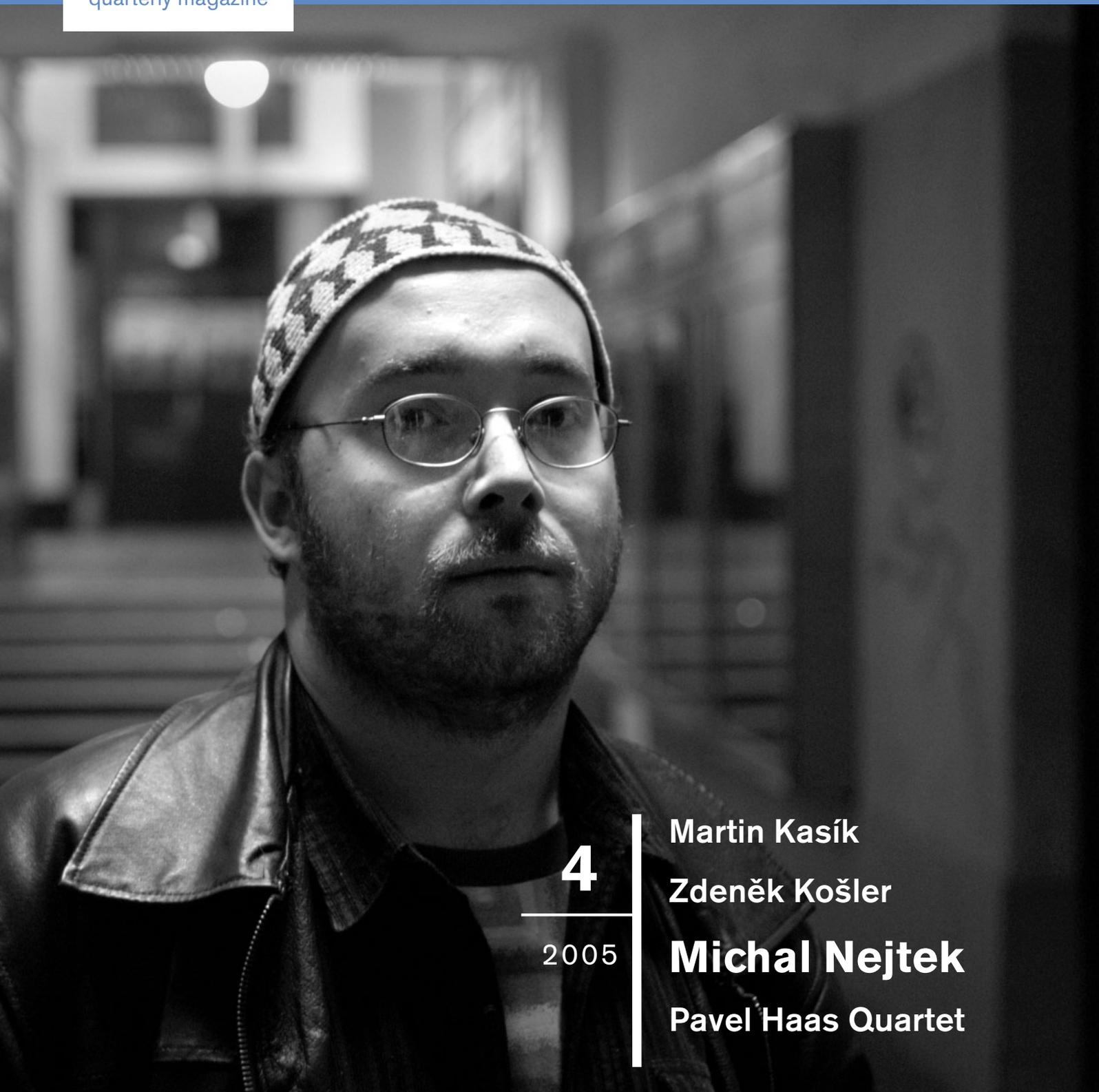


czech music

quarterly magazine



4

2005

Martin Kasík

Zdeněk Košler

Michal Nežtek

Pavel Haas Quartet

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editorial



Dear Reading

This is the last issue of **Czech Music** for 2005. It is also the sixth issue I have edited. That is not many issues, even for a quarterly, but all the same (or just for that reason!) I would like to ask you, our readers, to write to us and tell us what you think about the magazine. Tell us whether it provides the kind of information that you want and whether you find the form in which we provide information about current Czech musical life and history effective. For us it would be enormously valuable to learn which articles or themes particularly interested you, what information you think is lacking, what you didn't like, and what there should be more of in **Czech Music** and what could be reduced. We don't expect you to do our work for us, but your feedback is essential if we are to get the content and direction right. If you invest a few minutes of your time in an e-mail with your comments (send to czech.music@volny.cz) or a letter (you will find the address in the magazine credits), we shall reward you with an even better magazine, a magazine for you.

See you again in the New Year

PETR BAKLA
EDITOR

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A black and white photograph of a man, Martin Kasík, standing next to a piano. He is wearing a dark, high-collared jacket over a patterned vest and a white shirt. He has a slight smile and is looking towards the camera. The piano is visible on the left side of the frame. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**the pianist
martin kasík**

You have won a large number of prizes from competitions or from various foundations. Which of them do you value most? Do some of the competitions stick in your memory more than others?

Of course every competition is a very much an adrenalin affair and so you don't forget them. Probably the one I remember best is the Prague Spring 1998, because competing on hot domestic ground is always the toughest.

If I'm not mistaken, you were 22 at the time. In which phase of your music studies were you back then?

I was in the first year of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague with Prof. Ivan Klánský. I'm glad that I managed such a good take-off, especially when in the first half of the year I was going through a crisis – the transition from the conservatory method of teaching to the academy method probably gives every student problems.

You have taken many music courses in the Czech Republic and abroad led by various interesting people like Lazar Berman, Eugen Indjic, Christian Zacharias, Paul Badura – Skoda, Claude Helffer and others. Do you have any favourite among them, someone who gave you something more?

For me the most beneficial was the summer spent in Marlboro (Vermont), where they hold

ing young musicians for 45 years. It is actually a music agency that chooses musicians from all branches of classical music (including chamber ensembles, composers and singers) on the basis of a competition that it organises every year. Especially in the USA, YCA enjoys huge popularity and is extraordinarily successful in promoting its young artists. When you win the classical piano competition you get a diploma, money and a few concerts, and that is certainly very encouraging and raises your prestige, but it still doesn't necessarily mean so much for your future. After winning in the YCA your cooperation with the agency is just beginning. Usually you get a 3–5 year contract, which includes concerts in the Carnegie Hall in New York or the Kennedy Centre in Washington, for example, which is usually beyond the reach of ordinary mortals.

When you have the chance to play in such prestigious concert halls can you choose your own repertoire?

In choosing recital programmes I usually have a free hand, and I try to play as much Czech music as possible, especially 20th century – Janáček, Martinů, Slavický, Fišer and so on. As far as concerts with orchestra are concerned it's usually the organiser, who has his own idea of the programme for the whole season or festival.

You made your debut with the Czech Philharmonic in 2002 and then went with this orchestra on a tour of Japan with the conductor Ken-Ichiro Kobayashi and also concerts in Taiwan, also with the Czech Philharmonic and the conductor Zdeněk

2nd String Quartet (in co-production with ProQuartet France and Bärenreiter Prague) in May 2006. This is a performance of Janáček's song cycle, *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* with the singers Jaroslav Březina and Veronika Hajnová and with you playing as well. What is the place of chamber music in your repertoire? After all, most of your concert work is solo...

For me chamber music is something refreshing and different, and recently I've been doing more of it. I very much enjoy playing with brilliant musicians and ensembles, whether the Wihan, Panoch or Stamic Quartets or the Afflatus Quintet, and I look forward to working with the violinist Ivan Ženaty and the cellist Jiří Bárta. It's nice to create something together.

Which piece or, more generally composer do you most like playing?

It's very hard to answer that question. There is something unique and fascinating about every great composer which makes it impossible to compare him with the others. But if I really had to choose one, it would be Janáček – with his great knowledge of human psychology, his music is really "thrust deep into blood and life" as he himself wished.

When you give an encore after a successful concert, do you play something that makes you happy or do you tend to choose something more with a view to the audience?

I don't prepare encores, and I just play what I'm in the mood for, I most enjoy doing the Toccata by Klement Slavický as an encore –

beyond the reach of ordinary mortals

DENISA DOHNALOVÁ

meetings with chamber music. Playing with people from the Guarneri Quartet or the Beaux Arts Trio was a vast stimulus for me and a long-term inspiration.

Your name is usually followed immediately by the title, "winner of the Young Concert Artists Competition N.Y.1999". Could you say something about the course of the competition and how your success there has influenced your career?

Young Concert Artists is an organisation based in New York, which has been support-

Mácal. How did you find working with them?

Working with the Czech Philharmonic is every musician's dream. I see every concert with them as a great occasion and try to give it my best. With Mácal I had the chance to play the Dvořák's piano concerto and I must say that I have rarely felt so sure and so inspired on the podium.

The music agency Arco Diva is working on an interesting project to mark the publication of a new critical edition of Janáček's

it's a very spectacular piece but at the same time richly expressive.

What is your attitude to contemporary classical music?

I would say it was the same as my attitude to every other. With the difference that in the case of music of the Romantic period, for example, I dare make a judgment on what is good and what bad, whereas with contemporary music I can only say I like it or I don't like it. I don't have enough of an overview and distance, in terms of time, to judge it more



objectively. I'm aware that I am at a particular stage of development and I will definitely understand certain things later on, and so it would be stupid to condemn them now.

I sense a little scepticism in your answer... Do you sometimes have the feeling that contemporary music is developing in a wrong direction?

Contemporary music is certainly developing in the direction that it has to develop in, and I think that a true master writes out of a need to write and cannot concentrate primarily on how the audience are going to react to a piece. From history we know innumerable cases of composers and pieces of genius being denounced and forgotten. Today we glorify them. Were they ahead of their time? Did they speak in an unknown language? Did they not fit in with the taste of their period? There can certainly be plenty of reasons, and so we ought to be cautious in our judgments, even though we ought to know how to recognise a "fraud" – music that is in no respect up to scratch. Of course it is very difficult. In any case, a real composer has to know how to resign himself to lack of success.

Do you have feeling for the musical joke or experiment?

I hope so. How could anyone play Haydn, Mozart or a composer like Martinů, for example, without a sense of humour and some insight into improvisation?

What is the difference for you when you play a completely new piece, one never performed before? Do you find it particularly exciting or do you have an increased sense of responsibility?

It's both a privilege and a responsibility. You have far greater freedom of interpretation but at the same time you feel that your interpretation ought to take the most ideal form.

On one of your seven CDs you brought to life Luboš Fišer's 8th Piano Sonata. How did you come across this piece?

I was handed the sonata by my manager Jiří Štílec. He and his wife Sylvie Bodorová were close friends of Luboš Fišer. It is one of his last works, very contemplative and condensed in expression. While working on this piece I realised how much more enriching it was to read a piece from the manuscript.

Are you planning another new departure or premiere of a piece by a contemporary composer?

As far as the most up-to-the-minute music is concerned, I'm very much looking forward to the piano concerto that Sylvie Bodorová is just writing for me and that I shall perform with the Prague Chamber Philharmonic and Jiří Bělohlávek in Prague at the end of February next year (I haven't yet played any 21st-century music...)

Martin Kasík

born in 1976 in Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, has been playing the piano since the age of 4. He studied at the Conservatory in Ostrava (with Prof. Monika Tugendliebová) and the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (with Prof. Ivan Klánský). He is a regular participant in Czech and international piano courses (Paris, Villecroze, Piešťany, České Budějovice, Ostrava) led by Lazar Berman, Eugen Indjic, Christian Zacharias, Paul Badura – Skoda, Claude Helffer and Pierre Jasmin. He has won a series of prizes in Czech and international competitions:

1994

International Piano Competition in Kil, Sweden – 1st Prize

1997

International Frederick Chopin Competition in Mariánské Lázně – 1st Prize

1998

International Piano Competition of the Prague Spring – 1st Prize
Prague Spring Foundation Prize for the Best Recital (2nd Round)
Life to Artists Foundation Prize at Intergram
Gideon Klein Foundation Prize
Czech Music Fund Foundation Prize
Music Academy Prize in Villecroze (France)
Czech Radio Prize
Young Concert Artists Competition – European Round – Leipzig – 1st Prize
Bärenreiter Publishing House Prize

1999

Young Concert Artists Competition – World-wide Round – New York – 1st Prize
Pasadena Philharmonic Prize
Beracassa Foundation Prize

He has given concerts in many European states – Holland (Concertgebouw Amsterdam, De doelen Rotterdam), Finland (Finlandia Hall Helsinki), Spain (Auditorio di Barcelona), Germany, Estonia, France, Switzerland, Sweden, Poland (Duszniaki Chopin Festival), Slovakia, and also in the USA (Alice Tully Hall New York, Metropolitan Museum NY, Kennedy Centre Washington and elsewhere), Japan (Tokyo Suntory Hall) and Singapore (Singapore Victoria Concert Hall). He has performed as a soloists with a series of Czech and foreign orchestras (New York Chamber Orchestra, Minnesota Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Philharmonic, Rotter-

dam Philharmonic, Deutsche Radio Berlin, Helsinki Philharmonic, Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK, Utah Philharmonic, Slovak Philharmonic, Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra, Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, and others). In April 2002 he made his debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Pinchas Zukerman.

Thanks to his art he was included in a series of concerts devoted to the 40th anniversary of the founding of the New York Young Concert Artists competition, and on the 15th of February he appeared in the prestigious concert series of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. In November 2002 he made his debut with the Czech Philharmonic. This debut was followed up by three concerts as part of the Czech Philharmonic's tour of Japan (Tokyo Suntory Hall and elsewhere). In 2003 he first performed in the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris and in the Tonhalle Zürich. In the 2004/2005 season he toured with the Czech Philharmonic in Japan (conductor Ken-Ichiro Kobayashi) and also concerts in Taiwan (also with the Czech Philharmonic, conductor Zdeněk Mácal), in the USA (Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK), Switzerland (Settimane musicali di Ascona, with the Prague Chamber Philharmonic), Estonia, Germany, Mallorca (Frederik Chopin Int. Festival) and at international music festivals in the Czech Republic.

For the 2005 / 2006 season he has concerts planned in Switzerland (Tonhalle Zürich), USA (Metropolitan Museum NY), France (Festival at Fontainebleau), Great Britain, Spain and Germany.

He has several times recorded for Czech, German, Swedish and Missouri radio and for Czech Television. He has recorded a total of 7 CDs of works by J. S. Bach, L. van Beethoven, F. Chopin, R. Schumann, S. Rachmaninov and Klement Slavický. The CD "Martin Kasík – Live from Prague" with music by Schumann and Rachmaninov received an outstanding review in the French music magazine Répertoire in January 2000, in which Kasík's interpretation of Schumann's Kreisleriana was compared to the performances of M. Argerich or V. Horowitz. In December 2000 his second solo CD was released, entitled "Allegro barbaro" with works by K. Slavický, L. Fišer (world premiere), B. Bartók and L. Janáček. In April 2002 another of his solo recordings was released, "Martin Kasík – CHOPIN", which was also awarded an R9 in the magazine Répertoire.

In 2003 another compact disc was released in co-operation with the Wihan Quartet – "Schumann/Dvořák – Piano Quintets" followed by a complete recording of Dvořák's Slavonic Dances with Kristina Krkavcová in 2004.

Martin Kasík is the holder of the Davidoff Prix 2000 prize for the best Czech performer younger than 28 years of age for classical music and the Harmonie Prize as the most successful young artist for the year 2002.



JAROSLAV SMOLKA

I travel a great deal and so I have a basis for comparison. I can say with a clear conscience that Prague is truly lucky in having acoustically good concert halls. The Dvořák Hall can hold its own even beside such celebrated venues as the halls in Amsterdam, Boston and Vienna. Paris, for example, doesn't have this kind of quality and in New York there is only the Carnegie Hall. But the Dvořák Hall has not only outstanding acoustics, but also a unique charm, producing a feeling of special intimacy.

(Garrick Ohlson on the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum in an interview about the Prague Spring Festival 2000)

The Great Hall of the Rudolfinum, only renamed the Dvořák Hall years after the Second World War, was the first Prague concert hall designed just for music. It is acoustically ideal for solo piano, which is why so many masters have played here and such a large number of outstanding and lasting recordings

of masterly interpretations have been recorded here.

The Rudolfinum was opened for concerts 120 years ago on the 7th of February 1885. This was just as the great epoch of piano virtuosity and composing for piano was coming to an end both in the Czech Lands and internationally. Less than a year beforehand *Bedřich Smetana* had died, and just over a year afterwards *Franz Liszt*. Throughout Europe the following years were above all the epoch of their pupils, although of course musicians and composers from other schools and following other models were active as well. The only one of *Bedřich Smetana*'s pupils to achieve the status of virtuoso pianist was **Josef Jiránek**, who retained and recapitulated *Smetana*'s own style in his play and even the details of his idiom. He played solo and in chamber music at the Rudolfinum, among others with the Czech Quartet. The crown of his activities in this period were his performances at concerts for the *Smetana* exhibition in 1917. **Jindřich Káan of Albesty** was a pupil of the *Karel Proksch* School and of *Vilém Blodek*. He distinguished himself as the *Liszt* type of piano virtuoso with spectacular technique, and like *Liszt* he wrote virtuoso transcriptions and fantasias and performed them with brilliance. One of *Káan*'s pupils was **Karel Hoffmeister**, the pianist contemporary of *Vítězslav Novák* and *Josef Suk*. He placed the emphasis on accuracy of performance in terms of style and content, and was an outstanding teacher. In the last years before and during 1st World War the Rudolfinum witnessed the first great triumphs of *Mikeš*'s pupil **Jan Heřman**. He shone with his performances of the Beethoven

concertos *G major* and *E flat major* with the Czech Philharmonic (1907, 1913) and from 1909 as an interpreter of the works of *Bedřich Smetana* as well. All these pianists had become professors at the Conservatory in Prague before the 1st World War.

The intellectually and poetically orientated musician, aesthete and composer **Václav Štěpán**, the pupil of various Czech and foreign teachers, made a great name for himself from 1911 with premieres of *Novák's Pan*, *Suk's Life and Dream* and other works by these masters impressionists, but also *Smetana* and others. Information on the musicians who performed specifically in the Rudolfinum is hard to find since the reviews that provide most of our evidence for the concert life of the past often fail to indicate where concerts were held, and the researcher sometimes only finds out about some events from incidental mentions in literature where one would hardly expect mentions of piano performances. Take **Antonín Dvořák**, for example. A great deal is written about his appearances as a conductor in the Rudolfinum. He played on the piano in public only rarely, but did so on a concert tour of Czech towns when he was saying farewell to his homeland before his departure for America. The fact that he also played in the Rudolfinum is something we learn from the memoirs of his pupil *Vítězslav Novák*, who relates how he went to the Master to borrow the music for *Dumkas*, explaining that he wanted to play them with friends in Kroměříž. *Dvořák* apparently remarked ironically: "That could be a fine old disaster", to which *Novák* immediately retorted: "When you played the *Dumas* with *Wihan* and *Lachner* in the

masters of the piano in the



Rudolf Firkušný



Eugen Indjic



Ivan Klánský



dvořák hall of the rudolfinum

Rudolfinum, Maestro, Rubinstein was sitting in a box above you and watching your fingers. Dvořák was appalled, “For God’s sake, what must he have thought of me?” and leant the Dumkas without further ado. Whether Novák played publicly in the Rudolfinum as well is something we don’t know, since there is no written record of such a thing. Nor do we know whether it was in the Rudolfinum that the Prague concert took place at which Leoš Janáček heard his own *Sonata From the Street 1. X. 1905* side by side with piano pieces by Novák and Suk and was so self-critically mortified that on his return from the concert he threw the manuscript off a bridge when crossing the Vltava. Perhaps it was. We know that he used to stay in Prague at the Hotel *U Karla IV.* in Smíchov. A walk back from the Rudolfinum would have taken him over a bridge.

The pianist and composer and in his time highly respected Russian musician **Anton Rubinstein**, a performer of Lisztian type, played in the Rudolfinum in 1892. Among Franz Liszt’s direct pupils, one who appeared was the Austrian pianist **Emil Ritter von Sauer**, who became famous for his interpretations of *Chopin* and older music. Another pianist of the Lisztian and Rubinsteinian type who made very powerful impression in Prague was **Teresa Careño** from Venezuela. The critics of the time spoke of her *grand tone* and *ardent, ravishing, almost demonic* play. Pianists who played at the Rudolfinum also included the Russians **Vladimir Pachman**, **Sapelnikov** and **Siloti**, the Pole **Ignacy Paderewski**, distinguished performer of *Chopin* and first prime minister of Poland after the re-establishment of the state in 1918, the German composer and piano virtuoso **Eugen d’Albert** and from

France **Camille Saint-Saëns**, his compatriot **Alfred Cortot** and numerous others.

After the First World War concerts were discontinued in the Rudolfinum. The parliament of the newly established Czechoslovak Republic chose it as parliament buildings and the protests of musicians were ignored. Only under the German occupation was the building returned to concert operations in 1940 after thorough internal reconstruction. Over the intervening 22 years dozens of important pianists had visited Prague from abroad and a new generation of Czech pianists had come to the fore, their leading representative **Rudolf Firkušný**; all these musicians had to play elsewhere in Prague. International musical life did not of course return to the Rudolfinum in the midst of a Europe at war, and so the re-opened hall was used, as it were belatedly, by pianists



who had made major names under the First Republic, such as **František Maxián**, **Josef Páleníček**, **František Rauch**, **Václav Holzknecht** with his interest in playing contemporary music, **Věra Řepková** with her devotion to the work of Smetana, and the most prominent young hopes **Viktorie Švihlíková**, **Ilja Hurník**, **Pavel Štěpán** and **Zdeněk Jílek**.

The full development of international concert life at the Rudolfinum came only in the period after the end of the war. The major factor in this trend was the new Prague Spring International Music Festival held annually from 1946. **Rafaël Kubelík** founded it primarily as an event at which the Czech Philharmonic could present new work by composers from allied countries – and of course **Bohuslav Martinů** – and at which the world could get to know the most important new Czech works. From the beginning the Prague Spring was also a platform for leading international performers. Soon it became the custom for pianists to play concertante works with orchestras in the Smetana Hall, while the Rudolfinum was the venue for

solo recitals and some chamber concerts. The Czech Philharmonic and other orchestras apart from the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra performed piano concertos in the Rudolfinum only during the rest of the season. The FOK concert agency's star-studded cycle World Piano Music used to take place here, and the Czech Philharmonic and other institutions would hold recitals.

From the first years of the festival, musicians from Soviet Russia enjoyed huge successes. In the second year, at the 1947 Prague Spring, **Dmitri Shostakovich** played his own chamber works here: *The Piano Trio no. 2* with **David Oistrach** and **Miloš Sádlo**, solo *Piano Sonata* and the *Piano Quintet* with the *Pešek Quartet*. Soon audiences here were also to be dazzled by the Russian virtuosi **Lev Oborin** and **Emil Gilels**. Gilels especially was for long decades a fixed star of the festival, astounding the public with his perfect combination of veriginous technique and ingenious, poetic and passionate expressiveness. In 1950 **Sviatoslav Richter** came to the festival for the

first time. He was soon to become a top international pianist and throughout his concert career would be welcomed with rapture in Prague. His play radiated charisma, an expression of the way in which he was creating not just Soviet art (as was often suggested in communist propaganda) but absolute art for all humanity. Richter could be tough and courageous. I remember a concert of his in the Rudolfinum probably some time in the 1970s, when soon after he started he was unpleasantly surprised by floodlights for the television cameras. He stopped playing and insistently gestured for the lights to be removed. A television director came up onto the podium to try and persuade him. Richter did not argue, but simply left the podium saying he would come back and play when the lights were taken away. The television team resisted for about a quarter of an hour but then removed the cameras. Only then did the Maestro return and the public enthusiastically applauded him for defending the calm needed for an intense musical experience. Later even the



Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum

Zdeněk Mácal and Tzimon Bartó (right)

Daniel Wiesner

František Maxián

Vladimír Ashkenazy



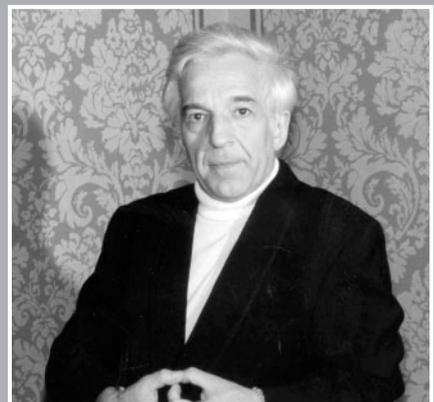
Ivan Moravec



Ivo Kahánek



Garrick Ohlson



Rudolfinum seemed insufficiently intimate for him and he looked for smaller venues in rural, ideally spa towns. In fact the problem was insoluble. I recall how he once played at a concert for the South Bohemian Summer Music Festival in Bechyně. It was arranged at the very last minute, but just a tiny notice in the newspapers was enough to have crowds of people who had been on holiday in the area rushing to the concert. Richter ended up playing in an overstuffed airless hall, in a much worse environment than a full Rudolfinum.

Russian pianists of genius and other outstanding virtuosi continued to appear in later years. Thus in the 1960s and 1970s the Rudolfinum was host to the versatile **Rudolf Kérer** and also **Yakov Flier**, **Yevgeny Mogilevski**, **Vladimir Krajnev**, **Viktorie Postnikova**, **Yakov Zak**, **Alexander Slobodnyak**, from the 1980s **Lazar Berman** and alongside him **Mikhail Pletnev**, winner of the Prague Spring Competition in 1988, **Sergei Tarasov** and others.

Outstanding pianists came to the first Prague Springs and seasons from other parts of the world as well. Prague fell in love with the Austrians **Friedrich Gulda** and later **Paul Badura-Skoda**, **Alfred Brendel**, **Jörg Demus**, **Hanns Kann** and **Walter Klien**. The Swiss **Nikita Magaloff** made a strong impression. In subsequent years German pianists had a major impact, including **Wilhelm Kempff** (especially as a specialist at the *Ludwig van Beethoven* anniversary in 1970), **Christoph Eschenbach**, **Dieter Zechlin**, **Gerhard Opitz**, and the duo of the brothers **Aloys** and **Alfons Kontarsky**.

In the first post-war years France was represented in the Rudolfinum primarily by the works of the impressionists and others: the performers were the French women **Germaine Leroux**, **Maria Aimée Warrot** and **Monique Haas**, at a later date **Cécile Ousset**, **France Cidat** and men **Robert Casadesus** and **Philippe Entremont**. Poland was also represented in the Rudolfinum after the war as a piano great power. One pianist who was very well received and invited more than once was **Halina Czerny-Stefańska**; **Stanislav Szpinalski**, **Stefan Ashkenaze**, **Barbara Hesse-Bukowska**, **Adam Harasiewicz**, **Regina Smendzjanka**, and exceptionally the almost eighty-year-old **Arthur Rubinstein** all played here: most of them performing mainly *Chopin*.

Hungarian musicians made a significant contribution as well. For decades **Annie Fischer** would play here, and later Hungarians living in the west of Europe **Géza Anda** and **György Cziffra**, as well as the younger **Zoltán Kocsis** and **Tamás Vásáry** who were based in Hungary. The Rumanian **Valentin Gheorghiu**, also a composer, came to Prague five times in the decade 1951-61 alone, and played Romantic and 20th-century music. The founder of Bul-

garian national music **Pancho Vladigerov** played his *Piano Concerto no. 3* at the Prague Spring in 1948, the Prague Spring Competition was won in 1963 by the young **Rumjan Atanasov** and in 1969 the Bulgarian pianist living in the West, **Alexis Weissenberg**, made a strong impression.

Italian pianists were among those who shone on the podium of the Dvořák Hall. **Giovanni Dell'Angolo** performed in the Rudolfinum at the beginning of 1950, and later **Aldo Ciccolini**, **Michel Campanelli**, **Andrea Lucchini** played there repeatedly. But the most prominent and most distinctive of the Italians, on an international scale, was **Arturo Benedetti-Michelangeli**. From 1958 he often came to Prague and dazzled the public with the captivating sound of a Czech PETROF piano; he gave particularly individual performances of the impressionist repertoire. After Benedetti-Michelangeli, the Italian pianist to have the greatest impact in Prague was **Maurizio Pollini**.

Among Iberian pianists who came to the Rudolfinum in the last thirty years of the 20th century, the most appealing and suggestive was the Portuguese **Sequeira Costa**. More interesting performers came from Great Britain: the pianists **Nicole Henriot**, **Moura Lympany**, the Greek-born pianist living in England **Gina Bachauer**, **John Lill**, **Clifford Curzon** and most successfully **John Ogdon**.

In the Dvořák Hall the USA showed itself a superpower in piano virtuosity as well. Apart from individual recitals by **Irving Heller** and **Grant Johannesen**, **Shura Cherkassky** was highly successful here, and in 1969 **Julius Katchen** (who died so prematurely) and **Eugen Indjic**; **Garrick Ohlsson** was massively popular.

South American piano culture achieved a strikingly high profile. From the later 1960s the Chilean **Claudio Arrau** and the Argentinian **Martha Argerich** came to play at the Rudolfinum repeatedly, and another Argentinian **Bruno Leonard Geber** performed here more than once. Outstanding pianists from other countries made isolated appearances: the Yugoslav **Dubravka Tomsić**, **Hioko Nakamura** from Japan, and the Moscow trained Vietnamese pianist **Dang Thai Son** and others.

Naturally, however, Czech pianists also played in Prague in abundance. In addition to the musicians of the middle generation mentioned above, fortune favoured the young upcoming generation. Under the occupation numerous talented students had matured technically and musically in relative quiet, and now that thorough training was bearing fruit. Successes here were achieved by **Anna Máchová**, and **Eva Bernáthová**, who studied in Budapest. The 1949-50 season saw the take-off of the careers of two musicians who were to be at

the forefront of Czech piano for many decades: **Ivan Moravec** and **Jan Panenka**.

The International Piano Competition for the *Bedřich Smetana Prize*, held in the Rudolfinum, offered great opportunities for young pianists. In 1948, among the Czech pianists **Eva Glancová** won the 3rd Prize, **Anna Máchová** the 4th Prize and the 5th Prize went to the pianist and composer **Jiří Vřešťál**. 1951 saw the triumph of young Soviet pianists: the 1st Prize was shared by **Marina Slesaryeva** and **Gleb Axelrod**, and the other prizes went to Czechs as well as Russians: 2nd Prize **Jan Panenka**, 3rd Prize **Mirka Pokorná**, 4th Prize **Pavel Štěpán**. The next time this competition was held, in 1957, the 1st Prize was awarded to **Zdeněk Hnát**, and 2nd Prize to **Jan Novotný**, a specialist in the music of Smetana and Jaroslav Ježek. The International Prague Spring Competition in 1963 brought to the fore the visually impaired **Václav Zelený**, as well as **Dagmar Šimonková**, **Peter Toperczer** and **Emil Leichner**. Other great talents were also discovered: the temperamental Odessa-born **Valentina Kameniková**, a student of *Nejgauz*, the specialist in the piano music of Dvořák and Janáček **Radoslav Kvapil**, **Dagmar Baloghová**, and in the 1970s and 1980s **Ivan Klánský**, **Boris Krajný**, **František Malý**, **František Maxián junior**, **Miroslav Langer** and others. The Prague Spring Competition in 1988 launched the careers of the Czech winners of the third prize, who in subsequent years made major names for themselves: the Brno pianist **Igor Ardašev** and **Jan Simon** from Prague. Cruel human fate and political reversals led to abrupt ends or breaks in careers started in the Rudolfinum: **Jiří Vřešťál** (see above) and **Antonín Jemelík** died young, **Renata Arnetová** abandoned a concert career, **Eva Bernáthová** and **Václav Zelený** emigrated (for both see above), as did **Antonín Kubálek**, **Jiří Hlinka**, **Richard Kratzmann**, and **Božena Steinerová**. We should also mention outstanding duos, in Prague **Ilja Hurník** and **Pavel Štěpán**, in Brno **Věra** and **Vlastimil Lejsek**. As far as specialists in chamber music and accompaniment are concerned, in the generation of **Maxián** and **Rauch** the outstanding figure here was **Alfred Holeček**, and in the generation of **Panenka** and **Moravec** it was **Josef Hála** – who only rarely, but very successfully, gave solo concert recitals.

The end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s represented a striking dividing line between the long post-war and current epoch of concert life in the Rudolfinum. By coincidence this was also the time of the end of totalitarianism, but the actual break in programming was caused by reconstruction of the building. For some months there was a redistribution of live music through the other venues of Prague, with more space being made available for piano elsewhere. There were piano

recitals in the Clementinum, and in newly open interiors in the St. Agnes Convent, for example. The Rudolfinum was out of operation from the autumn of 1989 to the summer of 1993 and when it reopened, apart from the activities of the home Czech Philharmonic, concerts did not return to it immediately on the same scale as before. This was because some contractual obligations had to be fulfilled elsewhere first, for example the popular World Piano Music cycle had temporarily found another home.

Only at this point did important emigrants start to return, including pianists who had earlier been unable or unwilling to come to Prague. Among the Czechs this was above all **Rudolf Firkušný**, and among the Russians working in the West it was **Vladimir Ashkenazy**. After some initial piano recitals Ashkenazy appeared here mainly as a conductor. When he became principal conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, he put on the attraction with which **Bruno Walter** had once dazzled the public on the model of the composer himself – he simultaneously played and conducted the *Mozart Piano Concerto in D major*. Other Russian piano masters were discovered, including **Elisabeth Leonskaya**, **Yevgeny Kissin**, and **Oleg Meissenberg**, who after injuring his right hand in a car accident, appeared in the Rudolfinum with *Ravel's Concerto in D major for Left-Handed Piano*. Other talents emerged from the west, such as the American **Jefim Bronfman**, the Frenchman **Ian Fountain**, the Norwegian **Leif Ove Andsnes**, the Pole **Piotr Paleczny**, the Japanese **Masako Ezaki**, the Germans **Lars Vogt** and **Andreas Boyde**, and from England **Murray Perahia**, who leads and at the same time conducts the famous Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields, and many others.

The main events in the piano programme in the Dvořák Hall, however, are recitals by maestri who have long ago proved their sovereign qualities here. And therefore **Ohlsson**, **Berman**, **Costa**, **Indjic**, **Moravec**, **Klánský** and others go on playing here and enjoying the favour of the public.

Finally a new generation of excellent Czech pianists is emerging. Let us name at least **Jitka Čechová**, **Daniel Wiesner**, **Adam Skoumal**, **Martin Kasík** (see the interview), the laureate of the Prague Spring Competition in 2004 **Ivo Kahánek**, **Jaroslava Pěchočová**, **Lukáš Vondráček**, and the duo **Zdeňka Kolářová** and **Martin Hršel**. The Dvořák Hall goes on waiting for new masters.



laurels for the pavel haas quartet

MARIE KULIJEVYČOVÁ

Add their ages together and you get just a hundred and five, and since there are four of them that makes their average age a little over a quarter of a century. At the international Prague Spring Competition they introduced themselves under the title of Haas Quartet and carried off the first prize and also the Oleg Podgorný Prize for the most successful youngest entrant in the whole competition. They are violinists Veronika Jarůšková and Kateřina Gemrotová, violist Pavel Nikl and cellist Peter Jarůšek and today they have the new name, the Pavel Haas Quartet.



In the Prague Spring Competition, nine ensembles eventually competed out of an original sixteen that had entered. There were so many other competitions as summer approached that the Prague competition inevitably suffered a little in terms of quantity, but that had no effect at all on the quality of those who took part. The second prize was shared between another Czech ensemble, the Penguin Quartet and the Korean Siegen Quartet and the Third Prize went to the Dutch Rubens Quartet.

For the competition the winning quartet chose from six Mozart quartets the one that most appealed to them, *C major K. 465 "The Dissonant"*, and for the final round, focused on 20th-century music, Janáček's *Second Quartet*. "This work is a real matter of the heart. Not just our hearts, but the heart of our chamber music teacher, Professor Milan Škampa," Peter Jarůšek revealed.

A Lucky Meeting

What brought the members of the Pavel Haas Quartet together? Veronica and Peter studied in Bratislava (Slovakia) and in 1995 came to the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague to complete their education. The leader of the quartet, Veronika, studied in Jindřich Pazdera's class and Peter with Daniel Veis. The youngest, Kateřina Gemrotová, completed her studies at the conservatory with Pavel Kudelásek last year and Pavel Nikl is a student in Milan Škampa's class at

the Academy. And by the way, in 1998 Veronika and Peter got married.

Peter played for five years in the Škampa Quartet while in 2002 Veronika formed the Haas Quartet, at that time with the cellist Lukáš Polák. Then, after a succession of changes, Peter became a member of the Haas Quartet and Lukáš, by strange coincidence, found himself in the Škampa Quartet. The ensemble has been working in this new configuration since 2004, i.e. for something over a year.

The idea of calling the new quartet after Pavel Haas, a pupil of Leoš Janáček, was there at the very beginning. After the competition the quartet added Haas's first name Pavel to make it more comprehensible and unambiguous for the public. The members of the **Pavel Haas Quartet** talk about the way that in his short life, cut short in the Auschwitz concentration camp during the Second World War, Haas produced a valuable creative legacy, and of course they naturally particularly appreciate his three superb quartets.

Common Aims

All these young musicians shared a common desire to work in a quartet rather than having a yen for solo performance, and in their view a quartet is the ideal form of chamber play. The fact that the quartet with its current membership started to work together only a year before the Prague Spring competition is not just remarkable in itself, but is a promis-

ing sign for its future development. Peter Jarůšek talks about it:

"I had never played in a quartet in my life, and like most of the students at the Prague Academy I wasn't trained for it there. We all emerged from the Academy as soloists even though a real soloist only ever appears once every five years or so. I played a great deal solo and with an orchestra, but it was playing in a quartet and getting to know the whole breadth of the repertoire that was the real artistic breakthrough for me."

Today Professor Milan Škampa works with the quartet. He and the quartet players have a lively, tolerant and inspiring relationship, dedicated to the exploration of musical interpretation. It is a relationship that makes it possible for the teacher to communicate his exceptional knowledge of quartet play, his specialist and his scholarly experiences. "What has a tremendous influence on us is his human approach and positive attitude in every direction, his capacity to see only the good in everything around us," adds Peter Jarůšek. "As far as interpretation is concerned, he is teaching us first and foremost to honour the composer's score, I would say almost in every circumstance."

It is a piece of luck that the quartet brings together four individuals of equal weight and confidence. Nobody has the last word,

and everyone shares in the final view. Each is more sensitive to something else, notices different details, and so all work together on the same level.

Repertoire

As far as repertoire is concerned, quite a lot is determined by the demands of the competitions that the quartet intends to carry on entering, but even so the ensemble chooses what they find closest to their hearts from the compulsory pieces. Haas's works are important to their repertoire and they have become particularly fond of his *Second Quartet* "From the Monkey Mountains" ["Z opičích hor"]. The name is that of a place near Brno where "Gilded Youth" used to meet. The composer added a percussion part as an alternative in order to underline the rambling mood of the finale part, and it is in this form that the quartet wants to play the piece at the 61st Prague Spring Festival at a recital that is part of the first prize for the winning quartet. Currently the main aim is to create a basic repertoire and that is a huge task. Thanks to collaboration with Milan Škampa, the ensemble seems to be drawing successfully on the traditions of the Czech quartet school represented above all by the legendary heritage of the Smetana Quartet. The young musicians have been able to take up the Smetana Quartet members' fervent devotion and sincere love for chamber music and also the challenge of a situation in which four often temperamentally quite dif-

ferent types of musicians must come together in a common attitude to play. Fortunately the members of the Pavel Haas Quartet are now in a shared state of euphoric enthusiasm for chamber play, and are in no danger of falling into stereotypical patterns of interaction.

The Results So Far

In what is as yet the short life of the ensemble the Prague Spring competition has been a major and exceptional experience, but even before this triumph there had been other milestones along the way. From the beginning it was invited to the prestigious Accademia di Musica della Quartetto in Florence and in 2005 it also performed at the Wigmore Hall in London with the Škampa Quartet in Felix Mendelssohn-Bartoldy's *Octet op. 20*. It also won the prestigious Rimbotti Prize in a competition at Fiesole by Florence, part of the prize being an important concert in the Teatro della Pergola.

In April this year, not long before the competition, the quartet exploited a chance offered as part of the ProQuartet study programme to work with Walter Levin, a member of the LaSalle Quartet. Undoubtedly this final stimulus had its effect on the quartet's brilliant performance at the Prague Spring competition. What is more, they established a warm relationship with Levin resulting in an offer to take part in a project for performance of the complete Beethoven quartets in Basle and Milan and an invitation for all four members to participate once every three weeks at the

academies for the rest of the concert season. While we cannot hear the Pavel Haas Quartet on radio or CD yet, Arco diva label promises a live recording of the concert at the next Prague Spring.

Marvellous Prospects

Now after an interval of several months, the members of the Pavel Haas Quartet look back on the Prague Spring international competition calmly and with a smile. They don't deny that it was a stressful experience, especially when the home audience expected so much of them, but towards the end of the contest they became visibly less tense. They had very little opportunity to hear their rivals and perhaps that was precisely why they managed to control their nerves and maintain their concentration.

The members of the Pavel Haas Quartet are at the start of their careers and are not afraid that fame will go to their heads. So far they have had time to achieve only a little, but they have courageously set out in a happy direction. In the 2005/2006 season they will be participating in several different festivals: in Český Krumlov, Kuhm in Finland, Orland in the Netherlands and Fontainebleau near Paris. This autumn has featured an independent concert in the Lichtenstein Palace in the Martinů Hall and they have had an invitation from the Czech Chamber Music Society to give one recital in the subscription cycle in the Suk Hall on the 23rd of November.

At the beginning of October this year they had planned to take part in a competition in



Cremona and in February 2006 the Schubert Competition in Graz in Austria, but they had to cancel both entries. Immediately after the competition in June they left for the Premio Borciani competition in Reggio Emilia in Italy and the result made a major impact on their programme; they came back with another first prize and a convincing victory!

Summer Lightning

In the seventh annual competition in Reggio Emilia (founded in 1987) they had to measure up their powers with twenty-two young quartets from all over world, and the prize was the promise of a major world tour. The contestants included (just to take some at random), the Amedeo Modigliani Quartet from France, the Biava, Chiara and Parker from the USA, Di Cremona from Italy, Ariel from Israel, Faust and Signum from Germany and Tankstream from Australia. Here they also met some old acquaintances, the Amedeo Modigliani and Biava from the spring course with Walter Levin.

The competition jury was made up of distinguished names from the musical world, headed by chairman Marcello Abbado, the brother of the conductor Claudio Abbado. The members included Sir Peter Maxwell Davies from Great Britain, who is the court composer to Queen Elizabeth. For the third round of the competition he had written a piece called *A Sad Paven* and he himself chose the entrants that had performed its best. Once again the choice fell on the Pavel Haas Quartet. It is also worth mentioning the honorary jury, featuring such stary names as Claudio Abbado, Radu Lupu, Arvo Pärt, Maurizio Pollini and Wolfgang Rihm. It is incidentally interesting that in the second round of the competition the list of pieces from which one had to be chosen included *Janáček's Quartet no. 2 "Intimate Letters"*. Four quartets chose it: the Austrian Anima, the British Pavao, the German Signum and the Australian Tankstream.

In the first round our ensemble played Schubert's quartet "Death and the Maiden" together with the obligatory Beethoven's Quartet op. 59, no. 3, "*Rasoumovsky*". They performed the second Janáček quartet in the second round, with the Beethoven's *Quartet op. 135*. In the last round they then presented *A Sad Paven* by P. M. Davies, *Mozart's Quartet in C major KV 465, "The Dissonant"*, together with Beethoven's *Quartet op. 59, no. 3*.

Competition Days in Reggio Emilia

Our quartet players spent their preparatory time repeating, rehearsing, playing constantly, but the one problem was that the heat was almost unendurable, and the humidity

intense. The result was that the cellist broke his A string four times.

The competition itself took place over fourteen days, the musicians attracting great attention from a town that was carried away by the event and drowning in a sea of posters. The competition and the final concert by the victors were held in the dazzling interior of a 19th-century theatre of the Verdi period. The individual rounds were sold out and the victory concert packed.

The Czech quartet went to the competition mainly to find out how other ensembles in their age group played, get a feel for standards and learn something from other contestants. Instead they knocked all the others out. To be honest, they arrived at the competition feeling a little like exotic outsiders, in a Skoda car (for which they have nothing but praise), while all the others flew in high style, or at least came by luxury train.

They still find their victory incredible. But the result is all the more impressive given the fact that in the seven years of the competition they are only the fourth absolute winners. On three past occasions no first prize has been awarded, which incidentally shows that the organisers have been trying to ensure that the competition and its results reflect the highest possible standards.

Unexpectedly at the Centre of Attention

It is piquant that when the Pavel Haas Quartet arrived at the competition they found they had been advertised as a Dutch group on all the notices, programmes and public posters in the town. Only when they had explained their nationality were the appropriate corrections made.

They were pleased with the cash prizes that came with their overall victory and their success with the performance of the piece by Maxwell Davies, but the artistic recognition is much more important to them. Even more important, however, was the fact that immediately after the concert of victors they took off for Orkney in Scotland for the first contract performance. The journey involved four air transfers, and then the same complicated journey back taking up the whole next day followed immediately by the long haul back to Prague by car. At the very beginning of their concert tour career they were certainly left in no illusions about the rigours of the travelling it will involve.

The Orkney concert was the first of the two literally world tours that were the main prize of the competition, one in the autumn (23rd October – 16th November) with fifteen concerts, and the second in the spring (9th

March. – 28th July) with twenty-two concerts. These were organised by the impresario office of the Simmenauer Competition, based in Hamburg. On the first tour they will perform in Austria, Germany, Belgium and Italy, and on the second in the same countries but also in the United States and Japan. This makes a total of thirty-eight concerts, a number that many famous ensembles could hardly imagine giving in such a short time! The members of the quartet still haven't quite got their heads round it.

They left, they won, they came back and then just read the e-mails and sent out programmes for the next concerts. To make matters more chaotic, their computer went down, apparently having failed to withstand a summer storm over Prague. And so, with their laurels still on their brows, they had to run round Internet cafes trying to deal with all the work that had mounted up in their absence and thanks to their obligations as winners. After a short rest in the summer they started to prepare for the new season, which will probably be crucial for their future life and development as a quartet.

Today perhaps we can say that with their great courage the Pavel Haas Quartet has broken through the starting-line tape into the quartet world. The Prague Spring Festival success ought to set them on track, and the victory in Reggio Emilia draw attention to the unique qualities of their performance.

The most important factor, however, is the mutual understanding within the ensemble, and that is now at its height. Quartet play is uniting them, they are helping each other from the technical point of view and learning together. They are going through a comprehensive school of music, and the main thing is that they are giving it all they have not out of a desire for gain, but first and foremost because they want to work at an outstanding level.

*with permission of the magazine
Harmonie*



MIROSLAV PUDLÁK



Michal Nejtěk (1977) has been emerging as one of the most remarkable composers of the young Czech generation. While still a student he won a number of prizes for composing and he drew a great deal of attention for his graduation piece at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague – the chamber opera *Dementia Praecox* on a story by S. I. Witkiewicz. Soon after graduation he obtained several prestigious commissions (Warsaw Autumn Festival 2001, Donaueschinger Musiktage 2002, De Volharding 2003). As an active pianist he has performed with the Agon Orchestra for example at the Warsaw Autumn Festival and the Wien Modern. He also works with Agon Orchestra as a composer and arranger. Agon regularly includes his pieces in their concerts, and in 2005 an entire concert of his works as part of the Marathon of New Music festival. A joint project by Agon and the legendary rock group Plastic People of the Universe, for which he wrote the arrangement, found favour with a wide audience. Michal Nejtěk has also been expressing his talent in major stage forms and multimedia projects (*Lamenti*, *Distress Sonata*). His orchestral work *Nuberg 05* written for the Berg Chamber Orchestra has been published on the CD *HIS Voice Sampler III* (see announcement in this issue). For more information go to www.musica.cz/nejtek.

Why did you decide to become a composer and what influence did the conservatory have on you? (Several other interesting composers graduated from the Teplice Conservatory when you did.)

It was more or less chance. I used to improvise and I wanted to it a more stable form, to fix it somehow. Composition had never been taught in Teplice and I have the feeling that I and Tomáš Pospíšil were the first to study it there. Prof. Bůžek taught us composition with great emphasis on structure, but left us a great deal of freedom as far as developing our own musical idiom was concerned. I remember that he managed to really get inside my thinking and advise me on possible specific solutions inside my micro-world. Otherwise my memories of the conservatory are basically romantic (although I actually teach there myself these days) – I met some very important gurus there, and went through several musical initiation experiences...

Despite all your classical music projects you still keep in contact with rock musicians (the group *Věcičky* – Little Things). What does it give you?

A certain normalcy. Composers ought not to live in the vacuum of their seminars, awards and analyses, and (at least in my view) they



Choir accompanying the Leningrad Cowboys?

No. Our first joint concert (December 2002) was still a little hectic, and we were still looking for a shared language, but as time went by I discovered that the two groups (chamber orchestra and rock band) could be combined better and more deeply than is usually the case in projects like this. The main problem was to discover the things in which the PPU were at home and to exploit. What's more, Agon and the PPU are not polar opposites. The members of the PPU can read music and play from it, and on the other hand the members of Agon are also part of all kinds of rock groups and know how to improvise. And so when in one part of the Passion Play (piece by PPU) I had Agon member Tomáš Čištecký and Vratislav Brabenec from PPU playing wild solos side by side, you wouldn't have known which came from which world. Our latest project, which Brabenec and me are preparing for next year ("a train opera" in Lysá nad Labem) essentially involves the dissolution of identities because Agon will represent a station brass band and will sing, and the Plastic People will play trad Country and Western.

In your last orchestral work (Nuberg 05) I can hear the inspiration of "remixes" transferred into a symphonic score. What do you think of current trends involving recycling of the music of the past?

ought to integrate themselves into ordinary musical life. In any case I've always enjoyed rock'n'roll, it involves huge pleasure, energy, playing together, it's – to use Agon leader's Petr Kofroň phrase – "being in sounding music".

What is your opinion of the trend to integrate elements of rock (and jazz) music into the work of the "classical" composer? Are the reasons for it aesthetic or sociological?

Maybe both. Today the influence of what's called "non-art music" (a ghastly term by the way) just can't be avoided. When I was growing up Michael Jackson and Miles Davis were

much more important to me than Kabalevsky and the other composers of instructive piano pieces. These lead me to one clear conclusion: these things are an integral part of my musical consciousness (perhaps even my unconscious) and it would be pointless and false to try to eliminate them. On the other hand, it would be nonsense to try and use them in the interests of a more lucrative career. It doesn't work like that, and it's always obvious.

This issue links up with the question of opening up to a broader public. I have in mind things like Agon's joint projects with The Plastic People of the Universe. Doesn't it all remind you a little of the Red Army



I don't really know. I don't like the idea that it's no longer worth trying anything really new, but on the other hand here and there the approach throws up something inspirational. When I think about it properly, then of course basically this recycling isn't anything so new either – the recycling of previous music is something that has always gone on in the composer's mind, and so today it's just that we help ourselves out in the face of this huge quantity of information by using computers. It isn't something that I have a special interest in, but I admit that some ideas (mainly contextual and stage) fascinate me – for example an ensemble performing on the podium and from somewhere the sound of an orchestra stealing into their music, playing fragments from the following pieces on the programme – as if the time phases were overlapping.

Are you sceptical about the modernist search for the new (style, idiom, material)? Isn't the aesthetics of remix precisely what is new?

I'm probably sceptical about the search for the scientific and exact (inventing a "new" system, tone material) but I have no doubt that something can come into being by other routes (across styles, by the accidental meeting of elements, media, musicians). And I would reduce the meaning of the word "new" from "objectively new" (for the world) to just "new for me".

Would you admit to any specific influences in terms of style and ideas? (New York downtown composers, Agon composers and suchlike.)

Certainly. At every phase in my writing something has been fundamentally important for me, whether a piece, a person, the experience of a concert. To name them all would take far too long, but if you like I can mention a few at random: the first Agon album, Zappa, Cage, Smolka's Euforium, meeting you, Goebbels...

Do you have any dream?

Yes, to have a band even better than those I work with now, full of dynamism, full of brilliant and committed people who play empathically to one goal, one expression, but at the same time there play comes out of many roots. I'm a little afraid that the idea of having a band like that in the Czech Republic today is Utopian. Nonetheless I shall keep working on it. So that at the next interview all I would be telling you about pleasure in playing and pleasure in work.



announcement



YOUNG BLOOD – The Music of Young Czech Composers

Michal Nejtek: Nuberg 05, **Miroslav Srnka:** String Quartet no. 3, **Ondřej Adámek:** Strange Night in Daylight, **Miloš Orson Štědroň:** Prosper and Gamble, **Markéta Dvořáková:** Waters, **Petr Bakla:** Wind Quintet, **Martin Hybler:** Echoes of Trees and Rocks, **Marko Ivanovič:** Rock's Goin' On?

The Czech Music Information Centre has just published the CD Young Blood as a representative sampler of the work of the young generation of Czech composers. We are offering this CD free of charge to all existing and new subscribers to the magazine Czech Music. If you are interested in the CD, please send us your request at czech.music@volny.cz or at the postal address HIS o.p.s, Besední 3, 118 00 Prague 1 Czech Republic, and we shall be pleased to send you the CD. It comes with a booklet in English.

zdeněk košler

let's do it properly first and only then be slavs

JINDŘICH BÁLEK

Ten years ago, when the conductor Zdeněk Košler died on the 2nd of July 1995, at the age of only sixty-seven, it was hard to avoid the feeling that fate had been unjust. We had prematurely lost a conductor who had always been a guarantee of artistic precision, love of music, extraordinary perseverance and an enviable breadth of repertoire. In the turbulent situation of the nineties, and indeed today, he might still have been a fixed point and guardian of the highest standards in music. Ten years is long enough for someone to be almost forgotten, but not long enough for someone to be rediscovered with a sense of surprise. Not that people fail to recall him at all, and with gratitude, but the scale and reach of his life work is known to few.

"I was saved from the career of a child prodigy by Václav Talich", said Zdeněk Košler, born on the 25th of March 1928, when looking back at the beginnings of his musical life. Some of his abilities – mainly his memory and perfect pitch – did indeed seem miraculous. He could conduct from memory any famous or less well-known work, including dozens of operas. Sometimes journalists would ask him whether it wasn't an unnecessary strain learning everything by heart. He would always answer that knowing a work by heart made his work much easier...

Opera in Prague, Olomouc and Ostrava

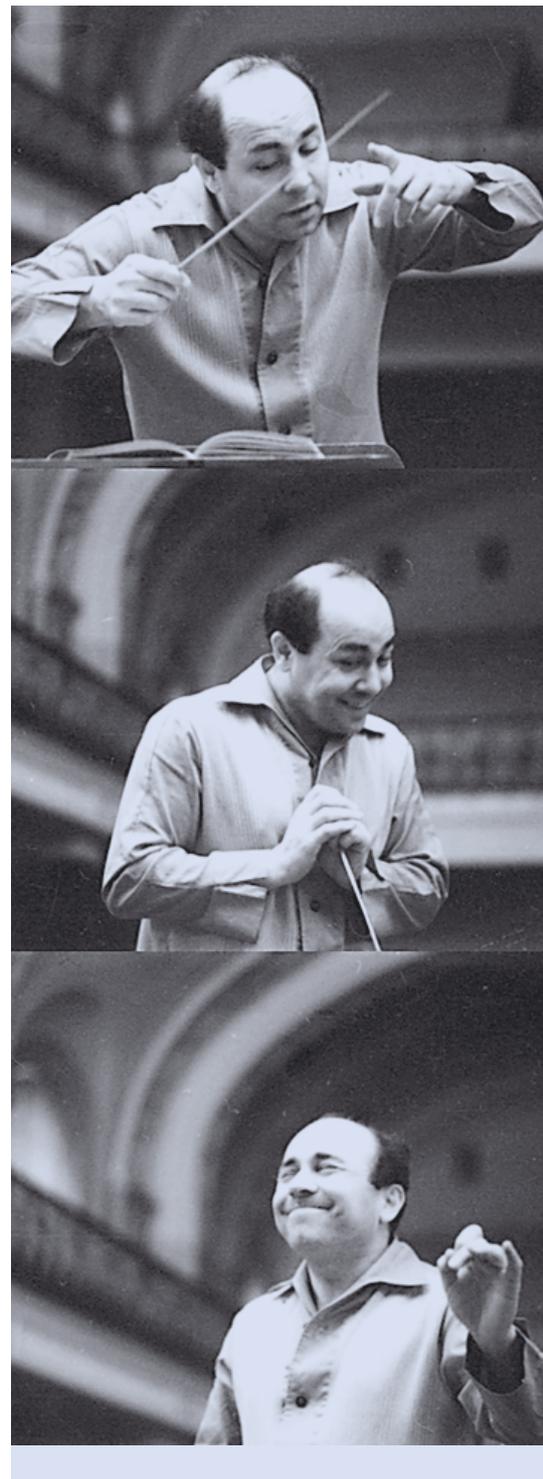
Thanks to the wise decision of his parents – his father was a member of the National Theatre Orchestra – he was first given a general education, and not merely in the humanities. He graduated from modern gymnasium in 1947 and went from there to the Academy

of Performing Arts. He joined the National Theatre (opera) in 1948, while still studying at the Academy, as an opera co-repitor, but his first experiences with the baton came soon. First of all with the *Barber of Seville*, then soon after that Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and immediately thereafter *The Secret*. The latter is Smetana's second opera after the "bride" and it was the opera Košler conducted most often, which is itself worthy of remark. In view of the great quantity of ensembles and choral scenes in the opera it is the most demanding of Smetana's works from the conducting point of view. As early as 1956 he could note his hundredth conducting performance at the National Theatre in his diary and when after ten years he left for Olomouc he had more than three hundred performances behind him. At the end of the 1950s he was conducting here more frequently than anyone else.

In 1958 he went to Olomouc to succeed Iša Krejčí, who had likewise developed an admirable repertoire here. Košler's first premiere in Olomouc was Janáček's *The Makropulos Case*, later followed by *Káťa Kabanová*, but also for example by Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, Wagner's *Lohengrin* and Otakar Jeremiáš's *Brothers Karamazov* and also Košler's first *Dalibor*. Prokofiev's *Semyon Kotko*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Meistersinger*, another *The Makropulos Case*, *Salome* and Dvořák's *Rusalka* – these were just some of Košler's premieres in Ostrava, where he was principal in the years 1962–64.

He Came, He Saw, He Conquered

In 1959 he was the winner in a conducting competition in Besançon, where the repertoire was orientated to French music. And



while he was principal in Ostrava he won an even more glorious victory in the Dimitri Mitropoulos Conducting Competition in New York in 1963. He shared first place with Peter Ignatius Calderon (then conductor of the opera in Buenos Aires) and Claudio Abbado. At the final concert he played Dvořák's *Seventh Symphony*, but he had rehearsed a total of 12 pieces, as always by heart. His perfect pitch and memory amazed the jury, but the critics and public were more struck by his mature conducting style.

After the competition the New York Times critic wrote that he "is a kind of amalgam of his two colleagues. He com-



bines Calderon's sovereign mastery with the temperament of Mr. Abbado. He is the true type of the Central European conductor – a good musician with a faultless training, conductor's instinct, and the ability to adapt himself entirely to the work that he is conducting”, and elsewhere that “Zdeněk Košler from Prague made all the others seem like gifted amateurs. He was a professional, a scientific genius with a finely firm and distinct hand, a radiant, smiling, young Georg Szell.” Under different political circumstances this victory might have opened his way to the whole world, but while in the following season he was able to take up the opportunity to be

Leonard Bernstein's assistant, everything else moved much more slowly.

In the end what made a far greater difference was the invitation from Walter Felsenstein to the Comic Opera in Berlin, which opened his way to other guest appearances at the end of the sixties. Let us remember that in the 1966 – 67 season, for example, he conducted in Vienna, with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, a major Dvořák cycle with all nine symphonies (!), the *Requiem* – and soloists were M. Rostropovich and R. Firkušný. As a guest conductor he premiered Strauss's *Salome* (with Anja Silja in the title role) at the Vienna State Opera, and we can

only guess how his international fame might have grown had the times been more favourable. Like Václav Neumann and Martin Turnovský Košler resigned all his posts in East Germany in protest after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the states of the Warsaw Pact in 1968. A few years later he became the second conductor of the Czech Philharmonic and principal of the opera in Bratislava.

The Czech and Slovak Philharmonics

With the Czech Philharmonic he played or recorded a series of works that added to the repertoire. With the Slovak Philharmonic, on

the other hand, he was able to record (to this day not fully appreciated) a complete set of Dvořák's Symphonies, the culminating symphonies of Mozart, and a wide range of other basic symphonic repertoire. His concerts were distinguished for their pioneering programmes and high demands on performers. His performance of Berlioz *The Damnation of Faust* in 1976 was like a revelation at that time. So too was his rendition of Novák's grand cantata for soloists, choir and orchestra – *Bouře [The Tempest]*. He also presented *Psyché* by César Franck, for example, or major scores by Richard Strauss and Sergei Prokofiev (he gave the Czech premiere of the latter's 6th Symphony). Every time he directed from memory, and every time he rehearsed the orchestra perfectly. And it may be said that he was a perfect opposite pole to the Czech Philharmonic Principal Conductor Václav Neumann, whom he often exceeded in hard work and conscientiousness at rehearsals. He was very ready to launch on interesting projects and so very much liked the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra.

"To the distaste of some players I sometimes say: Let's do it properly first and only then be Slavs. The foundation has to be the musical grammar, on which we only then build our internationally famous Slav warmth of feeling." His energy and commitment at every rehearsal was in line with this philosophy. He was the ideal type of conductor, who would again and again take a new approach to even a very familiar score. He knew absolutely all the pitfalls of musical life in this country. *"Conductors, orchestras but even audiences too know Má Vlast [My Country] so well that they are already used to 'taking for granted' some melodic lines to such an extent that they don't even have to hear them and they are completely satisfied with that."* His memory and perfect hearing earned him the natural respect of every musician. Nonetheless he managed to maintain a warm and collegiate relationship with the players. Thanks to his detailed knowledge of the score he also knew exactly which parts were the hardest in a piece and would always manage to encourage precisely these players at the right moment. Not by ostentatious calling up after the concert, but by his knowledge of the matter and friendly acknowledgment. *"Every member of the orchestra must always feel like the conductor's welcomed colleague and not his subordinate, and he must have a feeling of responsibility for himself and of his unique value. It is only this way that artists rather than mere employees will be sitting on the podium,"* he wrote in his book of reflections and memories (it is entitled *Poselství [Message]* – Argo, Prague 1996 – and is the source of other key quotes in this article)

Japan and the World

It is fair to say that Košler's art was much more enthusiastically received abroad than at home. This is clear from the reviews he earned on his numerous tours of England,

Austria, the United States or Canada. None of these, however, can compare with the response he found in Japan. He went there with the Czech Philharmonic four times, but if we add to that his guest appearances with Japanese orchestras, tours with the Slovak Philharmonic and the National Theatre Opera, he actually toured Japan as many as thirty times! *"The Japanese somehow developed a taste for me... I found myself a hobby, I'm learning Japanese. I should like to get to know the mentality of the Japanese better and also to be able to talk to them in their mother tongue. Learning Japanese isn't easy, but on my last visit my friends in Tokyo gave me 17 different Japanese textbooks on my departure. And so I can't disappoint them"*, he said after coming home from one tour in the mid-1970s.

He did not disappoint them, and in the end he even managed versified speeches at ceremonial occasions. *"I go there as if it was as close as Radotín [a town just outside Prague – note]; to all its orchestras, mainly the top ones, and with our orchestras"*. Even when working with the Japanese he readily went beyond the most popular pieces. For example in 1972 he presented Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* with the Tokyo Orchestra and in 1985 Mahler's *"Symphony of the Thousands"*. The Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra made a contract with him for annual visits, and his personal sense of affinity for Japanese culture only deepened with time.

The National Theatre a Second Time

In 1979 he was appointed principal conductor of the opera at the National Theatre, and his dedication and dynamism in the post in many respects recalled the times of Václav Talich. He arrived there in what was quite a difficult situation, which he himself characterised very mercilessly: *"Of the seventy soloists you could only reckon with twenty... Then there were great figures from a past time but still with a contract, together with an older generation of middling quality, and with them I took over the soloists who had once been taken on just because as communists they strengthened the party organisation... It was not easy persuading people to retire, including great figures that I had known from the opera since my childhood and had loved for their lifelong dedication to the National Theatre. It would not have bothered me that they were still members of the choir if many of them hadn't been lobbying with every possible institution to be assigned other important roles. I had no option but to explain my 'no' to superior authorities that had absolutely no clue about opera. Unfortunately this is a timeless phenomenon."*

In this honoured but extremely thankless role he nonetheless managed some starry moments. He conducted a gala production of Smetana's *Libuše* and conjured a terrific performance out of the







orchestra. The title role was sung by Gabriela Beňačková, who often says that she didn't want to sing Libuše because she had a different type of voice. The result, however, was a unique interpretation of the part as not just an exalted princess, but also a subtle and sensitive woman.

The political situation encouraged the warm reception and revived premiere of Smetana's *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*. This opera was eventually withdrawn from repertoire by the National Theatre management headed by Přemysl Kočí because the parallel with the occupation was clear and the opening line of the libretto "Foreign troops can no longer be suffered in our land" drew applause in 1969. Košler further performances as part of the celebrations for the re-opening of the historic building and Smetana centenary were also received with unre-served admiration. In the jubilee year of the 100th anniversary of Smetana's death, 1984, he directed a cycle of all eight of Smetana's operas at the Prague Spring.

Last Years

The Velvet Revolution found him at the National Theatre, where for the occasion he put on several scenes from Beethoven's *Fidelio*, which he had premiered in a new production just a few days before the 17th of November. In 1992 he retired but then took up new work. Among other things he had time to give a major "founding impetus" to the Czech National Symphony Orchestra. He was delighted at the energy with which the newly founded ensemble launched into work and he immediately conducted them on several successful recordings on which the orchestra still takes pride today.

In the year of his last concerts he was only sixty-seven years old. He liked coming back to the Czech and Slovak Philharmonics and people still remember the atmosphere of his last concerts in Prague and Bratislava. Fate was merciful to him at least in the sense that he had time to finish his recording of *Dalibor* with typically Košlerian, often audaciously slow tempos and great dramatic power.

Zdeněk Košler is not yet, and perhaps will never be, a legend like Václav Talich or Rafael Kubelík, but when we look closer at his career and work, we cannot but salute him. As he a conductor he was sometimes criticised for a lack of originality, a certain dogmatism, a one-sided perfectionism. Yet every new encounter with him shows how unjust these charges are. Anyone who carefully and uncompromisingly insists on quality is sometimes accused of chilly rationalism, or sometimes of exaggerated idealism, whatever seems convenient – but perhaps the time is slowly coming when these voices will have fallen silent and the man's true magnitude will be clear.

with permission of the magazine Harmonie



the first sound transmission of a czech opera

Two years ago Czech Radio celebrated its eightieth birthday (it started transmitting in May 1923), no later than anywhere else. The new invention had spread like an avalanche and the Czechoslovak Republic had been among the first countries to introduce it. Indeed its concessionary network relative to the overall population was soon such as to put it right at the top of the European ladder. From the beginning music had a place on the radio. Even though both with telephones and on the radio the principle is the same – the transmission of sound – today we regard them as two different things. Thirty years before the launch of Czech Radio the inventions of Bell (the telephone) and Marconi (the radio) had been very close. In fact the first “radio” transmission of music took place by telephone.

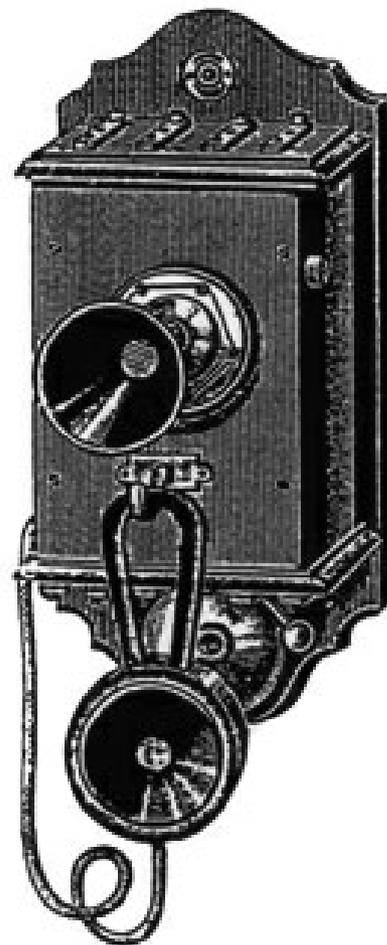
The telephone was born in 1861, when the German physicist Johann Philipp Ries succeeded in transmitting sound electromagnetically. Alexander Graham Bell improved his invention and in 1876 “developed” the first telephone network. When twenty years later in 1896 Guglielmi Marconi achieved wireless transmission of sound, the two inventions started to go their separate ways. By the 1920s nobody thought of music transmitted by telephone, but around 1891 this had still seemed to be the best possibility.

As early as 1873 we are learning “something about telephony”: “*What is telephony? By analogy with her sister telegraphics or writing at a distance, we could sum it up as sound at a distance,*” we read in *Hudební listy* [Music News] in 1873. The author of one of the first reports on the new invention immediately

starts thinking through the “benefits”: “*What if I find that a concert programme or individual numbers in it don't appeal to my aesthetic taste, what then? I can easily get rid of the pieces that I don't like by unhooking the wire so the inflow remains halted until the next number.*”

It was, however, to be another almost twenty years before technical progress reached a stage at which it was really possible to consider something like the transmission of musical experiences over long distances. In 1890 the idea started to be taken seriously. One of the first lines on which musical transmission was tested was the Prague – Vienna line. From the beginning Czechs had shown an interest in the invention, both technicians and musicians: “*An interesting experiment with a new telephone without earpieces was made on the Prague – Vienna telephone line on the 18th day of this month. The aim was to telephone a whole musical production from Prague to Vienna, and it was highly successful. All the details of the music and singing were properly audible throughout a hall in Vienna. Actively taking part in this experiment was one member of the Pivoda opera school and one member of the National Theatre orchestra. Experiments made with this telephone to date have been very successful. Conversations clearly audible in the whole hall right up to the gallery could be heard very well.*”

The new possibility was attracting attention elsewhere in Europe as well. In January 1890 a charity concert held in the Exchange Palace in Brussels was telephonically transmitted to Paris to the offices of the *Figaro* newspaper, where the assembled journalists could hear “*the separate elements in this concert, musical and vocal and declamatory, and likewise the applause of*



the audience, in fact everything down to the smallest noise”. While several months earlier people had considered 300 kilometres to be the limit for this kind of transmission of sound, it was announced with pride that the distance between Brussels and Paris was a hundred kilometres more. Soon Berlin joined in, and the report from the German capital is worth citing for its journalistic style as well. The first experiments involved telephone transmission of the opera *Carmen* from the royal court opera to the “Urania” Berlin exhibition park. “*When we visited the Urania at 8 o'clock*” writes the correspondent, “*we were taken into a small rotunda where there was already a large number of listeners. On the walls and in the window niches there were small sets, devices like gallows, which each had two telephone earpieces. The director of the Urania brought us theatre notices and the libretto of the opera Carmen. We sat down on chairs between the receivers. The second act of the opera began. Tak – tak – tak – the curtain went up. Miss Rothausen sang Carmen. We heard her song in honour of the gypsies and bright tralala well. The arrival of the gypsy sisters Frasquita and Merceda was also very audible. Then the choir came in welcoming Escamillo and finally there was his famous aria, Ó, Trocadero! [!] The individual voices were fully audible, in*



harmonisation as well. The orchestra seconded them unobtrusively. If you shut your eyes and added the picturesque Spanish costumes in your imagination, you were sitting in the court opera, the sound was so good. But often a "phutputput" interrupted us, the well known crackle of the telephone."

The proposed name of the machine, the "Theatrophone" testifies to the fact that during these experiments the main idea was the possibility of transmitting opera productions. "Theatrophone. It is under this name that recently the public has been presented in Paris with a telephone apparatus that is linked up to all the opera and concert halls in the whole city. This is an apparatus which has previously allowed visitors at various electrical exhibitions to hear fragments of operas and concerts. But the new advance in Paris consists in the fact that telephone apparatuses of this kind have been distributed to hotels, restaurants and cafes, and will also be installed for public use in other public rooms and it will be possible to install them in private apartments. The first theatrophones have been installed for public use in the vestibule of the "Nouveautés" Theatre. For a charge of 50 centimes you can listen for five minutes to an opera aria or concert production, and all that is necessary is to choose the theatre or concert hall with which you want to be connected", we read in a report in the magazine *Dalibor* in 1890.

Prague kept abreast with the new

inventions thanks to František Křížík, who was entrusted by the land commission with a license to set up a telephone connection for "the transmission of music and singing from the Czech National Theatre to the exhibition centre in *Stromovka*". The Jubilee Land Exhibition in 1891 was thus to be enriched by a pioneering musical transmission.

The year 1891 saw new telephone connections, for example between London and the Paris Opera, so that in London they could hear Massenet's opera *Le Mage* from the Grand Opera in the French capital. In the same year an international exhibition of electrical engineering was held in Frankfurt am Main and the exhibition programme included an experimental opera transmission, this time from the Court Theatre in Munich.

The following report shows that Bohemia and Czech music was keeping up with the trend from the beginning. Here is the Vienna paper *Fremden-Blatt* on the 8th of June 1892:

International Music and Theatre Exhibition. Smetana by Telephone.

While a large public listened to the prelude to the first act of Smetana's opera *Dalibor* in the exhibition theatre, around twenty people could enjoy the same experience in the setting of "Old Vienna" without even having to cross the threshold of the international temple to the muses. In a small room, its walls papered with thick material in order to isolate it from outside sound, invited gentlemen assembled for a dress-rehearsal experiment in telephone transmission. Standing in the room are four tables, on which there are twenty devices with earphones, on the wall there is a large starting switch that connects the devices with the Vienna Court Opera, the exhibition theatre, the music hall and the *Trpasličí Theatre*. The signal sounds. For the first few moments little can be heard. Some gentlemen had pressed the earpiece to close to their ears, while others hold it too far away, but soon people find the right distance and as if by a wave of a magic wand we are transported into the theatre. After the first tones of the overture the choir comes in powerfully only to be interrupted by the clear soprano of *Jitka* (Miss Veselá). After a while we hear the baritone king (Mr. Viktorín) and trumpets, although the pizzicato of the violins is audible "only a little or not at all". High and sharp tones can be heard very well on the telephone, but the deeper tones do not come across clearly, the tympani and drums are just a kind of noise but the brass can be made out in the distance. The remarkable thing is that the very slightest errors in singing and music – and the Czech opera makes only the slightest of errors – are more audible heard from a distance than in the theatre auditorium. The telephone is a strict judge, and prevents your attention being distracted by the beautiful appearance of the actors, the decor and so on.

In fact, tomorrow everybody will have the chance to judge the merits of telephone

music transmission for himself, because the hall will be opened to the public.

Around noon His Imperial and Royal Highness the Archduke Ludwig Victor put in an appearance at the exhibition in order to get a better view of the sections he had seen only fleetingly before. The noble guest first looked at the superb exhibits of the Court Theatre in Vienna, which he found very interesting. The Archduke then turned his attention to the Czech, English and French sections. At 8 o'clock in the evening His Highness was present at a performance by the *Trpasličí Theatre*.

Her Imperial and Royal Highness the Dowager Crown Princess Stephanie yesterday attended a performance of Smetana's opera *Dalibor*. The President of the Theatre Committee Baron Bourgoing welcomed the exalted lady and introduced her to the director Šubert. Her Imperial and Royal Highness said that she enjoyed listening to the opera, that its great success was known to her and that during the performance of the Czech National Theatre she recalled the beautiful days that she had spent in Prague.

The history of the successes of the Czech National Theatre at the International Musical and Theatrical Exhibition in Vienna in 1892 is well known. In one week from the 1st to the 8th of June the Opera of the National Theatre presented Smetana's *Dalibor* and *The Bartered Bride*, Dvořák's *Dimitri*, and Fibich's *The Courtships of Pelopos*. The immense success of *The Bartered Bride* meant that Šebor's *The Hussite Bride* and Bendl's *Lejla* were squeezed out of the programme; the theatre management decided to exploit the success of *The Bartered Bride* and sacrifice the two other Czech operas, and as history has shown, they did the right thing. On exactly the same day that the little report on the direct transmission of *Dalibor* was published in the *Fremden-Blatt*, *The Bartered Bride* was performed for the fourth time. The youngest of the emperor's brothers, Ludwig Victor, did not have the best reputation, and the Habsburg court was always having to smooth over his homosexual scandals, but his interest in art was undeniable. His visit to the exhibition was, of course, a matter of protocol and if the correspondent of the *Fremden-Blatt* reported that he looked at the Czech exhibition before the English and French it does not necessarily mean that he was expressing any particular favour for Czechs. The inclusion of the Czech section in the visit and the report was given merely by the fact that Bohemia was part of the monarchy. Nonetheless, Ludwig Victor's interest in the Czech exhibition may have been genuine. A year later he attended a staging of *The Bartered Bride* in the Theatre Na Václavce in which the Czech soprano Anna Veselá was playing as a replacement. The visit of the Princess Stephanie, widow of the Crown Prince Rudolf whom some Czechs would have greatly welcomed as successor to the throne was also probably more than a merely marginal affair. In the

1890s Czechs were becoming a strong element in the monarchy, and one that had to be taken into account. Their music helped in this respect, because a nation with such a talent was contributing to the "image" of the state.

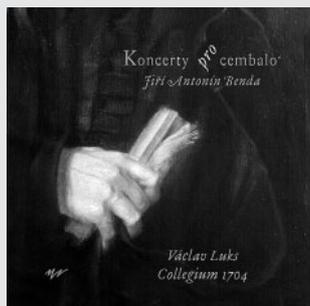
Bedřich Smetana therefore presided not just at the birth of modern Czech music, Czech national opera and much else with which we associate him, but also at the birth of the first experiments in distance transmission of music. We may therefore identify the first specific Czech singers whose voices floated though the ether as Anna Veselá, who sang Jiřka (she also sang Mařenka in the exhibition *Bartered Bride* and became the darling of the Viennese public), Vladislav Florjanský as Dalibor, Olga Parová-Zikeová as Milada, Václav Viktorín as King Vladislav, František Hýnek as the prisoner Beneš, Karel Veselý as Vitek and Jan Skramlík as Budivoj.

The firm that carried out this historic experiment in Austria was the Austro-Hungarian company Deckert & Homolka, founded in 1872 with offices in Vienna and Budapest. Few would guess that we still encounter this firm today. In 1908 it merged with the Swedish firm Ericsson, founded in 1876. From 1911 it then existed as Ericsson Oesterreichische Elektrizitäts AG and underwent further changes in output and organisation, but all still in the field of "telephony" and radiophonics. In 1919 the building councillor Eduard Schrack entered the game. He began to manufacture radio receivers, gained a license for the whole country and is considered the founder of the Austrian radio industry. In 1939 he purchased all the Ericsson shares and acquired authorisation to introduce a telephone networks well. Schrak's son Harald followed in his father's footsteps and in the sixties one of his achievements was to install fully electronic systems in hotels and hospitals. Co-operation with the mother firm Ericsson had various ups and downs, but has lasted to this day, since 2002 as Ericsson Austria GmbH. One of the most recent feats in the more than century-long life of the firm is the creation of the Mobilkom Austria network, one of the first to connect up three countries – Austria, Germany and Switzerland. And somewhere at the very beginning of this process of connection people heard in the ear pieces the opening chorus of Smetana's *Dalibor* "Today the judgment will be pronounced..."

Expanded German version printed as part of the study *"Miscellanea Smetaniana"* in: *Miscellanea theatralia. Sborník statí Adolfo Scherlovi k osmdesátinám [A Collection of Essays Presented to Adolf Scherl for his Eightieth Birthday]*, Divadelní ústav Praha [Theatre Institute Prague] 2005.



Bedřich Smetana



Jan Antonín Benda

Concertos for Harpsichord Obligato, Two Violins, Viola and Cello

Collegium 1704: Václav Luks – harpsichord, musical director, Lenka Koubková, Jan Hádek – violins, Michal Kuchařík – viola, Libor Mašek – cello. Production: Vítězslav Janda. Text: Czech, Eng. Recorded: 11/2004, 1/2005, Waldorf School, Příbram. TT: 69:49. DDD. 1 CD Arta F10133 (distribution 2HP Production).

The new CD from the Czech company Arta offers listeners four of the concertos by Jiří Antonín Benda. Although he was born in Bohemia, all the works presented were written in Germany (very probably in the 1780s), where the Benda family successively emigrated (as was commonplace in musical circles for much of our history). Perhaps it is to this move that we owe the musical content of Benda's concertos for harpsichord obligato, two violins, viola and cello, which are a distinctive synthesis of the musical currents that had an effect on Benda abroad.

As musical director of the **Collegium 1704** ensemble, with which he specialises in authentic historical interpretation, **Václav Luks** has approached the works with admirable feeling for more than just the external side of the music, that is to say for differences of tempo, the terraced dynamics and specific features of articulation of the individual parts. In comparison with some older recordings, Benda's concertos are here offered in a more natural, even a more musical form, aspiring to far more than just the rhythmic precision bordering on military severity that one encounters on certain recordings made using modern instruments. On the contrary, Václav Luks's Benda shines with deep knowledge and understanding of the customs of the time both in terms of interpretation, and in relation to the inner charge and message of the works of music (Luks is also the author of an interestingly conceived text in the booklet). When listening to the recording I constantly had to stop myself giving precedence to the sound of the harpsichord. The fact that Luks is technically so adept is in my view something to be merely "taken for granted" in the background. What the solo harpsichord shows in particular, however, is that the performer plays his instrument (a French copy made by the firm *Tečička – Hüttel – Šeřl*) not just with great musicality, but bringing to bear a great range of erudition "historical authenticity" of the highest degree. The delicate agogics woven into all the solo sections of the harpsichord part result in a kind of pure, genuine communicativeness. This is scarcely to say that the violinists **Lenka Koubková** and **Jan Hádek**, the violist **Michal Kuchařík** and the cellist **Libor Mašek**, all of them also playing on copies of old instruments, do not deserve appreciation. On the contrary, their marvellously integrated play and mutual musical empathy are here once again a kind of mark of professionalism that perhaps needs no further comment. The faithful and sensitive imitative "responses" of the performers, their unerring sense of what is fundamental in the musical tissue of the work, the "unisono", refined rounded off phrases – all these are attributes that enhance the recording (I have the feeling that the ensemble did not use the publication from the MAB edition for the concertos). This year their leader is tackling an ambitious project made up of the supreme sacred works of Johann Sebastian Bach, and so perhaps it would not be out of place here to thank the ensemble for this time offering listeners the music of a Czech composer and so helping to strengthen our national values.

TEREZA KIBICOVÁ



Gabriela Beňačková

Arias

Gabriela Beňačková – soprano, Czech Philharmonic, Orchestra of the National Theatre and its Choir, Orchestra of the Janáček Opera in Brno, Bohumil Gregor, Václav Neumann, Zdeněk Košler, Sir Charles Mackerras, František Jílek – conductors. Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., French, Czech. Recorded: 1978-1997, Rudolfinum Prague, National Theatre Prague, Janáček Opera Brno. Published: 2005. TT: 74:06. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3853-2.

Verdi, Puccini, Tchaikovsky, Smetana, Dvořák and Janáček – This is the order in which selected recordings from the discography of **Gabriela Beňačková** have been set. These are all Supraphon recordings made over a period of almost twenty years. They are proof of the singer's unaging sovereign mastery and stylistic range of style. Her exceptional voice is a delight, but what is essential is the spirit of her singing, which we always believe, whether she is playing Verdi's Leonora from *The Force of Destiny*, Desdemona from *Othello*, Puccini's *Tosca*, Cho-cho-san or Manon, Tchaikovsky's outstanding Liza, Smetana's Mařenka (one of the most charming we have ever heard), Libuše (relatively less heroic, but all the more exalted and feminine for that – the prayer from the 1st Act with the chorus forms the centre of the recording not only in terms of length, but conceptually. It is a live recording from the historic performance for the re-opening of the National Theatre), Dvořák's Rusalka or above all her uniquely interpreted roles in Janáček – *Káta* and *Jenůfa*. In the scene from *Libuše* she is joined by other soloists **Eva Děpoltová** and **Věra Soukupová**, Boris in *Káťa Kabanová* was sung by **Petr Straka** a *Laca* in *Jenůfa* by **Vilém Přibyl** (he is present here for just a few minutes. But they remind us yet again what an outstanding asset he was to Czech opera). The Janáček parts in particular as sung by Gabriela Beňačková are wonderfully moving and capture the full range of the composer's female characters. Some scenes have been "trimmed", unavoidably in selections of this kind, but here we are particularly conscious how "barbaric" this is when we want to carry on listening. Fortunately the art of Gabriela Beňačková is available on complete opera recordings as well – although, couldn't there have been more?

VLASTA REITTEREROVÁ

In this country recordings of Dvořák's symphonic poems on Erben's *Bouquet* cycle are quite frequent. Supraphon can boast recordings by Talich, Chalabala, Neumann and Gregor, Zdeněk Košler recorded Dvořák's Erben poems with the Slovak Philharmonic for Panton, Petr Vronský with the Janáček Philharmonic for Bonton, and Jaroslav Krombholc, Vladimír Válek and Stanislav Bogunia for the Czech Radio Recordings Library. These are very popular pieces with the Czech public. As a whole they are considered as an unofficial cycle or even a kind of lyrical, or better, balladic counterpart to Smetana's *Má vlast [My Country]*. In foreign catalogues, on the other hand, and unlike the complete sets of Dvořák's symphonies and concertos, we find it only occasionally and then rarely in complete form (as with Kubelík). Usually one or other of the poems is added to other usually longer scores (all four have been presented in this way by Harmoncourt, for example).

Opinions have differed on the programmatic pieces of Dvořák's since the times of Hannslick. On some occasions they have attracted serious criticism – for example alleged lack of formal integration and tightness, and problematic places from the point of view of dramatic sense. This is why the Dvořák symphonic poems are played altogether only on the radio, and concert organisers shy away from the entire cycle. This is a great pity! The real difficulty does not lie in weaknesses or problems of composition (these are mostly highly debatable), but in the performers themselves.

To guarantee success and understanding they need first and foremost to really get inside the fragile but cruel bal-ladic world of the Erben collection, enhanced by Dvořák's masterly treatment. Only then can these musical jewels shine in a perfect and persuasive synthesis. The proof can be found in some of the Czech complete sets mentioned above (especially Talich's, Chalabala's and Krombholc's) and this new and remarkable recording from Berlin. In cases of pieces very closely identified with national tradition can often happen that a performer from elsewhere will feel the music differently in many respects and produce something unacceptable to the orthodox guards of identity (this was the reason why many listeners, and not only Czechs, were cool towards Harnoncourt's *Má vlast*).

Sir Simon Rattle handles the Dvořák poems in the same way as his Czech colleagues (perhaps with the exception of the illogically frenzied tempo at the end of the *Golden Spinning Wheel*). He doesn't look for any specific interpretation, but modestly stays with Dvořák and Erben. He is more a master of detail than of large passages but with those individual details he deals extremely tastefully, without stormy emotions and sentiment, but with warmth and sincere feeling. Apart from fidelity to Dvořák and Erben's original, however, he brings something else that is extremely interesting, underlining Dvořák's oft-mentioned "impressionism" in a series of uniquely carefully worked passages (dreadful tension – the episode of the cor anglais and bass clarinet in *The Noonday Witch*, the mother's warning – string chromatics in *The Water Goblin*). Rattle has a peerless partner in the **Berlin Philharmonic**. Hearing extremely familiar Dvořák scores played with technical perfection both by individuals and whole instrumental groups (the grand organ-like brass in the forest scene in the Golden Spinning Wheel) is a real treat! It is interesting to follow the transformations that have taken place in the once "definitively stable" orchestra of Karajan with its perfectly practiced imposing, but sometimes excessively heavily weighted sound. Thanks to its subsequent principal conductors (recently Claudio Abbado, now Simon Rattle) today the Berlin Philharmonic is impressive not just for its perfection and technical standard but also for its modern sensibility and flexibility, which allows it to carry off such sensitive and specific tasks as presenting internationally relatively little known pieces. This recording of Dvořák's poems has not fitted onto one CD, but is far from filling up two CDs (it is a pity that they could not be filled up for example by the three programmatic preludes *V přírodě [In the Countryside]*, *Karneval [Carnival]* and *Othello*). The order of individual poems that the conductor has chosen is also rather peculiar – on the one hand understandable (the suggestion of something like a "sonata" cycle?), but on the other very debatable. We are used to an order based on opus numbers, and traditionally feel that the ravishing catharsis of *The Dove* is the ideal conclusion to the whole cycle. In Rattle's order, however it is followed by *The Noonday Witch* and *The Water Goblin*, which Rattle moreover conceives in rather intimate chamber terms and without major drama (where have Dvořák's wonderfully written parts for percussion disappeared?) But the essential good news is the fact that as in the case of Mackerras's *Rusalka* a few years ago, Rattle's Erben Symphonic Poems have found in EMI an edition that will bring them the international popularity they deserve.

BOHUSLAV VÍTEK



Antonín Dvořák

The Symphonic Poems on Erben's Cycle of Poems Kytice [Bouquet]

Berliner Philharmoniker, Sir Simon Rattle. Production: Stephen Johns. Text: Eng., Ger., French: 2004. Published: 2005. TT: 48:48 + 35:00. DDD. 2 CD EMI Classics 7243 5 58019 2 0 (EMI).

Bohuslav Martinů's quartets provide us with a unique overview of his development, since they do not form an integral group but are instead very different superb works from different stages in his career. In these three (out of seven) successive quartets, written between 1929–1938 this is more evident than anywhere else. What is common to all these quartets, and brought out through the excellent performance of the **Emperor Quartet**, is an immense musicality in the sense of melodic and expressive imagination, each quartet embodying a different but always fully thought out form and ability to captivate.

The ensemble has rehearsed the quartets from the new critical editions and combines the purified original score with its own clear concept. The fifth four-movement quartet, which comes first on the CD, is a work linked with Martinů's student and love – Vítězslava Kaprálová. The connection with Janáček's *Listy důvěrné [Intimate Letters]* is not just external, but perhaps distantly present in the music. The *1st Movement* is exceedingly passionate, but the ensemble very pregnantly discriminates and points up the individual parts without undermining the overall mood. By contrast the *2nd Movement* is restrained, and the performers are very cautious with any kind of romanticism, although this does not mean that the recording as a whole lacks it. Martinů himself later had his doubts about this quartet precisely because its non-musical content was so manifest. The *4th Quartet* was written a year before the *5th*, in 1937, and is no less exciting. Musically it is perhaps more thorough and unambiguous in style and form, which is on the borders of Neo-Classicism. We hear a motoric movement (*1st Movement*), lyrical places (*3rd Movement*) and great drama (*4th Movement*). The *Quartet no. 3* from the end of the 1920s is actually the "most modern". Striking treatments of sound with frequent pizzicato effects and other less usual forms of play are pressed here into a mere 12 minutes and a three-movement form. These features would not emerge with anything like such clarity were it not for the excellent conception and approach of the British Emperor Quartet. The whole recording is in fact distinctive for clarity, concreteness, sharp never foggy entrances and a great feeling for the integrity of the whole.

EVA VELICKÁ



Bohuslav Martinů

String Quartets nos. 3, 4, 5

Emperor String Quartet. Production: Robert Suff. Text: Eng., Ger., French. Recorded: 8/2002, Holy Trinity Church, Wentworth, South Yorkshire. Published: 2004. TT: 61:10. DDD. 1 CD BIS-CD-1389 (distribution Euromusica).

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 – 1975) is one of the composers who determined the course taken by music in the 20th century. He started very early, writing his *1st Piano Trio* at the age of 17. His lifelong output covered a huge range of genres of classical music including film music but from that early beginning he showed great individuality with strong distinctive features, unusual technical maturity (he was himself an outstanding pianist) and enormous powers of musical expression. Naturally his *1st Piano Trio* of 1923 still bears the traces of the predecessors and teacher admired by the young composer. Here we find the influences of Tchaikovsky, but also of Scriabin and Glazunov. The romantic twelve-minute piece is sentimental, but also merry and in places appropriately urgent. The performers have understood everything down to the smallest detail and we can perhaps say that they felt an affinity with the young composer's mind. Shostakovich was later to develop and deepen everything to be found in the *1st Piano Trio* in masterly fashion (This was a piece actually completed by the composer's pupil Boris Tishchenko, but the fact makes no difference to the contention). Shostakovich's graduation piece at Petrograd Conservatory – his *1st Symphony* aroused such interest and admiration at its premiere in 1926 that it literally opened the doors of the world to the composer. He was then to react quite clearly in his work to his period of successes and frustrations under the oppressive Stalin regime. Naturally he invested his deepest reflections in his wartime works, of which the most famous is the *7th Leningrad Symphony*. His *Second Piano Trio* written in 1944 falls into this cruel period, although



Dmitri Shostakovich

Piano Trio no. 1 op. 8, Piano Trio no. 2 in E minor op. 67, Seven Songs (Alexander Blok) op. 127

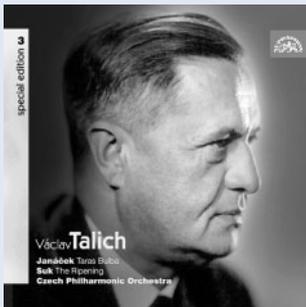
Artemiss Trio: Adéla Štajnochrová – violin, Alžběta Vlčková – cello, Jana Holmanová – piano, Alžběta Poláčková – soprano. Production: Jiří Štílec. Text Eng. Ger., Czech. Recorded: 10, 11/2004, Lichtenštejn Palace, Martinů Hall, Prague. Published: 2005. TT: 63:17. 1 CD Arco Diva UP 0069-2 131 (distribution Classic).

by this time Shostakovich together with other artists had been moved to the wartime rear. In this “great” trio, the **Artemiss Trio** is so expressively concentrated that in places the interpretation sounds raw and rough, but this was just the way that the composer conceived the piece, for the Nazi frenzy seemed to be endless. The piece is rightly considered one of his masterpieces. At its Prague premiere in the second year of the Prague Spring Festival in 1947 Shostakovich played himself with D. Oistrakh and M. Sádlo. It should be said that the young members of the Artemiss Trio have definitely not been cowed by this brilliant precedent, but have seen it more as a challenge for their own conception of how the work should be performed.

Shostakovich dedicated the vocal-instrumental suite *Seven Songs on the Poetry of A. Blok* to Galina Vishnyevska, the wife of Mstislav Rostropovich. At the premiere in 1967 they performed it with I. Oistrakh and M. Vainberg. Shostakovich’s lyrical forcefulness and economical rhythmic and melodic element give peculiar power to verses full of symbolism and tragedy. All four instruments – human voice, cello, violin and piano – grow out of single stem and especially in the piano part reach out into the darkest sides of human life. The influence of Mahler is detectable here, but it is Shostakovich’s Mahler or, if you like, Mahler after more than fifty years.

Shostakovich was and remains a great composer with a huge impact on the development of modern music. The unique essence of his musical vocabulary and style is present in all his pieces, but as is logical they appear to us in most concentrated form, emphasised by simplification in his chamber music. The rather unusual choice of pieces for the CD, each written in a different major phase of the composer’s career, brings out this element to the full. The Artemiss Trio is young and talented, as we know already from preceding recordings and many concerts and competitions, Shostakovich evidently “suits” the ensemble, even if at times the expressiveness is almost over the top (for example in the end of the *2nd Trio* or in the song *The Storm*), but that was just how Shostakovich was: his life was so full of struggle and emotion. I would offer a mild criticism only in relation to what are somewhat insufficiently nuanced dynamics, although on the other hand, there are some internally fully sung passages. In terms of technique and above all interpretation the members of the ensemble have given their all to the pieces. This is equally true of the soprano **Alžběta Poláčková**, who performed difficult songs that make extreme demands in range and expression with honour.

MARTA TUŽILOVÁ



Václav Talich – Special Edition 3

Leoš Janáček: *Taras Bulba*

Josef Suk: *Zrání [Ripening]*

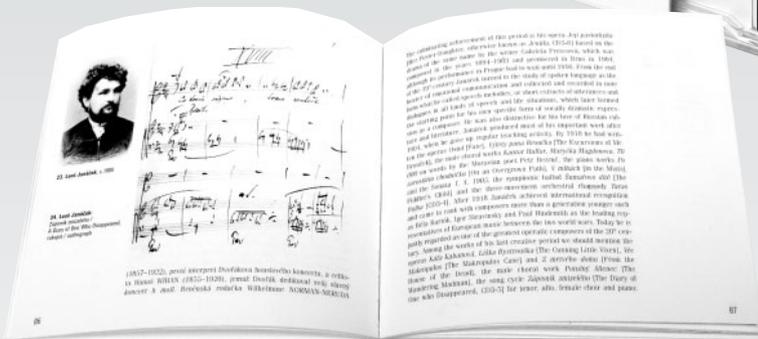
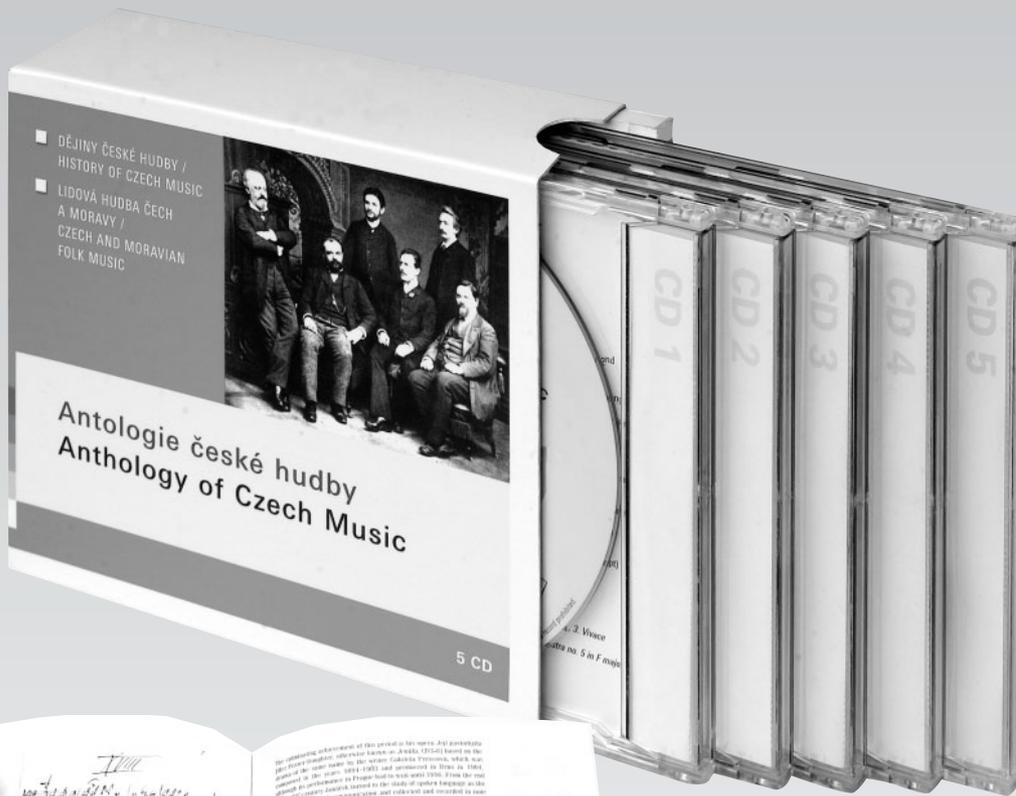
The Women’s Choir of the Czech Choir, Choirmaster Jan Kühn, the Czech Philharmonic, Václav Talich, assistant Zdeněk Bilek. Production: Jana Gonda, Petr Kadlec, Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., French, Czech. Recorded: 1954, 1956. Published: 2005. ADD Mono. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3823-2.

The third CD in the new Talich series offers two titles that are entirely fundamental to the history of modern Czech music. Both recordings were for years considered to be model and without competitors, they were the only ones broadcast on the radio and what was once the only Czechoslovak recording company hesitated to make new recordings (*Taras Bulba* was recorded with Karel Ančerl in 1961, and *Zrání [Ripening]* with Václav Neumann not until 1984!).

Suk’s musical poem *Zrání* played a key role in the life of the conductor himself. Its ravishing premiere immediately after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, at the end of October 1918, ensured Talich’s appointment as the new principal conductor of the Philharmonic and so opened the most celebrated chapter in the history of the **Czech Philharmonic**. **Václav Talich** was a close friend of Josef Suk and a great propagator of the composer’s work throughout his life. Interestingly, it was with Suk’s *Ripening* that Talich’s career as a conductor ended as well! And precisely with this recording, surrounded by so many memorable incidents and accidents – from the huge number of rehearsals for the studio recording session in the Rudolfinum (more than the today unimaginable number of ten) to the rather unconventional end of the story. The tired musicians asked the conductor for a run-through of the whole work and quietly persuaded the recording team headed by the unforgettable sound master **František Burda** to record the “rehearsal”. The result was marvellous – in one go, without cuts, so convincing and overwhelming that the conductor, naturally after detailed consideration – signed. All that was left were small additions with the concluding women’s chorus that were made in Talich’s presence by his pupil **Zdeněk Bilek**. It is gratifying that both the text in the booklet and the basic information about the recording (all provided by **Petr Kadlec**) mention this fact and for the first time after so many years the conductor Bilek and the women of the **Czech Choir** directed by **Jan Kühn** are duly credited. Although today we have more than one recording of the work in more modern digital form, this legendary Talich creation continues to give the impression of a peerless ambitious fresco and – despite the mono-recording, it is presented in remarkable sound dimensions.

Talich’s interpretation of Janáček’s *Taras Bulba* also has its distinctive features – both positive and somewhat problematic. Even after so many years we are captivated by its immensely dramatic character and burning emotional charge. In this respect the later legendary recording by Ančerl did not improve on Talich. But a question-mark continues to hang over Talich’s many retouches, however well meant. These are particularly evident in the instrumentation (for example in the percussion parts in the 3rd Movement). Although there are less here than in the suite from *The Cunning Little Vixen*, they still affect the resulting overall picture so much that in some places they sound alien and “unJanáčekian”. This was one reason why Ančerl’s new recording, respecting the composer’s original score, sounded so completely convincing at the beginning of the 1960s. But a maestro of the stature of Václav Talich has a right to his mistakes. The future has fully confirmed them.

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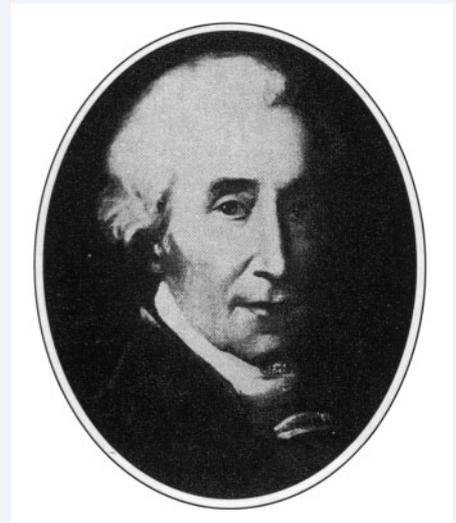
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wenceslao pichl

(1741–1805)

was he a member of the bologna
accademia filarmonica?



When the talented singer, violinist, composer, capellmeister and music historian **Václav (Wenceslao) Pichl** (1741–1805) was born in Bechyně in South Bohemia in 1741, he was entering the political and musical Europe of the Empress Marie Theresa and the Prussian King Frederick II, who were just making the Peace of Breslau. The same year saw the birth of the composers A. M. Grétry, J. G. Krebs, A. L. Tomasini, Jean-Pierre Duport and B. Giacometti. Händel was completing his oratorio *The Messiah* in 23 days and J. Ph. Rameau finishing his famous harpsichord cycle *Pieces de clavecin en concerts*. Vitus Bering crossed from Russia into Alaska and Anders Celsius introduced the decimal system for measuring temperature.

When Pichl died aged 64 in 1805, Napoleon was just about to win at Austerlitz and the American expedition of Lewis & Clark was approaching the Pacific. It was the year when Friedrich von Schiller and Luigi Boccherini died. Pichl was still alive when the deaf Beethoven conducted his *Eroica* in Vienna, but did not live to see the October premiere of his *Fidelio*.

On a visit to Prague in 1809 the Berlin composer and musical traveller Johann F. Reichardt noted that spring came earlier to Bohemia than to Vienna, referred to a much earlier visit in 1773 and quoted Risbek's view that *"Bohemia is a promised land and has a wonderful climate!"* And the musical reputation of Bohemia? In Berlin the composer Reichardt had married the daughter of another Czech, František Benda, and he knew about the flood of Czech musicians in the orchestras at German courts. He was most probably the "Professore di Musica di Germania" and "il mio amico a Berlino", whom Pichl in a letter recommended for membership in the Bologna Accademia (1781).

We can generally rely on the non-partisan assessment of the development of music "in Germany" (Bohemia was considered a part of Germany) from the pen of the correspondent of the Leipzig newspaper *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* Johann K. F.

Triest (1764–1810) in 1801. He confirms the claim made by the English musical historian Charles Burney in the early 1780s, that Bohemia was the *"conservatory of Europe"*. Triest asserts that alongside Saxony, Schleswig and Swabia, Bohemia is a province with *"a natural disposition for music"* and elsewhere adds that *"people in Vienna, Dresden, Prague, Leipzig, Munich and in Hamburg...very much appreciated and supported the art of music"*. The importance of Prague and the Bohemian Lands for the musical culture of the Austrian monarchy is indirectly illustrated in *Oesterreichische National-Encyclopädie* of 1835/36, a six-volume encyclopaedia that contains as many as 90 (or respectively 155) entries on musicians born in Bohemia or working there up to 1835/36. According to the *Künstlerlexikon* compiled by the Prague Premonstratensian J. G. Dlabacz in 1815, out of 951 professional musicians between the years 1740 and 1810, a total of 409 were already abroad, 360 of whom remained there and 49 returned home. 106 of them worked in Austria, 79 of these in Vienna. The next most frequent destination for Bohemian musicians was Germany (69 names), specifically Dresden and Berlin, followed by the Tsar's capella in St. Petersburg (44). In the Esterházy Capella under the direction of J. Haydn in the years 1781–1790, 14 out of the 23–30 members were from Bohemia.

Václav Pichl's musical career was typical for Bohemia: he gained his musical education from the local choir and cantor in Bechyně, followed by the Jesuit College in Březnice and then Prague University. He studied counterpoint with Josef Seeger and played the violin in the choir of the Týn Church on Old Town Square in Prague. In a letter of 1782 he wrote, *"I am grieving for my first teacher, Mr. Josef Seeger, who died a month ago in Prague. Apart from his great services to musical art he was a cavalier. In Seeger Prague has lost an organist in a class of his own, who played truly excellently... On the organ he was a pupil of the Minorite P. Bohuslav [Čer-*

nohorský, 1684–1742] and in counterpoint of [J.] Zach and [F.] Tůma."² Pichl's letter is the only one that provides evidence for the existence of what is known as the Černohorský School, the Prague composing line and the Italian orientation of not only Pichl but also his contemporary J. Mysliveček.

When the Hungarian Bishop Patačič was looking for musicians for his orchestra he sent his capellmeister Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf to Prague as well. Here the director of the Prague theatre orchestra and great admirer of Mozart Strobach introduced him to Václav Pichl among other musicians. From 1765 to 1769 Pichl then became violinist and deputy to the capellmeister Ditters in Adam Patačič's episcopal capella in Velký Varadín in Hungary (today Oradea in Rumania). Dittersdorf and Pichl were close friends. When both fell in love with young girls at the court and Dittersdorf was rejected by the father of the bride, Pichl comforted him. In his *Memoirs* Dittersdorf also wrote that *"the words of this kind and clever young man had more effect on my than the wise advice of the Bishop"*. Later it was Pichl who took it worst of all when the Bishop decided to dissolve the Varadín Cappella (1769). Before departure Ditters organised the betrothal and wedding of his friend Pichl and Pichl's beloved. They then travelled together to Pest and to Vienna,³ where Ditters managed to find a position for Pichl as first violinist in the theatre orchestra: *"The pay was only 450 guilders, but Pichl took the position with great joy. He was only employed in the evenings, and so he had the whole day free and could earn extra money by private teaching. I was glad that I had managed to settle my friend well with an assured income of 1050 guilders annually."*⁴ Between the 1st of April 1774 and the 28th of February 1775 Pichl also earned money from the budget of the Vienna Hofburg Theater for transcribing two Vaňhal and many other symphonies.⁵

Pichl then helped Dittersdorf negotiate the performance of his oratorio *Esther* in Vienna to benefit the Institute of Musicians'



The Cover of Pichl's Three violin concertos op. 3

Widows. This was an institution founded and run by F. L. Gassman (originally from Most in Bohemia) and Ditters actually come to the performance from Silesia with the Bishop of Breslau. The Emperor Josef II attended all the rehearsals before Christmas 1773 as did Pichl, who conveyed to Dittersdorf how much the emperor appreciated his oratorio, liking it even better than Gassman's or Haas's.

Ditters had been back in his place of work at Jánský vrch (Javorník in Northern Moravia), for six weeks when Pichl wrote to tell him that a place in the cappella in Vienna was free after Gassman's departure and that the emperor definitely expected Ditters to apply for it. But Ditters replied that he was expecting a pay rise from the bishop, and so excused himself from thus reunion of musical friends in Vienna. The emperor was rather annoyed, perhaps because Pichl's negotiations had not been skilful, but he heard Pichl's instrumental pieces including his solo violin sonata in 1784 on a visit to Milan and "they were kindly and warmly received". Breitkopf's publishing house in Leipzig as early as 1773 was offering a piece called *Sinfonia da Pichl als Ditters*, which shows that as an expression of friendship and a tribute to his musical model Pichl had written a sinfonia in the spirit of Dittersdorf. Ditters made a name for himself with his 12 programmatic sinfonias based on Ovids *Metamorphoses* and in Pichl's output we also find a cycle of sinfonias with the names of Greek muses: *Terpsichore, Euterpe, Uranie, Clio, Melpomene, Calliope, Thalia* and *Polyhymnia* (cca 1764–1769). Non-musical themes of antiquity also appear in other symphonies by Pichl, such as *Diana, Apollo, Pallas, Flora, Saturnus* and so on, but the programmatic element is much less specific than with Ditters.

Like his friend, Pichl twice refused the offer of a position in the cappella in St. Petersburg.⁶ Maria Theresa then recommend-

ed him in place of Mozart for the post of chamber capellmeister, composer and chamberlain for the Austrian regent of Lombardy in Milan, the Archduke Ferdinand d'Este. Pichl travelled to Milan in 1777 and stayed in the Archduke's service for twenty years until 1796. First of all he held the title of *Doorman* and *Directeur en Musique* (directore of music) and lived in the Casa Lampugnana near the church of S. Protaso ad Monachos. Later in his correspondence he signed himself *Wenceslao Pichl direttore di Musica di S[ua]A[ltezza] Reale Arciduca Ferdinando*. Music was played in the archduke's chambers daily, especially in the presence of guests, whether from home or abroad. Pichl travelled with the court through Italy (Mantova, Monza) and won respect and friends in centres of music throughout the land, as Vojtěch Jírovec wrote in his memoirs: "Pichl achieved great fame as a composer of symphonies, quartets and church music, and at that time was one of the leading European composers."⁷ In Milan he also seems to fulfil the role of musical agent for Mikuláš Esterházy. His pieces were copied and performed in Esterházy by J. Haydn (Pichl called him *mio amico*) and copies and autographs of them can be found in musical collections all over Europe. Pichl's pieces have often been attributed to other composers. His *Missa solennis* for mixed choir, soloists, strings, 2 oboes, 2 trumpets, tympani and basso continuo, for example, was attributed to Haydn.⁸ Conversely, three of Vaňhal's⁹ symphonies were published by Guera in Lyon (1782/83) under the title page "by Misterys Haydn and Pichl".

According to his own list he wrote as many as 700 compositions! In 1784 he sent the learned Padre Martini his portrait, entrusting it to L. Cherubini. He kept up contacts with the composers he had met in Mantua (1779) and the Bologna Accademia Filarmonica. After starting a correspondence with Padre Martini in Bologna, Pichl became the first Czech composer to grasp the importance of factography and musical historiography, and he then made an active contributor to Martini's project for a history of music. "If some treatise, praise or celebration of the art of music passes into your hands, by any author and on any theme, I humbly beg you to send it to me", wrote Pichl in Latin in his first letter to Bologna in May 1778, and he did not forget to tell Padre Martini that "My Most Royal Archbishop loves you tenderly and values you"¹⁰ In Italy he wrote works on Czech musicians, but these have unfortunately not survived, and nor has his Czech translation of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. Pichl's bibliographical labours and encyclopaedic thoroughness found further application when he wrote more than 900 entries for Dlabáč's *Künstlerlexikon* (Prague 1815). No active composers or musicians had ever produced this kind of work on such a scale since the time of Matheson.

Pichl wrote as many as 150 quartets and his symphonies in frequency of performance and style figured alongside those of Dittersdorf and Haydn (in his middle period). His music was printed from 1779 by publish-

ers in Berlin, Offenbach, Paris, Lyons, Vienna, Amsterdam, Leipzig and Hamburg. Towards the end of the century Pichl had more of a reputation as a composer of church music and violin concertos. In particular his cycle *Cento variazioni*, op 11, 1787 (A Hundred Variations), dedicated to the virtuoso Pietro Nardini, is considered a perfect anthology of technical tasks for virtuoso violin. It is not surprising that Jírovec (probably wrongly) identified him as a teacher of N. Paganini.

For a friend in Berlin (Reichardt?) Pichl obtained transcriptions of the operas of Leonardo Leo from Padre Martini. In a Latin letter of the 13th of June 1778 he listed four of his operas (*Adriano in Siria, Artaserse, Olympiade, Il Lucio Vero*¹¹) as well as 12 Cantate by F. Gasparini and a printed version of psalms *Estro Poetico armonico* by B. Marcello. He was not satisfied with the mere transcription of arias, but repeatedly asked Martini for copies of the whole opera, i.e. including recitatives.

Pichl showed notable interest in music theory in a letter of the 5th of August 1780, where he referred to a printed letter of P. Giovenal Sacchi [1726–1789] that contained a criticism of Rameau's concept of basso continuo.¹² Pichl expressed doubts as to whether two or more parallel fifths in a composition might not be unpleasant sounding. He turned to the authority Martini and asked him for an opinion on why this was. "According to my feeble knowledge it seems to me that the author [Sacchi] is right, putting more emphasis on metaphysical than on physical and mathematical reasons."¹³ T. Straková's edition of Pichl's correspondence does not, however, give the draft of P. Martini's answer to Pichl, in which he says, "Most honourable and respected Mister Pichl. Just a few days ago I obtained the printed letter of the most honourable P. Giovenal Sacchi, and as yet I have read only half of it. I have gathered from this letter a singular sharpness of mind, and great erudition used to take up the position defended; this position is supposed to cause confusion to all who raise certain proposals, and to ensure that two fifths be forbidden, because they are dissonant. This is a point I know never to have been treated of in full, and someone other than the rare talent of P. Sacchi will be needed to take up such a great task. I beg you to understand this from my side with all respect."¹⁴

For the moment another two of Pichl's letters have escaped the researchers because they are not in the Bologna collection of Padre Martini, but in the convent archive of St. Francis. The first is addressed to P. Martini and dated the 15th of December 1783. "Your Honour rates me too highly when you wish to exchange your incomparable works for my wretched musical parts, which although they are sought out by the printers, in my view do not deserve to be published. Even less do they deserve to be kept in your celebrated philharmonic collection."

Pichl collected compositions of the *Miserere* from important composers. He

Ma anche, perche io so, aver quella, tanti anni
ammata corte di composeri la, e, personalmente
e di reverirla con il devotissimo rispetto, che
io ho circa la Gi. Lei. Virtù, e merito.
chi fra tanto io honore di dicitarsi nomi
con ogni stima, immutabilmente d'Opera
di V. S. P. Q.

Milano ut supra.

Spespresso Amadore
Mendelcio Pichl

P.S. Io sto compiangendo l'unico Primo Maestro, intal
dell'Europe Schert morto un mese fa' a Braga
questo proveretto era oltre il suo gran merito, nella arte
di musica, anche un galant'uomo. Braga ha perso
con lui un Organista in suo genere di onore, veramente
insigne. questo valente uomo era capace di corare in
Organo sopra qualunq' difficile Tema dato di ad'improvviso
Fuga reale, con tutto il rigore, ed esattezza; avendo

mation on the course of his application. Furthermore, in 1784 Padre Martini died without having finished the fourth volume of his history of music. At any rate, Pichl's letter to Stanislav Mattei shows that he could not have been a member of the Accademia Filarmonica before 1783, as Allan Badley has suggested, referring to 1782.¹⁵

¹ Reichardt, J. F.: Vertraute Briefe geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien ... 1808–1809, Amsterdam 1810, Vol. 21, p. 198

² Straková, T.: Václav Pichl a jeho vztah k Gio. Bat. Martinimu, ČMM XLVII (1962), p. 184

³ Vzpomínky hudebníka XVIII. století ... diktoval K. Ditters z Dittersdorfu, SNKLHU Praha 1959, p. 115 and following..

⁴ Ibid. p. 130

⁵ Bryan, P.: Johann Wañhal, Viennese Symphonist, His Life and His Music Environment. Pendragon Press, NY 1997, p. 24

⁶ Straková, T., p. 166

⁷ The autobiography of Vojtěch Jírovec, ed. F. Bartoš, Topič edition in Praze 1940, p. 56

⁸ HÄGELE, F., Mario Schwarz: "Vorwort / Preface". Joseph Haydn. Missa solemnis für 4-stg. gem. Chor, Soli, Streicher, 2 Oboen, 2 Trompeten, Pauken und Basso continuo. Hrsg. von ~ und Mario Schwarz (Adliswil: Kunzelmann, 2003), S. [1–2].

⁹ Bryan, p. 112

¹⁰ Straková, p. 170

¹¹ Straková, p. 171 reads the name of the last opera as *Lucio Papirio*

¹² Tammaro/R, F.: Sacchi, Giovenale, Italian mathematician, music theorist and writer. From 1758 he taught rhetoric at the Collegio dei Nobili in Milan. He was in contact with Gerbert, Mattei,. Sacchi's printed letter *Delle quinte successive nel contrapunto e delle regole degli accompagnamenti* was published in Milan in 1780.

¹³ Straková, p. 180

¹⁴ Museo civico, Bologna, Raccolta P. Martini, sign. I.19.I.152a

¹⁵ Badley, A.: Wenzel Pichl, www.artaria.com/Composer/FullBios/BioPichl.htm [20.9.2005]

already had pieces from L. Leo, Palestrina, G. Allegri [!] and J. A. Hasse and asks Martini for others from his music collection. He promises to send more of his own vocal pieces and a portrait of Josef Haydn! It is not clear whether he owned the portrait or was able to get a copy made for Martini, but it is another confirmation of Pichl's relationships. He sends thanks on behalf of Padre Sacchi, his friend, who in Bologna learned various finesses and diversions that Pichl himself is now exploiting.

The second unknown Pichl letter is to M.R.P. Stanislav Mattei (1750–1825). This Minorite, Martini's pupil and friend, had been chosen in 1776 as his successor at St. Francis's in Bologna. The letter is undated, but given the content of the letter to P. Martini (20th December 1783) it was written and sent before the end of 1783. Pichl writes about

music "which was once my profession, and is not my entertainment and passion." He sends Mattei a *Gloria Pastorale* for two choirs and two organs for a judgment: "It will not be unknown to your V.P.R. that the famous Accademia di Bologna wishes to honour me with membership in the Philharmonic with the title *compositore*; in order to deserve this honour, I have been working on a Magnificat for eight parts and I shall send it to the learned academics." It seems that the questions to Martini about the interest of a "German friend" may have been Pichl's way of finding out about the procedure with a view to making a successful application of his own. In the end he made the application by letter, while Josef Mysliveček or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had still had to take written examinations in Bologna in person. We do not have any infor-

profiles

the man who planted trees

alois piños

at eighty

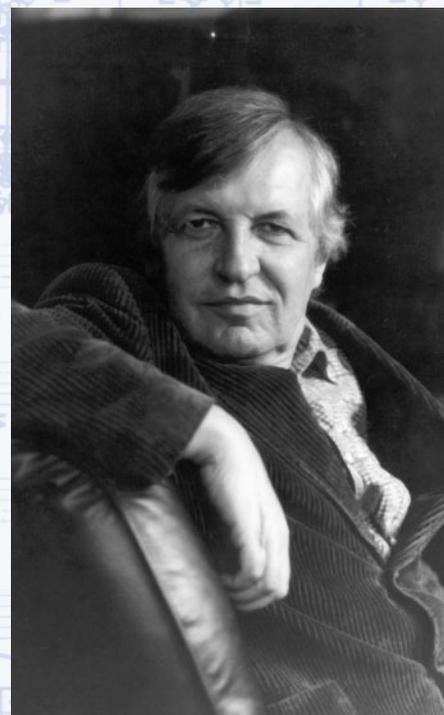
In the context of Czech music the composer Alois Piños occupies a quite exceptional position. His creative type is remote from what is known as “Czech music making”, and his output is more easily set in the context of rational or systems art, which in the Czech Republic is something represented more in fine art or poetry than in music. On the other hand Piños has never been concerned with strict order in itself, but with *play with logical principles*, often taken to the point of absurdity and so striking sparks of distinctive humour (especially in the literary texts that Piños also writes). Piños belongs to the founding generation of Czech New Music of the sixties, when he was one of its most striking protagonists. His work as a theorist and teacher has also been very important, and he has left a major mark on the history of Czech contemporary music. But of course his career as a composer is hardly over – Piños’s music shows both unending development and remarkable consistency, because it essentially springs from the same premise as at the beginning. The external expressions of his music constantly change, however, for if at the beginning what characterised it was a rough, dissonant sound, the grotesque, the bizarre and black humour, in later years subtle and fine grained levels have appeared, simplicity of sound, a new melodic quality, existential and spiritual themes.

The Heritage of Proud Spaniards

The old family of Piños came to Eastern Moravia from Barcelona after the Thirty Years War, when the Archbishop of Olomouc tried to settle his depopulated estates with hard-working Catholics from foreign countries – Spain, France and Italy.

Alois Piños was born on the 2nd of October 1925 in Vyškov in Moravia, into the family of a middle-school teacher Alois Piños, a doctor of classical philology who was also a skilful violinist and a keen devotee of music, especially choral singing. His mother Marie (née Jedličková) likewise came from a musical family, sang well and played the piano, while her cousin was the famous opera singer Maria Jeritz (Janáček’s Jenůfa in Vienna). He therefore inherited musicality from both sides of the family, and from his distant forebears vitality, unyieldingness, pride, a love of the sun and a fondness for Mediterranean culture.

Although Alois Piños showed a marked talent for music (perfect pitch, an exceptional musical memory) in early childhood, his interests were much broader and music remained only one of many. In his school years he was just as attracted by the exact and natural sciences, languages, literature and sport...He obtained a solid training in classic musical disciplines from his uncle Prokop Oberthor (a pupil of Antonín Dvořák), who was a military bandmaster and in fact the official composer of the Min-



istry of Defence in the First Republic. From childhood Alois Piños learned to play the piano and also experimented with composing. When he finished school his great affinity for nature led him to choose to study at the Forestry University. Family tradition played a role here as well, since his grandfather and uncle were forestry engineers. At the same time, however, his inclination towards music became stronger and so after getting his degree as a forestry engineer in 1949 he applied to the newly founded Janáček Academy of Performing Arts, where he embarked on composition studies with Jaroslav Kvapil. But the rather schematic teaching focused on Late Romantic style and the very conservative aesthetics did not satisfy him, and neither did the pressure of the time for “Socialist Realism”. Piños shared this attitude with his contemporaries Josef Berg (1927-1971) and Miloslav Ištvan (1927-1990). It was clear to all three of them that this was not the road they wanted to take. Fortunately in the later fifties information



about modern music in the West began to filter through into Czechoslovakia. People in Brno had the advantage of being able to hear the Vienna Radio well, and recordings, scores and books came in by other routes as well. Berg, Ištvan and Piňos formed a kind of study group and told each other about their external and internal discoveries, competing with each other in their ideas. It was a revolutionary period for them, when each of them was creating his own distinctive idiom as a composer. For Alois Piňos the crucial factor was getting to know the principles and techniques of rational composition and principles as they appeared in the music of the Second Viennese School, Béla Bartók and the composers of the Darmstadt Circle. He was especially captivated by Josef Matthias Hauer's set of six-tone tropes, which inspired him to develop his own theory of tone groups. From our perspective today it is no exaggeration to say that in this respect Piňos is one of our most distinguished Czech theorists: the systematic theory of tone groups that he elaborated represents a concise and sufficiently general theory that is valid for all music that works with any kind of combination of tones. This means that the various very diverse historical styles are only special cases of the application of tone groups, but at the same time the theory provides the basis for the emergence of new musical expressions on a practically unlimited scale. All these stimuli released in Piňos a wave of creativity, in which he could apply his rational and systematic temperament and his inexhaustible playfulness. Soon he managed to create his own system of composition based on the application of universal laws to musical material and he became one of the most prominent and pioneering composers of the generation that came on the scene at the beginning of the sixties. Alois Piňos attracted attention with his fiercely dynamic composi-

tions and distinctive signature, unafraid of harsh sound (*Karikatury [Caricatures]*, *Zkratky [Abbreviations]*, *Konflikty [Conflicts]*, *Koncert pro orchestr a magnetofonový pásek [Concerto for Orchestra and Tape]*, *Ars amatoria*) or critical social content (*Dicta antiquorum*, *Gesta Machabeorum*). His uncompromising approach earned him respect as a leading representative of his generation. His sphere of activities was not limited to Brno, and he kept up contacts with composers in Bratislava (Roman Berger, Ladislav Kupkovič, Peter Kolman and others) and in Prague (the composers Miloslav Kabeláč, Marek Kopelent, Zbyněk Vostřák, Jan Klusák and especially the musicologists Eduard Herzog and Vladimír Lébl were his close friends).

The "Golden Age" of New Music and its End

The Brno of the Sixties was an important cultural centre characterised by its living creative ferment in many fields, in theatre, poetry, art and music. Seen from today's perspective its output may appear small, but given the arid years of the seventies that were to follow it was genuinely the "Golden Age" of Brno New Music.

To understand the situation in the Czechoslovakia of the time you need to realise that all musical life was fully in the hands of the bureaucratized Union of Czechoslovak Composers and that music was perhaps the most conservative area of culture. This made the founding of the Brno "Tvůrčí skupina A" ["Creative Group A"] quite a courageous step. Together with Piňos its members were the composers Josef Berg, Miloslav Ištvan, Jan Novák and Zdeněk Pololánik and the theoreticians Milena Černohorská and František Hrabal. The activities of "Group A" and its ensemble "Studio Autorů" [Composer's Ensemble], however restricted, were among the most important expressions of the New Music in the

Czech Lands. The high points of its activities were above all two legendary festivals of domestic and foreign contemporary work entitled *Expozice experimentální hudby [The Exposition of Experimental Music]* (1969, 1970). These festivals also provided a chance for the performance of important composition teamwork pieces created by Piňos together with others (*Divertissement*, *Ecce homo*, *Peripetie [Peripeteias]*, *Hlasová vernisáž [Vocal Private View]*) and by Alois Piňos alone – the first Czech audiovisual compositions *Mříže [Grille]*, *Geneze [Genesis]*, *Statická kompozice [Static Composition]* (co-operation with artist Dalibor Chatrný) or the stage event on a bizarre text by Josef Berg *Vyvolavači [Touts]*, in a prophetic vision parodying the malignant burgeoning of advertising.

In addition to its artistic initiative, Group A strove for changes in the organisation of musical life. In July 1968 Alois Piňos was elected chairman of the Brno branch of the Union of Composers, but there was to be no time to push changes through. In August of the same year Soviet forces occupied Czechoslovakia and the long and dismal period of political and cultural repression began known as "normalisation" and characterised by the "tightening of the screws" of the communist regime. The impact of this period on cultural life was crushing, although the repression was mainly covert and often indirect, operating through the suspension of funds, the restriction of opportunities. Many artists succumbed to the atmosphere of fear and not a few chose to leave the country. New Music practically disappeared from concerts and radio broadcasts, and scores and recordings were no longer published. Contemporary musical trends were entirely wiped out of musical education (which was not hard, because they had never been an object of interest in the schools anyway).



Alois Piňos with the composers Martin Smolka, Petr Kofroň and Miroslav Pudlák at Darmstadt summer courses (1988)



The totalitarian regime unerringly identified composers who represented non-conformist musical thinking and tried to sweep them from the scene. They therefore provided massive support for musical conformism represented by what were called “genres accessible to listeners”, such as brass band music, inane pop music and “eternal” classics manoeuvred into the function of kitsch. For most of the public music became a form of escape from the unbearable political claptrap accompanying the president Husák era.

This inevitably changed the general function of music, which started to be regarded by the majority public as a mere means of “forgetting” and “letting off tension”. Clear preference for the function of music as diversion led to a weakening of its other functions, especially its function as real exploration of life and its meaning, and finally to the replacement of artistic criteria by the perspectives of “showbusiness” (i.e. “utility”). Today we are still struggling with this distortion of values...

Alois Piňos, who honoured the sacrifice of Jan Palach with a piece named *16.1. 1969*¹ and never made a secret of his political views, was among the most proscribed composers and for many years his teaching work at JAMU was under threat. In the seventies his pieces only rarely reached the concert podium, were hardly ever on the radio, and were never recorded for gramophone.

Although the seventies were a time of trial for Piňos-the composer, they at least brought him happiness in his private life. In 1971 he met Ludmila Simandlová, whom he soon married and with whom he started a new family. For some years he even used the name Alois Simandl Piňos.

While forced to struggle with all kinds of difficulties, he took them philosophically. For example, from the desperate situation when

for some time he and Ludmila had no apartment and had to live in Piňos’s car, he managed to extract an electro-acoustic piece called *Domov, aneb Dům čp. 3426* [*Home, or House no. 3426*] created out of the sounds of the car. It was not until after 1989 that he gained proper recognition (a readership that had been refused for years and a professorship) and honours (he was twice awarded the prestigious “Classic Prize”), and was invited as a lector to various international courses and onto the juries of composition competitions. Thanks to the support he found in his concise and sufficiently general theory (partly summarised in the publication *Tónové skupiny*, Editio Supraphon, Prague 1971; in English *Tone Groups*, JAMU, Brno 2002) he was able to overcome the stylistic limitations of the music of the sixties and venture through new phases (which brought music of a different style) without repudiating his original premises. The continuity of his work, which has never experienced crisis or stylistic or intellectual somersaults, is (with all the diversity of his external expressions) genuinely extraordinary.

Brno Teamwork

An objectivising approach to composition led Piňos to the idea of compositional “teamwork”, in which a group of composers under his direction would contribute to larger projects. Although group composition had occasionally turned up in the history of music earlier, Piňos’ conception, based on previously defined material and clearly defined compositional rules, made it possible for several composers to work together on a piece without a loss of consistency and coherence. Team composition is in fact a transfer of the idea of the “brains trust” as we know it from scientific research, to art. The expansion of the creative process beyond the boundaries of the individual subject has the advantage of multiplying critical

capability (in the planning phase, in discussions of the concept) and creative capabilities (everyone can contribute something of his own). It is an effective method that makes it possible to complete relatively large-scale projects in a short period. This was the case for instance with two chamber operas by the team Alois Piňos – Miloš Štědroň – Ivo Medek (*Anály avantgardy dokořán aneb Věc Cage* [*Annals of the Avant Garde Flung Open or the Cage Affair*], 1995 and *Anály předchůdců avantgardy aneb Setkání slovanských velikánů* [*Annals of the Forerunners of the Avant Garde or the Meeting of Slav Giants*], 1997) or the “symphonic kaleidoscope” written as a goodbye to the passing millennium, *Byly časy, byly...* [*They were times, they were...*] (1999).

Although the original teamwork constellation (Alois Piňos, Arnošt Parsch, Rudolf Růžička, Miloš Štědroň, and on single occasions Josef Berg and Miloslav Ištvan) was for external reasons quite short-term in its activities, the idea of team composition put down roots in Brno and became relatively common with other composers as well.

Teaching

Alois Piňos is not only a composer but has dedicated a large part of his life to teaching. He has trained several generations of composers who later influenced the development of Czech contemporary music. His pupils have included, for example, Miloš Štědroň, Jiří Kollert, Petr Kofroň, Peter Graham (Jaroslav Pokorný-Šťastný), Ivo Medek, Zdenek Plachý, Daniel Forró (Karel Horký), Martin Dohnal, Dan Dlouhý... Josef Adamík and Vít Zouhar have studied under him as postgraduates. And to these we must of course add quite a throng of foreign students who have attended Piňos’s courses in Darmstadt and Reichenau. Finally



With Siegfried Fink and Dušan Pandula

With Carin Lewin

Piňos's youngest son Mikuláš and the latter's wife Kateřina Růžičková both compose and are keeping the musical traditions of the Piňos family. In addition, from the end of the eighties Piňos has done a great deal of lecturing, taken part in many symposia abroad and produced a series of programmes about Czech music for German radio.

Piňos's teaching method has been based above all on the individuality of the student, which he always respected and at the same time tried to develop. He tolerated different stylistic orientations and materials, but always managed to clarify and streamline the student's musical thinking and lead him or her towards a more concise expression. He founded his teaching on a friendly and collegial relationship supported by the natural authority of the teacher. In retrospect we can say that each one of his students took from the rich complex of Piňos's stimuli a particular aspect that he or she then developed further in his or her own way. And perhaps we can say that in comparison with other teachers of composition, a circle of very diverse individualities has emerged from the Piňos hatchery of composers.

For Piňos, however, guiding young composers meant more than a mere teaching load – contact with young generations kept him in touch with new intellectual movements, different aesthetic attitudes and other opinions. It allowed him to absorb new inspirations, to react to them intellectually and with his own work. Unlike many of his contemporary Piňos never walled himself up with his own generation. He always expressed interest in the music of young composers and contemporary musical life and he has retained this openness and literally "youthful" curiosity to this day.

The Continuity and Transformation of the Work – Static Evolution

In Piňos's work there are no sharp stylistic breaks, but his music has nevertheless continually changed. "Static evolution" is a term of

his own which he uses to define the process of gradual development when certain parameters undergo changes, but others stay the same. This term is at the same time a cipher, a simplified expression for the development of Piňos's work, in which we likewise find certain constants practically throughout his career. One such constant, for example, is his preference for a conceptual point of view – for Piňos composition is above all an abstract structure in which what is important are mutual proportions, while their materialisation can take various forms and is essentially secondary. This means that his style is characterised not by a particular sound, but by a mode of thinking, which allows him to integrate all kinds of different types of material and at the same time realise a single compositional idea in more than one form. Although it was in the course of the sixties that he elaborated this approach, its viability was proved in later periods. In fact – although naturally in a naive form – these tendencies were already present in his period of "juvenile composing" in the forties. Piňos did not, however, recognise the validity of his own compositions until the end of the fifties, by which time he had formulated his own individual musical language based on the use of interval structures.

In his first creative period, which covers roughly the decade of the sixties, his attention was focused mainly on absolute music and titles evoking its traditional forms: *Wind Quintet* (1959), *Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano* (1960), *Sonata for Viola and Cello* (1960), *Suite for Violin, Viola and Cello* (1961), *1st String Quartet* (1961-62), *Concerto for Orchestra and Tape* (1964), *Chamber Concerto for Strings* (1967), *Three Pieces for Piano* (1968), *Divertissement* (team composition – 1969). In these works it seems as if Piňos was accepting the challenge of the preceding musical tradition, getting to grips with it and seeking to review conventional concepts and give them a new content. It could

perhaps be said that in this period Piňos's main interest was musical life as such and the attempt to stake his claims to it. But of course he also concerned himself with other areas that he explored by musical means, whether politics, on which he commented using the allegory of a biblical story in *Gesta Machabeorum* (1967) or a direct reaction to a topical important event in 16.1. 1969, or the love, as he presented it in his long cantata *Ars amatoria* (1967). This period culminated in lengthy pieces such as his *Trojkoncert na jméno BACH [Triple Concerto on the name BACH]* for bass clarinet, cello, piano and orchestra of strings and percussion instruments (1968) or his *Symphony "Apollo XI"* (1970), celebrating the triumph of science and technology – the conquest of the Moon by the Americans.

The political developments of the seventies put the brakes on Piňos's promising career as a composer and diverted his creative efforts into a new direction. In the difficult conditions he devoted himself mainly to chamber and electro-acoustic music in which his fondness for timeless questions – spiritual themes and nature – was expressed more strongly. External pressures as it were activated interests that had always been present in the composer, but covered up by others. The essential temperament of the composer emerged in these interests and every since they have remained part of his range as an artist.

He wrote a series of electro-acoustic compositions (*Korespondence [Correspondences]*, *Hudba pro dva [Music for Two]*, *Adorace [Adoration]*, *Domov, aneb Dům čp. 3426 [Home, or House no. 3426]*, *Nekonečná melodie [Unending Melody]*, *Konfluenc [Confluences]*, *Metatance [Metadances]*, *Speleofonie [Speleophony]*, *Kontrapunkt p̣írody [Counterpoints of Nature]*, *Panta rhei?*) and solo or chamber pieces (*Kontexty [Contexts]*, *Být bit [To be Beaten]*, *Trojhra [Triple Play]*, *Žestový kvartet [Brass Quartet]*). Nonetheless it was at this period that he also



wrote the symphonic diptych *Pocta Praze [Tribute to Prague]* (1973) / *České letokruhy [Czech Annals]* (1975), in which the first part is created by „multivariations” – the multiple variation of a single numerical relationship and the second, on the contrary, by the „integration” of historical quotations of all kinds. A rather different approach found a representative in *Seznámení [Lonely Hearts]*, duets for soprano and bass with guitar accompaniment on texts from genuine lonely heart ads (1975). Erotic themes wind through Piňos's work like a red thread: *Ars amatoria* (1967), *Geneze [Genesis]* (1970), *Hudba pro dva [Music for Two]* (1971), *Canti intimi* (1976), lyrical songs for bass baritone and string quartet on text from old love poems called *Síla a moc lásky [The Strength and Power of Love]* (1982), *Euforie [Euphoria] I–V* (five chamber pieces for different instrumental combinations of 1983–1998), *Přiblížení [Gettin Closer]* (1994). In fact, the erotic is virtually omnipresent in his work in the form of the conception of polarities and complementary pairs. In recent years the public has been discovering “another Piňos”, whose pieces have moved into new areas of expression and employ a broader palette of sound. They also reflect entirely new experiences – a composer who had throughout his life enjoyed physical health, vitality and strength has been encountering the darker side of life: seven serious operations in the course of the last seven years! Yet even in the darkest moments he has not given up composing, which accompanies him even through “the valley of death”. In the atmosphere of uncertainty around his first operation he wrote psalms (*Carmina psalmisona*, 1998). But biblical and spiritual themes in general have been a constant of his work (*Gesta Machabeorum*, 1967; *In extremis*, a triptych for mixed choir on words from the Gospel of St. Matthew, 1969; *Ecce homo*, team composition (Alois Piňos, Arnošt Parsch, Rudolf Růžička, Miloš Štědroň) on a text by

Josef Berg and Alois Piňos using extracts from the Bible and Franz Kafka, 1969; *České letokruhy [Czech Annals]* (1975); *Carmina lauretana* (1997), *Thanks for Every Day* (1998), *Stella matutina* (1999), *Music of Good Hope* (2001) but also pieces touching on the dark side of life *Zimní slunovrat [Winter Solstice]* (2001), *Finsternis* (2001) and the fight against evil *Nomen omen aneb Třináct portrétů hada [Nomen Omen or Thirteen Portraits of the Serpent]* (2002), *Bestiarium* (2002), *Tlučte a bude vám otevřeno [Knock and It Shall be Opened unto You]* for soloist on percussion (2003), *Precarious Situations* (2004), *Clamores* for chamber ensemble (2005), *Triple Fight or Tres faciunt collegium* for three percussion players (2005), *Dálkový běžec [Long-Distance Runner]* for solo percussionist (2005).

Alois Piňos and Nature

Although Alois Piňos never actually took up the occupation of forestry engineer, nature has been an important source of inspiration for him throughout his life. Piňos has never lost his interest in trees and the forest, which for him symbolise creative power and organic growth. But other expressions of nature also attract him and provide him with impulses for his own work:

“Natural phenomena fascinate me: they are constant, cyclical and changeable, expected and surprising, sometimes monumental and yet again intimately known, as it were natural. They can be observed and grasped at their basic natural level and in their specificity and at the same time you can reflect on their other, symbolic meanings. Down the ages they have tempted people into trying to express them in art. This inspiration can never be exhausted.”

It is characteristic of Piňos that in his case natural inspirations do not remain simply at the level of titles or textual references, but affect the deeper structure of the work and are par-

ticularly manifest in his instrumental and electro-acoustic music, representing an integral part of his poetics. It is models drawn from nature in the form of *universalia* that Piňos successfully applies in the creation of music. *Universalia* – the most universally expressed categories, phenomena, marks or processes – in fact form the links between the concrete world of nature and the abstract language of music. Although these attributes have always been used in music, Piňos's achievement consists primarily in the clear classification of *universalia* within the framework of musical expression and in his individual application of models that we rarely meet elsewhere.

Piňos's love for nature is not expressed only in abstract compositional techniques, however, but also in entirely concrete practical activity. Few people know that the mature grove that beautifies Borodínova Street in Brno-Kohoutovice is his own work – he himself bought the trees, planted them and moved them, and defended them from destructive boys... Today they are massive trees, far higher than the surrounding blocks of flats. Without ostentatious speeches then, Alois Piňos as a simple citizen has also given a great deal to his city.

His creative and teaching activities can also be compared to the planting of trees: his work has contributed to the growth of contemporary music in his country, and through his pupils it has flourished and branched. Without Alois Piňos Czech music culture would be fundamentally the poorer, and his extensive output remains a great challenge for future generations.

¹ On this day the student Jan Palach set fire to himself in protest against political developments following the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968.