

czech music

quarterly magazine



4

2006

Antonin Matzner
Czech Opera Today
Graham Melville-Mason
Janáček's Operas

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4/2006



editorial



Dear Reading

The theme of this issue is opera in the Czech Republic. An article by leading opera critic and journalist Helena Havlíková provides a detailed account of the Czech opera scene today and may perhaps inspire you to go to a performance when you visit the Czech Republic. It is with this possibility in mind that we have added an overview of all our opera companies including their current repertoire, and we shall certainly be returning to opera in future issues of Czech Music. In this issue, don't miss M. Štědroň's article on Janáček's operas!

You will also find one more interview than is usual. Apart from the title interview with Antonín Matzner and the regular interview in which we present the best musicians of the coming generation (in this case the bassoonist Václav Vonášek), we have also included a conversation with Professor Graham Melville-Mason, president of Britain's Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak Music on the occasion of his acceptance of a prize for lifelong promotion of Czech music. This is our way of offering Professor Mason congratulations and expressing our admiration and gratitude. Next year Czech Music will be coming out in a new graphic design, but what is most important is that not just the "envelope" will be improved but the "contents" will be enriched. Starting with the first issue of 2007 we shall be adding a free CD of music by contemporary Czech composers to the magazine, once or twice a year. Although this is a gift for our readers, the saying that "things that are free are not usually worth much" certainly doesn't apply here. What you will be getting is a full-value CD with the best in contemporary Czech music, without any cuts and usually previously unreleased. You have something to look forward to, and it's our pleasure, for not even the very best music magazine can be anything without the music itself.

On behalf of Czech music I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

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EDITOR

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cover: *La Clemenza di Tito* in *The Estates Theatre*. Wolf Matthias Friedrich (Publio), Sarah Castle (Annio), Elzbieta Szmytka (Vitellia) Photo: Hana Smejkalová

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Antonín Matzner (born in 1944 in Plzeň) is the author of more than ten books on film, jazz, popular and classical music, he has been popularising jazz on the radio for many years, and for the last decade he has also been repertory director of the Prague Spring Festival. He has been involved in the production of more than 150 musical recordings. After 1989 he could have become a minister or diplomat, but he says he would not have enjoyed it. He experienced the vital musical developments of the 1960s, the grey of the seventies under what was known as “normalisation”, the events of the Velvet Revolution and the years after it – about all this he knows much more than many, but as yet he has no urge to write his memoirs...



waiting for stravinsky to go out to the pharmacy

DITA HRADECKÁ

Your family was in stationery, so how did you come to music?

My father was trained as a retailer, but he was also a fan of music, a self-made expert and a great Wagnerian. He often went to the Dresden Opera with my mother, visited Bayreuth and was always telling me about Wagner. You have to understand that during my childhood Wagner wasn't played at all in this country – I first heard it performed in 1957 in Pilsen. It was Lohengrin, and the first ever Wagner performance after the war. For me it was therefore "narrated music", just like Mahler; Karel Ančerl and Václav Neumann did a great thing when they started to present Mahler in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.

My father had converted to the Church of the Czech Brethren and we were brought up in it. It was in the church choir that I started my own musical career. My pastor Jiří Pumr had an unbelievable collection of records, for example the Brandenburg Concertos with Sviatoslav Richter on the Melodiya Label or the complete records of the St. Thomas Choir. Here and there I would make a little music too, since I played in the Sunday school on the harmonium and organ. My brother and I also had subscription tickets at the theatre and we both had piano lessons. I won't say anything about the results... The basic problem was that I displayed a stronger character than my teachers and I never learned anything properly from them.

But people say you are an excellent pianist...

Me and the pianist and future conductor Václav Zahradník were in our way like Siamese twins, and we got up a sort of performance piece, a parody of the Internationale, and we called it the Hydrocentrale. It consisted of Vašek playing the melody and me sitting down with my back to the keyboard. Maybe that's how the reputation you mention started – the piece was pretty polished.

Nonetheless, I also played the piano professionally, in bars and with a pop group.

Does that mean that you were just as interested in popular and jazz music as in classical music from the start? Or did your priorities change over time?

My generation played Ježek's albums in our childhood; they were very popular. I tried to persuade my teacher to let me do Jaroslav Ježek, but I didn't succeed, because they didn't want anything to do with it. Jazz attracted me for the same reasons as Schoenberg, for example: it was forbidden fruit. And music like that fascinated me. Even before I went off to do my military service friends used to come to my place to listen –

I already had quite a decent sound library on tape, for example including Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* or Eimert's electronic studies...

Where did you get hold of these recordings? In the Late Fifties and Early Sixties...

It varied. Berlin wasn't yet divided by the wall, and so for instance the relatives of school-mates were working there and could get to the western section. I remember someone bringing the Modern Jazz Quartet. We kept on playing it until the grooves were worn out, learning the solos. Then all you could hear was *shrum, shrum...* I found another source in the Divadlo hudby (Theatre of Music). I'm surprised that the director of Supraphon Jaroslav Šeda was prepared to lend me a complete set of recordings of pieces by Anton Webern when I was only sixteen years old. Me and my friends were always meeting up, and listened to thousands of hours of music. It was the time when Serge Baudo was starting to conduct Honegger in Prague...

Miloslav Kabeláč, who gave you composition lessons, must have been a big influence on you...

In fact I studied composition with František Kovaříček, and I only went to Kabeláč once in a while for one-off consultations. Kabeláč was a real guru, with a fascinating resemblance to Schoenberg – he was a really stern old man. When I was on my way to a session with him I was so scared that once for example, when I reached the corner of his building, I decided that it wasn't worth going there just to get scolded again. So I called from a telephone box to say I was in bed with a fever, but as if just to spite me there was a tram turning the corner... well, Kabeláč never referred to the episode. I never saw him laugh, but we all had absolute faith in him. His profound anti-communism fascinated us. What's more, he completely accepted my jazz escapades, because he

was interested in exotic musical cultures. I remember how he brought back Lutoslawski's Venetian Games from the Warsaw Autumn Festival just after their premiere in 1961. It was the first time we had seen that kind of notation – or rather not notes, but diagrams. Kabeláč initiated us into proportional notation, and we immediately all started to write that way. Today I make futile efforts to persuade conductors to present Kabeláč's Sixth and Seventh Symphonies. Especially the Sixth, because it was never played again after the premiere and I was there when he was actually writing it.

Who did you see the most of at the beginning of the 1960s?

There was Jan Rychlík, for example. I would claim that his African Cycle was one of the first minimal music pieces. At a time when neither Reich nor Glass was yet on the scene, Rychlík came up with repetitive models on the basis of African metro-rhythmics. Rychlík died in January 1964. Reading his recently published diaries I realise that we had absolutely no idea of the Renaissance horizons of his knowledge at the time. Petr Kotík, a great free-thinker, was closer to me in age. Initially he was involved with the ensemble Musica Viva Pragensis, but he was thrown out after a row, and then he formed the Quax Ensemble.

What was the problem?

Musica Viva was making guest appearances in Vienna with one of Kotík's compositions. People didn't like it, they booed, and the ensemble decided they would play something else at the Warsaw Autumn. Only Kotík wrote an even longer and more extravagant piece, and so there was a big row, and Kabeláč wanted to strangle him in the cloakroom for bringing shame on Czech music. Petr then founded Quax, and I was something like a manager for the group. Jiří Stivín, for example, played in it and the programmes were based on Cage and Feldman, on the "why not" principle. It was important for us to discover that music could be done in a way that was different from just "sitting on the little black notes and hatching them" – that the academic approaches were not the only ones, and there were other possible ways of perceiving music.

Did you ever meet John Cage personally?

Once in my life, when I was twenty, and it was thanks to Petr Kotík – or more precisely his mother. After a visit to the Venice Biennale in 1964 she decided to invite Robert Rauschenberg to Prague, and Rauschenberg himself suggested that the Merce Cunningham dance company, which was on a tour of Europe, should come to Prague.

That was an audacious combination.

The production was a complete scandal! It took place in the Palace of Industry, and since no one knew who Cage or Cunningham was, it was advertised on the posters as

a "ballet a la West Side Story". Not long ago I saw the poster again in Merce's New York studio.

Let's get back to the event...

The rehearsal in the Theatre of Music was beautiful in itself. Musica Viva arrived and Cage told them which instruments he wanted. Only there was one trombonist too many, so Kotík asked Cage if he wouldn't mind writing another part. Cage just grinned, folded the trombone part in two, tore it down the middle and gave each player half. Then he pulled out an I-Ching, read some Buddhist aphorism and told the players to go home and meditate. Nothing was played at all! In the evening the hall was packed, and even the then mayor of Prague came along. John Cage was unusually taken with the stands along side where people were selling sausages and beer. Cage borrowed two tin beer crates to enliven the musical production. He tied them together and marched with them through the Palace of Industry. He was smiling all the time, radiating positive energy and dragging these crates behind him along the tiled floor. Naturally the organisers wanted to drag him away themselves. It was wonderful. And Cunningham's ballet was wonderful as well – the movement and music were absolutely disparate. Everyone danced as they liked, and on top of everything there were Rauschenberg's pop-art scribbles...

Were you also interested in art?

We all made friends with everything associated with the phenomenon of the 1960s, which brought hope. At the Medek's there was a famous salon, and there I met Luigi Nono. Once he brought his wife with him, Schoenberg's daughter Nuria, and I touched her and thought, "now it will come of itself, you'll write like Schoenberg..." The Theatre Na zábradlí was another nest of artists – a total crossroads charged with intellectual force. The mime Fialka played there with his court composer Zdeněk Šíkola, Václav Havel arrived as repertory director and the conductor Libor Pešek founded the Chamber Harmony. They played serial music at their Sunday matinees. It was even the venue for the very first small jazz festival, with only Czech bands performing – that was in February 1962. Two years later jazz festivals started in the Lucerna Palace, and things seemed to be looking up, but four years later, in sixty-eight, all the lights went out...

What was your first job?

I worked as what was called a methodologist in the Bratislava Aurora club for young people. I built up a literary and music café there. It was a time when I made a lot of friends among Slovak poets; I made radio programmes on contemporary Slovak poetry with Slovak actors. I wanted to get a proper flat in Bratislava, since that was impossible in Prague where I had just gone from rent to rent. I temporarily saw my future as lying in

Slovakia, but it turned out that wasn't to be my path.

Was it hard for you to resist the enticements of the "criminal organisation" as you call the Communist Party?

Right up to the nineties I was a freelance, which gave me an enormous advantage in the sense that when, for example, I became president of the Czech Jazz Society it didn't even occur to any of the potentates that I might not be a party member. If I'd been employed it would have been obvious. From 1968 I worked on an external basis for Supraphon as a music director and producer. In my identity card it said "free occupation" but every time I wanted to go abroad the union secretary had to rubber stamp it. It should be said that I always got the rubber stamp. Except for ten years during which I wasn't allowed to go anywhere, they deprived me of any possibility of travelling... People told me that in that case I should just join the party, since anyway everyone thought I was in it already. My view was that whatever they thought I was never going to join a criminal organisation. That meant I had to leave the television, where I had been a programme director for orchestra and ballet. I had eighty people under me, and so they enrolled me in an Evening School of Marxism-Leninism and of course I didn't attend. Joining the party was a step I forbade myself to take. And as it turned out that was the right path – in terms of life and art.

From the end of the 1960s you also worked with Supraphon. What did you manage to achieve there as a producer?

We managed back then to map the whole up and coming generation of jazzmen – Stivín, Děczí, Andršt, Dašek or Vklícký. These were records that had a long-term impact. Then of course there was the Interjazz project: it involved international orchestras cutting across a divided world, with musicians from the Eastern block sitting beside each other and always some Englishman or American. We also did major co-productions with Telefunken-Decca – in 1978 I recorded twelve LPs in just one month. For example the complete Vivaldi concertos for flautino with Hans Martin Lind, all the Vivaldi violin concertos, Händel's concerti grossi with Sir Charles Mackerras... An adventurous style was needed for these kinds of supranational co-productions.

How long did they tolerate this style of yours?

When things went from bad to worse at Supraphon after the departure of Jaroslav Šeda, and we were feeling the pinch of normalisation mainly in all kinds of minor administrative hold-ups, I decided I would jack it in and finish for good, but that I would make one recording the way I wanted it – with no compromises, and this would be my revenge for everything. And so I put together a free-jazz orchestra using complete lunatics from

all over Europe. I got Louis Moholo, the Zulu drummer from South Africa to come here on a false passport; I wrote to the Foreign Ministry telling him that he was fleeing from Apartheid and had been protesting through his music... It cost a terrible amount of money. And then came the moment when I had to play the recording to the committee. They listened for about three minutes and then said, "All right Mr. Matzner, that's enough joking, now play us the real recording." And I said, "That was it!". They nearly fell over. It was absolute free-jazz.

I expected to be fired immediately, but it didn't happen. In the West they went crazy about the recording, because no western producer could have afforded such an orchestra, while using state money I had created a "bestiary" from the entire world. The recording was bought not just by the East German Amiga label but by Free Music Production in West Berlin under fantastically good license terms. The record was entitled Prague Jamboree and proved to be excellent business for Supraphon. And so in the end I didn't leave.

How did you get to know your close friend the choreographer Jiří Kylián?

I have to start with the choirmaster Pavel Kühn. Singing in the choir opened up new horizons for me, a kind of repertoire I hadn't known before. You don't get to know it better than in separate rehearsals. I met Jiří Kylián thanks to Pavel, and Kylián is one of the most beautiful people I have ever known. Starting in 1981 we got the Kühn Choir to make regular appearances with the Netherlands Dance Theater. We went with them to Belgium, Hungary, and Paris... Jiří showed me that music has a different face that can be illuminated only by movement, gesture. For example he has created a famous choreography for the Berg Violin Concerto, which I know down to the last note. Or I thought I did, but when I saw it danced I heard notes that I had never known before. Jiří is an absolutely musician, infested with music and vision. I am a terrific admirer of his choreography – for example Stravinsky's Wedding in his version appeals to me more than the original Nizhinsky choreography.

Since the beginning of the Nineties your name has been associated with the Prague Spring Festival, where you are programme director. What are your criteria when it comes to choosing guest artists?

The credit for getting a big star to come can't be taken just by individuals. It is team work. So I might decide that we ought to have such and such a person at the festival, but then a lot of people have to work very hard to make it happen. The programme director or director shouldn't make choices that just satisfy his own libido, but I confess that sometimes I indulge myself. One of my great favourites is Alfred Brendel and I am always making another attempt to get him to



Prague. The same goes for Maurizio Pollini – in 2008 he should be finally coming back to the Prague Spring after a long period of absence.

You discovered Alfred Brendel's birthplace for him. Tell us how that happened.

I was always interested in finding out where the village of Wiesenberg mentioned in the encyclopaedias as his place of birth really was. I consulted a dual-language dictionary of place names in the borderlands and discovered that Brendel was born in Loučná nad Desnou. I exploited the knowledge when we were trying to lure him to Bohemia – by emphasising that he was really a fellow-countryman. It worked, and in Loučná they decided to make him an honorary citizen. Unfortunately his concert programme was so tight that we couldn't drive him off to somewhere near Šumperk, and so we compromised with a meeting in Prague, where the Mayor of Loučná presented him with a plaque in the presence of Ivan Moravec and Josef Suk.

What are great musicians like when you have personal contact with them?

Most are much better than their managers. Recently for example Herbie Hancock's team succeeded in creating a very strained atmosphere, even though I have known Herbie personally for twenty

years. But for him Prague is just a date in his calendar, and not something that immediately makes him think of some Tony Matzner or other... In our work we try to reach musicians through their lovers, spouses and friends, because their agents often tend to act like brick walls.

Recently you have often talked about the exceptional abilities of Chinese performers...

I genuinely consider China a very promising territory. It is producing interesting musicians, and there will be more and more of them. For the moment this is visible in the soloist and conductor category – Lang Lang, Li Yun-Di –, but just wait until we start getting to know their chamber ensembles! I have visited the Shanghai Conservatory, which is a hatchery of talents. While I was there I heard the New Music Ensemble, a variable chamber group consisting of professors and students. I took a few scores, and they are very good. I would very much like to bring them to the Prague Spring, since what they are doing is entirely on a level with what is going on anywhere else in the world. The Chinese are going to give us a big surprise, they have enormous potential. They seem to me to be more open and perceptive about West European culture than the Japanese, for example. This is something that is also evident from the sta-

tus that Tan Dun has in contemporary world music.

But the task of the Prague Spring soloists from abroad.

Naturally we have debts to our own music culture and many of its representatives. It's an old source of pain to me, the fact that – unlike many others – I am aware that since the death of Bohuslav Martinů in 1959, Czech music has had no composer of world class. There are many objective reasons why this is so, but one must admit that a number of people from Eastern Europe have become international phenomena and repertoire composers, starting with the Shchedrin, Schnittke, Pärt, Kancheli, and Gubaidulina from the former Soviet republics to Ligeti, Kurtág and to the Polish school. Unfortunately we have no comparable composer whose work would be performed abroad as a matter of course. I read the programmes of world festivals, the seasons of major orchestras, and there is never any modern Czech music there. It's sad. We can't turn the situation round with the Prague Spring, but at the very least we ought to be showing the domestic public that there are composers here who have almost taken off on world careers: Miloslav Kabeláč, Zbyněk Vostřák, Marek Kopelent, Jan Klusák, Luboš Fišer...

Which composers appeal to you most?

From the start it has always been the same: Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Arnold Schoenberg came first with me. Rebellion against the prevailing attitude in this country probably had something to do with it. The fact that everyone said such bad things about him irritated us into finding out what Schoenberg was about. When the Julliard Quartet came to the Prague Festival at the end of the 1950s and played Berg's Lyrical Suite, Ivan Vojtěch called it the crowning moment of the festival, but Bohumil Karásek wrote in Hudební rozhledy Magazine that it was the fruit of an extreme individualist and this was not the way forward.

I started to understand Stravinsky later; what excited me about him the most was his chameleon nature. I remember the great turning point in his work: his whole life had had a tendency to divergence from Schoenberg, but suddenly he returned to him in his own, original way. We looked forward to every new Stravinsky piece, and when someone brought a score we would immediately set about analysing it and getting to the root of the way in which his serialism was different. Stravinsky's music never lacks the element of excitement, and that connects up to my own approach to music and art; I want to be lifted up out of everyday life. In the theatre I want to be amazed not just to watch and I want music to surprise me and lead me somewhere else. The whole 20th century is there in Stravinsky: he was a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov and wrote his first significant piece in 1904. He saw Tsar Nicholas in a coffin, he was with Masaryk, he had dinner in the White House with Kennedy and he died in 1971. He lived through and helped to

create the boom in Russian ballet before the 1st World War, and it was he who was the first to sound the bugle and mark out the direction for Neo-Classicism; then it was he who found the different method in dodecaphonic technique that the Post-Modern movement discovered. And throughout his life Stravinsky also looked back into the past with respect. He drew everyone's attention to the fact that there once lived an eccentric called Gesualdo da Venosa, who stabbed his wife and her love but also wrote absolutely modern music...

Did you ever meet Stravinsky?

He never visited Bohemia again after the war, although before the war he came here often: he played his piano concerto with Václav Talich and the Czech Philharmonic, and frequently visited Ostrava because he was friends with Jaroslav Vogel and so it was there that his Symphony of Psalms was premiered.

At home I had a detailed map of Hollywood with his address marked on it, and I always looked forward to visiting him some time. I just wanted to see him. If he had addressed me, I would have turned to stone like Lot's wife. But I knew he had a Russian gardener, and my idea was that I would ring the doorbell and wait for Stravinsky to come out to go to the pharmacy. He was a hypochondriac and the doctors prescribed him placebos, so each day he would go out to get his pills...

Let us turn to your own journalism. I'm told that you published your first article at the age of twelve...

My first text wasn't about music. It was in the Pioneer Magazine and it was about Albania.

Albania?

It's a country that has always fascinated me. I've never been there, but I would terribly like to go and take a look there. The article was my entry to a Pioneer literary competition with the name, "Get to Know the Country of Your Friends" and at that time we were still friends with Albania. One of the things that fascinated me about Albania was its flag, which looked like an Austrian eagle. I'm a fan of the House of Habsburg and all my life I have felt like an Austrophile and a monarchist. I won the competition and as a reward I received an Albanian Pioneer magazine, which was printed on some sort of woody paper with the letters almost impossible to make out... That was how I launched my journalistic career.

A brilliant start. But as early as 1959 your profiles of jazz musicians began to come out in Mladý svět Magazine.

The first profile was of Benny Goodman, and I didn't conceal his Jewish origins. At that time the culture editor at Mladý svět was Arnošt Lustig, the famous Czech Jewish novelist. He wrote me a letter because he was convinced that he had been with my brother in the concentration camp. Only my brother hadn't been in a concentration camp, but to this day Arnošt tells this story, and just thinks that I don't want to talk about it; I've never managed to convince him. Still, back

then he decided to help me, and so I started to write much more for Mladý svět.

Your jazz profiles eventually came out as a book, but it is your contribution to the four-volume encyclopaedia of jazz and popular music that has been rated particularly highly...

It was ideal working with Igor Wasserberger, the co-author of the Jazz Profiles. We took twenty years altogether to put the Jazz Encyclopaedia together. Originally it was supposed to be just one little book, for which we had a contract right back in 1967. August 1968 (the Soviet Invasion) upset everything. First we put together the factual section, which was clearly less problematic. Then we divided people into foreign and domestic, but there was still a problem with emigrants. It was not until 1990 that a Czech volume came out including the names of emigrants, although in fact the type had been set before the Revolution in November 1989.

How was a book like that produced, technically in the time before computers?

Italian shoeboxes proved their worth, they were the best. Masses of boxes. And tickets, cuttings, excerpts. There was an enormous amount of information involved. As they wrote in the New York Library, for example, it was unique, and partly because it had been so difficult in the west to find information about jazzmen from the Eastern block.

Don't you have an urge to start writing your memoirs?

I don't feel like it. I myself enjoy reading memoirs, but especially recently there seems to be a fashion for them among people who know nothing – every second actor is writing memoirs... In this context I am fond of quoting Pavel Ludíkar, a Czech opera singer who sang Sarastro in the National Theatre in 1904, and appeared in Dresden, Vienna, and at La Scala in Milan. He was interned in Milan during the 1st World War, and Toscanini helped him out. He crowned his career at the Metropolitan, and then returned to Bohemia but emigrated again after the war and died in Vienna in 1970. But why do I mention him? One of his fans asked him, "Maestro, aren't you going to write your memoirs?" and he replied. "It isn't done to write about the women, and all the rest in life isn't at all interesting."

What are your plans then?

I have reached a phase in which I am discovering how much music I still don't know and ought to know. Vivaldi for example. Ever since I was eighteen my opinion has been that this is redundant music – that nothing can surprise me in it. When Stravinsky's conversations with Robert Craft came out, Stravinsky talked about it in the same terms, and that confirmed me in the rightness of my taste, because Uncle Igor is my guru. But then Robert Hugo said to me, "Which Vivaldi operas do you know? Because opera is the centre of gravity of his work", and I had to confess that I didn't know even one. I'm horrified at the fact that I don't really know him and I've been slandering him all my life.



report on the condition of opera in the czech republic

In 1770 and 1772 the English music historian Charles Burney travelled through Europe in search of a better understanding of the musical culture of different lands on which to base his *History of Music*. On his journeys he visited the Bohemian Lands, and expressed surprise at the musicality of the population there and its knowledge of instrumental play. In these circumstances it is no wonder that the catch-phrase “Every Czech is a musician” dates back to the 18th century when music and musicians were major “export items” for Bohemia and the country had the reputation of being the “conservatory of Europe”.

In this small survey we shall try to show the situation in the “conservatory of Europe” today. 17 years after the fall of the totalitarian regime and the return of the Czech Republic to the ranks of democratic states, we shall try to suggest how these political and social changes have influenced music theatre – opera. Even for the visitor to the Czech Republic today, especially the overseas visitor, the breadth and intensity of opera production in the Czech Republic can come as a surprise. The sophisticated opera-lover may sometimes have reservations about its quality, but can hardly be dissatisfied with its quantity and accessibility.

The Network of Opera Companies

The Czech Republic can boast one of the most concentrated national networks of opera companies proportionate to surface area (78.860 km²), and population (10 mil.). Ten professional companies regularly present operas. They are the National Theatre and the State Opera in Prague, the National Theatre in Brno and Ostrava, and opera companies in Plzeň, Olomouc, České Budějovice, Ústí nad Labem, Liberec and Opava. All the theatres outside Prague are easily reached from the capital within a few hours by public transport or by car, and so in practice you can attend any opera performance in the CR and get back to Prague without having to find somewhere to stay for the night.



The spine of this basic opera network dates back to the 19th century and Austro-Hungarian times. It is the result of long-term historical development and despite various changes of ownership and name in the case of individual theatres, it has survived and serves its purpose to this day. One very important aspect of the historical birth and development of permanent theatres/opera houses and their organisational structure was the co-existence of ethnic Czech and German communities in the country, and so we need to make a distinction between opera on Bohemian territory as such and the different **Czech and German companies** that operated on it. Before the First World War independent Czech opera companies existed in parallel with German companies in Prague, Brno and Plzeň. In other towns the opera was German-run and Czech opera productions were either not staged at all or were allocated a limited number of dates in the German opera houses. Following the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918, Ostrava and Olomouc joined the first wave of permanent Czech opera houses by setting up their own. The development of the Czech opera network culminated with the end of the Second World War and the post-war expulsion of the German community. The originally German theatres in Liberec, Ústí nad Labem, Opava and later in České Budějovice were taken under Czech management, definitively ending the tradition of parallel opera programmes in two languages.

The post-war decades of **"building socialism"** in Czechoslovakia brought no fundamental change as far as the extent of the theatre/opera house network was concerned. For example, repeated attempts to set up an opera house in East Bohemia, particularly in Hradec Králové, ended in failure. Of course, the theatre network was nationalised and the content of theatre and opera productions and repertoire changed radically, culture in the country was brought under the total control of the state and subjected to strict ideological censorship intended to prevent the penetration of "western" opera influences and new trends in production. The theatres were relatively well funded by the state, because culture was supposed to be the "shop window" of socialist successes.

After the fall of the regime in 1989 the scale of the opera network remained unaffected. Despite a wave of stormy debate especially in the mid-nineties no local authority abolished an opera

The National Theatre, Prague

Head of Opera: Jiří Nekvasil

Repertory 2006/2007

Bedřich Smetana: The Bartered Bride
 Bedřich Smetana: Libuše
 Antonín Dvořák: The Devil and Kate
 Antonín Dvořák: Rusalka
 Leoš Janáček: Jenufa
 Bohuslav Martinů: The Greek Passion
 Giuseppe Verdi: Aida
 Giuseppe Verdi: La traviata
 Giacomo Puccini: Tosca
 Giacomo Puccini: La bohème
 Georges Bizet: Carmen
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Don Giovanni
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: The Magic Flute
 Gaetano Donizetti: Don Pasquale
 Martin Smolka: Nagano

Premières 2006/2007

Josef Mysliveček: Antigona
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: La clemenza di Tito
 Bedřich Smetana: The Secret
 Camille Saint-Saëns: Samson et Dalila
 Tomáš Hanzlík: Lacrimae Alexandri Magni



The National Theatre, Prague

Curtain by Vojtěch Hynais in NT, Prague

La Clemenza di Tito in The Estates Theatre (NT Prague)



house, but nor did any authority set up a new one. The Prague State Opera, which has been operating independently since 1992, is not in reality a newly founded company, but a company that came into existence by being separated off from the National Theatre complex.

Opera Companies as Part of Theatre Complexes

Theatres are administrated by statutory local municipal authorities, apart from the two Prague theatres with opera companies administrated by the state through the Ministry of Culture. In legal terms they are **publicly-funded organisations** with power over their own budgets. The local authorities appoint the directors and provide basic funding. The director then appoints the heads of the individual companies. The opera companies have their own permanent orchestras which also perform for the theatre's ballet productions and occasionally give concerts of their own. They do not offer continuous concert cycles, which in the larger towns are usually provided by the local independent symphony orchestras. While Czech musicians predominate in the opera orchestras, in terms of nationality their composition is diverse, and more and more musicians from countries to the east of the Czech Republic are joining them. The situation is the same with choirs. The companies also have their own workrooms. With the increasing trend towards temporary contracts, the engagement of guest artists and external collaboration it would seem that the previously almost impenetrable walls surrounding core ensembles (ensured by permanent contracts not only for conductors but also for soloists, directors and stage designers) are breaking down – to the benefit of the diversity and quality of productions.

A tripartite pattern, with theatres having opera, theatre and ballet companies under a single managerial and physical roof, continues to be the norm among theatres. There are, however, exceptions – the Prague State Opera and the Ústí nad Labem theatre have no drama companies (in Prague there are a number of theatres devoted to spoken drama and in Ústí nad Labem spoken drama has a separate institutional structure). In České Budějovice a marionette company is part of the South Bohemian Theatre. In Plzeň and Ostrava the theatres have operetta companies in addition to the others, while in the larger cities of Prague and Brno this genre is presented by specialised theatres and in the smaller towns operetta productions are part of the repertoire of the opera companies.

Funding

Public sources (state and local authorities) provide around three-quarters of the funding for theatre activities. The degree of self-sufficiency of theatres (calculated in terms of the ratio of own earnings to the non-investment costs) has been successively rising and today it is on aver-



Giacomo Puccini: *La Fanciulla del West*
 Jiří Suchý, Jiří Šlitr: *A Well-Paid Walk*
 Bedřich Smetana: *The Kiss*
 Pavel Drábek: *Orfeus (Beating on the Iron Curtain XIII.)*
 Cesta Orfea – *Orpheus's Journey (Beating on the Iron Curtain XIV.)*
 Martin Marek: *Il dilemma d'Orfeo (Beating on the Iron Curtain XV.)*

The Prague State Opera

Head of Opera: Ingeborg Žádná

Repertory 2006/2007

Giuseppe Verdi: *Aida*
 Leonard Bernstein: *Candide*
 Georges Bizet: *Carmen*
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *The Magic Flute*
 Gioacchino Rossini: *The Barber of Seville*
 Gaetano Donizetti: *Lucia di Lammermoor*
 Giacomo Puccini: *Madama Butterfly*
 Giuseppe Verdi: *Nabucco*
 Johann Strauss: *Die Fledermaus*



*The Estates Theatre
(part of National Theatre, Prague)*



*The Prague State Opera
Dvořák's Rusalka in PSO*



age 33%, but as much as a half in the case of some opera companies (the Prague State Opera). It is estimated that every ticket is effectively subsidised to the tune of an average 500 crowns. Ticket prices for ordinary opera productions vary from 50 to 2.000 crowns, and the larger the town the higher the prices.

On average every second citizen of the CR (i.e. 5 million people) attends a theatre performance once a year. All the theatres have regular **subscription schemes** – or season tickets – offering discounts and other advantages for subscribers who can choose between cards valid for different periods, for specific ensembles, genres or age groups, or cards covering all productions on the frequent-theatre-goer principle. Ordinary tickets can now be purchased via the Internet and not only at the theatre box offices.

In addition to box office earnings, companies derive some income from hire of their premises and other economic activities. **Tours** are not only artistically important but economically significant. The opera companies of the National Theatre in Prague and Brno, but also for example the Plzeň Opera, are regularly invited for a month's tour of Japan. The Opera of the National Theatre has been a guest more than once at the Savonlinna Festival in Finland, and opera companies also make one-off guest appearances, mainly in Germany.

Companies are also trying to obtain money in the form of Ministry of Culture grants or other economic programmes, European Union Funds and from the regional authorities as well, argu-

Giuseppe Verdi: Rigoletto
Antonín Dvořák: Rusalka
Giuseppe Verdi: The Sicilian Vespers
Giacomo Puccini: Tosca
Giacomo Puccini: Turandot

Premières 2006/2007
Giuseppe Verdi: La traviata
Francis Poulenc: Les Mamelles de
Tiresias Francis Poulenc: La Voix Humaine
Giacomo Puccini: Manon Lescaut

ing that opera companies play for audiences from the whole region. Managements are turning theatres into **prestigious social centres** in towns and regions and are striving for sponsorship support. Another way of improving the bank balance is of course to make savings, whether by reducing the number of employees and exploiting external services or by looking for co-productions with companies at home and abroad and other partners. Overall, however, the companies are clearly involved in a struggle with minimal budgets, which on the one hand is a spur to creativity, but on the other hand often leads to tolerance of halfway solutions, carelessness and even sheer sloppiness, which corrodes the foundations of the craft of opera and is the undoing of even the best idea.

Buildings

Most of the permanent opera companies perform in classic town theatre buildings of **proscenium arch type**, which were usually constructed in the 19th or earlier 20th and are among the grandest buildings in the town centres. Only one new building has been built for opera (including the necessary backstage facilities) since the Second World War – the **Janáček Opera House**, opened in 1965. České Budějovice is somewhat unusual because the historic building of 1918 is small and more suitable for older operas with smaller casts or for experiments, whereas “large” opera productions are staged in the former cinema of the socialist-style complex of the Metropol house of culture, a venue that is basically unsuitable especially in its acoustics.

Opera companies also have other performance spaces, however. The most curious and original is the outdoor theatre with **revolving auditorium in the Český Krumlov** chateau park. Since the 1950s the South Bohemian Theatre has used this venue regularly in the summer months, presenting not just opera (with an amplified orchestra located in the rococo belaria close by), but also plays and ballets. The outdoor theatre was the brainchild of the stage designer **Joan Brehms**, who based this rarity on the principle of a great turntable supporting ascending rows of seats for the audience; during a performance it can be rotated to offer different views of the park as backdrop. Dvořák's *Rusalka*, *Rigoletto* or *The Magic Flute*, for example, are operas that work very well in this setting. There have been moves by conservationists to have the theatre removed on the grounds that it is too large and upsets the historical value of the entire Český Krumlov chateau complex, but it now seems that a compromise solution will be found and this artistic “attraction” will stay.

In Plzeň, Liberec, Ostrava and Opava the theatres use **smaller or indeed studio premises** as well, usually built in the 20th century and often offering flexibility in the placing of stage and auditorium. In these venues companies can enliven their standard repertory with experimental productions.

The “richest” companies, and of course not only in terms of their buildings, are the national theatres – in Prague and Brno. The National Theatre in Prague stages opera not only in its main building – known as its “**historic**” **Neo-Renaissance** building on the banks of the Vltava, built in 1881 according to designs by the architect **Josef Zítěk** –, but also in the **Estates Theatre**, which was assigned to the National Theatre complex after confiscation from the Germans in 1920 and has undergone quite a number of changes of name in its long history (originally the Count Nostitz National Theatre, from 1798 the Estates Theatre, then the Royal Land Theatre, then the Estates Theatre again, and in the years 1948 – 1991 the Tyl Theatre). Since it was in this Classicist building, erected in 1783 at the instigation of **Count Franz Adam Nostitz-Rieneck**, that the celebrated premieres of two Mozart operas – *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *La clemenza di Tito* (1791) took place, it is above all the Mozartian tradition that is cultivated here. Conversion of the attic space of the **Kolowrat Palace**, which is next to the Estates Theatre, has created another National Theatre venue in the form of the chamber studio stage called the Kolowrat Theatre which the opera uses for experimental productions.

In 1992 what was then called the Smetana Theatre was separated from the National Theatre complex and is now the Prague State Opera. Originally the **Neues Deutsches Theater**, after the Second World War it became the second opera stage of the National Theatre (with a short



The South Bohemian Theatre, České Budějovice

Head of Opera: Miloslav Veselý

Repertory 2006/2007

Emmerich Kálmán: *Die Csardasfurstin* (The Gypsy Princess)
Giuseppe Verdi: *La Traviata*
Friedrich von Flotow: *Martha or the Market in Richmond*
Jaroslav Beneš: *Na tý louce zelený* (On the Green Meadow)
Smetana / Dvořák: *Úsměvné smetanovsko-dvořákovské zastavení v čase. Operománie aneb Nebojte se opery* (A Cheerful Smetana-Dvořákian Halt in Time. Operamania or Don't be Scared of Opera)
Jindřich Feld: *Poštácká pohádka* (Postman's Fairytale)
Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka*
Gioacchino Rossini: *Signor Bruschino*
Jiří Suchý + Jiří Šlitr: *Vyvěste fangle aneb Med ve vlasech 2* (Put out the Flags or Honey in the Hair 2)

Premieres 2006/2007

Gioacchino Rossini: *Il barbiere di Siviglia*
Alexander Zemlinsky: *Der Kreiderkreis*
Bedřich Smetana: *The Secret*
Johann Strauss: *Der Zigeunerbaron*

episode as the home of the ambitious independent company the Great Opera of the 5th of November in the years 1945–48), and was focused on operas from the world repertoire. The **Nová scéna** (New Stage) built in the 1970s close to the historic NT building was also for a short period part of the National Theatre (today it is the home of Laterna magika).

The **Brno National Theatre Opera Company** usually plays in the Janáček Theatre, but some of its productions are staged in its historic building the Mahen Theatre. The oldest Brno theatre, the Reduta, built in 1734 and since 2005 open to the public again after lengthy major reconstruction, is used for small-scale and experimental productions.

Repertory Opera

For the permanent theatres with opera companies the season usually starts in October and finishes in June. During the summer vacation months there are generally no performances by the home companies. In the season there are performances almost daily, most of them starting at 7.00 p.m. with matinees sometimes included at the weekend. Some companies outside Prague still keep up the tradition of morning performances for schools. The programme consists of alternating opera (sometimes operetta), spoken drama and ballet (sometimes puppet) performances of the works that the theatre has in repertory that season. For some more complex and demanding productions, especially at the two Prague opera theatres or in the Brno Opera under the directorship of Tomáš Šimerda, a system of blocks of performances has been introduced, making it easier to maintain the standard of premieres and also often proving advantageous from the financial point of view.

Guest productions by companies from other theatres, and sometimes from abroad, can diversify the repertory programme. Foreign companies are showing a particular interest in the Estates Theatre where, for example, the Amsterdam Comabattimento Consort presented Händel's *Agrippina* in 2004 and in 2005 the French company Le Poème Harmonique played as part of its world tour, enlivening the Czech opera scene with its production of Molière and Lully's comedy-ballet *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Also worth mentioning is the unique guest appearance of the Triere Opera at the State Opera with the monodrama the *Diary of Anne Frank*.

It is generally true to say that the larger the theatre the wider its repertoire and the longer the lifetime of its productions. While in the National Theatre or State Opera with their high proportion of foreign visitors in the audience a production can remain in repertoire for as long as ten seasons, in the regional theatres, for example in Opava, it is usually for a production to be played for all the subscription groups and then to be dropped from repertory. In **total the number of premieres** presented by permanent opera companies in one season ranges between 50 and 60. While most opera companies maintain a traditional standard of four to five premieres distributed over the season, at the National Theatre in Prague after the arrival of **Daniel Dvořák** as director and **Jiří Nekvasil** as head of the opera in 2002, this number rose sharply as a result of co-productions and the project Beating on the Iron Curtain focused on contemporary new opera pieces; there were now as many as 15–20 new productions per season, although many of these were only presented once.

In terms of historical period, the repertory programmes of Czech opera companies are very clearly dominated by romantic opera of the 19th century, but after a dip in the 1990s contemporary opera is making a conspicuous comeback. **Mozart's** major operas remain a permanent part of repertoire while operas of the pre-classicist period appear only rarely and tend to be the domain of music groups specialising in "Early Music". As far as "national schools" are concerned, the Czech repertoire, with a preponderance of works by **Bedřich Smetana** and **Antonín Dvořák**, continues to take precedence over Italian repertoire (in which **Verdi** and **Puccini** are clearly in the lead) and German repertoire.

Other Opera Productions

The ten permanent opera theatres are far from being the only sources of opera activity in the country. Another substantial element consists of the summer productions in **chateaus and other historic or naturally beautiful sites** (Český Krumlov, Litomyšl, Locket, Kutná Hora,



The J.K.Tyl Theatre in Plzeň

B. Martinů's *The Miracles of Mary* in the J.K.Tyl Theatre
Foyer of the the J.K.Tyl Theatre

The J.K.Tyl Theatre in Plzeň

Head of Opera: Jiří Pánek

Repertory 2006/2007

Modest Petrovich Musorgsky: Boris Godunov
Georges Bizet: Carmen
Bedřich Smetana: Dalibor
Bohuslav Martinů:
Hry o Marii (The Miracles of Mary)
Bedřich Smetana: The Bartered Bride
Giuseppe Verdi: Il Trovatore
Johann Strauss: Wiener Blut

Premières 2006/2007

Antonín Dvořák: Rusalka
Giacomo Puccini: Manon Lescaut
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:
The Marriage of Figaro
Giuseppe Verdi: Nabucco

Grabštejn), which are presented more or less regularly with artistic or commercial ambitions. This is a phenomenon that follows freely from the oldest traditions of opera performance in Bohemia and Moravia, when in the 17th and at the beginning of the 18th century opera was cultivated privately in noble or episcopal residences (the first opera to be partly sung in Czech – *O původu Jaroměřic [On the origin of Jaroměřice]* by **František Václav Míča** – was written and presented at the chateau in Jaroměřice nad Rokytnou). The Baroque theatre in Český Krumlov (including the stage machinery and a rich collection of original props, scenery and costumes) has been preserved to this day as has the Baroque theatre at the chateau in Litomyšl. The Mozart Open Festival which commercially exploits the Prague Mozart cult uses the Estates Theatre in the summer.

Opera is also presented by **alternative groups** of like-minded composers and musicians, and most of these groups have a very distinctive aesthetic approach. Opera life in Prague in the years 1989-91 was stirred up by Daniel Dvořák and Jiří Nekvasil with their **Opera Furore**, which offered provocative “postindustrial”, “post-modern” and “ultra-superficial” stagings of new pieces, and unravelled the classics into opera clips. 2004 saw the brief career of the **Prague Pocket Opera**. In recent years **Ensemble Damian** from Olomouc has made a considerable name for itself under the direction of Tomáš Hanzlík and in collaboration with composer Vít Zouhar; it focuses on the modern adaptation of Baroque librettos discovered in Bohemia and Moravia, in the style of “Baroque Minimalism”.

The **Prague Children's Opera** has the very specific focus implied by its name. It was founded in 1999 by the National Theatre soloist Jiřina Marková-Krystlíková, and several important opera composers have even written new pieces for its child performers.

To this overview of opera activities we should add the opera **productions of music schools** (conservatories at the high school level and academies at the university level in Prague and Brno). While they occur at irregular intervals these productions are often inspiring and are a way for the young adepts of the opera genre to put their new ideas to the test. Stage play companies and also marionette companies occasionally venture into opera with interesting new angles on production, staging or adaptation of opera (for example Studio Y in Prague, Divadlo Na provázku in Brno or the puppet theatre Drak in Hradec Králové).

Opera Festivals, Awards, and Press

Festivals of opera, or involving opera, need to be mentioned in any account of the Czech opera scene.

In 1993 the Music Theatre Union (Jednota hudebního divadla; a voluntary professional association of people in music theatre including for example opera journalists) founded the festival **Opera** as a national representative biennale taking place in Prague. It has become the biggest showcase for all our professional opera companies, with school or alternative productions taking part in individual years. The festival gives opera companies a chance to present their profile productions in Prague and while it is not essentially competitive, a jury of opera critics awards a prize for the best production and a jury of emeritus soloists of the Prague National Theatre awards a prize for the best performance in a leading role and in a supporting role. A lay jury decides on a prize unrestricted to any category, and so does the director of the festival. The main benefit of the event, which enjoys a great deal of interest from the lay and professional public, is the chance it offers for comparison of the level of productions from all the opera companies in the CR.

(See the list of prizes for best production awarded by the OPERA festival at the end of this article)

At the beginning of the season the Prague State Opera holds a **Festival of Italian Opera** focusing primarily on the operas of Giuseppe Verdi; this represents the continuation of a tradition established by the Neues Deutsches Theater (which then owned the theatre) in the pre-war era.

Opera productions form part of the biggest Czech international music festivals, specifically the **Prague Spring**, **Smetana's Litomyšl**, but also the **Brno International Festival** (which presented all Janáček's operas in the composer's jubilee year of 2004) and **Janáček's Hukvaldy** or the **Prague Strings of Autumn**. The **Summer Festival of Early Music** has initiated a search for unknown pieces and presents concerts or opera or ballet performances in carefully chosen unique Prague historical settings. This makes for a marvellous atmosphere and unusual acoustic experiences as the music of long-gone eras is played on period instruments.

National **prizes** in the field of theatre help to raise the prestige of opera and attract media attention to the genre. Since 1993 the Actors' Association (an actors' union) awards its **Thálie Award** in stage drama, dance, opera and operetta and musical for the best performances of the year. In addition a prize is given for lifelong achievement to outstanding figures in these areas.

(See the list of Thálie Prizes in the field of opera at the end of this article).



*The North Bohemian Theatre, Ústí nad Labem
Don Giovanni (R. Haan and J. Šokalo) in NBT*

The North Bohemian Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Ústí nad Labem

Head of Opera: Norbert Baxa

Repertory 2006/2007

Giuseppe Verdi: Aida
Antonín Dvořák: The Devil and Kate
Petr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Eugene Onegin
Bedřich Smetana: The Bartered Bride
Giuseppe Verdi: Rigoletto
Antonín Dvořák: Rusalka
Giacomo Puccini: Tosca
Johann Strauss: Der Ziegeunerbaron
Johann Strauss: Die Fledermaus
Franz Lehár: Paganini

Premières 2006/2007

Peter Stone – Bob Merril – Jule Styne:
Sugar (Some Like it Hot)
Richard Wagner: The Flying Dutchman
Oskar Nedbal: Polská krev (Polish Blood)
Georges Bizet: Carmen
Leonard Bernstein – Stephen Sondheim –
Arthur Laurents: West Side Story

Another high profile award is the **Alfréd Radok Prize**, given each year by the Alfréd Radok Prize Foundation in collaboration with the Aura-Pont Agency. Different kinds of theatre are not separated for the purposes of these prizes, which are awarded to productions, companies, directors, stage designers and works regardless of whether these are in spoken drama, opera, ballet, operetta or musical. This makes it all the more remarkable that in competition with hundreds of premieres from all Czech theatres opera has been particularly successful – since 1998 it has won in the production category a whole four times! Opera scored another success in 2004 with the first prize in the category of original Czech new works going to the opera *Nagano* by composer Martin Smolka and librettist Jaroslav Dušek, while individuals – the stage designers and opera singers – also won prizes.

(See the list of selected Alfréd Radok Prizes won by opera at the end of this article).

For the sake of completeness let us add that opera premieres are regularly reviewed in the culture columns of the national dailies. There is no specialised Czech magazine for opera, but opera is the subject of systematic attention both in the music journals – the magazines *Hudební rozhledy* and *Harmonie*, and the theatre journals – the fortnightly *Divadelní noviny* (Theatre News) and the quarterly *Svět a divadlo* (World and Theatre).

Between Junk and Luxury

After 1989 the landscape of Czech opera was rocked by tremors and rent by fissures. The staid tranquillity of operatic life under the communist regime, the suffocating calm of the average (in fact as indestructible as destructive) gave place almost overnight to a "revolutionary unrest" borne on a great wave of expectation, hope and expanding possibilities. This sudden opening up of the horizon took many by surprise and alarmed them, while others had finally been given the long awaited chance to put their ideas into practice.

The National Theatre itself was a model example of this tension. It was here that the fundamental changes were demanded most vociferously, because some people suddenly saw the "golden shrine" as nothing more than a museum with a deadening effect on living theatre. There were impassioned and bitter discussions over the question of the future form of opera companies in Prague, but the debate also touched on the rationale for the very existence of the whole opera network, and there were even calls to rent out some of the theatre buildings to private entrepreneurs. A situation strained to breaking point led in 1992 to the division of the National Theatre, with the State Opera Prague being separated off as an independent institution. The twists and turns in the opera history of this theatre from 1883 to the present have been described in an excellent Czech-English-German publication by Tomáš Vrbka, which includes entirely unique illustrative material on 600 pages.

The twists and turns of the subsequent history of the State Opera Prague in fact provide a good picture of the complexity of the "post-revolutionary" development of opera houses in general. It was the members of the orchestra and choir who managed to get **Karel Drgáč**, then a thirty-year-old energetic manager with a Vienna education and a director with international experience, appointed as chief. After four years it was the same people who instigated a rebellion and got him dismissed. The reason was that Drgáč had been demolishing comfortable stereotypes with gusto. He showed that grand opera too could be done in a different way – with fire and passion, flexibly, but also in a way that took risks and was perhaps arrogant. In contrast to existing custom he saw opera not just as high art, but also as business; he pragmatically pushed through the model of co-production, and instead of accessibility to the "people" he was prepared to go for a certain snobbish exclusivity. Audaciously and unscrupulously he combined box-office hits with experiments in repertoire and staging, and started to invite directors, designers and singers to Prague from the whole world; at the same time he presented many of our rising opera talents on the stage and encouraged the export of Czech opera "commodities". He provoked a storm of



La Bohème (I. Jiříková) in F.X. Šalda Theatre
The F.X. Šalda Theatre in Liberec
Apollon & Hyacinth in F.X. Šalda Theatre



The František Xaver Šalda Theatre in Liberec

Head of Opera: Martin Doubravský

Repertory 2006/2007

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:
 Apollon & Hyacinth
 Giacomo Puccini: *La Bohème*
 Bedřich Smetana: *Dalibor*
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *The Magic Flute*
 Giacomo Puccini: *Madame Butterfly*
 Giuseppe Verdi: *Nabucco*
 Johann Strauss: *Die Fledermaus*
 Jacques Offenbach:
Orpheus in the Underworld
 Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka*
 Giuseppe Verdi: *Il Trovatore*

Premières 2006/2007

Giuseppe Verdi: *Macbeth*
 Giacomo Puccini: *Manon Lescaut*
 Charles Gounod: *Faust*
 Richard Wagner: *The Flying Dutchman*
 Emmerich Kálmán: *Gräfin Maritza*

emotion by daringly taking up the traditions of the New German Theatre that had played in the building up to the war and that was supposed to have been consigned to oblivion. In the hectic chaos outstanding productions alternated with total flops. Drgáč's period as chief was full of paradoxes, just like the times, in which it was necessary to work very hard to find a rationale and viable path forward for opera. It should be acknowledged, however, that at the least the productions of *Otello*, *Salome*, Zemlinsky's *The Birthday of the Infanta* and Hans Krása's *Zásnuby ve snu* (*Engagement in a Dream*) were achievements of European stature.

The fundamental point, however, is that the other companies started to take up this model in terms of the basic principles of opera management, if with different degrees of thoroughness, managerial skill and success, and of course with distinct caution, so as not to undermine the basic structure of a funded organisation tied to the local authority. Some artists who had been persecuted or ostracised by the former regime simply hoped that they would now find recognition and satisfaction, but others saw a chance to grab a place in the sun and in some cases turn Czech cultural traditions into a private goldmine – from essentially legitimate exploitation of Mozartian traditions and attractive theatre venues to the mere commercial manipulation of trusting foreigners.

Italian Gloss and World Opera Hits

The “newly” discovered criterion of economic self-sufficiency for companies and the search for ways to attract larger audiences led to an explosion of productions of Italian romantic operas – indeed, the former ideological rejection of Italian verism and the mere two premieres of Italian operas in 1951 now seems quite incredible. It is above all in this repertoire that we can see most clearly the changes in the production system from the ensemble type with permanent contracts for directors, conductors, soloists, orchestral players and choir members towards relatively freer circulation, enhanced by the opening of the border in both directions. There was an immediate shift to productions in the original language and theatres acquired subtitle equipment above the stage. This has brought practical advantages in the sense that Czech opera soloists can now create a repertoire for international consumption and opera houses can engage foreign artists without worrying about the language barriers. On the other hand there are some negative effects, when the churning out of the same old titles goes hand in hand with superficiality and laziness in all those *Traviatas*, *Trovatores* and *Rigolettos*, *Toscas* and *Butterflies* that vainly rely on the scintillating melodies to cover up shamefully shoddy performances – even if the audience still applaud and so do the company accountants! Naturally there are exceptions that prove the rule. Parts in Italian operas have provided singers like **Eva Urbanová**, **Ivan Kusnjer**, **Drahomíra Drobná**, **Zdena Kloubová**, **Vladimír Chmelo**, **Roman Janál** and many others with opportunities to give performances worthy of the highest praise.

In the classic opera repertoire exceptional musical experiences and a real engagement with content have been provided at the National Theatre by the conductor **Jiří Kout** in *Elektra* and *Rosenkavalier*, and most triumphantly in *Tristan and Isolde*. This internationally highly acclaimed conductor is distinguished for interpretations that are inspired by a clear conception, thought out to the last note, and are not only charged with musicianship, intense musical expression and dramatic verve, but succeed in releasing this energy with respect for the depth of an opera's inner order. In the same way another Czech emigrant who managed to make a career for himself abroad, the conductor **Martin Turnovský**, succeeded with director **Dominik Neuner** at the State Opera in creating a version of *Otello* that by stripping away the externals of the opera made it all the more intense as a drama of human passions. At the National Theatre the Slovak director **Josef Bednárík** presented *Romeo and Juliet* and *Carmen* as grand spectacular shows with abrupt cut-like changes of view, staking the production on heightened emotions and the permanent sharp pulsation of the stage. Here **Dagmar Pecková** was a wild, uncontrollable elemental force, driving her voice to the extreme limits in impassioned emotionalism. Among the youngest generation of directors, **Jiří Heřman** has attracted attention with the aesthetic power of his ritualised images in his Plzeň productions of *Samson and Delilah* and *The Flying Dutchman* and also with his production of Britten's *The Curlew River* for the Prague Strings of Autumn Festival.

Discovering the Forgotten

Opera companies have been trying to open up new views and vistas of the world opera landscape by presenting operas that were for many years forgotten or neglected in this country. One of the



The Bartered Bride in the Janáček Opera

The Janáček Opera of The National Theatre in Brno



The National Theatre in Brno – The Janáček Opera

Head of Opera: Karel Drgáč

Repertory 2006/2007

Giuseppe Verdi: *Aida*
 Giacomo Puccini: *La Bohème*
 Georges Bizet: *Carmen*
 Giuseppe Verdi: *Don Carlos*
 Antonín Dvořák: *The Jacobin*
 Leoš Janáček: *Jenufa*
 Leoš Janáček: *Katya Kabanova*
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *The Magic Flute*
 Giuseppe Verdi: *La Traviata*
 Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov: *Mozart and Salieri*
 Bedřich Smetana: *The Bartered Bride*
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *Requiem*
 Giuseppe Verdi: *Rigoletto*
 Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka*
 Operetta around the World

Premieres 2006/2007

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *Don Giovanni* (Janáček Theatre)
 Gideon Klein: *Trio* (ballet)
 Hans Krása: *Brundibar* (Reduta)
 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *Idomeneo, il re di Creta* (Mahren Theatre)
 Johann Strauss: *Der Ziegeunerbaron* (Janáček Theatre)
 Molière + J. B. Lully: *Jeden chce a druhý musí* (Reduta) (*Le Marriage force and Sicilian*)
 Petr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: *Eugene Onegin* (Janáček Theatre)

high points of the whole post-revolutionary period was the triumphal return of Berg's *Wozzek* to the National Theatre in a co-production with the Göteborg Opera. The whole team headed by conductor Elgar Horwath and director **David Radok** (see CM 1/06, www.czech-music.net/cm1-06.php) managed to give striking coherence and electrifying dynamics to this cruel drama of human degradation by presenting it through a series of images developing one from another with rising urgency to the final catharsis. Another production of European stature and a model example of modern music theatre was the production of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* at the Prague National Theatre with conductor **František Preisler**, once again directed by David Radok.

The 2004/2005 season saw the first ever complete performance of Wagner's tetralogy *The Nibelung's Ring* in a Czech theatre – at the Prague National Theatre in a co-production with the German Opera on the Rhine from Düsseldorf-Duisburg. The most striking achievement of the project was the work of the American conductor **John Fiore** with the orchestra, which convincingly displayed the first-rate quality of the players. With his concentrated approach, precise in every detail, Fiore managed like Jiří Kout in recent years to achieve a synergy of every element – magnificent yet simple.

A number of productions from the Prague State Opera can undoubtedly be considered exceptionally interesting and brave moves in terms of repertoire. They include Leoncavallo's *La Bohème* (presented with the opportunity for immediate comparison with Puccini's), d'Albert's *Lowlands*, Dukas's *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*, Weis's *The Polish Jew*, Joplin's *Treemonisha* and Bernstein's *Candide*. Among Brno productions the same can be claimed at least for Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt* or Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*. The České Budějovice opera has lived up its repertoire for example with Salieri's *Falstaff* and the Liberec Opera has drawn attention with Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*. The Plzeň Opera, which in the period when it was headed by **Petr Kofroň** was one of our most progressive companies, has attracted interest with its highly individual adaptation of Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Salieri's *Catilina*, Busoni's *Arlecchino* or Lortzing's *Undine*. One of its high points was a remarkable production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* directed by **J.A. Pitínský**, who with deep humility and respect for the poetics of the piece and the circumstances in which it was written presented it, in white and red, as a drama charged with playfulness, silken tenderness, fierce passion, rage, sensuality and proud possessiveness. In a similar way the Ostrava Opera under the leadership of **Luděk Golat** beat a path to the forefront of our operas with brilliant productions of Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco*, Halévy's *The Jewess* and Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*. Although the Opava opera company is the smallest in the country, it has astounded audiences and critics nation-wide with its productions of Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Bellini's *Norma* and Verdi's *The Robbers*.

The Mozart Tradition in Prague

Prague in general and the Estates Theatre in particular, where the operas *Don Giovanni* and *La clemenza di Tito* received their world premieres with the composer himself conducting, are closely identified with Mozart. The number of times that *Don Giovanni* has been presented on stages of the National Theatre is remarkable in itself – more than a thousand! The National Theatre celebrated the two-hundred year Mozart centenary in 1991 with a new production of *Don Giovanni* in the newly renovated Estates Theatre. The conductor **Charles Mackerras** and director **David Radok** organically combined the inspiration of the Baroque theatre with the production trends of the end of the 20th century and elements of authentic historical performance. The head of the opera **Eva Herrmannová** then reinforced the concept of Mozart operas as living, modern dramas with Radok's production of *The Magic Flute* and *The Marriage of Figaro* directed by **Jaroslav Chundela**. Prague made its own contribution to this year's Mozart anniversary with a production of the composer's second Prague opera *La clemenza di Tito*. Conducted by **Alessandro de Marchi** and directed and designed by **Ursel and Karl-Ernst Herrmann**, the production became a laboratory of the emotions, passions and loneliness of the powerful.

Of course, Prague has also been approaching Mozart in less "respectful" ways. For example, for Opera Furore Mozart became material to be "freely exploited" with a post-modern provocative audacity that juxtaposed revered musical values with the most banal kitsch. A cut version of a recording of *Don Giovanni* forms the basis for a puppet version of the opera with classical marionettes that thanks to untiring marketing activities has been running since 1991 mainly for the tourist public, and has now been played more than 200 times.

Czech Opera Classics – Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček and the others

In addition to attractive, and from the box office point of view reliable pieces from the world operatic repertoire, Czech opera possesses a huge treasure chest of domestic operas containing everything from authors now considered classics of the genre to composers who for various reasons have been forgotten or overlooked. **Bedřich Smetana** and **Antonín Dvořák**



The Moravian Theatre in Olomouc
Dvořák's *Jakobín* in MT, Olomouc

The Moravian Theatre in Olomouc

Repertory 2006/2007

Antonín Dvořák: *The Jacobin*
Johann Strauss: *Eine Nacht in Venedig*
Giacomo Puccini: *Madame Butterfly*
Giuseppe Verdi: *Nabucco*

Premières 2006/2007

Jerry Herman, Michael Stewart:
Hello, Dolly!
Giuseppe Verdi: *Attila*
Franz Lehár: *The Merry Widow*
Gabriel Fauré: *Requiem*
Carl Orff: *Carmina burana*
Jules Massenet: *Manon*

The National Theatre of Moravia-Silesia, Ostrava

Head of Opera: Oliver Dohnányi

Repertoire 2006/2007

Antonín Dvořák: *The Devil and Kate*
Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka*
Bohuslav Martinů: *The Greek Passion*
Emil František Burian: *Opera z pouti* (*Opera from a Fair*)
Gaetano Donizetti: *The Elixir of Love*
Giacomo Puccini: *Madame Butterfly*
Giuseppe Verdi: *Falstaff*
Giuseppe Verdi: *La traviata*
Giuseppe Verdi: *Macbeth*
Giuseppe Verdi: *Nabucco*
Giuseppe Verdi: *Rigoletto*
Leoš Janáček: *Jenufa*
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *Così fan tutte*
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *The Magic Flute*



The Antonín Dvořák Theatre of the National Theatre of Moravia-Silesia, Ostrava

Manon Lescaut in AD Theatre, Ostrava



rightly continue to occupy leading positions, but while there have been many attempts to stage *The Bartered Bride*, *Rusalka*, *Dalibor* or the *Jacobin* in a "different" way, most of them have provoked scandals of unprecedented intensity on the domestic scene. **Petr Lébl's** production of *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* as a kind of opera-comics combined with idyllic operatic mannerism and a spectacular show met with fierce resistance. Similarly, **Miloš Forman's** ideas for a modified version of *Dalibor* encountered such a wave of resistance before it even got to the stage that the world famous film director backed off the project in disgust. When *Dalibor* was finally staged at the National Theatre in 2001, directed by **J.A. Pitínský**, the premiere was greeted by boos from the audience. By contrast, in 2004 Dvořák's rarely performed *Dimitrij*, staged by the Prague State Opera in a magnificent spectacular production directed by **Michael Tarant**, was well received. *Rusalka* at the State Opera in 2005 also went down well with the public; well-known film director **Zdeněk Troška** used film sequences in combination with stage performance to emphasise the fairytale character of the opera. This year too the Brno opera production of *The Bartered Bride* directed by **Ondřej Havelka** managed to "hit the target" in combining modern dramatic presentation with tradition.

After years of deficit as far as **Janáček** is concerned, noteworthy production started to appear. In 2002 the National Theatre presented the first ever production of Janáček's opera *Fate*, inviting the avant-garde American **Robert Wilson** to direct it with **Jiří Bělohlávek** as conductor. The result was a ravishing production with the accent on the visual element. The National Theatre also staged the also infrequently performed *Excursions of Mr. Brouček* conducted by **Sir Charles Mackerras** and with the outstanding **Jan Vacík** in the title role. The difficulties of staging Janáček were clearly illustrated by the National Theatre's attempt to present *Jenufa* in a co-production with the Dublin Opera Ireland; in terms of direction the results were awkward, but on the purely musical side the conductor **Jiří Kout** raised performance above the usual standard in this country. The co-production of *Jenufa* by the Brno Opera and Vienna State Opera was more of a success. Directed by **David Pountney**, it opened the international Janáček's Brno Festival in 2004 (when the festival scored a first by presenting all Janáček's operatic works). In the Opava pro-

Premières 2006/2007

Giacomo Puccini: Manon Lescaut
Antonín Dvořák: The Jacobin
Franco Alfano: Cyrano de Bergerac
Georges Bizet – Peter Brook – Jean Claude Carrière – Marius Constant: La Tragédie de Carmen

The Silesian Opera in Opava

Head of Opera: Dalibor Hrdá

Repertory 2006/2007

Giacomo Puccini: Tosca
Rudolf Piskáček: Tulák (The Vagabond)
Bedřich Smetana: Dalibor
Jerry Herman: Hello, Dolly!
Jaromír Weinberger: Švanda dudák (Švanda the Piper)

Premiéry 2006/2007

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Don Giovanni
Bohuslav Martinů: Hry o Marii (The Miracles of Mary)
Peter Stone – Bob Merrill – Jule Styne: Some Like it Hot
Giuseppe Verdi: Il Trovatore



The Silesian Opera in Opava
Hello, Dolly! in the Silesian Opera

duction of *Jenufa*, **Oldřich Bohuňovský** succeeded in bringing out Janáček's animal fierceness and *The Makropulos Affair* at the Prague National Theatre conducted by **Bohumil Gregor** was also musically impressive.

Bohuslav Martinů is relatively rarely performed, and so it was all the more a pleasure when the high point of the National Theatre 1999/2000 season turned out to be *Julietta*, in a version at the cutting edge of world trends in the staging of opera. This production was primarily the work of English musicians – the director **David Pountney** with soloists from Opera North in Leeds, and was presented as the materialisation of a dream, an illusion based on some kind of peculiar reality that the dream gradually breaks down, blurs and multiplies. The tension arising from the incomprehensibility of the world around us mounts with themes of anxiety, alienation, escape from reality and the manipulation of human memory. The Ostrava Opera radiated with the poetics of playfulness and sweetness in its production of Martinů's *Theatre behind the Gate* directed by **Michael Tarant**. In 2003 Martinů's unfinished opera, *Den dobročinnosti [The Day of Charity]* proved to be a real discovery when presented for the very first time, thanks to **Václav Nosek's** reconstruction of the piece, by the opera in České Budějovice. In 2005 another of **Pountney's** ambitious productions, this time the *Greek Passion* was transferred to Brno from the Bregenz Festival and this year the *Greek Passion* was presented by the Prague National Opera, for the very first time in the historic building.

There tends to be a great deal of caution about producing Czech operas by composers other than the "Big Four". Nonetheless, here we should draw attention to the useful National Theatre project Czech Triptych, which has dusted off the pre-Smetana history of Czech opera with semi-staged productions of Kittl's *Bianca und Giuseppe*, Škroup's *The Sea Geus* and Měchura's *Marie Potocká*.

Among the other attempts to revive the legacy of Czech opera composers, it is worth mentioning the production of forgotten works by the interwar avant garde: E. F. Burian's jazz opera *Bubu of Montparnasse*, imaginatively presented by the Prague State Opera, and the Ostrava production of Burian's *Opera z pouti (Fair Opera)* (See CM 4/04). Fibich's *Šárka* in Plzeň received very mixed responses, but Fibich's *Smrt Hippodamie (Death of Hippodamia)* in the specific genre of melodrama, presented at the Zlín theatre (which has no separate opera company) in collaboration with the Zlín Philharmonic conducted by **Roman Válek** and directed by **J.A. Pitínský**, has been greeted by the public with enthusiasm and is consistently sold out.

The Courage for Contemporary Opera

The assumption that the fall of ideological barriers would automatically open up a space for contemporary opera, more or less a taboo under the former regime, has proved to be wide of the mark. The former filter mechanism imposed by ideology and censorship has been replaced by an economic filter and cornerstone modern works such as *Lulu*, the *Painter Mathis*, *Moses* and *Aron* or the *Devils of Loudun* have been pretty much lost to the Czech public... And yet it is contemporary opera, unencumbered by stage conventions, that has the potential to open the way to a music theatre of the present.

After much cautious hesitation the National Theatre plunged into the discussion on the development of contemporary opera with a provocatively naked presentation of human instincts and sexual desire in Davies' opera mono-dramas *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Miss Donnothorne's Maggot*, in which Ivan Kusnjer and Jaroslava Maxová gave excellent performances. The abandonment of the grandiose golden portal of the proscenium arch in favour of the intimate atmosphere of the Kolowrat theatre and the provocatively eccentric treatment of the theme of human consciousness and subconscious, and the uncertain, porous border between the normal and abnormal, characterised the operas *Zpráva pro akademii (Report for the Academy)* by Jan Klusák (see CM 4/04) and *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* by Michael Nyman. The National Theatre also turned to one of our most important composers, Petr Eben, and the result was his first opera/oratorio composition *Jeremias*.

The change in the management of the National Theatre since the 2002/2003 season has indisputably brought a great many new initiatives and a fresh wind. The new director **Daniel Dvořák** and head of the opera **Jiří Nekvasil** took plenty of risks when opening up more space for engagement with international trends in opera production, pushing through interesting developments in repertoire, initiating co-productions with opera companies from abroad, encouraging Czech opera composers to create new pieces and in the project *Beating on the Iron Curtain* providing opportunities for young composers at the start of their careers to get their work staged. The National Theatre has also started to use unconventional venues for opera productions, and we might mention for example the *Hut on the Piazzetta* project which found its place behind the historic NT building and beside the Estates Theatre. If earlier the National Theatre had only rarely ventured out of the lee of security, now we were often witnesses to the other extreme, with forays into dangerous and sometimes shallow waters threatening to devalue the status of the National Theatre as our leading opera company.

OPERA Festival Prizes for Best Production

1993 – Prize awarded to the opera company of the South Bohemian Theatre in České Budějovice for its production of Mozart's opera *Così fan tutte* with special reference to the direction of **Jana Kališová**, and to the opera company of the Silesian Theatre in Opava for its production of Janáček's opera *Jenufa* with special reference to the conductor **Oldřich Bohuňovský** and the choir conductor **Kremena Peschaková**.

1995 – Prize awarded to the opera company of the National Theatre in Prague for its production of the opera *Romeo et Julie* by Charles Gounod, to the Prague State Opera for the dramaturgy of the production of *Engagement in a Dream – Zásnuby ve snu* by Hans Krása and to the opera company of the South Bohemian Theatre in České Budějovice for dramaturgical adaptation and directorial concept of the F.L. Gassmann's opera *La Notte Critica*.

1997 – Prize awarded to the production of Strauss's opera *Der Rosenkavalier* at the National Theatre in Prague for the conductor's **Jiří Kout** achievement, to the Children's Opera Studio of the National Theatre of Moravia-Silesia under the direction of **Lenka Živocká** for performance in the production of Matějka's opera *Broučci* – Beetles, to the Silesian Theatre in Opava for the conductor's **Petr Šumník** achievement and the performance of the orchestra in the production of Puccini's opera *La Bohème* and to the Moravian Theatre in Olomouc for its production of Mozart's opera *Idomeneo* (conductor **Zvonimír Skřivan**, director **Ladislav Štros**, stage design **Jiří Jaroslav Janeček**, costumes by **Josef Jelínek**).

1999 – Prize awarded to the production of Leoš Janáček's opera *From the House of the Dead* by the National Theatre in Brno (conductor **Jan Zbavítel**, director **Zdeněk Kaloč**).

2001 – Prize awarded to the F. X. Šalda Theatre in Liberec for its production of Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* (conductor **Martin Doubravský**, director **Anton Nekovar**).

2003 – Prize awarded to the Silesian Theatre in Opava for its production of G. Verdi's *The Robbers* and to the J. K. Tyl Theatre in Plzeň for its production of B. Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*.

2005 – Prize awarded to the National Theatre of Moravia-Silesia in Ostrava for its production of L. Janáček's opera *Jenufa*.

Thalie Prizes – Opera Singer Laureates

1993 – Drahomíra Drobková

1994 – Helena Kaupová, Ivan Kusnjer

1995 – Luděk Vele

1996 – Eva Dřizgová-Jirušová, Luděk Vele

In our assessment of these National Theatre activities we have already mentioned the value of the "Czech Triptych". Another "triptych" was devoted to Minimalism, with the result that in 2003 there were quite successful productions of Adams' *The Death of Klinghoffer* and Glass's *La Belle et La Bête*, the main benefit being to familiarise the public with a movement in music that had hitherto been neglected on Czech stages and in this sense to build on the very effective production of Glass's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, already staged at the State Opera.

In April 2004 the National Theatre took another adventurous step by presenting the new Czech opera *Nagano* by composer **Martin Smolka** with libretto by **Jaroslav Dušek** in the Estates Theatre. It was a work that followed on from the same team's opera-dance composition using an artificial language, *La Serra* in the Archa Theatre, and the idea of making an opera out of the famous victory of the Czech hockey team at the Nagano Olympics was one that put paid to the idea that contemporary opera composers (and by no mean just Czechs) are stuck for strong and inspiring contemporary themes. In the case of *Nagano* the result was a comprehensive musical drama enhanced by **Havelka's** witty direction and **Vraný's** choreography as well as its "real" basis in the historic national hockey triumph. Nagano suggested a possible direction for contemporary opera in a more attractive and striking way than Emil Viklický's *Faïdra* (*Phaedra*) or *Máchův deník* (*Mácha's Diary*) for example. The State Opera too opened its gates to the operatic ambitions of contemporary Czech composers, for example presenting *La Roulette* by Zdeněk Merta. This is a piece that interestingly combines contemporary musical language with the canon of classical opera, but unfortunately Moša's libretto fails to fully support and capitalise on the potential of Merta's music.

A certain "shortage" of themes can be observed in the interesting project that Dvořák and Nekvasil launched at the State Opera and took with them to the National Theatre – Beating on the Iron Curtain. Of the new productions involved, so far only *Žirafí opera* (*Giraffe Opera*) by Markéta Dvořáková, a skilful study in the expression of Prévertesque moods, in places touching and moving, has made much impact. Vít Zouhar and Tomáš Hanzlík in their operas *Coronide*, *Endymio*, *Yta innocens* and *Torso*, for which they founded the Ensemble Damian, do not so much reconstruct a lost score as unconventionally construct music inspired by Baroque musical principles and use concrete preserved sections of Baroque compositions together with the techniques of 20th-century minimal music over a surviving libretto.

Thanks to **Luděk Golat** the Ostrava company has been making a strong contribution to the search for appropriate forms for contemporary opera. For many years the Jánáček's Hukvaldy Festival has played a noteworthy role in this respect, for example presenting productions of Britten's *Noah's Ark*, Luboš Fišer's *Lancelot*, and Josef Berg's *Euphrides before the Gates of Tjmenas*. The opera management has also not been afraid to commission its "home" composer Ladislav Matějka to compose the opera *Broučci* (*Beetles*) for the children in its opera studio.

The great quantity of new opera experiments shows that Czech opera is getting a "second wind" and there is definitely no cause to fear for the future of the genre. It would however be wise to be sparing with terms like "world" premiere in connection with these attempts, since otherwise such words risk becoming entirely empty and even ridiculous. What is fundamental is that the message of these operas should have a power of its own, not duplicable by other forms of art.

The return to the "normal order of things"

This brief account of the development of the Czech opera scene since 1989 can be optimistically summed up in the statement that despite all confusion, anxiety and iconoclastic delirium, what is basically happening is a move back towards the "normal order of things" that was built up over generations, codified, and then violently interrupted by totalitarian regimes. In the search for new models we must not, of course, forget the quite ordinary principles of the operatic "craft" which have been self-evident ever since the days when Bohemia had the reputation of being the "conservatory of Europe" and which still apply in full to this day.

Today opera houses are exposed to natural competitions. Audiences can choose in an informed way from the flood of top audio and video recordings from labels from all over the world, and it is no longer a problem for many people to make "lightning visits" to the opera in Vienna, Munich or Dresden. Opera companies trying to exploit the possibilities that developments after 1989 have opened up are inevitably taking the bumpy road that can lead to bravos but also to boos and hisses. Yet this is beyond any doubt better than the previous situation of drab security paid for by the loss of freedom and creative adventure.

- 1997 – Eva Urbanová, Ivan Kusnjer
- 1998 – Eva Dřízgová-Jirušová, Vladimír Chmelo
- 1999 – Dagmar Pecková, Roman Janál
- 2000 – Klaudia Dernerová, Valentin Prolat
- 2001 – Simona Houda-Šaturová, Ivan Kusnjer
- 2002 – Regina Renzowa-Jürgens, Pavel Kamas
- 2003 – Yvona Škvárová and Jan Vacík
- 2004 – Katarína Jorda Kramolišová and Peter Straka
- 2005 – Eva Urbanová and Jurij Gorbunov

Thálie Prizes for Lifelong Achievement in the Field of Opera

- 1993 – Karel Berman
- 1994 – Maria Tauberová
- 1995 – Karel Kaláš
- 1996 – Libuše Domanínská
- 1997 – Ivo Židek
- 1998 – Milada Šubrtová
- 1999 – Jiří Zahradníček
- 2000 – Ivana Mixová
- 2001 – Richard Novák
- 2002 – Ludmila Dvořáková
- 2003 – Antonín Švorc
- 2004 – Marie Steinerová
- 2005 – Jaroslav Horáček

Selection of Alfréd Radok Prizes Awarded in the Field of Opera

- 1998** – production – Henry Purcell: *Dido a Aeneas*, J. K. Tyl Theatre in Plzeň, conductor Vojtěch Spurný, director J. A. Pitínský
- 1999** – stage design – Daniel Dvořák (E. F. Burian): *Bubu z Montparnassu*, Prague State Opera)
- 2000** – production – Dmitri Shostakovich: *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, National Theatre, Prague, conductor František Preisler jr., director David Radok + female performance – Klaudia Dernerová: Kateřina Izmajlova
- 2000** – stage design – Aleš Votava: G. Puccini: *Tosca*, National Theatre, Prague
- 2001** – production – Alban Berg: *Wozzek*, National Theatre in Prague with Göteborgs Opera, director David Radok, conductor Elgar Howart
- 2002** – production – Leoš Janáček: *Fate*, National Theatre, Prague, director Robert Wilson, conductor Jiří Bělohlávek + stage design Robert Wilson
- 2003** – stage design – Matěj Forman, Andrea Sodomková, Renata Pavlíčková, Ondřej Mašek (Ph. Glass: *La Belle et La Bête*, National Theatre, Prague)
- 2004** – original Czech work – Martin Smolka, Jaroslav Dušek: *Nagano*, National Theatre, Prague, conductor Jan Chalupický, director Ondřej Havelka
- 2004** – stage design – Pavel Svoboda (R. Wagner: *The Flying Dutchman*, J. K. Tyl Theatre, Plzeň)
- 2004** – talent of the year – nomination: Kateřina Jalovcová
- 2005** – production – nomination – Bohuslav Martinů: *The Greek Passion*, National Theatre, Brno, conductor Christian von Gehren, director David Pountney

czech music – a lifetime's passion

The British musicologist, conductor, bassoonist and music organiser Professor Graham Melville-Mason, honorary advisor to the International Prague Spring Music Festival and since 1987 President of the Britain's Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak music, was for almost 30 years advisor to the Edinburgh International Music Festival and for 10 years worked for BBC Radio 3 classical music channel. In all these roles he has applied his intense active interest in Czech music, and this year he has been awarded the Czech Music Council (Česká hudební rada) Prize for lifelong promotion of Czech music.

MARKÉTA VEJVODOVÁ

(The author is a journalist at Czech Radio 3 – Vltava)

Professor Mason, when did you first encounter Czech music?

My first steps towards Czech music date back to my childhood. My grandfather had an old gramophone and several dozen gramophone records. Whenever I was at my grandfather's, I very much liked listening to music there. His collection included two records of Dvořák's Slavonic Dances and I remember that it was the Slavonic Dances that I put on the record player most often. That was the beginning, but I started to develop a serious interest in Czech music much later, at the University of Edinburgh. First as a student, but when I eventually became a teacher at the university, my interest finally turned in real academic research.

But what was it that brought you to Czech music at the University of Edinburgh?

In 1960 as a new member of the teaching staff at Edinburgh University I founded a collection of historical instruments and at the time I also discovered a score of Dvořák's Serenade for Wind Instruments in D minor in an Edinburgh archive. I thought it would be a very good piece for my wind instrument ensemble. Since the individual parts were not available separately, I copied them out by hand from the score. The work fascinated me and so I started to hunt in the archives for other wind pieces by Czech composers. I found pieces by Mysliveček and Kramář and realised just what a great undiscovered treasure-house Czech music still offered. I was beginning a research project on wind music and at that time one major impetus for my work was a new arrival to the teaching staff, John Clapham, a great expert on the music of Antonín Dvořák. His books on Antonín Dvořák are still among the best on the subject. Later as a professor I had a right to

a sabbatical year and I managed to get a Winston Churchill award, made for selected study projects abroad. This enabled me to go to Europe in 1975 for a long period of research in the music archives. One of the countries I visited was Czechoslovakia, because the archives in Prague, Brno, Kroměříž and Bratislava had the largest collections of surviving sources at the time. Ever since then Czech music has been my main interest.

Did your activities in the field of Czech music develop outside the university as well?

It helped me a lot that I also had the chance to work for the Edinburgh International Music Festival as an advisor. This gave me the opportunity to meet the leading Czech musicians who were invited to the festival. For me the important turning points here were in 1964 and 1970 when the National Theatre Opera performed at the festival and I was able to meet Jaroslav Krombholz, Beno Blachut, Eduard Haken, Libuše Domanínská, Karel Ber-man and many others. This was the golden age of the National Theatre, and the company brought over a brilliant selection of Czech operas – mainly Janáček operas that had never been performed in London until then. The former director of the Janáček Opera in Brno, Vilém Tauský, who emigrated to London after the war, had only presented Káťa Kabanová and Jenufa in London. Fortunately the then director of the Edinburgh Festival Lord Harewood heard Janáček's operas in London and decided to invite the National Theatre over with a Czech repertoire.

Was the National Theatre invited to the festival on your initiative as well?

No, at that point my job was only to arrange the tour itself and all the organisational and operational details. The source of the invitation was the festival director, Lord Harewood, the former director of the English National Opera in London. Later the festival had a new director who has originally been in theatre. At the end of the 1980s I rather hesitantly put forward a proposal suggesting that in 1990 we should focus on the celebration of the centenary of the birth of Martinů and the next year on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Dvořák. I was frankly very surprised when the director said, "Yes, we'll do it. Those will be the main themes of the festival, but you will have to take care of the whole thing yourself, because I don't know anything about this music while you know everything". And so I became completely responsible for the two festivals includ-



with the violinist Josef Suk and his wife

*with Roman Bělor,
director of Prague Spring Festival*

ing the programme and the choice of musicians. The Slovak National Theatre came, the Panocha Quartet, the harpsichordist Zuzana Růžicková, the pianist Rudolf Firkušný and many others.

How did audiences at the festival react to the Czech music?

Very well, Dvořák's music in particular had always been very warmly received, and of course when in England Dvořák had become a popular star. He had absolutely enthralled the English and ever since he has been played regularly on British concert podiums. All this was definitely what eventually led to the founding of the Britain's Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak music. And it is interesting that in past years Martinů was performed more frequently in Britain than in the Czech Republic, France or the USA, i.e. the countries where he actually lived. The British public has always had a great interest in Martinů's music – a greater interest, indeed, than the British music critics, who were at first a little suspicious of it. In Britain today Martinů is ever more in fashion and I believe that when his next important anniversary comes round in 2009 we in Britain will succeed in giving his music the truly important place and full respect that is its due.

Since 1987 you have been president of the Britain's Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak music. How much do you collaborate with the Britain's Dvořák Society in the Czech Republic?

We have always enjoyed good relations since the founding of the Britain's Dvořák Society in 1974. In our archives we keep the first greetings wishing us a successful start and the first letters wishing us all the best from the then director of the Czech society Karel Mikys. Ever since we have been in close contact. This year the Czech Dvořák Society celebrated its 75th anniversary and the current director Radomil Eliška personally invited me to attend the celebrations with the secretary of the Britain's Dvořák Society, Shawn Pullman, which delighted both of us.

How big is the Britain's Dvořák Society today?

Today we have around 700 members. Originally our society was founded just to promote Dvořák but currently it represents Czech and Slovak music in general and also Czech and Slovak musicians and composers. It is headed by 20–30 experts on Czech music, for exam-



ple the world famous conductor Sir Charles Mackerras, the British expert on the music of Leoš Janáček John Tyrrell, Jan Smaczny – an expert on the music of Dvořák and many others. This is very gratifying for us, but our members also include many ordinary people who love Czech music and that is really very interesting.

What are the main activities of the Britain's Dvořák Society?

We produce a quarterly magazine for our members with news and features from the Czech music scene. We also regularly publish a prestigious collection of academic articles by international music experts which usually has 200 to 300 pages. Members can buy the latest world recordings of Czech musicians and Czech music through the society at very advantageous prices. We regularly organise

lectures and if an important Czech musician comes to Britain we organise a meeting and discussion for our members. And not only in London, but all over Britain. We have a great deal of interest in membership in Scotland and in the North-West of England, something we certainly owe to Libor Pešek and Petr Altrichter who worked in Liverpool for many years. Interestingly, in this area we have a few members who have been living there since the war and are fond of Czech music thanks to the Czech airmen who were based there for training during the Second World War. Some of our members are also former child refugees saved at the start of the occupation of the Czech Lands by being sent on the Jewish children's trains to Britain. These people still support Czech activities even though they have lived all almost all their lives in Britain. Thanks to the support of the Czech ambassador we hold concerts in the Czech embassy in Lon-

don; at these we are trying to provide chances for young Czech musicians who are studying in Britain. And every other year we organise a trip to the Czech Republic for our members, each time on a different theme.

Has the society under your presidency engaged in other projects, as well as these main activities?

Fortunately our members are extremely generous and they themselves invest money in our activities. So for example thanks to contributions from members we have been able to organise three other major projects. In 1992 we started to co-operate on the creation of the Dvořák international database. This is a complete catalogue of all the sources on Dvořák from all over the world and it is being compiled on the basis of co-operation between the British and Czech Dvořák Societies and the Dvořák Museum in Prague. At the beginning of this ambitious project we donated appropriate software and a very high-powered computer to the Dvořák Museum in Prague and now we are going to help fund further necessary innovations to the system. The second project was saving Dvořák's summer house, the Villa Rusalka in Vysoká, which belonged to the composer's descendants. We organised a fund for the reconstruction of the villa and this enabled the family to repair the monument and save it. The third project relates to funding young Czech and Slovak musicians. When our society celebrated its 25th anniversary we decided that instead of gala concerts we would fund places at the prestigious Dartington International Summer School. Ever since, our society has been awarding the scholarship to Czech and Slovak students every year.

Which people in the music world do you work with most frequently?

For many years now I have been in personal contact with the British, Czech and Slovak composers and performers I got to know through my work as a musicologist and in my ten years of working for BBC's classical music channel Radio 3. But as far as the activities of the Britain's Dvořák Society are concerned, from the beginning we have been in close contact with top Czech artists in the forefront of the Czech musical scene. Our first patron was Josef Suk, and then Rudolf Firkušný and now Petr Eben. And in the position of Vice-President Jiří Bělohlávek, Radoslav Kvapil, Markéta Hallová, Alena Němcová, Miloš Jurkovič, and once Jan Hanuš and Jarmil Burghauser as well. We have been truly lucky in having had the chance to work with people of this calibre. They were not just "names" on letterheads, but have always given us active support and worked with us closely.

You have already mentioned your almost ten years of work for BBC Radio in London. Can you tell us more about how far you were able to promote Czech music there?

I was supposed to look after contracts with artists, I co-ordinated the music programme and was responsible for the choice and standard of the recordings. But I was lucky. At that time I had three colleagues on the music desk who were very interested in Czech and Slovak music and so I had no trouble getting music programmes based on Czech music on the air. For example we broadcast a very detailed weekly series of programmes about Václav Talich, and for instance my colleague Jill White had a special predilection for recording concerts given by Rudolf Firkušný and the Smetana Quartet whenever they were in Britain. Once we even arranged for Rudolf Firkušný to appear together with the Smetana Quartet and we recorded the concert. Today it is a real historic document.

Could you give us an idea of how many recordings of Czech music you used to transmit each year?

Every year it was between 750 and 900 recordings mainly of Czech but also of Slovak music. Around half of the works would be by Dvořák. The music of Janáček – mainly his operas, was in second place. But what is interesting is that in third place there was Martinů – we even broadcast more Martinů than Smetana. Also interesting, however, was the selection of pieces by the other composers – Břixi, Vejvanovský, Benda, Mysliveček, Kramář, Vaňhal and many others, but we also played music by contemporary composers – Petr Eben, Klement Slavický, Milan Slavický, Viktor Kalabis, Jiří Teml and many others. It was a range of composers covering the whole course of Czech musical history.

Of course finally you got the chance to have quite an influence of your own on the direction of Czech musical life inside the Czech Republic when you started working closely with the Prague Spring International Music Festival. How did this connection come about?

It all began after the Velvet Revolution when Petr Eben became president of the Prague Spring and Oleg Podgorný became festival director. I knew both of them very well. Immediately after the Revolution the festival ran into problems relating to its whole system of financing. I had acquired a great deal of experience with writing contracts at BBC Radio and I had more than thirty years of experience from the Edinburgh Festival. So Oleg Podgorný and Petr Eben hoped I would be able to help them. Just after the revolution the concept of sponsorship was still completely unknown in the Czech Republic. Many offers of financial co-operation were arriving from companies abroad and sometimes these were highly dubious. I spent a whole night studying the draft for a major contract on financial co-operation and in the morning I sent it back with a refusal, totally appalled at the thing. That was the beginning, but then I helped on the artistic side as well. I arranged meetings for Oleg Pod-

gorný with leading music agents and also visits to prestigious arts agencies based in London.

What was the main reason for all the financial problems that the festival had to solve?

If we go back to the beginning of the trouble, the biggest financial problem arose immediately after 1990, when the Ministry of Culture stopped financing the festival for a time even though up to then it had covered almost 100% of the financial costs. The festival then got no more than a tiny sum from the state and money had to be found elsewhere, mainly from sponsors. At that point the festival wasn't even yet supported by the Prague City Authority, whereas at the Edinburgh Festival, for example, funding from the city has always been fundamental.

How are major music festivals funded in Britain?

In Britain festival directors don't have to cope with these problems. We have what is known as the Arts Council, which is independent of the government but has a very large budget that it distributes to important festivals. And so the director of something like the Edinburgh Festival knows that each year he can count on 50% coverage of costs from the Arts Council. He knows that the City of Edinburgh will cover another 30% of the costs and that more money will be forthcoming from the surrounding districts, because everyone in the region is aware of the enormous economic benefits that a successful festival of this kind brings to the region and city. The director feels completely financially secure and knows that he will also have money to pay leading international artists in the coming years and that he can go ahead and invite them. The Prague Spring does not yet have this financial security for the future. Every director of the Prague Spring has to tackle the problem of funding and think of ways to secure the festival financially in the coming years.

Although Czech music has been at the centre of your life, as a foreigner you inevitably look at it with a degree of detachment. What in your view makes Czech music so distinctive?

One of the most frequent discussions at all conferences on Czech music revolves around the question of what the typical marks of Czech music really are, what does this "Czechness" really mean, and how it can be analysed. We can only actually identify Czech music in this distinctive sense from the middle of the 19th century, i.e. from the period of the National Revival when Czech music acquired a clear and entirely different character. Elements deriving from Czech folk music begin to appear – typical harmonic and rhythmic elements and melodic. But there is a parallel with British music here! Our composers also collected folk songs and elements of national

folk music are also present in British music. To the point where we could say that British music sounds "British" and Czech music "Czech". But behind this there are other parallels – I mean a shared sense of humour, which makes for a strong connection between we British and the Czechs.

How would you compare interest in Czech music among the British and among the Czechs?

If we are talking about the ordinary concert and opera public, I would say that 15 or 20 years ago the British definitely had more interest in Czech music than the Czechs had in their own music. For example, when a Janáček opera was performed in Brno, the theatre was half empty, while in London it was almost impossible to get tickets. Of course, that is only one criterion. I remember once going to the English National Opera in London to see Janáček's *Katya Kabanova*, and I had Alena Němcová from Brno with me. Even from a distance you could see an incredibly long queue of people waiting to buy tickets at the box office. That was already a surprise for Alena Němcová, but what really stunned her was when I told her that they were people waiting for returned tickets, because the production was already sold out. Alena Němcová was sorry that she didn't have a camera with her and couldn't take a photo of the queue and show it to people in Brno.

You speak excellent Czech. How is it possible for a foreigner to learn to speak this difficult language so well?

It really was hard. First I decided to go to evening classes in Czech at London University, where I learned the basics of the grammar but it didn't help me to speak at all. My wife is Czech by origin and when Czech friends visited she would talk to them in Czech. She always said she could just see me putting together a sentence in my head so that I could take part in the conversation, but before I had laboriously managed to formulate my comment in my head the conversation had moved onto a different topic. It was Karel Janovický, the former head of the Czech section of the BBC World Service, who lived close to us, who literally came to my rescue. He was already retired and used to take regular walks with his dog. Each time he would ring our doorbell and I would come and accompany him on the dog walks. We made an agreement that we would speak only Czech and so thanks to the dog and Karel's patience I finally started to speak the language

(with the kind permission of Harmonie Magazine)

PETR BAKLA



Martin Smolka

klangspuren 2006

It is still fairly rare to find contemporary Czech music at major festivals abroad, and so it is quite an important event when such a festival decides to present an extensive range of contemporary Czech music. The most recent festival abroad to do so was the Klangspuren Festival in Austria, this year in September.

The Klangspuren Festival specialising in contemporary music has been held since 1994 in the Tyrol, at several venues in the vicinity of Innsbruck. It is quite a big festival – this year it was almost three weeks long, and presented around seventy pieces, 11 of them commissioned by the festival itself. Klangspuren attracts stars of the calibre of Pierre Boulez or the Ensemble Modern, and all in all it is a very important festival. Each year it focuses on the music of one selected country and one of its composers. This year it was the turn of the Czech Republic, represented primarily by the composer Martin Smolka.

We offered a detailed account of **Martin Smolka** in Czech Music 3/2005, but let us still summarise the most significant facts about a man who is currently evidently the most visible Czech composer internationally. Martin Smolka (*1959) studied at the Prague Academy, but more important were his private studies with Marek Kopelent, at that time essentially banished from Czech musical life by the communist regime. Smolka says of himself that his main influences were post-Webernism and American minimal music, to which we should add that the so called Polish School has also played a major role in

forming Smolka's composing style. At the start of the 1980s Smolka founded the Agon Ensemble, which gradually emerged as the most important Czech ensemble for contemporary music. Smolka wrote many pieces for Agon, and for him working with Agon Ensemble meant a chance to experiment with the unconventional techniques of play and bizarre sound elements typical of his music. When Smolka parted company with Agon Ensemble about ten years ago he was already a composer with a very distinctive and original style. It is one of the paradoxes of the situation of contemporary music in the Czech Republic that especially in German-speaking countries he has been played abroad much more than at home (and his works are published by the German Breitkopf & Härtel House). One significant exception to this rule has been the highly successful production of his "hockey opera" *Nagano*, which was commissioned by the National Theatre in Prague and won an Alfred Radok Prize (see Helena Havlíková's article in this number). Smolka is a genuinely internationally established composer, who is regularly commissioned to write pieces for prestigious festivals (of the most recent let us mention the premiere of an orchestral composition com-



Tomáš Ondrůšek



MoEns

missioned by the Donaueschinger Musik-tage) and top concert performers. While to be represented at Klangspuren by a whole four pieces is important, in the context of Smolka's career it is by no means an isolated occurrence.

From practically the start of this career Smolka has been repeating similar structural and emotional schemata, which work very well: various shades of melancholy and nostalgia alternating in very striking contrast with thunderous, cracked and husky grotesquery (often as a kind of echo of the first), everything many times repeated and many times returning in reprise. The structure of Smolka's music often resembles a collage of longer or shorter contrasting sections, with abrupt cuts. In terms of sound his music is highly individual and immediately identifiable, comprehensible on a first listen because of its iterative quality, rich in bizarre sounds with great evocative power, and characterised by microtonal deformations of the conventionalised elements of tonal music (it is old, so let it scrape away nostalgically).

All this applies to the compositions presented at Klangspuren. The orchestral *Remix*, *Redream*, *Reflight*, performed at the opening concert by the Tiroler Symphonieorchester Innsbruck conducted by Beat Furrer (for interest we should add that the Czech music presented at the concert also included Leoš Janáček's orchestral rhapsody *Taras Bulba*), was written in 2000 and is one of the most frequently played Smolka works for a large ensemble. It was followed by choral pieces: *Walden*, the *Distiller of Celestial Dew*s (2000) on texts by H.D. Thoreau and the premiered piece *Slone i smutne* [*Salty and sad*]

on a text by Tadeusz Różewicz. Both compositions were performed by the Latvian Radio Choir.

The quartet of Smolka pieces performed at Klangspuren was rounded off by the percussionist **Tomáš Ondrůšek** (see CM 1/05, www.czech-music.net/cm1-05.php) playing *Ring*ing for solo percussion of 1989 at a solo concert preceded by a reading given by the middle-generation Czech writer **Jáchym Topol**. Ondrůšek combined world repertoire (David Lang, Iannis Xenakis) with music by Czech composers. Apart from the Smolka composition he performed *Ormai* by Miloš Haase (1948) and the small, seemingly very simple *Secreta* by Peter Graham (see CM 2/05, www.czech-music.net/cm2-05.php). There is no doubt at all that as far as contemporary music is concerned (and in practice it is the only repertoire for multipercussion), Tomáš Ondrůšek is one of the best Czech performers and is naturally a part of the international scene. At present he is head of the percussion department at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and as well as teaching he actually organises the summer courses "Trstěnice Percussion Workshops" for percussionists and composers.

Also representing Czech contemporary music at the festivals was the Mondschein Ensemble, which in recent years has shortened its name to **MoEns**. The ensemble was founded in 1995 by a group of Prague musicians and composers around the composer and conductor Miroslav Pudlák – incidentally also a co-founder of the Agon Ensemble mentioned above –, and the clarinetist Kamil Doležal. Their aim was to provide Czech musical life with a platform for the professional performance of contemporary music in the

form of a stable musical ensemble. The basis of the MoEns repertoire is the music of the younger generation of Czech composers complemented by selected contemporary works from abroad and the music of the classics of the later 20th century. The ensemble also commissions new works for its repertoire. The ensemble's concert programmes have often focused on individual composers or movements (Kagel, Reich, Kurtág, Andriessen, New Complexity) or the contemporary output of other countries (Lithuania, Finland, Hungary, Japan, Germany and so on). Each year MoEns commissions work from young composers and in the ten years of its existence has given concert premieres of at least 50 new pieces. It regularly records contemporary Czech music for Czech Radio and CD recordings, and has appeared at many international festivals.

At Klangspuren MoEns appeared reinforced by the **Saxophone Quartet Bohemia** with a programme of music by **Miroslav Pudlák** (1961), **Marek Kopelent** (1932), **Hanuš Bartoň** (1960; Bartoň also plays in MoEns as a pianist) and **Martin Hybler** (1977). In all cases the compositions were premieres and the programme was created specially for Klangspuren.

Finally Klangspuren presented the composer **Michal Nežtek** (1977; see CM 4/05) with a premiere of his piece for percussion *Frame Dreams*, commissioned by the festival (performed by Windkraft) and **Miroslav Srnka** (1975; see CM 2/06, www.czech-music.net/cm2-06.php), whose choral cycle *Podvrhy – Forgeries* was performed at the festival for the first time in complete form. The work was sung by the Latvian Radio Choir.

taking things from elsewhere

The bassoon is still often stereotyped as an accompanying instrument. Yet there are already performers able to fill an entire concert just with solo pieces for bassoon. We would like to introduce the opinions and experiences of the talented young Czech bassoonist Václav Vonášek, who has not been content to keep to the area traditionally assigned to the bassoon but makes audacious excursions into music written for other instruments and into the music of contemporary composers.

You are well-known for your efforts to promote the bassoon as a solo instrument, but I would still like to ask whether you have ever been tempted by another instrument?

Tempted... I don't know if that's the right way of putting it. I applied to the conservatory as a clarinettist, and they accepted me on condition I studied bassoon, and so I thought – "well, if that's the way it is, let's make it worthwhile!" I was well aware that as a beginner I would have to catch up to get to the level of the others – and unfortunately that almost unhealthy tempo of work has stayed with me. But to return to your question – maybe the soprano sax. I've always really liked it...

You have had the chance to study at home and abroad. What appealed to you there?

In London I had two professors, one Italian and the other English. I was delighted to be able to work with an Italian teacher! He took me through the Weber Concerto, which to be brutally frank is actually worn round the edges, but he showed me how I ought to step on to the podium and show people "Here I am, I've come to play to you!" and he told me what kind of attitude to take, and in the end made an operatic entrance of the whole thing.

So there was a lot of work with the player's personality, as it were?

Yes, not just the notes – "play it long like this here, give it more here". That's the way teaching often goes in this country and perhaps that's a pity. In this country we work mainly on solo material. In London they devote a lot of attention to work in an orchestra, really honest study of the materials, orchestral parts and even preparing students for the possibility that they won't be having an active music

career, and they do other things besides just study an instrument. If I didn't make a living by performing, I wouldn't have the skills for anything else.

Are you happy to hear and adopt new opinions?

Certainly. I can't understand some people who study at the conservatory with one professor and then carry on studying with him at the Academy. It means they are imprisoned in just one limited perspective.

You have had a lot of successes at prestigious competitions. Do you get a lot of invitations to perform as a result?

In most cases no. Those competitions for wind instruments aren't like the Queen Elizabeth Competition in Brussels for example, which I think is for piano, violin and singers, where the winner gets a contract with an agency and a recording company and basically already has it made. Most wind competitions don't have that sort of impact. It was only when I won 2nd Prize at the Prague Spring Competition that I then received offers from our orchestras that had contracts with the Prague Spring Festival, and to be brutal, actually had an obligation to invite a winner to perform. But that didn't mean that anything more permanent came out of it. No, it's not something you can count on. For that I would have to get a prize at the ARD in Munich. That's something comparable with the big competitions for violinists and pianists. There the winner definitely gets noticed by an agent or a recording company and they will offer him or her something. And then one thing leads to another, and the contacts are already there. So competitions are actually sometimes rather deceptive.



So you don't think that a career can be built on competitions?

Often you come home from a competition with the feeling that it was somehow unfair that you weren't successful. Professor Herman helped me when he said that competitions were never fair, and so then I thought about that sometimes when I won and someone I had considered the favourite didn't get anywhere at all. The fact is that sometimes you're lucky and sometimes you aren't. And so there are plenty of players who never win any competition but in the end if they get an opportunity as soloists, they are just as good. It's good to enter competitions, because then when you have them in your cv it looks nice. But still, the most valuable thing is when I perform somewhere and they invite me again. And they don't invite me because I've won a competition and they've read it in my cv, but because I played there and they liked it. And in fact that's how you can tell if someone is really a good player, not by looking at all the stuff in his cv.

What's your view of virtuosity?

I know it's a term that is very often misunderstood. When you talk about a virtuoso piece, most people think of something very fast and full of notes, but it's not like that. Playing an Adagio well can be harder than mastering fast passages! Especially on wind instruments. In my view virtuosity means mastering

the instrument so well that I can finger out any idea I have in my head.

You are a member of the international chamber ensemble Ostravská Banda, which specialises in playing contemporary music. (The Banda was founded in the summer of 2005, in the context of the Ostrava Days Festival.) How did you become involved in that?

I think it was through Karel Dohnal (*a young Czech clarinetist focussing on contemporary music*). They were looking for players for the ensemble and I don't think there were many takers among Czech musicians. They know Karel well in Ostrava, because he studied there. In the end he didn't play in the Banda himself, but he recommended me, and I'm very grateful to him for doing that.

The Ostravská Banda European Concert Tour 2006 will be starting in a couple of days. [The interview took place in October, ed. note] What is the plan?

Things will be a little different probably. The tour dates were shifted and that means that I can't take part in all the concerts, but the conductor Petr Kotík telephoned and said he wanted me there, and so we agreed that I would at least go to Bratislava (Slovakia) and Paris. According to the schedule in every town we are supposed to rehearse for two days in parallel with workshops and finally there's a concert. But last year in the summer the Banda basically just rehearsed and then played.

What about the programme planning? Is that done by Petr Kotík? Or can you as members propose something?

I've never tried to do anything like that, at least not at that time. In fact I went there basically just for the job. But now I've started studying for a doctorate and as my theme I've chosen contemporary solo compositions for bassoon, and so next year, 2007, I would be pleased if the possibility and interest was there for me to tell people something about the bassoon and demonstrate its potential at the Ostrava Days Festival and so perhaps inspire one of those young composers who go there in droves.

From all over the world?

Well, it's quite a prestigious event. Petr Kotík is quite a famous name. And so I would like to exploit the possibility next summer.

Do you have a seminar with composers arranged here at the Academy in Prague?

Not yet. Of course Professor Ivan Kurz (*the head of the composition department*) is one of the people I would like to ask to collaborate. He himself has written solo pieces for bassoon which is why I would like to involve him. Here I shall be leading the obligatory seminar, called the Poetics of Performance, and if it's possible I would like to invite composers and analyse pieces with them, talk about them.

Where did you get to know modern techniques of bassoon play? During your studies?

During my studies no. When I was studying it was always only classical music, and in that

sense London was no different from Prague. In fact it is only now that I've been encountering modern techniques, in the Ostravská Banda. Actually, it isn't entirely a case of new techniques. It was more a case of me not having expected anyone to have the gall to write something like that for bassoon. Specifically, in Xenakis (*Palimpsest*) there is a long section that is notated entirely in the treble clef and is also enormously fast. It made me absolutely furious! But in the end I realised that I couldn't rehearse it like Mozart, with every note perfect, and that it was a matter of effect. It was written for a French instrument, of course, and those are more flexible even in the high register, but still, I found it really too much, and I developed feelings of utter despair and hopelessness over how anyone could dare to write such a thing and expect anyone to practise it! But of course, when you get your teeth into it and somehow bite through it, struggle your way through, you find that it comes in the end.

Do you put it down to the composer's ignorance, or recklessness, or attempt to put sound concepts before technical possibilities?

Of course it's good thing when a composer has a clear concept, even if the concept is crazy and even if in the end he finds out, for example, that it just can't be realised in practice. But when a composer isn't limited by players telling him, "that won't work, and it's better to avoid this, and you can't have this with that and so on", then he or she is just going to find out from the encyclopaedia that the bassoon has a range up to f2, and then he or she will go and write thirty-second triplets in that top register as he or she likes. And then when someone comes who is supposed to play it, they may actually find that even this idea is playable. In the end it's good, really, but Xenakis is a very extreme example.

Do you think that audiences will value your hard work here?

Hard to say. It has to be followed through to the very end. You can't just somehow manage to play it; it has to have the real effect intended. In the piece we're talking about there's a place (*he indicates it by hitting himself on the nose*) that is terribly shocking, even aggressive. To the point where the music makes me feel slightly ill. But I know that this kind of effect has to be there and it was the composer's intention. Composers often have similar ideas, but because they know that the instruments are limited in one way or another, they prefer not to write them down at all.

What were the reactions to the Ostravská Banda concerts?

They were often rather surprisingly positive. Some pieces that we performers found hard to stomach were a huge success with the public, and I was amazed. I know that most of the audience consisted of students or people specially invited or people who had come out of curiosity. Everything shifted from Prague to Ostrava. So they were people used to listen-

ing to this kind of music, who have the score and are looking at it for themselves, bothering to work on it.

Returning to ordinary concert practice, could you imagine putting a piece like that in a programme?

Well, that's a terribly tricky question of dramaturgy. You would have to do it in the right environment and produce the programme properly, and here I mean the printed programme the audience buys – or rather doesn't buy, since if it's expensive they won't buy it, but just gets free to read. Or for example something should be said before the performance so they know why the music is as it is. And there again I could create an evening in which I play some Mozart, or Weber, and then put a modern piece in the second half and then quickly cover it with something classical – what they call a sandwich, with good things on the outside and something healthy on the inside. It's something that has to be very well thought out.

So you have the feeling that strategy is needed, that new music must be administered in careful doses?

Yes. And even then you have to think hard about the sort of public that is coming.

Do you feel you already have a good sense of that?

No, I don't yet feel I have. In most cases when I put some such programme together I include a contemporary piece mainly because I need to play it! For example once I was coming up for a competition and I played Isang Yun's *Monologue* and a cross section through the whole competition repertoire and I just threw it at those people because I needed the experience for the competition. But if we were talking about a seriously conceived concert, something supposed to speak to people, then the programme would have to be different. You could include pieces by composers, classics, who had influenced the modern composers, as a way of establishing a connection, and you could talk about it. But again, the envi-





ronment has to be suitable. When I play a solo piece by myself, it can't be somewhere in the middle of a lot of carpets. So it's not just a question of the programme and the pieces, but many other factors as well.

And you think all this out by yourself?

It's fair to say that in my case this is all at the embryonic stage. Now I hope that in the framework of my doctoral studies I shall get time and space to work on projects like these. Actually my experiences so far have been only academic, using material I have studied at the Academy, and I haven't yet organised anything completely independently.

Do you have the sense that tonal music is limited, or that its era is already over, or that as a performer you play it just because people want it and not because you can express yourself through it?

Not at all. I play it because times change and every music characterises a certain period. And if you are to express your response to the present, then the classics aren't enough. Even the music of the beginning of the 20th century isn't enough.

Is a career as a soloist your main priority?

Well, I'd have a hard time making a living just by solo performance. For wind players that's often a dangerous course. In my view for wind players orchestral play is a decent basis. Because in orchestral play you test out all the technical things. You find out if you know how to get the right intonation, if you have a sufficient dynamic range, if you know how to tune your play to someone else, to adapt yourself to his wavelength. Even though orchestral play can often seem like a sort of factory work. There you are manufacturing music, making your tiny little contribution, and sometimes you can loose that joy in music, that pleasure in the sense that you personally are making music, that you are expressing yourself through music. By the very fact that I am concentrating on my own little part it's obvious that I can't get as much out of it as when I play a modern solo piece.

Do you see it as a necessity then?

I see it as a sort of hygiene.

Chamber music is somewhere in between, a nice compromise. Can both sides of the equation work together there?

Yes, exactly. Of course, if someone spends a long time just as a second instrument in an orchestra, with no possibility of presenting himself in any solo way, there's a danger that he'll lose interest, lose that soloist kind of enthusiasm, and end up doing nothing but taking care to play in tune and come in at the right places. So then, although he plays cleanly and nicely, the need for some kind of self-expression falls by the wayside.

But that's not a problem that you have yet, is it?

No, but I feel it for example when I have a long orchestral stint. Then when I start to rehearse a solo piece or prepare for a recital and I find that I've lost touch with solo play somehow I have to give myself a kick. But on the other hand I'm glad I have this nice foundation, this basic mastery of the instrument that you learn best in an orchestra.

A sense of security?

Yes, and material security as well. So to go back to your original question, I would always want a balance. I would even say that I'm glad that I play in an orchestra because that means I can afford to pursue my hobby, which is solo play.

You include some transcriptions in your programmes. Do you do them yourself?

I do. Now you will think that I'm terribly overworked and that in the evenings I do transcriptions, I rehearse solo pieces and I play in the orchestra as well. With one exception the transcriptions I've been performing have been Bach. Once, it was at a competition, someone was selling printed music and had a Bach sonata, originally for flute. The Sonata in E minor transcribed into A minor for bassoon. I bought the music there. Then I played it and it worked absolutely wonderfully, as if it was the original, everything wonderfully natural.

And what is more, Bach's music is so immediately, self evidently powerful, so full of genius, that even when it ultimately isn't very suitable for bassoon, and couldn't be performed publicly on the instrument, a performer still moves a step up just by getting to the core of a Bach piece and thinking about it. When a bassoonist gets to play some original Bach, he plays continuo, but if he plays a Bach solo part, suddenly he's somewhere else. To be brutal, we are used to playing rather second-league composers who happen to have written something for us. We have one or two concertos from famous composers, Mozart, Weber, what else, but the remaining classical pieces are by people who were not so famous, and so suddenly, when you play Bach, musically you get to a higher sphere.

So you don't have to change anything when you transcribe?

Mostly we are talking about recorder compositions transposed down a fifth, because in the original range it would be too low or too high for the bassoon. It might still be playable, but it would be pointlessly hard and probably it would be obvious to the ear that it was a transcription. With a proper transcription you then develop a completely different set of standards, as happened for example when I was playing the cello suites. Suddenly you can hear what Maisky, Jacqueline Du Pré, and Rostropovich were all about when they played. And these are not just masters of their instrument, but universal masters, musicians. And you can draw on these people.

So your aim is the emancipation of the bassoon?

Exactly. So when I play flute sonatas, for example, I listen to James Galway or Jean-Pierre Rampal. I don't want to discredit the best international bassoonists, but I don't get my standard of comparison just from the bassoon world. I can set my sights on these other musicians as well.

Perhaps that's the reason for your successes, your admirable lightness and breadth...



That's for other people to judge. To be honest, I don't listen to bassoon recordings, because if I do that I can't relax. The flute sonatas, on the other hand, are complete balm to my soul. I listen to them and subconsciously I'm already following in their footsteps: I want to play it as the flute does. I would like to expand on this question because I would be happy if someone read it and then tried to do the same. To play even the kinds of things that may not be very suitable for public performance, but are still enriching. I've just got back from Japan, where I was invited from the Young Prague Festival, which takes place annually in August in the Czech Republic but half of it is organised by the Japanese. In Japan I had a small salon concert, and because I didn't have much time to rehearse with their pianist, she brought me a book of simple pieces for bassoon including various transcriptions – there were Japanese lullabies and Japanese songs, and we played them and we also played an aria from Don Giovanni that was there as well. And I said, let's perform that one, I adore it. And then we played it and it completely got on my nerves that I was just playing ta-ta-ta-ta-ta and I couldn't articulate the words, because I knew what it was about, so at that point I suddenly realised how terribly hard I try to get the content of the music across. Music teaching ought to include something about this whole aspect. That you ought for example to try and sound like a tenor. To take things from elsewhere.

How wonderfully versatile you are!

What do you mean by versatile? I am always focussed on the bassoon.

What else do you listen to, for example apart from classical music?

I listen to Freddie Mercury for instance. He really gets it across. I know that you can't talk about vocal technique in his case, but he really goes for expressiveness. I also have a lot of time for Sting.

You play with your wife in an unconventional duo – violin and bassoon. How did that come about?

We simply felt the need to play together. But it was thanks to that, for example, that one of the best contemporary pieces I have ever played was written. It was composed for us by Karel Janovický. He emigrated to London back in the 1950s, worked in the BBC and as a "Czech coach" – as I would put it – in opera. One time we were telling him that we didn't have anything to play – we had commissioned music for bassoon and violin and I had said to myself that the bassoon part would just be a rudimentary accompaniment and the violin part would be unplayable, and when it had arrived we had found that it was the bassoon part that was unplayable, almost. We had played it together and we wanted something else but there wasn't anything so we were playing transcriptions, for example Bach's two-voice Inventions... and so Mr. Janovický wrote us a duet. Just without accompaniment. And he managed it brilliantly; there's nothing empty there, and it's beautiful music. In this connection, just a moment ago you were asking if tonal music was obsolete, but this is one of the proofs that there is no need to use any avant-garde techniques. He is capable of writing music that has something to say even today. Of course contemporary composers, the extremists, may turn up their noses and say it's obsolete and too traditional, but we've become very attached to this piece.

And is it congenial for the public too?

It is. Although our combination of instruments is sometimes tricky.

An emptiness in middle?

Sometimes when we play in a small room where there is no resonance. But at other times we've played in a beautiful hall, big, and there's been no sense of anything lacking. We have each played one of our solo pieces as well and there was no need for anything else. But often it's risky. They invite us and we don't know what we're getting into.

What ideas and dreams do you have about what you would like to do in the future?

The same as what I've been doing up to now,

but I wouldn't want it to swallow me up so completely that I had no time for going out on my bike or to the mountains.

And is there time?

A few times, recently, although I didn't really have a proper ride, just had a couple of spins. I have this dream of being able to squeeze my music practice into the kind of hours that don't take up all of my free time. So that I could pursue a hobby or two, for example. I'd like to learn to keep things under control in that sense. A really good player doesn't need more than 2 to 3 hours practice daily. It isn't necessary to slave away from morning to night to keep up the standard you had when you were graduating from the Academy.

Do you have the feeling that you're still on the way up?

Yes, but there is more than one curve. There are two curves: one is maturity as a performer, and it keeps going up, but unfortunately the other curve rises much faster – the curve of your imagination and ideas. And the gap tends to keep getting wider.

Václav Vonášek (born 1980), studied at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in the class of František Herman and Jiří Seidl. During his studies he entered many competitions with brilliant results: first the national competition held by the conservatory in Ostrava and the international competition in Olomouc (2000), and later the international competition of chamber ensembles in Semmering and the finale of the international wind competition "Pacem In Terris" in Bayreuth. 2002 was a particularly important year for him: he won prizes not only at the Prague Spring International Competition (2nd Prize, Prize of the Czech Music Fund), but was also absolute winner of the Talent of the Year competition (open to performers of different instruments) which earned him a year's scholarship at the Royal College of Music in London where he studied with Andrea de Flammeneis and Martin Gatt. Enriched by this experience, in 2003 he was one of the ten finalists of the British competition Young Concert Artists Trust and a year later he won the world-wide International Double Reed Society competition in Melbourne. Václav Vonášek's most recent award has been 3rd Prize in the international competition in Markneukirchen. He has appeared in many major concert venues, such as the Wigmore Hall in London. He does not limit himself to solo play; for a while he was a member of the Prague Chamber Philharmonic and since October this year he has been a member of the Czech Philharmonic. He devotes himself to chamber music in the Prague Bassoon Band (a quartet) and in duos and trios with his wife, the violinist Jana Vonášková-Nováková. Since 2005 he has also been a member of the Ostrava Band formed on the initiative of Petr Kotík at the contemporary music festival Ostrava Days.

Today, half way through the first decade of the 21st century, what is the best way to approach the peculiar and still not fully explored phenomenon of Janáček's operas? After all, it is nearly a hundred years since the premiere of one of the most important, *Jenufa*, and they are among the most curious and brilliant works ever to have eventually found a lasting place in world opera repertoire...

Leoš Janáček, 1926

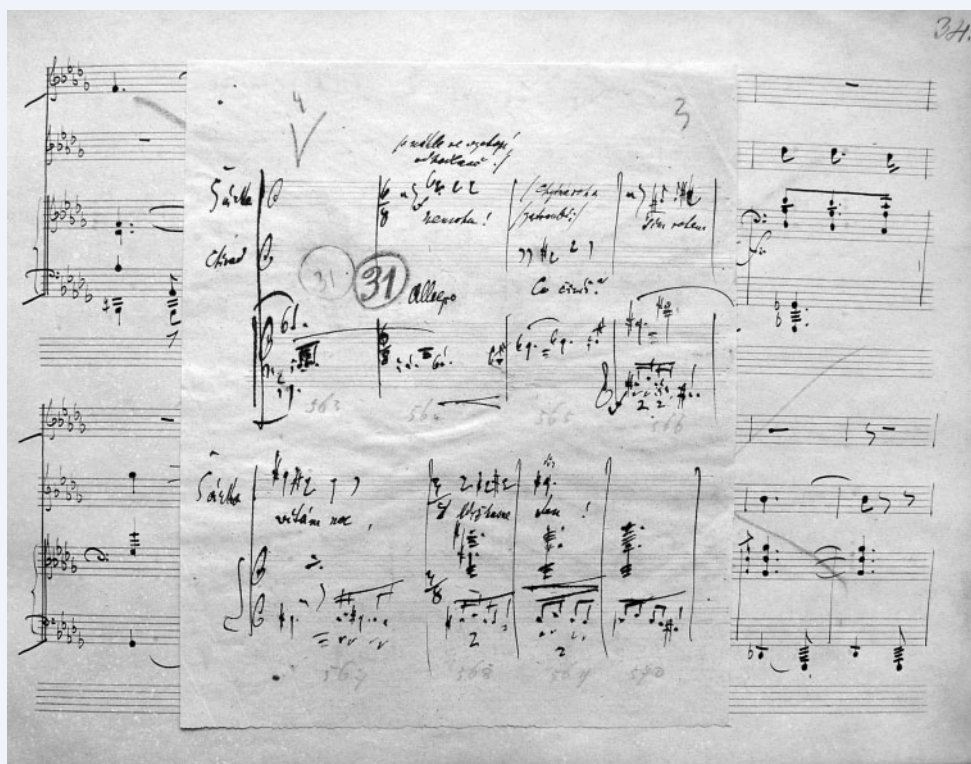
janáček

a few glosses on his operas

A conventional approach might well be to take a few general historical or musico-logical concepts in music and then look at the whole set of Janáček's operas in terms of the applicability or otherwise of these concepts, but in the relatively small space I have here I am not sure that the answers would be satisfactory... In other words, I have not chosen the method that would bracket all the operas together in one set and analyse them altogether in terms of labels like "verism", "radical folklorism", "impressionism and the field of sound and literary impressions", "expressionism", or – if we go on to structural phenomena – "montage", "collage", "monologue-dialogue" and so forth. What I shall do instead is simply take each opera individually and ask the question of how far we really have a grasp of what really informed the opera in terms of musical context and subject. Here the input of directors plays an important role, since their interpretations are what often provoke us to wonder how far directors can go, what is still part of Janáček's musical and literary poetics, and what has been simply more or less effectively tacked on...

Šárka

The two versions of the opera were written in the years 1887 and 1888. The author of the libretto Julius Zeyer refused to allow his text to be used and so the opera could not be staged. Šárka's plot is taken from Czech mythology and it is in this light that it is usually regarded, with the assumption that Janáček was here at his closest to an opera with a Czech national theme partly inspired by material from the Zelenohorský Manuscript (a supposedly ancient manuscript later proved a fake but in its time taken



Šárka – piano reduction with Janáček's later revision

up by Czech national revivalists). In Zeyer's *Šárka*, however, we find elements foreshadowing the decadence that was to make a remarkable breakthrough into Czech literature with Vrchlický's trilogy *Hippodamie* (1889-91). Almost no attention has been paid to the affinity between the poetic image of Hippodamie and Wilde's *Salome* or other decadent subjects, and in Zeyer's text we actually find these tones more than once. Right at the beginning Přemysl declares that, "Morana the pale calls! She has the form of Vlasta who wields a sword". Even more suggestive, however, is the image of Ctirad ascending into Libuše's tomb. Zeyer writes, "In the middle stands a golden throne, on which rests the dead Libuše, wrapped in a thick veil, on her head a golden crown." At the end of Act 1 Ctirad's words: "And pleasure and death my soul convulse!" offer a remarkable decadent union of bliss and death.

In his monograph *Leoš Janáček (Obraz životního a uměleckého boje. V poutech tradice. [A Picture of Struggle in Life and Art. In the bonds of tradition])* (Brno 1939) Vladimír Helfert noticed the composer's consistent tendency to turn away from the prevalent two-, four- or eight-bar phrasing ("this three-bar pattern then becomes a particularly distinctive phenomenon in Janáček's musical idiom"). Quite surprisingly, Helfert considers that "in this musical sensibility in three-bar patterns [there is] undoubtedly a folk influence". Janáček generally treated

Zeyer's text respectfully. Once I made the attempt to summarise all the metrical deviations and peculiarities (In: *Janáček a Zeyerův verš v opeře Šárka*. SPFFBU, H 21-1986, pp. 41-49). For the sake of brevity all I shall report here is that Zeyer's free verse varies in line length by as much as 10 syllables. This will perhaps be evident from the following data taken from the first hundred verses of the 1st Act of the libretto. In this sample we find 2 two-syllable lines, 3 three-syllable, 9 five-syllable, 18 six-syllable, 12 seven-syllable, 26 eight-syllable, 15 nine-syllable, 11 ten-syllable, and 2 eleven-syllable lines. Zeyer keeps to an iambic metre by using anacrusis, which Janáček declaims generally on the last arsis of a bar or else neutralises by using corresponding values: "Kles s tebou" as a half-note triplet, *Tam najdeš* as three quavers and sometimes, in fact quite often, even prolonging the anacrusis as against the subsequent text.

To make an automatic connection between the Wagnerian attributes of the text (Siegfried's sword and Trut's flail) and the music of assumed Late Romantic orientation, is to express the situation in only very approximate terms. The musical logic of *Šárka* is in fact already close to interest in the melody of speech. Janáček was to start recording these speech melodies systematically only subsequently, but the interest was already fundamentally formed in his mind. We should remember that in his monastery boarding school years and during his studies Janáček



The Beginning of a Romance – autograph of piano reduction

the times of Smetana's *Libuše*, especially in relation to costume, or perhaps with radical changes that may be against the spirit of Zeyer and even of Janáček?! The director J.A. Pitínský has managed to revive Fibich-Vrchlický's *Death of Hippodamie* for the modern audience in a remarkable way, and I hope that Šárka's time will come too.

The Beginning of a Romance

Some years ago, at the beginning of a musicological career that has had such notable results for Janáček scholarship, John Tyrrell showed that despite the enthusiasm of the local critics (K.Sázavský in the Moravian Eagle of the 13th of February 1894 welcomed the little work as a major oeuvre and stressed that Janáček had won three garlands: silver, laurel and "...from national offerings" (Tyrrell comments that national offerings were collections for charitable purposes, the contributors rewarded with receipts on card or stickers. In this case well-wishers probably clubbed together to buy Janáček a third wreath), this second opera was just a singspiel composition put together ad hoc, with Janáček adapting existing music to the text. The composer himself admitted this in an apparently self critical statement in his autobiography of 1924. Tyrrell makes a telling comment on this passage in a note to his English translation in his book *Janáček's Operas – A documentary Account* (Faber and Faber, London 1992): "*bylo nevkusno mi vnucovat do něho národní písničky*" (...)
The Czech is ambiguous. [It could mean]: *It was tasteless of me to force folksong into it or I hated putting the folksongs into it.* By his quotation of a bad example from the piece, it seems that he was reproaching not himself but his librettist for forcing in the folksongs." (Tyrrell, op.cit., p. 40)

It therefore seems entirely understandable that both conductors of the National Theatre in Prague – Adolf Čech and Mořic Anger – failed to recommend the work when asked for a view by the director F.A. Šubert. Anger considered it a repetition of the principles employed in the ballet Rákóczy and noted, quite acutely, that it was more a lieder-spiel than an opera. Nonetheless, even the negative consequences of these events were to be significant for Janáček's further thoughts on opera. John Tyrrell aptly made the point when he gave his first study of the theme the subtitle *The musical prehistory of*

had already showed an unusual concern with phonetics and declamation, so that the ground was already laid for the basic change that came when he finally immersed himself in folklore, taught himself to make fast, precise records and then used this ability for the continual recording of the situations that fascinated him in the form of speech melodies. The period of his life in which he as it were retreated into the world of folksong and music followed the composition of Šárka and is one of the most interesting features of Janáček's creative development and of the evolution of Czech music as a whole at that time. Figuratively speaking, the composer progressively wrapped himself up in the protective case of a musical activity that involved deliberate renunciation of the primacy of original composition and was also perfectly to

impregnate (and almost to stop) his development as a composer and postpone his fundamental creative dilemma for more than a decade. After Šárka, Janáček had no need to move forward to Late Romanticism and its great syntheses. The apparent negligibility of folklorism (especially as far as major exploits in form were concerned), threw him in the direction of sound quality and rhythm. Paradoxically, Zeyer's refusal to allow the opera to be staged actually worked to the benefit of this profound transformation.

We now have a recording of Šárka in Sir Charles Mackerras's interpretation and it is of a standard that allows us to think seriously about the possibilities of actually staging the opera. Freed from the mythology and associated Czech historicism that has remained like silt on the Czech stage from as far back as



Jenufa – autograph

Janáček's: *Počátek románu* and its importance in shaping the composer's dramatic style (In: *Časopis Moravského muzea* [Journal of the Moravian Museum], ČMM LII-1967, Scientiae sociales, pp. 245–270). It would be folly to believe that the little work hides some exceptional residuum of style that has not yet been uncovered. What is probably more important is that with this apparently

regressive creation Janáček's interest in Late Romanticism came to a radical halt. So far it has not proved possible to rehabilitate the work on stage in any way that challenges the judgements set out above. The one exception has been Magdalena Švecová's production in the composer's jubilee year of 2004. The director underlined the work's character as Liederspiel and achieved what has hitherto

been clearly the best performance.

Nonetheless, it is important to add that in the *Beginning of a Romance* Janáček consolidated a convention that he had already discovered for himself in *Šárka*, i.e. one character quoting the statement of another. For the sake of brevity I have called this convention "monologue-dialogue". In *Šárka* we find it used in the very first lines of Ctirad, who

introduces himself to Přemysl and his entourage by repeating what his father has told him. In the same way Poluška “quotes” the young lord’s invitation to her to return. In neither case is this use of quotation particularly important or a determinant for the music, but what is not yet the case may become so. Later, the citation of some statement fundamental to the action in the spirit of Aeschylean drama was to become something very typical of Janáček, and we shall be able to give this point more emphasis as we move on to the third opera. The decade between the Beginning of a Romance and the third opera, *Jenufa*, was, however, the period of the miraculous birth of what was as it were a quite different Janáček – the composer after the cantata *Amarus*, who seemed to arise like the Phoenix from the fire of the 1870s/80s into the new century.

Jenufa

Historical discussion of this opera, which has been the crucial work for Janáček’s entry onto the European operatic stage, today tends to revolve round the question of Karel Kovařovic’s retouches. It is also fashionable to refer wittily to the basic aversion to the work expressed by Zdeněk Nejedlý, as formulated in his book *Czech Modern Opera since Smetana* (J. Otto, Praha 1911). Believing as I do that very few of the people willing to make sweeping judgements have actually had the opportunity to examine these two sources, I shall return to them at least fleetingly. The director of National Theatre’s opera Kovařovic retouched works in many cases (for example Smetana’s *My Country*), and so his retouches of Janáček are nothing odd and unusual. It is to succumb to mythmaking to interpret them as sheer violation of Janáček’s score, and we might well respond by asking why, in that case, Janáček did not immediately insist on the use of the “original version” of the opera immediately after Kovařovic’s death on the 6th of December 1920. The answer is probably that it did not exist in accessible form and that it needed to be recovered on the basis of study of the sources. This was something not accomplished until the years 1996–97, by John Tyrrell and Sir Charles Mackerras, when they published their “Brno Version 1908” (Leoš Janáček: *Jenufa* – Její pastorkyňa / Ihre Stieftochter / Her Stepdaughter, Brněnská verze / Bruenner Fassung / Brno Version 1908, UE 30 145,

Universal Edition Wien, undated, preface dated 1996).

Everyone who has engaged in detail with the question of the retouches has not been entirely sure whether they should be accepted or rejected. This point is very well illustrated, for example, in the monograph *Zur Genesis von Leoš Janáček’s Oper Jenufa* (Univerzita J.E. Purkyně, Brno 1971) by Bohumír Štědroň, who even after a lifetime’s study of the matter cannot bring himself to reject all of Kovařovic’s changes... As a brilliant essayist, Milan Kundera takes another view, of course, and homes in on the literary essence of the dispute. For him there can be no compromise but only emphatic condemnation of those who wanted to bring Janáček into line with the practice of the time. It is a hard-line argument that brooks no answer, as in the case of the dilemma Kafka versus Brod. See Milan Kundera’s *Testaments Betrayed*.

A quick comment on Nejedlý: He attacked Janáček in the book mentioned as a representative of a separatist Moravian trend. He writes: “[One] movement wants Moravia to take up a position alongside Bohemia and compete with Bohemia (of course when it acquires the necessary resources especially by building a National Theatre) on the field of the same, nation-wide art. Another movement wants Moravia to become, on the contrary, as independent as possible and to create something peculiarly its own that would be only Moravian and would therefore represent the art of the country.” Janáček in his view belongs to this second movement and Nejedlý argues against it specifically by saying, “There was no Moravian music in the past, and so it is entirely against the spirit of progress to want today to make an artificial distinction between these elements of Czech national art”. And we should probably remind ourselves of another quote from Nejedlý as well, because it is highly material: “For all his naturalism in terms of content, on the question of national music Janáček is just like the neo-Russian composers in being a manifest formalist, which today, after the work of Smetana, is definitely a step backwards in Czech opera. Janáček was once an explicit opponent of Smetana, and today we still cannot rank him among Smetana’s supporters. His hostility to Smetana was once a result of his musical conservatism, but as is clear at first sight this is something he has overcome, and today

both in musical (harmonic) terms and in terms of his dramatic style, entirely taken from spoken drama, he gives the impression of being a directly progressive composer.” And Nejedlý continues, “The chief theoretical error of Janáček’s experiment, but one which he shares with the Neo-Russian school and other theories of national music specifically among Slav nations, is the principle that in Slav opera song ought to be the main thing and the orchestra should only come second.”

Here Nejedlý is generalising too much on the basis of a limited knowledge of *Jenufa*, which he certainly had not seen performed in Brno or in Ostrava by 1911 when he wrote his book. At best he would have been dependent on the Brno Club of the Friends of Art piano reduction, undoubtedly the source of the only noted example in his account, on page 189 – *Jenufa*’s “With those persecuting eyes right to the heart, right to the heart” from Scene 1, Act 1. Nejedlý’s criticism of the speech melodies signally fails to identify the specific features of the use of these forms in the opera, but there is nothing personal about the general part of his criticism of the theory – it is simply a different vision of opera and its poetics. Nejedlý writes that: “Janáček builds his theory of national and folk music on what is called a ‘speech melody’, which for him is the musical motif of a certain form of vernacular speech. It is an opinion that derives from the last outcrops of scholarly romanticism in the study of folk song, music and speech. What this Romanticism does is to invest this form of expression with an enormous amount of atmosphere and psychological depth, when in fact this is precisely what sober research into this expression can never find (...) This is why this Romanticism, as soon as it is transferred into practical art, always weakens rather than strengthens any genuine folk character in that art. Janáček’s work is a case in point. His drama fails to be strong in terms of folk spirit because he bases folk character on the external, which he believes to be the expression of great spiritual depth but which is in fact often quite incidental, and its effect is therefore doubtful.” (Nejedlý, op.cit., pp. 189–190). Nejedlý points out Janáček’s dichotomy – the voice element contra the orchestra. He attributes to Janáček the position of a composer who subordinates the orchestra to the vocal expression. After all that had gone before Janáček or was still



The Fate – autograph of piano reduction

reverberating in his time, Nejedlý regards this as manifest regression and anachronism. And on page 190 he adds this interesting passage, “At points where Janáček does not come into contact with this body (meaning orchestra) and where his one-sided cult of the vocal element is not therefore detrimental to the power of the other element, the results are incomparably better. His choral works far surpass his dramatic work in artistic value and folk character.”

It is interesting that no one reviewing Jenůfa on the Czech side, whether in Brno in 1904 or in Prague in 1916, was willing to consider the verism of the opera, even though it is an opera so distinctive for its strong regionalism and the importance of the colour and atmosphere of a very specific place. In general, the verist replacement of the universal by the strongly regional setting aroused international admiration, and in a musicologist of Nejedlý’s erudition what therefore emerged as a certain prudery in relation to world movements is surprising. The reason for his reserve seems to be a combination of a curious modesty and the sense that Czech art had “different” tasks. Vladimír Macura in his excellent book *Znamení zrodu [The Sign of Birth]* has reminded us that in the period before March 1848, Czech writers considered the education of the people and similar improving aspirations to be far more essential than the primarily aesthetic aspect of a book or play... Perhaps this provides a clue as to why while the focus

on the folklore and regional detail is one of the most interesting sides to Janáček’s opera, Czech society seems to have been uninterested in it. By contrast, the Viennese critics in 1918 were in no doubt: in Korngold’s review we find the characterisation “verism in the subject, impressionism in the orchestra.” In Austria there were plenty of users and abusers of operatic verism and if Nejedlý’s distaste for it, purist to the point of puritanical, was not entirely isolated, that distaste simply highlights the late national revivalist attitudes for which every new Czech opera had to be above all a national opera. Paradoxically, then, what we have here is a national universalism clashing with a veristic internationally acknowledged regionalism. In the case of Jenůfa none of the Czech critics were struck by the fact that the novelty of the opera lay above all in the way it narrowed the setting to the mountainous region of Moravian Slovácko, a very distinctive region with a strong folk tradition.

If in 1911 Nejedlý decidedly rejected Moravian opera as such, seven years later the situation took another paradoxical twist. At the end of 1917 the collapsing Austria-Hungarian Monarchy made a last attempt to keep its territories intact precisely by seeking to stress regional and provincial (as opposed to separatist national) identity. The Vienna production of Jenůfa was staged on the 21st of February 1918 despite challenges in parliament from the Moravian German deputies Schuerf, Weber and Wedra and was staged

“auf allerhöchste Anordnung” – i.e. directly by the decision of the Emperor Karl. This situation put Janáček in difficult political position (in the sense of making him apparently “loyal” to the court), because his “Moravian” opera became par excellence the subject of a degree of manipulation of the criticism through court cultural politics. At that point, of course, it still seemed that the “verism” of Jenůfa would be a permanent guarantee of folklorism of staging – costumes, customs etc. Contemporary directors do not feel bound to respect these aspects and on the contrary have reset the opera in a time of declining village traditions or even in different, virtually neutral black-and-white ceremonial costumes (Glyndebourne Theatre) with something almost Klezmeresque about them, or just with a minimum of folk “professionals” (Pountney in Vienna and in Brno 2004).

The Fate

I was actually present at the “world premiere” on the 25th of October 1958 at the Na hradbách Theatre in Brno, then known as the Janáček Theatre. I well remember the awkwardness of the production in overall direction and almost all particular aspects. It was clear from the start that the problem was one of the incompatibility between the libretto, itself an incongruous mixture of the rather ephemeral and affected poetic language of Fedora Bartošová (supposed to resemble the style of the poets of Czech Art Nouveau and



The Excursions of Mr. Brouček (To the Moon)
– autograph

Katya Kabanova – autograph



Decadence), and Janáček's now almost ten years of experience with naturalism and the prose of the speech melodies and Janáček's music, which in Czech conditions brilliantly synthesised experience of Impressionism and Verism with the first waves of Expressionism.

Janáček's new monologue-dialogue convention (i.e. the quotation or imitation of what another character had said or might say in a particular situation), had already become conspicuous in *Jenufa*. In *Šárka* and the *Beginning of a Romance* the quotations concerned had been minor and dramatically rather formal, but the method had evidently caught Janáček's attention and he turned it into a stronger and permanent element of his idiom. One example is when *Kostelníčka* decides to take action under the onslaught of the as yet imaginary words of the crowd, coming down on her with the words, "*Vidíte ji, Kostelníčku!!*" – "*You see her, Kostelníčka*". From now on Janáček was always prepared to employ monologue-dialogue whenever it was potentially more interesting and paradoxically "more dramatic" than dialogue. In monologue, after all, an individual is imitating someone else and so actually "interpreting" that other person – parodying, emphasising particular features. This method reaches its

apogee in his final opera, as we shall see below.

There have been plenty of attempts to "fix" the libretto of *Fate* as a means to making a breakthrough in its staging (and I have seen almost all of them), but up to Wilson they have failed to convince. The "formal" approach (which means virtually completely abandoning any attempt to solve the illogicalities of the libretto and concentrating on the lighting plan and the choreography of the characters), perfectly bridged all the illogical passages. This is particularly evident at the ends of the 2nd and 3rd movements. *Fate* has thus become an opera between verism and lessons taken from impressionism with tinges of expressionism. It can be played on any kind of stage and it "only" requires a good dose of directorial imagination for it to become a scene from the life of the composer. Indeed, I even think that the time is ripe for presentation of its unintended charms, for example Janáček's exhibitionism in a difficult situation in life, his self-pity and masochism, and the unconscious charm arising from the almost comic combination of the two incongruous levels of the text and double poetries... The opera has also benefited from all the translations, for example Rodney

Blumer's used on Sir Charles Mackerras's recording with the Welsh National Opera (EMI CDC7 49993 2 1990), since these have toned down or even got rid of the over-exalted passages in Bartoňová's text.

The Excursions of Mr. Brouček

Burlesque opera is something entirely new in Czech conditions, and as we reflect on Janáček's positive attitude to verism, we can now move on to the exotico type of verism that came to dominate the style after the rustico and borghese types and survived through the First World War to become part of the atmosphere of the avant-garde of the 1920s, as we can see in the case of Puccini's line of development from the pre-war western *La fanciulla del West* to *Turandot*. We should also note that while Janáček took a long time to write the first part of the *Excursions*, the second part was completed much faster, enabling the composer to react satirically and settle some scores with Zdeněk Nejedlý, for example, as has been demonstrated in an interesting way by Vladimír Karbusický.

At a time when Janáček was seen as a representative of the exotic current of East



The Cunning Little Vixen – autograph

the popularly successful line of European Opera at the beginning of the 20th century. We find something similar, for example, in the symphonic rhapsody *Taras Bulba*, where at times it is as if Janáček was longing for a Straussian and Novák-Suk style orchestra only to return to the conventions that he had developed for himself and was not about to abandon (fourth chords and melodic backgrounds no longer in the position of background, a preference for composing in layers, abandonment of two-, four- or eight-bar phrasing and the evolutionary motif-thematic stereotype, and especially the employment of montage techniques).

Katya Kabanova

With this opera, which evidently brought Janáček the greatest success of his lifetime at the Berlin premiere on the 31st of May 1926 in Charlottenburg, what is striking is the composer's achievement in overcoming the stereotype of Russian colour and atmosphere. Gennady Rozhdestvensky put it very well in an interview he gave me for the *Opus Musicum* review in 1970: "I particularly respect Janáček's 'Russian' pieces above all because they are so perfectly free of external 'Russianness'. With his music Janáček expresses the very spirit of the works (I mean the literary models) – the inner power and, if you like, the internationalism of authors like Gogol, Ostrovsky and Dostoevsky. This analogy worked for me in parallel with the apparent "non-Russianness" of composers such as Scriabin or Shostakovich, for example, although you cannot imagine them outside Russia. Here too an ethnographic approach to their music is not the point; the point is the inner essence." (In: *Opus musicum*, 2-1970, no. 7, p. 204).

In this opera we find what is probably the most concentrated lyrical study of a woman in Janáček's output, and one that is a kind of modern counterpart to *La Traviata*. The director who has "shaken up" the poetics of the piece, in a positive sense, is Christoph Marthaler with his use of a high-rise modern communist housing estate (evidently Lesná in Brno) as the setting for his production. Petr Kofroň has contributed the rather less fundamental but nonetheless interesting discovery that Katya could not actually have killed herself in her "own" town by jumping

European music and was pigeon-holed as a composer of a "national" school, it occurred to no one that the opera could be considered away from national context as the first to use the idea of waltz burlesque, together with Richard Strauss and his *Rosenkavalier*. Further directorial innovations can certainly be expected with *Excursions*, including more emphasis of its character as a sort of "musical", but despite new ideas of directors, we shall certainly be looking harder at the significance of a number of conventions that it exhibits – for any further Janáček opera analysis there remains plenty of inspiration to be tapped from John Tyrell's article *Katarzní pomalý valčík a další konvence ve finále Janáčkových oper* [The Cathartic Slow Waltz and Other Conventions in the Finales of Janáček's Operas] (In: *Opus musicum*, XX-1988, no. 10, pp. 289-311).

In *Excursions*, too, we can see an expansion of the monologue-dialogue passages, while one little known feature is the use of the viola d'amour. The instrument first appeared in Janáček's opera scores in the fourth opera *Fate*, but in *Excursions* the composer even considered using a whole group of the instruments. The finale to the 1st part of the opera, although cut from the final version, is also testimony to something previously unknown in Czech opera – an almost collage-style chaos in the genuine finale concertato, representing a quarrel involving several people... (Those interested in this situation will find it in the Supraphon recording *Janáček Unknown* (Supraphon 11 1878-2 931))

Musically, *Excursions* remain a great challenge to analysis because they contain the culminating synthesis of "modernism" with more compromising attempts to respond to

into the water, because along its entire bank is too shallow and muddy... Be that as it may, when we look at the model Ostrovsky's *Storm*, in the Russian original (A. N. Ostrovskij: *Storm, Forest, the Bride without a Dowry*, Chudozhestvennaya literatura, Moskva 1968), we can see that Janáček altered the end of the story significantly. In the Ostrovsky story, Katya throws herself off a cliff, as we know from the comment of one of the men bringing in her lifeless body, "Of course she's not alive! She threw herself off a height – there is a cliff here and she fell on an anchor." As we see, Katya killed herself by falling on an anchor from a height, but Janáček, so as not to have to explain the circumstance in the moment of culminating tension when every second sentence is a dead weight, struck it out together with the moralising words of Kuligin that follow as he brings then dead Katya to Kabanov: "Take your Katherine! Do with her as you will! Here lies her body, take it. Her soul is no longer yours, it waits before a judge more merciful than yours..." Moving, but a drag on the action, as Janáček, a dramatist of a different type, recognised. Incidentally, Janáček already knew from Peter Bogatyrev in 1926 that there already existed an opera of *The Storm* – *Groza*, and had even read extracts from its libretto, in which the great Ostrovsky entirely destroyed his own drama by changing his text into a kind of singspiel rhyming vaudeville.

The Cunning Little Vixen

An opera that juxtaposes the world of animals with the world of human beings is at the same time an opera with remarkable configurations of language layers. There are three very distinct language levels: the local dialect of the rural setting, Bílovice near Brno; an ordinary "universal" Czech with a tinge of Brno city slang; and hyper-correct Czech in the courtship of the fox and the vixen. This presented a major problem for example in German-speaking environments, where the choice of dialect usually meant that a translation was suitable either for the north or south of Germany but not for both. Some of these problems have disappeared today thanks to modern technical development. What continues to be clear, however, is the striking sonority and richness of the timbres of the score, which approach Impressionism and have led many musicologists to comment on



the "impressionism" of this opera in particular (e.g. Jan Racek: *L'impressionisme de Janáček*. In: *Acta janáčkána II*, Czech Music Society-Leoš Janáček Society, Brno 1985, pp. 45–50). The most pregnant expression of Janáček's interest in Debussian symbolism and impressionism seems to be his own analysis of *La Mer*, which I have twice published, most recently in the book *Leoš Janáček a hudba 20. století. Paralely, sondy, dokumenty* [Leoš Janáček and the Music of the 20th Century. *Parallels, Probes, Documents*] (Nadace Universitas Masarykiana, Scientia series, MU Brno 1998, pp. 82–86). Of all the composer's operas, it is the *Cunning Little Vixen* that seems to be the subject of the greatest changes in terms of directorial approach, but in terms of quality I believe that

the most fundamental production of the opera has been Mackerras's Paris version, which manifestly inclines to the opera-ballet type so popular and historically rooted in France. Philosophically, the power of this opera is probably to do with the nostalgia that so perfectly harmonises with the original model and environment and has been so well defined and explored in the writings of Milan Kundera.

The Makropulos Affair

I once tried with the composer Arnošt Parsch to analyse all the melodic lines of this opera using a computer. I hope that the exercise was useful methodologically and threw light on the relationship between Janáček's



From the House of the Dead – autograph

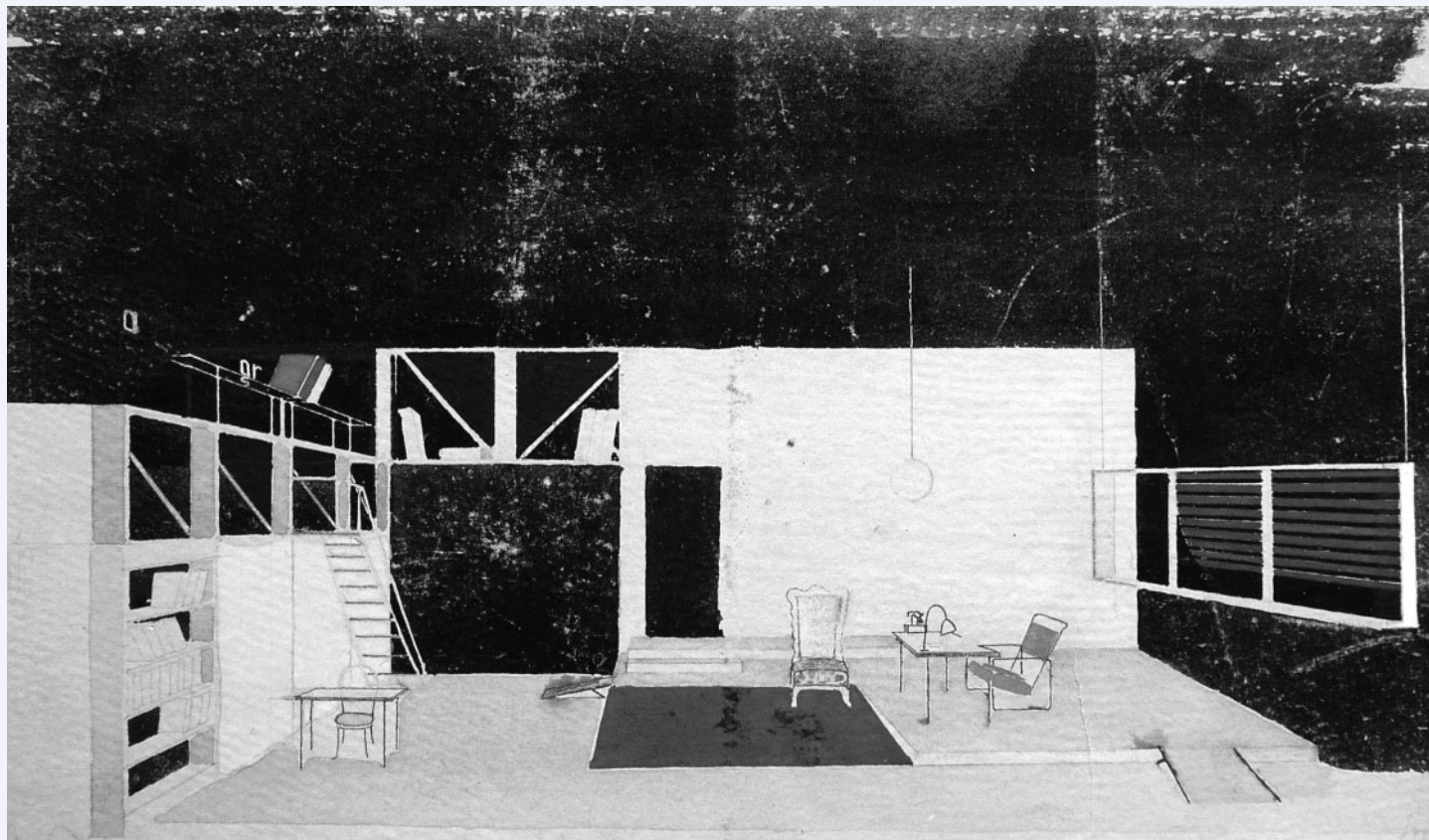
melodies of operatic type and the melodies based on speech and that we managed to document the probability of the occurrence of several intervals after others. On the other hand, probably the most striking result for us as the authors of the research and for anyone else interested in the theme was the generally logical, but here statistically proven discovery that two characters differ markedly from the others in the opera: they are Hauk, whose deviancy is evidently grounded in and supported by intervals, and Dr. Kolenatý, who as a lawyer is constantly quoting and so he often just repeats the same note. Tackling the libretto Janáček behaved like an experienced stage writer and eliminated all the long-drawn out philosophising commentaries in the style of economical TV scripts today. Janáček retained only the minimum from Čapek's extensive philosophising, but this was clearly to the benefit of an opera that is modernistically tight and brisk. Purely personally, I regret that the libretto does not contain Čapek's idea from the play, when just before her death Emilia Marty tells Bertík that "there

is no love in the Universe." This is the almost Taoist climax in Čapek's play. Musically the major influence in the Makropulos Case is that of the sound techniques of the avant-garde in the 1920s: fourth chords above all, but many others as well. We also see the ongoing development of the monologue-dialogue convention, already primed for its culminating deployment in the opera *From the House of the Dead*. In my view emphasis on the historicism of the Rudolphine setting and greater contrasts between the languages of the opera (German alongside Czech, Latin, Spanish and Greek) may characterise future directorial conceptions of this opera, and directors are happily already moving away from choosing singers for the main role with an eye to the character's supposed 300-year curriculum vitae and towards the youngest and most appropriate singers.

From the House of the Dead

This prison and even (increasingly in recent productions) concentration-camp

opera, virtually devoid of women, is a great challenge for directors. It has the potential to be an ideal film or television opera, but perhaps its most remarkable characteristic is the timelessness of characters for whom life is only a memory and for whom there is no future. This means that its threesome of narratives – two long and one episodic – have something of the static sculptural relief about them, but the internal tension of the situation and the power of the monologues imitating past dialogues is so great that one doesn't even begin to wonder if a dialogic opera might have been more "dramatic". Konrad Lorenz reflected on what humanity is, how it was born and whether it is not already dying. Here Janáček – although he had a great interest in everything new in the first half of the 20th century – touched on an existentialism of almost Beckettian type but derived from another source. When composing his sketches of stage music for Gerhard Hauptmann's *Schluck und Jau* in the last year of his life, he came into contact – evidently for the first time in such extreme form – with the



Stage design for *The Makropulos Affair* by Hugo Foltýn (above)

Costume design for *The Fate* by J. A. Čátek (Brno, 1958)

figures of homeless people who expect nothing and therefore have a different attitude to life. They very much resemble the characters of his last opera and foreshadow Beckett's protagonists in *Waiting for Godot*. One particular problem in the opera is the Russisms that Janáček included without always seeming to have understood every expression well himself, transferring them into the libretto from the Russian original apparently simply because he liked the way they sounded. Under pressure of production schedules, Osvald Chlubna and Břetislav Bakala, who revised the opera, often made decisions that go against the spirit of Dostoyevsky's text, and sometimes are even directly contradictory to it (See Miloš Štědroň: *Errata v libretu Janáčkovy opery Z mrtvého domu* [Errata in the Libretto to Janáček's Opera *From the House of the Dead*] (Dostoyevsky, Janáček, Bakala, Chlubna) In: *Opus musicum*, 26-1994, no. 7, pp. 201–204)

Conclusion

Can an editor, organiser and musician really advise directors and conductors on what to do next? Clearly, each successive era will emphasise different problems. What should be done with purely theoretical insights of the monologue-dialogue type? What about montage methods? Should we sometimes take the thorny path back to the sources or to accept the working ver-

sions? Should we go back to the "original" form of Jenufa type and put the accent on the very difficult and complicated evidence of sketches and autographs, however much these are the product of the particular ideas of the time about sound and were later corrected by actual production experience (for example the group of violas d'amour in the *Excursions of Mr. Brouček* or the viola d'amour in *The Fate*, so far piously employed only by Mackerras, and so forth)? The best I can probably do in conclusion is to paraphrase Plato's *Defense of Socrates* by saying that "each of us goes his own way": organisers will go to their scores and scholars will return to their sources, while conductors, performers and directors will go to their podiums, stages and productions. They to their stage, we to the auditorium, and which is the better way – as Plato says – only God knows...

The photos reproduced are property of Janáček's Archive of Moravian Land Museum. Photo: Jan Mikota

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

String Quartet no. 11 in F minor, no. 12 in E flat major, no. 13 in B-major (with Grosse Fugue), no. 14 in C sharp minor, no. 15 in A minor, no. 16 in F-major

The Smetana Quartet: Jiří Novák – 1st Violin, Lubomír Kostecký – 2nd Violin, Milan Škampa – viola, Antonín Kohout – Cello. Production: not stated. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz.. Recorded 1961, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1970. Released: 2006. TT: 63:36, 71:01, 77:44. ADD. 3 CD Supraphon SU 3870 – 2.

More than fifteen years after the **Smetana Quartet** ended its career, there is no doubt that its recordings have stood the test of time and there is good reason to go back to them. The booklet for the re-edition this time contains an unusually personal text from Miloš Pokora. It presents the important facts but is to a large extent a eulogistic analysis of the performance. It is appropriate that there should be more than the usual standardised biographies here and I think it is also a good guide for the listener if the author of the booklet text draws attention to the balance between the emotional and rational elements, the long process of search and gradual ripening, the youthful energy and sufficient maturity and the "synthesis of romantic sound with classicist order". The oldest recording of the complete set is from 1961, when they recorded the *Quartet op. 95 in F minor*, the shortest and most concentrated, and if not one of the "late quartets", still the best introduction to Beethoven's quartet art. In the same year they also recorded the heroic *op. 127 in E flat major*. It cannot be said that the Smetana Quartet was entirely without competition in the 1960s. The achievement of the Vlach Quartet, which recorded its own Beethoven quartets at the same time, is likewise absolutely exceptional, and in its sensibility, the technical qualities of the individual players and often unparalleled expressive power, the Vlach Quartet surpasses the Smetana Quartet. The Smetana Quartet by contrast is strong in terms of well worked out conception, inner logic and legibility, homogeneity of sound and unified spirit. In the 1960s, therefore, we had two different ensembles capable of performing the most difficult works in quartet repertoire at the highest international standard. Top interpretation is always a matter of wholeness and the strength of this recording lies precisely in this integrity. The balance between feeling for the whole and for detail is here absolutely model. Although today's generation is better equipped technically, it is noteworthy that the Smetana Quartet still holds it own very well in the overall picture. It is well known that Beethoven did not find composing easy and that behind just a few bars of his music there were dozens of sketches and many hours of strenuous work. Just this extraordinary perseverance and dedication is typical of the Smetana Quartet as well, and it adds authenticity to their interpretations. For the design Supraphon has used its older LP disks with well known photographs – the CD is in all aspects a wager on tried and tested quality.

JINDŘICH BÁLEK

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

Arias

(Le nozze di Figaro, Così fan tutte, La clemenza di Tito, Idomeneo; concert arias: Ch'io mi scordi di te? – Non temer, amato bene K 505, Vado, ma dove? o Dei K 583, Alma grande, e nobil core! K 578)

Magdalena Kožená – mezzosoprano, Jos van Immerseel – fortepiano, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Sir Simon Rattle. Production: Marita Prohmann. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 12/2005, AIR Studios, Lyndhurst Hall, London. Released: 2006. TT: 67:56. DDD. 1 CD Archiv Produktion / Deutsche Grammophon 477 6272 (Universal Music).

My attitude to the singer **Magdalena Kožená** has changed little over the 11 years of her career. Unlike some Czech reviewers who once treated her with condescension and contempt and today uncritically praise her to the skies, I am known for having always taken some issue with details of her technique and expression in some music. Nonetheless, her first Mozart album, and moreover an album made with her partner in life and ideal conductor, is excellent to a degree that is breathtaking. In the comprehensiveness of its virtues it is the kind of record I have never come across before and surpasses even her French album, which until now I considered to be the high point of her opera recital activities.

Dramaturgy: Magdalena Kožená seems to have an inborn talent for the selection of pieces, clearly cultivated by contact with people from whom she can (and wants to) learn. In the past these have included Johnson, Martineau, Minkowski and Goebel, while currently it is **Sir Simon Rattle**. **Performance:** The involvement of **José van Immerseel** has made K. 505 an even more brilliant gem than it was at Kožená's wonderful concert with the Prague Chamber Philharmonic last summer. A real musical fairytale! To say that the **Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment** is in the very front rank of the world's large ensembles using original instruments tuned in the original way is to seem to be dealing in clichés. But this Mozart sets the seal on the orchestra's primacy. And to perform under imaginative direction must be hugely inspiring. Kožená uses dozens of expressive refinements, nuances in voice or the articulation of voice. I don't know whether Mozart is one of her favourite composers, but it seems so from the result. It will give great pleasure to listeners. Incidentally, the authentic low tuning allows her to sing soprano parts equally well. (I am curious as to whether DG will also bring out a DVD, as has become its practice recently.) **Resumé:** This CD is simply faultless. The only thing the owner of this jewel might have welcomed would have been a more detailed sleeve-note.

LUBOŠ STEHLÍK

Jiří Bárta has finally attracted the attention of a prestigious foreign label, and the result is so remarkable that I hope it is only the start. While he made a fleeting appearance on one of Magdalena Kožená's records for Deutsche Grammophon, it is only now that has found a worthy space to realise his own conceptions. Given that Ignác Moscheles (1794–1870) came from Prague, and that Bárta is performing with the brilliant **Hamish Milne**, the choice of music was a happy one. The *Sonata in E major* is a superb melodic and harmonic spider-web, into which Bárta sinks with audible pleasure. It has a wonderful spectrum of dynamics, a plethora of opportunities for expression and romantic tenderness. As played by both musicians, Moscheles is an exquisite flower and easily intoxicates the ear. The references to the Czech musical background are pleasing. The result is simply brilliant.

It was a great discovery for me to hear the three pieces from the ten-part cycle *Melodico-contrapuntal studies*, in which Moscheles' offered a free and virtuoso treatment of music from Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier without slavish sycophancy to the great Baroque master. The performance is so wonderful that the listener is sorry not to be able to hear the whole cycle. Perhaps, indeed, this would have been a better idea than the inclusion of the *Sonata in A major* by Johann Hummel (1778–1837); the latter has its qualities and in terms of the conception of the CD the choice is defensible, but alongside the moving and stormy Moscheles it sounds too predictable and brings nothing new. It should be added, however, that the performers play it with great erudition and conviction in their efforts to turn a small master into a Maestro.

I have special praise for the sound quality of the recording, which is very intimate even in the details and unusually plastic. The reproduction of a painting of Prague Castle by Antonín Mánes (1784–1843) on the cover booklet is appealing homage to the Czech cellist and to Ignác Moscheles. Jiří Bárta has made his entry into the British (and so the international) recording world in grand style.

LUBOŠ STEHLÍK



Ignaz Moscheles

Sonata for Piano and Cello no. 2 in E major op. 121, Melodico-contrapuntal Studies Op. 137 (nos. 4, 8 and 9)

Johann Nepomuk Hummel

Sonata for Piano and Cello in A major op. 104

Jiří Bárta – cello, Hamish Milne – piano. Production: Simon Perry. Text: Eng., Fr., Ger. Recorded: 2/2005, Wathen Hall, Barnes, London. Released: 2005. TT: 64:55. DDD. 1 CD Hyperion CDA67521.

The CD is further proof of the rising standard of Czech orchestras performing early music on historical instruments or replicas. All the members of the **Collegium Marianum** ensemble have an excellent training and enthusiasm, their commitment to individual study, self-discipline and demanding leadership (the musical director is Jana Semerádová, who with Václav Kapsa has also created the parts from the museum original scores) have brought them to a remarkably high standard. That is just one very positive aspect of the project. The second is the very sensitive conception and arrangement of the album, reminding one of a perfect set of gears. The third is the quality of the music, created or played in Prague when it was just a "province". Brentner's concerto, for example, is enormously appealing. Altogether the instrumental parts of the project are the strongest. In the sacred arias **Hana Blažíková** shows herself to be a promising soprano, but she does not seem to be the instrumental singer type (which the Czech Republic lacks) and she still needs to do a lot of work. Her engagement was rather one-stringed, and one wonders whether it might not be better to keep such projects purely instrumental when a record company cannot afford to engage a top singer from abroad. The sound director has acquitted himself with honour, managing to combine the atmosphere of the acknowledged church interior and the transparency of an instrumental sound unblurred by a church echo.

LUBOŠ STEHLÍK



Hudba barokní Prahy II / The Music of Baroque Prague II

Jan Josef Ignác Brentner: *Concerto V in F major, Concerto III in B major, Aria V in G major, Aria II in C minor*. Šimon Brix: *Tu es Deus*. Francesco Bartolomeo Conti: *O Virgo gratiosa*. František Ignác Antonín Tůma: *Partita in C major*. Antonín Reichenauer: *Concerto in B major, Ó coeli, rorate*. Johann Friedrich Fasch: *Concerto in D major*

Collegium Marianum, Hana Blažíková – soprano.

Production: Collegium Marianum. Text: Cz., Eng. Recorded: 9/2005, The Church of Our Lady Queen of Angels, Monastery of the Capuchins in Prague. Released: 2006. TT: 68:28. DDD. 1 CD Collegium Marianum CM 06001.

When we hear the name Talich, we think of him first and foremost as a protagonist of Czech national music. This is right as far as it goes, but very narrow! It is an enormous pity that circumstances, time and illness prevented him from undertaking larger and more numerous recording projects. Talich was a distinguished and informed conductor of Mahler, for example, and modern music both Czech and international. Alongside the Czech masters there were a number of composers who inspired him to exceptional achievements. In first place among them was Mozart. This CD brings together several recordings that are eloquent on many levels in respect to Mozart, and in fact there are so many of these that others appear on other CDs in what is a major Talich edition. After the first CD, containing a recording of Mozart's Symphony no. 39 in E flat major and the Concertante Symphony for Winds, we now have another selection of Talich's Mozart record-



Václav Talich – Special Edition 9

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Overtures from the operas *Le nozze di Figaro* and the *Magic Flute*, Symphony no. 33 in B major K 319 and no. 38 in D major “Prague” K 504

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky

Suite no. 4 in G major *Mozartiana*, op. 61

The Chamber Orchestra of the Slovak Philharmonic, the Czech Philharmonic, the Slovak Philharmonic, Václav Talich. Production Petr Kadlec. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: 1950 – 1954, Bratislava, Praha. Released: 2006. TT: 75:10. ADD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3829-2.

ings plus the witty addition of a Slovak recording of Tchaikovsky's *Mozartiana Suite*, composed on Mozart themes. This time these are far from just original Supraphon recordings, and a major role is played here by radio recordings from public concerts in Prague. It is entirely logical that these radio recordings should turn out technically superior, since they are more recent and were for the most part already made on tape. There are, however, notable differences between them, even though they were made in the same year, 1954, at a time when Talich had returned to the Prague concert podium and was in the very last phase of his career. Technically the recordings from the June concert have emerged as the best, although the brilliantly played overture to the *Magic Flute* is too echoing and acoustically as it were overstuffed. Nor does the Prague Symphony of November come out badly. Technically the situation is worse with the original Supraphon recordings, especially in the case of the *Marriage of Figaro*, which can really only serve as a historical record now. It is a pity, especially when we consider that many old recordings released by other companies (Cantus Classics, Naxos), have emerged remastered in a way that means we can hardly tell which recordings were made in the thirties, forties and even fifties! What all these different recordings on the present CD have in common, however, is their artistic value. This is a brilliant and highly individual rendering of Mozart, in many respects shedding light on later Czech Mozart creations (for example in the recordings of Josef Vlach!) Talich interprets the 33rd Symphony (a unique finale!) in a way that is galvanic, but with chamber feeling, and the Prague Symphony is fantastic, with a spry but still supremely authentic tempo in the slow movement. Talich's interpretation of Tchaikovsky's *Mozartiana* (Supraphon made this recording with the Slovak Philharmonic at the beginning of the 1950s) is one of the most fully thought out versions available even today, especially in the colourful expressive kaleidoscope of the final movement. The CD sleeve notes including the text by the booklet editor Petr Kadlec on Talich's relationship to Mozart are of a very solid standard.

BOHUSLAV VÍTEK

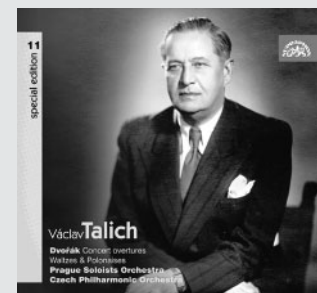


Bedřich Smetana *String Quartets*

The Wihan Quartet: Leoš Čepický, Jan Schulmeister – violin, Jiří Žigmund – viola, Aleš Kaspřík – cello. Production: Jiří Štílec. Text: Eng., Cz. Recorded: 2005–6, Prague. Published: 2006. TT: 48:33. DDD. 1 CD ArcoDiva UP 0086-2 131 (distribution Classic).

After recording all of Beethoven's quartets, the **Wihan Quartet** has moved on to record both the string quartets of Bedřich Smetana – no. 1 in E minor “*From my life*” and no. 2 in D minor. Smetana wrote the first quartet seven years before the second. It is not such a long gap, but the second was his summarising work, written literally just before his death (it was premiered in January 1884). Both quartets, however, are the personal testimony of a composer struggling with deafness, and listening to them on this CD is an opportunity to reflect on their place in the composer's chamber legacy and to get to know the Wihan Quartet's particular approach to their performance. The emotionalism that permeates both works is natural to the Wihan Quartet. It performs the first opus with a pithy musicality but one that also involves a certain prudery when it comes to the expressive rippling – it never goes beyond the limits of a subconscious feeling for proportion. The second, less well known and therefore not so “well-worn” quartet is played by the Wihan musicians with such passion and commitment that all the movements come across as just as communicative and full of meaning as the first quartet. The precision and accurate interplay shown in the fourth movements, for example, or the melodiousness and lamenting warmth of the slow movements are model examples of excellence.

EVA VÍTOVÁ



Antonín Dvořák is the composer who figures the largest in the relatively small archive of Talich recordings, and in many cases the Dvořák recordings have become unwritten models of performance. In this connection we usually mean recordings of the symphonies, concertos, *Stabat Mater*, and in some cases the symphonic poems, but we should say right away that this CD contains relatively unknown recordings, which is precisely what makes it so exceptional and so valuable. In fact, it is one of the many examples of originality in the new Talich edition produced by the young musicologist Petr Kadlec. It is true that the triptych of symphonic overtures has already been reissued on the so-called postal edition for the 100th anniversary of the Czech Philharmonic, but from the earlier period (particularly the radio broadcasts) we only know *Carnival* and to some extent *Othello*. From the point of view of technical standard, however, Talich's recordings of these pieces cannot be considered a cycle (for a time Dvořák called them *Nature, Life, Love*). If we listen to the *In Nature's Realm* overture, we are very drastically taken aback by the technical level. This recording was made at the end of 1948, which makes it the first of the legendary series that **Talich** gradually produced under the communist regime. At that time they were still not recorded on tape, and to make things worse, the recording, which is certainly as artistically convincing and radiant with typical Dvořákian luminosity as *Carnival* and *Othello*, never came out as an LP, and so was never in any way processed before. Despite the attempt at the most painstaking reconstruction, the problems are unfortunately evident, just as they were on the “postal” edition for which the London Abbey Road Studios did the sound treatment. It is, however, interesting that other recordings on the CD

that are much older (i.e. both polonaises and the first version of the Waltzes recorded as early as 1940) turn out to be technically superior! With these we have, on the contrary, to reconcile ourselves to minor artistic problems in the form of small faults in the ensemble play and sometimes in intonation – since at the time of the recording there was no way of removing or subsequently adjusting them. These faults can easily be forgiven, however, when the small pieces that today are often presented as “by-products” are absolutely captivating for the brilliant musical commitment and elan and the point up of some interesting details (the superb trio in the *Polonaise in E flat major*, the harp accompaniment in *Polonaise from Rusalka*). We have the chance to hear the *Waltzes* (in the original piano version nos. 1 and 4) arranged by Dvořák for strings, not only as a pleasant bonus on the recordings from 1940, but above all in a polished version with the ensemble that Václav Talich specially put together in 1951 – at that time to produce a recording of the *Serenade in E major*. It is interesting that from the artistic viewpoint the difference between this latter bravura performance by the **Orchestra of Prague Soloists** and that of the worthy Czech Philharmonic of 1940 is entirely imperceptible! The adornment of the CD is of course the relatively well known model recording of *Carnival* and especially *Othello* (perhaps even more ravishing in expression than *Carnival*) I must however confess that even I was a little disturbed by some minor – but evident – marks of ageing. The Talich editions has certainly come at the eleventh hour! The text in the booklet offers a wealth of quotations testifying to Talich's love of nature. On the other hand, there is a lack of wider information about the recordings themselves, even though this is common in many foreign re-editions and such information is extremely interesting for listeners.

BOHUSLAV VÍTEK

With this CD we have the opportunity to hear an unusually emotive interpretation of the two best known and most often played Dvořák piano trios. The **Smetana Trio** plays them with great vibrancy, immediacy and conviction. Vivid sound colour combines here with deeply, perfectly felt agogics and brilliant work with tempo has endowed Dvořák's music with a surprisingly extensive and free space for what the listener expects in the romantic “landscape behind the music”. The *Dumkas* with their mood contrasts emerge on this CD almost as symphonic poems, while the *Piano Trio in F minor* approaches a real symphony not only in terms of proportion, but above all in overall conception and sound. With the latter trio we also have a chance to draw a very interesting comparison, because the Smetana Trio made another recording of it five years ago for the Lotos label, but with the violin part taken by Hana Kotková rather than Jana Vonášková. Where this new recording shines is in its unmistakably juicier sound and greater maturity of expression. In overall conception what is evidently the biggest surprise is the final movement, where the performers have chosen a somewhat calmer tempo than in the earlier version. The quality of this project is enhanced by Vít Roubíček's erudite and insightful accompanying text and by the exceptionally effective and imaginative graphic design of the booklet, dominated by the excellent photography of David Port. The Smetana Quartet has been very fortunate in its choice of “court photographer”, since his photos are among the best I have ever seen in this field.

VĚROSLAV NĚMEC

Now six years old, this recording of both series of Dvořák's Slavonic Dances, with Sir Charles Mackerras conducting the Czech Philharmonic, still has a great deal to offer listeners. First and foremost Mackerras deserves praise for his work with rhythm and tempo, since Dvořák demands quite frequent variability that must however remain “orderly” in dance style. Mackerras's not just technically but above all artistically excellent treatment is captivating for the complete clarity of the interpretation; governed by order and precision (the orchestra faultlessly respects Dvořák's accents and dynamic and tempo instructions), but nevertheless enormous charm. It is clear that the conductor himself gets a great deal of pleasure and delight out of working with Dvořák's music, as is evident for example from his imaginative work with the musical structure, in which Mackerras finds ever new melodic lines that he emphasises with great musical ingenuity – the canon-style entries of the themes are particularly successful. The orchestra finishes melodic phrases with great sensitivity, but still play Dvořák's music with pure “Slavonic” understanding, which here shows its worth compared to affectations that communicate nothing. The recording will definitely thrill both the critics and more tolerant lovers of Dvořák's music, since it is brimming with the true qualities of professional musicianship and it is all to the good that it is being published again. What needs to be corrected, however, is some of the information in the booklet. On the 1st of August 1878 Dvořák was not at Špilberk, but on “Špicberk” (i.e. the Mountain Špičák in the Šumava), as is clearly written in the first folio of Dvořák's autograph of his seventh Slavonic Dance op. 46. I hope that this small comment will challenge the listener who enlivens his CD collection with this recording, not just to listen to the superb performance of Dvořák's music, but also to read through the accompanying and otherwise very sensitively written attached text on the history of the composition of the work.

TEREZA KIBICOVÁ

Václav Talich – Special Edition 11

Antonín Dvořák: *In Nature's Realm* op. 91, *Carnival* op. 92, *Othello* op. 93, *Waltzes for String Orchestra* from op. 54, *Polonaise in E flat major*, *Polonaise from the opera Rusalka*

The Orchestra of Prague Soloists, the Czech Philharmonic, Václav Talich. Production: Petr

Kadlec. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: 1940 – 1952, Prague. Published: 2006. TT: 68:18. ADD mono. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3831-2.

Gunther Rost – organ. Production: not stated.

Text: Ger., Eng. Recorded: 24. – 27. 11. 2003, Neubaukirche der Universität Würzburg. Released: 2005. TT: 73:35. DDD. 1 SACD Ursina Motette 12934

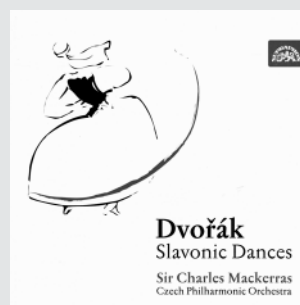


Antonín Dvořák

Dumkas op. 90, *Piano Trio in F minor* op. 65

The Smetana Trio: Jitka Čechová – piano, Jana

Vonášková – violin, Jan Páleníček – cello. Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: 3/2006, Studio Martinek, Prague. Released: 2006. TT: 67:02. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3872-2.



Antonín Dvořák

Slavonic Dances op. 46, op. 72

The Czech Philharmonic, Sir Charles Mackerras.

Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: 8.–11.4. 1999, The Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2005. TT: 71:13. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3808-2.



Leoš Janáček

Jenůfa / Její pastorkyňa

Gabriela Beňačková – Jenůfa, Naděžda Kniplová – Kostelníčka, Vilém Přibyl – Laca, Vladimír Krejčík – Števa, Choir and Opera of the Janáček Theatre in Brno, Josef Pančík – choir conductor, František Jílek – conductor. Production: not stated. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: 9/1977 and 1/1978, Janáček Theatre, Brno. Released: 2006. TT: 58:47 + 50:50. ADD. Digitally remastered. 2 CD Supraphon SU 3869-2.

I must admit to having a strong emotional attachment to this Supraphon recording of the end of the 1970s, because it was through this recording – first on vinyl, then on CD in its first re-edition – that I began to discover Janáček and his operas. Jílek's conception of the work as choir director and the striking performances of all the main singers created a kind of paradigm for interpretation of this opera of genius on the Czech opera scene for many years. Today, when Její pastorkyňa – Her Stepdaughter – is established under the title Jenůfa on the world's leading opera stages and there exist many other recordings with international stars, this second Supraphon reissue gives us a chance to reflect objectively on the qualities of the legendary Czech recording. Today we have become used to listening to Jenůfa without the cuts and alterations made by the conductor Karel Kovařovic, but this recording reflects an earlier phase of Janáček scholarship and reception of his work and so it still comes with the cuts and retouches. We might also have reservations about the psychologically relatively undeveloped conception of the two main female parts as interpreted by Gabriela Beňačková and Naděžda Kniplová. But the character of the Kostelníčka is so complex and can be interpreted in such different ways that even Kniplová's Kostelníčka, severe and fierce to the point of stridency, has its rationale and in any case we can admire her exceptionally huge voice. Nor can we fail to be struck by the voice of Gabriela Beňačková, which is unique in colour and lyricism even if her concept of Jenůfa is a rather too close to her concept of the lyrical Dvořák Rusalka. The new remastering of the recording has accentuated the voices, so that especially in the ensemble sections the individual parts stand out separately in an almost unreal unexpected way that makes it possible to hear even the little retorts that are usually naturally covered up by the orchestra or other voices on stage. With the solo passages, however, there is some reduced hum and background noise and acoustic over-sizing. Despite the thirty years that separate us from the making of the recording and the fact that conventions of interpretation had moved on, Jílek's Jenůfa remains a recording of unique quality.

EVA VELICKÁ



Bedřich Smetana

Hubička / The Kiss

Ludmila Červinková – Vendulka, Beno Blachut – Lukáš, Karel Kalaš – Paloucký, Přemysl Kočí – Tomeš, Marta Krásová – Martinka, Štefa Petrová – Barše, Vladimír Jedenáctík – Matouš, Karel Hruška – Constable, National Theatre Choir, Jarmil Burghauser – choirmaster, Orchestra of the National Theatre, Zdeněk Chalabala. Production: unstated. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: 30.6. and 1.–2. 7. 1952, Domovina, Prague. Issued: 2006. TT: 58:35, 44:52. ADD, digitally remastered. 2 CD Supraphon SU 3878-2.

The archives of Supraphon (this year celebrating an important anniversary) are full of real treasures! And the uncovering of these treasures in the form of re-editions is significant in many different ways. Most immediately, it meets our need to reassess and revive ideas of the earlier tradition of performance in the field of Czech national opera. The current experiments in modern presentation of the fundamental works of Czech national cultures result in productions that I sometimes watch with pleasure (although alas ever more rarely) but often with embarrassed astonishment or even resolute condemnation. The tradition cultivated by generations of outstanding performers was maintained and guarded for decades, usually with good intentions if sometimes with unhealthy insistence on orthodoxy, but today the trend towards new conceptions at any price is predominant and that the healthily traditional attitude is slowly but surely disappearing. And here I am not thinking about directorial concepts (that is a whole separate chapter), but purely musical concepts! In this situation the re-release of the original recordings of Czech opera made as a model series in the fifties and sixties, appears to be particularly timely and needful. Chalabala's version of Smetana's The Kiss is imbued precisely with the specific features of the Czech opera school of the time, which by the seventies was already giving place to a kind of cosmopolitanism and practically disappearing. Here natural singing, perfect diction and phrasing of picturesque melodic lines, unpretentiousness, but also sincere enthusiasm for the story, naive perhaps but with the contours of deep wisdom and love, make of apparently rather unrewarding parts and musical passages a work that is ravishing in its truth and sincerity. Each of the protagonists (every one a legendary name!) is an ideal Smetana character – Ludmila Červinková with her youthful dramatic style, Beno Blachut with his distinctive lyrical timbre, Marta Krásová and Přemysl Kočí with their almost neighbourly geniality, Štefa Petrová with her vital immediacy, Karel Kalaš with his wise smiling prudence, and Vladimír Jedenáctík and Karel Hruška with their spontaneous comic spirit. These past stars of The National Theatre managed to express all this purely with their voices, without needing a stage, and on this superb recording it all sounds entirely spontaneous and convincing. Naturally the presiding spirit here is Zdeněk Chalabala's; his feeling for this music, once loved by most of the nation, was in his blood. The recording is already more than half a century old. This time the reconstruction of the once outstanding mono recording (the sound master František Burda) has turned out superbly (Stanislav Sýkora) and fully measures up to the current top international standards in this respect. Another element in the success of the project is the booklet with Svobinský on the title page and an interesting and useful text by Daniel Jäger, which is concerned more with the genesis of the work (including very short but necessary thoughts on the modern attitude to the subject of the opera) than with musical analysis of the opera. We consider there to be a very urgent need for the reissue of other unique opera recordings that are still waiting for stage revivals (Krombholc's Two Widows and The Secret, The Devil and Kate with Chalabala or the unique period Bartered Bride with Vogel to name but a few!).

BOHUSLAV VÍTEK

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Opening Concert 19. 9. 2006 Praha 20. 9. 2006 Trutnov 21. 9. 2006 Jičín	Brigitte Fournier, Soprano (Switzerland) Ivo Kahánek, Piano Stamicovo kvarteto	D. Milhaud: String Quartet No. 1 E. Chausson: Chanson perpétuelle op. 37 – <i>Czech premiere</i> O. Schoeck: 3 Songs J. Turina: Las musas de Andalucía – <i>Czech premiere</i>
16. 10. 2006 Domažlice 17. 10. 2006 Praha 18. 10. 2006 Brno	Jing Zhao, violoncello (China) – <i>Award for the Winner of the ARD Munich Competition 2005</i> Stamic Quartet	P. Vranický: Quintet in C Major X. Gang Ye: Nine Run for Cello solo – <i>Czech premiere</i> A. Borodin: String Quintet
21. 11. 2006 Praha	Škampa Quartet Kateřina Soukalová - Váchová, Clarinet (<i>Winner of the Prague Spring Competition 2002</i>)	I. Krejčí: String Quartet No. 4 in E Major, Op. 50 H. Sutermeister: Capriccio for Clarinet D. Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 3 W. A. Mozart: Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet, KV 581
12. 12. 2006 Praha 13. 12. 2006 Liberec	WORLDS BEYOND TRIO Daniel Schnyder, Saxophone (USA / Switzerland); Kenny Drew Jr., Piano (USA); David Taylor, Trombone (USA) Stamic Quartet	J. C. de Arriaga: String Quartet No. 3 "From Berlin to New York – transatlan- tic bridges to music"; G. Gershwin, K. Weil, D. Schnyder
16. 1. 2007 Praha 15. 1. 2007 Kralupy nad Vltavou	Faust Quartett (D) Stamic Quartet	J. C. de Arriaga: String Quartet No. 1 in d Minor G. Kurtág: 12 Mikroludien for String Quartet J. S. Svendsen: String Octet, Op. 3 – <i>Czech premiere</i>
20. 2. 2007 Praha 23. 2. 2007 Chrudim	Trio Concertino Kaspar Zehnder, Flute (Swit- zerland)	D. Shostakovich: Piano Trio No. 1 in E Minor C. Diethelm: Pan – <i>Czech premiere</i> H. Gagnebin: Quartet for Violin, Flute, Cello and Piano – <i>Czech premiere</i> W. A. Mozart: Prague Symphony, KV 504 (<i>authorized version by J. N. Hummel</i>)
20. 3. 2007 Praha 21. 3. 2007 Jičín	Amedeo Modigliani Quartet (France) – <i>Winner of AFAA De- clat and Young Concert Artists New York</i> Vladimír Leixner, Cello	R. Schumann: String Quartet No. 1, Op. 41 K. Beffa: Quelques cercles – <i>Czech premiere</i> G. Onslow: Quintet for two Cellos – <i>Czech premiere</i>
17. 4. 2007 Praha 18. 4. 2007 Děčín 19. 4. 2007 Jablonec nad Nisou	Javier Echecopar Mongilardi, Guitar, Baroque Guitar (Peru) Stamic Quartet	A. Vivaldi: Concerto in D Peruvian Baroque music for Guitar – <i>Czech premiere</i> J. E. Mongilardi: Suite Barroca An- dina – <i>World premiere</i> C. G. Lecca: Dansas tradicionales Andi- nas – <i>World Premiere</i>
21. 5. 2007 Nové město n. M. 22. 5. 2007 Praha 23. 5. 2007 Olomouc 24. 5. 2007 Ostrava	Alexander String Quartet (USA) Stamic Quartet	J. Kern: Melody for String Quartet W. Peterson: Quartet No. 2 „Jazz Play“ J. Adams: Selection from the Book of Alleged Dances M. Plachká: String Octet – <i>World premiere</i> B. Martinů: String Sextet
11. 6. 2007 Havlíčkův Brod 12. 6. 2007 Praha 14. 6. 2007 Jablonec nad Nisou	Okazaki Keisuke, Violin (Japan) – <i>Award for the Winner of the ARD Munich Competition 2005</i> Ivo Kahánek, Piano Stamic Quartet	D. Shostakovich: Piano Quintet in G Minor, Op. 57 M. Ravel: Tzigane T. Takemitsu: Distance de Fee – <i>Czech premiere</i> E. Chausson: Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet in D Major, Op. 21



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