but don’t you have the feeling that the opposite trend exists as well, that artistic genres are getting further and further away from each other, and that for example contemporary music communicates far less with art or contemporary literature? Syncretism is to some extent a case of the “wish being father to the thought”, of course; we want it to be like that. But I would say that the position may actually have improved in music, in relation to the visual arts for example, when you think of “graphic music”, “visual scores” and so on. Earlier music was a purely acoustic matter but since 1950, with the existence of graphic music, it has not been possible to ignore the visual side. Nonetheless it’s true that a very high level of specialisation is occurring inside the individual branches of the arts. This is perhaps comparable with specialisation in the sciences after the positivist era. But here too there is a different level, because interdisciplines are developing that are far more important. Physical chemistry is emerging between physics and chemistry, and is more important than the classical disciplines…Interdisciplines are also emerging inside music, bringing it closer to the visual.

What is the situation in relation to literature? Does contemporary opera for example use contemporary prose as libretto? I’ll answer on the general level. Opera is actually something that began from literature and then moved further away from literature when it became fully operatic. The first opera librettos were written by great poets, but then people took over who turned them out as if on a production line. From the point of view of craftsmanship they were very good, but they devaluated the great words. The great word “love” was constantly on the lips of singers, and so nobody any longer much believed in it anymore. That was the situation from 1690/1700 to 1750. After a period like that, however, innovation always comes along in one form or another. Around 1800 we find types appearing who don’t trust the established art of libretto and rightly find it stale, and they look for a literary opera. Which means that they read. Obviously it depends on what they read. They may read banalities, or great literature. That was the case with Beethoven. He always became enraptured with something and wanted to do it as an opera and then looked around for someone who would do it for him. This is the process of the literarisation of opera. And the process continued in a very steep curve that culminates in Wagner. Wagner is the ideal example of poet and musician combined. And I deliberately put “poet” first, because his Collected Writings are very impressive. Today, however, there is no unequivocal answer. It is very likely that opera is using literature for inspiration. There are plenty of cases. Recently for example an opera based on Beckett was staged in Prague. Think how many times Švejk has been done as an opera. But of course the quality of the results is a different matter. Today the composer needs to have a good literary knowledge, to be widely read and able to find his or her own way. Abroad you find an ideal combination in Steve Reich and Béryl Korol. They are married, Reich composed and Korol writes terrific texts.

A few years ago the philosopher Václav Bělohradský claimed that opera was a genre as dead as poetry… That’s nothing new. People have been saying that since 1600. And I think opera has basically come to live with the situation and reckoned with it. Opera always has to be hitting a crisis to show once again that it is not in crisis. Since 1900 there has been enquiry after enquiry designed to discover whether opera is in crisis. Of course it is. Opera is a museum. People go to the Metropolitan Opera as they go to a museum. There they consider Puccini to be modern opera and Janáček is considered some peculiar anomaly. Some operas are deliberately museums, museums that have fantastic subsidies and attract vast numbers of visitors. Opera in general probably lives for the past, because it shows how many great achievements were accomplished then. When you compare what was written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with what was written in the twentieth century, then it is clear that the impulse of the past predominates. On the other hand, directors today in general try to innovate – to dress operas in new costumes, to put them in different settings. Recently I saw a Twelfth Night that was updated to the period 1900–1915. It was extremely interesting. Of course, it shifted the work to a different level entirely. It doesn’t bother people who already know the text and it can potentially attract a larger public by appeal to the popularity of a certain period, style of costumes and so on. You have mentioned Janáček, and of course his operas are a model example of the combination of literature and music. Milan Kundera has written that Janáček discovered the world of prose for opera, and even the world of realistic prose, and that he rejected stylisation and discovered the acoustic world outside music. What do you see as unique about Janáček? It is one of the great ambitions of musicologists – to explain how Janáček wrote his operas. Actually we don’t know much about it and one might ask whether it will help us a great deal when we do know. But his achievements, his contribution, are something else. Milan Kundera has expressed it very well, but Janáček was not the first to discover prose, and he was following the French naturalists. Specifically he made a detailed study of Gustav Charpentier, who
wrote the opera Louise. This is a story from Bohemian life, from the street, where we hear the jingles of milk-sellers and bakers and so on. Evidently this attracted Janáček, because he did something similar. He knew that opera could no longer speak in a stylised idiom that had originated some time at the beginning of the seventeenth century and drawn on the tradition of Petrach and Dante. That idiom had slid into the hands of mass producers who strikingly resemble today’s Musical librettists and the original power of the words had been lost. Prose libretto therefore definitely helped opera to come closer to reality, to naturalism. Janáček, originally a great proponent of formalism, suddenly started to talk about the need for truth to take precedence over beauty. This means that ugliness too is justified. It also looks as if he started to look for ugliness. Furthermore prose creates irregular shapes that made it possible to go beyond the stereotypes of aria and recitative. Janáček called this “formative splinters”, which is his term, and he put the opera together from these splinters. The melodies of speech, which he recorded on a systematic, daily basis in the street, are another thing. Today we no longer believe that this was a scientific enterprise. I would say it was a more literary project. Arne Novák, when he wrote about his feuilletons – Milenci a nevolník okamžiku [The Lover and the Serf of the Moment] was sharply insightful on this point. Few Czech writers – and here Janáček may be considered a writer – chose this form of splinters. Perhaps the smallest form that Janáček used in his feuilletons is precisely a kind of speech melody splinter. He then composes a sketch or feuilleton out of melody splinters and this isolated melody actually is a kind of entity. It was through these phenomena that Janáček got to know the world. And this is evident in his operas too. One other aspect is also interesting from the literary point of view. In his third opera – Jenůfa – Janáček for the first time altered the libretto, improving on Preiss’s original in terms of dramatic effect and in some instinctive way arrived at the Aeschylean principle. It is something first noticed by the English. The Aeschylean principle involves one figure playing many other figures and entering into them. We find this in all of Janáček’s operas – one character replaying, quoting another: a monologue that works like a dialogue. The Kostelníčka in Jenůfa says, “It will be soon. But in the mean time I have to go through a whole eternity a whole salvation. What if I took the child away somewhere... Then they would pounce on me, on Jenufa. You see her, You see her, You see her, Kostelníčka.” And now she plays the future situation over to herself. This principle is used randomly, appears once or twice, but it can entirely dominate as in the case of the last opera Z mrtvého domu [From the House of the Dead], where it is the principle that generates the action. The characters are already waiting only for death in a concentration camp and they narrate their memories. The memories are far stronger than their current state. They tell how they killed someone or what happened to them, what wrong has been done them or how they have arrived here through injustice, and as they do they play different characters. And it becomes clear that this monologue / dialogue is far more powerful than if there had been ten of these characters present with each playing only himself. And one more thing: in Destiny and Jenůfa veristic opera plays a major part. Jenůfa is essentially ancient tragedy, and its novelty and great modernity lies in the fact that Janáček has set it in a highly specific time and place. In the spirit of verismo he has replaced the universality at which Late Romanticism had arrived – the world as myth, the world as the universe, as we see for example in Wagner. This can be played anywhere, on a boat or in a military base and suchlike. In the case of verism, however, the setting matters a great deal; it matters that it is a mill that is so and so many kilometres from Hrubá Vbka. Verism work with the concrete, unique setting and ritual is important here. An ancient tragedy repeats itself: jealous, murder, love, hate and so on, but these are differently packaged, in this case in the garb of folk costume, the garb of ritual, the garb of the dance of recruits. Another musical phenomenon that you have been concerned with and that is linked with literature is that of singing poets. What form does this phenomenon take today? A musicus poeticus is someone who essentially works with both levels, with music and with poetry or the word. This tradition developed very strongly in humanism, i.e. from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century. In this period the poet was able to write some musical form and combine it with poetry. It was the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that were crucial, however, because this was when people who had a need to combine music with text emerged as a clear group especially in the universities and the intellectual sphere. But even well before this, in the fourteenth century, when the new mensural notation was developed, suddenly it was possible to write music down in a far more complex way, to structure it. Some people composed in a way that shows they were not even very interested in the question of whether a piece could be sung at all, and were just excited by the range of possibilities of what could be invented on the page. With the sixteenth and seventeenth came the development of a vast field of figurics, rhetorical figures in the sense of pre-composed situations that it was useful to know for particular kinds of verbs of motion, for particular kinds of numerical and spatial relations and so on. There are several dozen such figures and they can either be used conventionally as they were intended or else individualists can try to bend or break them using anti-figures. This means they begin to use them in other ways, which everyone notices. Around the year 1600 this led to the rise of what was known as the modern and a rift – musica antica e moderna. And in Italy a seconda pratica – other practice, developed. The popularisation of art, which is most evident at the beginning of the Baroque and in the Middle Baroque, acted as a major factor for conserving style. In the decorative arts or in literature and music, we are not sure in the Renaissance what is schlock and rubbish and what is high art. But in the Baroque we can be completely certain. We can see the artisan making cherubs and shrine figures on a production line. The equivalent in music is the broadside ballad. This is the projection of high art onto the ordinary market where it is sold for money. The trend on the other hand means the fall of musica poetica. Bach is still a musicus poeticus, which means that he knows exactly how to treat verses. After Bach, from the 18th century, the roles divide. There are composers and there are poets. You can see it today in Czech pop and folk. There are poets who are quite clearly a long way from being great musicians and fit some quite decent or adequate poetic figure to some empty music. Last year we celebrated a major Janáček Anniversary. Do you think this will attract more attention to his work? I almost have the sense that Janáček is more popular abroad than in this country. Janáček really is performed abroad more than he is here. The Janáček “boom” abroad is quite marked. But when he is performed in a better than average way here he draws great attention – for example Wilson’s Prague production of Destiny. The jubilee year 2004 – a hundred years from the Brno, local premiere of Jenufa – was a reminder that today Janáček is attracting the greatest directors, choreographers and stage designers, and is being sung by the best singers and staged in the most famous opera houses in the world. We are witnessing new interpretations of his operas. Jenufa as the problem of unwanted children, social and other inequalities. In the same way Wilson’s breakthrough production of the opera Destiny – as a probe into the composer’s biography – broke through in an earlier indifference to the piece. And Výlety pana Broučka [The Excursions of Mr. Brouček], that excellent burlesque on a Czech or indeed any other petit bourgeois, just like Liška Bystrouška [The Cunning Little Vixen] one of the most “ecological operas” of the 20th century. Its brilliant dynamism and colourfulness predetermine it to become the opera-ballet of our era, and a Paris production had just this concept of it. From the House of the Dead is the opera of the black 20th century – the century of gulags and concentration camps and escapes from them. This opera cries out for film or television adaptation. The main thing, however, is that we shall not be able to follow just some “one obligatory” tradition. New and different traditions are already emerging. And it is possible and likely that they will attract a larger number of admirers than the previous one.
We must exercise a certain caution when using the word “school” in the sense of a musical movement. Admittedly it is now conventional in music history to employ terms like the “Low Countries”, “Neapolitan” and “Venetian” schools to characterise particular trends in music of the Renaissance and Baroque, the “Mannheim” and “Viennese” school for the Classical period, and the “Second Viennese School” for the circle of Arnold Schönberg and his followers (not to speak of the “national schools” that appear everywhere in the literature), but the most recent historical analysis has challenged this blanket use of the concept. The fact is that the definition and application of the term “school” is very changeable and relative, like historical knowledge itself. When a new musical phenomenon appears, it is either rejected or accepted by those contemporaries who encounter it, but neither rejection nor acceptance is the result of truly objective aesthetic judgment; since this is impossible when the phenomenon is so new. The initial experience is not, therefore, the criterion of subsequent evaluation. If the new phenomenon is to be given a firm footing, not a negligible aspect of the creative process of composing (whatever the extreme avant-garde may have thought), and perhaps even less negligible when it comes to the reception of the music by the audience. On the other hand theory is one thing and its application another. Hába himself was not a purely microtonal nor a purely athematic composer. His musical talent was spontaneous and his music was never contrived. Some considered this to mean the loss of a personal style, the “style of a generation” or “epoch” and so forth. Bearing all these caveats in mind we find that it is possible, and impossible, to talk of anything like a “Hába School”.

In his attempts fully to integrate microtones into European musical language and give them a place equal to that of traditional tonal and harmonic techniques, Hába remained an isolated solitaire in the history of European music, but as we shall show, he was not without his continuers. His rejection of the classical romantic doctrine of musical forms and his promotion of “athematism”, was supposed to open the way to absolute creative freedom and emancipate the composer from dependence on a given compositional canon. Some considered this to mean the loss of a “Hába School”.

It was another feature of Hába’s personality that he managed to gather around him a very large circle of kindred spirits. These included his pupils in the strict sense of the word, i.e. those who attended his courses in microtonal music at the Prague Conservatoire, and his pupils in the broader sense, i.e. people who met him at his innumerable lectures (at home and abroad), who worked with him in musical associations and societies, and studied his articles in the music journals and books.
Entry into Musical Life
Alois Hába was undoubtedly one of the most influential people in Czech music in the period between the two world wars. He was a composer, theorist, organiser, propagator of modern music and a teacher. Active in music clubs and societies, he used them as a platform for applying and promoting his views. In the world of Prague associations he developed this activity first and foremost in *Fitanmost [Presence]*, becoming its chairman at the beginning of the 1930s, and in the Czechoslovak section of the International Society for Contemporary Music, ISCM. In both societies he had the deciding voice in the most critical years, when political and national conflict was becoming ever more intense. Hába always remained a convinced member and representative of his nation (one could even say his ethnic group) and he also remained a convinced supporter of international co-operation without regard to linguistic, racial, religious or other barriers. In the mid-1930s his tolerance did not make life easy for him. As Hitler’s Germany became ever more aggressive he was often accused of tolerating “Jews and Germans” around him – a double criticism fired by the Czech nationalism and anti-Semitism that grew in direct proportion to the social sensitivity and breadth of culture combined perfectly with the inheritance of his roots in the Moravian countryside, and with the social sensitivity and breadth of culture through which he transcended these rural roots.

**An Example of Courage**
Hába’s path to teaching the theory of composition was undoubtedly made easier by the teacher training that he received at the pedagogical institute in Kroměříž before he decided to set out on a composer’s career. Music teaching was at that time an obligatory part of teacher training and he was also able to test out his music teaching skills in practice during a period in Vienna. It has recently come to light that in 1918/19 he taught violin and musical theory at a private music school (Schallinger-Schule) where pupils of Franz Schreker, including Felix Petryek and Heinrich Knöll also taught. Hába undoubtedly obtained the job – just like a post as an editor at the Universal Edition – through the good offices of Franz Schreker, who was accustomed to helping his pupils improve their material situation in this way.

Hába gave his first lecture on the new possibilities of music in Prague in 1921 at the Prague Conservatoire. Even at this early stage he already found enthusiasts who were later to work with him among the young conservatoire students. He impressed them as a man of courage unafraid to venture into uncharted territory. For *Miroslav Ponc*, for example, a pupil in Bedřich Smetana’s class at the newly established Academy of Performing Arts (created out of the former master school of the Conservatoire), more than a hundred musicians of whom we have some record passed through his classes. If we were to add all of those who encountered Hába at lectures in the societies where he presented new pieces, at his appearances abroad and so on, the real number of people influenced by Hába would be much higher. Not everyone who in some way experienced Hába’s training became composers, and many chose other musical professions. These included for example *Karel Ančerl* (1908–1973), later head of the Czech Philharmonic (1950–68) and after his emigration in 1968 of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Ančerl was a highly versatile musician: he studied conducting with Pavel Dřežák and at the Conservatoire master school with Václav Talich, and composing with Jaroslav Kraček and Hába. Under Hába’s supervision he wrote a quarter-tone *Music for String Orchestra* and after graduating (1930) went on to an even tougher test in the field.

**The Opera “Mother” in the Hands of a Pupil**
On the 7th of May 1931 Hába’s quarter-tone opera *Matka [Mother]* received its world premiere in Munich under the baton of Hermann Scherchen. The production of this opera, which has remained the only one of its kind to this day, was a risky undertaking. In his vocal music up to that time Hába had tried out quarter-tones only in his *Suite on Interjections of Folk Poetry* (*Sinfonie na citoslave lidské poezii*), which had been performed, also under the direction of Hermann Scherchen, in Frankfurt am Main in 1924. When Hába met with Scherchen at the ISCM Festival in Liege in 1930, he told him (so Hába related later), that he had just completed a full-length quarter-tone opera. Scherchen enthusiastically replied “Really? Then we’ll put it on next year in Munich at the
February 1930 Schönberg's opera Prague German Theatre. Together with the and Hába knew him well from his time at the pose). The conductor Hans Wilhelm Stein-

translate the libretto into German for this pur-

November 1929 Hába had already commis-

sible, big worries as it is". But Büchtger

Munich from the intendant, and she's going
come to Munich. This will be sorted out very
soon, since I shall have to go to Munich
probably as soon as the day after tomorrow.
This is because the singers want to know
something about the financial side of the whole thing, and so I need to speak with Mr.
Büchtger, who is in charge of the whole thing, as soon as possible. (I don't want a revolution between Meistersingers). […] I rehearse for 6 hours and search for singers for 8 hours. I hope it won't go on like this for too much longer […] For the moment I'm rehearsing with semitone pianos, but it's lethally difficult work and then everyone complains that it's straining their voices. I can believe it, because they don't hear the real sound, but have to derive it all from the semi-tones, and so they strangle all the quarter-tones. I've turned into the complete singer, just imagine how often I have to sing 2–3 bars in advance for the singers! Wherever I go I sing quarter-tones, but I already know how." (28th September 1930)

"I can't find an contra-alto for the love of God. Schönberg is coming to Berlin on the 4th of this month, and I hope he will help me find a chorus, or at least tell me how I ought to set about finding one here." (2nd December 1930)

"Today I had my first opportunity to speak with Schönberg properly about every-
things. Just imagine, he had a whole hour.
I think everything will be different now. The thing is this: suddenly something prompted
me to ask him if I could study conducting with him. I explained to him that I had time in the evenings and so on. I think that the idea appealed to him, and he seems to enjoy teaching very much. […] We really do need to start rehearsals with the orchestra.

It’s already December. Especially when you consider that around Christmas we won’t be able to do anything, or with the choir for that matter, since as you know yourself Christmas is all celebrations here and no work at all. At any rate you can see that I’m not downcast. I’m sure, and I guarantee you that if the ensemble can just be put together, then by the end of April the opera will be rehearsed to tip top standard. […] It’s strange that all my singers understand me well except Debüser [Tini Debüser, who sang the title role]. Today I had to call her 3x yet again. […] But I won’t bore you with that, since tomorrow I shall really take a firm line yet again. […] But I won’t bore you with that, since tomorrow I shall really take a firm line with her (she is being terribly sweet now, just because Scherchen is here.” (4th December 1930)

“The string ensemble is almost complete, only no one wants to do anything more before the end of the year.” (15th December 1930) “My hope that I would get a quarter-tone harmonium in my flat hasn’t been fulfilled […] Scherchen was supposed to conduct today, but he didn’t turn up. […] What am I supposed to do with Zelenka’s designs? […] I shall write to Zelenka and send him a plan of the Munich theatre as soon as I get it from Büchtger.” (5th January 1931)

The Czech stage designer František Zelenka (1904–1943) designed the stage for the Munich premiere, but his sober stylistisation, which was typical of many Czech stage designers of the interwar period, failed to cope not only with the musical side of the production (including supervision of the transport of quarter-tone instruments), but with other aspects as well. “I had some words with Tini [Debüser] on the importance of her role, and told her what I thought of her approach to rehearsals, and so now she is working somewhat better, and keeping me waiting only for an hour. […] To be honest, I’m worried about her; she is too frivolous in her attitude, and doesn’t take the whole thing as seriously as she should. I shall give it another week, and if she doesn’t improve I shall drop working with her. […] I have put the chorus together in almost final form. There will be 12 people. So many people have expressed an interest now that I could form a 16-strong choir, but I think that 12 is enough, since if there were more I am not sure I would have them all ready in time. The work is going really well now and progress is being made. I hope and trust you will be satisfied when you hear it all. It is wonderfully beautiful preparing such a new thing. I never thought I would be able to get right into the spirit of it so fast. Büchtger still hasn’t sent me a plan of the stage.” (12th January 1931)

In finding and choosing the choir he was helped by the Professor of the Berlin Music High School (Hochschule für Musik) Georg Schünemann, who knew Hába personally. When Hába had been studying in Berlin he had had Hába’s works performed at school concerts, provided him with school musical instruments and allowed him to study phonographic recordings.

“Today Büchtger wrote to me telling me not to go to Munich, because 1) Meilie [Max Meilie, the singer of the main male role] doesn’t want to rehearse, because Scherchen hasn’t yet written anything positive to him, and 2) there isn’t an orchestra yet. You don’t have to write to Scherchen about that, because today I wrote him a long letter explaining everything in detail. I think that now he will really do something when he sees what is at stake. Here is Berlin things are now going very well. I rehearse every day with 8 to 10 singers. Now the only element missing in the choir is tenors, and I hope I shall get hold of some this week. […] How do you see the 4th scene in the choir? I’ve already tried it in several different ways, but it has never worked out well, because either the basses growl something indistinct or else they yell at the high end. […] The choral parts ideally suit women. But I hope that when I’ve got over the intonation problems with the men, plenty of other things will come right as well. Debüser is giving me trouble again. […] I wonder whether it wouldn’t really be more sensible to throw her out. Lately Scherchen wanted to do it, but didn’t and that was my fault. What do you think? I can’t devote much attention to her now, because I have plenty of work with the others and without me she doesn’t do anything. […] What is the situation with financial matters? I would like to know so that I can get Büchtger to write to singers, and he doesn’t want to do that until he knows where the funds are coming from.” (19th January 1931)

“The whole situation looks less than wonderful because it doesn’t seem to me as if Scherchen and Büchtger are taking care of anything – at least I still haven’t heard anything. […] I don’t know if I can rehearse the strings in Munich, I don’t know if I have performers at my disposal and I don’t know what the state of affairs is with wind players. You yourself know very well that if everything is going to come together, I just have to finally get a chance (it’s the end of January after all!) to work properly. […] I have already asked Büchtger to write to singers several times. So far he has done nothing at all. The singers are absolutely in the right, because they simply must be told at least the date and roughly the financial conditions. […] Still, they are all working very hard and conscientiously. […] I don’t know anything about Meilie. […] Debüser browbeats me, but I browbeat her as well. I am already doing the 7th Picture with her, and I think it would be a pity to start again from scratch with someone else. I can cope with it, but Scherchen ought to take more interest in the thing. I’m still lacking tenors
for the choir. I’ve exhausted all the sources and don’t know where to get hold of them. […] As far as the singers are concerned I can guarantee that I’ll have them ready by mid-April, but I can’t answer for the orchestra, because I don’t have one yet.” (24th January 1931)

“So far I don’t have tenors, but I’ll find some […] Debüser has improved. I wonder for how long. On Wednesday there was an interesting concert here. They played Schönberg’s Suite op. 29 for violin, viola, cello, 3 clarinets and piano, and then Hindemith’s String Quartet op. 32 and Stravinsky’s Octet. After Schönberg all the rest seemed to pale. Never before had I felt that kind of difference, but the Hindemith and Stravinsky went down better.” (30th January 1931)

“Yesterday Scherchen was here and Büchtger came as well. Scherchen finally sorted everything else, asked for the addresses of the singers and wants to write to them all himself… He set a date for […] Debüser has improved. He wants you to come to him in Wintherthur for about ten days so that he can work with you at least 6 hours a day on your opera. […] He immediately made a firm contract with Meilie. […] Büchtger has himself talked to some of the singers, especially those who were giving me trouble. It looks as if finally everything will now come together. Next month the Munich dance ensemble will start to rehearse the ballet. I have to be repetiteur with them. Otherwise I have to assist with Stravinsky’s Oedipus Rex, Honnegger’s Antigon and probably with Milhaud too. This really speeds up my work tempo, but it doesn’t matter, since I’m learning a lot. I shall certainly cope.” (23rd February 1931)

We do not have any more reports from Ančerl to Hába on the course of rehearsals for Mother; perhaps his work tempo became so tough that he had no time to write any. Most probably this exceptional experience was something that helped Karel Ančerl resolve his own personal dilemma: he entirely gave up composing and became a master conductor. With Hába he shared a tireless commitment to work and an undying faith that things would eventually turn out well. These attributes helped him to survive the horrors of imprisonment in the Terezín concentration camp, where he founded and led an orchestra. After the war he joined Hába in the Great Opera of the 5th of May, which occupied the building of the former New German Theatre (today the Prague State Opera) and Hába became its director. Karel Ančerl also took part in the production of the Czech premiere of Mother on the 23rd of May 1947, this time directing it himself.

Karlik

The job of repetiteur during rehearsals for the Czech production of Mother in 1947 was taken on by another of Hába’s pupils, Karel Reiner (1910–1979), familiarly known to everyone as “Karlik” [“Charlie”]. He too was someone who divided his interest between various different branches of music. For many years he not only composed but also was an active pianist and one of the first players on the quarter-tone piano. The first performers of Hába’s quarter-tone pieces included above all his own pupils at the conservatory, not only Reiner but also Jiří Svoboda, Arnošt Stržík, Táňa Baxantová, and the later conductor of the Scottish Orchestra and Victoria Symphony Orchestra in Melbourne and musical director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra Hans Walter Šüsskind. Outside the circle of Hába’s students his interpreters included Jan Herman and most notably Erwin Schulhoff. Reiner – like Schulhoff – also wrote on the theme of play on the quarter-tone piano: “Not even in the performance of semitone music is one particular technique sufficient. […] Chopin demands a different technique than Beethoven, Mozart a different technique than Liszt, Bach a different
his association with Alois Hába.

credit Reiner drew strength from the prin-

cipal Party, which he had joined soon after the

occupation and resigned from the Commu-

nist Party, for the last time

again, he was afflicted with the feeling that

for Germans he was already

Czech-speaking, settled in Prague. While he

called himself a Czech, at job interviews

he was often asked why he didn’t join “the

other side”: for Germans he was already a

Czech and for Czechs he was still a Ger-

man. For the Nazis he was a Jew with no

longer any rights at all.

Even after the war Reiner had a diff-
cult time. It was impossible to revive sev-
ered bonds and restore the institutions and

organisations of the pre-war period. Political-

ly speaking, the first three post-war years

saw Czechoslovakia becoming increasingly
dependent on decisions made in the Soviet

Union. While the inter-war avant-garde in

Czechoslovakia had been broadly left-wing

and had seen in the Soviet Union the only

solution, the years 1930–33) was bound up with

the power capable of defeating Nazi Germany,

after the war left-wing orientation meant the

loss of freedom and artistic liberty and sub-

jection to ideological diktat. It took Karel

Reiner several years to realise that by adapt-
ing to the demands for “communicability, sim-
plicity and melodic character” promulgated

by Socialist Realism, he was losing his own

identity. When he refused to abandon “for-

malist” composition, he started to be undesir-
able for the future development of socialist

culture. There followed years in which his

music was scarcely ever performed. Once

again, he was afflicted with the feeling that

he “belonged nowhere”, for the last time

when after 1968 he condemned the Soviet

occupation and resigned from the Commu-

nist Party, which he had joined soon after the

war. In all the trials that he encountered in his

life and in his efforts to defend his moral

credit Reiner drew strength from the princi-

ples that he had come to embrace through his

association with Alois Hába.

An Education in Freedom

Hába’s influence on his pupils relat-
ed not just to music, but also to overall out-
look in life. In the 1920s – and perhaps even

earlier, during his studies in Vienna – Hába

had been introduced to the anthroposophical

teachings of Rudolf Steiner. In the light of

Steiner’s theories he saw the role of the artist

in society and musical compositions as a
duel between contradictory elements and

an attempt to achieve equilibrium. In this

respect he influenced Karel Reiner, who also

espoused anthroposophical doctrines, and

affected the spiritual orientation of another of

his pupils, Viktor Ullmann (1898–1944).

Viktor Ullmann was the son of an Austrian

officer, a Jew who had converted to Chris-

tianity. His native language was German, and

he grew up in Vienna, fought in the First

World War (from which his father returned an

invalid) and started to study law before
deciding on music and attending Arnold

Schönberg’s composition class. In 1919 he

moved to Prague and thereafter his life (apart

from the years 1930–33) was bound up with

the cultural milieu of the Czech capital. We
do not know precisely when and where he

first met Hába, and it is possible that they

became acquainted in Vienna just after the

war. Ullmann first took a sceptical attitude to

Steiner’s ideas, but in the end studied them

in detail and was so enthralled that for a time

he gave up composition. Hába acted as Ull-

mann’s sponsor when the latter joined the

Anthroposophical Society and Ullmann him-

self called his new step in life, for which he

credited Hába, the “conversion of Saul into

Paul”. In Stuttgart he purchased a debit-rid-
den anthroposophical bookshop, but this
soon went bankrupt and in 1933 Ullmann

fled from his creditors to Prague (not from

Hitler, since at that time he was protected

from German discriminatory laws by his sta-

tus as Austrian citizen and Christian). Radical

decisions had not brought Ullmann good for-
tune, but as he himself said, fortunately he

still had music. A new distinctive phase in Ull-

mann’s composing career began in the

mid-1930s.

Hába and Ullmann remained close

friends. Ullmann’s search for all kinds of cre-
ative possibilities also (already at a relatively

mature age) brought him to Hába’s microton-
al class at the Prague Conservatoire

(1935–37). His graduation piece was a

Sonata for Quarter-tone Clarinet and

Quarter-tone Piano, of which only the clarinet

part has survived. Subsequently he never

used quarter-tones in his music. It can be

said that in this piece he reached the bound-

aries of an experiment that helped him to find

a musical idiom in which elements of histori-
cal forms are balanced by great freedom of
tonality and effective use of timbre. There are

also grounds for supposing that it was Hába

who introduced Ullmann to the folk song

that has left its traces in his Piano Sonata no. 2

and Slav Rhapsody.

Viktor Ullmann the composer has

been rediscovered since 1975, when his

one-act opera written in Terezín Čísář

z Atlantidy (Der Kaiser von Atlantis –The

Emperor of Atlantis) was first performed in

Amsterdam, but in a new orchestration (the

original form has been in performance since

the 1990s). Many of his pieces have, alas,

been lost. The works that remain have

become without exception part of the con-

cert and opera repertoire. In 2006 there are

plans finally to present the long delayed first

performance of Ullmann’s opera Pád

Antikristův (Der Sturz des Antichrist – The

Fall of Antichrist) on a Czech stage (the

world premiere, as yet without successors,

was produced in 1995 in Bielefeld).

Ullmann’s The Fall of Antichrist

was written in 1935. It has its counterpart in

the output of Alois Hába, in the form of his

ever performed opera Přijď království Tvé


Ullmann’s opera was based on a play by the

anthroposophist poet Albert Steffen about
Critical acclaim of a production that is to this memory what a second stage rehearsal is to a dress rehearsal? A production that the conductor is not even allowed to conduct—and why not?—and that has to be accompanied by a more than problematic piano? […] While Gustav Mahler was in the provinces, he kept his promise: not to present Mozart and Wagner there!

Modern Music between Nations
Among his pupils from the former Yugoslavia, the one with whom Hába kept up probably his liveliest correspondence was the Slovenian Osterc, who was in any case only two years his junior. Slavko Osterc (1895–1941) had arrived in Prague in 1925. In some ways he shared a starting-point in life with Hába. Apart from the fact that both had originally been supposed to become teachers and had to struggle to beat a path to art, they had both the same teacher, Vítězslav Novák, at the beginning of their careers as composers. In addition, Osterc had also been trained by Karel Boleslav Jrásk and gone through Hába’s microtonal department. Later he was himself to pass on his experience when teaching composition at the conservatory and Academy of Music in Lubljana. Hába’s contacts with Osterc related not just to exchanging news about their compositions but above all to the activities of the ISCM. Osterc was a member of the ISCM international jury in Paris in 1937 and played an important role in promoting Czech composers there. He managed to arrange for Czech music outside the main festival concerts and won votes for most of the pieces proposed by the Czech section. After negotiations in the jury he informed Hába that: “[…] now to details, mainly about the L ad 1/6 matinee. The jury allowed it, but doesn’t want to be responsible for the programme, because the pieces have not been submitted to them. In my view that is perfectly all right. You can therefore start to negotiate with the French section. But [the leader of the French section Jacques Ibert] has already been lamenting that there isn’t enough money. And so at the moment that would be the one vulnerable point. But I know you and I am sure you’ll find a way over this.

Naturally our internal work: putting together and presenting a programme—will be difficult. […] Kačinskas’s Nonet looks like the only piece for the moment, but of course you are better informed about everything! It hasn’t been possible to push through Bartoš, Polivka and Koffler, because Borkovec also sent a piece and Martín, too, outside the section, and so I was already rather anxious about Reiner. The situation was that apart from me no one was enthusiastic about Reiner (it’s a modern jury!!!), that was why Koffler was dropped—just because he writes in modern style—and I invested all my energies in pushing for Reiner and even got unanimous agreement for him, which makes me truly happy for Charlie’s sake. As far as orchestral pieces are concerned, then it is
you, Žebre and Rosenberg, that was unisono […]” (26th December 1936 from Paris)

And Hába’s reply: “You have put up a brave fight and I’m just as curious about the whole programme as I am about the hue and cry that I expect for L and 1/6 matinee […] For me and Reiner it will be a little hard to live with the jury decision, even though we are both delighted by it! Because at home the “financial reward” for pieces keeps going – to the others! Reiner and I at least have recognition abroad! If at least Bartoš’s piece had been accepted, as I strongly hoped, it would all be alright. But this way – just Hába and his most faithful pupil – Dr Reiner, there will be bad blood.” (26th December 1936)

Just by way of explanation: Franzík, Paul Borkovec and Vladimír Polívka were not Hába’s pupils, but Vladimir Polívka had taken part in presenting some of Hába’s piano pieces. The Polish composer Józef Koffler was a pupil of Schönberg and is considered to be the first Polish composer to use twelve-tone music. He fell victim to the Nazis, who murdered his entire family. The Nazi regime classified Hába as a “degenerate” composer, and for the communist regime he was a “formalist”. After 1948 he was deprived of his place as director at the Great Opera of the 5th of May and of the chance to go on teaching. With only two years to go before he reached pensionable age, Hába naturally defended himself, albeit in a fashion that today we might consider undignified, if not hypocritical. He wrote the following to the Dean of the Academy of Performing Arts Antonín Sychra:

“I have composed, and still composing and intend to go on composing. Among my latest compositions a number were highly rated at the [communist] Composers’ Union plenary meeting, and not in any formalist sense. Likewise my 7th String Quartet op. 73 and youth song Jarní země [Spring Earth] won prizes in the last year. I am now working on a Wallachian Suite for orchestra and plan a series of other works inspired by the life of the people and the present. […] Considering these circumstances it is my view that if my work as a teacher is currently considered undesirable, a certain account should at least be taken of my work as a composer and present creative orientation.” (8th July 1951)

Hába had never been embarrassed to approach people in the highest places with his requests, and did so this time as well. He wrote in his own cause to the Minister of Education Zdeněk Nejděl: “I have been teaching in this field for 28 years. In 1933 – after my illegal visit to a theatre and music conference in Moscow – the then Ministry of Education wanted to suspend my teaching activities at the State Conservatory of Music. […] During the Second World War the teaching of composition in the L and 1/6-tone system was threatened by the Nazis for both artistic and political reasons. This did not surprise me. I used even my L and 1/6-tone compositions to fight for a better future for working people. You yourself wrote about my cycle of L-tone male choral pieces Pracující den [The Working Day] (on a poem by J. Hora), dedicated to all working people for the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the USSR […] The L and 1/6-tone system may also be employed for artistic expression of the kind that you spoke about at the last congress of Czechoslovak composers […] Apart from this, on the 1st of February 1950 I signed a socialist contract with the Rectorate of the Academy of Performing Arts in which I undertook that in addition to my existing teaching duties I would act as permanent advisor to composition students for the writing of mass songs, choral works, cantatas, operas and other socialistically orientated music.” (July 1951)

The document is one that speaks for itself as a witness to the times. Hába’s attendance at the International Olympiad of Revolutionary Theatres in Moscow in 1933 definitely cannot be called illegal; incidentally, one result of this visit had been to re-establish, or perhaps initiate
Hába's String Quartet no. 11, op. 87 in sixth-tone system (left)
String Quartet no. 16, op. 98 in fifth-tone system (excerpt from 2nd movement; right)

a closer link with Hanns Eisler, whom we have mentioned above. The paradox of Hába's argumentation and the folly of the Fifties is the fact that in the String Quartet op. 73, which he speaks of in the letter to Sychra, Hába managed to smuggle in the Czech Christmas carol Narodil se Kristus Pán [Christ the Lord is Born]. Four years later, in the same way, his Concerto for Viola contained a version of the song of St. Michael, who as the angel who weighs the souls of the dead is one of the central symbols of anthroposophy.

In 1956 Hába attended the Summer Courses of Contemporary Music in Darmstadt, but faced with the Darmstadt experimentalists the former enfant terrible of the interwar period emerged as a defender of the "good old times". Nonetheless, when he was asked to give a lecture to musicology students at the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University in Greifswald in 1963, it was he who provided the East German students with some contact with events in Western music. He made an impact in the GDR particularly by demanding that music teaching concentrate just on music itself, its structure and specific meaning independent of philosophical systems that ultimately always manifest themselves as ideology. According to one of those present at the lecture Hába defended freedom of choice of musical material, without "expressing an opinion on questions of socialist realism and dogmatic definition, as if these questions did not exist for him". (Gedanken zu Alois Hába, 1996, pp. 95–97).

To be a successful teacher a person needs to remain a pupil throughout his or her life. This was the case with Hába. He kept up with events of all kinds (not just in music), studied historical systems of harmony and the music of non-European cultures and towards the end of his life even wrote a fifth-tone string quartet with a very concise structure, something quite new in his output.

Many Languages, One Music

Apart from those already mentioned, important pupils of Hába included Dragutin Colić, Dragutin Cvetko, Radoslav Hrovatin, Marjan Lipoviček, Ljubica Markić, Pregrad Milošević, Maks Pirnik, Milan Ristić, Pavel Šivic, Franc Šturm and Vojislav Vučković from the former Yugoslavia, from Bulgaria Vasil Božinov, Atanas Grdev and Konstantin Iljjen, Jan Wieczorek from Poland, Kazim Necil Akses and Halil Bedi Yenckett from Turkey, Mykola Kolessa from the Ukraine and many others. The English violinist and composer Frank Wiesmeyer (already mentioned above) later took the professional name Georg Whitman and did a great deal to propagate Czech music in England.

In his Česká moderní hudba [Czech Modern Music] (1936) Vladimír Helfert defined Alois Hába as "the most extreme wing in the development of Czech modern music, […] a phenomenon that has advanced the furthest in terms of evolution but at the same time represents the European standard of our music". The way in which the generation that did not come into direct contact with him on "the school benches" still responds to Hába as teacher was summed up by the composer Alois Pišov in 1993 (Opus musicum 1983, pp. 277–284): "Nobody composes thoroughly in a microtonal system like Hába, but the impulses he gave have lived on, for example in the now dead leading representative of the 'Bmo School', Josef Berg, and also Josef Adamik, František Emment, Peter Graham, Marek Kopele, Václav Kučera, Arnošt Paršch, Alois Pišov, Rudolf Růžička, Martin Smolka, Miloš Štědroš and others. Hába has his heirs (but not mere copyists) abroad as well. The Austrian composer Georg Friedrich Haas, for example, admits his influence, although (as Haas himself says) 'my way of seeing Alois Hába is – to put it cautiously – very individual.'"

Insofar as the authentic responses of Hába’s pupils have come down to us, summarising how they saw the value of his teaching, they echo the opinion of Mykola Kolessa, who wrote to Hába on the occasion of his seventieth birthday: "Your works and the creative methods to which you introduced us […] in your very interesting lectures and creative discussions, have left deep traces in me, even though I haven’t in fact used the quarter-tone system in my own work as a composer. Even today, after such a long time, I like to recall your teaching methods, which are a great help to me in my activities as a composer and teacher." (26th July 1963)

martin smolka
a microsentimental composer

"Wherever I mention that I use quarter-tones, sooner or later someone brings up the name of Hába. But I came to micro-intervals as part of the common equipment of post-war New Music and didn't concern myself much with Hába". We would be hard put to it to find any other composer in contemporary Czech music who has focused as systematically, conspicuously and successfully on the use of microtones as Martin Smolka (*1959). The basic idea behind his approach to microtones is in fact relatively simple and in itself not so uncommon. Smolka does not introduce “new tones” into the tempered system, but just “detunes” as intervals as a means of emotional expression.

Martin Smolka appeared on the Czech music scene in the Eighties, when together with the composer Miroslav Pudilák he founded the Agon ensemble. Later the composer and conductor Petr Kohroň joined the group and Agon soon became the most important ensemble for contemporary music in Czechoslovakia. Not only did long-term co-operation in Agon provide the composers with a platform for performance of their work and for experimentation, but Agon also functioned as (almost the only in Czechoslovakia) mediator of the repertoire of world avant-garde music. Somewhere at the beginning of Smolka’s career as a composer we can find, to a greater or lesser extent, the influence of essentially all the important movements and aesthetics of post-war music. In general, the 1980s were a time when the earlier fierce "irreconcilability" of "opposite" movements was a thing of the past, and this was doubly
true in communist Czechoslovakia. In the suffocating atmosphere of the hegemony of the officially privileged pseudo-modern music, which fumbled about somewhere between Vítězslav Novák and Shostakovich, practically any kind of music outside this circle was the object of attention and authentic interest, and all the more so because it was not an easy matter to get recordings or printed scores and there was no danger of “saturation”.

In Smolka’s music (as in the music of many of his contemporaries), we have generally little difficulty in identifying the influences of Post-Webernism, Minimalism, American experimental music (above all M. Feldman) and the Polish School. The latter was itself essentially a synthesising and borrowing phenomenon and especially in its later period eclectic. Added to this we find an interest in “across the board” tendencies to experiment with natural tuning and a “flexible” concept of the pitch, especially in the music of Harry Partch and Giacinto Scelsi; for Smolka’s development, however, this tuning systems were less fundamental than certain expressive techniques and idioms that are peculiar to the music of this circle. (As he himself says, his use of microtones is not based on any theoretical system).

All these influences never entirely disappeared from the work of Martin Smolka and at different periods they have been more or less evident, but much more often as abstracted principles rather than adopted mannerisms. Smolka’s music is original and in no sense plagiaristic or derivative (at the very least from the end of the 1980s). What then makes “Smolka Smolka”?

For Smolka what is characteristic is the typically European strategy of basing musical structure on contrast, i.e. de facto thinking in the “sonata” categories of first subject – second subject: slow – fast, merry – sad, thun-deringly – softly and so on. Smolka’s pieces are almost regularly built out of internally homogenous form segments, of which there may for example be only two in the whole composition or in which on the contrary many contrasting segments may follow in very quick succession, in extreme cases even in bar after bar. Development techniques are usually suppressed, seams between the form segments acknowledged, and the basic principle is repetition. These attributes make Smolka’s music accessible for audiences, since the structure and direction of his compositions is apparent on a first listen and thanks to the high level of redundancy (everything usually comes back several times), the listener can take in the music sufficiently without needing to hear a piece again. Of course, with music of this kind there is always a risk that the music will not bear further listening at all and the composer will be shown up as a mere purveyor of routine, but Smolka generally manages to come up with fresh ideas that balance the rather schematic treatment.

Martin Smolka is a composer of innovation and experiment, whose “discoveries” are mostly related to the exploitation of bizarre sources of sound (very undertuned strings, old gramophones, non-standard percussion instruments and so forth) and (to return to our central theme) the possibilities offered by microtones. It is nonetheless true that all his innovations and experimentation virtually always take place in the framework of the method described above for the “securely” structured form and are essentially systemati-
cally subordinated to the goal of finding new ways of projecting expressive contrast. Smolka’s music is practically never emotionally neutral, and two basic modes are typical here (the reader will I hope forgive me the cheap metaphors): 1) cracking exuberant merri-ment, musical box tunes and the sounds of the junk shop, typical noises of civilisation, folk or brass band, if possible playing off key, and 2) wistful memories, painful longing, the echo of the sounds of mode 1, nostalgia. In this context perhaps we could say that Smolka the composer is not very interested in undirected “pure research”; what Smolka is looking for is for yet more ways of getting himself and the listener into the desired mood, to brighten up or to move. This also applies to pieces that involve stylisation of sounds heard in the real world. Especially at the beginning of the 1990s Smolka focussed on the timbre aspects of music, and he talks about some pieces as “sound photographs” (for example L’Orch pour l’Orch of 1992 is partly a “portrait” of a shunting yard); despite Smolka’s fascination with some real sounds (locomotive brakes, ship sirens and so on), however, they are selected through the prism of expressive charge, and stylised in a particular emotional direction.

In his use of microtones, we see the same basic pragmatism and subordination of technique to goal that we noted in relation to his preferred mode of structuring pieces and choice of musical elements (and the direction of his “research” as a composer) on the basis of emotional potential. The main feature of Smolka’s approach to micro-intervals is its economy – deviations from standard tuning (and so deviations from established performance practice) are justified only when they are prominent and immediately recognisable to the ear, and this happens if they carry some expressive, emotional charge. On his sources of inspiration, Smolka explains that: “My most important starting point was concrete sound experience, and I started with experiments aiming to mimic the sounds of nature and civilisation. And then I found out that many of my early musical fascinations were caused by microtonal mis-tunings, often unwanted and unregistered. For example I was charmed by the interference of some piano chord and didn’t know that it was caused by the poor tuning of a neglect- ed instrument, or I was spellbound by the emotional power of a blues singer and didn’t realise that he was actually tugging at my ears (and soul) with notes just under pitch. In jazz orchestra recordings of the 1920s pretty well all the wind instruments have a sliding wail – the longer notes start being sweeter and then then tuned up, or sometimes not tuned right up as the note is held. Chords that are rendered slightly out of tune in a similar way, whether exposed harmonically or in melody, can be found in recordings of Central Euro- pean folk music where this music has been handed down from generation to generation uncontaminated by music from the media (does this perhaps count as at least one atti-
tude in common with Alois Hábá’s folklore.
inspirations? Author’s note) This kind of gural music could sometimes accompany a whole song with a tonic in which the major third was hopelessly flat and was flat for the whole piece! I believe that there is a wonderful expressive power in these natural microtonal situations. In these out-of-key thirds I feel pain, bitterness, weeping and unfulfilled longing.

The key principle behind Smolka’s treatment of microtones is therefore the out of tune and “detuning” of this kind always retains its link to the “in tune”. It is only possible if the reference point of the properly tuned is immediately present. For Smolka, therefore, it is not “new notes” that are important (i.e. tones as independent steps expanding the number of tones in standard tuning), but out-of-tune intervals, and this is the direction that Smolka takes in his actual strategies as a composer. (Here we might point out a distant analogy with J.M. Hauer’s approach to twelve-tone music: for Hauer the starting point was not the 12 chromatic tones, but the 12 intervals.)

Detuned thirds (or sixths) and octaves (or unison) appear to be by far the most effective elements in terms of expressive possibilities and immediate recognition by the ear. The great majority of Smolka’s microtones fall precisely into this category. When he alters other intervals (for example fifths) microtonally, he usually does so in the framework of common chords and a reference tone creating a third (sixth) with the altered tone or a prime (octave) is usually close by. Especially Smolka’s more recent pieces (ca from 1998) strikingly draw on the expressive possibilities of traditional melodic phrases and harmonic progressions, but microtonally deformed: “In the choral piece Walden, the Distiller of Celestial Dews, in the 3rd part called Indians I exposed a B Minor triad in several quarter-tone alterations. It was like illuminating one object with various different spotlights. Here detuning the common chord served as an expression of pain in line with the text, the passage in Thoreau where he describes how the Jesuits tortured the Indians who didn’t want to give up their faith, but the Indians still expressed unparalleled love for their enemy and forgiveness. The melody that appears between the detuned common chords and interacts with them towards the end as they tend to rise, finally opens out into tempered B Major, which has a radiance that represents the Indian forgiveness.

From the point of view of classical harmony we have a remarkable paradox here. Throughout the piece there is a triad, but we are liberated from its quarter-tone tension by chords of four or more notes – the special radiance of the quiet B Major is enhanced by an added second, sixth, seventh and even a fourth. (Just for the sake of completeness – as even higher purging comes at the end with a two-note motif from the soprano, which turns into E through the ordinary cadence progression V–VIII.)

“Our ears are so accustomed to tempered tuning that they react to detuned intervals with a desire to put them right, to get to proper tuning – the detuned tones then function like the leading notes in classical-romantic harmony. In the orchestral composition Remix, Redream, Reflight a pathetic string unisono dominates. Here quarter-tones play the role of the leading notes, and in an exemplary, direct way. The ascending modal melody has a simple, predictable structure and so every inserted quarter-tone massively gravitates towards the neighbouring step of the given mode.” (see example)

(Another typical Smolka’s technique is the stepped filling of a narrow interval such as a second with microtones ascending or descending, which creates the impression of a hesitant glissando trying to hold itself back.) While his alterations are usually quarter-tonal, Smolka also quite often uses sixth-tone alterations (for example in the Three Pieces for Retuned Orchestra the instrumental sections of the orchestra are divided into sub groups that are detuned by a sixth in relation to each.

above: string unisono from Remix, Redream, Reflight (2000)
below: Interludium for string quartet from Missa (2002)
with permission of Breitkopf & HärTEL
other), but much less often eighth-tones or even tenth-tones (on ordinary instruments these can only be played very approximately). Obviously the intonation of quarter- and sixth-tones is not usually entirely precise, which normally adds to the interest of the sound result (one of the reasons why Alois Hába was not entirely successful in his microtonal efforts was evidently the unnaturalness of “tempered” quarter-tones and so on.). For example, in places where a unison is prescribed, the imprecision can lead to slight deviations from pitch and so a characteristic roughening of the timbre; quarter- and sixth-tone fingerings in woodwinds have the same timbre effect.

See also
http://www.bostonmicrotonalsociety.org/

**MARTIN SMOLKA**
Born 1959 in Prague, Czech Republic. Studied composition at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts (with J. Pauer, C. Kohoutek), but found private studies with Marek Kope lent more important.

His work has won him recognition both at home and abroad. He has written commissioned pieces (ensemble 2e2m, Arditti Quartet, Neue Vokalsolisten Stuttgart and others) and his works have been chosen for performance at other important festivals (ISCM World Music Days, Hoeragaenge, Tage Neue Musik Stuttgart, Klang-Aktionen Munich etc.). Very successful was his opera Nagano, staged in the National Theatre in Prague in 2004.

In 1983 he co-founded Agon, a group specializing in contemporary unconventional music in which he worked as artistic director and pianist until 1998. In the course of Agon projects he has also carried out research (quarter-tone music by the pupils of Alois Hába, the 1960s music in Prague etc.), and the realization of graphic scores and conceptual music (the works by John Cage, Cornelius Cardew, Daniel Goode and Milan Grygar).

He co-authored the book Graphic Scores and Concepts.

Recently he has been teaching composition at Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno. Since 2000 his new works have been published by Breitkopf & Härtel.

**Selection of works:**

**Music Sweet Music** (1985/88) for ensemble and soprano

**Music for Retuned Instruments** (1988) for ensemble

**Ringing** (1989) for percussion solo

**The Flying Dog** (1990/92) for ensemble

**L’Orch pour l’orch** (1990) for orchestra

**Rain, a Window, Roofs, Chimneys, Pigeons and so … and Railway-Bridges, too** (1992) for large ensemble

**Rent a Ricercar** (1993/95) for ensemble

**Trzy motywy pastoralne** (Three pastoral motifs) (1993) for tape

**Euforium** (1996) for 4 instruments or ensemble

**Three pieces for retuned orchestra** (1996)

**Lullaby** (1996–7) for trombone, guitar and ensemble

**8 pieces for guitar quartet** (1998)

**Autumn Thoughts** (1998) for ensemble

**Lieder ohne Worte und Passacaglia** (1999) for ensemble

**Blue Note** (2000) for percussion duo

**Walden, the Distiller of Celestial Dews** (2000), text H. D. Thoreau, for mixed choir and percussion

**Remix, Redream, Reflight** (2000) for orchestra

**Houby a nebe** (Mushrooms and Heaven) (2000), Czech text P. P. Fiala, for non-opera alto and one or two string quartets

**Geigenlieder** (2001), German texts Chr. Morgenstern, B. Brecht for violinist-narrator and ensemble


**Observing the Clouds** (2001/3) for (youth) orchestra and 3 conductors

**Misza** (2002) for vocal quartet and string quartet

**Tesknice** (Nostalgia) (2003/4) for chamber orchestra

**Discography:**

**Music Sweet Music** – CD AGON, Arta Records, Prague 1991


**Rain, a Window, Roofs, Chimneys, Pigeons and so… and Railway-Bridges, too** – 3 CD Donaueschinger Musiktage 1992, col legno/SWF Baden-Baden, Munich, 1993

**A v sadech korálů, jež slabě zrůžověly** for solo voice, 1987 – CD Na prahu světla, Happy Music, Prague 1998

**Rent a Ricercar, Flying Dog, For Woody Allen, Nocturne** – 2 CD AGON

**ORCHESTRA** – The Red and Black, audio ego/ Society for New Music, Prague, 1998

**Euforium, Music for Retuned Instruments, Ringing, Rain, a Window, Roofs, Chimneys, Pigeons and so… and Railway-Bridges,too** audio ego/ Society for New Music, Prague,1999

Although he has lived mainly in the United States since the end of the Sixties, Petr Kotík, the composer, flautist and leader of the New York S.E.M. Ensemble, is a very important figure in contemporary Czech music. When in 2001 he came up with the project of a biennial Ostrava Days event and the idea of founding a Centre for New Music in Ostrava, many people (including myself) rather doubted that any enterprise of this kind had any prospects of success here. Kotík conceived the Ostrava Days as a “Second Darmstadt”, and many people (including myself) rather doubted that any enterprise of this kind had any prospects of success here. Kotík conceived the Ostrava Days as a “Second Darmstadt”, and with some seriousness and with all the implied ambition.

Events have proved Kotík right, and he has literally done wonders together with his small production team headed by Renáta Spisarová. The Ostrava Days Institute – three-week (!) composition courses focused on work with orchestra (!) has come into existence, and composers and performers with international reputations have been coming to Ostrava as lecturers. Kotík persuaded the Janáček Philharmonic to participate, an orchestra with which he has several times successfully performed difficult works of the post-war avant-garde as well as entirely contemporary pieces (before and after the launch of the Ostrava Days). His invitation was accepted by the Arditti Quartet, an ensemble specialising in contemporary music and considered among the best quartets in the world. The Days culminate in a weeklong festival involving more than ten concerts. Even in its very first year the festival immediately became practically the most important festival of contemporary music in this country in terms of choice of music and scale. The Ostrava Days 2001 was an unequivocal success.

This year saw the third Ostrava Days festival; the project has abandoned none of its ambitions and has in fact tended to grow. The industrial city of Ostrava, struggling with high unemployment and other problems, is perhaps one of the last venues we would expect for such an event, but it clearly appreciates and supports “its” festival. The Institute is regularly attended by more than 30 young composers, largely from abroad (the registration fee is a hefty 2000 USD, but scholarships are provided). Apart from P. Kotík the OD Institute permanent lecturers are the legendary composers Alvin Lucier and Christian Wolff, while many other leading figures can already be considered long-term collaborators with OD. They include the composer Phill Niblock, the composer Zsolt Nagy, the members of Kotík’s S.E.M. Ensemble pianist Joseph Kubera and percussionist Chris Nappi, the baritone Thomas Buckner and others – and the list is far from complete. In 2001 and 2003, participants in the Ostrava days included such prominent composers as Jean-Yves Bosseur, Tristan Murail, Frederic Rzewski, Somei Satoh, Martin Smolka and Rebeca Saunders. This year the role of “chief star” was taken by Louis Andriessen, and the musicologists Makis Solomos and Volker Straebel were invited. It is no exaggeration to say that OD is an event of international stature.

The Ostrava Days Festival is more than ever more attractive. In addition to the Janáček Philharmonic (which actually in the end turned out to be the weakest link), a now traditionally large number of distinguished and lesser known ensembles and soloists performed at the festival, and above all a significant number of usually young musicians (some from the ranks of students at the OD Institute) specialising in contemporary music. The international group (The Ostrava Band) of these musicians formed for the purposes of OD, flexibly metamorphosing from the various necessary chamber ensembles to an ensemble of more than twenty members, this year ensured that the standard of performance at the OD was very good, which was no always the rule in previous years.

I shall choose from the best moments of the festival: the opening concert presenting the Atlas Eclipticalis (together with Winter Music) by John Cage – the Janáček Philharmonic with many additional musicians is divided up spatially into three orchestras, into the cool beauty of the sounds generated inc accordance with astronomical maps the Ondruš miners’ brass band suddenly breaks in with its two “numbers”. A greeting from Charles Ives? The outstanding Sozovuk Ensemble led by Marián Lejava, Lejava’s beautiful piece The Gloaming Sessions. The dark organ recital by Christoph Maria Moosmann with music by M. Feldman, H. Holliger, O. Messiaen and E. H. Flammer. Alvin Lucier’s new piece, Explorations of the House – Lucier has dusted off an old trick of his: the orchestra plays a few bars of Beethoven, the recorded sound is reproduced into the hall and once again recorded, and after several repeats the resonance of the hall changes Beethoven into abstract electronic music. The Canadian string quartet Quatuor Bozzini – add a pioneering repertoire to the usual superlatives (perfect ensemble play, absolute identification with the text and so forth). The leader of the quartet, Clemens Merkel, later brilliantly performs one of Luigi Nono’s last pieces, La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura. The almost family atmosphere at the night performance of an extract (cca two hours) of Erik Satie’s Vexations. Andriessen’s La Passione, Xenakis’s Ata for large orchestra, Ives’s Piano Sonata no. 2 (Concord, Mass. 1840–1860) performed by Heathor O’Donnell, the violinist Hana Kotková with Beno’s Sequenza VIII (see photo), Petr Kotík’s Variations for 3 Orchestras and so on. I could go on in the same fashion for much longer, because practically every concert was a real event.

Although the festival is the most conspicuous and for the general public the only accessible part of OD, the meaning of the enterprise should not be “reduced” to the festival. The three-week meeting of all the participants in the “Days”, both “maestros” and “pupils”, composers and performers, and enthusiasts, generates a very special atmosphere in Ostrava. If the words had not become too much of a cliche, it is an atmosphere we would call creative and companionable. All the events take place close to each other. The Institute uses the premises of the recently renovated conservatory, the evening concerts are held in the nearby City of Ostrava House of Culture, and everyone is accommodated in a few adjoining hotels. Unlikely people gathering in an unlikely place; as if the city had been taken over by a conspiratorial spirit. Two years from now when you encounter a legend of the New York experimental school in Ostrava in the afternoon with a hot dog in his hand, making for the tram, you will appreciate what I mean.
Stravinsky: Les Noces, Cantata, Mass

Vlasta Reittererová

All the nine Dvořák symphonies in this recording by the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra with Vladimír Válek can be rated highly for several reasons. One is the project itself. Supraphon could easily have chosen from the existing recordings of Dvořák symphonies and perhaps added one or two new individual recordings if the quality or interpretation on an old one failed to suit. Instead it decided on one orchestra and one conductor. Apart from the live recordings of the 5th and 7th Symphonies from the Rudolfinum, all were made in the recording studio over a relatively short time from October 2000 to October 2003. As far as power of performance is concerned, they testify to a unified interpretative concept and the very high standard of the radio orchestra at the time. A great deal of credit must also go to the musical directors Milan Puklický, Jan Málek, Igor Tausinger and Jiří Gemrot, the sound directors Jan Lička, Jaroslav Vašíček, Miroslav Mareš and the assistants to the sound master Jan Šraber and Václav Milič. In terms of interpretation the first three symphonies are a particular challenge; they are full of the musical ideas with which Dvořák was always brimming, but at this stage in his career he was still too prodigal in the way he presented them. Symphonic movements of this kind are difficult to hold together. But Vladimír Válek manages it admirably. With the “well worn” symphonies, on the other hand, the danger is that of routine, and Válek triumphantly avoids it. Although I have no idea what precisely he intended and whether such “transcendence” is at all possible, it seems as if he is interpreting the early symphonies as the works of a mature composer, and approaching the mature works as if for the first time. This allows him to bring the sense of inevitability and lucidity that we discern in the last three symphonies to those chronologically earlier works and to give a surprising freshness to those last symphonies. The set is well equipped with a booklet and accompanying text by Jaroslav Holeček, which contains all the essential information in four languages (unfortunately in the German version the Prozatímní divadlo – Provisional Theatre appears as Vorläufiges Theater, a mistake that has occurred in previous Supraphon texts. For clarification: in bilingual Prague the usual name was Interimstheater and there is no reason to change it) and profiles of the orchestra and conductor (booklet edited by Daniela Růžková). As is clear from the attached logo, the recording has been partially funded by the Prague Radio partner Hotel. There ought to be more such businesses.

Vlasta Reittererová

The recording of a hitherto never recorded piece by a well-known composer is not such a rare event and so it is not unusual to find the catchy slogan “world premiere recording” on the back of a CD. But this CD is something different. It is not just a newly discovered piece of music that has its world premiere here, but a newly discovered composer and his whole oeuvre. This musical portrait of the Moravian composer Gottfried Finger is no small event for admirers of early music and above all for lovers of the viola da gamba. Finger, a native of Olomouc, first served for a short time in the Archbishop’s Capella of Archbishop Lichtenstein-Castelcorn, but he soon found Central Europe too small for ambitions that he pursued, immediately finding favour and a place in the London Chapel Royal. In England he composed a great deal of stage music including what was evidently the largest and most costly opera performance of its time, the Virgin Prophetess. Finger later left England and went to Vienna, although he did not stay there for long. His production of Eccles’ opera The Last Judgment in Vienna went down in musical history as the first performance of an English opera in continental Europe. Apart from holding posts in the service of the Prussian Queen Sophie in Berlin and as Kammermusiker and later Konzertmeister to Duke Charles Phillip of Neuberg, he travelled all around Europe. In his last years he settled in Mannheim, where he was one of several who laid the foundations of the “Mannheim School”. It would be unrealistic to expect a breakthrough in music history nd nobody could claim that Finger was a major peak in European culture. His output ranges from very original musical ideas to the borders of triviality. Yet it can not be denied that he was an important phenomenon of his time.

The initiators of the project Petr Wagner and musicologist Robert Rawson, who actively shares in the recording as the second gamba player, together with other members of the Ensemble Tourbillon, have taken great pains with the recording. The CD has been very creatively conceived as far as the sound colour of the instrumentation
is concerned, and works with the specific features of the sonata da chiesa and sonata da camera, variations, suite and with contrast between ensemble and solo passages. In the first sonata we already appreciate the imaginative approach to sound colour: the gamba is accompanied by an organ positive, a second gamba, archlute and theorba, which gives place in the course of play to the Baroque guitar. The entire set develops in similar permutations of the continuo. Each piece is differently instrumented, and this gives the recording its own highly individual character. The vibrant performance reflects not the evident pleasure that the players take in the music but their clear musical concept of the work and feeling for lightness and wit. The listener may congratulate himself that he is filling up a gap in musical history with this CD, but first and foremost he won’t be bored listening to it.

JAKUB MICHL

The attempt to rehabilitate the third of Gluck’s reform operas on Calzabigi’s libretto has undoubtedly value just in itself. Paris and Helena has lagged chronically behind Orpheus and Alcestes since its first production in the Vienna Burgtheater on the 3rd of November 1770. Yet Gluck had been at great pains (and emphasised in the prologue) to base the opera on the musical contrast between the rough and sharp Spartans with their buresque rhythms and the subtle Trojans with the soft lyricism of melodic arches. He had tried to give the part of Paris the urgency of amatory passion in his conquest of an honourable woman, firmly resolved to do her duty as a wife before her antagonistic suspicions are overcome not just by the insistence of Paris but by Amor, who as a confidante of beautiful Helena has been charged with seeing that the promise of the God Aphrodite is fulfilled. What are the problems in this opera, which seem to have continued to dog it despite all the subsequent changes in opera styles both from the point of view of composition and staging? Stretch out over five acts the action is rather thin, and the wrathful appearance of the goddess Pallas Athena in the first scene of the last act, warning that the affair between Paris and Helena will cause many years of war, does not go far enough to enliven a simple schema in which only three characters are involved. What is worse, of these three characters only Helena undergoes any development, from stubborn rejection to enamoured harmony. The opera is also weighed down by many celebratory, anthetic dances and choral passages that only increase the overall impression of disengaged, almost officious distance. Despite a series of arias, ensembles, choral passages and instrumental numbers, long sections are taken up by melodically very flat recitatives that soon begin to seem tiresome. And the use of woman’s voices in soprano registers for all the roles (Gluck wrote the role of Paris for soprano castrato) is too monotonous, as well as doing little to lend credibility to male passion for the most beautiful woman in the world.

In this recording we find Magdalena Kožená as Paris and conductor Paul McCreesh with the Gabrieli Consort and Players doing their best to overcome these handicaps. Magdalena Kožená has many years of experience performing parts in Gluck’s operas. Indeed it was precisely this role that she took in 1998 in a production of the opera at a festival in Drottningholm, and Paris’s aria from the second act even provided the title for her CD recital of Gluck, Mozart and Mysliveček arias conducted by Sir John Eliot Gardiner (and directed by Robert Wilson). She has sung Orpheus at the Théâtre de Châtellet in Paris and taken part in Minkowsky’s Armida for Deutsche Grammophon.

Kožená does not dazzle by brilliance of technique for its own sake, a temptation to which Cecilia Bartoli, whose repertoire is similar, sometimes succumbs. The strength of Kožená’s interpretation (always based on a technically entirely reliable mastery of the part) lies in the intensity of the marriage of text and music, in fine modelling, nuanced to the smallest detail, of the scale of expression from a whisper full of anxiety to fiery explosions of erotic feeling not only in the musical numbers, but also in recitatives. At the same time Kožená retains a sense of balance and never slides into mannerism or over-the-top exaltation. We have a sense of a kind of confidential urgency, an intimacy, with which she as it were “speaks” directly into our souls. In this she has the full support of the orchestra, which also tries to extract the maximum contrast from Gluck’s music, and of the choir with its well-balanced and integrated sound.

While in the role of the persuasive Amor the English soprano Carolyn Sampson enhances the colour of the music and the overall liveliness of the recording with her clear, light soprano, the choice of Susan Gritton as Helena, despite all her great experience with roles in Händel, Purcell and Mozart, overloads the opera with high notes that are sometimes excessively shrill (the closing aria of Act 4 Lo potrň) and a relative lack of compatibility with the other voices, evident particularly in the trio Ah lo veggo in Act 4.

Although the recording tries to get the most out of the score, it seems that Paris and Helena is destined to remain a work that helps to complete the picture of Gluck as an opera composer but does not embody the full richness of his imagination or the principles with which he advanced the development of opera.

HELENA HAVLÍKOVÁ

A representative of the young generation of Czech harpsichordists, Monika Knoblochová has a great deal to be proud of despite her youth. She has a very broad repertoire ranging from early music to the most recent works and she has already won a number of prizes for performance, among them 3rd Place in the Prague Spring Competition in 1999, together with a special prize for the best performance of Bohuslav Martinů Harpsichord Concerto.

And it is Martinů that dominates this CD, released this year by Supraphon. Apart from the already mentioned Concerto for Harpsichord and Small Orchestra, Two Pieces for Harpsichord, Sonatas for Harpsichord and Two Improvment on Harpsichord, the album also contains Martinů’s chamber Promenades for Flute, Violin and Harpsichord. All this is complemented by Manuela de Falla’s Concerto for Harpsichord, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Violin and Cello.

Reviewing a performance from a promising young talent is always an extremely sensitive matter. As we all know, prizes at international competitions are not in themselves automatic guarantees that musicians will make the top...
The problem of modern renovation of old and older recordings is one that has been confronted in various ways since the very beginnings of digitalisation. It is an exceedingly difficult task and involves far more than just repairing damaged sections or removing hum and crackle from the original records or tapes. It is essential to enhance the high or low frequencies too much; ad lib to the original mono-pictures too thickly, or even to enlarge it in an attempt to achieve a kind of pseudo-stereo, and to find ourselves in a completely new, artificially created environment which in no way corresponds to the unique atmosphere of the original recordings. Today's experienced restorers abroad and in this country (for all of them let us mention the sound masters Stanislav Šýkora, whose studio digitalises recordings especially for Supraphon, and Miroslav Mareš of Czech Radio, who is rescuing the rich archives there), have gone through all of this and learned to create a result in which authenticity and a modern sound are both essential conditions. This year Supraphon crowed their admirable Supraphon Ančerl Gold Edition and now they have launched a major Talich project. It has been opened with a unique recording – Dvořák’s Slavonic Dances made in the summer of 1950 in the Domovina Studio in Holešovice. This was the second recording of the cycle under the baton of Václav Talich. The first had been made for His Master’s Voice in London in 1936 and thanks to RCD it is now also available in digital form on CD. There is an absolutely basic difference between the two recordings. The pre-war version is much more sparkling, sharper in tempo, and focuses more on the dance quality of the individual scores. The now newly released and in recent decades generally known recording of 1950 radiates a much deeper, more lyrical power, in which of course the original dance energy has not been lost, but there is an equal stress on the emotional aspect and the individual inventions are more elaborately worked. Each of the sixteen scores thus acquires its own unique character as well as the distinctive Talich touch. The Dvořák specialist Otakar Šourek was reportedly present at the recordings and annoyed his close friend Václav Talich by making casual remarks about the playing. Hans Krása’s Elegy No. 1 was recorded by the first generation of Czech Radio in the mid-1950s. The CD is a digital reworking of this recording. Thought and precision are also evident in her play. Yet however hard and long I listened to it, I couldn’t help feeling something was missing, and what was lacking was that essential surge of musical energy, immediacy and real persuasiveness of expression. Furthermore, as far as the other instruments are concerned, especially in the Promenades the impression was spoilt by uncertain intonation in places and a not entirely acoustically satisfactory violin (in this context I was reminded of Martinů’s Three Madrigals for Violin and Viola, played with precisely disarming energy I was looking for by the violinist Jitka Hosprová and violinist Veronika Jarůšková on the Rhapsody album of 2002). In any case, lovers of harpsichord music (and not only specialists) should not overlook Monika Knoblochová’s album. It comes with a booklet containing a commentary by Aleš Bržina, who offers expert information on the background to the writing of the various pieces.

SVATAVA ŠENKOVÁ

The Stamic Quartet is indisputably one of the best Czech quartets and has a major reputation abroad as well as at home. It celebrated its 20th anniversary in the autumn with a surprisingly ambitious project. No Best of… no Dvořák, Beethoven or other composer with assured marketing potential, but three very little known and little played works by the “Terezin” composers (as the composers imprisoned in the Terezín Ghetto during the War are now called). These are complemented by Janáček’s 1st String Quartet Inspired by Tolstoy’s Kreutzer Sonata, and it is interesting (and one of the useful insights provided by the album) to find that in many respects the other music on the CD involves a response to Janáček. The Stamic Quartet plays brilliantly, especially Schulhoff’s rustic 1st String Quartet. It has an unbelievable elan and marvellous moments of articulation. The brilliantly profiled String Quartet by Hans Krása in no way lags behind. Pavel Haas’s 3rd String Quartet by Pavel Haas is distinctive for moments of genius and some lapses. The Stamic Quartet have managed to get almost the maximum out of these works. In the Janáček we can appreciate the way in which the piece has been fully assimilated by the players, a clarity of conception that in no way means a loss of drama and raw expressiveness, but deliberately moulds the passionate cantabile of the work. I could, however, with for a more engaged and luminous tone in the first violin. Given the nature of the CD I shall break with my usual practice and explicitly praise the sponsor, which was a co-initiator of the project. The firm I.Q.A. is a pike in the pharmaceutical generics market, but would deserve praise just for the comment that “Hans Krása is … as important as the discovery of a new drug”. Musically and visually the CD is a pleasure, although it is slightly annoying to find some unnecessary faults – there is no legend for the track numbers, the overall length of the CD is not given, and the simplistic emphasis on Janáček on the cover.

LUBOŠ STEHLÍK


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Arranged for three instruments and piano

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) originally wrote the first set of Slavonic Dances op. 46 for piano duet. It was composed in spring 1878, and still in the same year it was orchestrated by the composer for large symphony orchestra. The present arrangement, which is destined for the standard piano quartet, is tuned to the needs of the established performing practice offering up to twelve optional instrumental combinations. Piano is employed here as a harmonic and rhythm base over which perform three melodic instruments as well wind instruments (flute, clarinet, bassoon) as stringed instruments (violin I, violin II (or viola), cello) and their mutual combinations. The author of adaptation of Slavonic Dances for universal instrumentation is Martin Hybler.

H 7836, ISMN M-2601-0337-5, 100/24/24/24 pages, price 35 EUR

Miloslav Kabeláč

MOTIFS FROM EXOTIC LANDS op. 38

Miloslav Kabeláč (1908–1979) started employing himself with the problematic of music cultures standing out of Europe after the World War II. Inspiration by this music can be found in his works quite often, however, the most outstanding work of this kind is the piano cycle Motifs from Exotic Lands op. 38 from 1958–1959. In the composition art the author intended to work up musical thoughts and feelings, which are very different from the European ones. The composer used both original ethnographical components and also components independently created in this spirit. Some motifs can be geographically identified and others just nearly reflect bigger areas (to choose out of ten motifs, e.g. Indian, Javanese, Eskimoan, Central African etc.). Motifs from Exotic Lands are being published for the first time according to the autograph, respectively as 4th volume, V. series of Complete Critical Edition of Miloslav Kabeláč’s Works edited by researcher Zdeněk Nouza. There are author’s notes about the approximate lenght at the end of each piece as well as pedal markings.

H 7906, ISMN M-2601-0341-2, 28 pages, price 13 EUR

Josef Suk

MELODY

In 1892 the only eighteen years old Josef Suk (1874–1935) contributed by his Melody to a collection of simple pieces for violin (for two, three or four violins, and for violin with piano accompaniment) called “The Young Violinist” which appeared in Prague Publishing House Jos. R. Vilímek (several books a year). This composition is short, gracious and technically not difficult for young violinists and is being issued in the original form for two violins on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Suk’s death. It is even better known to the Czech musical public from editions for different instrumentations (for violin and piano or for solo piano). The autograph of the composition is missing – editor of the new edition, Zdeněk Nouza, based his work on the original, well prepared edition from 1892. The bowings are Suk’s own (he was an excellent violinist), fingerings are though not available, since the piece can be played by violinists of varying technical proficiency – first position would suffice; if necessary, however, a fuller, richer sound would be gained with greater mastery of the instrument.

H 7951, ISMN M-2601-0351-1, 8 pages, price 5 EUR

Bohuslav Martinů

FILM EN MINIATURE

Since the creation of Puppetets, the Martinů’s ability for joining didactical purpose and valuable artistic performance was very much obvious. The Puppetets indeed create a special midpoint between instructive and concert compositions. Moreover, children’s world was given a few more nice piano pieces that became popular for education – Film en miniature though belongs to more demanding pieces. Martinů (1890–1959) completed this work in Paris in 1925, the cycle relates, however, to native Polička (names of particular pieces contain topographic addresses connected with both Vysočina and also Paris). Film en miniature consists of six compositions: opening Tango originating in rhythms of habanera dance, Scherzo, Berceuse, Valse, Chanson and Carlion.

H 5709, ISMN M-2601-0338-2, 20 pages, price 12 EUR

Jiří Matys

STRING QUARTET No. 6

The Sixth String Quartet is a short expanse of interpenetrating musical segments and moods having mutual internal variability – not a traditional set of variations on a theme. Thus arises a single-movement compositional form with greater emphasis on sectional division than on continuous development, but in which the piece as a whole is nevertheless subservient to its unifying, poetic message. Matys (*1927) has written this composition for the 57th Prague Spring International Music Competition 2005.

H 7944, ISMN M-2601-0318-4, 24 pages, price 15 EUR
In the general perspective of music history, Alois Hába is usually characterised as one of the leading protagonists of the Central European inter-war avant-garde that moved between Vienna, Berlin and Prague. In the specific context of Czech music he likewise has the reputation of an exemplary innovator but is considered to have been strongly rooted in tradition as well. Hába is known primarily as a tireless propagator of microtonal and athematic music, for which his own term was “liberated music”. In this music he added more subtle quarter-, fifth- and sixth-tone intervals to the semitone system and abandoned up traditional treatment of motifs. Hába’s dream of the unlimited possibilities of new music lasted roughly twenty years (1919–1939) and found expression in a series of pieces that oscillate between the diatonic and bichromatic system. He wanted to introduce the public to the new tonal systems by using newly constructed instruments, and we might see his progress in this respect as a step towards the institutionalisation of his own innovations as a composer. Finally, Hába was a tireless organiser who helped to ensure that works of new music were regularly presented in Prague concert halls. Many of Hába’s pieces provoked a great deal of controversy in their time, and the listener today will certainly be able to judge his output (103 opuses) more objectively. Today we can see Hába’s creative impulses against the background of a broader pattern of cultural history, in which shorter periods of destruction of existing artistic norms always give way to periods of creative synthesis.

Alois Hába (21st June 1893 Vizovice – 18th November 1973 Prague) entered Czech musical culture at a time when the “lived inheritance of folklore” had come to be recognised as something of genuine potential value for high culture. Attempts at the authentic expression of musical roots no longer meant a degrading provincialism, as had still to some extent been the case when the Czech musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) expressed highly critical views of the work of Leoš Janáček and Vítězslav Novák. Nejedlý the aesthete condemned Novák for “falsified quotation” of folk song, in the sense of its use in the structure of his works as a musical symbol at a different level. Janáček he saw as a typical regressive composer, and claimed to see in the opera Jenůfa a striking similarity with the earlier romantic aesthetic of the 1860s, when the character of the work was deliberately determined by quotation from folk songs and the desire to get closer to the taste of the wider public. In fact, Nejedlý was much more generous in his criticism of Novák’s music, seeing it as at least a higher stage of response to folk material. Nejedlý’s critical opinions on the treatment of folk music have a very clear rationale, in line with the changing ideas of the time on the function of folk culture within a national programme. At this point, at the beginning of the 1920s, Nejedlý distinguished between folk culture and the taste of the broader public. In his view the audience, the wider public culture, was essentially conservative, and a progressive composer ought not to pander to its tastes. Despite the trials that this might involve, he should resist the pressure of the public and develop his own individual artistic identity. Art for the people should not be an art of lower quality that made few demands on its listeners.

When another Czech musicologist, Vladimír Helfert (1886–1945) in his book Česká moderní hudba [Czech Modern Music] (1936) tried to define Hába’s place in the evolution of...
Czech music, he praised the positive significance of the composer’s folklore inspirations. Helfert believed that in Hába, after Janáček, the Czech musical scene had acquired a composer whose starting-point was not romanticism and whose sensibility was partly defined by his origin. Some passages in Hába’s music have an undeniable similarity with Eastern Moravian melodic types, but Hába does not falsify folklore or demean himself by trying for the required “folkly” effect, i.e. the admixture of the “folk” remains something more essential than contrived. Although regional roots play an important role in Hába’s music, the composer never imitates or parodies folk music. As one of the most radical representatives of the Central European aesthetic avant-garde between the wars, Hába expressed his individuality by drawing on the well-springs in the sense of his own lived experience of folklore, but then reformulating this inspiration at the most universal levels – microtonality, atonality, modality. Furthermore, at the very moments when we are aware of the composer’s “inclination to folklorism” we can also hear, like a base note, his critical reaction to the late Romantic idiom of Hába’s great teachers. In a number of other commentaries Helfert was to continue to insist on the importance of Hába’s work for Czech music, seeing his work and that of Bohuslav Martinů as the two opposed, defining poles of its future development.

** Alois Hába was born in Vizovice in Moravia into the family of a folk musician. In this region he was able to experience folksong and music in its authentic forms, and his theoretical and biographical writings often allude to folk inspirations as a unique and major source of his original work as a composer. In the autobiographical sketch Můj lidský a umělecký vývoj [My Human and Artistic Development], which by his own dating was written at Christmas in 1942 (printed in 1993), and later in the text Mein Weg zur Viertel- und Sechsteltonmusik (1912–1914), taken Hába first to Prague and then to Berlin (1920–1923). In his case the progress through important centres of European culture genuinely corresponded to the artistic “progress” of the young composer on his “journeyman travels”. Studies with Novák and Schreker in Prague and his Berlin meeting with Ferruccio Busoni were undoubtedly important moments in Hába’s artistic growth. Apart from new experience and knowledge, however, what he acquired above all was the hallmark and reputation of a noteworthy innovator and progenitor of the new avant-garde trends. In the spirit of the collective creed of the avant-garde young generation Hába both joined the current of the most contemporary modern movement and at the same time increasingly developed his specific creative identity.

Hába’s life, however, we need to find the point at which he started to cultivate and develop this inherited element. In looking at Hába’s work we may also ask how far his choice of techniques, material and mode of treating that material was influenced by his later studies, or else whether his use even of the methods that he subsequently adopted through studies was subject to the kind of rules that predestine the direction taken by artists, rules that we acquire outside the field of art as it were unconsciously even before we start to create. In this context it will suffice to consider the tradition of the “culture of the centre” which Hába both accepts and rebels against. His journey from the periphery of the Eastern Moravian region, which led through teacher training college in Kroměříž (1908–1912) and a short period of work as a teacher in Bílovice in Slovácko (1912–1914), took Hába first to Prague (1914–1915), then to Vienna (1917–1920) and to Berlin (1920–1923). In his case the progress through important centres of European music was, according to the artistic “progress” of the young composer on his “journeyman travels”. Studies with Novák and Schreker in Prague and his Berlin meeting with Ferruccio Busoni were undoubtedly important moments in Hába’s artistic growth. Apart from new experience and knowledge, however, what he acquired above all was the hallmark and reputation of a noteworthy innovator and progenitor of the new avant-garde trends. In the spirit of the collective creed of the avant-garde young generation Hába both joined the current of the most contemporary modern movement and at the same time increasingly developed his specific creative identity.

Hába’s real teacher of composition was Vítězslav Novák (1870–1949). Hába joined Novák’s master course in 1914 without having graduated from the conservatory. With his sheer perseverance and hard work, and with the essential encouragement of the humane and tactful Novák, the enthusiastic autodidact filled in the serious gaps in his training as a composer. Novák insisted that his pupils acquire a perfect mastery of traditional musical forms and classic treatment of themes. He also encouraged interest in folk songs and their compositional principles. At this period none of Novák’s pupils had so close a relationship to folk culture as Hába, but he needed to enrich his experience of folk music by the kind of critical examination that would allow him to explore its musical organism more deeply and consciously. Hába studied with Novák for just under a year. In this short time he mastered the rules of compositional technique and crowned his studies with the composition Sonata for Violin and Piano op. 1.
Successful completion of his studies paved the way for the young Hába to enter Prague cultural life, but on the day of his twenty-second birthday he had to give up this promising prospect and join the Austro-Hungarian army. He spent the first years of the war on the Russian front, from where he was recalled to Vienna to organise a collection of military songs for army purposes together with Felix Petryk (1892–1951) and Béla Bartók (1881–1945). His first contact with radically innovative ideas in new music can clearly be dated to January 1917, and in this case precise dating has considerable explanatory value. Towards the end of January Hába, as a student of the Vienna Officers’ School, attended a performance of the opera Die Schneider von Schönau (1916) by the Dutch composer Jan Brandts-Buts (1868–1933) and at the same time read in the Viennese press about a showcase evening of quarter-tone music by the German composer Willy von Möllendorf (1872–1934), held in the Tonkünstlerverein in Vienna. Immediately after the opera visit, Hába, keen to compose similar music, wrote to Brandts-Buts asking for lessons in composition. Brandts-Buts was too busy to agree, but on his recommendation Hába was taken on for a while as a pupil of the important Viennese musical theorist Richard Stöhr (1874–1967), who trained him in harmony and strict counterpoint. The encounter with quarter-tone music was fateful for Hába’s future orientation as a composer, despite the fact that he only learned of W. Möllendorf evening at second hand, composer, whose teaching and his compositional style. As a prominent and experienced teacher with his first quarter-tone instrument, but in musical thought and in improvising on the violin was there no time to think of repetition or variation on melodic ideas or of repeating or varying longer sections. Now it was a matter of capturing spontaneous creativity not just with my hands on the instrument, but in musical thought and in notation.” These lines have, of course, undergone the inevitable authorial self-censorship and are highly stylised. The state depicted is supposed to correspond to the character of the avant-garde artist who wants to go his own way and lives through an indescribable creative rebirth. Nevertheless, by something like the path he describes Hába certainly found another element that was to be one factor determining his “liberated music” in the future: this factor is athematism. The first of his works using this technique are the quarter-tone Fantasie für Solo Violin, op. 9a and Music for Solo Violin op. 9b, the quarter-tone String Quartet op. 12, The Choral Suite op.13, the quarter-tone String Quartet op. 14 and the sixth-tone String Quartet op. 15. Their experimental quality apart, even after many years these works remain a clear confirmation of the composer’s exceptional creative powers. A striking feature of this period is his attempt to exploit to the full the possibilities of the new tone systems. Hába embarked on new music with panache and enthusiasm and if some attributes of his style were later to be singled out as typical of his work, they originated in this period in the years 1923–1927 he wrote the majority of his pieces for quarter-tone piano, among them five suites and ten fantasias. The character of this period as one of maximum technical innovation is underlined by the fact that between the piano Suite op. 10 (1923) and his Fantasie for Cello and Quarter-tone Piano op. 33 with one exception Hába wrote no pieces in semitones. Hába also contributed to the invention of new instruments. For example he designed a three-manual keyboard for quarter-tone harmonium and piano, and in 1925 the firm August Förster built a quarter-tone piano on his initiative.

**Athematism**

An expression often used in connection with Hába’s music is Musik der Freiheit, or more...
In Hába’s case we can clearly identify the motives that led the young composer to consider athematism or microtonality to be important compositional techniques. Berlin offered Hába a wide range of opportunities to pick up new ideas that would then form part of the theoretical background of his Musik der Freiheit. Among the composers who inspired him one frequently mentioned in the literature is Feruccio Busoni (1866–1924). In Berlin Hába encountered Bussoni’s ideas in the second, reworked edition of his book Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music (Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst, 1907, 1916). Later he occasionally attended the celebrated discussion circles that Bussoni ran in his Berlin apartment, where the young composer was familiarly nicknamed Ari-Baba by his host. In wider musical circles Busoni had the justified reputation as a leading supporter of microtonal music (and new music in general), but in fact he was extremely hostile to quarter-tone music, seeing the third-tone and sixth-tone system as far more natural and promising for future use. Busoni’s views eventually inspired Hába to compose his sixth-tone String Quartet op.15.

Yet another influence was at work here in Berlin, and that was the boom in ethnomusicology. The introduction of the sound recording, and invention of the phonograph, pitchmeter and gramophone records, had been vastly increasing the potential of the new musicological discipline. The deputy director of the Berlin Hochschule für Musik Georg Schönemann (1884–1945) arranged for Hába to visit the Phonogram-Archiv, part of the Psychologisch-Ästhetik der Tonkunst (Theoretical Background of His Musical Expression) of Berlin University, where the composer could find other fundamental rationales for his own music. The Berlin archive contained a very large quantity of recordings of non-European music; the infinitely reproducible songs, instrumental pieces and spoken word could scarcely have left a composer of Hába’s kind unmoved. Comparison of recordings of the music of distant cultures opens up the possibility of identifying fundamental common factors despite diversity. Of course, one of the most useful recommendations when listening to “unusual” non-European music, is that the listener should try as hard as possible to avoid established stereotypes of perception and conventional methods of study, but in Hába’s case the new experience seems to have led him less to an understanding of “objective differences” than to an attempt to derive general conclusions and look for common constants. Perhaps it was here that an opinion to be found repeatedly in Hába’s later writings first took shape. The different kinds of music of distant cultures were in his view just different variants and different evolutionary stages of one and the same thing. The different types of musical production share audible features that are hard to explain in terms of pure cultural convergence or the evolutionary kinship of different cultures. On the other hand, comparison led Hába to the belief that the a priori categories of European music relating to methods and techniques of musical structurings were not necessarily eternally valid. Theoretical and historical relativisation of this kind undermines the claims of the “grand musical tradition”. There was no reason why different types of music, hitherto regarded as incommensurable, should not be subjected to the same kind of judgement. Hába declared that “After
Hába's apprenticeship years, which culminated in Berlin, were something he could capitalize on at home, where many of his experiences acquired the attractive hallmark of complete novelty. In 1923, therefore, Hába returned to Prague for good. He started to teach at the Prague Conservatory in the same year and in 1925 managed to persuade the school authorities to allow him to open a class in quarter-tone and sixth-tone composition. In 1934 he was made a regular professor there. Hába's class attracted the pupils of other composers as well, who wanted to get to know the latest methods of composition. In his seminars Hába introduced his pupils to the methods of his own compositional work. The principles by which such music could be brought to real life were to be demonstrated with the help of materials gathered in a newly established phonograph archive. Hába's class soon developed an international reputation. Apart from Czechs and Slovaks it was attended by Germans, Southern Slavs, Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Lithuanians. Hába trained a number of pupils who also tried to compose in microtonal systems: his brother Karel Hába, Rudolf Kubín, Václav Dobiaš, Miroslav Ponc, Karel Reiner and Southern Slovaks Osterc, Ristič, Iliev, and others.

The first years following Hába's return to Czechoslovakia were by no means easy. Probably the most serious difficulties were associated with the reception of his microtonal work. While in the Prague German Association for the Private Performance of Music he found important support and facilities, thanks to which several of his quarter-tone pieces reached the Prague festivals of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM; 1924, 1925), the Czech section of this organisation showed no interest in his work. (the same syndrome was behind the fact that at the Prague ISCM festival in 1925 Bohuslav Martinů was classified as a member of the "foreign" French school). Quarter-tone and atematic music was felt to be a symptom of the stalemate in avant-garde art. Not even Hába's introductory lecture before each concert could change this opinion. The untrained listener heard such music primarily as chaos and "rough, naturalised expression". In the eyes of critics Hába's "liberated music" was part of the destruction of the organic unity of the work, and the author's theoretical ideas were often considered symptomatic of a crisis of values and essential negation of traditional culture. Furthermore, for an important group of Czech critics Hába's music failed to fit well into their concept of the evolution of Czech music, because it sounded calculated and "un-Czech". The feeling that Hába did not suit the native scene was aggravated by his supposed and real ties to German music, and implicitly to the compositional techniques of the Schönberg School. Many of the polemics exploited a tried and tested smear technique, consigning the condemned to the categories of alien, speculative, inappropriate or empty artistic as against idealist art, against music that respected the native and authentic (unutilised) tradition. The prospects for the performance of the compositions of Hába's and his pupils were transformed in 1927. In this period Hába, together with the music critic Mirko Očadlík (1904–1984), took up leading positions in the Spolek pro modern hudbu [Modern Music Club]. One crucial factor here was the affiliation of the Club to the ISCM, in which Hába could now exercise a major influence. The Club's publicity organ was the magazine Klíč [Key], in which it he published critical articles on modern music. In 1935 he transferred his activities to the Association for Contemporary Music Přítomnost [Present], and was elected its chairman. He also published in the magazine Rytmus and helped to create its profile. He took an important part in the organisation of the ISCM international festival in Prague in 1935, when he sat on the international jury, as he was later to do in 1932, 1938, 1939 and 1961. (In 1957 Hába was made an honorary member of the ISCM for his services; an honour previously granted to his teacher V. Novák.) Hába's name appeared on the international scene in other connections as well. Together with his assistant, the composer and pianist Karel Reiner (1910–1979) in 1932 he accepted an invitation to the International Congress of Arab Music in Cairo to give lectures and demonstrations of quarter-tone music. (Others who attended this conference included Běla Bartók, Paul Hindemith and the ethnomusicologist Erich von Hornbostel). Hába also took an active role in musical education. He realised that it was not enough just to train a new generation of composers when an adequately educated public is just as essential to musical life. In any case Hába believed that music cultivates the human being and that — in line with Steiner's anthroposophy — it helps man achieve the true spiritual experience of humanity. He was also convinced that music's educational effect will protect music itself from degradation into "mere entertainment" or "technical game". Education for music and by music was the theme of a number of Hába's lectures. Together with Leo Kestenberg (1882–1962) Hába helped to found the Society for Music Education (Prague 1934) and later to plan the 1st International Music Education Congress (Prague 1936), (The Society for Music Education was the precursor of the International Society for Music Education, which was formed in 1953.)

Neue Harmonielehre

Hába's own theoretical texts have very much conditioned the way in which his music has been understood. The most important of these texts came out as early as the 1920s: Harmonische zákłady čtvrttonové soustavy [The Harmonic Principles of the Quarter-tone System] (1923), O psychologii tvoření, pohybové zákonnosti tónových a zákładech nového hudebního slohu [On the Psychology of Creation, the Laws of Tonal movement and on the Principles of the New Musical Style] (1925) and Neue Harmonielehre des diatonischen, chromatischen, Viertel-, Drittel-, Sechstel- und Zwölfteltonsystems (1927). These works were largely directed to offering explanations and justifications. They have been treated as a supposed interpretative key to Hába's music, as texts that could help to settle disputes on its direction. In many cases, however, interpretation of these texts has not proved helpful in this respect. Most of the opponents of Hába's microtonal music have focused their criticism on the mechanical division of the tempered system into smaller intervals. Hába himself actually conceded the possibility that division into third-tones or sixth-tones was more suitable from the point of view of natural voice capacity, and admitted that microtone intervals were not natural distances but a mere stylisation of the natural system. On the other hand he forcefully defended the right of the composer to choose his own language of expression. At a time when discussion of Hába's work was conducted in the categories natural – artificial (system), Vladimir Helfert defended the view that it would be better to debate Hába's music in terms of the concept of artistic reaction versus progressive music. In the latter context "liberated music" emerges an expression of a specific kind of musical thought: "I confess that as yet I have not been convinced that quarter-tone music has a future. But one of Hába's arguments is of fundamental weight, and that is his creative act — his music. We do not have the right, and in fact we have no way of doing so, to doubt the authenticity of his quarter-tone musical imagination. The courage with which Hába and his pupils fight for this new form of imagination deserves respect. They are fighting for something that today is extremely unpopular as well as technically difficult. They place themselves in an exposed position for something from which they can expect no material success. Hába's musical gifts are such that he would have not the slightest trouble producing music in some more popular, ingratiating style. But he doesn't do it. Hába pursues his own creative vision with a courage and pugnacity that recalls the creative discoverer. And it is in this that the power of his argument consists, at least for anyone who looks at the thing calmly and without prejudice."

The most famous of Hába's theoretical works is probably the Neue Harmonielehre des diatonischen, chromatischen, Viertel-, Drittel-, Sechstel- und Zwölfteltonsystems. (Arnold Schönberg praised it when in a letter to Hugo Leichtentritt of 1938 he recommended it as an important German language treatment of new music). The book was written as early as 1925. The author himself translated the originally Czech text into German and after revisions by Erich Steinhardt, the book was published in 1927 by the Leipzig publishing house Kistner & Siegel. In the 1960s, still under the
Hába’s evidence of this relationship is a copy of Berg’s musical thought. One notable piece of Ries, and despite his constant stress on the microtonal systems (pp. 199–251). In several places Hába refers to the Ancient Greek musical tradition, to Zarlino and Rameau, and finally describes himself as the heir to the world Czech musical tradition (Skuherský, Stecker, Novák, Janáček).

The value of the textbook increases when considered in historical context, and above all by suggesting a relationship to the work of Arnold Schönberg. Much of what Schönberg had already formulated (mainly in the Harmonielehre, 1911), appears in Hába in modified form. Hába contests many of Schönberg’s ideas but at the same time appeals to them. As early as 1927 (resp. 1925) Hába was also reacting to Schönberg’s twelve-tone music. Despite his sympathy for the new theories, and despite his constant stress on the value of Schönberg’s music, Hába tries to achieve a distinctive individual concept of his own and his own interpretation of Schönberg’s musical thought. One notable piece of evidence of this relationship is a copy of Hába’s Neue Harmonielehre, annotated by Schönberg, to be found in the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna. We might ask whether Hába’s textbook might usefully be defined as an attempt at a theory of Schönberg’s music. The answer must be a definite no, but his book is a valuable map of Hába’s view of the great composer and the annotated copy a fascinating document of Schönberg’s corrective responses to Hába’s view. Schönberg is the composer most frequently referred to in the book, and Schönberg’s annotations relate exclusively to comments on himself. Hába’s efforts to define his own different identity and at the same time find a common language with Schönberg are very evident in his evaluation of dissonances (and likewise harmonic dissonances), and in his emphasis on the exceptional importance of the scale or row. The second part of the book, which is devoted to microtonal systems, Schönberg left without a commentary. (In any case he had already expressed his attitude to quarter-tones in his own Harmonielehre.)

Hába first of all develops the basic premise of the traditional Stufenlehre, in which chords constitute key and are based on the respective scale. Examining these principles he restates some of the conclusions of Riemann’s Funktionstheorie – according to which the notes of the scale become the material for the construction of the chords that represent the three main functions (T, S, D). The premise is then stretched to extremes with the claim that the abolition of these “controlling functions” will grant the necessary freedom to the whole system. A single chord built of six thirds is presented as the image of free relations in the order. This radical option is exploited to the full: when Hába sets out the possibilities for the maximum construct exploitation of the different tone systems, he speaks of seven-tone chord in diatonics, twelve-tone chord in chromatics, twenty-four tone chord in the quarter-tone system and so on. Hába does not go on in his Harmonielehre to describe chord progressions or rules of treating the voices, because in this respect almost everything is permitted – instead he explores the possibilities for building chords.

The rules given for the “free construction” of chords, however much they might seem to be the result of creative individuality, are not determined just by free decision and are not an independent act of the human psyche, but respond to the historical state of technical and aesthetic norms in. The idea of the interchangeability of the horizontal and the vertical makes it possible to bring internal progressions usual for melody into the chord. Thus chords are convertible into a row and vice versa: the notes of the row can be sounded simultaneously. And just as there are no rules for the creation of melody, there is no need to formulate any recipe for the construction of chords. According to Hába the sound qualities of the new music are unequivocally based on the introduction of sharp dissonances. The author’s specific recommendation then relates to “unusual sounding triads” containing a minor second. Despite this freedom of thought many of the examples given in the textbook remain mere construct possibilities, which are not of course excluded, but for which the composer found no broader practical application. The chords built of seconds might be regarded as a proposal for their actual use and nowhere in the textbook is there any prohibition on employing them, but they can also be considered an abstract model that demonstrates the material possibilities of the system (diatonic, chromatic and microtonal).

While Hába concedes the possibility of maximum density of the chord, he at the same time appeals for sobriety. The possibility of free octave transpositions allows the inclusion of a number of seconds into a chord and the construction of new chord dissonances. It might seem that Hába was trying to take to extremes Rameau’s idea of chord inversions, which entailed the notion that all subsequent forms of the triad are merely variants of the one same chord and have the same root (centre harmonique). This is not the case, however, and here we find the apparent contradiction of the Neue Harmonielehre. Hába sees each of the chords as an independent and unique form. Adding any other tone to the chord means its transformation in terms of structure and significance: the transposition of one tone changes the character of the chord. Hába likewise avoids octave doublings because every such “strengthening” gives the relevant tone or chord an importance that does not correspond to its real position in the structure of the musical phrase. (In Hába’s later expositions harmonic doubling acquires the metaphorical meaning of “halting” or “finitude”.)

Lengthy passages of the Neue Harmonielehre deal with the importance of newly constructed tone rows. When Hába talks about them (series of five, six or eleven tones), he in the same breath explains his own concept of tonality and his rejection of potential “atonality”: “every piece is tonal, because its sound material is part of a series under all circumstances. Perhaps just on account of this inescapable aspect scales and rows become a major theme of Hába’s textbook. In the framework of twelve-tone chromatics (and with an eye to the principle of symmetry), Hába creates 581 different scales, differing in the number of tones and interval structure (the number of these series is not supposed to be finite). Instead of describing different harmonic situations the author draws attention to unusual possibilities for creating scales, to their new features and the uncommon charm of the melodies that result. (If we are curious about the inspirations behind Hába’s approach here, we shall find an answer in a number of tucked away places. For example the author refers to the modal peculiarities of folk music, which are recognised and exploited by several domestic composers. The theoretical work of Ferruccio Busoni may also be another source of Hába’s interest.)

Hába also points out the possibility of replacing the traditional hierarchic relationship by other rules in chromatic (microtonal) music. In Hába’s case the notion of Tonzentralität is the way he solves the question of the notional relational centre. Its use may be considered the key principle in Hába’s work as a composer, because it is this that gives his music its specific order. Here Hába has come up with his own approach to the organisation of twelve-tone material, one conceived on the principle of the relatedness of tones and chords to one tone centre. What we are speaking of here is a kind of texture in which the centre is conveyed by other than harmonic means. In this case the tone has the functional significance of central chord (tonic) and this role is expressed by relationship to surrounding chords and tones. Translated into the language of Hába’s theory this means that any chord can be based on any tone of the chromatic scale and this tone becomes the centre for the relevant chords; or also, that all the remaining tones of the row may be related to every tone considered a centre. In later texts Hába enlarges this possibility. It is not just individual tones that can be tone centres, but also tone clusters, which “harness” the main tone to a minor second. Tonzentralität as a way of looking at musical structure is in a certain sense an auxiliary approach supposed to show the internal connections between distant harmonies. The introduction of this principle is designed to allow more complex harmonic phenomena to be analysed in a lucid way. Tonzentralität simplifies a rather complicated argument concerning alterations or some passing-note harmonies.
We can regard Hába's *Neue Harmonielehre* as an attempt to explore and encapsulate the developmental trends of music in the first quarter of the 20th century together with an attempt to express his individual style, his own concept of *Musik der Freiheit*, which can only with great difficulty be translated into a general rule governing the chord construction and chord progressions. *Musik der Freiheit* is not however something accidental, and certainly not something negative. This kind of music too, as the author tries to demonstrate in his writings, should be a matter of form and order. In its basic principles Hába's *Neue Harmonielehre* faithfully reflects trends in music in the Twenties, a period of important transformations of style, and so it is no accident that in his textbook Hába redefines or abandons established terms in harmony theory, as well as he tries to find new possibilities for creating chords that correspond better to the needs of the new music. Why are individual chords and more extensive harmonic passages not formed as freely as melody — according to Hába through free development of fantasy — or why does the theory of harmony bound by quantities of fixed rules fail to meet the trends of contemporary music? Hába asks these questions at a time when the search for “new” principles of melody and harmony was becoming more intense. In this case, however, the path that he takes and the way that he argues as he pursues his goals is perhaps more important than the finished results.

### The Opera Matka (Mother)

Hába sought to embody his notion of a new “liberated music” in a genre with a sufficiently high profile to publicise an emergent style; opera would be a demonstration of the viability of quarter-tone and atonistic music. In the period 1927–29 he composed the quarter-tone opera *Mother* on his own libretto. The work was first performed in German on the 17th of May 1931 in Munich with Hermann Scherchen conducting. (The opera was not presented in Czech until 1947 and then 1964 in Prague.)

Hába composed this opera after several earlier opera sketches. *Mother* is a realistic work, with “realist” understood in the widest sense. The story is set in the composer’s native Walachia. The text of the libretto is written in Mora-vian dialect. The local colour is then enhanced by a number of folk scenes (funeral weeping, a lullaby, wedding song). Despite this, as is the case with other important operas in the same vein (for example Janáček’s *Jenůfa* or in Burian’s *Maryša*) Hába is not composing a “folklore opera”. Although the work has clear references to folk setting, this is supposed to enhance the raw reality of the work. The plot of the opera is simple. After the death of his first wife the peasant Křen finds a new bride. This is Maruša, a girl from the neighbouring village, who just like the peasant’s first wife has to take on a great deal of work in the cottage and care for her step-children and own children. For the composer, Maruša Křenová seems to repre-
to interact with people of all religions and convictions, and anthroposophy also provided inspirations for his musical theory and practice. (Hába had been introduced to anthroposophy by Felix Petyrek, who in 1926 took him to the Goetheana, the headquarters of the Anthroposophical Society in Dornach in Switzerland. From 1927 Hába was an active member. He lectured regularly at the Dornach Free University for Spiritual Science, and several of his works were premiered in the Goetheana.)

In the years 1949 - 1953 Hába’s works were not played or published, but he himself continued to compose, writing both semitone and quarter-tone music. He was rehabilitated in 1953, and thereafter worked only as a composer. The last twenty years of Hába’s life were an extraordinarily fruitful period. Many musicians were ready to perform his earlier and new works, above all the Hába Quartet under its leader Dušan Pandula. Hába’s pieces were abundantly published and the composer invited to lecture and to attend the performance of his works abroad. His name appeared again at the ISCM international festival in Prague in 1967. He used his influence and contacts to help young composers who often identified with his legacy, although they took a cautious attitude to some of his aesthetic conclusions. In the final phase of his career Hába composed as many as 40 new works. These were mainly chamber pieces, and when he wrote larger-scale works, concertos. Hába continued to write in various different tone systems, whether traditional (e.g. the String Quartet no. 7 “Christmas”, op. 73; 1951), quarter-tone (String Quartet no. 14, op. 94; 1963), fifth-tone (String Quartet no. 16, op. 98; 1967) or sixth-tone (String Quartet no. 11, op. 87; 1957). Even at this late stage Hába never gave up an experimental and open-minded approach, and he repeatedly tried to get to respond to revived impulses of twelve-tone music and Webernian serialism.

After surveying his career, we may tentatively suggest some conclusions about Hába’s place in the context of Czech and Central-European music. First and foremost it is clear that he was a composer who became involved in the Central European musical avant-garde very much “from the outside”, from a Moravian region with a predominantly folk tradition. The strong individuality and originality that he began to show during his stay in Vienna became a respected reality in Berlin. In terms of the expressive canon of 19th-century music the position of “other, outsider” had been negative, a pure liability, a status overlapping with that of “dilettante” in the sense of exclusion from professional advancement. Now the situation had turned around – at least in Berlin if less in Vienna – and the position could be one of special privilege. (Vienna is generally regarded as a place with great respect for tradition and conservative views). To be different was now to have an exceptional status. Suddenly the attribute of otherness became an undeniable advantage. In a sense the change reflected the new democratic era, since it was a status that could be claimed by anyone, regardless of social background. Novelty and difference were transformed into attributes that could bring participants in the common “project of the new” closer together while at the same time representing another scale by which they could define their distinct identities and differentiate themselves. Hába was sensitive to the various individual developmental trends but did not identify himself wholly with any one of them. Despite his sympathy and affinity for the new theories, and his repeated stress on the value of the influence of Novák, Busoni and Schönberg, Hába sought to create a style all his own. For Hába art is undoubtedly a field of creative freedom, where a work is born as the result of the active activity of a unique, irreducible individual. Nonetheless, Hába shared with the rest of the Central European avant-garde the striving for explicit definition of the principle of redundancy. It is clearly a striving to render musical language more precise, to rid it of the last trace of the decorative and the rhetorical. Hába’s project was also characterised by a distinctively sharp struggle against traditional ways of treating material that forced the composer to surrender his own individuality. Another feature of Hába’s type as a composer was that fact that he shared only marginally in the future development of European new music; from the point of view of the “culture of the centre” as a historical rather than just geographical concept he ultimately remained at the periphery. The character of his work excludes him from the community of “established composers” and makes him once again an “outsider”.

There are a number of different reasons why this should be so. Hába’s “liberated music” is known only through a few theoretical works that came out mainly in German, a few recordings and relatively inaccessible scores. This has naturally limited an understanding of the whole Hába phenomenon. Usually Hába is characterised as a tirelessly propagator of microtonal and athematic music. These mere assertions, however, do not of themselves have any precise content and in fact problematise any proper conception of Hába’s music; for example, pieces composed with microtones in fact represent less than a third of Hába’s output as a composer. Of course, it remains an open question whether the change in the conditions for the reception of Hába’s music will make for major change in the way he is viewed. While in the 1920s Hába in his works took significant steps beyond the canon of traditional music by using unconventional sound material, in the period after the Second World War the leaders of the modern move-