

czech music

quarterly magazine

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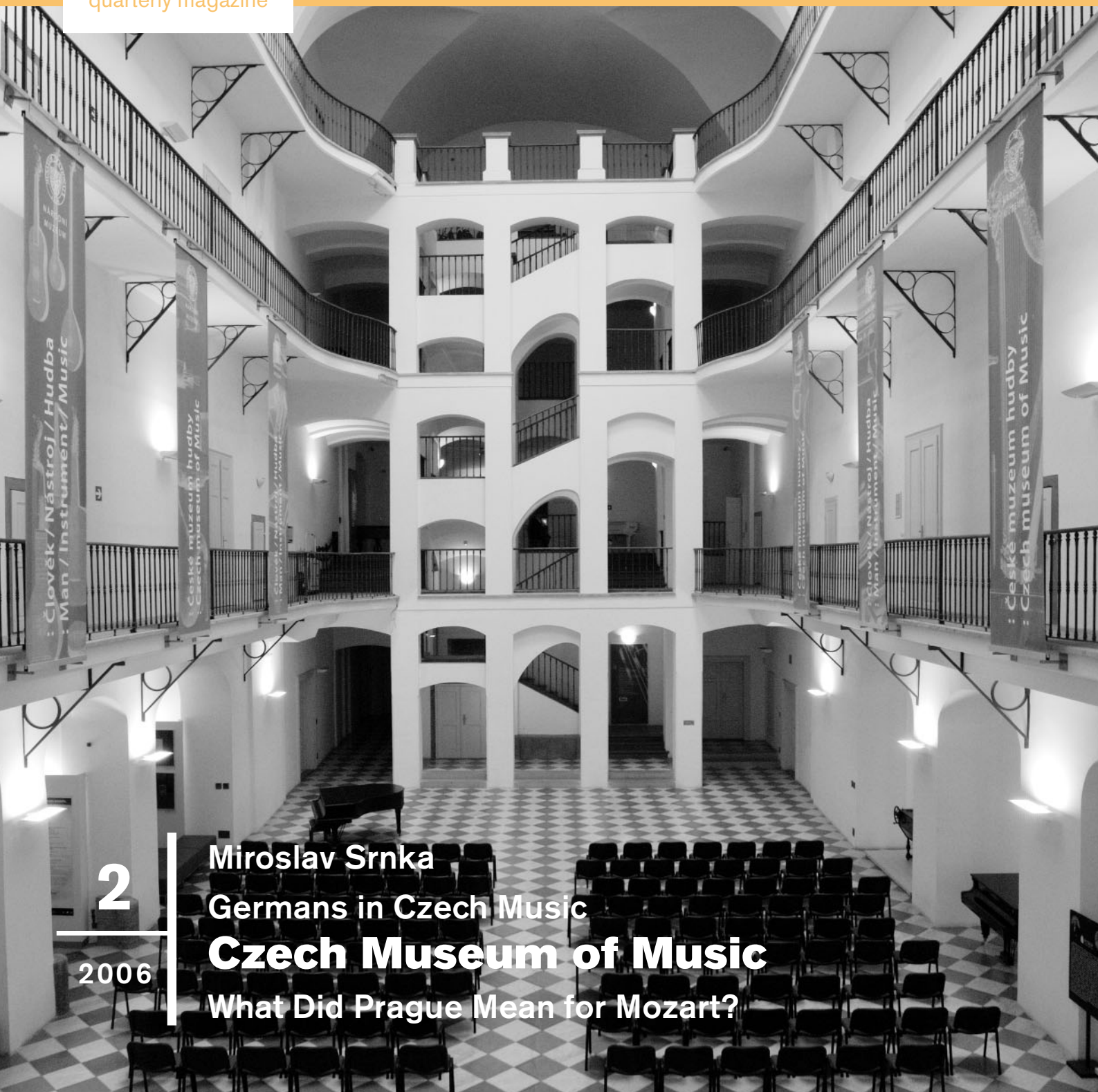
2006

Miroslav Srnka

Germans in Czech Music

Czech Museum of Music

What Did Prague Mean for Mozart?



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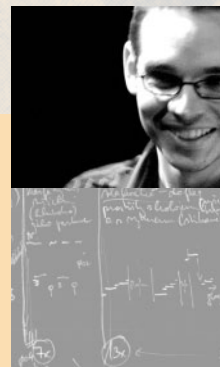
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czech music

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2/2006



editorial



Dear Reading

the theme of this issue of Czech Music is the relationship between Czech and German musical culture. In the history of Bohemia Germans constituted a very substantial minority, and since they represented one of the most important of the world's musical cultures, they had a manifest influence on Czech music. The coexistence of the two ethnic groups was, however, historically complicated and never idyllic, and it was finally ended with the events of the 2nd World War. We shall leave it to others to offer historical judgements on the whole epoch of Czech-German cohabitation in the Bohemian Lands, but my feeling is that at least as far as music is concerned, with the breaking off of close relations with German musical culture something fundamental for Czech music was lost. I would like to thank the Goethe-Institut in Prague for financially supporting all three of the articles concerned with this subject.

Tomislav Volek's article, "What Did Prague Mean for Mozart?" gets away from the usual rather tiresome and cliché-ridden circus around the Mozart 250th anniversary celebrations in at least two basic ways: first because of the author's great erudition, the fruit of a lifelong scholarly interest in W.A. Mozart (which, as he notes, is far from the rule with the "instant experts" on the Mozart anniversary), and second because of its polemic tone, which gives the traditional Mozart theme a new dimension and says a great deal more than any pure enumeration of facts.

I would also like to attract your attention to two young hopes of Czech music, the composer Miroslav Srnka and the conductor Jakub Hrůša. I believe we shall be hearing a great deal more about them in the future.

I wish you a pleasant summer

PETR BAKLA
EDITOR

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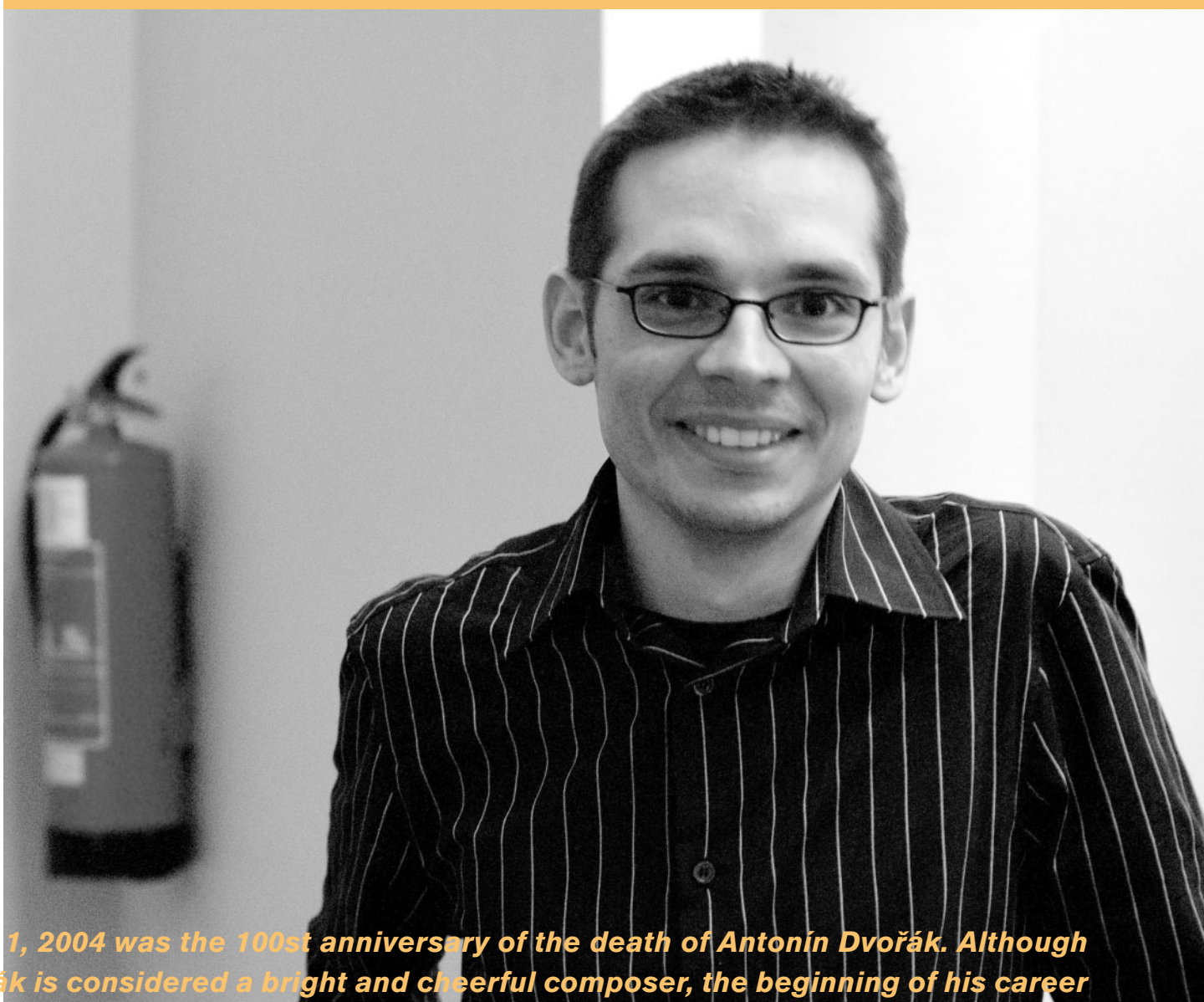
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„May 1, 2004 was the 100st anniversary of the death of Antonín Dvořák. Although Dvořák is considered a bright and cheerful composer, the beginning of his career was overshadowed by death. His first three children died in rapid succession in the years 1875-1877 and it was under these tragic circumstances that Dvořák, now in his mid-thirties and once again childless, wrote the first of his phenomenal works. My piece is dedicated to Dvořák in those years. The name of the piece is borrowed from the famous Beethoven piano sonata. The well-known introductory cadence from this sonata also appears in my piece three times - once for each of Dvořák's lost children.“

This commentary to the piece *Les Adieux* evokes the human and musical world of the composer MIROSLAV SRNKA (*1975) better than I could myself. It beautifully reflects Srnka's conscious and on many levels considered way of relating himself to the (Czech) musical tradition (incidentally, as a musicologist-editor Srnka is concerned precisely with Dvořák) and his as it were straightforward but unsentimental emotional approach to composing. All this combined with the sophistication and complete modernism of his musical language and with awareness of the world context – the piece was written for the Ensemble Intercontemporain.

what you do is only partly the result of your will

PETR BAKLA

In your music you evidently use the idioms of spectral music, and a great many composers are writing in this way at the moment. What do you think gives your pieces added value and raises them above the interchangeable products of dozens of IRCAM visiting students?

Good question. First and foremost we're all special and no two people write the same notes.

I would object slightly to the word "raise" – I don't believe you can say whose personal expressive testimony stands "higher".

It's not my place to judge and sometimes it isn't even clear to me why it's my notes that appeal to someone and not notes by somebody else I happen to think is fantastic. In general I think that what you call "added value" consists only in the depth and honesty of what a person is trying to express through the notes, and that it doesn't have anything to do with style.

You classify me with IRCAM visiting students, and that's quite amusing, because compared to some of the others I had a very "fleeting" relationship to the place. Perhaps the difference is that I came to France to find out how people I already knew were thinking in a similar way were actually doing things. Anyway, IRCAM is something like a programming environment, not a nest of a particular style. Today a huge number of people who compose in very different ways are all lumped together as spectralists, IRCAM types and so on, but it's only by setting them in the context of all the other possibilities open to people today that you could call them a group at all. The internal stylistic differences between then are as huge as between all the composers of the 19th century put together. And so from the style point of view it's rather as if you were asking what added value Brahms has over Berlioz – not that I'd have the nerve to compare myself to Brahms, of course! By the way, according to more than one comment that got back to me, for the French themselves my notes have something like the status of the "earthy primitivism" of Musorgsky. So it's a paradox that back in my

country I've already been accused more than once of Boulezism....

Well, let me put it another way then...What is original about the music of Mirek Srnka?

Maybe there's nothing original about it, or I don't know how to express it in words. Because that's the last question I would ask myself. I even believe asking it is a bad thing in itself. For me what is basic is whether the music of Mirek Srnka is recognisable, and I'm told that sometimes it is now. I write "sometimes" deliberately, since my way of composing definitely hasn't yet fully crystallised. I consider myself a beginner, because for example while my first student work actually to be performed was eight years ago, with few exceptions none of the works that I acknowledge and "allow" to be performed again is more than three and a half years old... Oh yes, and I'm definitely original among my contemporaries for having a wife and two children and writing about them. Almost exclusively.

Nonetheless I still assume that you're using the technical tricks of spectralism.

If I had to analyse myself in some way, then I'd say that there were big differences between my notes and spectralist ones. First of all I never use directly computer-generated structures. I just take ideas from what the software can do to manually create a kind of harmonic-kinetic background for concrete composition. And the composing is then completely independent of any kind of computer techniques.

In the second place my notes have a very dense polyphonic structure for spectralism.

I don't know why but it always matters a great deal to me that both the harmonies and the individual voices should make sense. It may sound old-fashioned, but at the same time I really enjoy "cracking" it, it's often like a puzzle. I often try to interlard harmonic and gestural ideas derived from spectralism with a rhythmic-lineal structure in which you could see a glint of that "Boulezism". Maybe there's something rough in an eastern way about this kind of combination, because in my view it's not much in fashion in France: to take one side or the other is also a bit of a "political" attitude. Maybe I'm wrong, since it's not something "talked about" but just something you can sniff in the air.

Anyway, in the third place, I work almost exclusively with semitones. I'm quite seriously investigating the possibilities of sound simulation of microtonal terrain using semitone notation. And so I take it as a great honour if after listening to my work someone asks, "Were there quarter tones there?"

You can hardly be surprised by accusations of "Boulezism". On the one hand it's understandable – you're hardly going to deny that your music belongs to that kind of circle in general stylistic framework. But above all:

"Czech music has always had a very strong capacity to assimilate – to accept and transform impulses from many different parts of musical Europe. For the domestic restorationary tendencies, however, what has been characteristic has been a fear of "foreign influences" which again and again have been regarded as destructive, subversive forces. It would



be interesting to catalogue the arsenal of Czech fears and warnings against these “foreign influences”. The terminology used in successive periods says a great deal in itself: German music, Teutonic music, French goods, Jewish-Bolshevik music, degenerate western music and so on.” (Vladimír Lébl, see CM 2/2005) The word “Boulezism” fits into the list very well. Your music frankly identifies with those foreign influences so alien to our healthy Czech musicality and refined feeling for moderation – and you’re a spectralist, a Boulezist, a lover of Frog-eaters and an opportunist and you know where you can shove your structural differences... Do you feel these kinds of pressure?

Now you’ve made my day by applying a quote from Vladimír Lébl to me, because he was always my favourite Czech musicologist. He could write fantastically, perceived connections and what’s more he wasn’t afraid of daring hypotheses, and that’s rare in Czech musicology...

Yes, I’ve heard it many times: We’re not going to play Srnka because it’s too difficult, it’s too Boulezian, it’s not Czech. So that’s the first, hidden pressure, the fact that very few people want to play my music in the Czech Republic. Earlier it bothered me a lot but now I don’t care at all, because I only want to have my music played by people who enjoy it and choose to play it voluntarily. You can’t compromise with yourself just for one opportunity. And so no performance is better than a resentful performance. Paradoxically, I didn’t feel much pressure at the academy. At seminars you have to know how to defend yourself even against completely opposite opinions, and sometimes discussions end in complete deadlock, but looking back I value the experience. It taught me to answer questions I wouldn’t have asked myself. In the end that always does you good....

But what annoys me more is the fact that contemporary Czech music doesn’t know how to define itself. It fights against influ-

ences because it doesn’t actually know what it is itself. When you are capable of proudly defining yourself, then foreign influences don’t have the power to bother you. I’m often asked to describe Czech contemporary music in some way, to characterise it, but I’ve found that I can’t do it. And yet there are plenty of talented individuals. Maybe we could push Lébl’s idea to the point of absurdity and say that Czech music is defined by its inability to define itself.

Otherwise you seem to be pretty successful.

What does that mean? That you have the chance to work with a few famous musicians? Hardly... Success is probably just if someone – maybe just one person – experiences something listening to your music that they have never experienced before. You can’t measure that by numbers of performances. It’s much more gratifying when a performer decides to include your piece in his or her repertoire or when there are people prepared to sacrifice the quiet of their evening to listen to a recording of one of your pieces.

I’ve noticed that you always talk about your music as “notes”.

For me “notes” is a kind of last resort expression, because calling my stuff “music”, “works” or even “compositions” strikes me as slightly pompous. I’m probably not being precise, because I’m not very concerned about the written record, in the sense that my conception of a piece is to do with sound, what can be heard, the acoustic. The record and notes are just a medium and are the last things to happen in the process, and as it were “secondary”. And I actually strive for the most classic kind of notation, because the fetishism of innovations in notation strikes me as pretty self-indulgent. Maybe I ought to describe my stuff as my “sounds” instead of my “notes”.

The abstract conception of music (as creation “ex nihilo”, or from the most ele-

mentary elements, in fact from those individual neutral “notes”) is today in retreat, in my view. The fashion is for dealing with already existing: integrations of idioms, the juxtaposition of the disparate (“recontextualisation”), plundrophonics, remix... all of this is affecting so-called contemporary classical music as well. And so while some people are looking for new ways forward by appropriating rock idioms, stitching together Ars Nova with the Backstreet Boys and rewriting or copying Bach, it seems to be precisely that “Boulezism” and spectralism that is as it were stubbornly defending and persisting in modernist positions. Do you believe in the possibility of finding new ways forward through new compositional technologies, pitch-class systems and so on? Even though today it is a very unfashionable view – and I very much believe this situation is only temporary – of course I believe in it, because to proclaim that the development of compositional technologies and systems is now passé would be as naive as to say that Czech grammar and vocabulary are now fixed once and for all. Post-Modernism announced that innovations in composition technology were no longer possible, but then quite unexpectedly along came Gérard Grisey and spectralism and offered a composition technology that could be internally developed, entirely contrary to the Post-Cage prophecies. In any case, if you take everything coming after the Modern, then in a spirit of pluralism you have to allow everything that wishes to go on “developing” the same right to existence as everything else. The concept of development is as valid as the concept that dumps it. The issue is just about the breadth of the term and tolerance for the development of any compositional language, even one you find repugnant. And even today compositional language is continuing to develop, but there are lots of compositional languages, and no single observable current.



*Michel Swierczewski and members of Prague Philharmonia
performing Srnka's Moldau Remixed*

Don't you ever have an urge to undercut the polished stylistic purity of your pieces by using references or allusions?

The truth is that for the moment the only kind I write is the classical, self-contained, and as you nicely put it, "polished" pieces – both in stylistic terms and in form. However, various other more open paths that other people take appeal to me as well, but so far I haven't got to them, and of course I don't rule out that I may some time in the future. You can't get to them just by your own decision. What you do is only partly the result of your will. To some extent you are only an observer of events inside you. Perhaps I'm too "polished", I myself as a person....

Although it may not seem that way, style overlaps attract me a great deal and I even use references quite often. But for the moment they are probably too encoded, lodged too deep inside the structure to creep through that stylistic polish. It's common for me to use quotations from my favourite Czech classical music, and I've written a piece in which there are hidden variations on the Star Trek music, and don't even ask me about the "pop" hits I used as a model for the musical plan that runs slow-downed by a factor of five behind my chamber opera *Wall*.

And to go back to those technologies – isn't a good Backstreet Boys remix also part of a compositional technology? Of course it is, just like Bach's appropriation of Vivaldi's concertos and his rewriting them in his own way (and under his name). Nonetheless we can detect Bach's personal compositional technology in these transcriptions. Why? Because it's behind that remix of Vivaldi. Bach just chose the Vivaldi as material because he felt that it was the right material for his "technology". For the moment I don't have the kind of personal composition technology that would enable me to remix something convincingly. I tried it quite overtly in *Moldau Remixed*, where I poke a little fun at Smetana. Teasing is a sign of affection...

What is actually your relationship to Czech music? I mean, to what extent do you see yourself as continuing those rather fragile modernist currents in Czech post-war (and perhaps even pre-war) music, and in what way if at all these are important to you? I happen to know that one of your musicologist interests is Czech music of the 1960s – what in your view is the position and significance of this essentially now closed chapter in the context of European classical music? Do we have anything to take pride in?

We certainly do have something to take pride in. The 1960s were clearly the strongest period in Czech post-war music. They had their special charisma of their own, which has not yet come back. It was taking giant steps to make up for the distance that had been lost in the 1950s. It



didn't quite make it, but it almost did, and left behind several works of permanent and international value. I would very much like to see them revitalised in international repertoire. Music like Jan Klusák's *Variations on a Theme by Gustav Mahler* (see CM 4/2004) or Luboš Fišer's *Fifteen Prints after Dürer's Apocalypse*, Jan Rychlík's *African Cycle*, Miloslav Kabeláč's percussion things (see CM 1/2005), Marek Kopelent's chamber stuff, are simply "Jahrzehntwerke". Only the Czech contribution to internationally stable repertoire still so far ends in 1959, with the death of Bohuslav Martinů.

But what on earth is a "closed" epoch? Everything that has come to be included in active repertoire since Gregorian Chant is a matter of "closed" epochs, and it still has plenty that is new to say to us. So why should something incomparably more recent have nothing new to say to us? What's more, relationships of influence and inspiration are much more subtle than it seems at first hand. All the contemporary music of today is for the most part living off what was discovered in the 1950s and 1960s. Even the music that deliberately denies it.

You are right in saying that I wrote a musicological dissertation on Czech orchestral music of the 1960s. But the strange thing is that I didn't in any way choose this theme because of my composing interests, because these have nothing in common with this music. Here the separation between composer and musicologist was complete, but even so there are some "universal" things that even the composer can take from this scholarly research: Kabeláč's uncompromising purity, Fišer's emotion in austerity, Klusák's courage to follow visions. But there can be no talk of continuation – successorship in composing. My relationship to Czech

music could probably best be described as an umbilical cord. I get nutrients from it. Only much more Dvořákian and Janáčekian nutrients than any "fragilely Modernist" ones.

MIROSLAV SRNKA (*1975 in Prague). He has studied composition and musicology in Prague, Berlin and Paris. The more than twenty already performed pieces by Srnka are distinctive for his striving for a virtuoso grasp of solo instruments and the use of various post-war compositional techniques, as well as a harmony and timbre quality inspired by spectral music and structures created using computer aided music composition. Srnka have collaborated with renowned contemporary music performers, such as Arditti String Quartet, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble Itinéraire, Leipzig Sinfonietta, Firebird Ensemble, Camilla Hoitenga, Sylvio Gualda etc.). Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin Unter den Linden commissioned the short opera *Wall* as a part of the project *Seven Attempted Escapes From The Silence*. His works are published by Bärenreiter Verlag.

In addition to composing Srnka devotes himself to editing and musical journalism. The centre of his musicological interest is music after 1945.

Srnka's *String Quartet No. 3* performed by Arditti String Quartet has been included in the CD-anthology of young Czech composers *Young Blood*. (Existing and new subscribers to *Czech Music*, please request your free CD at info@czech-music.net. See page 29)

www.srnka.cz

the czech museum of music

GABRIELA NĚMCOVÁ

The Czech Museum of Music is in fact an umbrella organisation that looks after both a *Department of Musical Instruments*, about which we shall be saying more later, and a *Music History Department*, which administers what is in size, value and diversity the most important collection (more than 120 000 exemplars) of written sources, pictures and sound documents relating to the music and musical life of the past and the present. Its treasures include two autographs of Beethoven compositions, as well as the autograph of the František Jan Škroup's song "Kde domov můj", which later became the Czech National Anthem. The Music History Department also owns a large collection of non-note written materials, which mainly consists of the correspondence of composers and other figures in musical life, but also personal documents, manuscripts of journalistic and academic works on music, manuscript notes, diaries and memoirs.

The largest sets of correspondence are those of Leoš Janáček, Bohuslav Martinů, Emmy Destinn and above all Josef Bohuslav Foerster, but the museum also owns letters from such great world composers and performers as Gustav Mahler, Anton Bruckner, Clara Schumann, Richard Wagner, Ferenc Liszt, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Max Reger and others. Another very valuable source for music history research is the museum's collection of more than 50,000 concert and opera programmes, posters, press cuttings and small printed pieces from the last quarter of the 18th century to the present. One of the rarest items is the oldest surviving poster for the Prague performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* on the 2nd of September 1788. A specific feature of the Prague department is the largest musical iconographic collection in the Czech Republic, containing over 20,000 sculptures, paintings, prints, photographs including negatives, all kinds of gifts and pieces of furniture. The most recent section, which has been systematically built up since the 1960s, is a sound library that after what is a relatively short period already boasts more than 55,000 recordings – from phonographic cylinders to standard and long-playing gramophone records to compact discs.

The Czech Museum of Music also manages the *Bedřich Smetana Museum* and the *Antonín Dvořák Museum*. The main concern of both museums is to look after the archival collections – note autographs, correspondence and other documents, art works and period photographs, programmes, posters and personal effects – and make them accessible to the public in permanent exhibitions, temporary special exhibitions, con-



When you are taking a stroll in Prague to admire its beauties, if you cross Charles Bridge but instead of making straight up the hill to Prague Castle turn left towards the Kampa Park, you will soon find yourself standing in front of the entrance portal of the Czech Museum of Music, which is currently housed in the former Baroque Church of St. Mary Magdalene, a 17th-century building designed by Francesco Caratti. It has been changed and renovated many times and has served many different purposes, for example as a Dominican monastery, a post office, a police barracks and an archive. It is now, indeed, a truly impressive architectural hybrid composed of elements of Early Baroque church architecture combined with Classicist utilitarian alterations and modern reconstruction carried out at the end of the 20th century.

tributions to various kinds of academic research and the holding of lectures and concerts.

The Department of Musical Instruments

The National Museum has been collecting musical instruments from the very beginning of its existence (it was founded in 1818), although during the 19th century the acquisitions were more or less matters of chance. Some exemplars, forming the basis of today's much larger collection, have been in the museum's collections for almost 150 years, for example three valuable wind instruments once in the possession of the Jindřichův Hradec grammar school teacher Antonín Liška, but originally belonging to musicians of the Rožmberk Capella in the later 16th century and acquired by the museum in 1820, or the bone Renaissance flute donated to the collection in 1869 by Václav František Červený, the world famous manufacturer of brass instruments (see CM 1/2006). Other remarkable stringed and plucked instruments followed (the bequest of Antonín Buchtel in the 1890s), and many wind instruments (the collection of the Zbiroh lawyer JUDr. Jan Pohl). The collec-

tion of stringed, wind and keyboard instruments obtained from Ondřej Horník, choir conductor at the Prague Karlín Music Theatre is particularly important, while the set acquired from the Czech instrument maker based in Odessa, Josef Šediva, consists of more than 170 exemplars, including his own invention called the "Šedifon" (a brass instrument with two bells).

It was not until after the Second World, in 1946, that the National Museum set up a separate music department, which started to develop its activities more fully in the 1950s. The year 1953 then saw the founding of what is known as the *State Collection of Musical Instruments*, a special fund of stringed instruments of top quality earmarked for occasional loan to major Czech maestri (Václav Hudeček, Ivan Ženatý or Gabriela Demeterová) or exceptionally gifted young musicians at the start of their careers. Alongside the creations of such world famous instrument makers as Antonio Stradivari and Giuseppe Guarneri, it contains examples from the workshops of leading Czech violin makers Přemysl Otakar Špidlen (see CM 1/2006) and Tomáš Pilař.

Today there are around 2,500 musical



Glass Harmonica



Brass instruments exposition



Kettledrums



The Litomyšl Gradual (1561-63)





Woodwinds exposition, showcase of clarinets
left: one-manual baroque regal



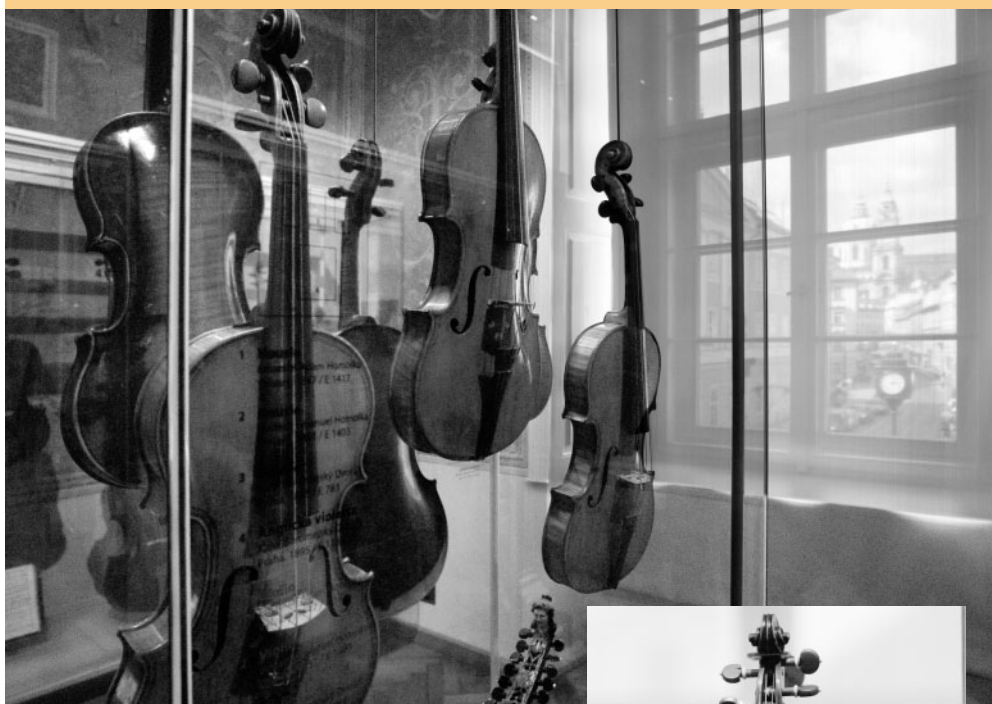
Showcase of Guitars



instruments in the museum's collections, including all the organological groups, i.e. woodwind and brass, stringed and plucked, percussion and a few mechanical instruments as well. Exemplars are mostly exhibited in the Czech Museum of Music as part of the permanent or temporary exhibitions. The museum also loans exhibits to institutions outside Prague, such as the Piano Museum in Žďár nad Sázavou, the Chateau at Hořovice (mechanical instruments), and the National Institute of Folk Music in Strážnice, and on a short-term basis for specific anniversary or cultural events.

In November 2004 a new permanent exhibition of musical instruments entitled "Man – Instrument – Music", was ceremonially opened at the Czech Museum of Music. It aims to present a comprehensive picture of musical development in the Czech Lands (and to a limited extent in the world as a whole), and contains not just musical instruments but also written, note and iconographic materials documenting the flowering of musical culture from the Renaissance to the 20th century. The exhibition has seventeen separate sections, in which visitors can see the instruments of the Rožmberk Capella mentioned above, rare violins made by world masters and Czech instrument makers (Tomáš Ondřej Hulínský, Jan Oldřich Eberle, Tomáš Edlinger, Jan Jiří Hellmer and Kašpar Strnad), Baroque lutes and guitars and a selection from an extensive collection of violas d'amore and violas da gamba. Considerable attention is also given to woodwind instruments and their development from the Baroque to the 20th century and to the brass, including Baroque trumpets and trombones from Nuremberg and Bohemia and products of the workshop of Václav František Červený and Josef Šediva. Historical clavichords, harpsichords and hammer pianos from the 18th to 20th century are all represented here. One highlight is the unique quarter-tone piano constructed in 1924 to Alois Hába's design, but there are also fascinating folk instruments and mechanical instruments.

The exhibition presents almost 400 musical instruments complemented by note material and audio extracts of leading Czech musicians playing the instruments displayed, which means that visitors have the chance to hear an authentic recording of the instruments in front of them.



Stringed instruments showcase

Violin by N. Amati



View of harp exposition

The "giraffe" piano





Prague's geographical position as a city in the centre of Europe has formed many of its distinctive features. One is a long tradition of cultural heterogeneity. Prague was always the meeting place of all kinds of different influences, which competed with each other, inspired each other, and sometimes opposed each other -, whether we are speaking of Czech, Italian, German (predominantly Jewish) or many other influences. In the past the Italian influences were brought particularly by architects, painters and sculptors, while in the sphere of music (as was the case all over Europe), the principal Italian cultural import was opera. The hegemony of Italian opera was fading at the beginning of the 19th century, the period when modern national consciousness began to emerge. In the lands of the Kingdom of Bohemia there were two layers of population as defined by language that were striving to become nations in the modern sense: Czechs and Germans. Their attitude to each other has sometimes been characterised as a "love-hate relationship". They could not ignore each other and to a certain extent they realised that they could not do without each other; they respected each other but also slandered and envied each other. The German population had the support of the Habsburg Monarchy, while

prague as a european cultural metropolis of the inter-war period

VLASTA REITTEREROVÁ

1918 saw the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic and the positions of the two language groups were reversed. Czechs had gradually come to feel during the 19th century that they were living in a state that had been "imposed" on them. Now the German population of the republic increasingly felt the same way. Before they had been Austrians, but now they were Czech Germans. As early as 1926 the German politician Rudolf Lodgman von Auen would speak in the Czechoslovak parliament of the "oppressed nation" of the Germans in Czechoslovakia, using just the same terms as the Czechs had once employed when complaining about their position in the Habsburg Monarchy. Art and culture represented an important element in this polarity, because art reacts to the situation of the day and also helps to create the social climate.

It is not easy to say which areas of art were the most important for the cultural orientation of the new republic. In art, bilingual-

ism was often a major advantage. Czech poets and writers (Otokar Březina, Antonín Sova, Vilém Mrštík) had in fact already been translated by Prague German writers (Franz Werfel, Otto Pick, Max Brod, Paul Eisner, Erich A. Saudek) and so entered European literary consciousness together with their German colleagues, Richard Dehmel, Rainer M. Rilke, the French poetes maudits or the Russian Symbolists. Modern Czech architecture exploited its contacts with the Viennese modernists Otto Wagner and Karl Loos (Josef Gočár, Vlastislav Hofman and others) and we could present a whole range of similar examples.

The life of music and the fate of public cultural buildings in Prague were interlinked. Soon after the establishment of the republic, music lost an important home when the Rudolfinum concert hall was turned into the Czechoslovak Parliament. The Czech Philharmonic, the German Kammermusikverein and the German Singverein also lost the roofs over their heads. The German theatre

and opera lost the Estates Theatre building, which was occupied by the Czechs. Music could still claim the hall of the Municipal House, which had been opened in 1911, and the hall of the Lucerna Palace (1912), but neither had acoustics or facilities suitable for symphonic concerts.

Modern or National?

This was a question to which an answer was constantly sought throughout the inter-war period. The development of Czech music was conditioned by the proclaimed programme of "De-Germanification", which meant not just the "Czechification" of institutions and organisations (so that those that had remained bilingual now became Czech or German), but also a definitive parting of the ways with Vienna. In no field was Prague to remain a mere provincial town overshadowed by Vienna. The aim was distinctive, self-sufficient Czech music, which should honour the tradition built up in the 19th cen-

among Czechs the development of cultural self-confidence was increasingly accompanied by a new goal – a nation-state of their own. The relationship between Czechs and Germans was ever more expressed in terms of politics and enacted on the political stage. In the cultural field their relationships was characterised by much that we are today trying to identify and explore anew. There is no unambiguous answer, however, to the question of whether Czech, German and Jewish culture existed in parallel to each other, whether they formed isolated islands or co-operated.



Left to right: Václav Štěpán, Otakar Ostrčil, Max Brod and Erwin Schulhoff
(by Hugo Boettinger, 1926)

tury but at the same time strive to develop in ways that stood the test of international comparison. The now Czech Germans, who lived mainly in the peripheral territories of Bohemia and Moravia, the Sudetenland, also endeavoured to create an autonomous music that would represent not just a linguistically defined group but a distinctive nation. It should be remembered, however, that in the 1920s the term "Sudeten Germans" meant the entire German population of the country (including German-speaking Jews) – and so the term peripheral had a double meaning, territorial and cultural, and only with the rise of fascism did it acquire a fateful political subtext.

The young generation of Czech musicians felt that they could not rely merely on the work of the founding fathers, but in the midst of euphoria provoked by the achievement of independence and awareness of the new possibilities, there were voices that warned against anarchy and chaos. On the one hand we can find signs of over-confidence and on the other strongly critical voices that found Czech music lacking in any conspicuous new achievement. The musical life of inter-war Prague was very closely bound up with musical journalism, which was much more significant in terms of quantity and diversity of views than it is today. In the years 1920–1938 as many as thirty Czech and ten German music journals were published (a ratio that corresponds to the actual population ratio of the two language groups). Naturally not all of them came out for the whole two decades, some were very short-lived and so were de facto only bulletins for societies, but nonetheless the possibilities of music journalism were much greater than before or since. In the daily press too (Czech and German), musical life was given a great deal of space and

many more small booklets were published independently (it cannot be said that they have been fully replaced today by the possibilities of the internet, especially not for future historians). In 1920 the magazine *Listy Hudební matice* (Music Foundation News) (from its 9th year renamed *Tempo*) replaced the printed organ of the *Umělecká beseda* (Arts Association), *Hudební revue* (Music Review). The magazine aimed to be non-partisan, and capture the „ferment and strivings of contemporary composers [excluding] history and everything not connected with contemporary movements in music“. The very first issue carried an essay by Alois Hába (see CM 3/2005) on *The Development of Music Composition and Theory with Respect to Diatonic, Chromatic and the Quarter-Tone System* and an article by Egon Wellesz on *Music of Our Time*. The editor of the magazine Boleslav Vomáčka argued that there was a stagnation of development caused not just by the war but by the period itself, which had brought a "new orientation, but also disorientation", affecting even the greatest composers. As examples he adduces Vítězslav Novák and Josef Suk, from whom great things were expected but from whom nothing great had yet been forthcoming. Vomáčka saw that the crisis was universal but "the irresolute programme of Vincent d'Indy, Arnold Schönberg and Richard Strauss offers no way out". He put great hope in Czech composers who were managing to hold out against Artism and he hoped that a composer would appear who would signpost a genuine new direction. Vomáčka's words were essentially a call for a new leading personality, a kind of Bedřich Smetana for the 20th century.

The year 1920 also saw the founding of the Czech Germans' music magazine *Der Auftakt* (The Upbeat). The title was a play on

words, which was explained by its first editor Felix Adler: "It truly is just an upbeat, a gathering of spiritual and physical strength." Adler went on to formulate the magazine's purpose: "*Der Auftakt* aspires to be modern. This does not mean that it subscribes to some particular movement and will blindly serve partisan interests. To be modern means to be prepared, and we are prepared." From the 9/10 double issue in the first year the editorship was in the hands of Erich Steinhard and under his direction *Der Auftakt* became a journal with a highly expert content. Over the next eighteen years it critically monitored all the important phenomena in modern music in the Czech and German cultural environments of the Czechoslovak Republic, and abroad. It was the official journal of the German music-educational association (*Deutscher musik-pädagogischer Verband*) founded in 1919, which was an important institution of German musical life in the republic. So important, in fact, that in the latter half of the 1930s it became an instrument of Sudeten German nationalism. In 1938 Erich Steinhard was removed from his editorship (he perished in the concentration camp in Chelm by Łódź in 1942), *Der Auftakt* was suspended and its place taken by the nationalist *Musikblätter der Sudetendeutschen*.

Quantity and Quality

The articles of Prague music critics and journalists in the inter-war period often raise the question of the contradiction between the great quantity of music being composed and its quality. Thus for example in the first issue of *Auftakt* we read the following: "It would be hard to find a city where there is as much music as in Prague. There are two operas here, the duel of the competing

orchestras ought to be ensuring that the listener is the winner, there is a large range of chamber music, choirs, famous and less famous musicians beating at the doors of the concert halls..., and yet for anyone who is expecting spiritual inspiration and enrichment from public concert life, it is as if there were nothing here at all. Above all what is lacking is joy in experimentation, and a boring conservatism prevails instead. We hear the same thing again and again ad nauseam. [...] Modern Prague musical life strives ever more for quantitative records, while real artistic achievement cuts no ice – either in the opera or in the concert hall. And the value of the Czech crown has done its work, burying artistic morality.” As we can see, laments over the rise of commerce and transformation of art into a commodity are not just a phenomenon of today.

The musical life of the first twenty years of the republic was also characterised by all kinds of polemics and disputes, often quite trivial in character and not infrequently purely a matter of personal antipathies. Immediately after the proclamation of the republic the critic and Charles University Professor Zdeněk Nejedlý (who was to become notorious after the 2nd existing on a voluntary, amateur basis were not spared acrimonious disputes. Unfortunately these were not always purely musical disputes, for in the context of the time they became ever more bound up with political issues. On the other hand, the quarrels always showed a level of genuine interest in musical questions that sometimes seems sadly absent today.

Leading Protagonists in Inter-War Musical Prague

In the first year of *Auftakt* H. R. Fleischmann, in an article on Expressionist music, wrote that “in Prague Czech and German artists work side by side in the service of new music”. Here he still uses a small “n” for “new”, although in fact *Der Auftakt* was to be one of the first journals in which the term New Music with a capital “N” (*Neue Musik*) was employed to denote a stylistic orientation. Fleischmann identified Alexander Zemlinsky as the leading personality among German musicians in Prague, and Josef Suk as his equivalent among Czechs. As the head of the opera of the New German Theatre [*Neues deutsches Theater*] in the years 1911–1927, Alexander Zemlinsky had made a strong mark not only on the profile of this particular company, but on Prague musical life in general. With the theatre’s orchestra he held concert cycles, the May Festivals (*Májové hry* – *Mai-Festspiele*), in which he was taking up an idea proposed by his predecessor Angel Neumann – the same idea that Václav Talich was to pick up in 1939 when he organised the Prague, and then in later years (up to 1943) Czech Musical May. With this festival Talich was identifying with all that was fine in the legacy that its German inhabitants had left to Prague, and indeed Czechoslo-

vak culture, while at the same time standing up to Nazi propaganda, since he deliberately organised his Prague Musical May as a kind of opposition to the German Musical Weeks (*Deutsche Musikwoche*). After the war, the heir and continuer of Talich’s Musical Mays was to be the Prague Spring Festival.

Vítězslav Novák and Josef Suk were among the greatest authorities in musical life in the inter-war period, above all in their capacities as professors of composition at the Prague Conservatory. In Novák’s case we can speak of a whole school of composition (among his pupils was the greatest experimenter of his generation Alois Hába, composer of the only full-length quarter-tone opera, *Matka* [The Mother], premiered in 1931 in Munich). Suk’s class also represented a strong generation in the development not only of Czech music, but music throughout Europe. The third Czech figure of international importance in Prague at this period was Josef Bohuslav Foerster, an admirer and friend of Gustav Mahler, who after many years in Hamburg and Vienna returned to Prague in 1919. Their pupils – Ladislav Vycpálek, Emil František Burian (see CM 4/2004), Jaroslav Ježek, Karel Boleslav Jirák, Iša Krejčí, Pavel Bořkovec and many others – were very diverse in terms of temperament and stylistic direction. Of course, a further two composers (although widely differing in age) are today generally considered to be among the most important figures in Czech music of the Inter-war period, and these are Leoš Janáček and Bohuslav Martinů. Their lives and music had little to do with Prague, however, since Janáček was based in Brno and had to wait a long time for any kind of recognition in the capital, while Martinů lived in Paris from 1923. Nonetheless, their works were included in Prague concert programmes and formed a yardstick by which to measure the others.

Among the Prague Germans a generation was growing up with the potential to represent modern Czechoslovak art. In 1919 Schönberg’s pupil Viktor Ullmann moved to Prague, immediately attracting attention as a choirmaster and conductor (for example he rehearsed a Prague performance of Schönberg’s giant work *Gurre-Lieder* in 1921). He introduced himself as a composer in March 1923 with *Seven Songs* [*Sieben Lieder*] (today lost), which – according to a review from Oskar Baum in the *Prager Presse* – were the “special sensation of the evening”, and in 1929 he won international praise with his *Variations on Schönberg* [*Schönberg-Variationen*] in Geneva. Hans Krása caught public interest in 1921 with his op. 1, *Orchestral Grotesques with Accompanying Sung Part* [*Orchestergrötesken mit begleitender Singstimme*] on the texts of Christian Morgenstern’s *Gallows Songs* [*Galgenlieder*]. In 1934 he was awarded a Czechoslovak State Prize for his opera based on Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Dream Betrothal* [*Verlobung*

im Traum]. As a composer Erwin Schulhoff, otherwise a versatile pianist and one of the first performers of pieces for the quarter-tone piano, caused constant surprise with his wanderings between styles.

Between the wars the Prague Conservatory attracted young musicians from all the countries of the former Yugoslavia, as well as students from Bulgaria, Lithuania, the Ukraine, and also Turkey and elsewhere. They were drawn not just by material considerations (inter-war Prague was relatively cheap), but above all by the international atmosphere of the city. Among Hába’s Czech pupils, those who most notably matured under his musical and personal influence included the composer and pianist Karel Reiner, and the later world-famous conductor Karel Ančerl (for the so called Hába school, see CM 3/2005). The German Music Academy also won international renown with its excellent teaching body, which included at various points Alexander Zemlinsky, the pianist Konrad Ansorge, the violinist Henri Marteau, and the outstanding singing teacher Konrad Wallerstein.

The International Dimension

After 1918 Czech music had an abundant supply of repertoire (the musicologist Vladimír Helfert counted as many as fifty viable original Czech operas), including a vast amount of chamber and vocal pieces. Suk was becoming an acclaimed composer of symphonies, while Novák already had major symphonic poems and cantatas to his name. The stagnation of which they were accused should be understood in the context of surrounding developments that put a high value on experiment. In this sense the work of the Czech Germans appeared more audacious in the 1920s. The Czech Germans had no inhibitions when it came to adopting the example of Arnold Schönberg, whose Society for the Private Performance of Music (*Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*) had its own branch in Prague, and when this ceased to exist its role in promoting German Modernism was taken by the Literary-Artistic Society (*Literarisch-künstlerischer Verein*). Yet if the Czechs were rather treading water when it came to the orientation of their own work in accordance with the rather vaguely formulated slogan of “being modern, but remaining themselves”, the problem at least inspired them to all the more feverish efforts on the level of organisation and propagation. And here, of course, we mean those Czechs who did not accept the slogan of “de-Germanification” as a dogma, but realised that if young Czechoslovak art was to achieve recognition beyond the frontiers of the state, it would have to give up nationalist squabbles and stand up for the principle of tolerance, which was in any case a principle historically native to the Bohemian Lands. Czechoslovak musicians responded immediately to the founding of the International Soci-



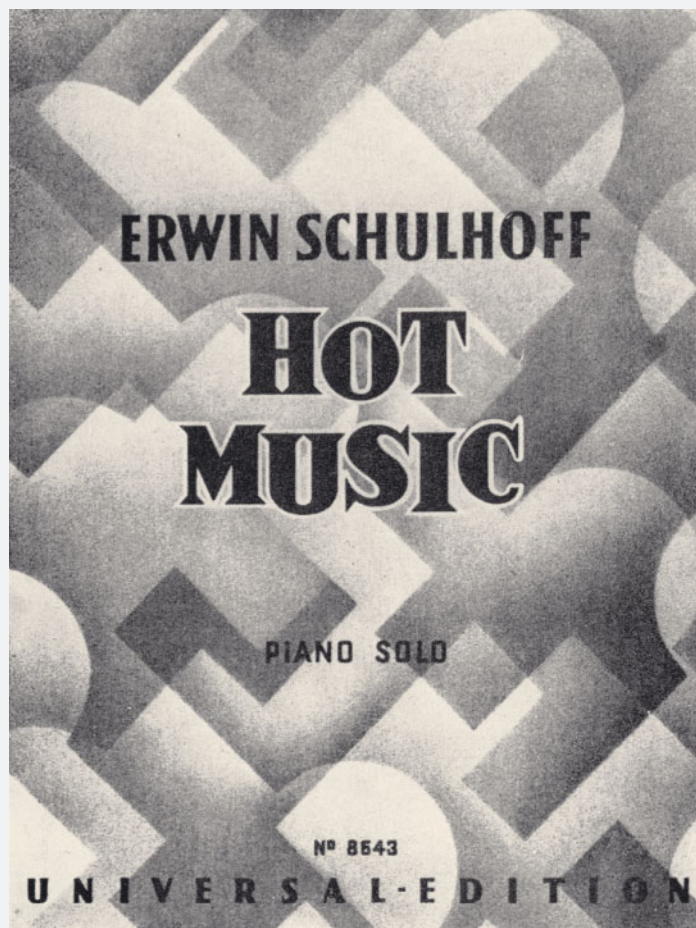
Alexander Zemlinsky



Hans Krása



Viktor Ullmann

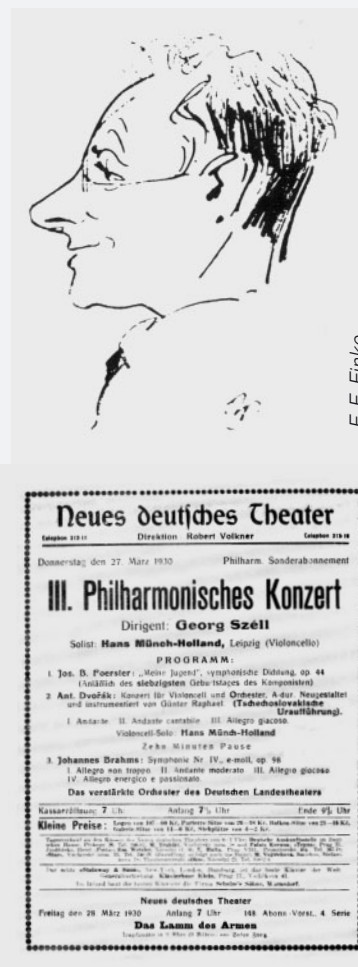


ety for Contemporary Music (ISCM) in 1922. The rapidly established Czechoslovak Section of the ISCM had two subsections, one Czechoslovak (or in fact Czech, because Slovak music appeared at the society's festival for the first time in 1935), and one German – but externally it acted as a unified state section and was perceived as such. In 1923 Alois Hába returned to Prague from studies in Berlin and Vienna and stirred up the still waters of Prague musical life like a real pike in a fishpond. In 1924 Prague became for the first time an organiser city for the ISCM international festival (its orchestral section) and in the following year it hosted the festival again. In 1924 the festival was held as part of the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the birth of Bedřich Smetana, and in this way Czechoslovak art succeeded in showing the possibility of combining tradition with modern directions. It also showed national tolerance when the New German Theatre presented Alexander Zemlinsky's production of Smetana's *The Dove* as well as the world premiere of Schönberg's *Erwartung*, and presented its own idea of what constituted modern music: the festival included performance of Smetana's 2nd String Quartet and his unfinished *Prague Carnival* but also the first ever presentation of a quarter-tone piano, built to Alois Hába's design by the August Föhrster company.

In the festival brochure Jan Löwenbach wrote that, "While Bohemia was still a coun-

try represented in the Imperial Council of Austria-Hungary, music was in fact the only means of expression that could not be regulated by any decrees or regulations. It expressed the spirit and thought of the people without obstacles. [...] Music has always been the daily bread of the Czech at home and his cultural passport abroad. Wedged between East and West, platonically sympathising with the French, kin by blood and race to the Russians, surrounded and saturated in the German spirit, Czech music has managed to draw from the well-springs of its own folk spirit the distinctive elements of modern musical creation. So far music has never failed. It has never wished to serve as an underling, but has always helped the people to attain their ideals." And Erich Steinhard in his article on German music in Bohemia in the same brochure remarked that "although it is flowering in the border areas of the nation, in some talents it is still showing marked distinctive features." Among these talents he names Fidelio Finke, Erwin Schulhoff, Hans Krása, Viktor Ullmann, Erich Korngold and a number of others that are today nothing more than names. Nazism and racial theory not only separated them from Czechs, but also created a fissure in their own linguistic community.

Fidelio Friedrich Finke was a pupil of Vítězslav Novák's. After the Prague Conservatory had been turned into a Czech institution he became professor of composition and later rector of the German Academy of



F. F. Finke

Music and Theatre Art [Deutsche Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst] founded in 1919. He remained in this post up to 1945, i.e. even after the academy was changed into the Higher Institute of Music [Hochschulinstitut für Musik] attached to the German University [Deutsche Universität] and subordinated to the Reich in 1940. From the mid-1930s he was increasingly drawn into the net of politics, which of course it was hard for him to avoid given his senior position. He continued to associate with Czech musicians, for which he was pilloried in the German press, while the Czechs branded him Henlein's lackey pro because he attended a lecture by Konrad Henlein (although he may well have had no choice but to attend). In 1938 he chaired a congress of the Music Teachers' Association, where he expressed his support for Henlein's nationalist policy. In the last two years of the war, however, his position as rector became ever shakier, the Nazis regarded him as unreliable and he lost any kind of practical influence. After 1945 he was expelled in the mass transfer of Germans to Germany. He settled in Dresden, got involved in politics even there and at the price of further ideological volte-faces became a prominent composer in the German Democratic Republic. Fortunately there were enough people remaining in Czechoslovakia who knew and understood the situation, and were aware, for example, that under the Protectorate it was Finke who had ensured that the decree banning Czech higher schools and universities (which could have threatened his master school) was not enforced and that its collection of musical instruments was not confiscated.

A sadder and even more absurd fate was in store for Finke's colleague Theodor Veidl, the first recipient of the Czechoslovak State Prize for Opera (1929); he died in Terezín after it had been changed at the end of the war into a reception camp for Germans awaiting expulsion, which meant that he died absurdly in the place to which other creators of the Czech German musical culture between the wars, a culture that had sought to be united, had been sent under different conditions: the Jewish composers Viktor Ullmann and Hans Krása among others. (Veidl's opera *The Small-Towners* [Die Kleinstädter] was staged again in the autumn of 2005 as a joint production by the Theatre in Regensburg and the Prague National Theatre. On the 18th of March 2006 a plaque commemorating Veidl was unveiling at the Church in his native village of Vysočany u Žatce – one of only three buildings that remained of a village buried by the waste material from the Tušimice power station.

Another testament to the international character of inter-war Prague, and its openness to everything new and its democratic spirit – especially in the period of the growing threat of Nazism – was the fact that it was here that the International Society for Musical Education [Internationale

Gesellschaft für Musikerziehung] was founded in 1934. Its moving spirit was Leo Kestenberg, a native of Ružomberok in Slovakia and from 1929 a councillor of the Prussian Ministry for Science, Art and Public Education [Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Volksbildung], who was then fired from his post in 1933 for racial reasons and settled temporarily in Prague. The first congress of this society also took place in Prague, to great acclaim in 1936.

As far as promoting and disseminating music is concerned, we should also remember the role of radio broadcasting, launched in Prague in 1923. In 1925 the ground was prepared for the establishment of a radio orchestra that soon became well-known and started to give its own concerts (its conductors included Otakar Pařík and Otakar Jeremiáš, for example). In 1934, yet another orchestra was born to take its place alongside the Czech Philharmonic and Radio Orchestra: this was the FOK Symphony Orchestra (Prague Symphony Orchestra; see CM 3/2004). Naturally, in any survey of orchestral life in Prague we should also include the orchestras of both opera houses, the National Theatre and the New German Theatre, and the orchestra of the Prague Conservatory.

Music Societies

As has already been suggested, the young generation of Czech composers made up for a certain lack of definition in their own work by eager efforts on the level of organisation. The 1920s saw a positive avalanche in the founding of music societies and Czechoslovakia did not lag behind. In 1920 the Czech Spolek pro moderní hudbu [Society for Modern Music] was formed on the initiative of Vítězslav Novák, and after 1922 it also de facto represented the Czech part of the Czechoslovak section of the ISCM. 1924 saw the founding of another Czech society, Přítomnost [The Present]. Some people were involved in both societies, which sometimes complemented each other in concert activities and sometimes competed. In 1927, for example, the Society for Modern Music presented Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* with Dutch guests, and then in 1931 Přítomnost presented the same piece with a complete Czech line-up and in Czech. In the 1930s Alois Hába took over the decisive role in running Přítomnost and under his vice-presidency and later presidency the society's programme became very diverse and adventurous, involving foreign composers and soloists, monothematic evenings, and evenings of new pieces played from manuscript scores. Another Czech society that organised evenings of new chamber music was the Hudební skupina Mánesa [Manes Music Group], attached to the Mánes association of fine arts. Prominent among the German societies were the Literary-Artistic Society men-

tioned above, and the Urania educational society. Both the higher music schools (the State Conservatory and the German Academy) organised series of concerts, and of course there was a whole range of active music associations, choirs and ensembles organising concert life.

It is worth considering the way the German pianist and music journalist Ernst Latzko, who had also been involved in Prague musical life, summed up the situation in an article for the *Tempo* journal in 1938. He wrote that, "The Czechs rightly sees in music one of the most precious of his national possessions and so overlooks no opportunity of placing it in the services of national sentiment. A foreigner may see a certain danger in this approach and cannot help but think that apart from *The Bartered Bride*, *My Country*, the *New World Symphony* and a number of other, often repeated works, there are many more jewels in the Czech treasury that deserve more attention than they have so far attracted." He himself was personally acquainted with the contemporary Czech musical generation and could therefore go on, "The first impression is of richness and diversity, an undeniable instinct for musicianship, and in the interpretation of foreign works a preference for feeling and temperament at the expense of style and tradition." He expresses great admiration for the standard of Czech performance (orchestras, choirs, chamber ensembles), considered that more Janáček operas should be staged in Prague(!) and is not entirely satisfied with the standard of stage performances "especially when the stage has a distinguished orchestra, excellent choir and range of distinguished soloists at its disposal." He appreciates the enormous importance of the music department of the radio, then headed by Karel Boleslav Jirák, and praised the excellent orchestra conducted by Otakar Jeremiáš and the choir led by Jan Kühn. He pays tribute to the Czech public too, which "is never blasé, has unusual musical gifts, and gives precedence to musical enjoyment and imagination over critical reason". And from this characterisation he draws a conclusion that – considering he was a German – is remarkable.

"This naive way of listening corresponds to the naivety of Czech music and the foreigner who compares both with the more self-critical and reflective method of German music arrives at the conclusion that the competition between the two cultures and mentalities, which are so different but at the same time border on each other and intersect, must necessarily bring forth the most beautiful fruit."

The End of Co-existence

Latzko's words fell on a ground already being trampled under the boots of German nationalists, and their seeds could never germinate. After 1933, when Prague became a transitional place of exile for many artists fleeing from Hitler's Germany, the co-

operation between Czech and German artists had deepened further than in the early years of the republic. In 1937 the New German Theatre, which was increasingly a thorn in the flesh of the more nationalistic Germans, presented Otakar Ostrčil's opera *Honzovo království* [Hanza's Kingdom] (see CM 3/2004), a strongly anti-militarist work, and in its last complete season, in June 1938, the world premiere of Ernst Křenek's *Charles V*, an idealistic dream of a united Europe. By that time the composer had already found exile in the United States, having fled from Austria after the Anschluss in March. In 1937 he had written to Alois Hába from Hollywood, saying, "As you know, I am coming to the premiere of *Charles V* in May – at least I hope it will take place. On that occasion might I play at a Přítomnost concert? I would like to play my

Variations (I have just played them for the first time and I shall be playing them in San Francisco, Amsterdam and London – they take 22 minutes). I would also like to offer you the first performance of five small songs on texts by Franz Kafka, I have three of them ready now. They will be about 6 – 8 minutes long. They would probably need a voice like Frau Nussy, since they are relatively difficult. If you would like them, would a radio broadcast be possible? Financially it would come in very handy for me. I would be very happy if it worked out, because then at last would have another chance to play you some proper music!" (Julie Nussy-Bäcker was a harpist and singer who had emigrated to the USA to escape from Nazism)

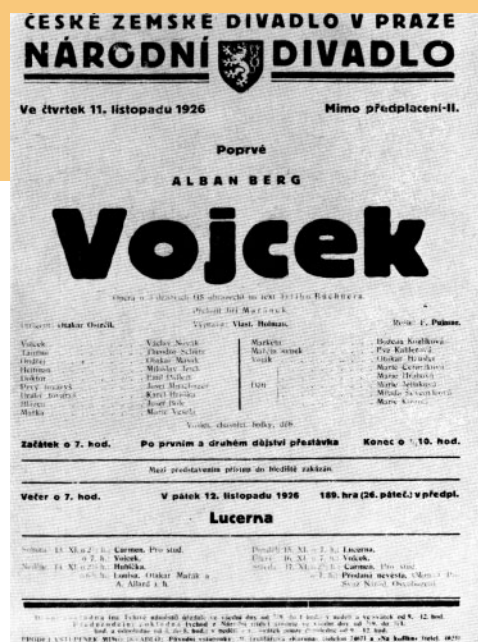
The date of the premiere of Křenek's opera was shifted back to the very end of the season. Ernst Křenek did not

come for the premiere, and there was no second performance. The reaction of the German nationalist press had been unambiguous. The New German Theatre was consigned to oblivion, and its activities ended at almost the same moment that the agreement for the cession of the Czechoslovak borderlands to Germany was signed at Munich. A year later Czechoslovakia was occupied by Hitler's forces. The invasion by Greater German "Culture" meant the end of co-existence between the two language cultures in Bohemia and Moravia, a co-existence that had not always been free of problems, but had always been mutually inspiring.

causa wozzeck 1926

JITKA LUDVOVÁ

A great deal has already been written about the Prague premiere of Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* at the Czech National Theatre in 1926. Organised disturbances at the third night of the opera on the 16th of November meant that the performance could not be finished and led to an official ban on further performances. The scandal provoked counter-protests by writers, artists and musicians in Prague, and the unfinished performance became a warning example in later debate on restrictions of freedom of artistic expression. The whole episode is very well documented in the literature, but hitherto attention has centred mainly on the immediate events surrounding the premiere in November, and these are treated as a kind of unique and unprecedented explosion resisting easy explanations. The affair around *Wozzeck* was not, however, the first theatrical storm to involve street disturbances and demonstrations. Prague's public life, divided by permanent nationalist tension and dissension into separate Czech and German camps that were nonetheless closely related through individual relationships between artists, was a fertile seedbed for conflict that could all too easily erupt over opera and theatre.



I. For Czech society, towards the end of the 19th century theatre, particularly opera had become one of the chief symbols of modern national revival and embodied the Czech aspirations to lift Czech culture out of long-term decline and onto the same level as its large European neighbours. The National Theatre had taken thirty years to build, and was financed partly from public collections among the Czech population and partly by the central authorities. It was opened in the autumn of 1881, almost immediately destroyed in a fire but then rebuilt within two years. For the quarter of a million Czechs living in Prague it was not just an object of national pride, but also a prime instrument in the political struggle to obtain



Alban Berg



Otakar Ostrčil

a better position for Czechs within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

German theatre enjoyed a different status. It had an unbroken history in Prague dating from the 17th century, and use of German made it a permanent part of the European-wide network of German theatres. Many more foreigners were involved in it than domestic artists, and the domestic public was also small; it played for the mere 40,000 German inhabitants of Prague. The official German stage in Bohemia was the Estates Theatre (from 1783), while since 1888 what was known as the New German Theatre (today the State Opera), built by private money, had also been running. When after 1880 the German deputies in the parliament requested a subsidy for the new building, the issue became part of a bitter political battle in which the obstructive tactics of the Czech deputies, supported by the Czech public, twice prevented the grant of state support for the building of the German theatre. All this took place against the background of impassioned and none too fastidious press campaigns that kept up the level of nationalist fervour on both sides. On the other hand, however, the two theatres, Czech and German, were capable of a high degree of co-operation and their directors were on friendly professional terms.

In the last decade of the 19th century, nationalist street conflicts escalated in the struggle over Czech-German constitutional rights and culminated in 1897 when martial law was imposed in Prague. Both Czech and German anti-semites became active and publicly visible. Events surrounding theatre acquired aspects of social tension when in January 1901 the orchestra of the National Theatre went on strike and in October 1907 the orchestra of the German theatre followed suit. The German orchestra strike was even backed by the All-Austrian

(i.e. including Czech-German) Society, founded in 1905, but the collaborative approach of the musicians in this affair was the exception in the general atmosphere of nationalist tension. Most of the Czech newspapers continued to slander the Prague German stage and print articles wondering whether a proper Czech ought to go to German performances at all. The German opera was criticised for not playing Czech works, although this of course was partly based on agreement for the division of repertoire made between the two directors. For their part most of the German papers ignored Czech cultural life and had no qualms about printing comments on the superiority of German to Slav culture.

The First World War opened up a large space for propaganda in which nationalist passions were turned against other nations as well. After the announcement of a state of war between Austria and Italy, the campaign against Italian opera spread from Germany to German Prague. "Do we need Italian opera?" asked the music critic of the German paper *Bohemia* on the 23rd of May 1915. He reminded his readers of the patriotic aspects of the work of Richard Wagner and proposed that the "worthless and artistically antiquated" Italian works be expunged from repertoire, although a few operas by Verdi and Rossini might be allowed to stay.

At the end of the 1st World War, with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and proclamation of an independent Czechoslovak Republic, Czech-German conflicts were then to take very acute and visible forms directly related to theatre, as well as other issues. On the 28th of October 1918 a number of German theatres built in the 19th century by towns and their German theatrical companies, for example in Liberec, Olomouc and Brno (see the article by T. Páková), were confiscated and handed over to Czech companies, or at least hence-

forth had to share buildings with Czech companies. Even before the end of the war, representatives of Czech theatre and opera, and politicians, had been expressing scepticism about the prospects for Prague German theatrical life in the future Czechoslovak state. Some Czech artists went considerably further than the Czechoslovak government, which did not in fact wish to curtail the cultural development of the German population in the new state. Radical anti-German speeches by artists and deliberate provocation on the part of the press led to mass response that the police were unable to control.

The theatre-related event with the greatest political implications was the forcible Czech takeover of the Estates Theatre, carried out on the 16th of November 1920 by a group of Czech actors and legionaries supported by several parliamentary deputies. The Estates Theatre was incorporated into the National Theatre and the authorities de facto accepted the violent approach that had been adopted. The actual takeover had been preceded by a campaign lasting more than a year in the Czech newspapers and the pressure of Czech deputies in parliament. The immediate trigger for the action was the Czech-German conflict in Cheb the day before. On the 16th of November unidentified organisers called an anti-German demonstration on Wenceslas Square; egged on by sloganeering, the crowd then set off for the Estates Theatre and eight actors and legionaries occupied it. Violent street elements joined the original core of the demonstration and several hundred people ransacked the editorial offices of the German newspapers, *Bohemia* and *Prager Tagblatt*. The very next day, the 17th of November, a synagogue in Prague's Vinohrady district was attacked. The nationalist pogrom took place under the slogan "theatre of the Czech nation".

Most leading figures in the cultural and political world, like most of the press, finally distanced themselves from the extreme consequences of this event, but the police hardly intervened at all. A court too confirmed the validity of the transfer of the theatre into Czech hands, especially since during the court hearing street hoodlums threatened to destroy the theatre building if it was "returned to the Germans", and the government ultimately found unofficial ways of compensating the German directors for the damages they had suffered. It was in this context of recurrent explosions of nationalist tension that preparations were made to present a difficult modern opera by a German composer in the Czech National Theatre.

II. The work of Georg Büchner (1813–1837), an author discovered at the turn of the 19th/20th century, was well known in Prague after the 1st World War. In 1921 he had even been the subject of a doctoral the-



Prague Wozzeck scenography, seventh act - the street

sis by Gerhard Schulz at the Prague German University. The Prague German theatre undoubtedly noticed the premier of Büchner's drama *Dantons Tod* in 1910 in Hamburg, the premiere of the romantic comedy *Leonce und Lena* in 1911 in Vienna, and the performance of the fragment of *Wozzek* in Munich in November 1913, followed by its Vienna premiere on the 5th of May 1914 in the small Residenzbühne. In 1916 Hans Demetz, a young man scarcely twenty-years-old, was appointed repertory director at the German theatre company in Prague. He devoted a special repertoire series to Expressionist drama (Kammerspiele), including, on the 4th of October 1920, a production of Büchner's *Wozzek* in the Estates Theatre. At almost the same time the Czech Revoluční scéna (Revolutionary Theatre Company), one of many short-lived post-war companies, presented its own production of *Wozzek*. In 1921 the Prague City Theatre at Královské Vinohrady, an ambitious Czech company that competed with the National Theatre company, staged Büchner's *Danton's Death*. In 1923 the play was also produced at the Prague German Theatre, which included the comedy *Leonce und Lena* in the same year.

As far as Berg's opera was concerned, on the 19th of April 1925 three scenes (*Drei Bruchstücke*), which the composer had extracted from his work for separate treatment, were presented in concert form in Prague. They were performed by the orchestra of the German theatre under its conductor Alexander Zemlinsky, who gave a second performance of the pieces on the 20th of May at the Prague festival of the ISCM. Zemlinsky was a friend of Berg's and was undoubtedly the moving force behind the choice. It is reasonable to ask why he did not try to put on the whole of

Berg's opera. The answer is fairly obviously that he no longer had enough energy for such a demanding project. He was in his fifteenth season of work in Prague, was tired of the unending fight to preserve the existence of the theatre, no longer had his former authority with the company and was planning his departure to Berlin. It would be no surprise if it were ever established that he himself negotiated on the Prague production of *Wozzek* with the head of the opera of the Czech National Theatre Otakar Ostrčil, with whom he was on friendly terms. Zemlinsky was well aware of the high standard of the Czech opera company, and could well have seen it as a better guarantee for the quality of the production at that particularly juncture.

In any case, the main architects of the world premiere of *Wozzek*, which took place in Berlin on the 14th of December 1925, were well acquainted with the Czech music scene. The conductor Erich Kleiber had studied at the Prague Conservatory, in the years 1909–1912 had been conductor at the Prague German theatre, and came back on occasion as guest conductor of the Czech Philharmonic. Together with Zemlinsky, the director Franz Ludwig Hörth had staged Wagner's tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* with the German opera in Prague in 1923 and 1924 and had certainly exploited the chance to visit the National Theatre. It is well-known that Otakar Ostrčil had some reservations about Kleiber's Berlin production, but he could definitely have drawn on the experience of the Berlin conductor and director through personal contact.

On a first acquaintance with the piano reduction of *Wozzek* in 1924, Ostrčil was by no means taken with the work, and he



Václav Novák as Wozzeck

probably changed his mind only after the performance of the fragments of the opera. He had already decided to stage it in the autumn of 1925, and attended a reprise performance in Berlin. He was well aware that the premiere had aroused mixed responses and dramatically contradictory reviews. He must have anticipated that reactions would be similar in Prague.

Problems arose immediately during the first rehearsals, when the orchestra of the National Theatre refused to play the difficult parts, demanded that the opera be withdrawn from repertoire and adopted a policy of passive resistance. The members of the orchestra failed to keep quiet about their views even outside the theatre and so encouraged a negative public climate of opinion. At first the soloists were equally unenthusiastic, fearing that the parts would damage their voices, and it was only as rehearsals progressed and the hard work bore fruit that they became less suspicious. Even before the premiere, a brochure from the Universal Edition publishing house reprinting the positive and negative reviews of the Berlin premiere was in circulation in Prague, and the sensation-hungry Czech press started a negative campaign. Alban Berg turned up in Prague before the 7th of

November so that he could be present for the final preparations, and on the 11th of November the curtain rose on the premiere.

According to the first reports in Czech and German newspapers, the Prague production, attended by a Czech and German audience, went much as could have been expected. The performances were of a high standard and the composer was satisfied. Enthusiastic applause alternating with angry whistles and other expressions of distaste sounded from the auditorium and during the interval the audience loudly exchanged opinions on the pavement. The overall response to the evening was favourable, however, and a substantial part of the audience realised that they were encountering an extraordinary work of music. By pure chance a sad event occurred that was later abundantly exploited by the press – during the performance, offstage, a high official of the city authorities suddenly died of heart failure at the age of sixty-six.

The second performance took place without incident, but rumours were already going round that “something” was being organised for the third performance on the 16th of November, which was the first performance for subscribers. On the fateful day there was no sign of trouble until the second act, and the entrance of the choir of sleeping soldiers. At that moment the signal for the beginning of the demonstration was given from one of the boxes and catcalls, whistling, trumpeting, hooting, sirens and general noise came from various points in the auditorium and lasted for more than half an hour. According to eye-witness reports there were no more than twenty to thirty hoodlums. The orchestra stopped playing, most of the audience tried to get the noise to stop by loudly applauding over it, the curtain was several times brought down and raised again, and no one knew if the production would continue until finally the theatre was gradually evacuated. Bunches of theatre goers stayed on the pavement long into the night in fierce discussion. The next day the Land Administrative Committee, which had jurisdiction over the National Theatre, met and decided to ban further performances into order “to prevent the abuse of the National Theatre for the purposes of political demonstrations”.

In the days that followed many articles were published in the Czech papers condemning the hooliganism in the theatre, and there were protests against the ban on further performances of the opera, with artistic clubs and associations issuing proclamations, brochures and petitions. From every quarter of the cultural community voices were raised in support of the chief of the National Theatre Otakar Ostrčil; a year later, 1927, he was awarded a Czechoslovak state prize for the production of *Wozzek* on the recommendation of a committee of artists. The production was not, however, revived at the National Theatre.

III.

Three basic questions immediately arise when we look at these events: Who initiated and carried out the whole action, against whom was it directed, and what was supposed to be the result? The vandalism was definitely not provoked from inside artistic circles, even though many Czech composers did not approve of Berg's music. Expert opinions on the opera differed in Prague just as they did in Berlin. Some reviewers were enthusiastic, while others expressed major doubts, and disliked both Berg's unusual composition techniques and the brutality of the subject matter. There was nothing peculiar about these reactions. It was also to be expected that the Prague German cultural community would have more understanding for the opera than the Czechs. This was not only because of the nationality of the composer; the Prague German public had simply had more contact with bleak and unconventional modern opera and drama and was therefore more inclined to accept them. Of course, the German theatre audiences had a strong conservative middle-of-the-road element too, and such people reacted with outrage to new work. For example in May 1920 the public was sharply divided at the premiere of Hasenclever's drama *Die Menschen*, while at the end of February 1925 the directorate preferred to withdraw Ernst Toller's comedy *Der entfesselte Wotan* from repertory, because its caricature of Prussian rightwing attitudes provoked too much controversy. There had also been noisy objections from some members of the German public at the Prague premieres of other contemporary German operas, such as Hundemith's trilogy *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen, Sancta Susanna* and *Das Nusch-Nuschi* in March 1923, or the world premiere of Schönberg's monodrama *Erwartung* in June 1924. Even the average German audience, however, had a certain experience of new trends in theatre and opera and it would have been hard to exploit its reactions to provoke a public scandal.

Yet a public scandal is what occurred in the Czech theatre. To understand what happened we have to bear in mind that as the official Czech theatre the National Theatre “belonged to the nation” and this exceptional status tended to tie its hands as far as repertoire was concerned. It was supposed to maintain honour for historical traditions; to avoid experiments, orientate itself primarily to mainstream taste and provide plenty of space for Czech authors and composers. Its fulfilment of these duties was overseen by the Czech political parties and most of the Czech press. Contemporary opera was something with which the Czech public of the National Theatre was clearly less well acquainted than the German, even though Otakar Ostrčil, chief of the opera from 1920, had included an above average number of contemporary works in his repertoire. The protests written by subscribers to the National Theatre to his bosses after the pre-

miere of *Wozzek*, the dissatisfied letters of respected and well-known citizens, mirrored the horizons that the National Theatre had been providing for its audiences. “We demand our money back for this piece, for it was a bore and not entertainment,” wrote one offended theatre-goer, and it is easy enough to see his point of view..

It was on these voices of the middle-of-the-road and poorly informed public of the National Theatre that the initiators of the scandal relied. Immediately after the premiere the Czech right-wing daily *Národní listy* published a piece under the title “In the Service of Foreigners”, in which it accused the National Theatre of letting works by contemporary Czech composers wait for performance, while undertaking “costly experiments with foreign rubbish”. The extreme right-wing Czech newspapers were writing about the “decadent opera of a German Jew”, using just the same vocabulary that the German National Socialist Party would be using ten years later against “entartete Kunst”. It was pure chance that the attack on *Wozzek* happened six years to the precise day after the fanaticised crowd had taken over the German Estates Theatre, but it was no accident that the target was a German work and that the arguments used were extreme nationalist ones. The events in the theatre were inspired by the first Czech fascists, who exploited Prague's “Gilded Youth” to carry out their plans. Behind the banning of further performances of the opera were highly placed politicians in the Theatre Commission of the Land Administrative Committee, who saw in the scandal a possible way to achieve changes of personnel in the National Theatre and to increase their political influence on its directors. When the fascistic voices in the press went to such offensive lengths that they provoked a wave of counter protests, most of the politicians retreated. Nor was this similarity with events after the 16th of November 1920 pure chance either.

The affair lasted for several months, but actually brought little in the way of change to the life of the National Theatre. While many who had provoked the scandal had hoped for the removal of Otakar Ostrčil, attempts to unseat him failed, and the repertoire remained essentially unchanged. A production of Berg's opera *Wozzek* was staged (almost without attracting any notice) in 1932 by the German Opera in Brno, and then in 1935 Büchner's original spoken drama was put on by the Prague German company, this time attracting a great deal of attention in the Czech press. At this time Prague was experiencing a major influx of emigrants fleeing from Nazi Germany. They were not welcomed by those who had whistled ten years before in the auditorium of the National Theatre, but those Germans and Czechs who back then had protested against the banning of *Wozzek* at the National Theatre, were ready to give them a helping hand.

german brno

TEREZA PÁVOVÁ

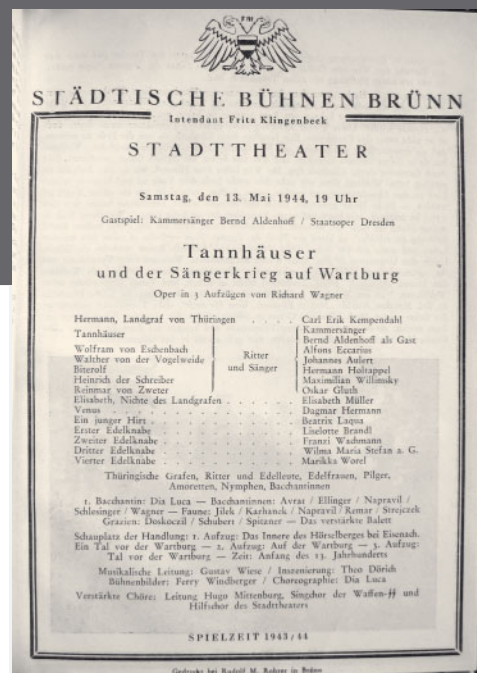
Until 1945 Brno was the town with the largest number of German-speaking inhabitants anywhere on the territory of what today is the Czech Republic. According to accessible sources, up to 1918 Germans constituted as much as 70% of the overall population of Brno, and even after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, when many Germans left, mainly to move to Austria while many Czechs came back from Austria, they continued to constitute almost a third. Up to 1918 it was the Germans who determined the character of Brno and the typical face of its cultural life, since the Czech element was in a minority here. In musical life, however, overlap between the two communities was far from rare. Czechs used to go to the German opera house and Germans to Czech concerts – mainly in the latter half of the 19th century, when the Czech society Beseda brněnská – the Brno Arts Association, developed into a major cultural phenomenon under the leadership of Pavel Křížkovský and Leoš Janáček. There were also plenty of bridges between performers, with German instrumentalists and singers quite frequently taking part in Czech concerts, and the orchestras of both communities helping each other out whenever necessary.

Theatre and Opera

As in the rest of the Moravian towns, in Brno too the theatre was among the oldest of cultural institutions. Its history went back to the 17th century, although the Czech stage was very much younger, and not founded until 1884. The German theatre's first building was situated on Zelný trh. It suffered serious fires from time to time, a common hazard of the period, but these never interrupted its existence for long. In view of its geographical proximity, Brno early established contact with the Viennese theatres like the Court Theatre (Hoftheater) and the theatres in the suburbs. This was mainly a matter of tours by individual artists and ensembles, but there were also close ties in repertoire. Works that audiences had been able to see in the capital of the monarchy – above all spoken drama, but also singspiels and later opera – soon arrived in Brno, but we also find influence in the opposite direction, for example the effect of the Brno ballet com-

pany on the Vienna repertoire. Before his departure for Vienna the capellmeister Wenzel Müller (a native of Moravian Trnávka) worked in Brno, while conversely the theatre director Emanuel Schikaneder astounded Brno audiences with his huge theatrical spectacles at the end of his career.

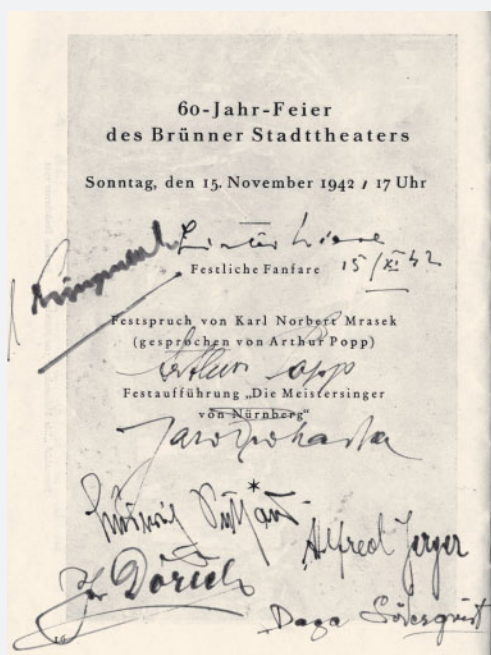
Towards the end of the 19th century the Theatre on the Zelný trh was no longer large enough to satisfy public demand and so the Germans, on the initiative of the mayor Gustav Winterholer, decided to build a new theatre (today the Mahen Theatre). Construction started in 1881 to plans by the Viennese architects Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer. The Brno City Theatre was a first in Europe in being fully electrified. Its first director was Adolf Franckel. The gala opening on the 14th of November 1882 presented two works, the play *Bei Frau Luna* by Adolf Franckel himself and Goethe's *Egmont*. The theatre had a drama and an opera company. At the beginning it



was mainly the drama company that made the box office profits, but later operetta established a strong position, and was particularly popular during the 1st World War.

German Opera and Operetta

Opera began to flourish here under director Adolf Baumann in the years 1890–1893. Baumann concentrated on staging the works of Richard Wagner (*Rienzi*, *Die Walküre*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Tristan und Isolde*), but also organised an important Mozart cycle that included *Idomeneo* and *Così fan tutte* and the singspiel *Bastien und Bastienne*, Mozart pieces relatively rarely performed in Bohemia. Baumann's successor Andreas A. Aman, who was director until 1898, stayed with the Wagnerian repertoire, adding the later parts of the tetralogy (*Das Rheingold*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*). It was under his auspices that the *Ring* cycle was first staged as a whole in Brno. Aman also discovered the famous tenor Leo Slezak and the baritone Rudolf Berger. The core of the opera repertoire continued to consist of German music. Only at the beginning of the 20th century was the repertoire enriched with non-German works (Niccolò Spinelli, Umberto Giordano, Camille Saint-Saëns, later also Giacomo Puccini and Eugen d'Albert). In fact the core repertoire of all German opera houses was Richard Wagner, and in Brno too a Wagner cycle was presented in the 1904/05 season and Wagner's *Ring* cycle was almost continuously in repertoire. In 1910 Brno welcomed Wagner's son Siegfried, who conducted his own opera *Banaditrich* there. Premieres of works by local German-speaking com-



posers also began to appear on the Brno stage, including pieces by Josef Gustav Mraczek and Max Oberleithner, for example.

As has already been indicated, operetta played a special role in Brno's musical life. The favourite composer in the genre here was Franz Lehár (in fact a native of nearby Komárno), as he was in Vienna as well. Close on his heels in terms of popularity came Oskar Straus and Leo Fall. The pre-war period prefigured the approaching economic crisis, which naturally had an impact on the theatre as well. The director Julius Herzka, who headed the opera in the years 1910–1918, nonetheless tried to maintain the theatre at least on the existing level. His repertoire once again relied on Wagner, and he tried to lure celebrated operatic stars to Brno. In May 1911, for example, he presented the entire *Ring* in Brno, with Hermann Wiedemann from the Hamburg Opera in the role of Wotan. In 1913 German theatres everywhere celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of Richard Wagner, and Brno was no exception. The cycle started with *Rienzi* and ended with *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Up to the 31st of December 1913 only Bayreuth has the privilege of staging *Parsifal*. Brno was not as quick off the mark as Prague and many other German theatres that presented *Parsifal* immediately on the 1st of January, 1914, but it lagged by only four months and on the 8th of April, *Parsifal* was staged at the Brno City Theatre. The orchestra was specially reinforced by the Brno Philharmonic for the occasion and conducted by August Veit. *Parsifal* here enjoyed 6 absolutely sold out performances.

The End of the Monarchy

The Brno company often visited Vienna and the population of Brno took pride in its successes. Pride, however, could not overcome economic depression and the imminent catastrophe of war (and of course a new com-

petitor for theatre was appearing in the form of cinema). Theatre and opera were faced with a tough fight to keep their audiences. Despite the seriousness of the situation the Brno German Theatre was among the first to launch the 1914/1915 season, but under completely different conditions. The theatre ceased to function as an institution funded by the city and was transferred to autonomous management by its members. For economic reasons, the company was reduced in size, and of course many members joined up or were conscripted. The number of performance days was cut back, military uniforms became more common in the audience, but surprisingly the theatre held its own. The wartime audience was grateful for every diversion that the theatre could afford, and allusions to the current situation increased its confidence. During the 1st World War the soloist of the Vienna Court Opera and native of Brno Maria Jezitzka, for whom Max Oberleithner had composed his opera *Aphrodite*, often appeared at the Brno theatre. The theatre's main magnet, however, was operetta – not only the works of Franz Lehár and Oskar Straus, but also of Edmund Eysler and Emmerich Kálmán, who were later to be banned by the Nazis. Eysler and Lehár even directed their own works in Brno. In the war years the old subscription system was abolished and replaced by an open coupon system that allowed people to choose performances while assuring the theatre the same income. In the third year of the war, unlike in preceding years, there were performances in July and the director Herzka for the first time engaged Leopold Reingruber as permanent dance master. The last productions of the war years at the German Theatre included two new one-act operas by the Brno native Erich Wolfgang Korngold, *Der Ring des Polykrates* and *Violanta*. *Violanta* attracted significant interest from the critics, but the reaction of the public was unusually cool.

The programme prepared for the 1918/19 season was never put on.

German Brno in the Czechoslovak Republic

The collapse of the monarchy and establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic radically altered conditions in Brno. In December 1918 the City Theatre was transferred to the management of a Czech theatre company with effect from the 1919/20 season and the Germans had to go back to the small theatre in Zelný trh. This situation was supposed to last only for the next three years, after which the Germans would theoretically be able to apply for return of their theatre, but from the beginning it was clear to everyone that under the new political circumstances the Germans would never get their theatre back. It was an event that was hardly conducive to harmonious Czech-German relations. Although the Czechs allocated the Germans two performance days a week (Monday and Tuesday) at the City Theatre, this scarcely sufficed. The only option was to use the premises of the German House and convert them for theatre use until a new German theatre could be built. But that was never to happen. In the inter-war period the German company played in three different places (in the City Theatre on its allocated days, in the Theatre on the Zelný trh and in the German House), an arrangement that naturally had many disadvantages. Opera was the genre the worst affected and it was operetta that increasingly had to compensate for its box-office losses. The loss of a major part of the German public meant the beginning of the end for the German theatre in Brno, but even so there were some important events, such as the appearance of the Viennese Volksoper in November 1919 with Felix Weingartner and the production of Mozart's opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.

There was not much left of the former



Today's Mahenovo Theatre

mutual tolerance and even collaboration between Czech and German artists. Often, if the Czech public attended a German performance it was only to provoke clashes (and vice versa). Yet it was in the 1920s that works by Czech composers were presented for the first time by the German company, a development previously unheard of. They staged works by Smetana, Janáček and Dvořák, but also the most important composition by František Neumann (the head of the Brno Czech opera), the opera *Liebele!*, which was produced at many German opera houses at the time. The very first Czech opera to be performed on the German stage was Bedřich Smetana's *The Kiss*, in Ludwig Hartmann's German translation (as *Der Kuß*) for the 100th anniversary of the composer's birth. The Czech company even lent costumes and its director Václav Štech designed the sets. The theatre made tactical attempts to establish contacts with summer theatres in Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně, and in Moravian Ostrava, and to develop its existing tradition of co-operation with the theatre in Olomouc, which was also experiencing a crisis at the time. Every tour and appearance elsewhere meant more income for the company.

Nor did the 1930s get off to a favourable start. The theatre tried to extract itself from economic crisis by appealing to a national spirit – anyone who feels for the nation will become our subscriber: “*Are you already subscriber to the United German Theatres in Brno?*” (“*Sind Sie schon Stammsitzmieter der Vereinigten Deutschen Theater in Brünn?*”) or “*The strongest unity of the Brno German community will be ensured by its theatre!*” (“*Den stärksten Zusammenschluß des Brünner Deutschtums bringt sein Theater zustande!*”) (1929/30). In Germany the National Socialist movement was gaining in strength and only a few theatres that embraced the democratic idea remained (one was the New German Theatre in Prague). The situation came to a head in 1938, when the two major political groups clashed in Brno – the nationalist group headed by Hans Baumann and the democratic forces. Aggressive nationalism won the day and strivings for a democratic theatre were smothered. The declaration of the Pro-

tectorate of Bohemia and Moravia after the Munich Agreement meant the rupture of the last ties between Czechs and Germans. The Germans took over the running of the city and, after twenty years, regained control of the City Theatre. The newly appointed intendant Theodor Anton Modes and his supporters from Henlein's Sudeten German movement ruled them in the spirit of instructions from the Reich. The first season in the “liberated theatre” (befreites Theater) opened on the 6th of December, still in the German House, with Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. In March 1939 the Germans ceremonially returned to their theatre with a production of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and soloists of the Vienna State Opera under the baton of Leopold Reichwein.

Brno under the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

The clock had been put back to the situation before the founding of an independent Czechoslovakia. In the new political order, the theatre community (Theatergemeinde) started once again to battle for audiences. This time publicity campaigns were focused on adherence to the German Reich and sentiments of unity with the German nation. The core repertoire had not changed very much. Once again we encounter Mozart, Lortzing, Wagner, Verdi, Puccini and Strauss, although the Jewish composers (Kálmán, Eysler, Offenbach) were dropped. The greatest change, however, was in the function of productions. The aesthetic side often suffered, replaced by an orientation to propaganda or pure entertainment.

Hitler's favourite Franz Lehár became the most frequently performed operetta composer, and actually visited Brno several times in the course of the war. Modes nonetheless introduced a number of contemporary works into Brno repertoire, for example presenting the Protectorate premiere of Werner Egke's opera *Die Zaubergeige* (1940), or Ottmar Gerster's opera *Enoch Arden* (1941). From the 1942–43 season Brno had a new intendant, Fritz Gerhard Klingenberg, who developed relations with Viennese and Reichsdeutsch artists still further. He was only to hold the post for two years but managed to attract incomparably larger audiences to the theatre than his predecessor. He deliberately changed the repertoire, shifting it towards operetta at the expense of spoken drama. After what had been a gap of twelve years he presented Hans Pfitzner's opera *Das Herz* (1943) and Heinrich Sutermeister's *Romeo und Julia* (1942) again. A major fan of ballet, he brought the Brno public *Tannhäuser* (1944) in the third “Paris” version, i.e. with ballet. The 1944/45 season was planned, but never launched. The company gave no more performances to the end of the war, some of the artists managing to escape in time, and the others being transported for forced labour. Thus

the era of the German Theatre in Brno ended a year before the war itself.

German Music Societies and Orchestras

In Brno as elsewhere, music societies and choirs played an important part in musical life. In the German musical community the most important was the *Liedertafel* society (which had the same name as its model in Germany), from which the Czech society *Beseda brněnská – the Brno Arts Association*, which was later to have a crucial impact on Czech musical culture in Brno, split off in 1864. The Brno Musical Society (*Brünner Musikverein*), founded in 1862, made a major contribution to German concert life in Brno, and operated its own music school for training orchestral players and choral singers. The society experienced a particularly fruitful period under the leadership Otto Kitzler, propagator of the work of Anton Bruckner and Richard Wagner, who headed the society and the school in the years 1868–98.

The first Brno symphonic body was founded in 1902 from members of the theatre orchestra under the title *Brünner Philharmoniker*, with August Veit as its conductor. Its guest conductors included leading European figures, such as Gustav Mahler (1904), Felix von Weingartner (1910), Richard Strauss (1911, who directed his own *Electra* here in the theatre in the same year), and Klemens Krauss (1924). The orchestra used the German House (*Deutsches Haus*), built in 1891, for its concerts. As in other Czech towns the German House fulfilled the function of centre of the local German cultural life. The largest hall in the Brno German House was equipped (as far as we can tell from reports in the press of the time) with an excellent organ. Max Reger, for example, gave an independent recital here. Today you will not find this grand building. Towards the end of the 2nd World War it was several times damaged by air raids and in 1944 it was demolished.

A symphony orchestra was a necessity even under the Protectorate. The Regional Symphony Orchestra of the Brno NSDAP, founded in October 1939, carried on the tradition of the Brno Philharmonic. Nikolaus Janowsky was appointed as its principal conductor. During the season the orchestra gave between 5 and 7 concerts, concentrating on symphonies by Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms and Bruckner. Its guest conductors included names like Robert Heger, Hermann Abendroth, Hans Pfitzner, Franz Konwitschny, Peter Raabe and others, and prominent political figures attended its concerts. Just like the theatre, the orchestra's life came to an end in the summer of 1944.

The transfer of the German population was legalised by the Potsdam Conference but had started earlier with spontaneous and often violent actions in many places, and for many decades the theme of German culture in Bohemia and Moravia (and so in Brno as well) was to be taboo.



Hana Kotková

euroart international festival



Jana Boušková

In the six years of its existence, the Prague EuroArt International Festival has earned itself a place of honour among Czech festivals and has gradually been making a name for itself in music-loving circles abroad. Last year it became a member of the Czech Association of Music Festivals and of the European Association of Music Festivals, which testifies to the quality of its choice of performers and compositions, and to the fact that it has been succeeding in a competitive conditions by the "smart strategy" of filling a gap on the music market. This is because it is the only year-round European festival of chamber music and the only festival of its kind in the Czech Republic. This year, in its sixth season, it will as usual be offering audiences outstanding ensembles and soloists from all over the world, and refined taste in its choice of pieces, many of them rarely publicly performed.

The Prague EuroArt Festival is international in its foundation, presents music by international composers and brings leading foreign musicians to the Czech Republic. Nonetheless, let us now take a look at the way in which the festival promotes Czech music and helps Czech musicians on their way to an honourable position alongside renowned foreign ensembles.

In its very first year, 2000, the Prague EuroArt Festival already managed to offer

visitors two significant musical experiences by presenting the works of Czech contemporary composers on the one hand and top Czech performers on the other. Seven pieces by 20th-century Czech composers, five of them contemporary and mainly from the ranks of teachers at the Prague Music Academy AMU, were played at the Lichtenštejn Palace in the Lesser Town in this first festival. In the second year the programme was comparable, and in subsequent seasons works by important composers from EU and candidate countries were played in juxtaposition with Czech work. Audiences therefore had the chance to hear the Czech premieres of many pieces, and what is more they were played by outstanding foreign ensembles, which is a rather rare privilege for Czech composers. In the 2002/2003 and following seasons, composers whose work was performed at the festival have included Marek Kopelent, Peter Graham, Jan Klusák, Milan Slavický, and Svatopluk Havelka as well as the classics L. Janáček, B. Martinů, I. Krejčí, J. Suk, A. Dvořák, B. Smetana, L. Koželuh and J. L. Dusík. The world premiere of R. Z. Novák's String Quartet, played by the British Arditti String Quartet started a tradition of the performance of works specially commissioned for the festival. This policy was crowned with the premiere in December last year of "Fragments of One Afternoon" for vibraphone, piano

and string quartet, which the well-known jazz pianist and composer Karel Růžička wrote specially for the occasion. Czech Radio expressed an interest in the piece, which is soon to be jointly recorded. One of the festival's aims is to provide a space for young composers, students at Prague's Musical Academy HAMU. In this context the performance of Tomáš Pálka's 1st String Quartet with Tape was an interesting aspect of the festival and for the next season the festival is planning to present the premiere of Michaela Plachká's String Octet performed by the brilliant American ensemble the Alexander String Quartet and the Stamic Quartet.

Currently, the festival's choice of programme as far as Czech music is concerned is focused on the promotion of gifted young musicians, to whom it offers appearances at the festival as part of the prizes in international competitions. This meant that in 2005/2006 season, for example, the festival included a performance by the winners of the International Prague Spring Festival Competition for string quartet, the Pavel Haas Quartet, and from the next season the Stamic Quartet will be joined as resident musicians of the festival by the young pianist Ivo Kahánek, who is likewise a laureate of the Prague Spring competition. Other outstanding Czech soloists and ensemble have also had the

chance to shine at the festival. Just at random, let us mention the cellist Jiří Bárta, the violinist Hana Kotková, the harp player Jany Boušková, the oboist Vilém Veverka, the vibraphonist Radek Krámpel and the young Zemlinsky Quartet.

One important development is the increasing organisation of festival concerts outside Prague, in the Czech regions. This extends the audience base and the festival's aim, which is now not just to offer excellent Czech and international chamber music in Prague, but to bring its concerts to listeners in what are already ten partner cities.

The next season will offer audiences keen to hear Czech musicians the pleasure of concerts by the Škampa Quartet and clarinetist Kateřina Soukalová – Váchová, winner of the Prague Spring Competition, and also a recital by the piano Trio Concertino, at which the resident musician Ivo Kahánek will introduce himself in the form

of a chamber player. In the opening festival concert Kahánek will also partner the Swiss soprano Brigitte Fournier, and at the end of the festival accompany the Japanese violinist Okazaki Keisuke and the Stamic Quartet.

We look forward to seeing you there!



Zemlinsky Quartet

International Festival of the Chamber Music EuroArt Praha

www.euroart.cz



Season 2006/ 2007

<i>Opening concert</i> 19. 9. 2006 Praha	20. 9. 2006 Trutnov, 21. 9. 2006 Jičín	Brigitte Fournier , Soprano (Switzerland); Ivo Kahánek , Piano; Stamic Quartet	D. Milhaud, E. Chausson, A. Honegger, J. Turina
17. 10. 2006 Praha	16. 10. 2006 Domažlice, 18. 10. 2006 Brno	Jing Zhao , Cello (<i>China</i>) – Award for the Winner of the ARD Munich Competition 2005; Stamic Quartet	A. Vranický , Work by Chinese composer for Cello solo, A. Borodin
21. 11. 2006 Praha		Škampa Quartet ; Kateřina Soukalová – Váchová , Clarinet	I. Krejčí, H. Sutermeister, D. Shostakovich, W. A. Mozart
12. 12. 2006 Praha	13. 12. 2006 Liberec	WORLDS BEYOND TRIO: Daniel Schyder, Saxophone (<i>USA / Switzerland</i>), Kenny Drew, Jr., Piano (<i>USA</i>), David Taylor , Trombone (<i>USA</i>); Stamic Quartet	J. C. de Arriaga, G. Gershwin, K. Weil, D. Schnyder
16. 1. 2007 Praha	15. 1. 2007 Kralupy nad Vltavou	Faust Quartett (Germany); Stamic Quartet	J. C. de Arriaga, G. Kurtág, J. S. Svendsen
20. 2. 2007 Praha	23. 2. 2007 Chrudim	Trio Concertino ; Kaspar Zehnder , Flute (<i>Switzerland</i>)	W. A. Mozart, D. Shostakovich, Works by Swiss composers in negotiation
20. 3. 2007 Praha	21. 3. 2007 Jičín	Quartet Amedeo Modigliani (France) – Winner of AFAA Declic and Young Concert Artists New York; Vladimír Leixner , Cello	R. Schumann, K. Beffa, G. Onslow
17. 4. 2007 Praha	18. 4. 2007 Děčín, 19. 4. 2007 Jablonec	Javier Echecopar Mongilardi , Guitar and Ba- roque Guitar (<i>Peru</i>); Stamic Quartet	Works by Baroque Peruvian Composer, A. Vivaldi, L. Boccherini
22. 5. 2007 Praha	23. 5. 2007 Olomouc, 24. 5. 2007 Ostrava	Alexander String Quartet (USA); Stamic Quartet	S. Barber, A. Copland, Ch. Ives, M. Plachká, B. Martinů
<i>Closing concert</i> 12. 6. 2007 Praha	14. 6. 2007 Jablonec	Okazaki Keisuke , Violin (<i>Japan</i>) – Award for the Winner of the ARD Munich Competition 2005; Ivo Kahánek , Piano; Stamic Quartet	D. Shostakovich, M. Ravel, T. Takemitsu, E. Chausson

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Petr Škvrně © Supraphon

musica florea

DENISA DOHNALOVÁ

I first encountered the Musica Florea ensemble at the 1995 Prague Spring Festival, where it performed a work by the Czech master of the earlier 18th century Jan Dismas Zelenka – *Missa Sanctissimae Trinitatis* (ZWV 17) of 1735. I was very struck by the precision of performance from what was at that stage an ensemble full of young musicians entirely unknown to me, and it left an outstanding impression. Since then I have followed with interest the further development of the ensemble at numerous concerts and in recordings that soon started to collect many awards from Czech and foreign music institutions.

The origins of Musica Florea go back to 1992, when Marek Štrýncl, the founder, cellist, conductor and musical director of the ensemble and its first members were studying at the conservatory in Teplice. With

good facilities and some helpfully inclined professors, the members of the young group became more closely involved in Baroque music.

The ensemble's first concert took place on the 10th of March 1992 in the Church of St John the Baptist in Teplice. It presented a chamber version – 2 violins, viola, 2 cellos, double bass and harpsichord (or organ) – of works by the lesser known Baroque composers Johann Rosenmüller and Tarquinus Merula and a mass by Adam Michna of Otradovice. For the Michna mass Marek Štrýncl found six amateur singers, which in itself reveals his desire to find a new, non-traditional sound using voices unencumbered by classical training.

"In an experimental spirit I really looked forward to 'untrained' voices, as a way of getting closer to the aesthetics of period

singing in the circumstances of today."

At this concert the members of the ensemble were already using old instruments, initially lent to them by Pavel Klikar, a friend of Marek Štrýncl since shortly before the Revolution in 1989. It was from Klikar that Štrýncl also gained his first practical experience when playing in his ensemble Musica Antiqua Praha.

"...in the first year on the Valtice courses I completely fell for the charm of 'authentic performance' thanks to one of the concerts by the Musica Antiqua Praha. I liked the completely different sound of the Baroque instruments, the colour, technique of play, and even the tuning between the separate pieces. It just grabbed me..."

Musica Florea does not have a fixed number of players but uses different combi-

Musica Florea is today one of the best ensembles in Europe specialising in the performance of earlier music on period instruments and basing its interpretation on the careful study of sources and period aesthetics. In the almost fourteen years of its existence it has appeared at hundreds of concerts in the Czech republic and throughout Europe, and has also been a guest at such important music festivals as the Prague Spring, Europalia, Resonanzen Wien, Festival van Vlaanderen Brugge, Europamusicale and others. As well as playing the works of J. S. Bach, G. P. Telemann, Jan Dismas Zelenka, A. Vivaldi, J. B. Lully, W. A. Mozart and other well known composers, Musica Florea has given modern premieres designed to revive interest in many forgotten composers and their music.

nations of musicians drawn from a circle who co-operate with the ensemble depending on the needs of each programme. Thus other strings, a wind section, and sometimes percussion, can be added to the seven core players – 2 Baroque violins, viola, cello, archlute, double bass and harpsichord / organ.

The core of the orchestra is therefore stringed instruments, sometimes with a viola da gamba which ceased to be used in later music. The members of the ensemble mainly play on original old instruments from the later 18th century, and the viola da gamba is a copy produced in the 1990s on the model of old instruments from the turn of the 17th/18th centuries. Přemysl Vacek, the court player on the archlute and theorbo in Musica Florea, uses Jiří Čepelák's copies of instruments from the mid-17th century.

As far as wind instruments are concerned, when necessary a Baroque recorder or flute, oboe, chalumeau (always played by Christian Leitherer), corno da caccia, bassoon, clarino and sometimes trombones are added. The players mostly



Petr Škvrně © Supraphon

use copies of the original wind instruments produced in the 1990s, while the ensemble's bassoonist plays an early 18th-century German instrument. Playing these wind instruments in line with Baroque models demands considerable dexterity in the creation of tone and above all in the intonation, where the player must use his skills to make up for the technical shortcomings of the instrument. That is one reason why I have great admiration for the solo wind passages for example in the recording of Bach cantatas with Magdalena Kožená, where we find brilliantly executed obligato parts by the flutes, oboe, bassoon and horn. The whole family of trombones, alto, tenor and bass trombone can be heard on the recording Vejvanovský – Rittler – Biber (Studio Matouš 1996).

Musica Florea's first recording was the *Missa Sanctissimae Trinitatis* by Jan Dismas Zelenka. In this, the last of his five crowning mass compositions, the influence of the then modern forms of secular music, concerto and opera, is apparent. One curious feature of the recording was that it was made in the Chateau of Duchcov at a temperature of 14 °C (due to a heating breakdown). The ensemble more than coped with the unusual conditions, and the recording won an award in the prestigious French magazine Diapason.

Musica Florea has since returned more than once to the musical heritage of Jan Dismas Zelenka. Apart from concert performances of his *Psalms* and *Lamentations*, the ensemble took a major part in the ambitious modern premiere of the one Czech coronation opera. *Sub olea pacis et palma virtutis* (for Charles VI, first performed on the 12th of September 1723 in the Prague Clementinum). A stage presentation of this opera took place on the 17th of July 2000 in

the Vladislav Hall of Prague Castle as the final concert of the Europamusicale Festival. It was an enthralling occasion, thanks to the choreography by the French director Marc Leclercq which underlined the visual side of the work, striking costumes by the artist Marie Fulková and sensitive conducting by Marek Štrunc who was still only twenty five at the time. The orchestra was created by combining the instrumental ensembles Musica Florea, Musica Aeterna, and the Ansamble Philidor, and the vocal elements provided by the boys choir Boni Pueri and soloists Anna Hlavenková (soprano), Noémi Kiss (soprano), Markus Foster (counter tenor), Jaroslav Březina (tenor), Adam Zdunikowski (tenor) and Aleš Procházka (bass).

Shortly after the performance Supraphon promptly made a recording (SU 3520-2 232), which was released almost exactly a year after the production of the work at the festival. This project, complete with the prestigious label "world premiere recording" offered the world one of the most important of Zelenka's vocal-instrumental works in authentic form. It was a recording for which Musica Florea won the Cannes Classical Award at the world music fair MIDEM in 2003

So far the most recent project on work by Jan Dismas Zelenka is a recording of his *Good Friday Responsorios* (Supraphon 2005, SU 3806-2 2).

One very important area in the ensemble's repertoire is made up of works from the archives of the episcopal residence in Kroměříž, which in the years 1664 – 1695 was the seat of the music-loving Bishop of Olomouc Karel Liechtenstein-Castelcorn. This includes above all works by the composers Pavel Josef Vejvanovský, Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, Heinrich Ignatz Franz Biber and Filipp Jakob Rittler. The ensemble

has devoted three compact disks, released in 1995 – 1996 to these authors.

In July 2001 at the Chateau of Kroměříž Musica Florea presented the modern premiere of Vejvanovský's *St Wenceslas Vespers*. This composition is also included in a recording for Supraphon in 2002 (SU 3535-2 231), in which apart from Musica Florea the participants were the choir and young soloists from the Boni Pueri boys choir and the soloists Jaroslav Březina (tenor) and Michael Pospíšil (bass). The ensemble has also presented the works of less well known composers from the Kroměříž archives, such as A. Bertalli, C. Rosier, J. J. Flix, J. K. Dolar and others.

Another unique Musica Florea recording (Supraphon 2000, SU 3474-2 231) is *Cithara Nova* by Josef Leopold Dukát, written in 1707. It shows clearly that this Czech composer, organist and regenschori in the Premonstratensian monastery in Želiv has a worthy place among the composers of the High Baroque. The compact disk contains 7 of his total of 12 church cantatas for solos, two violins and basso continuo (prepared by Přemysl Vacek). The core members of the ensemble are here accompanied by soloists Anna Hlavenková (soprano), Markus Foster (counter tenor) and Aleš Procházka (bass).

Musica Florea has completed many other concert and recording projects up to now, let us name here just a few more that have drawn particular public attention for their unique character or other reasons.

From this point of view the seven concerts that were part of a tour with the mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kožená with a repertoire of Bach cantatas and oratorios, complemented by Brandenburg Concertos nos. 3 and 4 were an extraordinarily successful achievement. This fruitful collaboration also resulted in a compact disk (Polygram 1997, *J.S.Bach – Arias*), which won the prestigious "Golden Harmony Award 1997" as the best domestic recording.

Musica Florea returned to opera in April 2000, performing for a stage production of Jean Philippe Rameau's *Castor and Pollux* at the Prague Estates Theatre. This repertoire production was based on French-Czech co-operation between the National Theatre and the Institut Français in Prague. In Prague the international team created a project unique even by all-European standards, creating for the first time on a modern European stage a production faithful to the Baroque reality in almost every detail (including the lighting of the stage by candles). The staging opened the way for other new and adventurous productions at this leading Prague theatre.

French music has been the subject of two recordings in 2004 and 2005, created in collaboration with the Centre for Baroque Music in Versailles. These are four major motets by Jean Baptiste Lully and a motet for two choirs by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. (K617157, K617171).

In the Spring of 2004 the ensemble expanded its repertoire to include the later 19th century by performing several pieces by Antonín Dvořák on period instruments. At a June concert as part of the Prague Spring festival, Musica Florea played the Overture to the opera *Vanda* op. 25, *Symphonic Variations* op. 78 and the *7th Symphony in D minor* in a form reminiscent of the mildly scandalous performance of Smetana's *Má vlast* [My Country] at the opening concert of the Prague Spring in 1996 by the British London Classical Players under the baton of Sir Roger Norrington. Dvořák's pieces were performed by an ensemble consisting of eleven first and nine second violins, seven violas, five cellos, four double basses, two flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, five french horns, two trumpets, three trombones and timpani. The stringed instruments used gut strings, and the wind instruments were either originals from the period 1860 -1900 or modern copies. Once again there was a wave of polemic over whether music of the later 19th century should be played on period instruments and with the original, more chamber-style set of players, but this time – thanks to the very precise performance by the combined ensembles Musica Florea, Amphion Bläserorchester Basel and Solamente naturali, the critics were generally significantly more positive.

One novelty in the Autumn of 2005 was a series of concerts entitled "Rediscovered Concertos of the Czech Baroque". Here Musica Florea presented works by generally little known composers of Czech origin such as Johann Joseph Ignác Brentner, Antonín Reichenauer, and Joseph Caspar Ferdinand Fischer.

Musica Florea certainly doesn't suffer from a shortage of repertoire. An impressive series of recordings for companies at home and abroad, very diverse international projects, and a revelation of musical treasures from almost three centuries – all this adds up to great promise for the future and an assurance not only that Musica Florea will go from strength to strength, but that other similar ensembles will be encouraged by their success and find in them impulses and inspiration.

An interview with the director of Musica Florea, cellist and conductor Marek Štrncl

Your ensemble Musica Florea has been working successfully for almost 14 years. What have these long years of musical collaboration given you personally?

First and foremost the knowledge that no sort of artist activity can be torn away from the concept of beauty, which in contemporary aesthetic theory tends to be damned more than anything else. It seems to me that it is suffered at best only so that artists can ostentatiously and defiantly avoid it. In our time beauty has been materialised –

reduced purely to pleasant emotions or experiences, and this has led many people, instead of trying to restore to beauty its right face, to reject it altogether as an inferior category, inadequate for the explanation and understanding of modern trends in art. But the classical concept of beauty has broader, metaphysical implications. It no way rejects artistic contrasts involving ugliness, dramatic contrast or even images of despair, but it assimilates them in a meaningful whole which is ultimately receptively perceived as a "gift", a "grace" a "glorification". The main overarching principle behind the aspirations of artists and their creations is not absurdity, which has afflicted especially the 20th century like a plague. So long as classical artistic principles (unity in diversity and beauty) are not degraded, in a way full of contradictions, to the level of mere material experience, they have the power to explain even modern artistic movements. They simply involve an insistence on the fact that art must ultimately, to put it shortly, be meaningful and must not deny the metaphysical nature of human existence, to which the phenomenon of beauty, the good and the true belong as automatically as human beings breathe. Can we really afford definitions of art of the type "art is essentially meaningless, indefinable" or "art simply naturally feeds off itself and devours itself," or else that "beauty is just a by-product like the experience of taste"? The Marxist dialectics that inform these ideas are massively contradicted by the spontaneous efforts of artists. To create works of art while believing that they deserve to produce no feelings of exaltation, wonder and interest is barbarism, and we are reaping the fruits of this attitude in full. It makes no difference whether the object of this exalted feeling is a kitschy garden gnome or Bach's Art of the Fugue. According to today's art theorists the objective nature of a work can have no decisive influence on its beauty, because these theorists reduce beauty simply to subjective "pleasure", which arises just out of the chance encounter between a person and a work of art. We are no longer allowed to decide on the justification or otherwise for such "pleasure" because that conjures up a moral appeal, so hated today, suggesting that acts we enjoy might be in breach of an objective law of the good, based on the "objective character of the work", especially a work of man. The desire for genuine "character", originality, something right and meaningful is what has given life to the authentic performance phenomenon including our own ensemble. The attempt to get rid of false ideological prejudice in attitudes to the cultural artistic legacy of our predecessors is something essential. Over the 14 years of the existence of our ensemble I have realised that it would have ceased to exist without these ideals. I have discovered at first hand and keep on discovering that human or financial obstacles that seem insoluble can be overcome by painstaking faithfulness to a vocation that relates not

just to the music, but to the members of the ensemble. Despite small changes the core of the ensemble has remained the same, which is something I have to rate as a decent moral achievement.

You take on various different roles in your ensemble and elsewhere. Do you think of yourself as more a cellist or more a conductor?

Both. So far I really haven't felt that artistic schizophrenia that afflicts some conductors until they get it together to decide which has precedence. Although as a conductor I am very committed to symphonic romantic or contemporary repertoire, there would be no point in my saying goodbye to the branch I have been trained in – older music, which is clearly based on a chamber approach to performance. Actively playing an instrument is a necessity for me, because it is the only way to internalise the newly discovered means of expression that can then become second nature to performers and conductors.

What are you working on currently with Musica Florea? Are you planning something new for the near future?

I must admit that in the last few years we have presented so many new pieces that

we really ought to give the public the chance to get to know them, and that will be our goal over the next year. Most of the projects concerned have already been presented (F. X. Richter *Te Deum*, rediscovered concertos by Czech Baroque composers – Gurecký, Reichenauer, the complete performance of J. S. Bach's Musical Offering and the Art of the Fugue and so on.) We are preparing to record all Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, which we performed in concert last year. Currently we are "editing" our second recordings of the symphonic works of A. Dvořák using period romantic instruments (the *8th Symphony*, the prelude to *Vanda*, *Prague Waltzes*, *Polka*).

What about your current musical activities apart from leading the ensemble? I am thinking of your work in other musical groups...

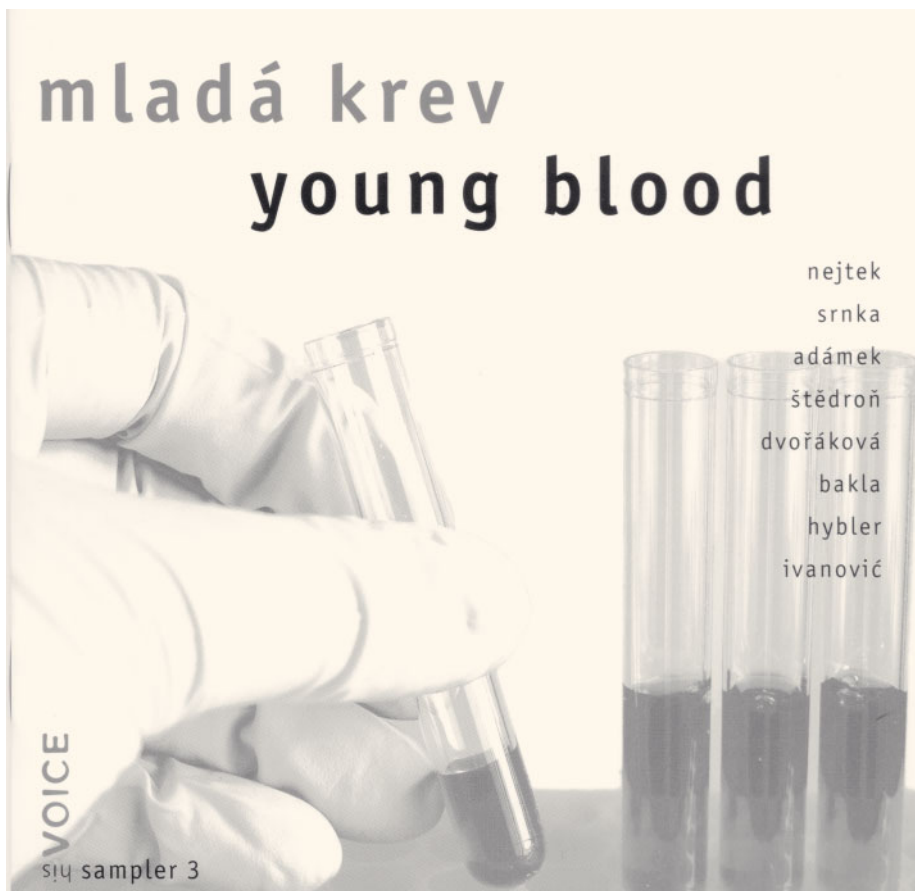
Recently I have been forced to cut back my activities in other groups, because a growing family is demanding in terms of time. But these are groups I worked with more or less on an ad hoc basis. I now have the interesting prospect of working with the Capela Apollinis ensemble and the harpsichordist Barbara Maria Willi. As a conductor I shall be involved in projects with the Spanish Baroque orchestra La principessa

filosofa and with many other chamber and symphonic orchestras especially outside Prague.

I know that you recorded music by Vladimír Godár with the Solamente Naturali ensemble for a film by Petr Šulík, and this was played on Baroque instruments. Have you been involved in other similar projects? Do you ever have a yen to try a completely different field of music?

My collaboration with Vladimír Godár has been going at full tilt in the last year. I recorded other pieces by him with this orchestra and the soloist Iva Bittová (folk music elements are present, of course). I believe that in the future audiences in Prague will be able to enjoy this project. I would like to mention an interesting avant-garde concert at the Hradec Králové Philharmonic Festival, which cleverly combined what at first sight might seem completely incongruous, J. S. Bach's Musical Offering and the violin concerto *Offertorium* by Sofia Gubaidulina, composed on the same theme. In addition to Musica Florea the concert involved the Hradec Králové Philharmonic and the soloist Gabriela Demeterová (violin). I wouldn't want to exclude other genres. Maybe I shall get round to them too.

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 info@czech-music.net 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.



jakub hrůša

the secret weapon of czech music

He was born only twenty-five years ago in Brno, and his path to the elite may still be long, involving hard work, sacrifice and the necessary good luck, but Jakub has all the qualities needed to get him to Olympus one day. Currently he is entirely in the power of the magic pentagram formed by Brno, where he has his family background, Zlín, where last year he was appointed principal conductor of the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic whose standard he aims to raise, Prague, where he conducts the Prague Chamber Philharmonic, and Paris. He triumphed in a competition with 90 conductors from throughout the world to become, since September 2005, assistant to the principal conductor Myung-Whun Chung at the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. (To any readers not entirely familiar with the name I recommend a look at the Deutsche Grammophon Catalogue.) But even earlier, in the years 2002–2005, he was assistant to two successive heads of the Czech Philharmonic, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Zdeněk Mácal. The year 2005 was a turning point for him in other respects. Not only was he offered positions in Paris and Zlín and started to qualify for the title “flying conductor”, but he also conducted for the first time at the Prague Spring Festival.

All four landmarks of his life today are, however, linked by the fifth angle of the pentagram – music. It is music that is his alpha and omega. In his annus mirabilis last year something else important happened. The otherwise usually conservative Supraphon, which usually bets on certainties rather than taking risks, this time gave rein to instinct (the essential attribute of a good producer) and have Jakub Hrůša the chance to make his debut record with the Prague Chamber Orchestra and a Dvořák programme (please see the review section in this issue). His CD debut has already got excellent reviews from, among others, The Gramophone and Daily

Telegraph. The next project will include Josef Suk’s *Serenade* and *Fantastic Scherzo*.

Unlike most of your colleagues you attended ordinary grammar school and played the trombone. Why that particular instrument?

It was simple. I always wanted to play a wind instrument and my favourite was the clarinet. As it happened, they didn’t have a place in the clarinet class in music school, but I didn’t abandon my dream and in the end I chose the trombone, which suited me physically. I really loved it at the time and I was very impressed by the way it was played altogether. Thanks to the trombone I could play in a student orchestra, and I started to admire the phenomenon of conducting. In fact from that time on I started to think seriously about conducting and in the end I decided while still at grammar school that I would go on to a music academy.

With hindsight, do you think you were right to get a general high school education rather than go to conservatory?

Definitely. In fact the older I get the more I appreciate the fact. Of course, when I started to study at the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts (AMU), I felt I had a certain handicap in music theory subjects, and I studied privately to catch up, but now my general education is paying dividends.

Have you definitely finished with your trombone playing?

I’m losing it, but one a year, at Christmas, I take out my trombone and play with a brass quintet. That’s when I get back my “five-minute” embouchure which goes the moment I put the instrument back in its case...

Why did you go to the academy in Prague and not in your native Brno?

The main reason was the teaching staff, headed by Jiří Bělohlávek. I just had great respect for them and wanted to be in contact with them. And I won’t deny that Prague attracted me as the musical centre of our country.

Were you satisfied with AMU as a school, with its system of teaching?

I know that many people have criticisms of the school, but my experience has been generally positive. Perhaps that is partly because I see it now in healthy retrospect. All my teachers were very forthcoming and I felt they were all simply trying to help me. Of course, there is one problem, although all higher music academies suffer from it too – a lack of resources for practical exercises. Or to put it another way, student conductors have only rather limited chances of contact with an orchestra. Actually AMU provided students with this practice annually from the second year, and that is unusual! Naturally it is up to the students to find ways to work with orchestras outside the school as well. I was lucky, and I was helped enormously by the chance to work with the Prague and later the Czech Student Orchestra.

Last year you had a scholarship at the Universität der Künste in Berlin. Did you get more orchestral practice there than in Prague?

No, none at all, in fact, except one week of work with an orchestra from outside Berlin, which was full of enthusiasm but didn’t have such a high standard. This is typical though. In Prague students conducted only once a year but with professional orchestras, while in Germany maybe more, but in the country

In the rather staid and stiff world of Czech music, the dizzy career of conductor Jakub Hruša (*1981) has a very clear message. Which is that for Hruša it is more important to seek for the universal beauty in music than to specialise in one particular sector of music. With enchanting lack of affectation he is conducting both unknown Mozart, and the organisationally complex premiere of a work by a living composer. This extraordinarily talented young man with clear opinions has been arousing great hopes and could be the Czech “secret weapon” that will penetrate the international musical scene. (His membership of the musical stable of the IMG British agency may stand him in good stead). It is a sad fact that since the generation of Jiří Bělohlávek, no Czech conductor has achieved a place in the prestigious club of top international conductors.

and in the style of conductors' courses. But in Germany I mainly got to understand the place, its language and mentality better. The Germans are extremely thorough in their studies of the German repertoire. Teachers there insist you explore absolutely every aspect of a piece, not just practically, but by thinking and talking about it. Naturally this can be rather at the expense of the breadth of repertoire.

What was it like studying with Jiří Bělohlávek?

Generally marvellous. Naturally any strong teacher leaves a strong imprint, and so subconsciously and consciously I bear his imprint, his seal. Nonetheless his style of teaching is very open and tolerant and actually encourages students to argue and be different. He is stricter about the need for perfect mastery of manual technique. Perhaps that is why you can tell that someone belongs to his school.

Do you have a distinctive personal approach to a piece in the preparation stage?

I don't know if it is really a specific feature. I try to consider the score down to the smallest details. I sit at it “manually” and write lots of things into it. This has one negative effect. If I go back to a piece after a significant gap the score is sometimes so scribbled over that I have to get myself a fresh copy.

At your AMU graduation concert you stunned people by choosing Josef Suk's *Asrael*, which is difficult even for an experienced conductor. Do you have a special relationship with Suk?

It definitely wasn't a purely rational decision. While I was studying I was encountering masses of music for the first time and as it were wolfing it down, and *Asrael* was part of

it, and the encounter was so strong that I wanted to focus on it. Later when I got a gently push from my teachers, the choice felt generally logical. A very strong bond had developed between me and *Asrael*.

What do you like best at your present level of exploration of music?

It seems to me that I have a certain feeling for romantic music in the broad meaning of the word. But then that probably means I enjoy earlier or later music all the more, just for a change.

You still haven't had enough of studying and you are continuing at AMU with doctoral studies...

It's a way of developing my positive relationship with the school. Furthermore, I can work on a theme that is a challenge and an intellectual stimulus for me and seems necessary to me – the theme of new music, premieres, the relation between the author of a new work and a performer-conductor. I wanted to combine two things – my need to carry on learning and my need to provoke myself into performing contemporary pieces.

In 2000 you were the best and the youngest Czech entrant in the Prague Spring Competition, where you came fourth. Wasn't this a little hasty? You would certainly have done better a year or so further on.

Although I didn't finish among the “medalists”, it was a milestone for me, and as little more than a first year at AMU it was a massive psychological boost for me. It confirmed me in my decision to become a professional musician, and then on the practical level I immediately got a number of opportunities to conduct good orchestras, which probably wouldn't have happened otherwise.

I assume that the selection process in Paris, which opened up a new horizon for



you in your music career, was a competition too.

Yes, effectively it was a competition in Paris. Around 90 candidates, a very wide range of people applied. In my view this kind of confrontation actually has more sense than a mere competition. It's about real support for our profession, because the winner is offered concrete work. Not laurels and titles but a real post, experience. In fact for the French the post of “young conductor” or “young principal” even has social prestige. The reality is great just now, because I have practical tasks that enable me to learn a lot and move forward. A title is good for the external dimension of one's career, but for musical work itself it is the reality that counts.

You were an assistant in Prague as well while you were studying. Could you tell readers what an assistant actually does, at home and abroad?

It depends on what people mean by an assistantship. In the Czech Philharmonic it was above all a study post – the chance to watch the orchestra in all its activities – rehearsals, concerts, communication with conductors, and you get to know things that are maybe unpublishable. For me it was a counterpart to my AMU studies, and real contact with a living orchestra, and what is more the leading orchestra in the country. If a crisis comes up, then you may even get the chance to stand in as an “understudy”, which actually happened to me with the Czech Philharmonic and I am grateful to the orchestra for its friendly tolerant attitude... In France the post is conceived in a much more practical way. I already have my first subscription concert behind me, and I shall be conducting another in the spring. My specific task, the one I am supposed to master, is the most recent music. My work with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio

France also has some curious aspects. Before Christmas I made a recording of music for an animated film. I can attend all the auditions as one of the selectors, and that is interesting experience too. For example I have a vivid memory of the kettle drums audition, where there were dozens of candidates – it revealed to me all kinds of ways of playing the instruments that I had never known of before.

When so many people are interested in the position of timpanist, how many apply for the post of one violinist?

Usually it can be close to a hundred.

What else do you have to do in Paris?

Sometimes I have to take separate rehearsals....It's wonderful for me to have the chance of real contact with important musicians, which I didn't have in Prague. For example just before Christmas it was Pierre Boulez and Valery Gergiev. My experience in Paris so far has been an education in the reality of performance. Sometimes it is uplifting, and sometimes disillusioning. It is also very useful to see your own country's musical life from a distance, from another country. Given that I am distinctly sceptical about some aspects of Czech musical life, it was wonderful that one of the greatest experiences in Paris was the production of *Rusalka* with Jiří Bělohlávek in the Opera Bastille!

You have already mentioned your work with two important student orchestras. What are your memories of those years?

It was tremendous and at the same time essential experience... It was a sensational complement to my studies at the Academy. The reality of the constant rhythm of two evening rehearsals each week with an amateur group was sometimes difficult, musically speaking, but that is something I see more in retrospect than I did at the time. At the time I was purely and simply hungry for any kind of chance to conduct and mould something and so the opportunity was a blessing and I did it all with enthusiasm. It gave me a huge foundation and specific experience. Everything that I lived through with the Prague student orchestra I deepened in my experience with the Czech Student Orchestra. This great experience culminated in 2003 with our appearance at the Young Euro Classic in the Berlin Konzerthaus. When you realise that the orchestra, which was purely amateur apart from some wind players from music schools, played (and sturdily!) Janáček's *Taras Bulba* and Miloslav Kabeláč's *Mystery of Time* [*Mysterium času*], then I don't need to add anything. Despite all the inevitable shortcomings and problems, I had a feeling of pride there. The enthusiasm of all the players, which is often lacking in professional ensembles, was very cheering.

You are actually keeping up your contacts with young musicians in your other new

post as director of the Prague Chamber Philharmonic, which is still regarded as a young orchestra. Is it an advantage for the orchestra to be homogeneous in terms of generation?

That is not a question I can answer. I would go as far as saying that the secret of an orchestra's success is not directly related to it. I couldn't imagine an orchestra made up only of really elderly players, but in the world there are top orchestras that are mixed in terms of generations and top orchestras that are fairly homogenous in that respect.

I have noticed that many people watch your conducting with real pleasure because it has a certain elegance. How important is the movement side of conducting?

Elegance isn't important. I know plenty of conductors who conduct in a very inelegant way but there is no doubt that they are outstanding. Manual technique (naturally conveying your ideas to the orchestra) is another matter. It is the alpha and omega of our field.

Since we've taking a side-turning into the question of craft, tell me which is better: to signal the maximum or to "radiate ideas", fluid, to operate through charisma, as we see it in Karajan, Gergiev and others?

Both approaches are possible. But it is not so much about signalling as about leading. And so the question is whether it is better, to put it in a simplified way, for the conductor to lead the orchestra all the time, or to "let it play" at certain suitable points. I won't hide the fact that the leading concept appeals to me more. For me the ideal is to be capable of leading the orchestra at any time, and to know when not to lead it... The way music is conducted always has a fundamental effect on the overall result. I think that if a conductor is inexact, then you will hear it in the music – and now I'm not making a judgment about whether it is good or bad. It depends on the specific example. It's just the case with Karajan, for example, even though the way his Berlin Philharmonic played is phenomenal. The question is when that imprecision is a fault and when it is not. A certain „fluidity“ was typical of the Berlin Philharmonic under Karajan and for a certain kind of music that was a good thing. And of course a top orchestra can be led in an inexact way, while you cannot do that with a less good orchestra. The conductor's charisma, the atmosphere that he radiates, his inspirational power is something interesting for us as music lovers, but in fact it is just a bonus to performance, even if beautiful and important in the highest art.

What then is the vocation of the conductor?

I ponder that for example when people ask me whether conductors are really necessary at all (and the question isn't so rare!). In my view the content of our work is not to allow

music in the concert hall to become a stereotype and performance to be left without a creative artistic dimension. Not to be just the executive, as it were, but to remain the inspirer of creative work. The well-known saying about "searching behind the notes" applies all the more to an orchestra because it isn't a quartet, but a fifty – or a hundred-member collective, a mass of different views and approaches. The conductor has to be a unifying agent.

Remaining for a moment at this exalted level, does music of this kind have a chance in the fragmented world of today?

Undoubtedly, even if its listeners will continue to be a minority. I have an unshakeable belief that there will always be enough people wanting this kind of music to live on.

Especially in relation to the Czech Philharmonic, people have written about a typical sound.

I would prefer to talk about a way of playing particular music. The philharmonic first and foremost has a natural and positive domain in the specific way it plays Czech music. I have to say that when I hear Czech music played by foreign orchestras, I often find quite a lot missing. It may be technically perfect or technically poor – that is not the main thing, but what is often lacking is naturalness of phrasing, the specific character of dances, the structure of the melody, ideal breathing, bow strokes, the choice of tempi for the different movements. I don't feel qualified to speak about the sound of the CP as such. Here I don't really see any specific feature other than what I have just mentioned – except perhaps a unified school in the teaching for individual instruments, yes... The CP applies what is typical for Czech repertoire to other music as well. This then has interest for people abroad.

Do you have inspiring models that mean a lot to you?

As far as conductors are concerned, then definitely my teacher Jiří Bělohlávek, and then from history Leonard Bernstein, and Sergio Celibidache and the still living Claudio Abbado. Although for example Bernstein was very different from me in character, I find it very inspiring to experience his work at least through recordings and films. Celibidache is a titan in terms of intellectual grasp of music! There is a quality in his recordings that I have never found anywhere else. That remains true despite his sometimes unbearable "style". For example his slow tempi in slow movements, for which he had all kinds of arguments. His creations are simply an amazing school of phrasing, work with motifs, the build up of dynamics, and tectonics of every kind. And above that there is his personal courage to think about music in unconventional ways. Abbado is as it were his opposite pole. In Abbado I always find the most natural path to the music that I can imagine.

what did prague mean for mozart?

The 250th anniversary of W. A. Mozart's birth is an excellent reason to look back and take stock of the whole Mozart phenomenon. Since January people have been making the attempt all over Europe, since Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born on the 27th of January 1756 and it would be unthinkable not to mark the occasion in any civilised country. To mark the occasion is one thing, however, while to reflect more deeply, consider all the issues and evaluate the impact of so great a genius in the two and a half centuries since his birth is something quite different. Essentially, in fact, the task is so difficult as to be beyond the capacities of any author. (Stendhal: „The theme dwarfs the narrator“). Editors have unfortunately been oblivious of the basic asymmetry of the task, which might be summed up in the words, “a small person of 2006 confronts a creative giant spanning two and a half centuries“, and they have contributed to a contradictory situation in which all the media (including the tabloid kind) have felt the need to say something about the major jubilee of a genius, but despite the token superficial expressions of respect, the lack of authors competent to speak on the matter has been sadly obvious. What kind of results could have been expected!?



TOMISLAV VOLEK

Miserable results indeed. It doesn't seem to have occurred to many papers, magazines and pen-pushers that to write about a creative genius behind a huge body of work that has come down to us through ten generations is something quite different than to write about actors, models, footballers or hockey players, members of parliament or ministers of the year 2006, who are of course legion and who practically all know only one song: a song about themselves. But Mozart gave unforgettable voice to Don Giovanni, Donna Anna, Leporello, the Comendatore, the Queen of the Night, Sarastro, Papageno, Tamino, Tito, Vitellia, Don Alfonso, Guglielmo, the Count and Countess, Figaro and Susanna, Cherubino, Constanze, Osmin, Idomeneo, Electra, Zaide and Gomat, Mademoiselle Silberklang, Sandrina, Podesta, Mitridate, Aspasia, but also the Christian Spirit (Christgeist) and World Spirit (Weltgeist), Apollon and Hyacinth, Bastien and Bastienne and so on, just to mention about a quarter of the characters of his dramatic works, almost every one of them unique and irreplaceable.

Yet the less the jubilee pen-pushers know about Mozart's characters and other works, the more they assume a pseudo-privileged viewpoint and tell us all about the need to "demolish Mozart myths". The music correspondent of a leading Czech newspaper, for example, wrote about the need to "change the image" of a composer "whose concerts brought in dizzy sums to him" while he himself behaved like an "immature, over-sensitive profligate"! In the mass of rubbish produced about Mozart in January you could also learn that he was an infantile and vulgar man, a peacock and a gambler, a drinker and womaniser and so on, who allegedly immediately squandered any money he earned, and so fell into debt and "no-one in Vienna had any time for him any more"... It is almost as if there were an agreed common aim behind these lousy stylistic exercises, i.e. to denigrate the composer as a human being and not to write about his work! Perhaps because it would be pretty hard to connect this picture of a second-rate and morally decimated man with music that takes up 130 volumes of a critical edition and whose value no one would dare to doubt.

Horribile dictu! – so the old Latinists would groan over this curious way of "glorifying" one of the greatest musicians in human history by resorting to backstairs

gossip! The Mozartian Society in the Czech Republic has tried to counter products of this kind on its web pages. Yet what do we find when we look at attempts to take stock of Mozart in 2006 from better qualified pens and in international academic publications?

New publications abroad provide us with a chance to join in the anniversary debate on Mozart by responding to the arguments and interpretations of foreign scholars, particularly in relation to the theme of Mozart and Prague – a theme close to our heart, of course, but with broader implications than the merely local. In this context the most immediately striking publication is *Das Mozart-Lexikon*, a book produced for the anniversary under the editorship of the leading Vienna Mozart scholar, Prof. Gernot Gruber as part of the planned six-volume, *Das Mozart-Handbuch* (Laaber-Verlag). As one might expect, this huge 933-page lexicon includes entries on the cities that played an important part in Mozart's life. Surprisingly, however, we do not find "Prague" among them. The basic information on the theme is included under the entry *Die böhmischen Länder* but we Praguers can scarcely fail to ask why Prague is not accorded the same importance in Mozart's life that the *Mozart-Lexikon* attributes not only to Salzburg and Vienna, but to Dresden, Leipzig, Berlin, and even Mainz? Mozart's Mainz yes, but Mozart's Prague no? (Please don't try to remember how many operas Mozart composed in Mainz, because the answer is zero, but the entry nonetheless informs us that in Mainz Leopold Mozart once presented a play by his seven-year-old son in an inn and that the adult Wolfgang once played there at the chateau. It is curious that Mainz merits an entry when there are dozens of towns with the same status in Mozart's life all over Europe. These, naturally, get no mention.) When we discover that the lexicon has no separate entry for Milan either, although three of Mozart's operas were premiered there, we can reasonably conclude that we are dealing with a certain systematic historical distortion in a book produced by a German publishing house. Can it be that someone somehow wants to give readers the impression that Mozart is primarily a phenomenon of German-speaking lands with a few episodes in Paris and London? (These major capitals obviously have to have a place in the Lexicon, while the peculiar "marginalisation" is applied only to cities in "marginal" countries like Italy and Bohemia.) Gernot Gruber

seems not to have got over the habit of taking the embarrassingly politicised view of historical facts that afflicted his earlier book *Mozart und die Nachwelt* (1985). There he could actually write that, "*Among the reasons for the warm reception of Mozart's operas [in Prague] the patriotic [?!] aspect is the most striking. The very enthusiasm with which Praguers reconciled Mozart with his disappointments in Vienna speaks of the artistic understanding and open-mindedness of the citizens of the city, but also of the patriotism of Germans in Prague. Mozart was also a factor in the fight [!?] against the Czech nationalist [!?] movement [!?].*" If a text like this had been written during the war, at the time of the Nazi occupation of Prague, it would not be so surprising, but in 1985? Mozart scholar Gruber seems to be oblivious of the fact that in Mozart's time nationalist conflicts had not yet afflicted Prague, and that to ignore the role of Czech musicians and the majority Czech public in the creation and development of the cult of Mozart in Prague would mean retrospectively erasing from Mozart's circle of Prague friends the Dušeks, Kuchař, Němeček, Vitásek, Mašek, and in the Prague Opera Orchestra Král, Šebek, Kučera, Mazanec, Houska, Střelský, Vaněřovský, Matějka, Votruba and so on, not to mention the friend from Salzburg that Mozart visited at the University Library, Hurdálek (incidentally, the only Praguers from whom Mozart requested an entry in his personal album...) and so forth.

After this disturbing evidence of a certain continuing tradition of distorted interpretation in a German publication subject to expert Austrian editing, one naturally looks around for a different, more qualified view of the question of the cities that played an important role in Mozart's life. And, lo and behold, the editors of the musical monthly, *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* definitely take a different view of the issue. In their special Mozart number in 2006 they decided to include a block of articles under the general title, *Zwölf Mozartstädte*. They commissioned contributions from 12 authors from different countries, and unlike Prof. Gruber they did not consider Prague and Milan were unworthy of the designation "Mozart Cities". Unfortunately, however, in the case of Prague they made a different mistake by commissioning an article not from an expert but from a functionary, a head of



The Nostitz Theatre with a partial view of the Kotce Theatre (by Leopold Peuckert, around 1790)

department at the Czech Museum of Music, who hastily and with numerous mistakes copied from the work of other people, so that a chance to provide the international music public and the music-lovers with an informed view was lost.

Otherwise, the editors' idea of comparing important cities in Mozart's biography as a way of achieving insights that other approaches to the Mozart phenomenon miss, has proved genuinely fruitful. In the knowledge that Prague is a city without which something very fundamental would be lacking in Mozart's life and work, we are therefore happy to join the kind of comparative project conceived by the editors of the *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift*.

In this we have many advantages compared to the others, the first being the fact that research on the theme of Mozart and Prague has a long history, de facto longer than any comparable scholarly project. After all, Prague was the first European city in which a book about Mozart was published, and one that naturally contained some sections on the relationship of Praguers to Mozart's music. In 1798, the then high school teacher František Xaver Němeček published his *Leben des K.K. Kapellmeisters Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart*. It was so well received by readers that ten years later this unique work by a historian and witness – by this time Němeček was a professor of practical philosophy at Prague University – was published in a second edition. Since then there have been many more editions, including facsimiles and translations, and so

when Rudolph Procházka published his book *Mozart in Prag* in Prague in 1892, he was continuing a well-established tradition. This was developed further in the 1930s by Paul Nettel, a reader at the Prague German University, who emphasised the continuity of Prague Mozart scholarship in the sub-title of his book, *Mozart in Böhmen* (1938): *Herausgegeben als zweite, vollständig neubearbeitete und erweiterte Ausgabe von Rudolph Freiherrn von Procházkas Mozart in Prag*.

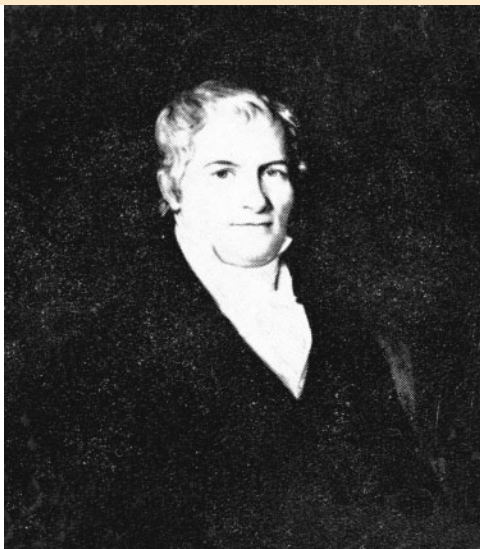
After the 2nd World War, Mozart research in Prague slowly revived. Archival discoveries provided the basis for the present author's book, *Mozart a Praha [Mozart and Prague]* (1973) and his studies about the Prague connections of the two operas composed specifically for Prague. After the fall of the Communist regime, the present author was also able to train a new generation of scholars in Mozartian lectures and seminars at Charles University. This generation has plenty of material to tackle, as Milada Jonášová in particular has shown with her discoveries of new important period copies of Mozart's work, published at home and abroad. These discoveries demonstrate, *inter alia*, that not only did Prague respond to Mozart's music with deep interest, but that it was from Prague that many pieces were disseminated in numerous copies and transcriptions, abroad, and even to Vienna.

During his short life W.A. Mozart took 17 journeys, and was away from home for

a total of 10 years and 2 months. This makes the time he spent in dozens of towns and cities one of the main themes of his biography. Is it therefore reasonable to ask why he undertook specific journeys, what kind of city he chose, how he and his music were received there, what stimuli and opportunities each city offered him and what traces his works left there.

Naturally we need to make a distinction between the European tours he made as an infant prodigy and the journeys he made as a musician with professional skills and experience. As an infant prodigy Mozart – temporarily – attracted attention and enthusiasm among the social elite sought out by his father, but what was the situation in his later years? It is safe to say that Mozart never set out on a journey at random, „au hasard“. His destination was always a city with a ruling court, where the position of court capellmeister existed and, ideally, an opera as well. It was in cities of this kind and with the prospect of such a position at a court that Mozart sought to make his career.

As many of the contributions to the Mozart issue of the *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* confirm, there is no reason to doubt the composer's systematic efforts in this context, and this leads us to a crucial and in its way shocking fact, one not usually mentioned and not even touched on in the project *Zwölf Mozartstädte*, which is that no-one anywhere in Europe ever offered Mozart the post as capellmeister or composer that he so eagerly sought! No city, no royal or princely town ever offered him what



František Xaver Němeček

he looked for and put himself forward for over so many years. And it is this fact that ought to be mentioned at the end of every set of texts on the theme of *Mozartstädte*! This would once and for all make clear a major tragic feature of Mozart's life as a musician and a man.

Mozart took this failure particularly hard in the case of the two cities that were his home for many years: Salzburg and Vienna. In both he had a period of hope that he might be appointed to such a post, in Salzburg when the death of the court capellmeister created a vacancy in August 1778 and in Vienna in December 1787 when the position of court composer came free. Unfortunately, giving Mozart such a high position was out of the question as far as Archbishop Colloredo in Salzburg or Josef II in Vienna was concerned. In the case of Vienna the situation was quite obviously "political". With his excellent musical education the emperor no doubt realised that Mozart, who had then been resident in Vienna for six years, was by far the most suitable candidate for the post left vacant by the death of Gluck, but he clearly felt that it was best to avoid the conflicts that could be expected between the court capellmeister Salieri and a new court composer with the provocative genius of Mozart. The imperial decision of December 1787 was therefore very much a "Judgment of Solomon": the position of court composer remained vacant, and while Mozart – whose new Prague opera "Don Giovanni" had been greeted with admiration by the experts – was accepted into court service, this was on a more or less formal basis, since he was placed in the vaguely defined category of „Kammermusicus“, given the average pay of a member of the court orchestra and assigned no specific duties. (After Mozart's death, however, the position of court composer was filled again, this time by the consistently loyal Leopold Koželuh who was unencumbered by any embarrassing genius...)

How have these facts about Salzburg and Vienna been interpreted by the Mozart scholars from these cities in 2006 in the Mozart issue of the *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift*? Prof. Ernst Hintermeier in his article „*Sie wissen, wie mir Salzburg verhasst ist!*“ („You know how I hate Salzburg“, which is a quotation from one of Mozart's letters) presents the real situation without evading the issue in any way, but Prof. Manfred Wagner in his article *Mozart als freier Künstler in Wien* (Mozart as an Independent Musician in Vienna) performs an extraordinary academic tight-rope act in order to be able to put forward the theory that in Vienna Mozart found "optimal opportunities for his work". The claim is of course at odds with the historical facts. It would be more correct to say that "yes, Vienna was a city that could have offered Mozart optimal opportunities for his work but did so only to a very limited extent". As is generally known, Mozart more than once expressed dissatisfaction with his situation in Vienna, a fact that Wagner shrugs off with derogatory comments at Mozart's expense! First he suggests that the composer was sorely tempted "to hanker after positions" („war er dennoch versucht nach Anstellungen zu schießen"), and then takes the notion of "hankering" even further by intimating that Mozart had a "marketing-tainted mania for titles" („Mozarts marketingverdächtige Titelsuche"). This is nothing but disinformation designed to conceal the fact that Mozart was not considered worthy of the office of court composer in Vienna. Mozart was by no means a title chaser by nature, as we can see quite clearly from the fact that when the pope honoured him with a higher chivalric order than the one awarded to Ch. W. Gluck, Mozart soon ceased to add the title "cavaliere" to his name, while the socially adept Gluck signed himself "chevalier" to the end of his life. So what has "Titelsuche" to do with it? Mozart was naturally and justifiably keen to obtain a position that would give him the chance to compose operas and

other major musical works and assure a decent income for himself and his family. At a time when he was interested in a position at court in 1777, he saw it as an opportunity that would enable him, „alle jahre 4 deutsche opern, theils Buffe und serie, zu liefern“ („to produce 4 German operas, part comic, and part serious, every year"). What is extraordinary is not Mozart's attitude but the behaviour of today's representative of numerous Viennese musical and non-musical institutions M. Wagner („Titelsuche" is much in evidence on his web page!), who after ridiculing Mozart for his alleged need for titles takes it upon himself to grant the composer a nonsensical, ludicrous and degrading title of his own devising: „höchster Unterhaltungschef des Kaiserhauses" ("supreme head of entertainment at the emperor's house")!

When claiming that in Vienna Mozart found "optimal work opportunities" („die optimalen Arbeitsmöglichkeiten"), M. Wagner adds with clear distaste the words, "even if this has not always been a view taken in the literature" („auch wenn dies in der Literatur nicht immer so gesehen wurde"). Not only has it not been taken "in the literature", but it was certainly not a view taken by Mozart himself, since otherwise he would hardly have written the following to Puchberg on the 12th of July 1789, and by extension to us in 2006, that, "... Mein Schicksal ist leider, aber nur in Wien, mir so widrig, daß ich auch nichts verdienen kann, wenn ich auch will; ich habe 14 Tage eine Liste herumgeschickt und da steht der einzige Name Swieten!" („... My fate, but only in Vienna, is so wretched that I too can earn nothing, even when I want to: for 14 days I had a (subscription) list circulated, and the only name on it is Swieten"). Are these the words of a proud musician enjoying "optimal work opportunities" in Vienna?

As an impassioned defender of the good name of imperial Vienna, Wagner develops the theme of Mozart's income still further, initially with a claim that is in fact valid only for

Opposite:
Page from Mozart's autograph of
Don Giovanni, where the quotation
of the melody from Le Nozze di
Figaro appears



the last four years of the composer's life: "Mozart had a fixed income ...". Yes, 1.200 florins annually as court "chamber musician". But Wagner's next claim about this fixed income is unsupported by any evidence, i.e. "...it was probably much higher than might be supposed from the bare figures". And this is followed by another logical somersault on the theme of Mozart's "fixed income". Apparently, "... it varied from year to year" („es schwankte ...“), with Wagner estimating it at as much as 5.000 florins for the year 1791....! Given this kind of conjuring with facts and "fixed incomes", it is no surprise that the author entirely fails to mention Mozart's debt of 1.435 florins and 32 kreuzers to Prince Karl Lichnowsky, which he was ordered to pay by a decision of the Viennese court towards the end of 1791.

But let us leave the advocate of the City of Vienna, Wagner, and confront Europe's Mozart cities with some more questions. We know that all Mozart's long nursed hopes of a position as capellmeister were to be frustrated, but what other expressions of favour could he expect from the European cities that we today call "Mozartian"? What creative commissions or opportunities did they offer him? Who gave him important commissions as a composer and where?

If the desire to compose operas took first place among Mozart's creative interests, then it is evident that only four European cities provided him with such an opportunity at any point in his life. They were Milan, Munich, Vienna and Prague. Only four cities commissioned and also presented operas by the greatest musical dramatist of the 18th century! (For purposes of comparison: in the case of Verdi it was 12 cities and in the case of Wagner five cities but also a theatre in Bayreuth built exclusively for his operas...).

Let us start our comparison of these four Mozart "operatic" cities chronologically, and therefore with Milan. The situation here was very peculiar, although the literature rarely informs us of just how peculiar it was. It is true that the capital of Lombardy provided Mozart with three opera commissions, and this is the highest number from any city in which he did not actually live. But we must be careful, for these commissions were not genuine orders from an Italian opera house! Two of them (*Il Mitridate*, *Ascanio in Alba*) were commissioned by one and the same Austrian patron (!), who was also undoubtedly the moving force behind the third commission (*Lucio Silla*). He was the supreme representative of the Austrian state in occupied North Italy (Lom-

bardy), i.e. the governor with his seat in Milan (and with relatives in Salzburg), the count Karl Joseph Firmian. The Italian record in respect of commissions of Mozart operas is therefore very ambivalent and is qualified by the fact that a) no Italian opera house ever came up with the idea of commissioning an opera from Mozart and staging it, and b) no other opera house took over Mozart's *Il Mitridate* and *Lucio Silla* and presented it in their own programmes. And of course the „festa teatrale“ *Ascanio in Alba* was so closely bound up with the environment and immediate situation at the Austrian Habsburg court in Milan that it could not in fact have been taken up by another opera house. Altogether, the musical dramas that Mozart wrote for Italy and that were staged in Italy were presented a total of 52 times. With this their effect ended, since they returned to the Italian stage only in the mid-20th century, in all kinds of different arrangements.

Initiated by the Austrian governor, the commission of *Ascanio* for the Austrian court in Milan, which since 1771 had been presided over by the Archduke Ferdinand, awakened in Mozart the hope that the archduke would appoint him to the head of his court music. An Austrian promoting an Austrian... The Mozarts, father and son, there-



von Schönfeldsche

I. I. Prager Oberpostamtszeitung.

Montags den 29ten wurde von der italienischen Operngesellschaft die mit Sehnsucht erwartete Oper des Meisters Mozart Don Giovanni, oder das steinerne Gastmahl gegeben. Kenner und Tonkünstler sagen, daß zu Prag ihres Gleichen noch nicht aufgeführt worden. Hr. Mozart dirigierte selbst, u. als er ins Orchester trat, wurde ihm ein dreymaliger Jubel gegeben, welches auch bey seinem Austritte aus demselben geschah. Die Oper ist übrigens äußerst schwer zu executiren, und jeder bewundert dem ungeachtet die gute Vorstellung derselben nach so kurzer Studierzeit. Alles, Theater und Orchester bot seine Kräfte auf, Mozarden zum Danke mit guter Execution zu belohnen. Es werden auch sehr viele Kosten durch mehrere Chöre und Dekorazion erfordert, welches alles Herr Guardasanti glänzend hergestellt hat. Die außerordentliche Menge Zuschauer bürgen für den allgemeinen Beyfall.

Report about the first performance of Don Giovanni in Prague

fore prolonged their stay in Milan by several weeks, waiting for a summons to the court (which came) and an engagement (which did not). In one of the letters written by Marie Theresia (that loving mother and "beneficent ruler") to her son Ferdinand, she adds a warning not to engage „useless people“ („gens inutiles“) like Mozart and his family! Thus in Habsburg Lombardy as elsewhere, Mozart's dream of obtaining a post as capellmeister ended in fiasco. Instead the position was entrusted to the much less gifted Czech composer (in Italy an Austrian), Václav Pichl (see CM 4/2005)... And we can only wrack our brains over the question of why Pichl should have been "more useful" as a court capellmeister – according to the honourable empress – than Mozart...

After Milan, we move on to the two opera commissions for the official seat of the Elector of Bavaria, Munich. It is not precisely known who it was that initiated the

first commission, which resulted in the opera buffa *La finta giardiniera*. This was staged – but not under the direction of Mozart! – in January 1775 at Munich's second theatre, the old "Salvatortheater" and was performed only three times. Mozart's first opera composed and staged on German soil failed to make much of an impact.

Mozart's second Munich opera, *Idomeneo, re di Creta*, was a much deeper work with much better prospects. The elector himself was behind the commission and the opera was staged in January 1781 in the beautiful new court theatre (Cuvilliés-Theater). This in itself testifies to the fact that Mozart's social and musical credit had already risen considerably, at least in this part of Germany. Suffering from an absence of opera commissions in Salzburg, Mozart threw himself into the work with enormous energy and struggled in a brave and disci-

plined way with a whole range of obstacles: the subject had been imposed on him; the adaptation of the libretto was the work of G. Varesco, an Italian chaplain to the prince archbishop of Salzburg with no experience in the field of drama; for the title role of warrior-king and lover Mozart had to accept a once outstanding but now sixty-six-year-old tenor... In Munich the brilliant and still highly effective tragic work was performed three times – and that was it. Ergo: the two Mozart operas written for Munich had no more than six performances altogether. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this says something fundamental about the Munich opera public of the day.

Between the two Munich commissions Mozart wrote one opera independently and not to order – *Zaide*. It was a desperate expression of Mozart's desire to compose opera, even without commissions, at a time when instead he was having to make a living in Salzburg as an organist! *Zaide* is a work of great quality using a German text, but when in 1781 Mozart arrived in Vienna there was no interest in the piece from the recently founded court singspiel company. One reason must certainly have been that some of the roles in *Zaide* were too difficult for the inexperienced singers of that company.

In the ten years of life left to Mozart after his arrival in Vienna in 1781, fate decreed that only two cities were to provide him with the chance to compose opera. They were Vienna and Prague. Of the two only Vienna was a capital with a royal court and court opera. Only there could a brilliant musicians hope to become a court composer or court capellmeister. Naturally Mozart took that into account in 1781 when he wrote a letter to his father from Vienna justifying his decision to stay there. He wrote that it was "*für mein Metier der beste Ort von der Welt*". As we know from letter of July 1789, Mozart's experience of the city in the intervening eight years in Vienna was to be quite different.

Unsurprisingly, given his method of "striking out the inconvenient facts", in his text on Vienna M. Wagner offers readers the vaguely formulated information that Josef II "*initiated the German National singspiel*" („*initiierte das deutsche Nationalsingspiel*") but omits to mention its inglorious end.

Above all, he makes no attempt to interpret the fact that despite the brilliant success of *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782), the court in Vienna commissioned no further singspiel from Mozart and allowed the German company in the Burgtheater (1778–83) to collapse for lack of repertoire. Equally unsurprisingly, Wagner then passes over in silence the fact that the only demonstrable theatrical commission given to Mozart by the court was the music for the one-act *The Impresario* (*Der Schauspieldirektor*). Neither *Le Nozze di Figaro* nor *Così fan tutte*

was composed on the commission of the court; in both cases the court poet Lorenzo da Ponte negotiated the composition with Mozart and then managed to arrange the staging of the already finished works on his own initiative. Another question that arises here is why, in their accounts of Mozart's situation in Vienna, none of the Viennese specialists have taken into account a source published 46 years ago in the Salzburg Jahrbuch by the present author. This source records the view expressed by the Bohemian Estates Theatre Commission after the staging of the opera *La clemenza di Tito* as part of the coronation festivities in Prague in 1791, to the effect that "*a prejudiced antagonism to Mozart's composition has been evident at the court*" (*„zeigte sich bei Hof wider Mozarts Composition eine vorgefasste Abneigung“*). For purposes of comparison let us add at that no prejudice against Mozart's composition was discernible in the Prague public. On the contrary, after the departure of the court and its society, *Tito* achieved a popularity comparable with that of the other Mozart operas.

Since we know what kind of cities Mozart gave priority to on his travels through Europe, it will be clear why Prague was not one of his destinations for many years. It was only another bitter experience in Vienna – the withdrawal of his brilliant opera buffa *Nozze di Figaro* from the programme after only nine performances, but at the same time the arrival of a celebratory poem and invitation from Prague after the success of the same opera in the Bohemian metropolis –, that led the now thirty-one-year-old Mozart to decide on a trip to Prague. Friends had invited him there before, but Prague lacked the key magnets of a princely court and a court opera. In short, a city that could offer no position as court capellmeister or composer was simply not attractive for Mozart. (To point up the tragicomic aspect of the situation we should add that theoretically a Habsburg could have offered Mozart the post of capellmeister to the King of Bohemia, because he was also King of Bohemia, but like all his predecessors except for Rudolf II he resided in the Arch Duchy of Austria...)

Yet while Prague could not offer Mozart the permanent source of income and freedom to compose represented by the post of court composer or capellmeister, in 1787 it could offer him something else he wanted too – a commission to write an opera. While Prague was not a royal seat, unlike any of the non-Italian royal seats to which Mozart had been offering himself for years, it had a public opera house. Furthermore, since this opera house had been in operation for more than sixty years, the city also possessed two or even three generations of opera enthusiasts. An institution and public of this kind was a totally new cultural factor

in the Central Europe of the time, and one still unknown to cities such as Vienna, Munich, Berlin or Dresden with their feudal courts and court operas. The crucial factor behind the creation of a beautiful relationship between the composer Mozart and the Bohemian metropolis was precisely the existence of a large opera public with a strong interest in and experience of new productions in Italian opera.

Considered from this angle, Prague emerges among the *Mozartian cities* as the perfect polar opposite to Mozart's native Salzburg. While Salzburg had a ruling court and court orchestra, as an archbishop's court it had no opera, a fact that was devastating for Mozart: *„Es ist kein Theater da, keine opera!“* To some extent Prague also seems to be an opposite case to Munich and Vienna as well, since while the latter had operas, these had for decades been "only" court operas, which excluded the public from a share in the genre. Let us remind ourselves that Mozart wrote two operas for Prague just as he wrote two for Munich, but in the Bavarian capital they found a public only for six performances, while in Prague the two operas played on and on. This was because in politically provincial 18th-century Prague, Italian opera had for decades been the main attraction of the local secular culture. Italian opera had enjoyed an uninterrupted life here since 1724 and – an extremely important point as far as Mozart would be concerned – it differed fundamentally in type from all the other opera houses north of the Alps. It was not the private theatre of the ruler and a small circle of his court society, but a publicly accessible city opera that anyone could attend if they had the interest and money for a ticket. In line with Italian practice this institution was headed by an impresario, who in Prague enjoyed the kind of freedom of which the intendants of court companies, hemmed in as they were by the requirements of official duties, could not even dream. It would, for example, have been unthinkable at a court production to have an inebriated (Roman) emperor turning up on stage, blathering inanities in several languages and drunkenly combing his hair with a branch. Or – in the intermezzo – to have a scene in which the "hero" in the costume of an emperor commands a lady in front of his "throne" to take off all her clothes... This freedom, appreciated by a public that was also big enough to pay for a large number of performances, was undoubtedly a major reason why the Prague opera became so popular with Italian artists, especially at the beginning of their careers. This was why dozens of world premieres of Italian operas took place here, including works by such authors as A. Vivaldi, Ch. W. Gluck and – W. A. Mozart.

In a chapter on *Mozart and Prague* we need to see Mozart as one of a decade of

composers of Italian operas whom Prague, thanks to its public opera house, commissioned to write an opera. Or to put it another way, one of many composers from whom the Prague public, through the local impresario, ordered a new opera. Some of the themes of Mozart's operas were hardly new to Prague. The city had experienced its first opera on the Don Juan theme in 1730, and another in 1776 (by V. Righini and successful enough that it was transferred to Vienna after a year, just like Mozart's opera eleven years later.) Prague had also seen an opera about the noble Tito 30 years before Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*.

In the 1780s the popularity of Italian opera was at its height, creating particularly favourable circumstances for Prague's meeting with Mozart. Testimony to the atmosphere is given by a local newspaper story printed on the 8th of July, 1786, reporting that in Prague a visitor need only stand on the corner of a street for a while, *"... and from all sides he will hear arias from popular Italian operas, and so it may be feared that one day whole operas will be performed in the street."* (*„... und es werden ihm von allen Seiten die Arien aus den beliebten italienischen Opern entgegen tönen, so dass zu fürchten ist, es werden auf der Gasse ganze Opern gegeben werden."*)

It was just a few months after this report on Praguers' love of opera that *Le Nozze di Figaro* was first staged in Prague. It was not the first Mozart opera to be performed in the city – that was *The Abduction from the Seraglio* in 1783 – but this time the response was absolutely extraordinary, and led to the equally extraordinary step, an historic moment in European opera, when the orchestra sent the composer of the successful opera a letter inviting him to visit Prague. The letter itself has been lost, but it is mentioned with evident paternal pride by Leopold Mozart in a letter of the 12th of January 1787. The very existence of such a letter underlines the unusual character of the situation: the orchestra of an opera house, not under the direction of any „Hoftheaterkommission“, could of its own accord invite a composer from another land to visit and to collaborate with it. Could the orchestra of a court opera have been able to do such a thing?

With its enthusiasm for the *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the Prague public effectively decided on the commission of a Mozart opera written specially for itself. It happened to be the "opera of operas", *Don Giovanni*. Today we know that it was commissioned from Mozart by a Prague impresario whose motive was undoubtedly cool calculation and the prospect of excellent takings after the commercial success of *Le Nozze di Figaro*. In his book, F. X. Němeček did not

forget to mention that „... this opera was played almost without interruption throughout the winter (...) and was a wonderful help in getting the entrepreneur out of his miserable financial situation.” („... diese Oper fast ohne Unterbrechen diesen ganzen Winter gespielt ward, und (...) den traurigen Umständen des Unternehmers vollkommen aufgeholfen hatte.“)

The heart of the answer to the question, “What did Prague mean for Mozart”, should therefore be sought first and foremost in the Prague commission of an opera for the autumn season of 1787. A composer at the height of his creative powers was given a chance to compose a major opera entirely according to his own ideas, without any kind of prior limitations or conditions. There was no censorship in his way, no interfering instructions from the theatre management or the „Hoftheaterkommission“, no binding extra wishes of particular singers, and no reason to fear a lack of sympathy from the public. Mozart could fully develop his whole personal universe of human and musical experience and imagination in his favourite musical dramatic genre! And because the Prague orchestra consisted of outstanding instrumentalists, he could write an orchestral score that was far more demanding than in any of his previous operas.

It is a pity that no sources survive to provide us with insight into the process by which the opera was composed. What is certain is that when Mozart and his wife arrived in Prague on the 4th of October 1787 to direct the preparations for the staging of *Don Giovanni*, the opera was far from finished. Fortunately, in a rather paradoxical way, our Bohemian forbears made it easier for the English expert on Mozart autographs, Alan Tyson, to make a laborious identification of which parts were written in Prague. This is because the Bohemian paper used by Mozart is even on a first glance worse in quality than the rest of the papers used for this composition... This means we can be completely sure that apart from the overture and Masetto's aria from Act I, Mozart composed a substantial part of Act 2 in Prague. In total this means around 1,600 bars, representing a third of the entire score. Mozart found quiet for composition just outside the city in the Villa Bertramka, where he was the guest of the musical couple Josefina and František Xaver Dušek. (After the premiere of the opera he rewarded his hostess with a beautiful aria and recitative, “Bella mia fiamma, addio”.) Then, to amuse himself and his Prague friend, in the comic part of the opera finale he included small allusions to the harpsichordist and author of piano reductions of his operas Jan Křtitel Kuchař, the charming singer of the role of Donna Anna, Tereza Saporiti, the simple melodies of the opera *Cosa rara* by Martin y Soler, which had squeezed his Figaro out of opera programmes in Vienna, and so forth. The

public today can respond with amusement only to one of these allusions, and that is Mozart's quotation from his own work, Figaro's popular aria *Non più andrai*.

It is remarkable that even in this, the earliest history of the staging of *Don Giovanni*, the difference between the Prague Opera and the Vienna Opera of Mozart's day is very clear. While the Prague public immediately and rapturously welcomed Mozart's crowning work in the form that he composed it, a year later the same work went down less well in Vienna. First of all the singers of the court opera took a condescending attitude to both Mozart and his work. The tenor refused to sing the aria, *Il mio tesoro*, and insisted on the composition of a different aria, and the singer playing Donna Elvira behaved in the similar way. In order to satisfy the local public Mozart and Da Ponte had to add the comic duet between Zerlina and Leporello. This duet, which introduces the alien spirit of a coarse-grained suburban farce into a masterwork and which is always left out today, itself suggests something about the difference between the opera public in Prague and Vienna. And even with the forced changes, after 15 performances *Don Giovanni* was withdrawn in Vienna. There was no one left who wanted to see it.

In 1791, Prague had another chance to enter the life of Mozart with a new initiative and did not waste it. The impresario Domenico Guardasoni, whose knowledge of the Prague opera public was unrivalled, chose Mozart to compose an opera for the celebrations of the coronation of Leopold II as King of Bohemia, and the Bohemian Estates hastily commissioned the composer by a contract of the 8th of July. Guardasoni's motives were the same as those behind the commission in 1787, but this time with the prospect of even better financial rewards, for the arrangement meant that the Bohemian Estates would be footing the bill for a new opera that he could add to his repertoire and continue to stage for the Prague public in years to come. When the Italian opera company left Prague for ever in 1807 after his death, they gave as their last performance Mozart's *Tito*. The opera had been so popular that when choirs from this opera were performed at concerts, the public was capable of singing along. Which of us has ever experienced such a thing in a concert hall?

Was *The Magic Flute* any less popular in Prague? This unique Mozart singspiel was first performed outside Vienna by the company of the Prager František Bulla in Lwow (Lemberg) and immediately afterwards in October 1792 in Prague by Václav Mihule's company. The Praguers were enchanted with it. The popularity of *The Magic Flute* reached a peak in 1794, when it could be heard in the Bohemian metropolis in three different versions: in the German

original, in Czech translation and in an Italian version, with recitatives composed in Prague. Another unique achievement for Mozart's Prague!

The love of Praguers for Mozart's music was also reflected in the activities of many musicians away from the opera house, as is evident from the concert programmes of Mozart's friend Josefina Dušková and the much younger pianist Jan Vitásek, for example. Mozart's friend and fellow Mason, the outstanding clarinetist Anton Stadler, begged Mozart to finish the clarinet concerto quickly enough for him to include it in his Prague concert, and so on the 16th of October 1791 Prague was the first city to enjoy a performance of Mozart's last composition for orchestra and soloist.

Prague's love of Mozart and his work remained constant even after his death, and indeed the city's response to his death once again gave it primacy among “Mozart cities”. Did any other city express such an honour for the dead musician shown by Prague with its requiem mass in the Church of St. Nicholas on the 14th of December 1791? To which city, if not Prague, did his widow Constanze send her sons to be cared for? And was not Prague the first city to set up a Mozart memorial (1837, kept in the University Library, now the National Library, to this day)? Is there any city in which the “opera of operas”, commissioned by Prague, is performed more frequently than in Prague? There is not, and even in this point Prague maintains its Mozartian primacy.

It is sad that after so much in the way of praise for Mozart's Prague, this Prague Mozartian cannot but admit in conclusion – in the interests of an objective view – that currently far from all the productions of Mozart's operas in Prague are of the artistic standard they deserve. In a number of aspects the Mozartian tradition in Prague seems to be undermined and weakened. Today the Czech metropolis no longer has the kind of enlightened opera public that it possessed in the last years of the 18th century. But this – fortunately – is not our theme in these pages...

The recording debuts of Czech conductors are frequently relatively late, and in the same way the managements of our music institutions are very cautious when it comes to appointing principal conductors from the younger generation. Let it therefore be said that here we have an exception! Last year the twenty-five-year-old **Jakub Hrůša** (see the interview in this issue) became the principal conductor of the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic in Zlín and the principal conductor of the Prague Chamber Philharmonic. He is the assistant to Myung-Whun Chung at the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, with which he gives concerts. Hrůša has already conducted many of Czech orchestras including the Czech Philharmonic. At two musically outstanding concerts with the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra he showed that he is now a remarkable and highly promising conductor: given his age, he gave what was a surprisingly considered and mature interpretation of Josef Suk's *Asrael* at his graduation concert at Prague's Academy of Music (AMU) in 2004 and also made a successful appearance at the Prague Spring last year. His debut album with Supraphon is thus very timely. The oldest and best known Czech recording company entrusted with minor works by Antonín Dvořák, but this definitely didn't make his task easier, for these are very famous pieces – especially the *Czech Suite* and the *Polonaise in E Flat major*, which are evergreens on concert podia and the subject of many older recordings inviting tough comparisons. Apart from these pieces the CD includes the complete *Waltzes* in Jarmil Burghauser's instrumentation. Looking at the contents of the CD one cannot but remember the Supraphon record made twenty years ago (the music was the same except for the *Czech Suite*), with Hrůša's teacher Jiří Bělohlávek conducting the Prague FOK Symphony Orchestra. Jakub Hrůša, however, was given the Prague Chamber Philharmonic, with which a conductor has to work in an entirely different way than with a large orchestra. He knows this very well, since even in this specific area he has often co-operated with this first rate ensemble and is entirely at home with them. In contrast to the traditional recordings here we can savour the sensitively elaborated details and pleasantly colourful sound of the different instrumental groups. One factor that also helps in this context is the choice of the Domovina studio rather than the Rudolfinum more often used in these cases. The musical director and sound master have also done an excellent job. In this chamber version the Polonaise sounds delightful and the accompaniment voices, easily lost to the ear in the symphonic current, are wonderfully audible. When we listen to the entire cycle of the eight Waltzes, better known in the original piano version, the question of their instrumentation by another composer inevitably arises again. Despite all Jarmil Burghauser's best efforts to ensure the maximum authenticity, we cannot help feeling that we are in a different, albeit not a distant world. Dvořák himself instrumented only two waltzes (nos. 1 and 4) and then only for string ensemble, where the result is much more poetic and closer to the original chamber sound. One example might be the entirely different conception of the middle section of the 1st Waltz. Jakub Hrůša's interpretation of the cycle is highly inventive and in some sections the results are very charming, for example the colourful instrumental cascade at the return to the reprise in the 1st Waltz, or the colourful play at the beginning of the 4th Waltz or the very ingenious expression in the 6th Waltz, which in this instrumentation is probably the closest to the Dvořákian world. *The Czech Suite* was written by the composer for a small orchestra and this recording fully respects the fact. I see a problem in the tempi of the Polka and Furiant. They are too fast! The entrancing main theme of the polka thus becomes ordinary to the point of lacking poetry, and the trio is more a rather hasty episode than a sweet trifle. And the furiant, although significantly artistically stylised, tends to lose its original identity. At such a tempo is it a long way from the original rhythmically arousing even demonic passages. Incidentally, not even the best dancer would be able to cope with the basic dance figures at this speed. But it should be said that even Hrůša's much more experienced colleagues present the furiant in this kind of insensitive way, without regard for its original identity. Yet that is perhaps my only reservation. The beautiful *Romance*, sweetly genial *Sousedská* and lyrically delicate introductory *Prelude* in fact in many respects improve on the older recordings of *The Czech Suite*.

BOHUSLAV VÍTEK

When I first saw **Pavel Šporcl**'s new image in a photograph by Robert Vano in connection with Dvořák I couldn't help feeling a certain distrust. Would this pseudo-Paganinian appearance also inform the intimate lyricism of the *Romantic Pieces* or the *Sonatina*? As an initial basis for comparison I chose Gil Shaham's project of 1997, when with his sister Orli he recorded the core of Dvořák's legacy for violin and piano – both the already mentioned cyclical pieces and the exquisite *Sonata in F major*, which is unfortunately not included on the Supraphon CD under review. To my great surprise it was Shaham, who looks like a young, mild American professor from Stanford, whose performance went in for the spectacular effects, excessively fast tempi and virtuosity of the Paganinian romantic legend. The Czech violinist, on the other hand, seemed to be deliberately reining in his spontaneity and passionate engagement with every phrase. In comparison not only with the American's, but also with Josef Suk's or Bohuslav Matoušek's Dvořák, his Dvořák is very restrained, chamber-style, and I would even venture to say spiritually ascetic. Shaham's play is in great contrast, he brings each phrase to as much passionate life as he can, and is not afraid to display the splendour of his tone enhanced by a brilliant instrument. It seemed to me, therefore, that Šporcl had no chance. Curiously, however, after a while Shaham's concept of Dvořák began to weary me, because so much of it was overdone – tone, contrast, dynamic waves enough to threaten an avalanche, and above all the fast tempi which in my view lend Dvořák's music an unnecessary hastiness and one-sidedness. Although Šporcl wanted to record Dvořák in his own way, and has indeed succeeded in this, he has strong roots in the Czech tradition of melodiousness, phrasing and tempo order. Although Shaham had the better technical foundation, an instrument that was superior by a class and a slightly more sensitive piano accompaniment, it was actually Šporcl who in his conception and more interesting sound appealed more to me. The ideal situation would be if the two violinists met halfway along the line. Shaham would stop reaching for contrast and impressive virtuosity at any price, and Šporcl would gain in expressiveness and flexibility, and arrive at the technical perfection of his competitor.

LUBOŠ STEHLÍK

**Antonín Dvořák**

Czech Suite in D Major, op. 39, Polonaise in E Flat major B 100, Waltzes op. 54

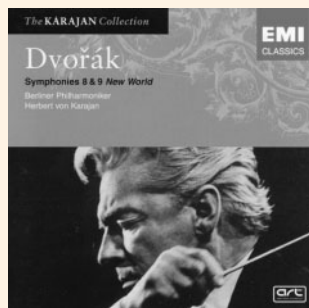
The Prague Chamber Philharmonic, Jakub Hrůša. Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., French, Czech. Recorded: 10/2005, Studio Domovina, Prague. Published: 2006. TT: 55:10. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3867-2. Alternative: Czech Suite – Pešek, (Virgin), Prague Chamber Orchestra, Vlček; Vlach (Supraphon), Polonaise in E Flat major – Neumann, Czech Philharmonic (Orfeo), Polonaises and Waltzes – Bělohlávek, FOK (Supraphon).

**Antonín Dvořák**

Music for Violin

(Romantic Pieces, Capriccio, Romance in F minor, Sonatina in G major, Mazurek, Ballade in D minor)

Pavel Šporcl – violin, Petr Jiříkovský – piano. Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., French, Czech. Recorded: August and September 2005, Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, Prague. Published: 2005. TT: 70:35. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3860-2. Alternative: Shaham – Dvořák for two (Deutsche Grammophon).



Antonín Dvořák

Symphony nos. 8 and 9 "From the New World"

Berliner Philharmoniker, Herbert von Karajan. Production: Michel Glotz. Text: Eng. Ger, French. Recorded: 2 – 3. 1. 1979 (no.8), 2 – 3. 1. 1977 (no.9), Philharmonie, Berlin. Released: 2005. TT: 78:07. ADD. 1 CD EMI Classics 7243 4 76898 2 6 (EMI).

Alternative: Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Teldec 3984-24487-2 (no.8), 3984-25254-2 (no.9).

Of Antonín Dvořák's nine symphonies, **Herbert von Karajan** only had the last two in his repertoire, but he worked on their interpretation throughout his life. The EMI recording under review was made in the 1970s. It was a time when after long years of drill, the **Berlin Philharmonic** had become the perfect instrument of Karajan's musical ideas. In precision and quality of sound there was no one to compare with the orchestra at the time and the standard that it then set remains a great challenge for performers today. While some of Karajan's recordings may today be considered outdated (this relates mainly to his interpretation of music of the 18th and early 20th century), in his later 19th-century repertoire Karajan still has much to say to us today. This is certainly true of the recording of Dvořák's symphonies. If it strikes us as unusual or even ground-breaking compared to the domestic tradition of performance, when we look carefully at the score we find that in most cases it is simply a matter of Karajan's thorough respect for Dvořák's instructions on dynamics and expression, and especially the wonderful richness of nuance and colour in the quieter passages. One excellent example is the secondary theme of the second movement of the 8th Symphony with its clearly discernible three dynamic belts (pp, p, mp), played with peerless delicacy and grace. If we compare this passage, for example with the recording made by Václav Neumann with the Czech Philharmonic in the 1980s, where it is played in "workaday mezzoforte", Karajan's version seems truly pioneering. Also very effective (and tasteful) is the way tempo is used to discriminate between some contrasting phrases (for example the slower response of the clarinets to the call of the flutes in bars 11–17 in the second movement of the 8th Symphony). On the other hand, Karajan would have done better to leave out the glissandi between the upbeat and first beat at the beginning of a phrase in the third movement of the 8th Symphony. Karajan always strived for an ideal of beautiful sound, and the result was sometimes that the sound is excessively rounded, and occasionally even "blurred" at the expense of the pregnant articulation and phrasing that are as important with Dvořák as with Beethoven, for example. In this respect (and not only in this) Nikolaus Harnoncourt's recording with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra can be considered model and revealing. But there are not as many good recordings of Dvořák symphonies as it might seem, and despite the reservations suggested, Karajan's recording of the 1970s is still one of the best.

PETR BUDÍN



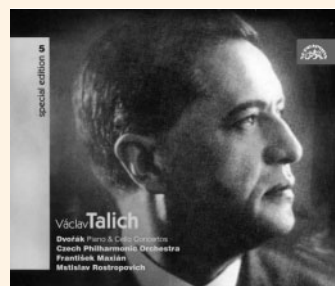
Baroque music in the Czech Lands

(Biber, Zach, Vejvanovský, Plánický, Benda, Brixl, Pezelius)

Dušan Foltýn – oboe, Pavel Hromádka – trumpet, Tomáš Thon – organ. Production: not stated. Text: Eng., Czech. Recorded: 12th and 13th of July 2004, the Minorite Church of the Holy Spirit in Opava. Published: 2005. TT: 58:46. DDD. 1 CD Studio Matouš MK 0805-2 131 (distribution Studio Matouš).

More than once I have had occasion to write a review of the first studio efforts of groups that under various kinds of pressure have stabilised in a mature form from which it is but a short step to public presentation, and so ensemble CD is a necessity. I have always also pointed out the danger of the first wave of enthusiasm which initially produces an almost perfect sound product in every respect – and then nothing else! The Baroque trio (oboe, trumpet, organ) formed on the music-historical initiative of **Tomáš Thon** in Ostrava, on first sight seems as if it might fall into this trap, but it is clear that each one of its members already has a rich and varied concert life to his credit, and if an ensemble bond has formed between them, its basis has not been just the desire to get concerts in the first place, but the desire to multiply what each has already been doing for years at the highest professional standard. The repertoire for an ensemble with these instruments has to be put together by transcribing pieces of a kind that allow or even seem to lend themselves to this approach. Currently this is a fashionable trend and it should be admitted that is almost the only way to revive pieces when the original combination of instruments or a suitable performers cannot be found. Furthermore, the combination of oboe and trumpet is a happy one in technical terms. The two instruments are roughly as rich as each other in overtones, and with the fanfare sound of the trumpet and the contrasting lyricism of the oboe the pieces acquire a new dimension for listeners, and one enhanced by the royal instrument and so also the church environment. I can only say that the CD works deliberately with all these aspects and gets the best out of them, relying on the great discipline of all three musicians as ensemble players. Musically the outstanding piece is the *Sonata in F major* for oboe by František Benda. The musical mastery shown by the composer goes beyond the intellectual content of the other pieces, which were originally designed more for use at banquets and dances. And **Dušan Foltýn** is simply excellent. The brilliant structuration of the different movements, the long and arching legatos, the dynamic proportions, and the particularly suitable choice of the reed for a bright coloratura tone perfectly highlights the origin of the piece in Benda's violin virtuosity. It is a pity that in some sections the introverted tone of the oboe is rather drowned by the massive (and at this point insensitively mixed) sound of the organ. The picture of St. Cecilia (the patron saint of organists and church singers) on the title page of the booklet prefigures the honour that the Baroque Trio from Ostrava does her with their recording. And since we are talking of the booklet, I must not forget to mention the insightful preface by Petr Koukal, whose historical erudition enhances the whole outstanding CD.

JOSEF ŠEBESTA



Václav Talich – Special Edition 5

Antonín Dvořák: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in G Minor op. 33, Concerto for Cello and Orchestra no. 2, op. 104

The grand masters of European music performing Antonín Dvořák. At the beginning of the fifties **Václav Talich** joined forces with the pianist **František Maxián** for performance of the *Piano Concerto in G Minor op. 33*. The piece is based on classicist foundations but is adorned with many romantic elements. Richly arched melody, expansive harmonies and above all a new perception of tectonic structure together constitute the most important musical phenomenon of the romantic epoch and are fully evident in this concerto. František Maxián, whose concept of the part was founded on enormous experience with romantic music, seeks to convey its full expressive power. In doing so he could rely on his extraordinary technical skill, which allowed him to give a cultivated performance full of emotion and genuine romantic resolve. The original recordings, published here as a re-edition, have the charm of unmediated musicianship. Retaining the human factor is often a positive factor for listeners.

The most beautiful concerto played by the best performer. This ideal combination can be enjoyed as you listen to Antonín Dvořák's *Cello Concerto in B Minor* played by **Mstislav Rostropovich**. The most celebrated cellist of his time provides an interpretation full of energy and, unsurprisingly, amazing sympathy and feeling. The cantilena of the solo instrument is supported by the whole orchestra, and what is more, Rostropovich's ability to convey to the audience the composer's own true vision and emotional reflections turn what is always a great work into a perfect work.

Václav Talich needs no further introduction. He was one of the most famous of Czech conductors, and in large part responsible for the great reputation of our musicians throughout the world. **The Czech Philharmonic** offers the soloists all the necessary support. The concertos were recorded by Supraphon in 1951 and 1952

and today it has published the rare recordings on CDs as well. The accompanying booklet offers details on the conductor and some other information, but nothing on the pieces and the performers – no doubt a printer's error is to blame for the missing pages.

MICHAELA KOMÁRKOVÁ

Two newly published recordings of Janáček's piano music offer us a marvellous opportunity for comparison. The re-edition of the old recordings by **Josef Páleníček** from 1971 and 1972 offers an impressive Janáček, if (to put it mildly) a very individual one. If someone wanted to play like this at a competition today, he or she would be sent packing for many sins against the score. This is a romantic but very original Janáček, to the extent that in the rippling first movement of the *Sonata*, for example, one might even think if the composer wasn't someone else entirely. In the *On an Overgrown Path* [*Po zarostlém chodníčku*] too, there are many peculiarities of rhythm, conjuring with touch and surprising dynamic changes. These we can justify only by the personality of Josef Páleníček, but behind them there is quite extraordinary art and faith in the durability of a composer who at that time was far from an acknowledged classic, especially not in his piano music. The subtitle of an old gramophone record, "My Janáček" would be more appropriate for this interpretation, but it succeeds in defending its own independence. It is, however, a very interesting proof of the fact that interpretation is above all a search and has its history. Páleníček conceives the *Capriccio* and *Concertino* very much as a small piano concerto.

The most recent recording by **Jan Jiraský** last year, on the other hand goes right back to the sources. It is less romantic in terms of expression and in places even insufficiently melodious, and is exceptional for its enthusiasm, care and thorough preparation. In my view the *Overgrown Path* would benefit from more tension and contrasts between the individual movements. But I would not venture to predict whether after thirty years we shall be returning to this recording with interest, as in the case of J. Páleníček. The double CD also includes two recordings of the cycle *In the Mists* [*V mlhách*], one of them on Janáček's original piano. This is more a point of interest than something that offers new insight. In the *Capriccio* he emphasises the playfulness and programmatic character of the piece, while it is evident that it is being played by an "ensemble of soloists" rather than a tightly knit chamber group. I would in any case continue to consider Rudolf Firkušný's recording of Janáček as the classic recording, since it seems to contain the best elements of the two we have been discussing. Both can be recommended to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of Janáček's piano works, although for completely opposite reasons.

JINDŘICH BÁLEK



This set of three CDs, which was released in 2005 – i.e. in the year of the 70th anniversary of the death of the composer Josef Suk (1874–1935) and also the 80th anniversary of the birth of the performer, leading Czech pianist **Pavel Štěpán** (1925–1998) – represents a cross-section of Suk's music for piano. Pavel Štěpán came from a well-known musical family (he was the grandson of Prof. Vilém Kurz and son of Dr. Václav Štěpán and pianist Ilona Štěpánová-Kurzová), who was a close friend of Josef Suk. It was therefore natural that he should become as it were the "court" interpreter of Suk's works (like F. Rauch in relation to the works of Novák). He devoted himself to Suk intensively particularly in the seventies, when this recording was made (1974–75) and in 1978 he won the Supraphon Golden Disc for his five-disc (LP) complete set of Suk's piano works.

The CD set contains Suk's most important piano pieces, leaving out only a number of early minor pieces of the 1880s and 90s and, surprisingly, the famous *Píseň lásky* [*Song of Love*]. Taken altogether the three discs allow us to form a good picture of the way in which Suk's piano output developed, since the pieces are arranged chronologically – with the exception of a kind of supplement in the form of four minor pieces under the title *Episodes* at the end of the third disc. Thus the first disc introduces us to Suk's early work – *Fantasia-Polonoise op. 5*, *Humoresque in C major*, *Village Serenade* and the cycles *Nálady* [*Moods*] *op. 10* and *Piano Compositions op. 12*. The second disc contains the *Suite op. 21* and the cycles *Jaro* [*Spring*] *op. 22a*, *Letní dojmy* [*Summer Impressions*] *op. 22b* and *O matince* [*About Mother*] *op. 28*, in which the composer is already finding his own musical voice. On the third disc we find Suk's crowning piano music – the cycle *Životem a snem* [*In Life and Dream*] *op. 30*, *Ukolébavky* [*Lullabies*] *op. 33*, the piece *O přátelství* [*On Friendship*] *op. 36* and the *Episodes* already mentioned. For the performer this wide range of pieces demands a mastery of various different styles – from salon influences in the early work, through the intimate and impressionistic cycles on the second disc to the specific musical idiom with elements of expressionism in the cycle *In Life and Dream*. Pavel Štěpán carries off all these forms of expression with excellence, but if I had to choose, then what impresses me most is his interpretation of the slow parts in the cycles of Suk's mature period. For example in sections VII and X of the cycle *In Life and Dream op. 30* Štěpán shows himself to be the master of the most subtle dynamic nuances, each note sounding at the right moment with the right power to the point where the hairs stand up on the back of our neck. The same can be said of the *Lullabies op. 33*, Suk's last piano work. The high standard of the CD is complemented by the excellent text by Vít Roubíček.

KATEŘINA RIETHOFOVÁ

František Maxián – piano, **Mstislav Rostropovič** – cello, **The Czech Philharmonic**, **Václav Talich**. Production: Jana Gonda, Petr Kadlec, Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., French, Czech. Recorded: 1951(1–3), 1952 (4–6) Rudolfinum Prague. Published: 2005. TT: 78:03. ADD mono. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3825-2.



Leoš Janáček

Piano Works

On an Overgrown Path [*Po zarostlém chodníčku*], *In the Mists* [*V mlhách*], *Sonata 1. X. 1905*, *Concertino*, *Capriccio*)

Josef Páleníček – piano, **Chamber Harmony of the Czech Philharmonic**, **Wind Harmony of the Czech Philharmonic** Text: Eng., Ger., French, Czech. Recorded 1971 and 1972. Published: 2005. TT: 53:59, 41:16. ADD 2 CD Supraphon SU 3812-2

Leoš Janáček

Complete Piano Works

(*On an Overgrown Path* [*Po zarostlém chodníčku*], *In the Mists* [*V mlhách*], *Sonata 1. X. 1905*, *Tema con variazioni*, *Concertino*, *Capriccio*)

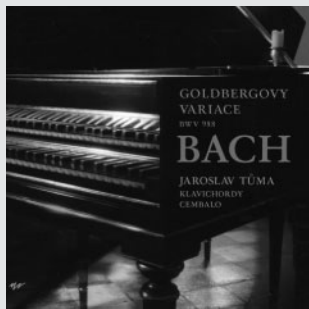
Jan Jiraský – piano, **J. Ševčík** – flute, **J. Houček**, **M. Vajo** – trumpet, **S. Penk**, **P. Fríd**, **P. Čermák** – trombone, **J. Nauš** – tuba, directed by **L. Mátl** (*Capriccio*), **P. Wallinger**, **J. Vašta** – violin, **M. Kovár** – viola, **V. Spilka** – clarinet, **R. Novozámský** – bassoon, **J. Petráš** – French horn (*Concertino*). Production: Jiří Štílec. Text: Eng., Czech. Recorded: 2004. Published: 2004. TT: 61:22, 65:03. DDD 2 CD ArcoDiva UP 0071-2 132 (distribution Classic).



Josef Suk

Piano Works

Pavel Štěpán – piano. Production: Vít Roubíček. Text: Eng., Ger., French, Czech. Recorded: 1974–1975. Published: 2005. TT: 65:39, 74:02, 79:08. ADD. 3 CD Supraphon SU 3820-2.



Johann Sebastian Bach

The Goldberg Variations BWV 988

Jaroslav Tůma – clavichord, harpsichord.
 Production: Jaroslav Tůma, Vítězslav Janda.
 Text: Czech, Eng. Recorded: 10/2004 Petrovice. Released: 2005. TT: 154 min. DDD. 2 CD Arta F 10136 (distribution 2HP Production).

„For performers who have fallen in love with the music of Bach, the *Goldberg Variations* are a great challenge,” observes the performer himself in the booklet. One of leading Czech organists, but also harpsichordist and player on the clavichord and hammerklavier **Jaroslav Tůma** has accepted the challenge, and could be said to have triumphed just by having recorded the whole monumental cycle of thirty variations representing a difficult compendium of approaches to composition not just once but twice over. Once on a two-manual harpsichord, the instrument for which the *Goldberg Variations* was written, and once (clearly for the first time ever in the history of recording the piece) on a pair of clavichords, an instrument Bach supposedly found more sympathetic than the harpsichord. The listener expecting that a recording by Jaroslav Tůma will offer artistic erudition and insight, maturity of performance and great musical experience will not be disappointed. Everything here has its order, its proper place and its proper time. All the movements have a steady pulse, but at the same time there is very thoughtful, detailed work with agogics. The tempi chosen for the individual variations are very sympathetic. Nothing is taken to extremes and so all the variations remain musically lucid. Naturally the two different instruments with different dispositions produce two different versions of the same work. While the clavichord version is reminiscent of a soft drawing in charcoal, with every tone sensitively modelled, the harpsichord version is more like an engraving with sharp and clear lines, in which the overall composition of the picture plays an important role. In the clavichord version Tůma beautifully brings out the plastic polyphony, in which every part is finely dynamically shaded. The acoustically finely worked gallant conclusions of every variation are like charming compliments. In contrast to the preceding clavichord version, the harpsichord version involves a great deal of ornamentation, and thanks to the change of registers offers the chance for more diverse changes of colour between the variations. As just one example of many we might mention the twenty-fifth variation, the last of the mere three in a minor key, which unexpectedly seems to transport us to another world. And in addition, the CDs’ very professionally conceived booklet provides us with Tůma’s own erudite and detailed, but hugely loving and readable commentary. The set is a stimulating and valuable contribution on many levels and can be warmly recommended.

MARTA NĚMCOVÁ



Leoš Janáček

String Quartet no. 1 „Kreutzer Sonata“, String Quartet no. 2 „Intimate Letters“

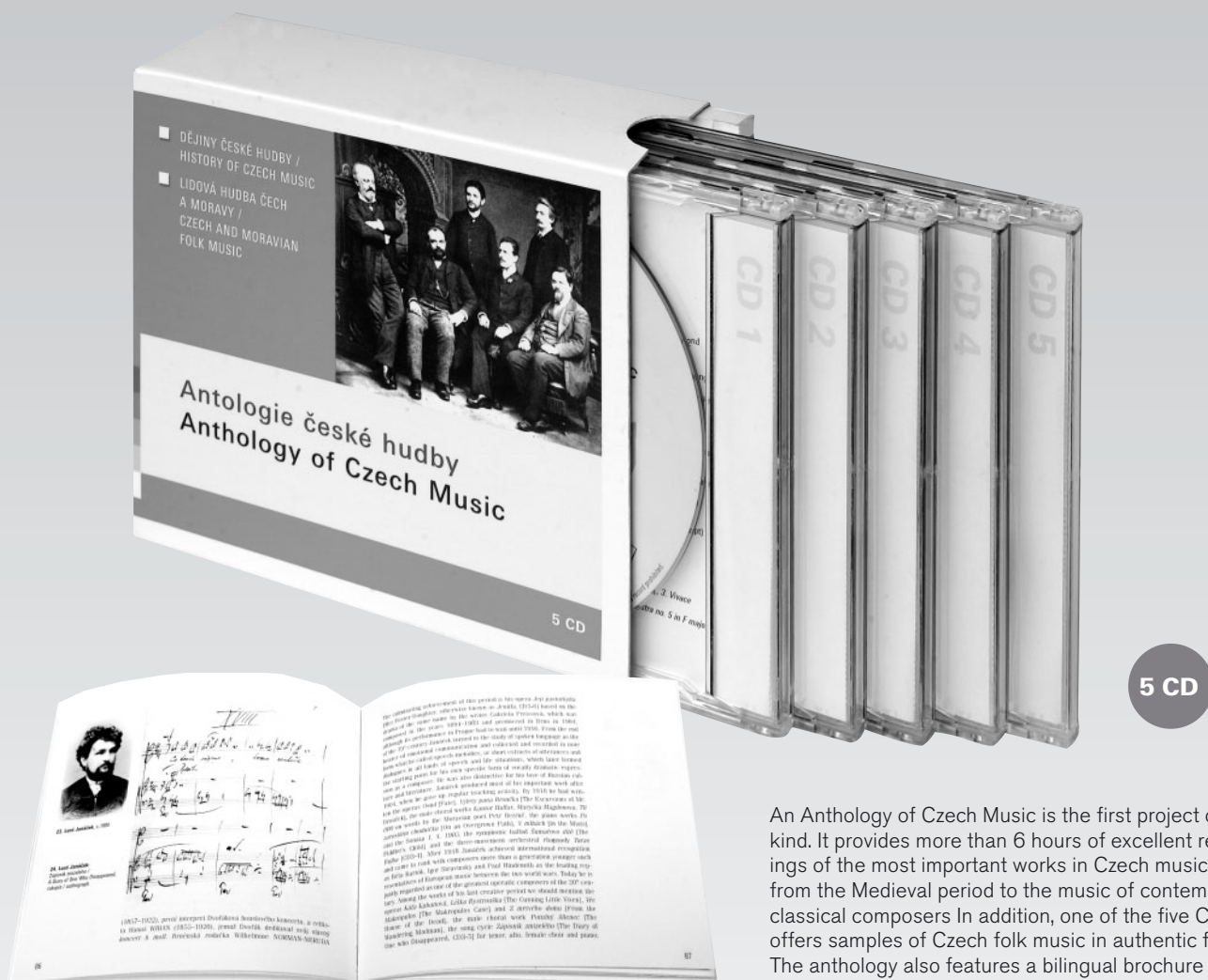
Erwin Schulhoff

String Quartet no. 1

The Talich Quartet: Jan Talich, Petr Maceček, Vladimír Bukač, Petr Prause. Production: Jacques le Calvé, Michael Adda. Text: Fr., Eng. Recorded: 12/2004, 3/2005, Studio Arco Diva, Praha. Released: 2005. TT: 57:08. DDD. 1 CD Caliope CAL 9333 (distribution Classic).

The Talich Quartet has brought off another daring feat. Two years ago they crowned their complete Mendelssohn, then they shocked the experts with a highly mature conception of Smetana’s quartets and Fibich’s 1st Quartet, and now they have released another wonderful title with their home French record company. Their interpretation of Janáček astounds the listener with the tension of each phrase, the dramatic spirit, the erotic punch, and despite all the abrasiveness an intoxicating sweetness of tone. Currently it would be hard to find any parallel for their treatment of agogics, which pervades even the details. The expressiveness is taken so far that in places I wondered if it wasn’t over the top, yet everything is so beautifully balanced and in proportion that I was entirely convinced. Of course it is just one of the possible interpretations of a complex score and other ensembles offer other versions (the Panoch, Stamic, Kocian, Wihan, Hass and other quartets). As far as the standard of the performers is concerned, the ensemble is ideally balanced. The first violin Jan Talich is a brilliant violinist, able and dominant, but the violist **Vladimír Bukač** is also capable of masterly solo play. The second violin **Petr Maceček** is not just someone who provides the accents and the “feedlines”, but a complementary partner to the first violin, and background is reliably created by cellist **Petr Prause**. The Talich Quartet seem to be entering a golden period when they can record almost anything at top level. The Schulhoff Quartet is a good supplement, and played with no less enthusiasm, but it is just one of the possible solutions. Filling extra time on a CD of brilliant Janáček quartets is difficult and can never be absolutely right.

LUBOŠ STEHLÍK



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