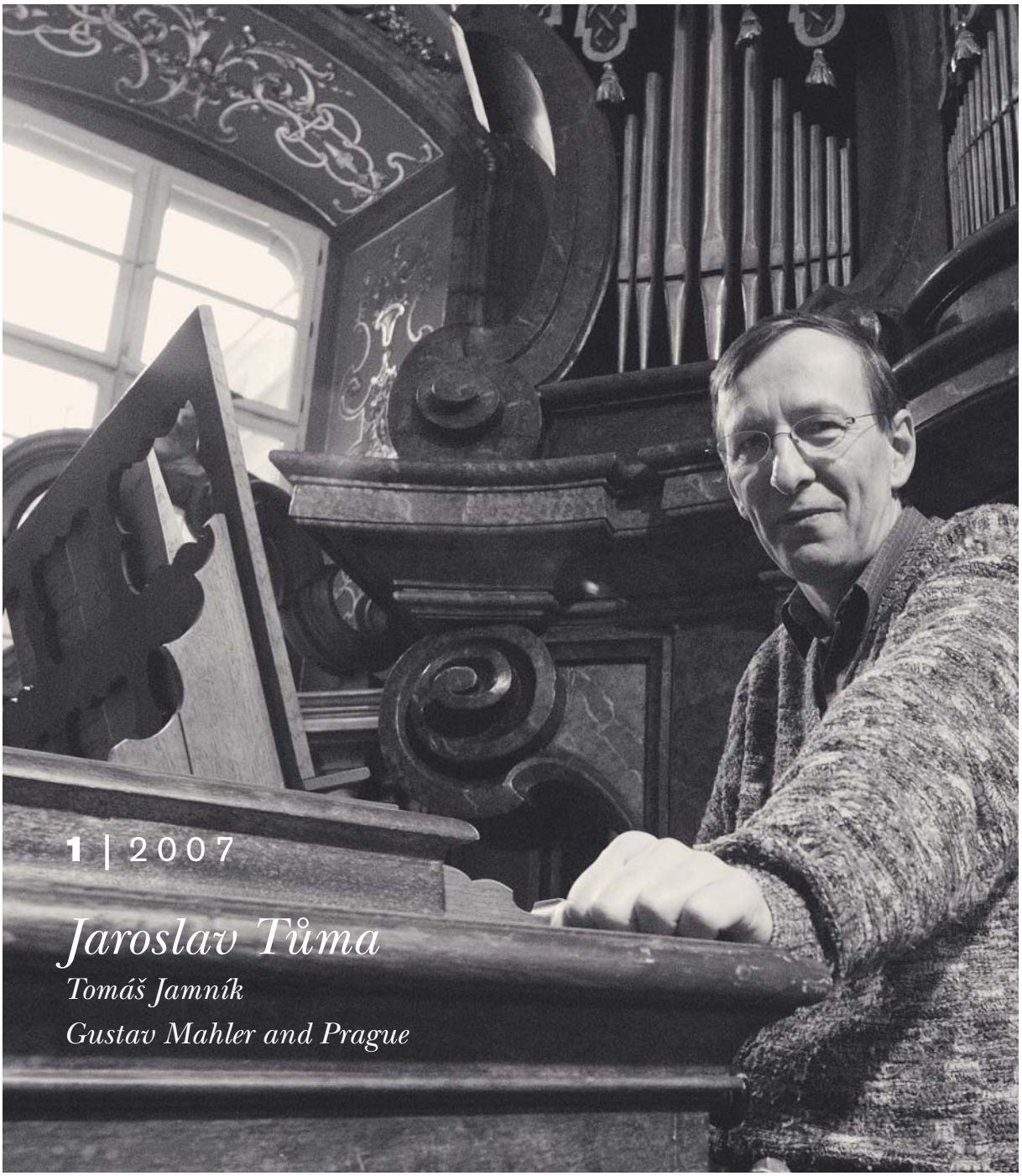
czech music quarterly



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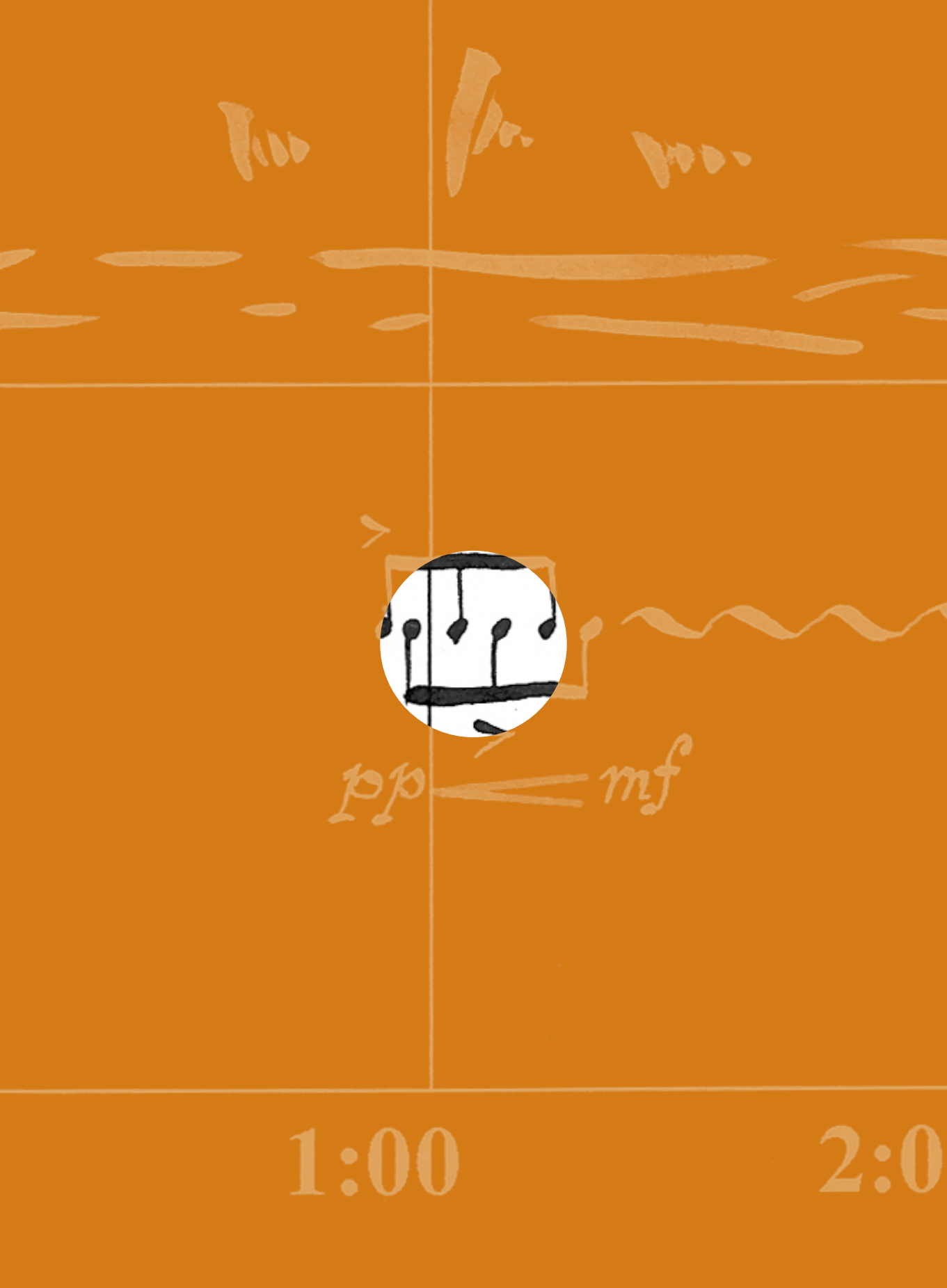
Jaroslav Tůma

Tomáš Jamník

Gustav Mahler and Prague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Dear Readers,

As you have certainly already noticed, Czech Music Quarterly has been graphically reworked for 2007. We thought that the existing design needed freshening up, and I hope the new appearance of the magazine will give you the same pleasure that it has given us. The smaller format and more attractive paper should make for more comfortable reading.

This issue of the magazine also comes with a free CD, containing pieces by six contemporary Czech composers, which means that Czech Music Quarterly is now a magazine not just to be read but to be "listened to" as well. The Chamber Music compilation is the first in a series. You can read more about the whole project in the preface to the CD itself and so I here I shall just draw you attention to the article by Miroslav Pudlák, which is related to the CD and highlights some aspects of the contemporary Czech scene in composing.

I would also like to remind you that you can order older numbers of Czech Music Quarterly – if we have any of the ones you want, we shall be glad to post them to you. You can find a list of the contents of all preceding numbers at www.czech-music.net, and there is plenty of choice! And please feel free to contact us any time if you have a question or a comment – just write to the e-mail address info@czech-music.net.

See you again in the spring

Petr Bakla

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by Dita Hradecká

THE ORGAN IS QUITE A TREACHEROUS INSTRUMENT

Unorthodoxy of approach to the performance of music of earlier and more recent epochs, imagination and passion, all characterise the organist and harpsichordist Jaroslav Tůma (*1956). His approach to music is comprehensive: he not only records and gives concerts but writes his own accompanying texts for his albums, and has a gift for communicating his favourite themes in words to radio listeners and television viewers. He has played the organ since early childhood, and later expanded his instrumental repertoire to include other historic keyboard instruments.

You come from Čáslav, and your father was a minister of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church. What influence has this had on you, musically and otherwise?

I will answer with a memory from my years at the conservatory, when on one occasion my teacher Jan Hora (we are now colleagues at the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts) told me, "Jarda, on the one hand you were lucky in the circumstances of your birth, and on the other hand unlucky". It was obvious what he meant. Under the prevailing political conditions it was difficult for me to get to high school, let alone the academy, but on the other hand I had a better chance than most even in the course of my studies to get to play the organ, not only in the Hussite Church, but with the Catholics and Protestants. You see, at that time ecumenical relations worked far better than today when the churches are to some extent in competition. Although of course today I already have plenty of friends in different communities, and so the fact that the situation is worse now as far as access to organs is concerned is something that affects young organists at the start of their careers rather than me. Every so often I hear them complain about people being unwilling to let them play some instrument. My family background had a fundamental influence above all in ensuring that I began to play the organ at all. It was natural for me to be in the church every Sunday and by the organ – my mother used to play it.

What first grabbed you about the organ? The sound or the technical side of the instrument?

At the end of basic school I wasn't terribly interested in school as such, but I was crazy about the organ. You should realise that the organ has a fascination for a lot of people, then and now, but organ enthusiasts tend to have very different perspectives – for example some are interested in the organ as a technical thing, as an exotic instrument where every exemplar is different. Others get their kicks out of documenting the instruments, recording the various dispositions, and taking an interest mainly in the historical aspect, for example. What is bad, is when some individuals are hell-bent on adapting the instrument they possess in line with their own ideas and interests. There are some amateur enthusiasts who have no qualms about changing the whole pipe order regardless of the original design of the instrument. Those people are organ destroyers.

The organ has always interested me first and foremost as an instrument on which I can make music. The first impression is usually of the overwhelming principal sound of the instrument in its full majesty. Almost everyone is initially bowled over. But real interest in the instrument's acoustic flexibility and diversity tends to be confined to a rather narrowly specialised public.

Of organ composers it has been Johann Sebastian Bach who most attracted me from the very beginning. Over the years I have mastered his entire organ oeuvre and performed it in twenty-one concert programmes.

When did you make your first public appearance as an organist?

I had my first public recital as an organist as a fourteen-year-old in the Hussite Church in Čáslav. Even before I auditioned for the Conservatory. I had been playing at church services for a long time before.

How did you get to the conservatory?

It was Stanislav Mach who prepared me for the conservatory. I had to play the piano for the auditions, since even today conservatories do not expect candidates to have any substantial experience of playing the organ. The conservatory tested capacity for improvisation, ear and many other similar things. Seven people had applied and there was only one place. In the end they took two of us. It was a paradox of the time that while during my seven years at the conservatory I took part in international competitions and even won prizes, when I applied to AMU (the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts), there was once again a problem about whether I could be admitted or not. I was lucky, because at the conservatory I was supposed to be in Professor Jaroslav Vodrážka's class and at AMU in Professor Milan Šlechta's and both of them wanted me. I remember the story that Director Mach later told me about it. He didn't just concern himself with preparing me for the auditions, but lost not time and took me to the conservatory in advance to introduce me to the head of the organ department, Professor Krais. He expatiated on my talent not only to Kraus, but also for example to his acquaintance Mr. Sokol, who was the conservatory secretary, an official. The organ committee recommended me for admission to studies, but then came the official political vetting stage. This Mr. Sokol later told director Mach with a smile that when the question of my political family status came up at some later meeting, he permitted himself to answer the question of some die-hard communist with the remark that I was of a proletarian family because my father was a worker in the vineyard of the Lord. This formulation lightened up the atmosphere, but I dare say some of the self-important members of the committee may not even have understood the reference.

Did you already develop a taste for the harpsichord at the Conservatory?

I discovered the harpsichord relatively early. At the conservatory harpsichord was available as an optional subject. With the harpsichord I could play a lot of chamber music. In my second year I entered the international Concertino Praga Radio Competition with the flautist Petr Zejfart, the horn player Jiří Havlík and the cellist Jan Páleníček, and in this rather curious combination we won second prize in the quartet category. The competition piece was by G. Ph. Telemann but we needed another piece for the public concert defence of the title and we tried to find one, but just couldn't. So we asked our professor of harmony, Jan Zdeněk Bartoš, to write us something and he was happy to oblige. Then we experienced all that glory surrounding the concert of laureates in the Rudolfinum in Prague, and the South Bohemian Festival, with radio everywhere, and even television and so on. It was an occasion when I met a lot of musicians I am still in touch with today. Many musicians who have all later had careers as soloists or players in prestigious chamber groups or orchestras went through this almost children's competition.

Were you aiming for a solo concert career from the very beginning?

From the beginning I had a longing to give public concerts. That was there in me from when I was fourteen or so. But I had no idea that one day it would really happen. Back then it looked a very unlikely prospect. Organ concerts were more or less forbidden. My first organ recital (mentioned above) was for a long time my last.
Back then I didn't really grasp, either, that one day I would have to make a living somehow.

You had early successes in foreign competitions – but going abroad must certainly have been a difficult business...

The form was that if I wanted to go abroad for some competition, I had to be successful at the selection playing in front of a committee appointed by the Ministry of Culture. Sometimes I managed it, and sometimes I didn't. If I was selected, what followed was a bureaucratic nightmare. I had to go round and round getting permissions from different officials at the Ministry of Culture, and then the passport department, and get bits of paper from the street committee in my place of residence, from the Communist Party, from my school, and so on. It all took so much time that I had none left for practising and preparing for the competition itself. There was always a risk that one bit of paper would be missing, for example the certificate saying I had no criminal record. It would be a cliff-hanger to the very last minute.
Then you got on the train and reached the border, and saw the barbed wire and machine guns, and the inspectors would come through the coach and you would have all your papers in your hand but until the last minute you still couldn't be sure they would let you through.
I was always lucky and rode across the line into another world. It doesn't surprise me that many people left their parents behind and stayed abroad. But I never wanted to emigrate, after a few days abroad I would start to get homesick.
Coming back was always strange. You felt as if you were someone going back to prison after a few days leave, but at the same time going back somewhere that you knew and that you loved. I remember the visual aspect of it as well: in the West everything looked colourful and returning to Prague meant arriving in a totally grey city. Although this had its charm, of course, and in fact greater charm than it has today. Now when I see bored street salespeople standing in front of their shops full of trinkets for tourists with the meaningless pop music blaring in the Old Town, it makes me sick. You can't help being aware of the destruction, the degradation of historic monuments and cultural values.

What were organ studies like in your time? Was there an attempt to separate the instrument from its natural liturgical function?

Of course! But the teachers still taught us how to accompany a chorale, and how to improvise a prelude to a psalm and so on... Nevertheless, from today's perspective I must admit that it is completely right to consider the organ primarily as a musical instrument, and only secondarily as a liturgical instrument. Otherwise there would be no need to insist on complete mastery of the techniques of play and musical performance. Of course, no one could doubt that that perfect mastery of both is also of benefit to liturgical play, but in my view the priority is clear, since if nothing else every one of my colleagues has definitely seen plenty of organists who have learned to play at the mass well just by playing at masses, while none of us has yet met anyone who has learned to play the organ professionally just by playing at masses. This is why schools probably ought to teach play on the instrument and improvisation in first place, with liturgy as a supplement. Studies in church music as conceived in Germany, for example, in which the student is professionally trained in the various different fields necessary for work in church choirs (organ play, conducting, singing etc.) are of course a different matter.

Does the motivation of the people coming to AMU to study organ today differ from that of your own generation at the school?

There is no comparison between the prospects of our generation and the current generation; for us almost all doors were closed. But the study of music was beautiful, and good musicians even had the chance to go and see what was happening abroad. Now the doors are open, and anyone can study anything if he or she has the ability to do so. Life with music is still beautiful, but it is hard grind. While it is easy to go and take part in performer classes and competitions, it is getting harder and harder to succeed. Young people today, however, start thinking relatively early above all about what will provide a decent livelihood, and the result is that fewer and fewer of them will be professionally studying music. We aren't feeling this yet at AMU, but at the conservatory it is really the case that in many subjects there is an ever decreasing number of applicants.

What are the trends abroad?

The same, but evident even earlier. There are very few places for organists, for professional musicians. There is no great social prestige about it, and no big money in it. And you really have to practice for hours each day. Europe has become lazy, and especially the young want above all to enjoy themselves. One result is that a great many Japanese came to Europe to study. And then Koreans and now Chinese too. When these waves subside there will be almost no one to teach.

You often sit on competition juries. How do you actually judge organ performances? How does the personality of the performer come through in play on the organ where the character of the individual instrument has more of a determining influence on the performer than with other instruments?

The organ is quite a treacherous instrument. Often it's not so easy to make out what the organist is like. If a singer comes along who has no voice, or a violinist who plays all the notes flat, then there's no argument, it's clear, anyone can hear it. But the tone of the organ sounds almost the same whether it's a first-class professional or a complete layman who strikes the keys. Both can even play a concert. But the treacherous part rests in the little word "almost". While the differences in play are small on a first hearing, on the second or third hearing they are absolutely cardinal. For a long

time a layman isn't sure who it is that he has before him, and even I myself cannot necessarily distinguish a good player in the first minute of a concert. And because concert organisers or agency representatives are usually organ laymen, sometimes organists on the level of complete bunglers and botchers get concert space. The sad thing is, too, that I'm not talking now of concert organisers somewhere at the back of beyond, but of some quite famous festivals.
I don't altogether enjoy sitting on competition juries. If I can I try to insist that the jury members do not have their own pupils among the competitors, that the entrants play on a fine instrument and that the competition should be completely anonymous. I was one of the founders of a competition of this type in Humpolec, which is for Czech and Slovak organists of up to 26 years old. It will be taking place for the second time in the autumn of 2007.
Naturally the personality of the performer does come through. And I don't mean simply in terms of choice of tempo and registration. It's more than that. In the first round of the Humpolec competition, which was played on a single-manual historic instrument in Polná, we were fascinated to see how the organ sounded clean when the better candidates played, but off-pitch with the weaker candidates. And the reason was not just that some people didn't press the keys down properly; it was more a question of the overall way of pressing the keys and the way the notes were articulated. People who had up to then believed that the organ was just a machine couldn't believe their ears.

The organ is perhaps the only field of instrumental study where there has been continuity in the teaching of improvisation. Your concert activity leads me to believe that you regard it as important and enjoy improvising. Am I right?
Yes, for as long as I can remember. When my mother forced me to practice fingering exercises on the piano, I used at least to try to play some variations so as not get

bored. Professor Vodrážka at the conservatory was a great inspiration; I was 19 when in 1976 he accompanied me to the Netherlands where I took part in the International Organ Improvisation Competition in Haarlem. Ten years later I won that competition. Improvisation is of course important from the point of view of church practice, but it is useful to cultivate it on all instruments because it enhances the performer's general ability to be creative, which then has a beneficial effect on his or her quality of performance.

Organs are not just musical instruments, but in most cases cultural monuments as well. Do you see them that way as well?

Yes, which is why I can't understand why the great majority of organ owners can't respect the fact. Every change made to an organ, except the most ordinary repairs, should only be made on the basis of the agreement of a range of specialists. What are we to make of the fact that an organ specialist appointed by a diocese suggests that for example the replacement of the wind chest in a Baroque organ is just a minor repair? Many cases were examined and often there was officially declared a violation of the law, but the Ministry of Culture apparently still cannot withdraw a license to work on historically protected organs from an organ builder who acquired it illegitimately and went on to ruin a historic organ of considerable value. Apparently the organ builder would be able to bring an action against the ministry, and if the ministry couldn't demonstrate that the damage had been deliberate, it would lose the action. It's the same as with the asset-stripping of banks and the big firms. Billions have disappeared, we know who is responsible, but we can't prove anything against them. Everything is on a knife edge and there is no way of finding a simple solution. This democracy of ours has big problems. It seems to me that enlightened absolutism would do more to protect organs.

How were organs treated in the past? Has there been a change in this respect since November '89?

Paradoxically the time before the Velvet Revolution, when organs in churches meant something undesirable, was very favourable for the preservation of old organs. The instruments could hope to see better times. In the West there was the will to carry out repairs and the money, which meant there were a lot of well meant attempts at restoration at a time when nobody had a good idea of how to go about it. Here the situation was the opposite: the organs were left to decay and so they were preserved intact. It is better for the restorer when an instrument is in a bad state and isn't even playable than when it has been renovated ten times. In the latter case many of the original components have simply gone. In this country there are many instruments that can really be restored to their original form using all our current knowledge to ensure that they are as like they were at the time of construction as possible. Only good restoration and repair is expensive.

Can you give an example?

The most recent example of an organ restored in the best way possible is the one built by Abraham Starck in Plasy in the Plzeň Region. The restoration was completed in 2006 by Vladimír Šlajch, an organ builder in Borovany. The greatest credit for the saving of the organ must go to the American sponsor (The Packard Humanities Institute), who provided help through CORA – The Centre for the Protection and Restoration of Architecture. There are many examples of badly conceived repairs or restoration projects. Listing them would make a sad and long inventory.

What is the position of the Czech Republic with regard to the number and state of preservation of historic organs?

We are certainly arousing the interest of organ-lovers from the whole of Europe and overseas. Foreign experts already know that we have some real treasures here. At the beginning many of them gaped. There was an interesting mission from Holland, which involved the organist Petr van Dijk and a radio crew from Hilversum recording a representative cross-section of Czech organs. The result is a set of recordings of about 40 instruments, and exceedingly interesting. Even before then, however, Radek Rejšek from the Czech Radio had started to map Czech organs. He has already recorded about 140 instruments. Some historic ones that haven't been restored at all, many of them provisionally brought into working order again just for the purposes of the sound documentation, and others that have been restored, sometimes better and sometimes worse. Some of the organs played no longer exist. In one case the church roof fell in on an organ, and in other cases inexpert alterations and repairs just destroyed the instruments. My belief is that we shall manage to preserve only a small percentage of this treasury for future generations. The real worst enemy of the organ is not woodworm or even the hand of time, but the irresponsible organ builder in co-operation with the irresponsible owner and the irresponsible and uneducated organ "expert" or organist. Unfortunately, as I must emphasise again, not even the church or the state have the right ideas on how to protect organs on a large-scale basis. Human stupidity and penny-pinching are more powerful. I know one charming story of how an unnamed organ builder offered to mend an organ for as parish priest. "You know, Father, you have a fine organ in your church, but it needs cleaning and one unnecessary stop needs replacing with another that you're missing." The priest agreed to the offer in good faith, because it seemed cheap. Fortunately quite by accident he ran into a colleague he had been trained with who by coincidence had received a similar advantageous offer from the same organ builder. The nice cheap organ builder had been planning to change the registers around between different parishes, and it had never even occurred to him that the priests might know each other. So they didn't take up the offer in the end, and someone then wanted to send a circular round the parishes telling the others to beware of the crook. But someone high up refused to approve this, because it would have meant mean discrimination against the poor old organ builder. Can you believe the absurdity of it?

You play almost everything that has a keyboard. Was that the case from the start, or did you come to the instruments one by one?

I have already talked about Concertino Praga and my harpsichord beginnings. After graduating in organ studies at AMU I took postgraduate harpsichord studies with Prof. Růžičková. At the end of the 1980s my friendship with Pavel Klikar was a crucial factor in my development. He was a peculiar phenomenon of the day; he founded the Original Prague Syncopated Orchestra, managed to produce faithful instrumentations of the Jazz pieces of the 1920s from old American recordings and found musicians and instruments. We loved his concerts and recordings. He started to get involved in 17th-century music with just the same passion, and was one of the people who discovered historic organs, and went to look for them. Among other things he has one of the best collections of photographs of dilapidated Baroque instruments...

Some time in 1986 he introduced me to František Vyhnálek and Jiří Vykoukal, who at his suggestion were starting to build copies of harpsichords. I reserved their first

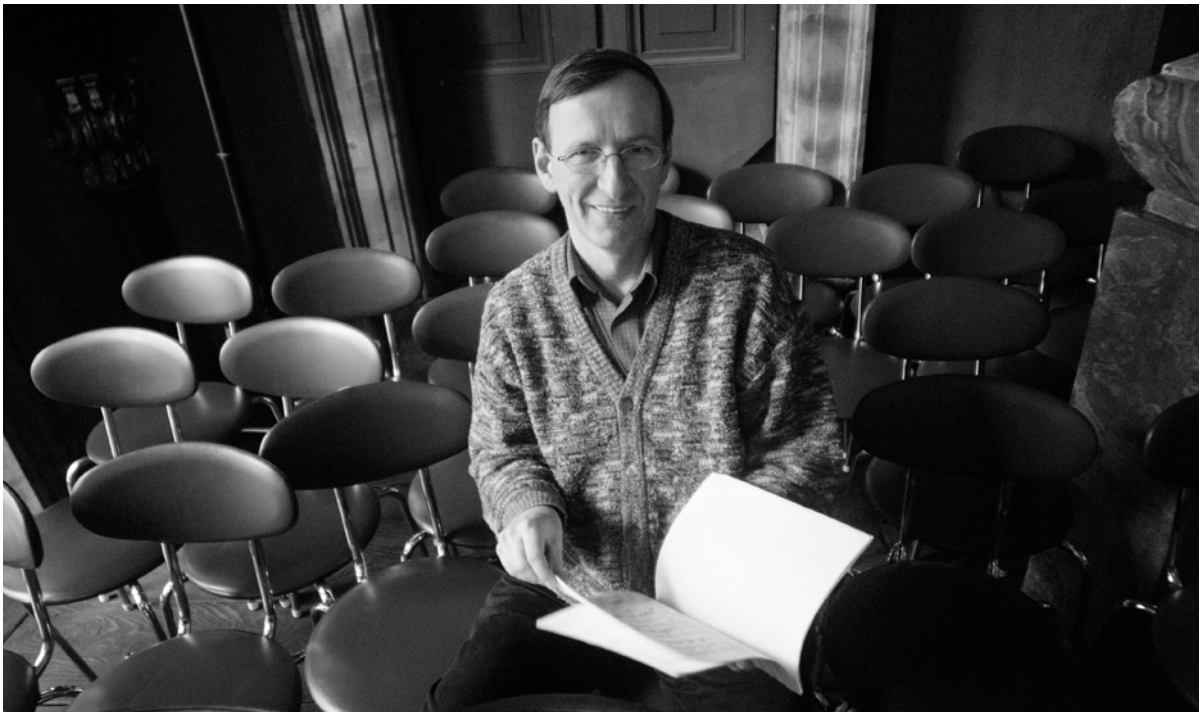
opus for myself. But then they parted company, since they each wanted to work in a different way. In this situation I contracted to buy a harpsichord from whichever of them produced the instrument first. It turned out to be Vyhnálek's instrument – a copy of a single manual harpsichord from Eisenach – I acquired it in 1988 and I still have it. But the first copy in Prague – an Italian virginal – had actually been built a couple of years earlier from a Zuckermann building set by Engineer Architect Daniel Špička. Špička had made friends with Christopher Hogwood, who had earlier been at AMU for a short time as a student with Prof. Růžičková. Zuckermann was to musical instruments something like Ikea is to furniture. Špička created a miracle out of that DIY set. None of the other DIY harpsichord sets that I have seen since could hold a candle to Špička's virginal. But my harpsichord from Vyhnálek is wonderful, and for a long time I couldn't understand how he managed to achieve such extraordinary sound qualities with his very first instrument. A long time afterwards, over beer in Vilnius in Lithuania, he revealed his secret. When he was starting out he didn't have good wood and he was making intensive efforts to find some. Someone called him and said he had ceiling beams from a collapsed small chateau in Northern Bohemia. Vyhnálek used them to make the corpus of my instrument – they were mature beams 150 years old. But my first keyboard instrument ever was a clavichord which I won in 1986 at the competition in Haarlem I mentioned earlier.

You also own an organ positive. Was that made especially for you as well?

Of course. But at the time I was worried that I was needlessly getting myself into debt. Actually it all turned out well, and buying the positive was a good strategic investment. It broadened my career possibilities. I had already had some earlier experiences with organ positives, for example I had even borrowed a historic positive from the Týn Church for a concert in the Bethlem Chapel. I spent a long time hopelessly trying to arrange transport for it – apparently at the time there were only two vehicles in Prague capable of transporting it and they had to be ordered half a year in advance. An absurd situation from today's point of view. In the end four people carried the positive across Prague on foot. At least it didn't rain. After all these problems I insisted that my planned positive should fit into a Wartburg estate. That was what happened, and in January 1989 the organ builders Vladimír Šlajch and Dalibor Michek delivered the instrument on which I still play concerts today; I have often recorded on it, and used it to accompany Plácido Domingo, and Eva Urbanová, and to perform with Petr Schreier and many other soloists, ensembles and orchestras. I've appeared with it not just all over Europe, but in Mongolia as well.
When I don't need it myself, it serves at Holy Mountain by Příbram. Many years later I acquired a hammerklavier as well, a copy of Walther's instrument of 1805 from an American living in Divišov near Prague, Paul McNulty. It was expensive but he offered me a no-interest leasing arrangement, which was very nice. He said that when I had some money I could always pay him something.

Is it better to play on a historical original, even if slightly damaged, than on a perfect new copy?

I've tried both. For example the piano on which Mozart played in Prague, and which was recently restored by Mr. Czernin in Vienna, evidently has persistent problems with repeat playing of the keys. My copy of a Walther piano from Paul McNulty's workshop on the other hand works perfectly. By contrast the original Walther, which is owned by Daniel Špička and on which I played Rejcha's vast cycle of 36 fugues for clavier, is more of a risk when it comes to reliability, but has even more interesting



sound than the McNulty's instrument. I can make the same kind of comparison with clavichords. The Žatec Schiedmayer instrument of 1789, on which I recorded Bach's Inventions and Sinfonias is marvellous in terms of sound, but you can't help hearing the quite strong clatter of the keys. That was why I preferred to record both parts of the Well-Tempered Clavier and the Goldberg Variations on various outstanding copies by the European manufacturer Martin Kather from Hamburg.

What is your next recording project – after your most recent Bach albums and the Rejcha cycle?

My CD of Bach's Organ Book is coming out on the Arta label, and then a set of 17th-century pieces played on the organ in Plasy. I'm currently recording the Dusík sonatas for Czech Radio. It's a project scheduled over four years. As far as I know, no one has yet recorded the complete set. I can already see one fundamental thing – that the experience you gain from one sonata pays dividends when it comes to the next. This experience enables me to get an idea of the functional proportional relations – what tempo I can allow myself, what form of performance or touch the composer probably had in mind when he used a certain stylisation of the accompaniment – these are all things that you only realise when you know his work in its entirety. As yet what we call a tradition of performance of Dusík sonatas doesn't exist here. Unlike in the case of Mozart or Beethoven sonatas where there is a tradition. By contrast Dusík is very much a salon composer; he definitely wanted above all to impress the opposite sex with his music. And as a performer he certainly new how to twist the ladies round his little finger. This is particularly clear in the slow movements – where the approach is taken to absurd extremes in many places. Contemporary pianists mostly tend to feel very uncomfortable at this extreme, but I really enjoy myself. It is very different from when I play Bach.

Does an organist play piano pieces differently from a trained pianist?

I certainly play them differently because I approach these nuances of performance without the prejudices of the tradition that dominates the modern interpretation of works of the classical epoch, and on the contrary I draw on my experiences with clavichord play and the study of the works of earlier composers. Apart from the Baroque pieces of the fantasia type the cornerstone composer in this respect was Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. I'm convinced that he played his pieces with much greater freedom in the field of rhythm, for example, than Chopin did later on. He would certainly have been closer to Liszt. Pianists trained in the modern school would certain play Carl Philipp Emanuel in a pretty risible way. I often see them having their first contact with the clavichord. The common denominator of these first encounters is amazement that anything of the sort can be played at all. But I wouldn't like to give the impression of someone who gives priority only to authentic interpretation. I have often been full of admiration for Sviatoslav Richter's performances of Bach, for example, while I have often damned authentic performances that have bored me to death. What will happen after Dusík? I don't know. Maybe I shall start composing again.

Jaroslav Tůma (1956) – *organist, harpsichordist, player on the clavichord and the hammerklavier. He studied at the Prague Conservatory under Prof. Jaroslav Vodrážka (organ and organ improvisation) and at the Musical Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague under Prof. Milan Šlechta (organ) and Prof. Zuzana Růžičková (harpsichord). He also took master courses under the direction of important figures such as Prof. Hans Haselböck and Prof. Piet Kee. He won first prize in organ improvisation competitions in Nuremberg in 1980 and in Haarlem in the Netherlands in 1986. Besides, he won prizes at many organ competitions, for example, Linz in 1978, the Prague Spring Competition in 1979, the Leipzig Bach Competition in 1980 and many others.*
In the years 1990–93 he performed the complete organ works of J.S. Bach over twenty-one concerts. On the clavichord he has several times presented the Bach's complete Well-Tempered Clavier. For the 250th anniversary of the death of J.S. Bach in 2000 he also performed the Goldberg Variations, which he later brought out on two CDs played on harpsichord and clavichord. Tůma's discography encompasses more than fifty titles, mainly solo. Supraphon is publishing his series Historic Organs of Bohemia, which presents the authentic sound of rare instruments of different epochs from the Renaissance up to the beginning of the 20th century. In addition, he has made numerous recordings for radio and television both at home and abroad. He wrote and presented an eleven-part serial on historic organs broadcast by Czech Television and he makes regular programmes about organ and other classical music for Czech Radio. Tůma's repertoire embraces all periods of keyboard music. Apart from the works of the romantic organ composers he plays music by rarely heard composers such as Antonín Rejcha or Jan Ladislav Dusík. He has performed Vítězslav Novák's St. Wenceslas Triptych, *for example, and Alois Hába's* Fantasia and Fugue, op. 75b. *Improvisation on themes requested by the audience forms a special chapter in Tůma's programmes. Jaroslav Tůma is a senior teacher at the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts and is often invited to sit on the juries of international organ or harpsichord competitions.*

by Miroslav Pudlák

CZECH COMPOSERS IN THE POST-MODERN ERA

CZECH MUSIC CD SERIES #1

CHAMBER MUSIC

The CD published as a supplement to this issue of the magazine could not possibly claim to illustrate the recent development of Czech music in full or even as a representative cross-section. It is far too small (someone important will always be left out, and even the pieces selected do not represent the whole output of their composers), and so while Czech Music Quarterly has decided to acquaint readers with Czech music by the direct method of providing them with sound recordings, it is long-term enterprise and this CD is just the first piece in the mosaic. The series is deliberately not conceived as a chronological view, as will be clear from the very first CD which focuses mainly on the current middle and younger generation of composers. Here composers born in the 1950s rub shoulders with one composer 20 years younger.

Despite great diversity of style, the generation to which the five older composers belong (out of the six on the CD) shares a number of more general features that have to do with their common historical experience. These features are individualism, resignation to what for years was enforced isolation from the international "festival" mainstream coupled with resistance to identification with the conservatively minded institutional musical life in the Czech Lands. Orchestral pieces are almost absent from the lists of their works (the situation in Czech orchestras being unfavourable to the attempt) and most of their output has consisted of chamber music written for a circle of like-minded performers. To this day their work tends to be performed as part of their own projects, ensembles and small festivals. Their example is highly illustrative of the much in the life of Czech music over the last 30 years.
Let us therefore first take a look at the period of the 1970s and 1980s, when this generation grew up and started on their active careers. These were the two decades of the rigid Neo-Stalinist regime installed in 1968 by Soviet tanks after Czechoslovakia's brief experiment in cultural and political liberalisation. It was an epoch that brought centralist control and conformism to the life of the Czech arts. Official

Petr Kofroň

In some survey, you once responded to a question on whether you kept up with developments in contemporary music by saying that you kept up with the way contemporary music and your view of it evolved in your thoughts. What have you discovered?

Despite every kind of twist and turning in my life I keep coming back to Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss and Charles Ives – composers I discovered when I was seventeen.

If I'm not mistaken, your activities in recent years have had a great deal to do with various forms of theatre. What makes theatre so attractive for you?

I enjoy different kinds of recycling (pieces of music, texts). And of course in a theatre performance there is less pressure for music to be autonomous and so recycling doesn't annoy so much.

Can you in some way pinpoint and name the roots from which your music grows? Do you feel yourself to be a part of any tradition or current?

Music grows out of life. Music goes the way life goes. I accept the tradition of my life and sail in the current of my life.

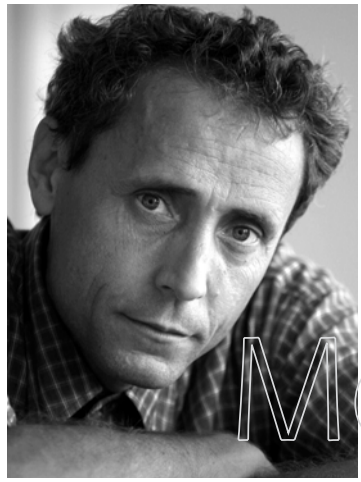
What are you really getting at as a composer?

Nothing now, actually.

Pavel Zemek

Can you say something more about your original unison technique – where does it come from and where is it supposed to be going?

The unison was the most beautiful thing that I got from the orchestra of the Janáček Opera. It took 10 years for it to find proper expression in my own writing. Today what gives me the most pleasure is the fact that the instruments don't stand against each other, but instead help each other, and also that dissonance vanishes from the harmony and that this to a certain extent also dematerialises the structure of the sound.



In the nineties you had a period studying with G. Benjamin and G. Grisey, and Grisey especially is one of the most remarkable phenomena in modern music. This experience isn't very common for mature composers – and at the time you were already a teacher of composition yourself. What did it give you?

I'll say a few words about Grisey, for example.
It was clear to both of us that at 40 I couldn't absorb as much as at 20. But he gave me the courage to carry on with what I was trying to do. What exactly? Adding another line that only emphasised certain points in the basic line. And also the courage not to be afraid of musicians. I sincerely admired Grisey's calculations of the harmonic series; he had literally wall-papered the whole of his large study with them. He was very friendly and I could go to him for individual instruction, which allowed me to compare our habits with his approach. I helped him repair his flat, and he took me on and fed me… His premature death just after I left grieves me to this day. He was a great admirer of Janáček and he was curious about our students as well. Perhaps contact with him would have been just too great a miracle…

What are you really getting at as a composer?

Ten years ago I might have written something maybe a little elevated. The closer I get to the end, however, the more often I wonder if 3/4 of what's behind it all is not just my conceit. Maybe next time I'll say something, but today I'll keep my mouth shut.

What are your most recent fascinations in music? What has surprised you, or electrified you?

Musical form as an "infinite" flow of consonances, in polyrhythms, polymetrics, with the separating off of instrumental groups, a soloist, two conductors: a cello concerto for Jiří Bárta. The speed of the alternation of consonances interests me. Unfortunately, I work at an ever slower pace: it's a pity that we can't be here for 200 or 300 years. That would be amazing.

Ivo Medek

You say your music is built on processuality, on the superposition of processes, but this is above all a technological definition. How would you characterise your music from a purely aesthetic point of view? What are your "sound" preferences, and what kind of expression are you trying to achieve?

concerts of contemporary music were for long years grey and boring affairs. Conservatism also ruled the music schools where composition was taught. At the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts the key teaching posts in composition were held by mediocre composers, prominent in the Communist Party. Composers like Martin Smolka, who were students during this period, did not feel themselves to be the heirs of these conformist composers in any respect. Instead they tended to see themselves as the successors of the Czech avant-garde of the 1960s, i.e. of groups of composers who at the time were ostracised and driven underground into the position of musical dissent. In their biographies Martin Smolka and Petr Kofroň for example identify their teacher as Marek Kopelent, who gave them private consultations since at the time he was not allowed to teach at any school.
Compared with the politically extremely regimented Prague, the situation was rather better at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno, where a group of progressively-orientated composers with a broad outlook and serious interests in new musical trends continued to teach even in the 1970s. In Brno the truly outstanding teacher of composition was Alois Piňos (see CM 4/05), who published important

works on the theory of composition and kept up contacts with the Darmstadt Courses, where he was regularly invited as a teacher and to which he took his own students. Peter Graham, Josef Adamík and Petr Kofroň, for example, all studied in his class. It was in their circle that there first developed a clear search for new, in the broad sense of the word "post-modern" stylistic orientations, as it were in an attempt to find a way out of the all too familiar territory where the wearisome and in fact already anachronistic conflict between the ruling Czech traditionalism and the forbidden fruit of the 1960s avant-garde was still endlessly raging.

Since official concert life in the field of contemporary music was centrally directed by the Union of Composers and offered few possibilities for free musical expression, these composers sought their own ways of getting their work performed. In the mid-1980s, therefore, the Agon Ensemble was formed, led by a group of composers. Initially it operated on an amateur basis (and so could not be controlled by the authorities) but later became more and more a professional body. In addition to presenting works by its own composers, the ensemble introduced the Czech public to important foreign works and the music of the half-forgotten Czech avant-garde. On the Brno scene a similar role was played at the same time by the ensemble Art incognito (later Ars incognita) and the Central European percussion ensemble DAMA DAMA.

By the time of the revolutionary

That always depends on the particular piece concerned. Most of my pieces have their own particular poetics, their own "global" principle (often taken from outside music) and the musical order derived from it. With the Wings, everything was based on the motto of the piece – the poetics of wings in various states – from fluttering to majestic beating, associations and relationships on all levels, but also movement up and down as the principle of construction and form of the structure. Everything interpenetrates to create a single whole.

You do a great deal of improvisation. To what extent to these activities connect with your composing, i.e. with writing notes on paper? How do the two activities influence each other?

There are connections at various different levels. When one does a free improvisation the focus is more on fusion, noticing the connections and impulses generated by the others, creating one's own impulses, and concentration on now. When, however, we play something repeatedly in the framework of the Marijan Ensemble, some connections and sequences, and sometimes even structures, increasingly stabilise. The improvisation becomes more and more based on forms that have already emerged; what happens is a blend of improvisation and composition, which has become common recently and already has a special name – comprovisation… When you are writing notes you have time for everything, which can be both an advantage and a disadvantage – often it is hard to choose one of several alternatives – but again the issues of order, structuration, the balance of co-existence, continuity and succession do not have to be tackled ad hoc, and indeed in my case, on the contrary, these things always come at the beginning of the composition process. I only start writing down the notes when I know almost everything about the piece. This means that I can even write while watching TV, for example. It is actually just like making a "fair copy" from notes and sketches in a diary.

What are you really getting at as a composer?

If someone is to write contemporary music what he has to have above all is that "urge", that need to do just that, even though he knows that it will take up a huge amount of time, that he won't be able to make a living from it, and that it is actually a kind of lifetime hobby. I simply enjoy doing it. Not just the composing itself, but aspects of communication with the audience through the piece, those games of transmitting and perceiving and the (mis)understanding of the information that a work generates and sends to the audience…

What are your most recent musical fascinations? What has surprised you, or electrified you?

At the moment I have my hands so full of admin, making grant appli-

cations and being an organiser, that unfortunately I don't have much time to keep my ear to the twitter and hum. And so I don't think I shall mention any concrete thing. But generally (after all I do sometimes get out to an interesting festival) I can say that what surprises me is that recently not much has been surprising me… Perhaps I'm also getting old and starting to be too detached from it all…Yuk!

Ondřej Štochl

If you had to define your music in some way in relation to the panorama of contemporary classical music, where would you situate it?

I'm not sure if a composer is the right person to make such an assessment of his own work, and I am also opposed to any "pigeonholes in art", since although they are an aid to orientation, they are very misleading. I know that the influences that have set me off in various directions have been more or less strong, but they have never been absolutely fundamental. So I probably don't belong to any…'ism'. But if there's one thing that really annoys me, it's the principle of conscious return to something already tried and tested and accepted by the public. I'm disgusted by the cool and ultimately very short-sighted pragmatism of all eclectics – whether those who want to pack the halls by this method or those who copy the most recent influences so as to grab the role of the one-eyed king.

The young generation of composers today doesn't seem to be producing music that is in any way fundamentally different from that of the older generation. Do you feel a need to define yourself – as it were – as against the generation of your teachers or former models?

Every generation probably defines itself in a different way. You might say my generation is weary of this eternal competition – who is going to be the first to invent a new system, sound or whatever, never known before. One reason is that the preceding generation created an enormous field, but while it has been discovered, in my view only a small part of it has yet been exploited. This is evidently why it is now up to my generation to take up the techniques discovered and use then in many new ways, from different angles an in many as yet

changes in 1989 these ensembles had already created a solid performer base from which other professional groups could emerge in the 1990s. The circle of composers that had been the architects of Agon and Ars incognita went on to define the character of the festivals New Music Marathon in Prague and the Exposition of New Music in Brno, both of which became important components of musical life. Agon also managed to break through into several foreign festivals, for example the aesthetically like-minded Bang-On-A-Can Festival in New York, and thanks to the overlap between its members and the Marathon Festival to arrange a whole series of invitations to important foreign composers and performers.

Peter Graham (*1952) (real name Jaroslav Šťastný), who works mainly in Brno, is one of the most original of Czech composers. His music reflects his passionate enthusiasm for eternal experimentation on a wide front. Since each of his pieces is the result of fascination with a new problem, his style is hard to define overall; in his output we will find Cageian indeterminate pieces, minimalist pieces, and pieces that superficially look rather traditional. On closer examination, we find that the author's strong and distinctive personality imprints them with more integrating features than might be apparent at first sight. One is his hostility to traditional performance styles and his effort to push performers towards creative and unconventional interpretations, which

then gives even apparently simple scores a typical "Grahamesque" sound. Some works, in which a diatonic world and motoric rhythm predominate, also suggest more aesthetic connection with rock music and for example American minimalism than with anything from the European tradition.
While still a student at JAMU in the years of "normalisation", **Petr Kofroň** (*1955) was one of the first Czech composers to attract attention with a highly original post-modern approach. His diatonic "endless" pieces from the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s showed that here was a composer with strong aspirations to become the enfant terrible of Czech music. In his second period he moved from this rather artificial naive style to pieces that were structurally more complex and also less easy on the ear. At the beginning of the 1990s he took on the direction of the Agon Ensemble in Prague, and since then he has composed in close co-operation with the ensemble, and indeed his music has been to a considerable extent tied up with it. This represents a certain limitation that gets in the way of the greater diffusion of his pieces, but is also an advantage in the sense that pieces are "made to measure" and the composer maintains complete control over their interpretation.
Under Kofroň's direction the ensemble changed its name to the Agon Orchestra and in the course

undiscovered connections and dimensions. To work intuitively with what has been created as a result of rational construction, and vice versa. This is why I think the greatest contribution of this generation will not be any kind of forced synthesis of styles, nor the invention of something new at any price, not to speak of any post-modern negation of all that has gone before – this would already be sheer nonsense. It would be superficial and easy. Each composer ought to find his or her spontaneous mode of expression without copying someone else's style or, on the contrary, shrinking from using an already discovered detail in a new context. This way apart from new discoveries this generation can above all come up with further dimensions of the already discovered and (thanks to this) rather more creative maturity that was usual in the preceding generation. I don't know, judge it twenty years from now.

Dare you predict the way in which your music will develop in the future?

No! And I'm glad about that…

What would you like to achieve as a composer? What are your goals?

Well, if I have to write about the highest goal, it is to find a balance – between reason and emotion, between the power of the impact of the detail and the whole… I would like to have my language under control to a degree that would make me sure of this balance. For a long time I've been interested in the effects of music on the deformation of the relationship between physical and psychological time, and neither in this I want to remain just at the stage of intuition; I would like to get through to some rational core.
But at the same time I want this goal to keep on changing and getting further away. So that I can be sure of always having a reason to write.

Martin Smolka

The text in the CD booklet says something about the sources of your music and the point it has reached. After more than 20 years of active composing, do you have a sense of the way in which your music will develop in the future? What attracts you?

To answer directly I would have to describe dreams and desires and all kinds of plans with very unclear outlines. And that is unreliable. The history of my last larger work, *Semplice*, is a good example. I had found four poems-prayers by various medieval and modern mystics and for ages I was thinking in terms of a monumental oratorio. Gertrud von le Fort, fascinating visionary verses such as "God of Flame-Throwing Mountains" were to be the axis. Then in a moment of high creative pressure I wrote a letter to Armin Köhler, the programme head of the Donaueschingen Festival, asking if he could advise me

Smolka

where to turn to get a chance of having the planned piece performed – somewhere where I could get and orchestra and choir, and perhaps an ensemble for early music. He surprised me by accepting it into his plans for Donaueschingen, and later he surprised me again by having a completely different idea of it. What attracted him was the notion of combining old and new instruments, while the singers were fading out of the plans. Then when I got my hands on verses in the original languages, I discovered that they inspired me less, and there were long-drawn out inquiries (never complete) about whether I could obtain permission to use the texts (of the modern verses), and meanwhile I was working on other things and my enthusiasm about the flame-throwing mountains quietly cooled off. Eventually, after three years of dreaming and half a year of intensive work, *Semplice* turned out amazingly well: it's a long piece, it was played superbly to a concert hall full of experts and connoisseurs – I have something to be happy about. But in fact it was not at all what I had been wanting to aim for in the beginning and what had attracted me then. Instead of visionary monumentality it was more about delicate colour shades and subjective lyricism.

Would you say that your music was in some specific way linked up to Czech culture? (I'm not asking this as a routine duty question, but because I think that it is).

I have often felt an affinity with the writers Hrabal and, when reading Švejk, Hašek. With their bizarre wry humour, which hides enormous kindness, and in the case of Hrabal, a potent nostalgia. But that probably couldn't be demonstrated in my work. Maybe I am just projecting my literary preferences onto my creations.
Your question could only be answered by someone from as far as possible outside Czech culture. I am as far inside as possible – I'm as Czech as they come, I have always lived at one Prague address and if I take a trip 200 kilometres to the west I become half-illiterate, because I have never learned any foreign language properly. I am stuck inside my Czechness like in a cage, but I know Cage better than Czech music. I am definitely more connected to Feldman and Webern than to Feld and Eben.

What are you really getting at as a composer?

To answer that would sound banal or pompous and probably both. I'll do better to try to get at it than to define it in words.

of the 1990s appeared at numerous international festivals.
Martin Smolka (*1959) is the only one of the composers mentioned to have a solid footing in the international context. From his student years he followed his own temperamental and aesthetic tendencies in a self-conscious way, seeking to define his own musical originality. He then systematically based his musical language on his introspective insights. It is a language dominated by slow tempos, "detuned" consonances, a dreamy, melancholic mood, and playfulness in the use and treatment of unusual sounds. Smolka is another who started out as a "home" composer of the Agon Ensemble. Commissions from festivals like the Warsaw Autumn and Donaueschingen as well as distinguished ensembles and interpreters soon made him the leading representative of his generation of Czech composers abroad.
Ivo Medek (*1956) has played a fundamental role in Brno, his main centre of activity. He was a founder of Ars Incognita in the 1980s. He is not only a composer but also an active organiser of musical life in Brno, where he acts as a crucial link, working on joint projects both with composers of the older generation (Piňos, Štědroň) and the younger (Dvořáková, Kavan – with whom he founded the improvisation group Marijan). He has taken part in team composition projects in various combinations. His style

integrates a wide spectrum of the technical and sound discoveries of the new music, expresses his special fondness for percussion instruments, deploys humour, erudition and interest in integrating music into multimedia performances.

Pavel Zemek (*1957) (real name Pavel Novák) is also a highly individual and distinctive Brno composer. His experimentation takes the form of radical decisions and a pioneering expansion of composing technique. In his current creative phase he has been composing exclusively in strict unison and systematically exploring the possibilities of this limitation. Although he is of the same generation as the composers mentioned above, his originality has only recently been recognised and highlighted. Today his work is ever more often being played abroad.

The younger generation to which **Ondřej Štochl** (*1975) belongs, has been struggling with the problem of how to define itself in relation to the very similarly orientated composers of the preceding generation and produce something genuinely new. What is more, the external conditions in which this generation has been entering the active music scene are no better than at the beginning of the 1990s – the Czech state is offering even less support to contemporary music than in the past. Younger composers have been reacting to this situation by striving for the highest possible quality in performance and for ingenious forms of concert presentation. In the framework of their synthetic style they are seeking to innovate in terms of expression and technique. One

What are your most recent musical fascinations? What has surprised you or enchanted you?

Unfortunately my capacity to be fascinated is weakening a little. But recently I was bowled over by Pavel Zemek's *4th Symphony* and in general by his style over the last years, his exclusive concentration on unison.

Encountering Gérard Grisey's last work, *Quatre Chants Pour Franchir Le Seuil*, was a fantastic overwhelming experience. There's a brilliant simplification there (relative, in relation to his earlier work), of the same kind that I love in Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*.

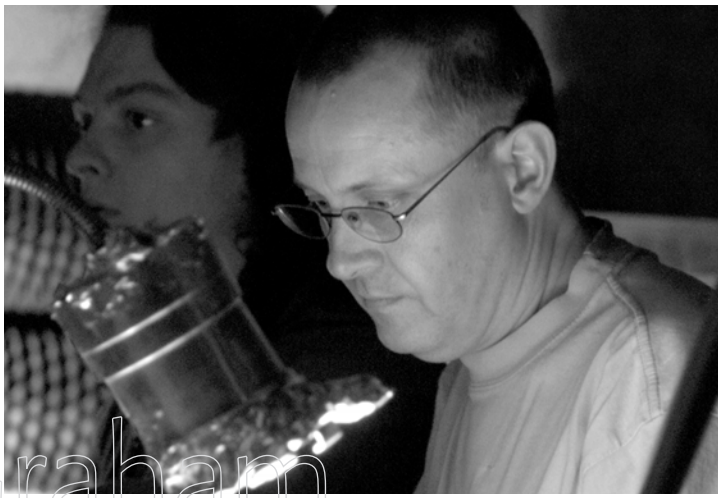
I very much like Pärt's piece for strings, *Orient Occident*. I think that it's in this piece that he got his second wind, reviving his tintinnabuli with a freer approach.

Twenty years late I have got to know deeper Ligeti's *Horn Trio* and I was immediately hooked. For the last four years I have been teaching 20th-century styles of composition at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts and so I am being forced to study many things I believed I knew well again, and more deeply. And that is wonderfully enriching. I have been "rediscovering" Bartók and Messiaen, for example .

Peter Graham

When listening to your quartet on the CD and other examples of your music it is impossible not to ask about your attitude to what we usually call tradition, and by extension to the ambivalent "remixing" and "plunderophonic" responses to tradition in our so-called "post-modern age". So I'm asking...

I have no simple way of answering that question. I am more interested in *history* than in *tradition.* History has always interested my right across the board – I mean not just the history of Europe, but of other continents, and also various marginal phenomena. A sort of "recycling materials and ideas" has always been cultivated in music, and *remixes* and *plunderphonics* are just technically more advanced forms of the idea of operetta *potpourri…* As in every area, the most important thing here is *who* is doing it! (Think how often even behind the most avant-garde sounds you can sense ideas referring to something in light pop or salon music). At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, when these "all-embracing" trends became very up-to-date as a result of the mass spread of computers, I reacted with what was more an attempt to "purify" my own musical idiom. But the quartet mentioned is a little exceptional, in that I wrote it immediately after the death of my father, who had been a devotee of classical and especially quartet music. It was a kind of belated regret that while he was still alive I hadn't given him much pleasure… At the same time it was a commission from the Welsh Arts Council for the Cardiff Festival, where they had invited the Kyncl Quartet. This was not an ensemble you could expect to have much sympathy for sound experiments. But I was also interested in exploring what could be done with these "ordinary notes and traditional harmonies". I therefore concentrated more on the construction of the form. I gave it a great deal of thought, but in the end the piece still seemed to "write itself". It was a very organic process, with individual elements running through all the movements of the piece and continuously being transformed. Every time something new appears it is actually



only a mutation of something that has been there before – it is just that at the beginning this isn't immediately recognisable. It strikes me that this has something in common with life – the way we change and at the same time we are always ourselves… But I only noticed that subsequently.

Can you in some way pinpoint and name the roots from which your music grows? Do you feel yourself to be a part of any tradition or current?

I don't know if *roots* is the right word here – it is better to talk about a kind of very broad *seedbed…*
These sources and influences are terribly numerous; I wouldn't like to leave one out but it's impossible to enumerate them all. Sometimes it can be something very tiny – perhaps just two notes quoted from somewhere, while at other times it is some principle transferred to different material and so forth. Certainly one important source for me is nature, which I see as a huge reservoir of forms and processes. I am also interested in the way other creative artists work – architects, poets, dramatists, film-makers, writers, painters and so on. All kinds of inspirations can be found in their thought processes. And even if I don't use them consciously, I think they have some effect on my own work. In music I find more distant areas (historically and geographically) particularly attractive, but here my interests tend to change in a pretty unpredictable way.
Am I a part of some tradition or current? Somebody else will have to answer that question, and with the benefit of distance. I tend to be more conscious of all the places where I don't belong…

What are you really getting at as a composer?

With every piece I try to create a certain *world of its own* which has a certain *poetic quality.* I want each piece to differ in some way from other music including music I have already written myself. Of course this is extremely difficult – even the greatest masters fell into their own stereotypes! The worst thing is that I am always at square one…

What are your most recent musical fascinations? What has surprised you, or electrified you?

Only just recently I found out something that maybe everyone knows but for me it was a genuine discovery that changed my life. This is that every activity has its own rhythm, which I can not only observe, but also control – i.e. I can interpret anything I do as music. The funniest thing is that this idea occurred to me thirty-five years ago as a "concept for Zen monks", but not until now did it occur to me that actually I could try it myself…

manifestation of the aspirations of the younger generation has been the founding of the composers' and performers' group Konvergence (which apart from Štochl includes Tomáš Pálka, Jan Rybář, and Michaela Plachká; the first three being not only composers but performers as well.) The aim of Konvergence is to present both pieces by the composers of the group and concert performance of pieces by established foreign composers.

Discography

Petr Kofroň – Agon Orchestra */ The Red & Black, Audio Ego 02*
Martin Smolka – Agon Orchestra */ Martin Smolka, Audio Ego 03*
Peter Graham *– Der Erste, Arta Records F 10073, Twentytree Still-Lifes, Šot Records 1997*
Ivo Medek *– DAMA DAMA, WORE 990011-2, WORE 990014-2, WORE 970006-2*
Pavel Zemek – Bárta *– Reflections, Supraphon 3425-2*
Ondřej Štoch*l – Konvergence, Studio Matouš, MK 0057-2131*

Available for on-line purchase at ***www.musica.cz/cdshop***

by Lenka Dohnalová

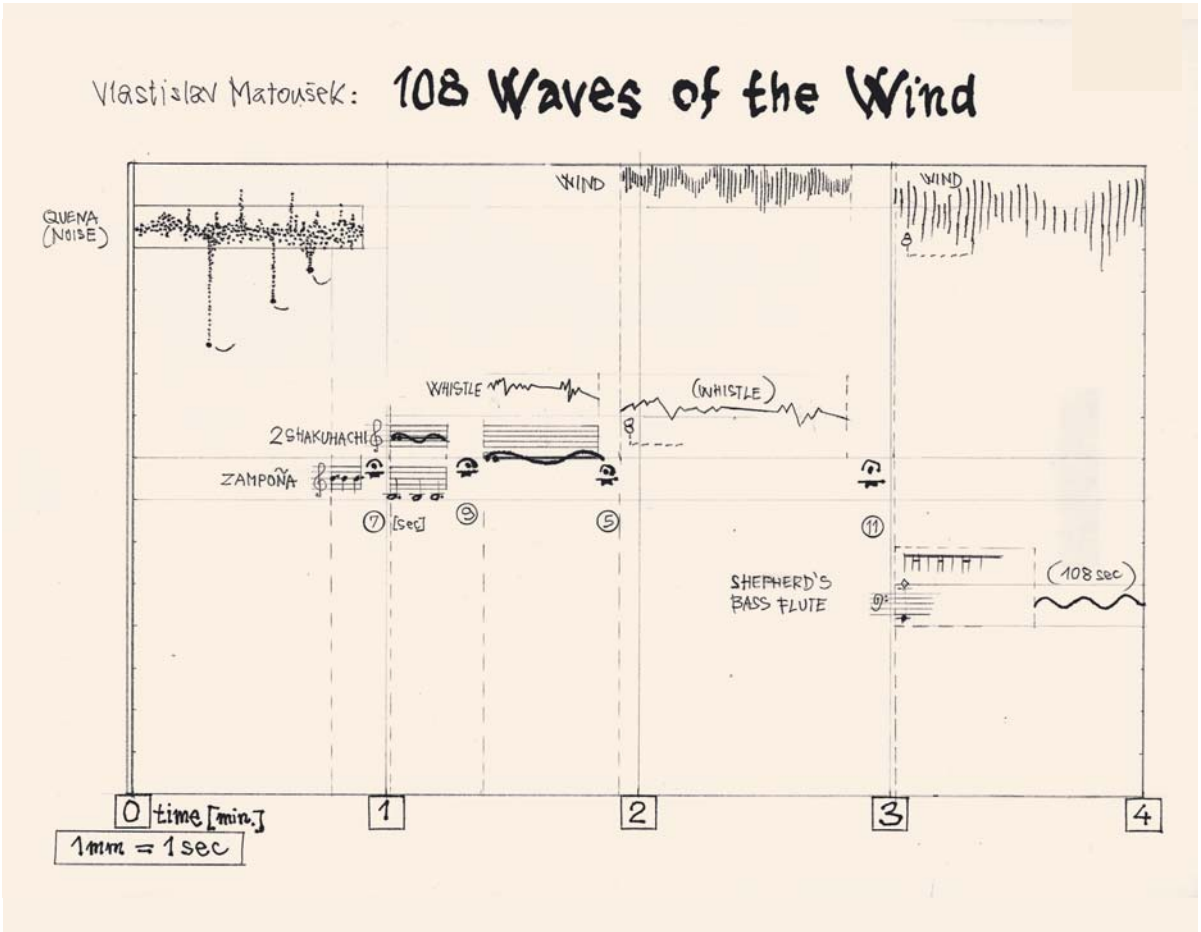
REFLECTIONS ON THE MOST RECENT YEAR OF THE MUSICA NOVA COMPETITION

Electro-acoustic (EA) music, defined as music composed and realised using electronic media (alone or in combination with acoustic instruments), is at the roots of what today is known also as "technical music", multifarious in genre but in most cases sharing a need for computer support. The charm and the weakness of this music lies in complete freedom in the choice of initial material, and the chance to model the acoustic microstructure, create connections at will from hard montage to smooth transitions from one sound to another, and model different depths of virtual space. Not everyone can cope with this degree of freedom, and there is a consequent major risk of dependence on already existing software, tried and tested stereotypes of sound and composition either in groups (associated with particular electronic studios) or individuals, even though such stereotypes may sometimes be chosen deliberately and symbolically, for example in the techno music with its depersonalised mechanised sound.

EA music was conceived in the womb of radio plays, sound movies, and the new possibilities of gramophone and tape recording at the end of the 1940s, but its expansion was conditioned not just the advances in technology that are usually put forward as the crucial factor behind the style, but also by changes in values, taste and our powers of acoustic discrimination. Looking back, the most influential technological changes were obviously the transition to commercial analogue synthesiser in the 1960s, then from the 1970s the spread of numerical sound synthesis, which caused an expansion of the genre into pop music, and from the beginning of the 1980s the transition to personal computers, digital synthesisers with MIDI, and live electronic music. The field became more laicised. The 1990s brought programming environments for live electronic (MAX/MSP), software for synthetic co-ordination of gesture, image and music, virtual multi-channel sound topology, the application of biofeedback and ecological approaches (psycho-acoustic investigation of the effects of different ways of modelling sound, especially in its micro-structure, is an interesting field associated with EA music). Basic and quality programmes for modelling and mixing sound exist in accessible free versions.

What is fundamental is that the rapid development of technologies is today considered a normal part of life, in contrast to the attitude of the 1960s and 70s, when technical advance was either the subject of inflated futuristic expectation or else demonised as the road to dehumanisation. I believe it is this axiological change that has guaranteed the natural diversity of creative approaches to EA according to personal disposition, style or purpose.

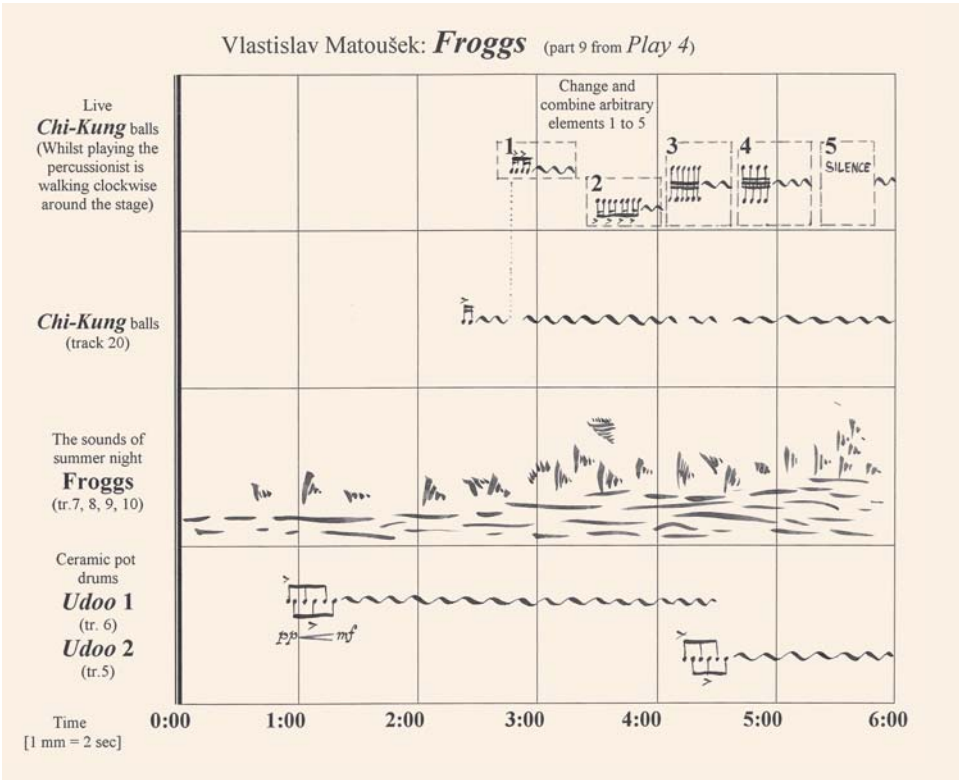
EA music today can be divided into three basic currents, each having their roots in the history of the genre. In simplified terms they are 1) the heuristics



Vlastislav Matoušek: 108 Waves of the Wind (Musica Nova honourable mention in 1994)

of sound sources and hearing, drawing on the philosophy of P. Schaeffer, 2) the heuristics of mental forms, i.e. the projection of different traditional musical but also mathematical and other more universal models into sound, often on the basis of the early philosophy of Stockhausen and Xenakis, and 3) an intuitionism associated with emphasis on poeticism and individual approach.

One way of getting an overview of the evolution of the field is to look at the results of established international competitions. Today these include not only the competitions in Bourges, Linz, Stockholm, the ECMC in New York, the discontinued Luigi Russolo competition in Italy and the more recent Belgian Metamorphosis or Italian Schaeffer competition, but also the already traditional Musica nova competition held in Prague.
Musica nova was founded in 1969 following the establishment of a sound studio at the Pilsen Radio in 1967, and most of the established Czechoslovak composers took at least one course in EA music. The founding fathers were especially M. Kabeláč, M. Hlaváč, R. Růžička and M. Haase. In 1970 the competition was suspended for political reasons and was not revived until 1993. Since then it has been attracting around 120 entries from about 35 countries every year. After the two years 1993–95 the competition organisers decided to stay with a limitation to autonomous (i.e. not multimedia) compositions on the grounds that they needed to attract works of top artistic and technological standard and to ensure that the entries were comparable. Otherwise the competition imposes no preferential criteria of style and isn't anonymous. The jury has a subsidiary interest in gathering material as a basis for comparing conditions for the field in different countries and the way in which composers describe works graphically and verbally.
Two quantitatively strong groups have emerged in the EA music that I have characterised as concerned with the heuristics of sound and hearing. One group is essentially characterised by the mixing of different concrete sound objects that



Vlastislav Matoušek: Froggs

in superficial form means something like "sound tourism", and in sophisticated form the kind of technically elaborated surrealism represented for example by the works of Canadian F. Dhomont or N. Barrett and M. Adkins of the Birmingham school. The charm of these contemporary compositions lies in the alternation of smooth transitions and sharp montage links between different sound realities and in the transitions between the concrete and the abstract. If we conceive of such works (anyway known as "cinema for the ear") in visual terms, then we can say that what is going on is that different real objects – often in unusual combinations – are emerging and disappearing in a fluid virtual space. The best works of this kind in the competition have included Natashi Barret's *Industrial Revelations*. To the same category belong Hans Tutschku's *Rojo* and *Composition for Harpsichord and Birds* by the Canadian Thierry Ghautier, which were awarded prizes in this year's Musica nova. Among Czech authors, laureates have included for example Ondřej Adámek wth his *Střepy z Kybery [Potsherds from Kybera]* in 2002. The main pitfall of this style is the difficulty of mastering heterogeneous material, its syntax and large forms.

For me the second offshoot of the "sound hunters" is more interesting, i.e. those who are looking for rarely exploited interesting sound sources or synthesize them for themselves and then use them to generate a suitable form. Among examples of this kind of music which won awards this year we should mention the Turkish composer Erdem Helvacioglu's *Lead Crystal Marbles*, in which with great musicality and in various different ways the author plays with the beautifully colourful sound of glass marbles, evoking as it were their different sizes and speeds. Interesting Czech "sound hunters" include Radek Rejšek *(Stomatologická rapsodie [Stomatological Rhapsody], Mofety [Moffettes])* with his humorous pioneering approach. But beginners may prefer to turn to tried and tested sources. One, for example, is the sound of a clock, exploited this year by the winning composer of the Czech round Pavel Kovařík with his piece *Time-Space*.

A third common style is the heuristics of the potential of instruments – very often the clarinet, flute, piano or percussion instruments. MAX/MSP makes possible a striking enrichment, in real time, of the expressive and technical possibilities of instrumental play; it adds new structures at different speeds, echoes, spatiality, and changes the colour. Prize-winning pieces this year included one of the *Instrumental Landscapes* by Australian Peter Mcilwain, and in previous years among Czech entries Košut's *Flautato*, for example, or the percussionist Dan Dlouhý's compositions.

Pieces based more on abstract models than on the characteristics of sound itself tend to be compromised by modishness – they exploit stochastic models, game theory models, and in recent years some sound metaphors for string theory have appeared. This approach is significant above all for more general comparative research on sign systems and so forth, but unless it is regulated by the ear and has "anthropological rhythm" it tends to date fast.
From the beginning of the movement (the 1950s, 60s and 70s) Czech composers have traditionally paid a great deal of attention to musical form. This is evident from the very fact that the field of EA music here has been and remains a field studied as a complementary element in studies of classic composition. In the circumstances this has turned out to be a boon, since especially from the 1980s the backwardness in the technical equipment of publicly accessible sound studios became ever more evident and rigour and inventiveness of composition to a certain extent came to compensate for the lack of sophistication of available technical resources. A turning-point came with the 1990s, when composers living abroad (B. Mikolášek, P. Bachratá) or on longer scholarships abroad (O. Adámek, P. Gavlasová, J. Bařinková, S. Smejkalová, M. Rataj) began to create EA music. These composers broadened the horizons of the field in the Czech Republic as well. Where is their still room for improvement? First of all in the systematic standard equipment of universities but also conservatories, and there is also a need to introduce special courses for motivated students that would involve teaching by creative composers from abroad and enable performers as well as composers to get to know the possibilities of this kind of music. In Bratislava, for example, co-operation between the Academy of Performing Arts and the well-equipped and managed Slovak Radio Sound Studio (led by Juraj Ďuriš) has proved its worth. Film is still an under-exploited field, in which EA music has economic as well as artistic potential. The competition is one way of motivating Czech composers to work in the field and giving them, through the sound CD-R compendia, the chance to get to know some of the best international works. We can say this with confidence, because the names of the finalists of international competitions including Musica Nova appear again and again and are well-known to experts in the field.

by Kateřina Hnátová

JAROSLAV JEŽEK: CO-CREATOR OF THE CZECH INTER-WAR MODERN MOVEMENT

At the beginning of autumn last year a hundred years had passed since the birth of the remarkable Czech composer, phenomenal pianist and elemental musician Jaroslav Ježek (25th September 1906 – 1st January 1942). 2006 was generally a year in which great musical anniversaries were celebrated, with concerts commemorating Mozart, Schumann, and Shostakovich taking place throughout the world, but Ježek seems to have been rather forgotten in his homeland, the Czech Republic, even though he was part of an important chapter in modern Czech history, and not only in the field of music.

The 1920s in Czechoslovakia

Ježek was very much a representative of inter-war Czechoslovakia – the first independent republic, born on the 28th of October 1918, in which Czechs invested so many hopes after four years of devastating war. His personality resonated perfectly with the spirit of the time, the spirit of inter-war Europe, which the 1st World War had definitively severed from the last offshoots of Late Romanticism. Ježek belonged to the generation born soon after 1900, which not yet had time to make its mark before the war. In 1918, however, it entered the scene with enormous energy, welling from the desire to survive, to enjoy life at full tilt and with the new jazz rhythms and wild dancing to drown out the disillusion produced by the corrosive experience of war. The twenties were a time of intoxication with jazz and the American dance rhythms of the foxtrot and charleston, the time of the first films, when people were fascinated by the speed of automobiles and aeroplanes, and the telephone and radio were ceasing to be rarities. The first post-war decade was building its own new world from scratch, without anyone realising how short its life would be. Over the period 1920–1949 the dominant style in the arts was Art Deco, which with its orientation to the applied arts spread to all fields of human activity. The different branches of the arts were characterised

by a succession of –isms, some of them ephemeral. There was an inexhaustible number of models and inspirations for creative artists.
Even between the wars there were plenty of traditionalists defending academicism, but these were ever more often confronted with the innovative spirit of their younger colleagues. Experienced teachers at the Prague Conservatory recognised the talent of the young student Ježek and understood that for him classical education and academic grounding were only a springboard to a new life, but they nonetheless were prepared to meet him halfway. Even strict authorities in the mould of K. B. Jirák were of help to the young Ježek, and another important Czech composer, Josef Suk, was generous in his praise.

Childhood and Studies at the Prague Conservatory

Jaroslav Ježek was born on the 25th of September 1906 in the Prague district of Žižkov as the son of a ladies' tailor Adolf Ježek and his wife, who was to give birth two years later to his sister Jarmila. Jaroslav started to attend general school, but after two years his teacher recommended that his parents send him to an institute for children with poor sight, since at three he had lost his right eye after a third unsuccessful operation and he had only minimal sight in his left eye. To make matters worse, scarlet fever had left him with a festering infection in both ears which had failed to heal and permanently impaired in his hearing. As we know from the example of many other composers, nature often compensates for physical handicap by endowing the afflicted man or woman with an inner life of unusual perceptiveness, imagination and acuity, which when combined with an enormously strong will, zest for life and heightened intensity of experience becomes fertile soil for the growth of an artist of genius.
After the outbreak of the 1st World War Ježek's father was called up and so committed his son to the Hradčany Institute for the Education and Treatment of Blind and Poorly Sighted Children. Here Jaroslav was to remain from September 1914 to February 1921 and to learn, among other things, to play the piano, cello, clarinet and guitar, a certain amount of harmony and experience in choral singing. When the war ended his sick father returned home and in 1921 the family moved into a new flat in Kaprova Street no. 10 in the Old Town, where today you can visit the Jaroslav Ježek Museum and the famous "Blue Room" with Ježek's original piano (a Steinway, model M, New York 1927–28).
By now the young Ježek was set on pursuing a career in music and initially planned to study musicology at Prague's Charles University. He was not admitted, however, because he lacked the prescribed education, and so applied to the Prague Conservatory instead. The history of Ježek as composer started in 1924, i.e. before the starry epoch of the Liberated Theatre (Osvobozené Theatre) that we shall be talking about below. In 1924 the eighteen-year-old Ježek went to audition at the piano department of the Prague Conservatory and surprised the committee by the unusual choice of pieces that he intended to play. He avoided chronically well-known "classics" and played Maurice Ravel's three-movement *Sonatina in F sharp major* (1905) and Hindemith's *Boston* from the *"1922" Piano Suite*. But while the young pianist amazed the committee with his skill and choice of modern pieces, he was not accepted for piano studies on account of his blindness. He was therefore offered the alternative of composition studies and his abilities in this respect were tested at the entrance examination by the composers K. B. Jirák and Alois Hába. Ježek started studying composition in the department headed by the strict Professor Jirák, and in 1925 he was finally accepted into the piano department as well, under Prof. Albín Šíma. He also attended Hába's course in quarter-tone music, and as a result wrote a *Suite for Quarter-tone Piano* in 1927.
This was merely an experiment and part of a search for new ways of composing, however, and he did not go further along the quarter-tone road in his subsequent work. Following all the new international developments in composing as he did, Ježek naturally also encountered the twelve-tone technique of Arnold Schoenberg. What most appealed to him, however, were the dance rhythms that were filling inter-war Europe at the time and were an expression of joy at the end of the 1st World War and the desire to live at full throttle. Jaroslav Ježek was drawn to older classi-

cal dances (the waltz and polka) but above all to the modern dances that were often imports from the American continent (charleston, foxtrot, etc). He never drew a very precise line between these popular dances with their rhythms and jazz elements and the fields of serious classical music and their musical forms that he studied intensively under the exacting supervision of K. B. Jirák. As a result, even his early graduation piece *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (first performed on the 23rd of June 1927 in Prague, by the Czech Philharmonic conducted by K. B. Jirák) is a kind of prototype of "symphonic jazz", as it was perceptively called by the music journalist, pianist, frequent performer of Ježek's pieces and his friend of many years Václav Holzknecht (1904–88) in one of Holzknecht's Ježek monographs. This piano concerto is divided into three movements, but the 1st movement is written as a foxtrot, the 2nd movement as a tango and the 3rd movement as a charleston. This method of synthesising a major three-part symphonic musical form with the most modern dance rhythms and the attempt to stylise original jazz into something on a higher level and so create a new type of concert music was in itself a very audacious innovative move in the Czech environment.

Alois Hába, Igor Stravinsky, Jaroslav Ježek and Jaroslav Křička (1930)

The Spell of Gershwin

In the composition of his graduation concerto Jaroslav Ježek was evidently already following in the footsteps of his beloved George Gershwin (1898–1937), whose works he had got to know during studies at the Prague Conservatory (affected by a wave of modernism) and whom he hugely admired. He was absolutely dazzled by Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, as he himself testified, *"It was in this environment that I first heard Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue and even today I would not be able to find words for the dizzy intoxication with the record produced in me. What I had been unconsciously moving towards and what I had looked for in dance albums and in the poor piano arrangements of unknown piano composers stood before me unexpectedly in the utmost splendour, in complete perfection of form, in sensual seductiveness of content, in the exoticism of colours, sounds and rhythms. I tried to write something similar, but I lost courage at the first attempt and left my first composition unfinished – it was already a foxtrot for piano with orchestra. I began to master jazz in stylised form, composing songs on texts by Nezval[1], Seifert[2] and the contemporary French poets, and tested the ground in small works for the Liberated Theatre... I spent my apprentice years over a gramophone and I needed very good ears to be able to make out from the final sound of the record all the instruments and all the finesses of sound and rhythm that I had to get to know. Let me assure people who classify jazz under light music that I learned at first hand just what unusually hard music it is..."*

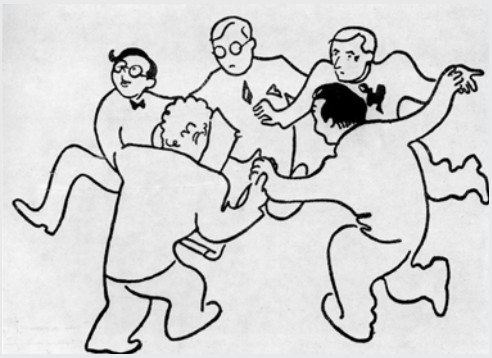
These are words that underline Ježek's refusal to draw a distinction between the serious music taught at conservatories and all the rest – light or even decadent music, and the fact that unlike many academics he was afflicted with no prejudices. Thanks to his classical training he could identify the complex harmonic techniques in jazz and in Gershwin, for example, the complexity of form filled with a new contemporary content. Probably what most attracted him to jazz were the wild rhythms and syncopation that were otherwise unusual on Czech terrain. He was brilliant in his ability to combine jazz techniques with charming Czech melody, in the same way that Gershwin, from a Russian Jewish family, saturated his jazz pieces with East European inspirations. Indeed, the combination of strong rhythmic elements with lyrical cantilena was a major element of music by the Russian composers, such as Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich.

The synthesis of classical techniques of composition and jazz breakthroughs often involved audacious constructs that could not easily be classified either as classical music or popular music. From the beginning Ježek's work therefore encountered a lack of sympathy and comprehension in conservative Prague circles, but fortunately he found full support among his closest friends and in avant-garde circles. Moreover, not only could he rely on many members of his own generation (friends and fellow-students from the Prague conservatory), but his piano teacher Albín Šíma (1886–1951), and the traditionally minded K. B. Jirák stood behind him, and even the great Czech composer Josef Suk (1874–1935), under whom Ježek obtained his diploma in the master composition class in 1929, was full of praise.

Stay in Paris

Apart from his traditional training at the Prague Conservatory Ježek gained valuable experi-

ence during a six-month stay in Paris (January to June 1928), and it was evidently in Paris that he conceived his admiration for Prokofiev and above all for Stravinsky, whose music he heard for example at performances by the legendary Diaghilev Ballet. As we know from his diary, he also attended a lot of operas, but could afford to go to only a few large concerts. He got to know some of the music of the composers of "Les Six" and alongside the predominantly cabaret aesthetic of the Six also noticed serious major works, such as Honegger's opera-oratorio *Judita* on a biblical theme. In terms of impact on his musical imagination, the deepest traces left by his months in Paris were probably those of the works of Igor Stravinsky, the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů who was living in Paris at the time, and, unconsciously, impressionist compositional elements from Claude Debussy (above all work with the colour of keys and harmonies in some piano pieces, whole-tone sequences and suchlike), about whom he wrote in depth as part of his journalistic activity for Czech periodicals (Český svět, Rozpravy Aventina and others). In the 1920s Ježek also collaborated with the poet Vítězslav Nezval and the Devětsil Group of artists, one result being Ježek's stage music (1927) for Jean Cocteau's play *The Eiffel Tower Wedding Party* (by coincidence a piece of the same name had been jointly produced by members of the Six in 1919). The arts group Devětsil was active in the years 1920–31 and was one of the main centres of the Czech avant-garde in the 1920s.



The Mánes Music Group. From left to right: at the front Pavel Bořkovec and Iša Krejčí, at the back Jaroslav Ježek, František Bartoš and Václav Holzknecht (1937)

1 Vítězslav Nezval (1900–1958) – Czech poet, writer, and translator, in the 1920s he was one of the founders of the poetist movement and in the 1930s he turned to surrealism.
2 Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986) – Czech poet and translator, in 1984 he became so far the only Czech to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

Jaroslav Ježek with the leading lights of the Liberated Theatre, Jan Werich and Jiří Voskovec

Ježek and the Liberated Theatre

Among Czechs, Ježek is associated above all with the legendary Liberated Theatre and the many popular songs that interlarded the plays by the theatre's writer-performer duo Jiří Voskovec (real name Wachsmann) and Jan Werich (both cult figures who enriched the Czech scene with their distinctive intellectual humour that developed from dadaist jokes to political satire). In brief encyclopaedia entries Jaroslav Ježek appears as the "hitmaker" and member of the theatrical authorial trio Voskovec–Werich–Ježek. This characterisation is, however, rather one-sided, because the classically trained Ježek also composed music in major forms and wrote a number of commissioned works that were performed at concerts of the Society for Modern Music in Prague or at the Mánes Society (in the 1930s).
The Mánes Music Group was another important Prague avant-garde grouping and existed as an element of the Mánes Fine Art Society (founded by students of art school in 1887). In the 1930s it carried on the legacy of the Devětsil group in many respects. The musical chapter of the history of Mánes opened on the 16th of December 1932 with an evening of music to verses by Vítězslav Nezval. The society, whose members were the composers F. Bartoš, P. Bořkovec, J. Ježek, I. Krejčí and V. Holzknecht, focused on the presentation of Czech and European music (above all French and Russian). The artist Adolf Hoffmeister has left us testimony of how Ježek loved art as well as music and how comfortable he felt in the company of the "Mánes" painters. At a time when he was constantly coming up against ossified academicism and a failure to understand his works in conservative

The Mánes Music Group. Václav Holzknecht, Iša Krejčí, František Bartoš, Jaroslav Ježek

music circles, the open minds of the artists of the Mánes circle was a great stimulus for him.

Let us go back, however, to the history of Ježek's collaboration with the Liberated Theatre. Ježek got together with Voskovec and Werich and their Liberated Theatre (it existed from 1927) after his return from Paris (where by the way he wrote his remarkable five-part *Petite Suite for piano*) in 1928. The revue *Premiéra Skafandr [Diving Suit Premiere]*, the first joint work of the three authors, was premiered in the spring of 1929. It included one of Ježek's most popular hits – the foxtrot *Tři strážníci [The Three Policemen]* which was later incorporated into the play *Ostrov Dynamit [Dynamite Island]* of 1930.

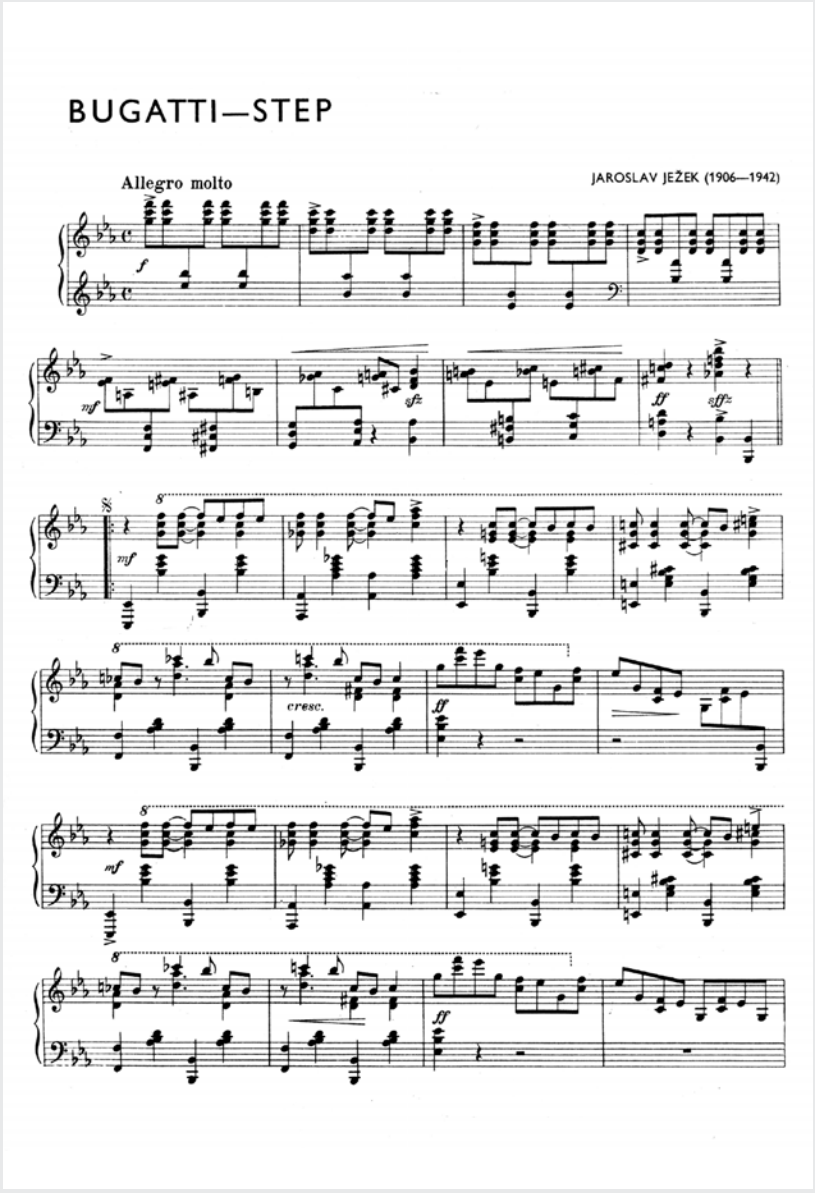
In addition to intensive work with Voskovec and Werich, Ježek continued to compose songs on texts by Czech and French poets and was also busy with piano music, while in 1928 he also wrote a two-part ballet, *Nervy [Nerves]* with short vocal finale. Nor did Ježek avoid chamber music; in 1927 he wrote a *Wind Quartet for Flute, Two Clarinets and Bassoon* and four years later a *Wind Quintet*. In the 1930s he inclined more to stringed instruments, writing his *1st String Quartet* (1932), the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1933), and *Duet for Two Violins* (1934). Ježek was well able to cope with a large symphonic orchestra, as well. In 1930 he composed his *Fantasia for Piano and Orchestra* which developed the line marked out by his graduation piano concerto of 1927. In 1930 he wrote a *Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra* which was performed in the same year in Prague by the Czech Philharmonic conducted by Václav Talich. In 1936 Ježek set to work on his *Symphonic Poem*.

The 1930s was also a very fertile period for his film music. Apart from the film *Ze soboty na neděli [From Saturday to Sunday]* by director Gustav Machatý (1931), there were all the films from the Voskovec and Werich studio: *Pudr a benzín [Powder and Petrol]* (1931), *Peníze nebo život [Your Money or Your Life]* (1932), *Hej rup [Heave Ho]* (1934), *Svět patří nám [The World Belongs to Us]* (1937). In 1933 Jaroslav Ježek added to his piano work with ten *Bagatelles*, later arranged into a single cycle. 1933 was also the year when he wrote the piano *Etude*, which was premiered with the bagatelles by V. Holzknecht at a concert on the 26th of January 1933 at Mánes. The last piano piece that he composed in Bohemia is the *Rhapsody* of 1938.

During the 1930s, however, Ježek gave precedence to intensive work for the Liberated Theatre, helping to create a long series of legendary theatrical productions full of distinctive humour and political satire with a relevance that was to endure into later periods of Czech history. The verbal acrobatics of the scripts were brilliantly complemented by the immanent wit of Ježek's music, and the result was a quite extraordinary symbiosis of a kind seen only in a very few other cases (for example the collaboration between Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, whose *Threepenny Opera* of 1928 is among the most successful attempts at synthesising jazz and classical music). The most famous plays of the Liberated Theatre include *Fata Morgana [The Mirage]* (1929), *Ostrov dynamit [Dynamite Island]* (1930), *Sever proti Jihu [North against South]* (1930), and *Don Juan a comp. [Don Juan & Co.]* (1931), featuring the today

"Always with a Smile PF 1935"
Jaroslav Ježek's New Year's Greetings Card for 1935, drawing by Adolf Hoffmeister

celebrated *Bugatti step*, written in honour of the Czech female racing driver Eliška Junková, the star of many automobile races of the 1930s in her Bugatti. The *Bugatti step* became popular both in piano and orchestral form. Among other Liberated Theatre cult plays we should mention: *Golem* (1931), *Caesar* (1932), *Robin Zbojník [Robin Hood]* (1932), *Svět za mřížemi [World behind Bars]* (1933) – containing the famous blues number *Život je jen náhoda [Life is Just Chance]*, *Osel a stín [The Donkey and the Shadow]* (1933), *Slaměný klobouk [The Straw Hat]* (1934), *Kat a blázen [The Hangman and the Fool]* (1934), *Vždy s úsměvem [Always with a Smile]* (1935), *Panoptikum* (1935), *Balada z hadrů [Ragtag Ballad]* (1935), *Nebe na zemi [Heaven and Earth]* (1936), *Rub a líc [Front and Back]* (1936), *Těžká Barbora [Heavy Barbara]* (1937), and *Pěst na oko [A Sore Thumb]* (1938). This huge output and the innovative creative technique of the authorial trio of Voskovec–Werich–Ježek makes it clear that the 1930s witnessed a whole new chapter in Czech theatre. A number of later performers tried to imitate and develop the tradition, but the central clown duo of Voskovec and Werich remained matchless. The Liberated Theatre existed in the years 1927–38, and after its forced closure in 1939 Voskovec, Werich and Jaroslav Ježek all emigrated to the USA.



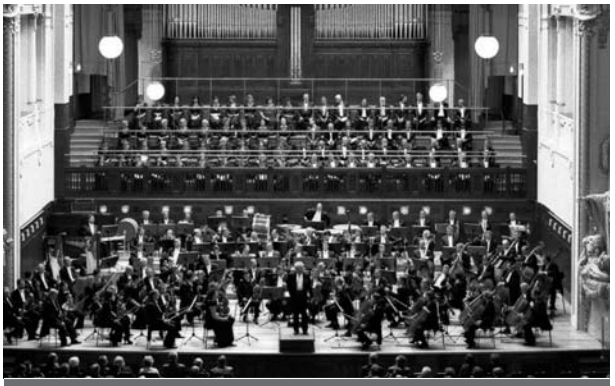
Jaroslav Ježek – Bugatti Step (1931); first page

Last Years in the USA

In America a new, if rather sad and short chapter, opened in the life of Jaroslav Ježek. Ježek performed with Voskovec and Werich for Czech Americans and expatriates, and the three were given a warm welcome because everyone was interested in the fate of the first Czech emigrants and felt for them. In the USA Ježek managed to

put together a Czechoslovak Choir, which he conducted himself. Work was the only activity that could distract Ježek from depression and homesickness for his country, for Prague, and for his mother. He suffered from pain in the inner ear and kidney disease, but he still went on composing. In 1939 he wrote a piano *Toccata*, reminiscent of Sergei Prokofiev in its rhythmical energy. His concerts with the choir meant that he did not complete his *Piano Sonata* until March 1941. Jaroslav Ježek finally succumbed to ill-health at the tragically early age of thirty-five, dying of kidney failure on the 1st of January 1942 in the Cornell University Hospital in New York. His funeral on the 4th of January was attended by his friends, members of the choir and other figures from the world of the arts. After the war, on the 5th of January 1947, the government of the Czechoslovak Republic held a memorial ceremony in the House of Artists in Prague, followed by the interment of his remains in the cemetery at Olšany.

Yet if Jaroslav Ježek died more than half a century ago, his music lives on and the dynamic and multifaceted development of jazz in the 20th century has shown how right he was, when with enormous intuition he sensed the durability and authenticity of this kind of music. Although he had a great fondness for composing stage music and a masterly ability to characterise different people and situations, he was never tempted, for example, to venture into the world of opera. His intuition seems to have told him that new branches of music theatre and film would shift the main interests of the public and composers elsewhere. Inter-war revue and cabaret were reborn as musical in the later 20th century, and today musicals are very much the fashion. Few people are aware, however, of the roots of today's trends. In this sense the inter-war Czech musical avant-garde should be seen as the preface to the development of Czech popular music from 1945 to the present day. This is yet another reason why Jaroslav Ježek has a unique and essential place in the history of Czech music.



by Iva Oplištilová

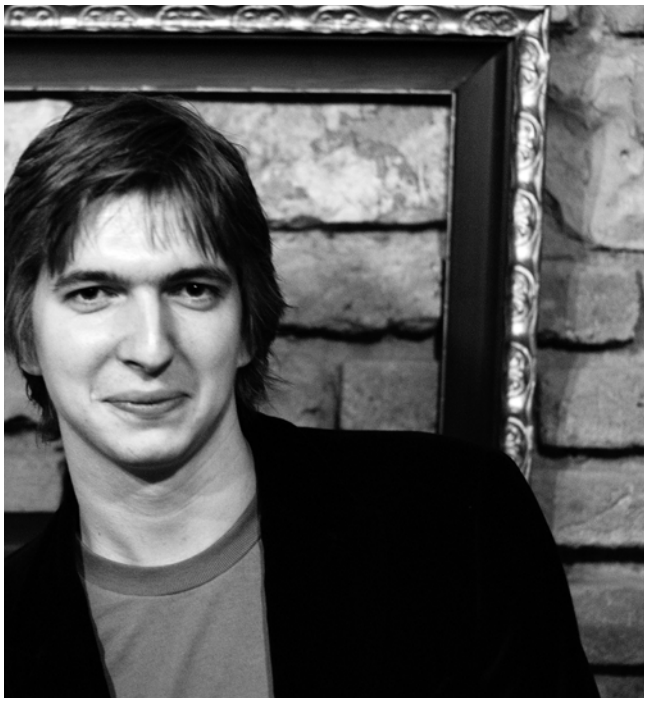
THE PURITY METHOD

An interview with the young cellist Tomáš Jamník

What questions is a promising Czech cellist confronting in his first exciting season? We talked with Tomáš Jamník, winner of the 2006 Prague Spring Competition, about the process of forming his own conception, the context of the time, and different approaches to performance.

Let's begin with the essentials. Do you have a particular ideal of sound?
I am very much a stickler for overall purity or cleanness of sound. This starts from the practice stage, since first I rehearse a piece very slowly, without vibrato, in completely clean, pure form. For me, vibrato definitely isn't something I would begin with, keeping it the same from start to finish. Generally I enjoy playing with sound. On the other hand you mustn't overdo the purity, because it can detract from the sound; often the clean approach doesn't allow for such intensity of expression and certainly you couldn't play a Brahms sonata that way, for example. But even with Brahms I have to have an idea of a constant structure, to which I then add expression. It is important for me to know the completely clean prototype.

So music is an abstract thing for you, not some outpouring of feelings...?
At concerts I definitely have to stir people's feelings and electrify them, but I still always need to have a basic vision of the work to keep to.



And do you practice the emotions, or are they just a question of the mood of the moment?
Earlier, when I was younger, playing was more a matter of on-the-spot "podium ideas" (*laughs*). Essentially I created everything on the podium. When I was younger I didn't practice pieces so much as wholes, but concentrated more on technique and particular passages. I would then glue it all together on the podium – that was definitely exciting in its way...

A dangerous game...
Exactly. But now I do it less, or in fact not at all, because even what I add to the structure ought to have a conception behind it. It can't be just animal playing. And a conception means you avoid needless mistakes.

Do you fight or have you fought with any of your professors?
The transition from my high school teachers Mirko Škampa and Martin Škampa to the Prague Academy of Performing Arts (AMU) was not entirely easy. With Professor Chuchro I started to practice in a very physical way. For example initially I had 4-hour lessons with him and that was really a slog. One reason was the need to keep up an ever larger repertoire for concerts. I got into better physical condition, and acquired more tonal power, and I learned to practice for longer sessions – it all helped me get a better view and grasp of the works. When I play the Dvořák cello concerto it is terribly important to have an overview of the whole concerto and to be aware in the introduction to the first movement that there is half an hour of demanding play waiting for me.

What sort of student are you? Do you go your own way, or do you take something from everyone and try to reach a kind of synthesis?
It is important for me to feel natural on the podium, but on the other hand I can't ignore the advice of my professors, and so it is a sort of compromise. I take account of all the comments that I hear and try to translate them into my own language, to make any alterations as natural as possible.

If you need to feel good in a piece, does that mean there are some composers you avoid?
Definitely not. When he composes his music, a composer has his own feelings and something makes him write a piece a certain way – in most cases it is some profound motive. As a performer I have to discover all that and convey it to the public

Which do you prefer, giving concerts or recording?
I make a distinction between three types of playing: concert, competition and recording. Naturally concert playing is the closest to my heart, but in competitions or the studio I still try to give a two-hundred-percent performance and then I am enormously pleased if the competition or recording is a success.

How do these three types of playing differ?
It's a question both of mode of preparation and of mode of play at the time. On the concert podium I can allow myself more leeway, and the emotional charge of the moment plays more of a part. I can work with the present, for example I don't need to ignore the fact that there is a storm outside, or the sun is shining. There is also a very delicate relationship of co-operation between me and the public. When I sit down to play in front of a jury, I don't care at all what the weather is like outside, because there I must give a performance of the best calibre but also the kind of performance where I have to keep my passions in check. I can't put all my ideas into my performance and the result is certainly not so electrifying as at concerts.

You have the complete cello works of Bohuslav Martinů in your repertoire. What does this composer mean to you?
Martinů has been a favourite of mine since I was small. I got to know his music gradually – first I played individual *Pastorelles* and *Arabesques* at children's competitions. Then at 15 I got to know his *Variations on a Slovak Folksong* – at the time I played it very often. Later it was his sonatas and cello concerto. For me as a Czech there is no question about it – Martinů composed the most pieces for cello and piano. I also love his musical idiom, which is very congenial to me. At music high school I put together my graduation concert entirely from works by Martinů. And because I know his biography, I like him as a person as well. I believe that if I had met Bohuslav Martinů in his time we would have got on well together.

How easy do you find it playing with different orchestras?
I am the sort of person who enjoys myself under any circumstances. It's an advantage. Because nothing depresses me. Before a concert I just say to myself: that's it, I've rehearsed as well as I can, I know more or less how to do it and so does the orchestra, and so now the only thing is for us to try and get the maximum out of it on both sides.

What is your attitude to the public? Do you try to meet it halfway or do you perhaps try and educate it a little?
I certainly don't try to instruct the public. My starting point is that the programme must be interesting for a given audience, and making it varied, for example, is one way to do so. For example last year, when there was the Mozart centenary, the Talich's Beroun festival asked me to put together a Mozart programme. That is quite hard, because Mozart has almost nothing for cello! But I tried as much as possible to oblige. Mozart has something tiny for cello and piano, and I made a transcription of

his violin sonata and I also asked my friend the composer Marko Ivanovic to compose variations on a theme from Mozart. I enjoy putting together programmes in a way that gives them overall coherence, and means that they aren't slapdash affairs.

You mean finding links and shared contexts?
Yes, I'm trying to do the same with my new CD. Supraphon offered me the chance to record a debut album, ideally of pieces by Czech composers. I felt that for my debut the pieces ought to be tailor-made for me, but at the same time I wanted there to be some rationale to the overall selection, and so I chose works by Martinů, Janáček and Kabeláč. I am trying to find links and bridges between these composers so the resulting album gives the impression of a coherent whole.

Are you working on the Kabeláč by yourself?
I am just beginning, just trying to get hold of the manuscript in order to understand him as well as I can. I first encountered Kabeláč when I played his *Mystérium času [Mystery of Time]* in a student orchestra. The piece completely electrified me. I also remember that the cellos in it have an unbelievably intense passages, it was perhaps the first time I ever thought I wouldn't manage to play a piece to the end. But the result was astounding and even back then I said to myself that I would have to look for other works by Kabeláč.

You are orientated to ur-texts – original manuscripts. Why are they so important for you?
My approach is based on logic. When something is going to be immortalised on a recording, it has to have a meaning not just for today but for the people who will be listening to it fifty years from now, for example. I try to find details, something that perhaps no one has seen before but that suddenly strikes me as completely obvious. The ur-text is important to me in the sense that what I have in front of me is the primary source of the composer's message. Let me give you an example. When I was preparing to play the Dvořák Concerto at the Prague Spring Competition, I visited the Dvořák Museum in Prague and spent a few days discovering all kinds of secrets of the cello concerto manuscript. It is good to know all the deletions, the original versions of the piece. For instance in the introduction to the first movement there is a passage in forte which Dvořák originally intended to be in the opposite dynamic, in piano. This changes the context of the whole thing. As a result I have to play forte, but in awareness of the fact that it is not

an unquestionable. Maybe it has no effect for the audience, but for me as a performer it is important. The manuscript can convey a great deal in itself. It is enough to see that where the author was writing in an excited hurry, where he pressed the pencil down hard, and where he was at a loss (places with a lot of deletions)...

This year you spent a period in Germany. Would you be able to describe the differences between the various cello schools?

I wouldn't say a Czech couldn't play a French composer, but it is always better to know the views of someone who has experience of the French environment. For example in December I had the chance to play a Debussy Sonata to Philippe Muller. The first time I ever played the Debussy Sonata, I had a sense of French relaxation, impressionist sound. With Philippe Muller I discovered that as a Frenchman he didn't feel these things at all; on the contrary, he completely honoured the part precisely as it was written, just as German strictly reveres Beethoven, and he demolished everything I had been trying to add. This was amazing experience for me. Maybe a Frenchman playing Martinů for the first time would experience the same sort of misunderstanding. In the same way I'm interested in how Martinů is performed outside the Czech Republic. I enjoy watching how other nations approach his work and I try to identify the features common to all performances. Which brings me back in a roundabout way to what I said about it being a good thing to know a variety of views and then to form one's own picture.

On the other hand, I have a feeling that today cello playing – like everything – is experiencing a degree of unification. At home I have a poster I brought back from a competition in Liezen in Austria which uses the image of a tree to show which cellists studied with whom. It beautifully conveys how the roots at the beginning were very far apart, but today everything is running together. You can go to a master class attended by around 200 cellists of every nationality with dozens of great international cellists teaching and performing – it's a huge cultural melting pot.

What is your approach to master classes? Is it a good way of learning?

I've caught myself out several times for not actually remember many details such as bow strokes or ways of fingering from a master class, but what I always try to get is a sense of the personality of the teacher. When I was younger and came away from a master class I would try maybe for a month to play like the cellist who had given it, because the way he spoke and performed had completely fascinated me.

What about contemporary music, and other ways of playing?

I enjoy contemporary music. The ideal situation is when I can be in contact with the composer and help to put the finishing touches on the music with him. What is more I have already encountered works that are based purely on sound quality, where there is no need to see the piece as a whole, and you just have to let yourself to be carried away by each moment of the piece. Today's concert conditions mean that you can hear the most subtle deviations, and so a performer's thoughts are mirrored through his fingers.

But I also try to think in a contemporary way about the classic works of cello literature. For example, recently I was playing Beethoven's *Sonata in C major* with my friend the excellent pianist Ivo Kahánek [see CM 3/04], and I really enjoyed the fact that I was playing it in a contemporary context. I think this is the task of the performer generally – to put things in context. Now we are in the era of the boom in home cinemas with three-dimensional sound I can't expect listeners to feel the same as people centuries ago.

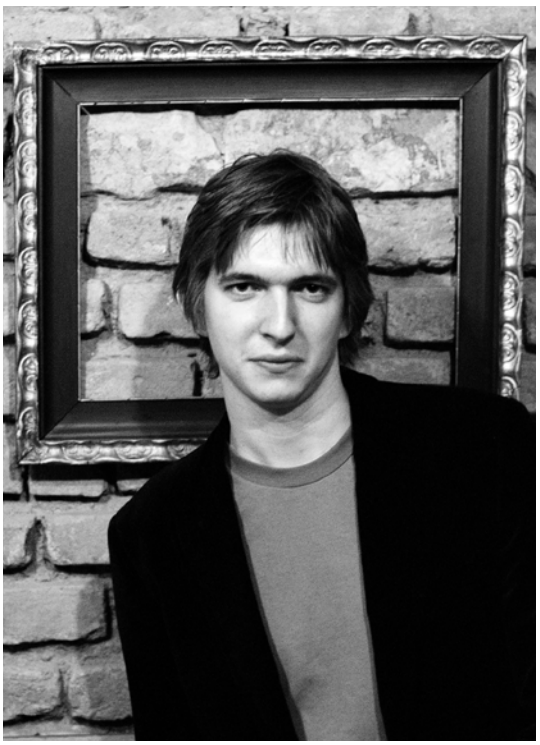
How do you manage to combine playing with a normal life? Do you have any free time?

I had an advantage attending the Jan Neruda music Gymnasium (high school) in Prague, because while it is basically a conservatory, students have normal subjects like mathematics or chemistry in the curriculum as well as music subjects. This means you don't have so much time for practice and have to learn to organise your time effectively. It also means you never get bored with practising – I never sat down to the instrument with a sense of reluctance.

My free time spills over into my work time without a break and vice versa. I don't make precise schedules about when I'm going to practice and when I'll take a break. I definitely enjoy travelling and sport, chess. I also love literature; earlier I was a hardcore fantasy literature fan, but today I don't have so much time for it.

Do you have any particular goals, ideas?
I would like to be truly effective as a cellist. Today when I listen to recordings of the great cellists – Rostropovich, Casals – I know they are people who got to the top by small laborious steps. My highest goal is to keep on taking these successive steps, so that in the end when someone listens to my CDs they will say, "yes, it makes sense that way". I want my greatest weapon to be playing itself. That is my take on competitions, for example – a pure stripped down method that means I just practice and the jury, which understands it, assesses my performance. And then people interested in me turn up and will want to support me. The point is just to be in the right place at the right time.

You really are an optimist!
Yes, a terrible optimist, but so far it works.



Tomáš Jamník (*1985)

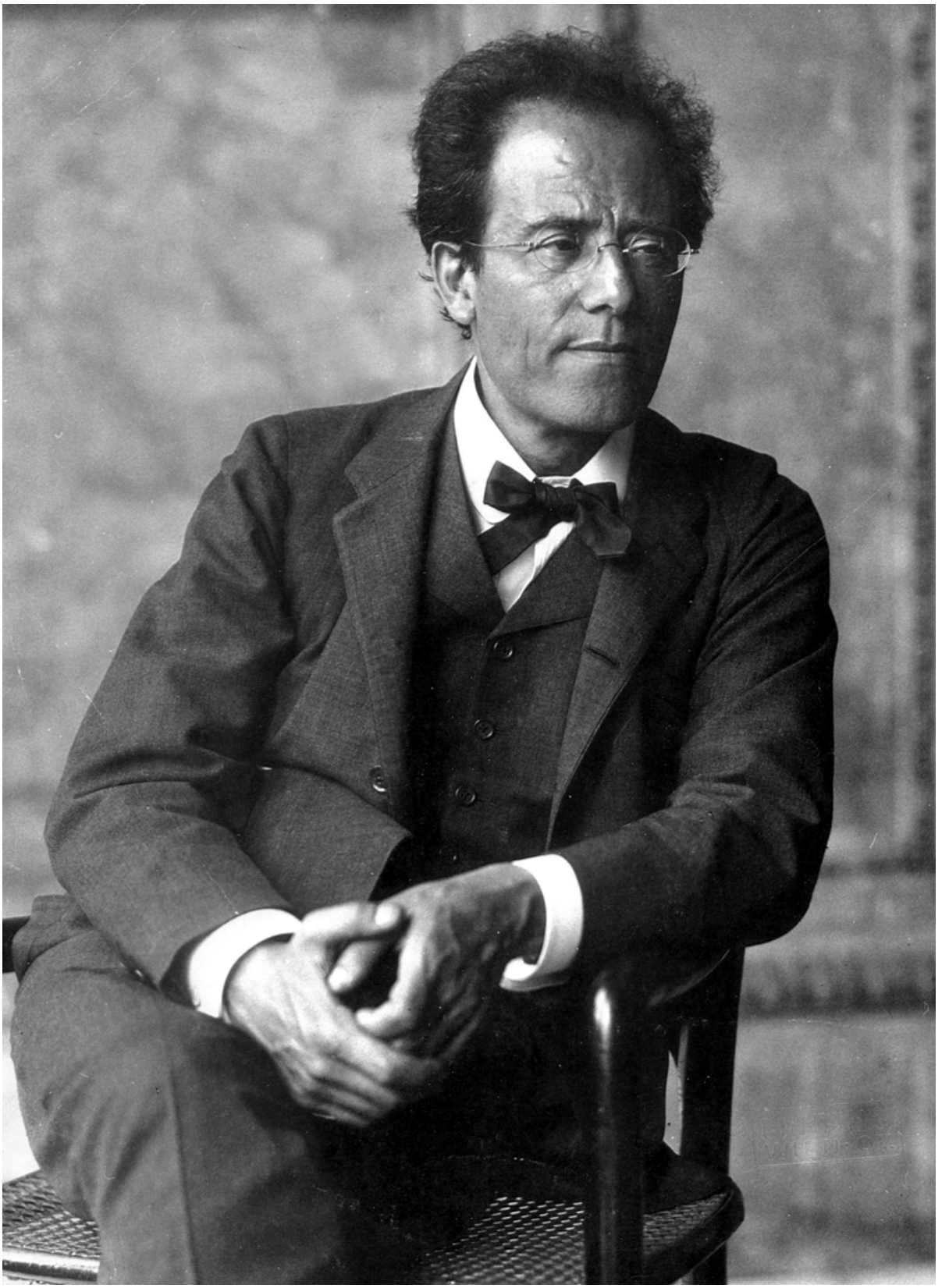
He started playing the cello at five, and studied with Mirko and Martin Škampa (Jan Neruda Music Gymnasium, Prague) and Josef Chuchro (Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague), where he is still studying. In 2006 he studied with Peter Bruns at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Leipzig on a scholarship.

His successes at competitions include the Heran Competition 2001 (absolute winner), Liezen 2000 (2nd Prize), national round of the Concertino Praga competition 2000, 2002 (1st Prize); 2003 – winner of the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation performer competition; 2006 – laureate of the 58th International Prague Spring Music Competition.

Most important awards and scholarships: at 12 years old he won a summer scholarship to Granada from European Union of Music Competitions for Young People (EMCY); award for the interpretation of a work by David Popper and Czech Music Fund Award for the best performance of a piece by Bohuslav Martinů in 1995 and 1999; 2000 – Bohuslav Martinů Prize, EMCY and Bärenreiter Prizes; 2006 – Czech Radio Award, Oleg Podgorný Award, Gideon Klein Foundation Award and also a Josef Hlávka Award, given annually to the best students at universities in the Czech Republic.

He has been chosen for active participation in master courses by Jiří Bárta, Heinrich Schiff, Steven Isserlis, Siegfried Palm, Gustav Rivinius and Young-Chang Cho.

Solo performances with the Prague Symphony Orchestra, the Prague Chamber Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra Berg, the Pardubice Chamber Orchestra, the Plzeň Philharmonic, and the Czech Student Orchestra. He frequently records for Czech Radio and maintains long-term collaboration with the Japanese pianist Shinya Okahara (CD complete set of the cello works of B. Martinů)
Member of the Trio Concertino (Ivo Kahánek – piano, Jan Fišer – violin), which in 2004 won 1st Prize in the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation competition.



by Jitka Ludvová

GUSTAV MAHLER AND PRAGUE

The history of Mahler's relationship with Prague started in July 1885, when he was engaged by the Prague German Opera as a conductor at the young age of twenty-five. Prague was to prove an important milestone in Mahler's life, for it was here that he first confronted major professional challenges and it was here that his music was played for the first time. Mahler last visited Prague in 1908, when he conducted the premiere of his own Seventh Symphony. *"My symphony* [the 7th] *will be performed on the 19th of September in Prague – if the Czechs and Germans don't go for each others throats before then",* he wrote to Bruno Walter on the 18th of July. It was a time when Czechs and Germans were indeed battling for political hegemony, but Mahler's symphony was nonetheless premiered by a joint Czech-German orchestra. The Prague public and critics of both nationalities received it with respect, acknowledgement and even enthusiasm. Mahler was and remained a figure who commanded the allegiance of both Czech and German musicians in Prague, and feelings were mutual: Mahler identified with German and Czech musical Prague.

1.

Mahler had embarked on a career as an opera conductor in 1881. His successive jobs in the Upper Austrian spa town of Hall, in German theatres in Ljubljana and Olomouc and finally as music director in the Municipal Theatre in Kassel gave him the chance to get to know the ordinary opera repertoire and acquire practical experience, but hardly encouraged his creative growth. When he managed to get a post at the Royal German Land Theatre in Prague *(Königlich deutsches Landetheater in Prag)* it was actually only as a replacement, but the year's engagement was to prove a turning point.

In June 1885 Mahler was offered a post as conductor at the opera in Leipzig, but this was not coming vacant until the 1886–87 season. While still in Kassel he therefore tried to find work for the 1885–86 season. On the 3rd of December 1884 he wrote a letter to the director of the theatre in Bremen, Angelo Neumann, enquiring about the possibility of collaboration. Neumann, however, had just finished in Bremen and was preparing to take over the Prague German Theatre. He had no interest in Mahler, and had already chosen Anton Seidl, an outstanding conductor with whom he had very good experience, as orchestra conductor for the Prague theatre. Over the next weeks, however, it transpired that Seidl was angling for an engagement at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Neumann was concerned that Seidl might let him down in Prague, and so turned to Mahler. Quite probably he visited one of the young conductor's performances in Kassel, because he never engaged musicians he did not know. He had an unerring ability to discern talent and he took Mahler, even though the twenty-five-year old *Kapellmeister* had no experience of large-scale theatres and productions.

Neumann's caution was justified. Immediately after the start of the first Prague season, in August 1885, Anton Seidl requested a long leave of absence to guest conduct in Bayreuth and then went straight on to New York rather than back to Prague. Neumann's ambitious Prague opera programme now rested on the shoulders of the soon to be departing Ludwig Slansky, who had worked at the Prague Theatre for more than twenty years, and Gustav Mahler.

The Prague German Theatre company was in a difficult situation. It was housed in a building with an august tradition – it was here that Mozart had conducted the premiere of his opera *Don Giovanni* in 1787 (at the time it was called the Nostitz Theatre – *Gräflich-Nostitzsches Theater*) and Wagner's operas had been performed since 1854 (by this time it was called the Estates Theatre – *Ständetheater*), but in 1885 it was in a poor technical state and inadequate to modern demands. The Prague German Theatre was also struggling against the competition of the Czech *National Theatre*, which had opened in November 1883 and was luring away the German public as well with its excellent opera company. The German opera company was, indeed, on the verge of extinction.
Gustav Mahler arrived in Prague on the 17th of July 1885 and in mid-August took up Seidl's duties. With Ludwig Slansky he fulfilled the duties of both second and first conductor at the same time, and his responsibilities were heavy. As the second conductor he was in charge of the day to day programme (including twenty-seven repeats of the popular chivalric tale from the Thirty Years War in Viktor Nessler's opera *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen*), but at the same time he got his first chance of his life to tackle large-scale opera of the most demanding kind: on the 6th of September he conducted Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, on the 27th of September Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and on the 25th of October a new production of another Wagner opera, *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*. In November and the first half of December he devoted himself to the works that were of most consequence to Neumann: he rehearsed the first two parts of Wagner's Ring Cycle, *The Rhinegold* and *The Valkyrie* with the Prague company. After laborious preparations with both orchestra and singers he then conducted the premieres on the 19th and 20th of December in the Estates Theatre. There were five reprises. Wagner's famous work even attracted audiences from Germany, and the Prague Theatre won back part of its prestige. Toward the end of the season Mahler also conducted Mozart (*The Abduction from the Seraglio, Cosd'fan tutte*), Marschner (*Hans Heiling*), Lortzing (*Undine*), Meyerbeer (*Der Prophet*), Gluck (*Iphigenie in Aulis* in Wagner's edition), Weber (*The Freeshooter*) and Beethoven (*Fidelio*).

As a loyal Wagnerian, Neumann devoted several days every year in February to Wagner's memory, and 1886 was no exception. On the 13th of February, the anniversary of Wagner's death, Mahler conducted two parts of the opera *Parsifal* and on the 21st of February Beethoven's

9th Symphony, the piece with which Neumann usually ended his Wagner festivals. Mahler had spent a mere twelve months in the Prague German Theatre, but this one season had fundamentally enlarged his musical horizons and increased his self-confidence as a conductor in the theatre and on the concert podium.

2.

On the 18th of April 1886 Prague became the first place where Mahler's music was publicly played. In the large conservatory of what was then the Grand-Hotel in Mariánská Street (today a student hall of resident in Opletalova Street) a charity concert was held to help students of law. The hall was entirely packed with important Praguers. The German theatre had entrusted the choice of programme to Mahler and given him an orchestra. Mahler put together a three-hour programme in which he appeared as conductor, pianist and composer. He chose Mozart's *Symphony in G minor,* Boccherini's *Minuet*, the Scherzo from Anton Bruckner's *Symphony in D minor* (this was the first time any of Bruckner's music had been performed in Prague) and Wagner's *Kaisermarsch*. The critics were enchanted by the fact that he conducted from memory. The programme also involved performances by singers whom Mahler accompanied. Mahler's Prague friend Betty Frank sang three of his songs. We know the titles of two, but the third is less certain. Frank definitely sang the song *Steh auf!,* later renamed *Frühlingsmorgen* and included in the collection *Vierzehn Lieder und Gesänge aus der Jugendzeit* (1880–92), and the song *Hans und Grete* from the same collection,

The Estates Theatre (above)

The first house where Mahler lived in Prague in 1885, in Rytířská Street (below)

Angelo Neumann (1838–1910), director of the German Theatre in Prague

while the third was from the collection *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, and probably *Ging heut' morgen über's Feld*. The critics particularly praised the singer for the chamber intimacy of her performance and excellent vocal technique, Mahler's music was considered "interesting and natty in conception."

3·

During his Prague season Mahler attended several performances at the Czech National Theatre. He was captivated not just by the excellent singers, but also by the operas of Bedřich Smetana, which he wrote about in letters from Prague to his future employer, the director of the theatre in Leipzig. Subsequently he was always to keep up with Smetana's work and to return to it several times as a conductor.

When Mahler bade farewell to Prague in the summer of 1886, not just the Prague press but the composer himself was full of regret. He would like to have exploited the great chances offered him by Angelo Neumann, and even tried to change his plans accordingly. As early as December 1885, after the premieres of *The Rhinegold* and *Valkyrie* he wrote from Prague to the intendant of his former company in Kassel, confiding that *"I would like to terminate my contract in Lepizig so as to be able to stay here, but director Staegemann will not agree to it. So next August I am just going to have to set out on the hard road to Leipzig, where an unpleasantly rivalrous relationship with Nikisch is definitively in store for me."*

After his departure, however, Mahler did not vanish from the pages of the Prague press and his opera activities were carefully followed. On the 13th of July 1887, after the end of his first Lepizig season, Mahler came to Prague for a few days to visit his friends. Among them was Angelo Neumann, who had plans with Mahler. Mahler had been working on an arrangement of Weber's opera *Die drei Pintos*, which he wanted to present for the first time in Leipzig on the 1st of January. Neumann was very keen that Mahler should present his work in Prague as well, and it is likely that the date for the Prague premiere, the 18th of August 1888, was already set in the summer of 1887. The opera was to be staged in the new building of the Prague German Theatre (Neues deutsches Theater, today the Prague State Opera), which opened on the 5th of January 1888.

Mahler arrived in Prague on the 8th of July and started rehearsals four days later. There was huge interest in the production, correspondents of the foreign press came specially to see it, and Neumann even opened the dress rehearsal to the public. Originally Mahler

Königl. Deutsches Landestheater.

Sonntag den 21. Februar 1886

um 12 Uhr Mittags.

Zum Besten des deutschen Schulpfennig-Vereines.

Große Musik-Aufführung.

I. Abtheilung.

1. Duett: **Götterdämmerung** (Brünnhilde und Siegfried) . . . Richard Wagner.
Brünnhilde — Marie Rochelle. Siegfried Adolf Wallnöfer.
Das Orchester des königl. Deutschen Landestheaters. Dirigent: Ludwig Slansky.
2. Verwandlungsmusik, grosse Chor- und Schlussscene des 1. Actes **Parsifal** . Richard Wagner.
Chorpart: Deutscher Männergesangverein, Gesangverein Sct. Veit.
Chordirigent: Musikdirector Friedrich Hessler,
Das Orchester des königl. deutschen Landestheaters, Dirigent: Gustav Mahler.

II. Abtheilung.

Neunte Symphonie

für Soli, Chor und grosses Orchester . . . . Ludwig van Beethoven
Chorpart: Deutscher Männergesang-Verein, Gesang-Verein Sct. Veit.
Chordirigent: Musikdirector Friedrich Hessler.
Das Orchester des königl. deutschen Landestheaters, Dirigent: Gustav Mahler.
Die Soli gesungen von Betty Frank, Laura Hilgermann, Adolf Wallnöfer, Johannes Elmblad.

Operntexte und Clavierauszüge billigst bei H. WEINER, Musikalienhandlung Prag, Obstgasse Nr. 2 neu.

The concert for the Wagner anniversary, on the 21st of February 1886 in the Estates Theatre, where Mahler conducted Wagner and Beethoven. He appeared with the theatre orchestra and soloists together with Prague German choirs.

was supposed to have conducted only the premiere and first reprise on the 21st of August, and then to have handed the production over to Slansky. In the end Mahler stayed in Prague until the 31st of August and conducted not only four reprises of the opera, but other performances between them, all to packed audiences. The prolongation of his stay in Prague was not without a practical purpose, either: Mahler was waiting for the definitive form of his contract with the Royal Hungarian Opera in Budapest, where he took up the post of first conductor in the autumn of 1888.

The two seasons that he spent in Pest by no means severed Mahler's contacts with the Prague German or the Prague Czech opera. He kept an eye out for good singers, and followed operas in the Prague repertoire that he wanted to present himself. When he left Pest for Hamburg in the autumn of 1891 he was already planning to engage two Czech singers for the Hamburg City Opera – the bass Vilém Heš and the soprano Berta Foersterová-Lautererová. Both became leading members of his company and outstanding interpreters of Smetana's operas *The Bartered Bride* and *The Two Widows* which Mahler conducted in Hamburg.

Mahler also established a close friendship with the Czech composer and music publicist Josef

Bohuslav Foerster, who was working in Hamburg as a teacher and journalist.

In the summer of 1897 Mahler became director of the Vienna Court Opera. He had kept up his interest in the works of Smetana and immediately, in October 1897, put the opera *Dalibor* on the programme, editing and conducting it himself, and in 1890 he went on to conduct the overture to the opera *Libuše* at a concert of the Vienna Philharmonic. At this period his other contacts with Prague related to his own music. In January 1898 the organisation Gesellschaft zur Förderung deutscher Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur, based in Prague and dedicated to supporting German culture in the Czech Lands, responded positively to Mahler's request for financial assistance with the publication of the scores and orchestral parts of his 1st and 3rd symphonies. It was a generous gift at a time when Mahler's work did not enjoy universal acceptance and Mahler immediately showed his gratitude to his compatriots by personally conducting both symphonies at the Prague German Theatre in the following years. On the 23rd of March 1898 he conducted his 1st Symphony at a philharmonic concert, and on the 25th of February 1904 he came to Prague again specially to present his 3rd Symphony. In June 1899, he also expressed his appreciation for Neumann's support by agreeing to conduct Beethoven's 9th Symphony in the German Theatre at the end of the Wagner cycle.

Betty Frank, the first interpreter of Mahler's songs in 1886 in Prague

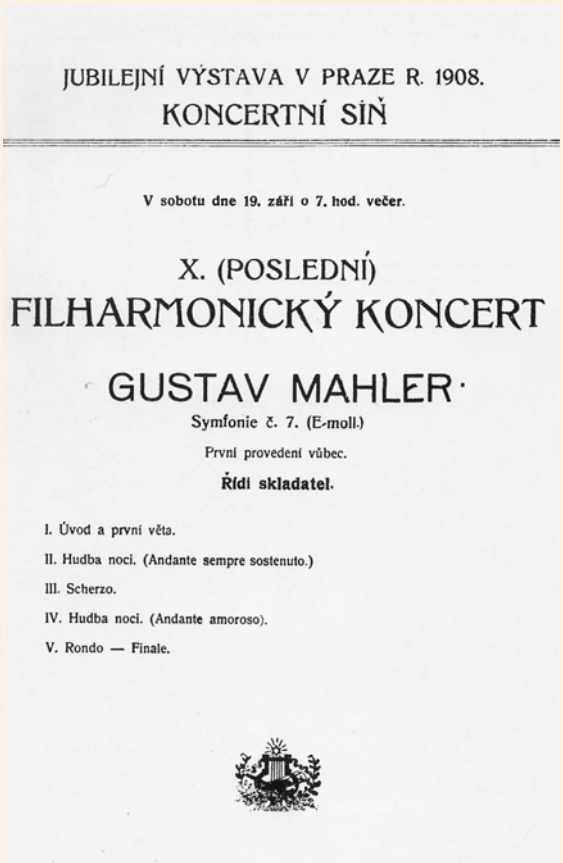
In October 1907 Mahler left the Vienna Court Opera (his own decision), and at the beginning December crossed the Atlantic to take up an engagement with the Metropolitan Opera in New York on the 1st of January 1908. The German season at the famous American opera house lasted only three months and Mahler was able to return to Europe in April 1908. In the following months he twice conducted in Prague, in both cases as part of a major music festival that accompanied the jubilee exhibition held to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Chamber of commerce and industry in the Bohemian Lands.

The exhibition was an enormous event in the social life of Prague. It was opened by the heir to the throne Ferdinand d'Este and visited by members of the imperial family. The cultural programme involved a large number of concerts. A large wooden pavilion with excellent acoustics and space for an audience of 1,500 was constructed at the exhibition ground, and popular concerts were presented here every day. Between the 23rd of May and the 19th of September it was also the venue for a special series of ten "philharmonic" concerts offering serious music. The first and last of these were conducted by Gustav Mahler, whose orchestra – under the name Exhibition Orchestra – was made up of the Czech Philharmonic strengthened by sixteen

players from the German Theatre. Mahler arrived in Prague on the 21st of May, as usual took lodgings at the Blue Star Hotel (on the site today occupied by the National Bank), immediately started rehearsals and the following day wrote to his wife in Vienna that *"Yesterday was very pleasant. The orchestra is very good and amenable."*

At the opening concert on the 23rd of May he conducted Beethoven's *Coriolanus* Overture and 7th Symphony, the overtures to Wagner's operas *Tristan and Isolde* and *Meistersinger* and the overture to Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*. For Beethoven's 7th Symphony Mahler brought note material with his own alterations, and these were then copied during rehearsals into the Czech Philharmonic's orchestral parts. The orchestra's archive still contains this authentic testimony to co-operation with Mahler.

Concert Pavilion in the complex of the Prague Exhibition Centre, where Mahler's 7th Symphony received its premiere on the 19th of September 1908.



JUBILEJNÍ VÝSTAVA V PRAZE R. 1908.

KONCERTNÍ SÍŇ

V sobotu dne 19. září o 7. hod. večer.

X. (POSLEDNÍ)

FILHARMONICKÝ KONCERT

GUSTAV MAHLER·

Symfonie č. 7. (E-moll.)

První provedení vůbec.

Řídí skladatel.

I. Úvod a první věta.

II. Hudba noci. (Andante sempre sostenuto.)

III. Scherzo.

IV. Hudba noci. (Andante amoroso).

V. Rondo — Finale.

Programme for the premiere of the 7th Symphony

Former Neues Deutsches Theatre, now Prague State Opera (right)

In September 1908 the same orchestra presented the premiere of Mahler's 7th Symphony. Musicians from all over Europe came to Prague for the occasion, among them several young conductors, admirers of Mahler, who had attended all his previous premieres in various cities and in Prague provided Mahler with welcome help by correcting the parts after rehearsals. The orchestra – regardless of nationality – greatly appreciated chance to work with the celebrated conductor and several members of the Czech Philharmonic were later to publish their recollections of the experience.

Mahler's last contact with the country of his birth was through the music of Smetana. In his second New York season, he conducted the premiere of a production of *The Bartered Bride* in the Metropolitan Opera on the 19th of February 1909. The text was sung in German translation, and Emmy Destinn took the role of Mařenka.

4·

Mahler's own works were played exceptionally frequently in Prague. During the composer's lifetime

his symphonies and songs were performed fifteen times (between March 1898 and May 1911). On ten of these occasions the concerts were in the German Theatre, where they were conducted not only by the composer himself but also by Leo Blech, Richard Strauss, Paul Ottenheimer and Artur Bodanzky; they were included four times on the programme of the Czech Philharmonic with the conductors Oskar Nedbal (for the first time with the 2nd Symphony on the 18th of December 1903) and Wilhelm Zemánek (1907, 1909). The Seventh Symphony was performed in 1908 by a joint Czech-German orchestra.

Czech and German musical Prague continued to embrace Mahler's music even after the composer's death, and over the inter-war period there were nearly a hundred performances of Mahler's works. In 1911 Alexander Zemlinsky, a personal friend of Mahler's, became music director at the Prague German Theatre, where in March 1912 he conducted the huge 8th Symphony, and then *Das Lied von der Erde* (for the first time in April 1913). Under Zemlinsky Mahler's symphonies and song cycles became a permanent part of the programme of the theatre orchestra's philharmonic concerts. Zemlinsky was succeeded in 1927–29 by Hans Wilhelm Steinberg, and after him Georg Széll, both admirers and interpreters of Mahler. Up to 1918 the Czech Philharmonic was headed by Wilhelm Zemánek, who conducted Mahler as did his colleague Otakar Ostrčil, Zemlinsky's pupil and later the head of the National Theatre Opera. In 1919 Václav Talich became conductor of the Czech Philharmonic; he conducted Mahler's works himself as well as entrusting their performance to his colleagues (Karel Boleslav Jirák, Otakar Jeremiáš). Alexander Zemlinsky himself was a frequent guest conductor with the Czech Philharmonic in the inter-war years, and presented Mahler's works with the Czech orchestra seventeen times over the period 1923–37. Other conductors from the Prague German Theatre who guest conducted Mahler's works with the Czech Philharmonic were Leo Blech, Otto Klemperer, Hans Wilhelm Steinberg, Georg Széll and Erich Kleiber. Erich Kleiber was in fact the last to conduct a Mahler work in Prague before the Second World War: on the 8th of April 1938 he conducted a concert with the Czech Philharmonic that included – in memory of its Prague premiere – the Seventh Symphony. Mahler's music was entirely banished from concert life in the occupied country during the war years.

5.

After the Second World War, when the orchestra of the German theatre vanished from the Czech Lands together with German culture, the once strong Mahler tradition was slow to revive. As in all the satellite countries of the Soviet Union, in the former Czechoslovakia too the ruling communist ideology kept to the doctrines embodied in the New Soviet Encyclopaedia according to which Mahler was a representative of despicable bourgeois culture and unsuitable for the education of the population in a communist spirit. Mahler was not absolutely banned, however, since very fortunately Dmitri Shostakovich, a composer with political influence in the Soviet Union, admired Mahler and was in a position to take the edge off the sharpest ideological objections. A certain degree of tolerance was therefore exported to Prague, although in the 1950s performances of Mahler's work were rare indeed compared to the inter-war period. Gramophone recordings of Mahler were to be rarities on the domestic market for twenty years. The situation changed entirely around the year 1970, when the Czech Philharmonic presented its first cycle of Mahler symphonies for many years and people queued for tickets for hours on the steps in front of the box office.

Today a whole century separates us from the life and death of Gustav Mahler. For the whole of this period Mahler has continued, incredibly, to be seen as a contemporary composer. Unlike many of his contemporaries he has not become a classic of acknowledged values, but has remained what he was in 1900 – an interpreter of life's contradictions in all their immediacy. This is given to few, and his contemporaries in the Bohemian Lands were among the first to recognise it: *"This feverish and changeable era of ours has given birth to an excess of minor artists but very few major artists. And only two geniuses: Rodin and Mahler"*, wrote the Czech aesthetician Otakar Zich in his obituary of Mahler.

reviews

Antonín Dvořák
Suite in A major, op. 98b

Josef Suk
Serenade for Strings in E flat major, op. 6, Fantastic Scherzo, op. 25

Prague Chamber Philharmonic, Jakub Hrůša. Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: 7.–9. 3. and 23. 8. 2006, Studio Domovina, Prague. Released: 2006. TT: 66:11. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3882-2.

For his next profile CD (the first was devoted exclusively to Antonín Dvořák) **Jakub Hrůša** with the **Prague Chamber Philharmonic** has chosen a very natural combination: Dvořák and Suk were related on three levels at once – personally through Suk's marriage, by the teacher-pupil relationship and through affinity of musical temperament. All the works on the CD are well-known, but with the exception of Suk's *Serenade* they are not particularly often performed. The interpretation of the latter, however, shows that even extremely well-known pieces can be made interesting, the deposits of musical cliché stripped away and the listener compelled to listen properly. Dvořák originally wrote his *Suite in A major* for piano, but with his gifts and skill in instrumentation later gave it a very becoming orchestral garb. It is an intimate, undemonstrative piece, and Jakub Hrůša with the Prague Chamber Philharmonic performs it in just this spirit. The orchestra employs silken tones both overall and in the solo passages (for example the oboe in the fourth movement!); it builds the dynamics smoothly and sensitively, and all the rubatos, ritardandos and accelerandos are logical and delicate. Suk's Serenade, as has been noted, is one of those notoriously well-known pieces that some conductors situate on the border or even over the border of salon music. This us how it is played by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, for example on the Decca recording of 1996 (447109-2), with a dash of suave sentimentality, sliding tones and vibrato that Jakub Hrůša and the PCP have entirely cut out. In expression and polished details Hrůša shows himself here to be a true pupil of Jiří Bělohlávek (Bělohlávek's recording with the same orchestra of 1996, SU 3157-2-031), but also with his own creative originality: Hrůša's *Adagio* in the third movement for example is more than two minutes longer than Bělohlávek's but never loses emphasis and nowhere becomes saccharine or tedious. Here too the conductor can rely on excellent string and wind sections, which respond sensitively throughout. *Fantastic Scherzo* was a piece that Josef Suk was later inclined to dismiss, not regarding it as the most profound of his pieces. It is far from easy to keep it together in terms of structure, and possibly it contains too much evolutionary music at the expense of genuinely elaborated ideas. These problems, however, only make one admire Hrůša's approach the more. He has managed to weld the structure together, essentially by simple and obvious methods: where other conductors bring out direct contrasts, Hrůša integrates them in dynamics and tempo. As the sharpest comparison that I can think of I would mention Charles Mackerras's recording with the Czech Philharmonic of 1999 (Decca 475 7061). Mackerras performs Suk in an almost "Janáčekian" style, that is by splitting it up into small motif sections and soberly separating these off from each other. His forte passages are almost aggressive and other sections lack the quality of dance, which Hrůša on the other hand manages to bring out with lightness of touch, as well as finding typical Dvořákian-Sukian lyrical moments. Each piece meanwhile retains its individuality, and this is the real basis of the conductor's art. Jakub Hrůša is twenty-five years old and because conductors (or so they say) mature over a longer period, in such cases people usually talk of "promise". I believe that Jakub Hrůša has already fulfilled his promise, with sovereign ease. Vít Roubíček has written a fine commentary in the booklet.

Vlasta Reittererová

Upside-Down or Ba©chanalistica
Ritornello, Michael Pospíšil

Production: Vítězslav Janda. Text: Cz., Eng. Recorded: 2/2006. Released: 2006. TT: 66: 30. DDD. 1 CD Arta F10145 (distribution 2HP Production).

In their latest album "Upside-Down or Bacchanalistica" the **Ritornello** Ensemble is following on from their second album "Shrovetide is Here". Under the direction of **Michael Pospíšil** it opens the doors even wider into the world of the musical beauties of Baroque Bohemia. As with "Shrovetide", so in the merry "Bacchanalistica", Ritornello uncovers the relatively little known repertoire of Baroque secular music inspired chiefly by food and drink. This is not some decorous banquet, but a real nosh-up and booze-up with everything that involves, and so music-making as well. One piquant aspect of the whole thing is the fact that the sources of this culture are to be found tucked away in monastery libraries. This is evidence of a remarkable long tradition stretching right back to medieval vagabond poetry cultivated by wandering students and wanton monks. Michael Pospíšil puts it very well in his erudite commentary when he calls this repertoire "Czech Baroque Carmina Burana". It is rare to find an album that manages so brilliantly to invest a small, cold CD with the unique atmosphere of a recording session such as this. And so the listener really "shouts, leaps, dances and sings" with the performers, especially when he or she has the songbook (it comes with the CD). The booklet also offers outstanding Czech translations by Michal Svatoš, and rhymed English translations to help those without a knowledge of Latin (or even Czech!) to get into the Bacchic spirit of the recording. It all means that we can be participants in a terrific, wild party after which – replete, well-lubricated (to put it euphemistically) and enormously entertained – we can finally fall asleep with Ritornello. The album is brilliantly conceived and designed with care given to the smallest detail. It shows us the world "turned upside-down" – the same but different, inverted but not perverted. If we look at our own world (or ourselves) like this, even serious matters seem comic. It helps us to keep hold of common sense. Our ancestors were well aware of the fact and unlike us they knew not only how to have a good time, but also how to divide their time properly between Divine and Human matters. We can only look forward to Ritornello's next surprise.

Jan Bata

Magdalena Kožená
Enchantment
(Gounod, Bizet, Mozart, Handel, Rameau, Conti, Bach, Mysliveček, Gluck, Massenet, Respighi, Shostakovich, Britten, Janáček, Dvořák)

Magdalena Kožená. Production: D. Butchart. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 1996–2003. Released: 2006. TT: 65:61, 76:56. DDD. 2 CD Deutsche Grammophon 477 6153 (Universal Music).

Today, when the music market is saturated with every kind of re-edition, compilation, collection of favourite melodies, "the best of…" and suchlike, it is hard for the less experienced music-lover to tell truly high-quality recordings from purely marketing driven products that tend to be very average in standard. **Magdalena Kožená's** Enchantement album belongs to the first group. It offers a very attractive and refined repertoire that will appeal both to the connoisseur and the novice, who may be just starting to explore classical music. Lovers of older music, opera fans and admirers of romantic songs will all come into their own here. While the choice of repertoire is important, the performances themselves are the decisive thing – a standard of performing excellence that is rare indeed is ensured by the singer herself, and the names **Minkowsky, Štryncl, McCreesh** or **Johnson**. For people who have not succumbed to the collecting mania (either on principle or because they cannot afford it), this album offers a unique chance of looking inside the rich musical world of Magdalena Kožená and encountering recordings that are relatively less accessible or well-known. This is because the individual arias and songs have been chosen not just from existing solo recordings, but from some large projects, such as Gluck's opera *Paris and Helen* or Rameau's *Dardanus*. The album also contains two bonuses: a Bach videoclip and (more of a rarity for young or foreign listeners) Dvořák's song *Žalo dievča* – a number from what I believe was her very first solo CD (label Sinfonietta), not sold abroad. If many even well-stocked admirers of Magdalena Kožená succumb to this offer, it will hardly be surprising, for it offers not only a representative cross-section of a remarkable series of recordings, but above all successfully accents what is probably Kožená's most important musical characteristic – her as it were effortless virtuosity in the broadest sense of the word, a virtuosity not in the service of her own personality, but of music.

Marc Niubo

Johann Sebastian Bach
Sonatas for viola da gamba

Petr Nouzovský – violoncello, Monika Knoblochová – harpsichord. Production: Pavel Vlček. Text: Eng., Cz. Recorded: 12/2005, Studio Martínek, Prague. Released: 2006. TT: 43:38. DDD. 1 CD Cube Bohemia CBCD2631.

Bach's gamba sonatas are mainly recorded by gamba players, such as Savall, Kuijken, Bylsma, and Boothby, while "normal" cellists are more interested in the solo suites. (One of the few exceptions has been Mischa Maisky (piano Martha Argerich, DGG)). It is understandable in a way, for the gamba suites are not superficially attractive and technically rather thankless. Nonetheless, they contain a great deal of remarkable music. **Petr Nouzovský** and **Monika Knoblochová** (see CM 3/06) are musicians still little known at home and unknown abroad. They are young, they know exactly what they want to achieve, and they are highly erudite on the theoretical historical side as well. Listen to their performances and I guarantee that after a time they will start to fascinate you and "draw you in". While Maisky's Bach has an appropriately romantic aura and is first of all Maisky and only secondly Bach, here the reverse is true. The gossamer fine, equal dialogue is utterly precise in its contours, the phrasing is neither self-indulgent nor an end in itself and everything coheres with everything else. The cellist has taken enormous pains to meet the harpsichordist halfway and to achieve what is known as historically authentic performance. This kind of consonance between a "modern" instrument and an old instrument (albeit a copy) at such a high level is rare in this country. Particularly successful are the slow movements of all three sonatas, which have great meditative "pietistic" power. The Label Cube Bohemia, which is an offshoot of the Cube firm known more for jazz, has produced an exceptional album. One can only regret that Bach did not write more sonatas for the gamba and that the overall playtime is so modest.

Luboš Stehlík

Leoš Janáček
Lašské tance [Lachian Dances], Suita pro smyčcový orchestr [Suite for String Orchestra], Idyla [Idyll]

Brno Philharmonic, František Jílek. Production: music direction Jaroslav Rybář (1–6), Vladimír Koronthály (7–17). Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: 1991 (7–17) and 1992 (1–6), Studio Stadion Brno. Released: 2006. TT: 70:39. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3886-2.

Leoš Janáček was unique in his long intellectual and creative journey to the very source of music. A taste for simple folk song opened a new chapter in the music of the Moravian composer, the roots of which are connected with the work of František Bartoš, the collector of Moravian songs. The composer's native Hukvaldy, as well as other Lašsko and Wallachian villages, became Janáček's main musical source. He recorded almost everything in full – from melodies, text and instrumental accompaniment even to the dance steps. The inspiration of original folklore was soon embodied in his five dances entitled *Lachian Dances,* originally called *Wallachian Dances.* At first only parts were premiered, and the complete set was not presented until the summer of 1891 at the Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague, together with a text by the writer Jan Herben and in the form of ballet *Rákocz Rákoczy*. The *Suite for String Orchestra* of 1877 is one of the earliest surviving compositions by Janáček. Soon afterwards he wrote another work for string orchestra; the seven-movement *Idyll* of 1878 was literally christened by Antonín Dvořák, who attended the premiere conducted by Janáček himself. **František Jílek**, who is deeply familiar with many of their works, has done much to promote the music of Smetana and Janáček. He has conducted the complete operas of both composers, and many years working with leading music ensembles in Moravian towns has given him a sensitive understanding of the character of Janáček's music. The **Brno Philharmonic** supports the conductor's concept skilfully and to the full, and some of its renderings of Janáček's works can be regarded as definitive.

Michaela Komárková

Bedřich Smetana
The Bartered Bride

Gabriela Beňačková – soprano, Peter Dvorský – tenor, Richard Novák – bass, Miroslav Kopp – tenor, the Prague Philharmonic Choir and the Choir of the National Theatre Opera company, Josef Veselka – conductor, Ballet of the National Theatre in Prague, Otto Šanda – choreography, The Czech Philharmonic, Zdeněk Košler – conductor. Directed by František Filip. Text: only list of performers in Cz., Eng. Recorded 12/1980–2/1981, Czech Television, Prague. Released: 2006. TT: 137:56. Video format: DVD 9. Audio format: Dolby Digital 5.1, Dolby Digital Stereo. 1 DVD Supraphon SU 7011-9.

Many years after the sound recording of Zdeněk Košler's *The Bartered Bride* with Gabriela Beňačková, Peter Dvorský and Richard Novák, released by Supraphon in 1981 we now have a DVD of the television production that regular inclusion in the Czech Television New Year programme has made a classic with Czech viewers. It confirms that the music part of the 25-year-old studio recording is showing no signs of ageing. Zdeněk Košler's interpretation is precise and ravishing. Gabriela Beňačková has remained a peerless Mařenka, with current adepts of the role still merely timidly inching closer towards it, Richard Novák may be beginning to find a younger successor in Zdeněk Plech and perhaps only Peter Dvorský and Miroslav Kopp have serious competitors among contemporary tenors in the roles of Jeník and Vašek. The same cannot be said about the visual side, however, which is very much a product of its time and follows the conventions of TV opera productions of the eighties. Fortunately the principle of double casting (singers for the sound recording and actors for the staging) had already been abandoned here, but the director František Filip's concept still remained straddled between the use of real exteriors and theatrical paste and cardboard. The result is an amorphous compound that that lacks both the advantages of film and television techniques and the authenticity of a purely stage recording. The overture is accompanied by idyllic shots of Prague Castle, the Smetana monument by his museum, the National Theatre from outside with trams passing and from inside (with an empty orchestra pit), and then with the first bars of the choir's entrance we suddenly find ourselves in the studio with mock-up cottages, sunflowers and other floral embellishments, realistic gingerbread hearts and wooden toys for the fair (Zdeněk Zahradník was the designer). Everything is indifferently "perfect" – smiles, children running here and there and graceful ballerinas, idyllic groupings of figures, crumpling of handkerchiefs, and Kecal's umbrella and scarf or fake musicians in the pub. Women "gracefully" rotate in the wings, men "jovially" clink glasses of beer and children "mischievously" peek into the pub. The soloists helplessly alternate between looking at their partner and into camera, and have problems synchronising the singing with the movement of their lips and faces. However much the musical interpretation deserves the highest rating, the handicap of the visual side inevitably brings it down. Nonetheless, we should be glad that this Bartered Bride is now available on DVD as a document of the time in which it was produced (although the DVD deserves to come with more additional information than just a picture and list of the names of the artists who participated in the recording). A quarter century after this document was made it ought to serve as a challenge for contemporary artists to get to do better with this "flagship" of Czech opera, which carries such an (unwanted) freight of national feeling that it often sinks beneath the water line. Only the hold of this particular ship contains more than just the crown jewels of Czech national identity, and so far only a few have managed to relieve the Bartered Bride of its accumulated load without her being torpedoed and sunk, or in some cases rebuilt into a completely different craft.

Helena Havlíková

Jaroslav Tůma
(Leoš Janáček, Paul Hindemith, Jaroslav Tůma)

Jaroslav Tůma – Organ. Production: Jaroslav Tůma, Jaromír Javůrek, Vítězslav Janda. Text: Cz., Eng., Germ. Recorded: 4/2006, The Church of St. Nicholas in Ludgeřovice. Released: 2006. TT: 79: 50. 1 CD Arta F10147 (distribution 2HP Production).

The most precious organ in North Moravia, the biggest, the best preserved and the highest in quality – such is the royal instrument in the Neo-Gothic Church of St. Nicholas in Ludgeřovice. It was built by the firm Rieger in 1931. Last year it underwent general repairs, but this year it shone in all its glory at the Janáček May International Music Festival. The performer was none other than **Jaroslav Tůma** who on this recording also presents organ treasures of the last, i.e. the 20th century. Musicians usually play the organ solo from Leoš Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* at the end of recitals (especially since it is the closing part of the mass) as a spectacular piece and one that is particularly appealing to audiences. Jaroslav Tůma, however, uses the piece as a majestic opening to the album, as if to suggest or promise the other organ treasures that are in store. Here listeners have a rare chance to hear all three sonatas by Paul Hindemith, when it is mostly just the *Sonata II* that is performed. The choice of Hindemith for this recording may not have been entirely a chance matter, since the composer first visited Ostrava in the year that the Ludgeřovice organ was built. In my view the high point of the whole album are the sensitive improvisations on four piano pieces from the cycle *On an Overgrown Path* by L. Janáček. The organ disposition and his own improvisational art enabled Jaroslav Tůma to present these miniatures at a very profound emotional level, and in atmosphere and under circumstances that he describes in the text booklet. But I shall not give away too much in advance. It is perhaps relevant to add that two of the pieces played (*Our Evenings*, *The Owl has not Flown*) were originally written for harmonium. This recording is an outstanding set of performances by our leading organist Jaroslav Tůma and a marvellous advertisement for the reconstructed organ. It is an excellent reason for holding more concerts in a place as tremendously atmospheric as the church in Ludgeřovice.

Jitka Kocůrková

Václav Talich
Special Edition 10
Dvořák, Suk

Czech Philharmonic Choir, Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Václav Talich – conductor. Production: Jana Gonda, Petr Kadlec, Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: January and May 1952, Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague. Released: 2006. TT: 77:30, 75:04. ADD, digitally remastered. 2 CD Supraphon SU 3830-2.

This double album in the Václav Talich – Special Edition series (no. 10) contains the most momentous works of Antonín Dvořák and Josef Suk. The idea of putting together Dvořáks *Stabat mater* and Suk's *Asrael* certainly did not require a great deal of thought, for the combination is an obvious one for several well-known reasons that there is no need to go over here. Their deep seriousness is underlined by the interpretations of the two major works from the same conductor and orchestra, **Václav Talich** and the **Czech Philharmonic.** In both cases Talich got the chance to show his huge ability to construct great tracts of music, his capacity to develop a marvellous tension as tragedy grows up out of pianissimo, his skill in creating turning points with a well-placed accent, in reaching peaks and rising up from the depths. In the Stabat mater we also encounter a legendary generation of singers – a meeting that is more than just a historical document: the soloists here are **Drahomíra Tikalová**, **Marta Krásová**, **Beno Blachut** and **Karel Kalaš** and the **Prague Philharmonic Choir** conducted by **Jan Kühn**. For me personally the most beautiful recording of Dvořák's Stabat mater will probably now remain Helmuth Rilling's with the Oregon Bach Festival Orchestra of 1996 (Hänsler-Verlag), but it is a mistake to compare the latter with Talich's recording, and not just because of the complete difference in technical quality. Talich's recording was made in 1952 and there is a background hum, but it still has something that keeps me excited throughout, without my being able to define it... And not only with the Stabat Mater, but also with Asrael, although it would be unjust to Václav Neumann's 1983 recording with the Czech Philharmonic (Supraphon 11 1962-2-932 or SU 3864-2) to consider the latter worse. The explanation for why the recording is so unusually compelling is something I perhaps ought not to reveal in advance, but I am not writing a detective story. Even though in this case a crime is involved. The fact is that the second CD carries a bonus in the form of a five-minute speech by Václav Talich to the members of the orchestra, recorded in the course of the recording of the pieces on the 28th of May 1952. Talich is thanking the musicians for their work. At the beginning he is searching for words, expressing himself with caution. What he finally says he has been suppressing in himself for seven years. At sixty nine he speaks before the philharmonic about the injustice he has endured and that has not been rectified. This is also the key to the understanding of his interpretation of the Stabat mater and Asrael. The players of the Czech Philharmonc understood, and surprisingly – despite technical imperfections – this subtext has been preserved in the recording. The production team deserves special thanks for the idea of including the speech.

Vlasta Reittererová

Václav Jan Tomášek
Piano Concertos no. 1 in C major and no. 2 in E flat major

Jan Simon - piano, the Symphony Orchestra of the Czech Radio in Prague, Vladimír Válek. Production: Petr Vít. Text: Jarmila Gabrielová. Recorded: 3, 4/2006, Studio 1 Czech Radio, Prague. Released: 2006. TT: 53:33. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon Music SU 3819-2.

Václav J. Tomášek (1774–1850) is regarded as the most important Prague composer before Smetana, yet we almost never encounter his music on concert podiums and it very unusual indeed to hear one of his piano pieces of songs. This recording, labeled "Complete – World premiére recording", offers us a rare chance to get to know Tomášek's piano concertos. Even on a first listening it is evident that these are very good compositions, that overall are most reminiscent of the late concertos of Mozart or the first Beethoven concertos. The instrumentation of both concertos is colourful, and the solo part is spectacular and pianistically rewarding. There are appealing ideas to appreciate right in the opening movement of the first concerto, the second movement arouses our interest with the Field-Chopinesque stylization of the piano part, and the final rondo offers fresh music with many witty moments. Although both concerts were written roughly in the same period (1803–1805), the second concerto gives the impression that Tomášek is trying to step out of his own shadow (or the shadow of Mozart). The quite long (almost a quarter of an hour) first movement has a striking introduction based on a succession of short tutti with the winds, and containing a number of surprisingly dramatic passages. The second movement, where the piano essentially ceases to be a solo instrument and integrates itself into the orchestra as a one instrument among equals, is extremely impressive. The final movement scintillates with wit from the first bars, in which a short twittering passage from the solo piano is twice quickly alternated with string pizzicato. As far as the performance is concerned, it is very good at the very least. Jan Simon has excellent technique and presents both concertos with the necessary elegance and lucidity, while the radio orchestra plays meticulously and responsibly and the interaction is almost problem-free. Despite this, when listening I occasionally had the feeling that the music sounded as it were tired in places and that a bit more "sparkle" would have been good for it. On the other hand, I am unable to judge how much this lack of "sparkle" is the fault of the composer and how much of the performers. In any case, this is a recording worthy of attention.

Věroslav Němec

Jan Ignác František Vojta
Sonatas I-III, Parthia amabilis, Anima mea dilecta, Arietta cordialis, Threnodia hujus temporis

La Gambetta, Elen Machová. Production: V. Janda. Text: Cz., Eng., Ger. Recorded: 9/2005, the Church of the Bohemian Brethren, Nymburk. Released: 2006. TT: 65:54. DDD. 1 CD Arta F10141 (distribution 2HP Production).

The Czech musical world has a new star, but not many people are aware of him. The new "Superstar" is no show-business victim, as you might imagine, but the Prague physician and composer Jan Ignác František Vojta, who is now perhaps celebrating his three-hundred and fiftieth birthday in the next world. This Baroque composer definitely deserves posthumous fame and admiration. The best argument is of course the recording under review, which is the first to give the broader public a comprehensive view of the music of J.I.F.Vojta. Although his main profession was medicine, his music was quite widely diffused, even outside the Bohemian Lands. Probably what have caused the greatest surprise and even sensation are the three sonatas, probably a sonata triptych, a copy of which has been preserved in the musical collection of the Vienna Minorites. These pieces have been compared with the works of H.I.F.Biber, and quite rightly so. These are compositions possessing refined formal qualities, emotionally very rich and at the same time making great demands on the technical skill of the performer. Like Biber's Rosary Sonatas they also use scordatura (retuning of the strings) – a technique also employed in the last preserved instrumental piece by Dr. Vojta, the *Partita amabilis*, i.e. a suite for violin, viola and basso continuo, which has survived in Paris. With these pieces alone Vojta would have assured himself a brilliant place in the very patchy and hole-ridden picture we have of Czech Baroque music. Fortunately, however, three vocal pieces have also survived: the solo motet *Anima mea dilecta*, the St. John's Feast/Midsummer *Arietta cordialis* and the cantata *Threnodia hujus temporis*. While the joyfulness of the St. John' motet clearly draws on the Czech peasant Baroque tradition, the other two pieces are written in the typical vocal style of the last third of the 17th century. In the case of the Threnody, however, we encounter a unique, relatively lengthy dialogic cantata for soprano and basso continuo. The main credit for reviving this beautiful music must go to Jiří Květon, who has copied the pieces from various sources and prepared them for the recording, for which he has also written a commentary. Here he focuses mainly on a possible symbolic interpretation of the sonatas, which is certainly another interesting level of Vojta's work, albeit all such interpretations are on thin ice. The pieces are played by the **La Gambetta** ensemble (and its numerous guests) led by **Elen Machová,** a young, medially inconspicuous but already recognised violinist specialising in historically authentic interpretation. Her play is masterful, energetic and at the same time sensitive. She communicates the rhetorically rich sonatas very convincingly, her violin becoming a true instrument of narration. The recording is also fascinating for the variety of the instruments used for the basso continuo in the hands of a succession of brilliant musicians; apart from harpsichord, organ and violon we hear and archlute (**Miloslav Študent**), triple harp (**Chiara Granata**), Baroque guitar and galizone (**Pietro Prosser**), which is an instrument akin to the lute but with a deeper range. Among the vocalists the soprano **Hana Blažíková** stands out, always impressing with the sweet shimmering colour of her voice, and a heartfelt but very natural rendering that is entirely ideal for this music. If we leave aside a few small points of intonation, we can only praise the whole recording as a highly successful, revealing and worthy project.

Marc Niubo

Bohuslav Martinů
Choral Works

České madrigaly [Czech Madrigals], Čtyři písně o Marii [Four Songs of the Virgin], Madrigaly pro pět hlasů [Five Voice Madrigals], Zbojnické písně [Brigand Songs], Romance z Pampelišek [Romance of the Dandelions]

Netherlands Chamber Choir, Stephen Layton – choir conductor. Production: Leo Samama. Text: Eng., Fr., Ger.; texts of the songs: Cz., Eng. Recorded: 9/2003, Augustinuskerk Amsterdam. Released: 2006. TT: not stated. DDD. 1 CD Globe GLO 5208 (distribution Euromusica).

Talking about Bohuslav Martinů, Czech experts always complain how hard it is to get his work performed abroad, and how foreigners are mainly interested only in a few of his operas and a few of his concertante works. Then with hope in their voices they add that his time is certainly coming. I have no doubt they are right, but there is still a very long way to go. This makes is all the more surprising that a Dutch choir, on a Belgian label, is recording music that we don't often hear even at home and that is undeservedly on the margins of interest in Martinů. Furthermore, the **Netherlands Chamber Choir** is a top ensemble and **Stephen Layton** has a very good reputation not only as a choir conductor but for example as an expert on early music. Devoting an entire album to Martinů in itself deserves high praise, and it also offers a different view of the music than those to which we are accustomed in what are still the keystone recordings from Pavel Kühn and Josef Veselka. Distance from the tradition is evident in the phrasing, expression, and the interpretation of meanings, some of which the Dutch simply cannot know. The air of the Czech Highlands is absent from the music, but there is an abundance of professional musicianship. All the 24 singers display excellent intonation and admirably precise pronunciation (language training – Heleen Rous). This strikes me as an analogy to the interpretation of Smetana's *My Country* by the London Symphony Orchestra at the Prague Spring Festival. It is modern, technically almost perfect (although the soloist **Heleen Koele** in *Romance of the Dandelions* could have adopted a simpler, more tender conception) but it does not have the ardour, colour and intoxication of tone conveyed by the Czech choir conductors mentioned above. Despite this the recording is of a high standard and in making it the Dutch have made a major contribution to the promotion of our genius Martinů.

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Concerts begin in Prague at 7:30 p.m.

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 Quaret No. 1 **E. Chausson:** Chanson perpétuelle op. 37 – *Czech premiere* **O. Schoeck:** 3 Songs **J. Turina:** Las musas de Andalucía – *Czech premiere*
16. 10. 2006 Domažlice 17. 10. 2006 Praha 18. 10. 2006 Brno	**Jing Zhao**, violoncello (China) – *Award for the Winner of the ARD Munich Competition 2005* **Stamic Quartet**	**P. Vranický:** Quintet in C Major **X. Gang Ye:** Nine Run for Cello solo – *Czech premiere* **A. Borodin:** String Quintet
21. 11. 2006 Praha	**Škampa Quartet** **Kateřina Soukalová - Váchová**, Clarinet (*Winner of the Prague Spring Competition 2002*)	**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 Schynder**, 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 – transatlantic 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. Kurtag:** 12 Mikroludien for String Quartet **J. S. Svendson:** String Octet, Op. 3 – *Czech premiere*
20. 2. 2007 Praha 23. 2. 2007 Chrudim	**Trio Concertino** **Kaspar Zehnder**, Flute (Switzerland)	**D. Shostakovich:** Piano Trio No. 1 in E Minor **C. Diethelm:** Pan – *Czech premiere* **H. Gagnebin:** Quartet for Violin, Flute, Cello and Piano – *Czech premiere* **W. A. Mozart:** Prague Symphony, KV 504 (*authorized version by J. N. Hummel*)
20. 3. 2007 Praha 21. 3. 2007 Jičín	**Amedeo Modigliani Quartet** (France) – *Winner of AFAA Declic and Young Concert Artists New York* **Vladimír Leixner**, Cello	**R. Schumann:** String Quartet No. 1, Op. 41 **K. Beffa:** Quelques cercles – *Czech premiere* **G. Onslow:** Quintet for two Cellos – *Czech premiere*
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 – *Czech premiere* **J. E. Mongilardi:** Suite Barroca Andina – *World premiere* **C. G. Lecca:** Dansas tradicionales Andinas – *World Premiere*
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 – *World premiere* **B. Martinů:** String Sextet
11. 6. 2007 Havlíčkův Brod 12. 6. 2007 Praha 14. 6. 2007 Jablonec nad Nisou	**Okazaki Keisuke**, Violin (Japan) – *Award for the Winner of the ARD Munich Competition 2005* **Ivo Kahánek**, Piano **Stamic Quartet**	**D. Shostakovich:** Piano Quintet in G Minor, Op. 57 **M. Ravel:** Tzigane **T. Takemitsu:** Distance de Fee – *Czech premiere* **E. Chausson:** Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet in D Major, Op. 21

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