

Michal Rataj

Contemporary Czech Pop

Radio Days



Národní divadlo | opera

Georg Friedrich Händel

RINALDO

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Lighting design: Christophe Naillet | **Choreography:** Françoise Denieau

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Dear Readers,

This issue is rather untypical – it comes with a CD that is entirely devoted to Czech popular music. Yet the “pop” on the CD is not at all the commercial globalised mainstream kind, but consists of original works of a high standard, as well as showing a wide range of styles. Still, it IS pop-music, a genre that our magazine usually keeps away from. We shall be continuing to keep away from it, but this time we decided to take up the offer of collaboration with the Music Institute of the Theatre Institute in Prague, which has published the CD. If you find this taste of Czech pop-music enjoyable and interesting, we shall be pleased. If not, you will no doubt be able to think of ecological ways of disposing of it...

The regular historical article spot is this time devoted to the beginnings of radio broadcasting in Czechoslovakia. Our interview with Michal Rataj, composer and radio producer, also picks up the theme of music and radio broadcasting. As we all know, the economic situation is gloomy everywhere in the world. The Czech Republic is no exception, even if the situation is far from as bad here as the journalists of various august “Times” newspapers seem to think (their geography is rather muddled, and they have confused the CR with other much-worse hit nations). I can therefore recommend J. Vávra’s balanced article on the possible effects of the financial crisis on our cultural sector. Although, who knows what will happen a week from now...?

Wishing you a beautiful spring

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PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

MICHAL RATAJ: BUILDING A VISUAL WORLD WITHOUT PICTURES

Michal Rataj moves with the same ease in the field of composing “classical” music (although entirely contemporary in idiom), and the world of electronic technologies and the kind of concepts of music that go far beyond the writing of black dots on paper. Because Michal is also a radio producer of many years’ standing and an erudite musicologist, we talked not just about his own art, but also about the phenomenon of radio and various theoretical themes.

Your dissertation for your degree in composition at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague was entitled “Pierre Boulez’s ...explosante-fixe... as a duel between the acoustic and the electronic”. As a composer intensely interested in creating both instrumental pieces and electroacoustic (EA) music, is this a kind of stress that you experience yourself? Or does it no longer apply to “your generation”?

It definitely isn’t a matter of generations, and couldn’t be. On the contrary – mine is already the third generation to be successively handing on a certain continuity of experience in the field of music and technology. In my dissertation (and other similar texts that I wrote before), I was concerned primarily with analysing the positive and negative interactions between music and technology – to try and get a deeper understanding of how various types of experience with new technologies and media can concretely affect work with instruments and the human voice, how what are today generally available analytical tools can benefit composers by casting new light on the microscopic level of sound, how to get a better understanding of what is going on inside sound from the point of view of composition, aesthetics, the conceptual level and so on. These are questions that I probably kicked off myself at the time when I was writing the text and that have become more urgent and intense since then. And – perhaps paradoxically – the more I’ve been glued to monitors in recent times, the happier I am when I can write a purely acoustic score, even if the music is very much determined by computer experiences or

computer-assisted sound analysis. For example, my last orchestral thing *Raining (Inside)* wouldn't have worked without analysis of the rhythm of raindrops and their transformation, in terms of frequency and rhythm, into a piano part. Well – it's just occurred to me that the stress you mentioned is just a sort of vibration, and as one person close to my heart says: "anything that doesn't vibrate isn't strong".

We are touching on the typical tautology of today's "cutting edge" technologies – i.e. that their products are often good old mimesis in fact. Nevertheless, the music usually doesn't come into existence just by the simulation (for example instrumentally) of analysed sound. I would be interested to hear about the most important basic principles of your – let's say – musical syntax (what is material for you, and what you then do with it) and your aesthetics (what fascinates you, the kind of expression that your music is aiming for).

It's definitely not a question of simulation from either side. As far as material is concerned, recently it's been very important for me to listen – to really "listen in" – to the sounds around me, to discover by active listening what we otherwise just experience as insignificant background, to learn from sounds, to observe how they behave, the kind of structure they have, their characteristic internal movements, their rhythm, how their timbres change in space. Maybe one reason for this is my close contact with radio – my many years of radio experience refining the ear to catch acoustic detail and at the same time giving me a certain awareness of the importance of the meaning of sound. I don't at all mean programmatic music or something similar; I mean that probably it is quite important for me in music to work with a certain narrativity, work with semantic aspects of sounds, stylise them and recontextualise them. Recently I've noticed various people talking about stories in connection with my music and this quite pleases me; I don't think music is some kind of pure abstract essence. The things that *musique concrète* has brought into compositional thinking and that are very much associated with the conceptual world of radio are things I find very appealing: the notion of building what you might call abstract sound stories in which there is enough room for the audience to listen actively and for each listener to be able to enter the sound story for himself, to establish an internal dialogue with it.

*You seem to regard sound as something that is in its own way alive, something that has its specific expressions and whims like a living organism. Are sounds that are acoustic ("natural") and sounds that are electronically generated equal for you in this respect? And what is your attitude to electronic deformations of acoustic sounds – the "domestication of wild sounds" or "abuse of sounds"? From this point of view isn't the "tearing away of sounds from their natural environment" the very basis of *musique concrète*? What are the consequences in terms of aesthetics?*

Yes, organism is probably quite a good word here. I don't want it to be too out of touch with reality, nor do I want to get involved in some way-out theoretical constructs. But the fact is that I'm fascinated by situations when, as I listen, a picture starts emerging and developing before my eyes without me actually seeing one. I like closing my eyes when surrounded by sounds of all kinds of

different origins, I like letting them conjure up a film for my ears and I like conjuring up this kind of sound film for myself – whether it’s a matter of abstract instrumental music or electronic music (which is often more concrete in meaning). But a certain level of narrativity is always important for me. And I think this relates to your question about the origins of the sound. It seems to me that today it isn’t at all crucial whether the sound in question is a recorded acoustic sound, or a synthetic sound. After all there are so many transitional variants – when I take a few partials from the sound of a flute and convert the result of the analysis back into sound (i.e. resynthesise the sound), does that count as acoustic or electronic sound?

I believe that technology is helping us to understand what is happening inside sound and thank to that we are capable of thinking in much more concrete terms about the overall frame of sound dramaturgy – from the point of view of composing this interests me much more than distinguishing between the origins of sounds. And so – the important thing is *what* is being done, and not *how*, because when there is no *what* there is no point in worrying about *how*.

Purely technically (if we keep to field of EA music), in fact I have very good experience with making various timbre linkages between acoustic and synthetic sounds – these result in complementary colours, delicate tonal values as in oil painting... This fascinates me and these are moments when I feel that technology in music has meaning in such contexts.

As for the “tearing of sounds out of context” – in fact the isolation of sounds from their original context is an inseparable part of the roots of *musique concrète*, and what is more, whole generations of composers have drawn inspiration from such thinking. When I take a sound out of original context and transfer it into a different context, I’m not only starting to play a chess game with meanings (sound dramaturgy, narrativity), but can also concentrate better on the musical parameters of the sound; better, because when a sound is isolated I can perceive its rhythm, its pitch and dynamic envelop, the changes of its timbre in time... It is a wonderfully inspirational process.

How have strategies of narrating sound stories changed or developed over the sixty years of musique concrète? How do you like to narrate them yourself in your music?

I’d say that the right word here would probably be “diversity”. The initial experiments, which were limited by the available technologies, took place more or less at the level of collage, the direct confrontation of sounds and their explicit or hidden semantics. Then there was a gradual evolution of the possibilities of manipulating sound, understanding its structure, and developing medial concepts (necessary for disseminating EA music). Also with the progressive transition from original experimentation and pioneer enthusiasm to more elaborate composing projects, an immense diversity of authorial concepts is emerging in *musique concrète*, and these are ceasing to be confined just within the relatively increasingly strong tradition of Francophone-orientated *musique concrète*. So before our eyes we see a gradually unfolding theatre of sound leading from acoustic ecology (soundscape) via various (more or less orthodox) authorial concepts of *musique concrète* all the way for example to sound

installations, i.e. from a kind of puristic narrativity through the comprehensive world of artificial sound influenced by hermeneutics to interactive systems that as it were suspend time and enable the listener/viewer to “step inside”.

In my view, though, it is very much the tradition of *musique concrète* with its phenomenological and hermeneutic accent that has set off the process of finding “inspiration from elsewhere”, from a world to which we are not usually sensitive because it is so everyday. And perhaps the point is in that... perhaps throughout the history of human knowledge we are discovering beauty where we would least have expected it.

I’ll try and give two specific examples from two of my own pieces. One evening two years ago I was listening to my daughter sleeping in the quiet of the night; she was breathing out – regularly but also in a different way each time. I began to concentrate more on the amplitude of the breath, the subtly changing rhythm, the tiny nuances in the colouring of the individual exhalations. I fetched a microphone, recorded the child’s breathing from very close up, and then worked with the sound as with a musical instrument, i.e. using resonance filters I tuned it, and instrumented it in what was in practice a traditional manner.

Whatever the combination the sound is used in, you can always feel that physiological rhythm of breathing in it, even despite the fact that the other (let us say harmonic parameters) of the sound have essentially vanished. And I chose this distant sense of breathing deliberately in the attempt to draw the listener away to places where reality and dream permeate each other, where we are not sure whether we are dreaming or awake... hence the title – *Dreaming Life*.

The second example is the large orchestral piece I have already mentioned, called *Raining (Inside)* and one of my most recent compositions (due to be premiered this year in August at the Ostrava Days Festival). It has no electronic part, but a large amount of its material was created using analysis of the very concrete “drip” sound of rain. It was through analysis that the rhythm of the piano part was created, as well as many of the harmonies and orchestral colours; the lengths of the “phrases” in the sound of rain to a certain extent predetermine the length of the individual phrases of the resulting score... And for me that motif of rain transformed into an orchestral structure has from the start meant the feeling of standing in the rain, feeling the water flowing over me and washing away all the silts... anything... More and more water falls on my head, I have to close my eyes, the tempo of the drops increases and the rhythm is less comprehensible. Then it suddenly weakens and the continual noise becomes a sort of soundscape with individual sounds flying somewhere in space... I don’t want it to sound like when we narrate myths and fairytales about Smetana’s *Vltava*, but essentially the choice of material, its computer processing and the writing of a score, are governed by feelings and thoughts of this kind. They determine the formulation of the musical language at the general level.

The human voice plays quite a prominent role in your work – both in the EA pieces, especially the “radiophonic” ones and when you work with the influences of liturgical music. How has your concept of the human voice developed and where are you heading at the moment in this area?

That’s a nice question, and I must say that your observation is a pleasant surprise, because maybe I myself have a tendency to downplay concentration on the human voice as something that refers too closely to the world of the tradition of vocal music. I can openly admit that if we are talking about



PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

traditional song, choral or (most) operatic music then that's a world that has never much appealed to me. I've never much enjoyed music in which something is sung and I never know what it is because it gets lost in endless ornamentation and usually in completely incomprehensible articulation. And so my own interest in vocal expression always took slightly different paths. I've probably spent the most time with Gregorian chant, or liturgical singing in general. I wrote my degree dissertation as a musicologist on it, I have spent quite a long time studying the various influences of chant on contemporary music (in Messiaen, Pärt, Eben and others) and I've always been fascinated by it as a composer: how to convert that *absolute* symbiosis of pure melody, latent harmony, meaning and ritual into a contemporary musical form. In my case that has meant everything from various electro-acoustic collage approaches (*Christmas Meditation*, *Oratorium electronicum*) through counter-posing a choral ensemble and instrumental ensemble (*Vítkov Oratorio*) all the way to something else that I have hugely enjoyed and where I feel I've touched something I'd been in search of for a long time. This was my collaboration with the choral Schola Benedicta and its artistic director Jiří Hodina, who invited me to work with them himself. The result was a piece *Corde, Lingua, Voce* for the 15th anniversary of the St. Wenceslas Festival in 2006. The work is based on the St. Wenceslas antiphon *Corde et lingua*: for the first time I think I managed to find a form in which chant, rhythm and latent harmony could be integrated fluently and seamlessly with contemporary musical language – even the instrumental kind (I used saxophones and organ). This collaboration continued at last year's Forfest Festival 2008 with another, this time purely vocal piece *Invito (Načalo)* using the texts of the Latin and Orthodox invitorium, and I think that as far as work with voice is concerned, it was perhaps even purer.

Then there is the whole world of voice on radio, where what mainly fascinates me is the permanent tension between the voice as pure timbre (into which you

can have deep insight more than anywhere else, thanks to the microphone) and voice as the bearer of meaning. If I were not a radio producer myself I would certainly devote more time to composition on this basis – to this day I’ve got what I hope is quite a good piece with texts by Jaromír Typlt lying in a drawer. But I can’t exactly broadcast it myself, can I...

And then I have an increasing interest in getting involved in music theatre. Just at the moment I’m working with Jiří Adámek rehearsing a kind of laboratory production with one amplified actor, for which I’m programming the sound design... It’s hard to predict the future, and the world of theatre doesn’t yet have much of a connection with my mindset and “timeset”, but it’s a fascinating world and I enjoy it a great deal – mainly in the field of movement of the body and spatial sound. To some extent it’s a kind of transfer of the radio studio and the ether into a theatre auditorium. Space as a musical instrument – an instrument that for example in the form of a Gothic cathedral turns a chant into superb “polyphony”...

You’ve spoken about imagery, narrativity, a theatre of sound, of music theatre. What is your attitude to the various visualisations that are so frequent (and also often so stupid) especially in EA music, and more generally what do you think of the combination of music with the visual as such?

My attitude to visualisations is definitely not very positive and if I said anything else then I’d be effectively going back on everything I’ve just said. Once I succumbed to the feeling that I had to do a visualisation too (that was the performance *Rely, Relay, Relation* in 2004). Maybe it wasn’t a fiasco, but it didn’t add anything to the sound itself. Visualisations seem to me to create an environment in which the sound doesn’t matter because there’s always something to look at... a state of total undervaluation of sound, because sound is more internally, intimately visual...

I’m talking here about the visualisation of music, or sound performance and various kinds of improvisation events, where the visual element has been a kind of imperative. In music theatre or various mixed forms the visual element can work very well. For example I remember a stimulating production from the ensemble Handa Gote (Computer Muzic). I wasn’t much impressed by the compositional element, but the integration of the visual into the overall structure was pretty captivating. Or else the very contemporary opera – music theatre by the Portuguese composer Miguel Azguim *Itinerário do Sal*, which I consider a brilliant piece of truly integrated musical theatre... There are visual places in the opera where it doesn’t even occur to me that I’m looking at something – the visual is always an integral part of the musical structure.

In my case there’s the reverse process too – I love drawing inspiration from visual compositions, pictures, film. Not long ago I had the chance to do the music for a documentary on [communist president] Gustáv Husák, and the director Robert Sedláček gave me a very free hand... I tried just to identify the rhythm of the film and emphasize the fine contours with sound, or to create contrapuntal sonic gestures. I terrifically enjoyed the work.

Then there is another relevant thing recently, which is that I’ve been very

strongly connecting a great many gestural elements in my music (rapid turnarounds in dynamics, transitions from rhythmatised passages to static ones and the reverse, fast transformations of timbre and so on), with abstract visual images, for example clusters of irregular forms, sharp transitions of colour values, or a direct line vs. an irregular curve... I don't know how to put it into words very easily, but I experience something like a strange synesthesia, something hidden inside, secret...

Apart from these abstract ideas and associations with pictures, the connecting lines between music and the visual field can also run across spatiality – a concept that has appeared in our conversation before. I know that this aspect interests you in instrumental pieces, and not only in EA where it is almost obligatory. Could you tell us more about your approach to the spatial possibilities of the treatment of sound?

That's a big subject... First of all, I probably need to clarify what I mean by spatiality. In my view you can't think just about it in terms of a lot of loudspeakers around us, but you might just be talking, for example, about one acoustic sound source radiating its signal into a Gothic church... There are a whole range of concepts relating to the theme of sound in space, and there are two of them that eminently interest me. One is more theoretical, and the other mostly practical and structurally orientated.

The theoretical concept relates largely to radio, the ether. It is in fact a set of concepts that seek to clarify how information is disseminated in radio broadcasting and how this information is received (in different ways in many places, and anonymously), how it is understood and what kinds of reaction it provokes. We are talking about a special mode of communication that is hard to control. On the one hand we perceive all this energy in a supremely acoustic manner – we do not see but hear. We perceive acoustic information entering our private space (home, in the car, in iPod in the form of a podcast, on Internet broadcasts, at our table in a cafe...) and we react in one way or another – either though active listening (i.e. understanding it in an interactive way, one might say), or on the contrary by hearing passively, receiving the acoustic information just as part of the “noise pollution” around us. Both these acts create the framework of the space in which some kind of acoustic discourse – to put it in rather “ugly” terms – is established. This may all sound quite virtual and unnecessary and probably I'm still not entirely clear about many of these issues. But the fact is that thinking about these concepts in radio broadcasting has taught me a lot about the perception of sound, the understanding of sound and its communication between me and my listeners – and here I'm already talking about much more concrete situations.

Although I've had the chance to conduct several experiments with unorthodox spatial location of musicians in a concert place, this kind of treatment of space has never felt natural to me. It's expensive, often very impractical in terms of performance, extremely dependent on acoustics, and frequently impossible to repeat elsewhere. So I soon turned instead to modelling virtual acoustic space using sets of speakers and the electronic spatialisation of sound. Initially I did this in the context of acousmatic pieces, and more recently ever more

often in concerts and performances using live musicians or just my own performances. And the main emphasis is in the direction of “composing the live sound environment” that surround us. I can still recall the feeling (it was in 2004 at the AudioArt Festival in Cracow), when I first discovered how it felt to be a performer in the middle of a large space with eight speakers and realised that “I had the sound around me in my power” – that a movement of my hand, a gesture of my body, would supply the energy for the movement of sound around me. I experience this aspect in a terribly physical way and at the same time in a very structural way. In many situations (for example when remixing stereophonic recording in 5.1 and so on) I had already become aware of the great differences in the density of the information with which we work in a stereophonic regime and the way that the potential density of the information rises with spatial perception of sound. What is more – the human ear has wonderful spatial orientation, and so the perception of sound in space is at the same time a channel of information. All the same, the level of meanings and information is probably not the main level that fascinates me when composing in space. The main thing is to create a sense that we find ourselves inside a kind of sonic bath, where the sound overflows in one direction or another in a gestural way and where our ear simply feels good. In my most recent production, *Writing Machine* (premiered at my final concert at CNMAT in Berkeley), I first experienced the system for modelling 3D sound in the Ambisonic protocol, which is something that completely absorbed me and I would like to do a little more work in that direction – perhaps building a little “AlloSphere”, inspired by the one they have at the University of California Santa Barbara, or IEM in Graz, somewhere here in the Czech Republic.

We are now touching on your work for radio. Could you tell us something about what you have achieved in radio over the years and your future goals in radio?

So you want me to behave like someone flexible, self-confident, progressive, unworried by considerations of time... Well then: In 2003 I was given the chance to take on the job of dramaturge (artistic advisor-director) of the premiere broadcast series of the new Radioateliér programme (for the public station Czech Radio 3 – Vltava). a couple of months before the first premiere I also became a member of the producers’ group EBU Ars Acustica, part of the European Broadcasting Union, which is a wonderful group of artists and producers cutting across the generations and with a common denominator in radio. The symbiosis of the two events made a big difference not just to my mind-set as regards radio, but also to the real orientation of my work (naturally despite an utterly incredible struggle with radio officials, who really hate it when someone has “his own ideas”). Up to then I had only been involved in the music dramaturgy and sound design for literary programmes and radio plays, but with the start of Radioateliér a chapter started which you can follow in quite lot of detail (and today in English too) on the rAdioCUSTICA web (www.rozhlas.cz/radiocustica_eng). We are now in the seventh year of the programme’s existence... The programme’s starting-point was the fact that in the Czech Republic there has been no continuity in the contemporary art music of the last 60 years. If we



PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

could get any information about key avant garde movements at all, it was always just marginal, superficial and inconsequential. So there was a need to establish a certain continuity in the field of contemporary acoustic arts (here with a special eye to the radio medium and the long tradition of its creative concepts) and to make a number of things possible. These were: first, to gather together a quantity of new acoustic works that as time goes by would start to say something about quality, trends and authors' motivations. Second, to put together a budget that would be stable and provide the means for a producer to pursue a comprehensive policy (including promotion, foreign journeys etc. which is definitely not the rule). Third, not just to enable composers to create new works but to provide them with at least a symbolic fee and to try to create a new "tradition of commissions". The word is more or less a euphemism, but even so we have been succeeding over the years in raising the fee and getting it at least to the point of being a small motivating factor (I think that currently it's the only lasting system of commissions in the music world in the CR). Fourth, to build a website to map all this and to strengthen a database role in relation to public broadcasting archives. Fifth, to bring the home scene into the international context of the long-lasting tradition of similar work, production practice and theoretical discussion. And finally to provide all this with at least an elementary theoretical framework that would bring back into the domestic context at least a little bit of meaningful discourse not just about radio itself, but also about EA music, and the current state of acoustic art in general. Well, if I have to stock take and look at how far we have got in all this, then: The sound archive now contains almost 80 original pieces created for the

Radioateliér *PremEdice* (the title of the premiere series), running from abstract EA music through soundscape to relatively pure forms of hörspiel in terms of genre. The financing of the programme and related activities has recently been re-organised on a permanent budget basis rather than a grant regime, and I consider this a success. Our commissions are approximately as high as the half of average salary in the CR, which is still awful but on the other hand stable and gradually increasing. And above all, I can already count on around twenty artists who keep coming back with new compositions and so are making it possible to identify certain trends in the development of personal aesthetics, concepts, over time... This is terribly important and seems to me to be part of the essence of long-term public-service thinking. I must also say that rAdioCUSTICA as a website has recently (since the launch of an English version) seen a rapid rise in visits, is a tangible testimony to what has been said earlier, and represents a decent basis for database documentation in future. Since 2005 more than twenty productions have been broadcast in some dozens of countries throughout the world thanks to lively programme exchange in the European Broadcasting Union. Otherwise – I'd rather hoped that when I managed to devote myself fully to the contemporary context of radio art in my dissertation, which came out in Czech (and will be published in English in 2009), it might provoke some new up-to-date discussions maybe at Czech Radio. But this hasn't happened. Theoretical discussion about radio is practically non-existent in the Czech Republic and if it happens at all, then this is usually on a very woeful level corresponding to the realities of the 1960s, or else it takes place outside radio as an institution. But a number of students have been approaching me to ask me to supervise their degree dissertations, and I regard this as a wonderful sign of a fresh wind. It's just rather a pity that a wind of this kind usually blows into limp and rotten sails in the domestic radio context... I don't know what the future will bring; after ten years it seems a good time for a change. It's a thought that strikes me from time to time in an atmosphere where doing something often gets you no further than doing nothing.

You mentioned eighty original works – which is already quite a respectable enough sample on which to base some more general observations. Although you say that these works fall into various different genres, can you still identify some more general trends to which Czech composers are inclining?

I think I talked about something similar with a Czech critic recently, so I may be repeating myself a little, but this is my great experience not just as a producer but as a composer – since the issue is very relevant to both these levels of my work.

My impression is that there are two groups of composers. The first group are people from a more or less traditional composing background, who are usually coming to radiophonic sound concepts for the first time. The second group (and apparently the larger) is made up of artists more from the world of soundart, fine arts, club improvisation and the electronic scene, but also for example from the world of literature, poetry... In short, from scenes where sound has been a logical partner in recent decades but where the craft of composition has been lacking as a basis. Obviously every generalisation has its pitfalls, but one general observation seems to me to be valid – in the first group, from the point of view of a producer I very often notice a very good orientation in time, a feeling

for formal proportion, deep thinking about composition, and a feeling for timbre, while in the second group all this tends to be undeveloped. By contrast these second authors come up with very inventive concepts, fresh ideas, very unconventional thinking about sound and work with sound, its interaction with the radio medium, with other media... And these are things that often seem to me to be undeveloped among the “composers” who are rooted in traditional forms, vocal-instrumental thinking and so on.

Despite everything, though, I notice very positive responses among European producer colleagues who follow these activities on the Czech Radio and I’d go as far as to say that today these activities are considered a stable part of the European scene. That’s a kind of private satisfaction for me – it doesn’t much interest anyone else at Czech Radio...

Do you yourself have any tendency (or desire) to go outside the boundaries of the purely compositional mode of creation and to make incursions into the craft of fine art or writing? Don’t you ever make a sound installation in the garage (go on, admit it)?

I admit that I’ve been tempted several times, and I’ve even tried a few things, but I’ve only been experimenting for any length of time in one of the fields you mention. This is work with text. I already mentioned it earlier, in connection with the texts of Jaromír Typlt – and yes, I immensely enjoy picking up a text and letting it somehow resonate in a new way. This probably doesn’t apply to any text; so far it has always involved a kind of trust on the part of a specific author who has “put his text at my disposal”. The feeling when I get a text in my power and recast it into completely different structure is a very very inspirational, attractive, and thrilling. Here I’m speaking more of the world of EA music, radio art and perhaps musical theatre too, and less about the world of the traditional musical setting of a text.

For me everything else (sound installations, the big world of soundart) is more remote from my primary focus on compositional structure, on fascination with sound as the main bearer of emotion, and as something strong enough even in today’s “visual world” to appeal time and again to the fantastic potential of everything auditory to build a visual world even without pictures. And time and again (and actually perhaps in quite a conservative spirit) I am confirmed in my sense of this magic power, and I believe that this is the way it will stay.

Michal Rataj (born 1975)

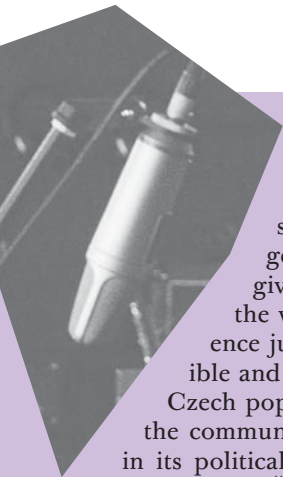
Is a composer of acoustic and electronic music, a radio producer, the author of theoretical texts about electronic music and radio art. He studied musicology at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University and composition at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. He also studied abroad (for example at the Royal Holloway University of London, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Hochschule für Musik Hans Eisler). Since 2000 he has been a music repertory advisor and later music director at Czech Radio and the producer of the programme Radioateliér and internet portal rAdioCUSTICA (www.rozhlas.cz/radiocustica_english). Since 2004 he has been working concurrently as a lecturer in the department of composition at the Music Faculty at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts in the field of electro-acoustic and multimedia music. In the years 2007–2008 he was a Fulbright Scholar at the Center for New Music and Audio Technologies at the University of California, Berkeley. This year his book on electronic music seen in the context of contemporary radio art will be published in English by Pfau-Verlag.

TWENTY YEARS OF THE CONTEMPORARY IN CZECH POPULAR MUSIC

It is now nearly twenty years since the chinking of keys on Wenceslas Square sounded the death of a whole era in Czech history. In line with developments in the surrounding East European countries, the chain of events set off by the demonstrations in November 1989 led to the fall of communism and the establishment of a democratic society. With a new social and political order came new orders of values. The diktat of ideology gave way to the diktat of the market with all its positive and negative aspects.

In dimensions, profile and character, the Czech popular music scene after 1989 has been radically, even diametrically opposite to the situation preceding that year. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that contemporary Czech popular music can be dated from this social transformation, while before 1989 we are talking of what now seems ancient history.





Give me back my enemies

Following the Velvet Revolution, once banned or exiled protest singer-songwriters suddenly played to packed audiences in the biggest Prague venues. Underground and alternative artists started to give an unprecedented number of concerts, and LPs by bands from the weirdest of subcultures, which had previously eked out an existence just for a narrow circle of initiates, sold in incredible and unheard-of numbers. The former impressarios of Czech pop music, who had been willing to show loyalty to the communist regime and had often been directly involved in its political organs and offices, were temporarily in retreat (F. Janeček, L. Štáidl, K. Vágner, the Hannig - Hons tandem and others). But only temporarily. Some “timeless” icons of Czech pop culture were too deeply engraved in the memory of the people and so they soon returned to the scene and have lasted “forever”: Karel Gott, Helena Vondráčková, Michal David... The majority public is tolerant and actually doesn't even want to hear some rather damning pieces of information from the past lives of these icons.

Conversely, as time went by there was a relative decline in interest in folk balladeers, underground and alternative artists. The popularity of these genres started to succumb to the operative principles of the mass media and pop culture. Only artists who while retaining a distinctive poetry still knew how to appeal to a mass public (J. Nohavica) stayed in the limelight. The role of rebel protest singers just couldn't be sustained, despite all efforts. In one of his songs the satirist and song-writer Jiří Dědeček cried, “Give me my enemies back!”

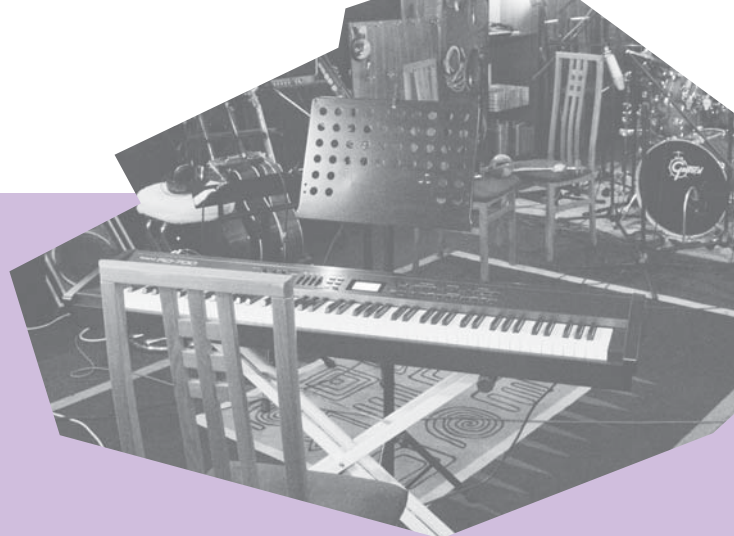
Boomtime

The biggest change, and a permanent one, related to infrastructure. There was an end to the monopoly of the “only permitted” institutions in the fields of publishing/recordings, radio, television, advertising and so on. There was an unprecedented boom in private media. Magazines: 1990 Rock & Pop, 1991 Folk & Country, 1996 Trip 2 House (in 2000 re-titled Tripmag and in 2003 Xmag), 2001 Ultramix (today Filter) and others. These were only some of the specifically musical magazines, but many such publication sooner or later closed. Today, music journalism enjoys the greatest interest (if we can really talk of interest at all) in non-musical magazines - the general social political and cultural weeklies like Reflex, Respekt or Týden [Week]. Unfortunately, interest in criticism, analyses and studies gradually faded away, while the tabloids and tabloid treatments of the music scene started to sweep the board and continue to do so.

There was a boom in music clubs (Rock Café, Bunkr...), which ended in their closure and limitation because of excessive noise. There was a boom in recording companies.

Before 1989 we had only two recording firms in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia. These were Supraphon and Panton, which released records under strict state and communist party control. And in 1991? Incredibly, there were more than a hundred firms producing gramophone recordings! They were kept alive by the short-term





popularity of bands for specialised publics (groups like Orlík, Tři sestry, Psí vojáci...), the result of the hunger for these kinds of music that had gone unsatisfied for so many years in the 1980s.

This boom ended soon enough, too, and only a few companies survived. The great supranational companies were now playing their characteristically ambiguous role here in the Czech Republic as elsewhere. The colonisation of the Czech market took place fast, up to the mid-1990s. These companies then mostly pursued a strategy of concentrating on the international repertoire, without frontiers, and only later selectively added a few local heroes to this broad range. This meant that life was no bed of roses for the domestic bands, who were hardly spoiled as a result. Paradoxically, this was why the deepening crisis of the recording industry caused by the progressive drop in the sales of CDs did not have particularly catastrophic consequences for many of them. They had got used to issuing their own recordings or recording with small firms and today it is already common practice for them to orientate themselves as much as possible to the internet and offer recordings and other products online.

The contemporary Czech videoclip cannot be said to have experienced any terrific upswing. And this despite promising beginnings many decades ago. It is worth remembering that many Czech directors had witty ideas on visuals for songs in film and on television from the beginning of the 1960s. In the 1990s, however, we saw little more than a null and directionless series of TV music programmes. None of them lasted long, “Bago”, “Šedesátka”... The programmes changed as the conditions changed. Very few domestic videoclips were produced at all. With few exceptions they reverted to serving advertising functions and had no greater ambitions. The programmes were discontinued because of a shortage of clips. There was then no motive to shoot clips because there was nowhere to broadcast them.

Czech Broadway

All the same, there was one new area that unexpectedly started to prosper as never before: The 1990s saw the development of mass popular enthusiasm for musical, from the classic works like *Bídnič / Les Misérables* (1992) or *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1994), to original new domestic musicals such as *Sny svatojánských nocí / Midsummer Nights' Dreams* (1991) and *Bastard* (1993, both by Z. Merta), *Dracula* (1995) and *Monte Cristo* (2000, both by K. Svoboda), *Hamlet* (1999) and *Galileo* (2003, both by J. Ledecký). Czech society soon developed a taste for this kind of light and undemanding treatment of major and serious themes. How symptomatic!

The boom in musical brought with it a number of associated developments. It popularised singers who in the 1980s had been more or less hidden in the anonymity of bands, and launched them on starry solo careers: Lucie Bílá (e.g. Arakain), Ilona Csáková (Laura a její tygři), Bára Basiková (Precedens, Stromboli), Kamil Střihavka (Motorband), Janek Ledecký (Žentour), David Koller (Žentour, Lucie), Petr Muk

(Oceán), Dan Bárta (Alice). It also had an effect on music education. The musical department of the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory trained new, technically skilled performers to meet the new demand. Creative composers, however, remained thin on the ground.

Alongside bands who retained a lasting popularity from the 1980s or even 1970s (and the continuing success of these was no accident, but the result of long-term tenacious work – examples included the Yo Yo Band, Žlutý pes / Yellow Dog and Ivan Hlas), new groups eventually began to appear too. The work of a number of these showed marked traces of the contemporary influence of the British independent guitar scene, as represented by groups like the Scottish Jesus & Mary Chain, the Irish My Bloody Valentine and their successors. These British-influenced Czech bands included Tichá dohoda / Secret Agreement, formed in 1986, and younger bands like Toyen, Sebastians, Naked Souls or Ecstasy of St. Theresa, which later developed into the leading band in Czech electronic music. Czech hardcore was represented by bands like Meat House Chicago I.R.A., Kurtizány z 25. Avenue, Jolly Joker & The Plastic Beatles of the Universe, while grunge, spreading from Seattle in the USA from the end of the 1990s, inspired Czech versions in the form of the bands Spanish Fly's, Support Lesbiens and others.

Reaching the wider world

Shortly after the revolution there was a sudden wave of foreign interest in Czech bands (Vladimír Mišík & Etc., Garáž, Toyen...). It was part of the general increased curiosity in the West about political events in Eastern Europe and sympathy with the social changes underway there. Naturally the wave eventually subsided, but some of the contacts made were kept up and a number of artists have continued to attract interest and give more frequent concerts beyond the borders: Iva Bittová, Už jsme doma, Dagmar Andrtová, Jablkoň, Ecstasy of St. Theresa.

The reverse wave – foreign musicians becoming interested in performing with Czech musicians and in the Czech Republic, proved to be even more fruitful and longer lasting.

From the start of the 1990s the foreign musicians to appear on the Czech rock scene were mainly Americans, playing with Czech colleagues. One of the first was Phil Shoenfelt, an English-born musician who had lived in New York from the end





of the 1980s. In 1994 he gave concerts in the Czech Republic and in the subsequent year he decided to settle here. He created the Phil Shöenfelt & Southern Cross formation with the violinist and guitarist Pavel Cingl and released a number of albums. He plays in clubs and at festivals in the CR, Germany and other European countries. Bradley Straton is another to have left a significant mark on the Czech music scene. His group Cirkus Praha was an important singer-songwriter formation of the 1990s. It only released two albums, but they were well received and the band appears from time to time to this day. Yet another example is the group Dirty Pictures, a classic punk trio fronted by American Huckleberry Dirt. Sometimes, by contrast, the foreign musicians are in the background. The three energetic rockers in the Gaia Messiah band were augmented by an unobtrusive bass guitarist from Australia, for example. One-off collaborative projects are worth mentioning too – for example the New York guitarist and singer-songwriter Gary Lukas, who recorded the album *Strašidla* (1995) with the Czech band Urfaust.

Another phenomenon is interesting in this context – female singers, often African-American, who came to the Czech Republic just to study but then found and developed their singing talents here. In the much more competitive conditions of the USA or Western Europe they might well have just remained amateur singers and attracted little public attention, but here, with the advantage of excellent English combined with native expressive feeling and phrasing and the added advantage of exotic appearance, they became very popular. Examples include Anya, the African-American lead singer in the band Alvik, Alex Marculewicz from the former Deep Sweeden (a band made up of one Czech, two English women and an American woman) and above all Tonya Graves, who has recently made a name for herself here as an actress as well but started in the club band Liquid Harmony, from which she moved on to the energetic funk group Monkey Business.

There are also foreigners who are not permanently settled in the Czech Republic but are willing to fly in for a concert just for a day from London for example (like the English singer Charlie One). In short, Czech popular music of the 1990s and later years is very cosmopolitan. Naturally there are cross-border projects too, one example being the Czecho-Polish music theatre production and album by Jaromír

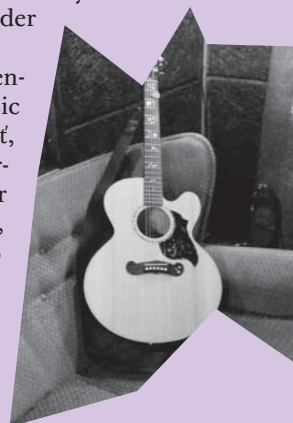


Nohavica, Tomáš Kočko, Renata Putzlacher and Radovan Lipus
Těšínské nebe / Cieszyńskie nebe (2004).

World Music from Czech Melodies

In the Czech Republic there are a number of bands drawing inspiration from exotic musical cultures, and often including musicians from the regions concerned. Relaxace and Yamuna interpret the music of India and Jaoan, Tshikuna and Hypnotix have submerged themselves in African music, while the bands Natalika and Ahmed má hlad have fallen in love with the music of the Balkans, Al-Yaman focuses on Yemen and Arabia and the duo Persepolis combines elements of Iranian music with many other influences including Spanish flamenco. There has also been a great growth in bands that perform Czech folk music in updated form. Their skills as performers, creative individuality and diversity has just kept on increasing. a range of other groups have been indirectly building on the pioneering work of Petr Ulrych with the groups Vulkán (1960s), Atlantis and Javory (1970s) and the openness to influences from and collaboration with distant styles and genre influences shown by the dulcimer band Hradišťan with its leader J. Pavlica.

Some of these groups have a folk-rock approach: Fleret, Benedikta, Koňabož. Others combine Czech and Moravian folk music with elements of Celtic music or country, as well as rock: Dobrohošť, Čechomor, Teagrass, Do cuku, Tomáš Kočko and Orchestra, Marcipán, Njorek. Yet others with elements of jazz: the dulcimer player Zuzana Lapčíková and the pianist E. Viklický's trio, the Muziga band, I. Kellarová and Romano Rat. There are also groups that have no qualms about combining dusted off folk music with elements of hard rock: Ciment, Silent Stream of Godless Elegy.



Swahili

Czech pop today is sing in many foreign languages. Naturally most groups sing in Czech because they want to address the domestic public, but quite a few give precedence to English, hoping to appeal to an international public (my personal view is that they are deeply mistaken). And then there are some who tackle the problem of belonging to a small nation with a fine, but very local and elsewhere generally unknown language by making up their own special new language. This practice has roots going back decades. Musicians from the period of the new wave in rock music at the beginning of the 1980s used bizarre and comic word plays and neologisms. One of the leading bands of that era, Pražský výběr, called the language of some of its songs "Swahili" (the real Swahili, an East African language, contains many expressions that sound very strange to Czech audiences).

Even earlier, "Swahili" had been the terms spontaneously used, more or less as a joke, for the indeterminate meaningless accentuated syllables used by authors recording the first demo-tapes of new songs that would then be used as the basis for creating real texts. The Pražský výběr band, however, used a Czech-Swahili dictionary for real inspiration and composed selected onomatopoeic words into their lyrics.

For the listeners, this technique was appealing not just for the comic effect and the phonetic innovations, but also for its playfulness and sense of free expression. The impression of something coded and conspiratorial played an important

role. Today the “Swahili” traditions has been indirectly (and evidently not deliberately) taken up by other performers, often those who identify with the contemporary trend of “world music”. Bands like Posmrtné zkušenosti, Čankišou, DVA or the singer Vladivojna La Chia use bizarre neologisms or mix freely created onomatopoeic combinations of vowels from words from real foreign languages but without regard for their real meaning.

A Word on Our Sampler

If you switch on Czech television, or tune in at random to Czech radio stations, you will probably get the impressions that not much is happening in our popular music, that there is nothing interesting, original or really stimulating going on here at all. Not that the situation in surrounding countries would look any better. But if you suspect that this picture would not be entirely true, then you are right. The Czech popular music scene has some remarkable buds and shoots. It is just that you have to know where to look for them – to have a chance to visit small clubs in the larger towns, to ask journalists, and explore the internet. Although it is admittedly just the subjective selection and opinion of the present author, you may find the attached sampler *Contemporary Czech Pop* to be one useful guide.

The selection starts with overlaps between pop, rock and jazz, continues by way of electronic music and hip hop and than returns via world music to jazz-based creations. The tracks are taken from albums recorded in the years 2006 – 2008, and we have to say, with apologies, that in some cases the groups concerned no longer exist (Khoiba) or have a different line-up.

The sample also contains an example of the “Swahili” mentioned earlier. The language of Vladivojna La Chia partly imitates Czech, partly English, German, Dutch, Japanese or Russian. Even when she sings in Czech, she treats the language very freely. The meaning of the language lies above all in the emotional sphere. The half-improvised and half-fixed combination of vowels in incredible fast and break-neck rhythmicised syllables expressing extreme moods and feelings.



Four of the Czech groups represented on the sampler sing in English. Most of these are bands drawing on electronic sounds and dance rhythms: Skyline, Khoiba and Ecstasy of Saint Theresa. The last of these, in which the well-known musician and sought-after producer Jan P. Muchow collaborates with singer and actor Kateřina Winterová, has for some years been recognised as a pioneering band in terms of sound and composition. The singer Zuzana Kropáčová from the group S.O.I.L. also writes English lyrics, while her musical concept is based on a fusion of jazz, soul and electronic. One text from Gabriela Vermehlo of the Maraca band is in Portuguese, with the rest in Czech.

In recent years there have been a number of examples of use of other foreign languages on the Czech popular music scene. The singer-songwriter Radůza, for instance loves wandering through Europe with a guitar or an accordion, and finding stories and inspiration on her travels in all sorts of languages. These are then projected into her songs. On our sampler she is represented by a song that is entirely in Czech, but in many others she mixes phrases from other languages into the Czech text. Her album *"Vhoře"* ["In the Mountain"], for example, includes phrases from five European languages (none of them English). The importance of foreign languages in her case is a matter of the enrichment of the sound, joy from a sense of belonging to more than one region at the same time, to Europe, and to the world community as well as delight in depicting national characters.

We can say of all the bands or individuals represented on this sampler that they are among the fixed stars of Czech pop and it will be worth following their work in future. When we speak of pop here, we do not mean the mainstream, but alternative pop, i.e. a popular music with roots in authentic sub-genres such as rock, jazz, hip hop or world music. Unfortunately, we haven't had space to include many important names. On a next similar sampler, for example, we shall definitely need to include Clarinet Factory with the singer Lenka Dusilová, something from the playful work of the DVA band or something from young Czech jazz. At any rate, seek and you will find!



XX. FESTIVAL FORFEST CZECH REPUBLIC 2009

www.forfest.cz / June 5–28 / Abyss of Time

We have given the jubilee 20th year of the Festival a rather romantic name, because we feel that the period of twenty years invites to certain thoughts of recapitulation. It was – and still is – time full of paradoxes: as we can see the growing spirituality in today's art and life, we also can remember unrealized hopes of the first half of nineties and often unattached position of unclassified art, which remains in permanent danger in the whole contemporary world. Almost thirty years ago Tarkovskij defined no-spirituality as an illness of our era. Today's situation is incredibly polarized again; we are facing to omnipresent fundamentalism. Despite of these facts there are some perspectives, which give hope that everything can be different. During the last two decades world art contains visibly growing intensity of spiritual return – It appears in unexpected places and in uneasily described forms, which have not been considered before. These are accompanying signs of turn periods, which always signaled the beginning of great styles in the history of art.

HOW WILL THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AFFECT THE ARTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC?

All the indications are that the cultural sphere and the “creative industries” altogether will be facing lean times in the coming years, especially as concerns funding. It is therefore high time for us to be asking how the crisis will impact on music and the arts in general in the Czech Republic?

If we are talking about the funding of culture, for several decades now there have been two basic models: the American and the European. The European model is built on the principle of state responsibility for and subsidy of the arts. The American system of support for the arts is based on the tradition of philanthropy – patronage by companies and individual donors. In the USA there is no ministry of culture, for example. In a period of financial crisis, however, private donors become scarcer and less generous. The president of the Kennedy Centre in Washington and well-known crisis manager Michael Kaiser, whose achievements have included saving the Royal Opera House in London from bankruptcy, says of the present situation: *“Nobody has any idea of where this will stop. I have never before seen the level of donations and subsidies fall so rapidly”* (daily Baltimore Sun 23rd November 2008). In the United States the crisis has already destroyed one opera company (in Baltimore) and other institutions are being forced to put off planned premieres (for example the Washington National Opera’s costly projected production of Wagner’s Ring).

The American model is therefore collapsing and more and more leading cultural managers are calling for state intervention. In an article for the Washington Post (29th December 2008) Kaiser appealed for an immediate state injection of finance for arts organisation. He also appealed for changes in the law and greater tax relief for donors to the arts. In the USA the culture sector provides 5.7 million jobs and has a yearly turnover of 166 milliard dollars, but because the network of cultural organisations is very fragmentary, the bankruptcy of these organisations isn’t going to hit the headlines in the same way as the collapse of a big automobile factory. In short, if the state is concerned to save gleaming automobiles, it ought also to save what is hidden under the bonnet – its cultural riches.

The European Way

In Europe the situation is similar, but with the difference that the priority to be given to cultural funding is up to the political decisions of individual governments. As in the USA, the nightmare that haunts organisers and artists is cut-backs on marketing costs on the part of companies – i.e. the sponsors of art. This has a direct impact on artists. The first thing that occurs to us all is that there will be fewer receptions and other social events where artists can make extra money (e.g. to supplement the below-average levels of pay in orchestras). But there will also be a reduction in the overall sums devoted to sponsoring cultural events. This is either because firms will be making genuine economies (in this case spending on promotion and marketing is always the first item to be cut before redundancies become necessary) or because the financial crisis will provide firms with a good excuse to reduce what many

managers consider unnecessary expenditures and use the savings to improve the running of the firm and raise profits. The fact is that many firms in Europe still engage in sponsoring not out of any general company philosophy of building up a good name for their trade mark through socially responsible actions (Corporate Social Responsibility in the jargon), but just because "the others do it". This is the same as when someone installs a swimming pool in the garden just because his neighbour has one. So now that the other firms are in crisis and cutting back sponsorship, these firms can cross it off the budget too without embarrassment and nobody will now blame them for not being socially responsible when times are hard. Paradoxically it will be the profit-making cultural sector that will be financially the worst hit. For they are essentially in the same position as the sports sector. Both sectors are very dependent on consumer priorities – how much money people are prepared to spend on goods that are not essential for survival. In 2009 we shall therefore discover the extent to which particular cultural events or sports are in fact mere dispensable entertainment or a real priority to which part of the family budget will always be sacrificed. It is to be expected that most of these events will experience a drop in ticket sales. Just as most managers and companies will deny themselves the luxury of a new model automobile (and the motor industry is already running into difficulties as a result), so the football fans will content themselves with watching matches on the TV and last year's team tee-shirt. A family will go to a musical just once a year, if at all. In normal circumstances these losses could be made up for by support from private sponsors, but as mentioned earlier, company economies on marketing outlay will make this kind of support much harder to come by.

The Czech Republic: Companies are cautious

In the coming years we can expect a similar downward trend in private sector funding of culture in the CR, with the difference that here the culture of private sponsorship is in any case still in its infancy. Many companies are currently putting off the decision of whether and

whom to sponsor to much later than usual – they are waiting for the final economic balance sheet for 2008.

This is the case for example with Karlovarské minerální vody a.s. (KVM – Karlovy Vary Mineral Waters inc.), the producer of the popular Mattoni and Magnesia, which usually provides substantial support for prestigious cultural events such as the Prague Biennale in fine arts, the Czech Grand Design competition and the Magnesia Litera literature prize. KVM's press spokeswoman Štěpánka Filipová announced in relation to the coming year that, *"The current economic situation will certainly affect our company's marketing expenditures in 2009 and the structure of those expenditures"*. In response to a question on whether the real level of spending on marketing would be increased or decreased, she was reluctant to give any information: *"At this point it is impossible to say more"*.

By contrast, representatives of the Česká spořitelna (ČS – Czech Savings Bank), one of the biggest sponsors of cultural events from the domestic banking sector, express hopes that present conditions can be maintained. *"We are continuing to fulfil our side of all long-term sponsorship agreements,"* says Pavla Langová from the press department. This is certainly good news for major musical events like the Prague Spring Festival, the Český Krumlov International Music Festival or Smetana's Litomyšl Festival, traditionally beneficiaries of ČS cultural sponsorship. Will the amount of funding be the same too? *"The amount allocated to sponsorship activities next year will be similar to the amount this year – we consider the sum an internal matter,"* adds Langová.

Foundations in Trouble

Czech cultural foundations are already in a difficult situation. The funds that they are supposed to distribute to the arts community are generated primarily as revenue from their assets, which are invested in real estate, bonds and mixed share funds and savings accounts. But this year because of the crisis these instruments have produced almost no profits. It looks as though the Nadace Český hudební fond – Czech Music Fund Foundation (CMFF), which is one of the country's biggest cultural foundations – will be forced in 2009

to make a substantial reduction in the amount that it has been used to distributing each year. In 2006 revenue from invested foundation assets was 3.9 million crowns, the next year it was 1.7 million and according to prognoses it will be around six hundred thousand for 2008. Revenues are thus more than 6.5 times lower than they were two years ago.

The greatest threat is to subjects that are regular recipients of a CMFF grant and whose activities basically depend on CMFF funding. These are first and foremost the Circles of Friends of Music, a network of small organisations that hold classical music concerts in small towns. *"The Circles of Friends of Music is an amazing kind of activity, organised by enthusiasts. If it were not for them, good quality classical music would not reach the small Czech towns. If financial support for them ends, this will be an irretrievable loss,"* says the director of the foundation, Miroslav Drozd.

There is a further complicating problem in the law regulating the work of the foundation. Most of the property of the CMFF is registered as foundation capital assets (for the sake of transparency). In the law on foundations there is a clause stipulating that foundation capital asserts cannot be reduced, and must be topped up by the foundation if their value falls. *"But no one reckoned with the financial crisis. The value of the foundation's assets is now dropping through no fault on our part and so the foundation law is now at odds with reality,"* says Drozd. The foundation does, however, has what is legally known as "other property" as well. Can the foundation use it? What is its current worth? *"The greater part of our 'other property', twenty-four million crowns, is invested in a mixed share fund. If I wanted to take it out now, I would get almost eight million less,"* Drozd explains.

Other foundations are in similar straits. For example the Nadace Český literární fond (Czech Literary Fund Foundation, CLFF) has an obligation to the state, from which (like the CMFF) it gets investment funding from the Foundation Investment Fund, to distribute roughly 900,000 crowns next year. But as a result of the financial crisis the revenues from the assets entrusted to it by the state will be a third of that, a mere 300,000 crowns. *"Overall we shall be distributing a similar amount to last year,*

but we are being forced to make up for falling revenues by drawing on the rest of the foundation's property, which is being eroded, and our accounts are constantly ending up in the red," is how the director of the foundation Michal Novotný describes the current situation..

The foundations are thus being compelled to change the conditions for awarding grants and the individual categories of possible grant recipients. From 2009 no journals will be getting grants from either the CMFF or the CLFF. Both foundations regard such funding as too much of a luxury in present circumstances. State Subsidies for Live Art will Fall by 35 Percent

The decline of private donations and the problems of the foundations will evidently mean that many cultural organisers will turn to the state for direct subsidies. There will be more and more applicants for the same or even a lower amount of available funding. Either the money will be divided up into tiny amounts, or the majority of subjects will get no public funding at all, and will go bankrupt. Reports from the Ministry of Culture unfortunately suggest that this black prospect is all too real. Although in real terms the overall funds assigned to the Ministry of Culture from the state budget for 2009 are 113 million crowns higher than in the previous year, the budget as passed by parliament included stipulations for the allocation of funds that discriminate against live art, which paradoxically will need more help than ever before next year. *"Care of monuments has been made the priority for next year by the Ministry of Culture,"* says the director of the Art and Libraries Section František Zborník and he adds: *"funds directly earmarked for subsidies to live art, apart from theatre, will be sixty-five per cent of funds for the same purpose last year."*

It is hard to predict the overall development of the situation for example in 2010. The published programme plans for the next season published by orchestras and opera companies will nonetheless be telling in one respect. The financial crisis will clearly lead management to keep to tried and tested titles and contemporary operas and premieres of new works may well be squeezed to the margins. It's possible that this will be the worst affect of the crisis on modern music.

LADISLAV MOŠE BLUM

AN AUDIO DOCUMENT OF CHANT IN A PRAGUE SYNAGOGUE

Jewish culture found itself in a strange position in post-war Czechoslovakia. While in the 1950s the communist authorities made it very clear that they were scarcely less antisemitic than the Nazis, in subsequent decades they did not express this attitude so unambiguously. Not that their basic attitude had changed much. The Jewish community was allowed to function, but it was always under the vigilant surveillance of the state and the party. Yet even under these unfavourable circumstances the members of the community continued to maintain their traditions, among which liturgical music played an important role. This remarkable document published by the Jewish Museum in Prague gives us an idea of the musical side of Jewish religious life at the turn of the 1970s/1980s through a portrait of one important figure.

In this double CD and attached Czech-English booklet, the editor – the musicologist Veronika Seidlová –, presents the cantor Ladislav Blum (1911–1994) as a figure who linked the post-war period with the traditions of synagogal chant of the first half of the 20th century. He was born in Eastern Slovakia into a family in which the art and repertoire of the *chazonus*, i.e. liturgical chant, had been handed down from generation to generation, and his teacher was his uncle Adolf Rothstein. This family tradition clashed with the temptations of modernity, of course, and at secondary school Blum became enchanted with jazz, playing it himself on the piano. Later, when he was studying law in Prague, he was attracted mainly to opera. He then studied classical singing in Budapest and it is precisely the combination of classical technique with a knowledge of the cantor tradition that was the

foundation of his exceptional qualities as a singer.

It was an irony of fate that he obtained his first role in an opera in 1945 in Terezín, where he had been sent after internment in a labour camp in Seredi in Slovakia. After the war he and his wife settled in Bohemia and he sang for a series of opera companies, the Vít Nejedlý Army Arts Choir, and the State Song and Dance Ensemble before becoming a member of the Prague Symphony Orchestra Male Choir towards the end of his career. In 1963 Ladislav Blum became second cantor at the synagogue in Jeruzalémská Street in Prague, and four years later succeeded Alexandr Singer in the post of senior cantor, which he held until the end of his life. For social and historical reasons the distinction between orthodox and liberal Jews, each with their own synagogue, had lapsed in Prague and the groups had combined. The synagogue where Blum worked was

The first CD consists of recordings made in 1980 in the Prague Jerusalem Synagogue. These are compositions by important figures of the first half of the 20th century, such as Josef Rosenblatt, Sholom Secunda and Moshe Kusevitzky. As we read in the booklet, Ladislav Blum himself transcribed most of them from publicly released recordings. Although in terms of religious affiliation Blum did not identify with the orthodox current in Judaism, musically he drew on the traditions of the orthodox singers of Eastern Europe. His style is a special mixture combining the technique of European operatic bel canto with an expressive method of melodic ornamentation deriving from the Near Eastern roots of this music. Ultimately the modes which the individual pieces are based on are akin to those that are the basis of the classical music of the Arab world. Blum's voice for the most part keeps to the high registers as a counter tenor and his expression gives an impression both of great control and exaltation.

A black and white photograph of a man, likely a clergyman, wearing a dark cap and a white stole over a dark garment. He is holding an open book with both hands and looking down at it intently. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Handwritten musical score for a song titled "SP'NA I: K'DUSHA Y". The score is written on ten staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are written below the notes in a mix of English and Hebrew. The lyrics include: "SH' NA I: K'DUSHA Y", "HU E LAU KE NU A DO SHET", "HU E LAU KE NU", "HU E LAU KE NU", "HU E LAU KE NU", "HU E LAU KE NU", "HU E LAU KE NU", "HU E LAU KE NU", "HU E LAU KE NU", "HU E LAU KE NU". The score is handwritten and appears to be a personal or working draft.

The second disk is a mosaic of live recordings from a number of ceremonies in the Jerusalem Synagogue over the period 1978–1983. Technically these are of poorer quality, which is only to be expected given the conditions in which they were made. On the other hand, they capture the atmosphere of ritual including the “gaps”, in which we sense, even if we cannot hear, the participants each praying on his own.

The textual part of the publication, produced by Veronika Seidlová but also the ethnomusicologist Alexandr Knapp, offers a biography Ladislav Blum, an introduction to synagogue musical practice and translations of the sung texts.

At a time when re-editions of recordings from the very beginning of the 20th century are coming out, tape recordings only a little more than twenty years old might not seem to be much in the way of a surprising discovery. In the case of cantor Blum, however, we need not hesitate to call them a discovery. This is a window into the spiritual and musical life of a community that found itself in a strange and difficult position in socialist Czechoslovakia, and at the same time it is a portrait of an artist who stands at the end of one current of the musical tradition of Central and Eastern Europe.



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This text is a response to the review of J. Tyrrell's monograph on Janáček from the pen of Miloš Štědroň, which was printed in CMQ 2/2008. Michael Beckerman is a professor at New York University and the author of the monograph *Janacek as Theorist* (Pendragon Press, 1994). (Ed. note)

TWINES AND TANGLES

After several breathless pages of unvarnished praise in his recent review of John Tyrrell's roughly 2000 page Janacek: *Years of a Life*, Milos Stedron pauses to state his primary objection to the 3.6 kg biography:

One aspect which I do not agree with and which I consider to be an inadequately thought out part of the monograph is the passage on Janacek as Theorist. Tyrrell generally takes over the internationally cited monograph by Michael Beckerman Janacek as Theorist. I personally think that despite its elegant form this book is only an attempt at identifying Janacek the theorist. Beckerman seems to have wanted to stake a claim to this lucrative theme, but his treatment ignores the results of Czech music theory (Blazek, Rehanek, Volek) and starts entirely from his own research.

On every level, Stedron's assessment is careless and incorrect. First he misreads Tyrrell who, after damning my 470gm volume (which he calls "slim") with faint praise, swiftly moves on to quote such scholars as Kulka, Chlubna, Kunc, Hanak, Volek and Blatny, completing a lean consideration of Janacek's theories in a mere 9 page (4gm) chapter. My book may be the starting point for his chapter, but it is hardly the core of it.

This would hardly be worth noticing had Stedron's reading of my own work not been so sloppy and misinformed, particularly when he claims that I have ignored specific Czech sources. Blazek's contributions are cited throughout my work, and I annotated his texts thoroughly as I prepared my book. I also studied the work of Rehanek, and have had a warm relationship with that author over the years.

Finally, I had many long conversations with Jaroslav Volek about related issues, and always found his ideas fascinating, though sometimes idiosyncratic and occasionally opaque. He is prominently cited in my final chapter where his views are presented (see, for example, p. 99). Many other Czech scholars are mentioned, as even a cursory glance at the book will show. The reader of Stedron's review will not find out, however, why citing Czech scholars is so important, or which specific aspects of Czech thought might have been neglected in my work, since he devotes his entire discussion of Janacek's theory to me instead of trying to say something useful and original about Janacek.

Bizarrely, it is not enough for Stedron to criticize my work, he maligns my motives as well, with the unpleasant suggestion that I somehow capitalized on the subject of the theoretical works to "stake a claim" to its "lucrative" potential. The stature of Janacek and his theoretical works in American academic circles in the 1980's is neatly summarized by the following response to my application for a teaching position in 1982: "Why do we need someone working on a third-rate Czech composer when there are plenty of second-rate American composers around?" No, Janacek's international standing as a composer is a more recent phenomenon. Alas, the notion that Janacek's theory has been a lucrative endeavor for anyone anywhere, including the Maestro himself, could only be put forward by someone fantasizing wealth on the other side of the rainbow or the Atlantic Ocean.

Oddly, Stedron laments that mine is the main source for Janacek's theoretical works in English. We scholars have a remedy for such things; it is called publishing. If we do not like what a fellow scholar has written, we are free to make other interpretations and make sure that competing approaches are available to our peers. If these theoretical works are indeed as "lucrative" as Stedron claims, it is simply inexplicable that nothing has been made available to English readers in the fifteen years since the appearance of my book. I can hardly be blamed for work that others, including Stedron, have not done.

I believe that is somewhat surreal that I have come to occupy such choice real estate space in both the major Janacek biography of our time and its review in this journal. Don't these scholars have better things to write about? Does anyone believe that the length of a work is a useful measure of its contribution? Surely any lover of Janacek's art would hold such a view. Further, when Milos Stedron wrongly concludes that Tyrrell did not perform due diligence on the theoretical works, why do I become the subject of his attack? The fact is, I have no idea, and to tell the truth, I see little evidence that Stedron has read my book in its entirety. But rather than speculate on the motives and activities of other scholars, I would prefer to spend the remainder of my time addressing what is really the core of Stedron's attack: that in my work "Janacekian theoretical ideas and their link with his music" are not "satisfactorily addressed and explained."

I'm sure it will come as a relief to the reader at this point to hear that I actually have to agree with Stedron's assertion. In fact, after studying all of Janacek's theoretical works, and most of his other writings; engaging the music for decades; reading articles by such figures as Blazek, Risinger, Blatny, Pecman, Burghauser, Cernik, Volek, Rehanek Cenohorska, Geck, Sin, Chlubna, Dusek, Hanak, Gulke, and many, many others; speaking about the problems of the theoretical works with Czech and international scholars (including most recently the brilliant young German scholar, Kerstin Lucker); struggling to find English language terms for the composer's strange neologisms, and having studied seriously a range of related topics from Physiologi-

cal Psychology to Abstract Formalism and from Audiology to Acoustics; after all this I freely admit that I was unable to demonstrate a precise correlation between music and theory.

There are several reasons for this: since no one, including John Tyrrell or Milos Stedron has been able to "explain" either Janacek's music or his theoretical ideas separately, it stands to reason that the *link* between music and theory will be even more treacherous to chart. We accept as an article of faith that music is slippery stuff (the score may hold still for us, the "music" never does). But there are specific reasons why Janacek's theories are so elusive. Here are just a few of them: Janacek is not always precise. Some theoretical constructs are deliberately presented poetically and not scientifically. Janacek changed his mind and his terminology several times over the years. Some of Janacek's theory really is pedagogical and some is speculative, and often they are mixed up together. Finally, the motivating core of the process, Janacek's fundamental stance as a thinker, developed over the years. He began his career as an orthodox "abstract formalist" in league with Durdik and Zimmermann, a Dvorak supporter and a detractor of Smetana. As he came to believe that the elements of a composition were indeed infused with "life moods" he no longer could be an abstract anything, and whether he ended up as a formalist at all is open to question. He began to find the whole topic repugnant. Near the end of his life he wrote: "I reject the sterile hoax of aesthetics." Of course he changed that line too...

But there is more. When we look at how Janacek used his time and energy, particularly towards the end of his life, it is obvious that what he cared about most was composing, not theorizing: when he composes the most, he theorizes the least. For this, and many other reasons, some given above, I would argue that it is impossible to demonstrate any integral connection between theory and practice in Janacek's work that goes beyond wishful thinking, that Janacek's theory is no kind of "road map" through the musical works; though that has not stopped people from spinning their wheels. I challenge anyone to create a fixed system from Janacek's theoretical writings that will stand still long enough to be useful as a means of gaining special insight into *his* musical compositions, as opposed to those



Michael Beckerman

of his contemporaries, or even to state what it might mean for a composer's theories to be useful in understanding a musical composition.


Let me try to give an example that shows how tricky it is to try to make such connections. One of Janáček's most distinctive formulations from the *Complete Theory of Harmony* is his notion of *spletna* which could be rendered in English as something like "twine" or "tangle." This refers to a moment when, during a harmonic progression, the tones of one chord sound simultaneously with the tones of the following one because of the imperfect damping mechanism in the inner ear. Here Janáček based his conclusions on the work of Helmholtz. Far from decrying such a physiological imperfection, Janáček believed that this "chaotic moment" was the "cement" that bound the chord together and imparted to it "a sheen of beauty and a particular character". In other words, aesthetics emanates from the *spletna*. This is an incredibly rich concept, and the scientific data that might support it is even today in the balance. There is no

Nezapomínejme, že není konce souzvuku u taktové čáry, není mu konce za notovanou jeho délkou; vyznívá ještě pacitem za taktovou čárou i za délkou notovanou.

Pacitové vyznívání trvá až 3/10 vteřiny; v 1/10 vteřiny klesá na 1/10 své prvotní síly.


Jsmo pod jeho dojmem, i když je přehlušován.



Notou  označuji pacitové vyznívání.

Sledujme hlas sopránový v těchto dvou souzvučích:



Tón *fis*¹ zní zároveň s pacitem tónu *g*¹ a po době  vypadá z tohoto svazu.

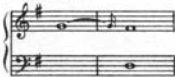
Podobně je tomu s každým hlasem.



Má-li být vazba souzvuků (spoj) pevná, nedostačí, aby jen části souzvukové (hlas) byly spojeny; třeba, aby každý hlas měl styk (současné znění) i se základním tónem, fundamentem druhého souzvuku.

Tomu tak je. Základní tón druhého souzvuku nezní jen současně se všem tóny svého souzvuku, ale i s pacitovými tóny předcházejícího.

To je onen tmel, ona silná spletna tónů, jež váže oba souzvuky; její rozuzlení, tj. uvolnění druhého souzvuku od pacitových tónů, prvního, dává zář krásy i ráz spoji souzvuků.

Přesvědčme se o účinnu vazby jednotlivých hlasů se základním tónem druhého souzvuku.



Hřejme to způsobem klavírním; vyčkejme déle na době  — spletna tónů *d* — *fis*¹ — *g*¹ nás dráždí — pustme klávesu pacitového tónu *g*¹  — a takové rozuzlení nás jistě uspokojí.

Ve hře té je jediná nepravda¹⁰: přílišné zesílení pacitového tónu.


Tuto vazbu vyslovují intervalem základního tónu k pacitovému ④ a intervalem rozuzlení, tj. základního tónu k pacitovému tónu téhož hlasu: — 3.

Oba intervaly, z nichž prvnímu říkám zpětný interval, znázorňují celou vazbou ④ — 3 spojovací formu¹¹ toho hlasu: KVARTA VZRUŠENÁ TERCÍÍ.

Janáček's explanation of the "spletna" (reproduced from Blažek's edition of Janáček's theoretical writings, pp. 182–183)

difficulty speculating about what such an idea *might* have to do with Janáček's music, in fact in my book I wondered if the famous opening of the *Second String Quartet* could be a kind of "slide" of the *spletna* under a microscope, as it were. But one can find analogous moments in Ravel's *Tombé de Couperin* and in *Petrushka* as well, so it is not clear why such a thing should give us particular insight into Janáček's work even if we had a hand written note from the composer saying "Dear Historian: I used a *spletna* in my string quartet." If Janáček's theories are not merely idiosyncratic it stands to reason that they will account for important features in the work of many other composers, thus making them less specifically applicable to Janáček. But some of Janáček's terms have broader applications. *Spletna*, it turns out, is as good as term as any for describing the disjunction that occurs when we try to make firm connections between things that are in a constant state of flux, like Janáček's music and his theory.

In the final chapter of my book I do the best that I can with these issues. Reading that chapter again, decades after it was written and fifteen years after it was published, I am not sure I can do much better, though I certainly might do it differently. In it I say, among other things, that when you look at the theory and the music side by side all you can really say is that "Janacek is always Janacek"; but I am not even sure that I believe *that* any more. What makes Janacek such an extraordinary figure is that he cannot be pinned down or reduced to the kinds of formulae that would make it possible to demonstrate the connection Stedron so badly wants to see. So in the end I do agree with him when he says that my work is "only an attempt at identifying Janacek." What else could it be? I will leave it to others with grander ambitions and weightier publications to provide us with some kind of "definitive" Janacek. For me, the first step in locating such a thing is to admit that it may well not exist at all.



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
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14. 5. 2009, 18:00 Goethe Institut Prag
Filip Waldmann, double-bass; Iturriaga Quartet (D)
F. Mendelssohn, Bartók, A. Dvořák

4. 6. 2009, 17:00 Bertramka, Prague
Prague Bassoon Band
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RADIO DAYS

THE BEGINNINGS OF RADIO BROADCASTING IN INTER-WAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA



RADIO DAYS THE BEGINNINGS

OF RADIO BROADCASTING IN INTER-WAR

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

If we want to look at musical production from the 20th century to the present, then it is clear that one of the factors that strongly influenced musical life and cannot be overlooked is the rise of radio and radio broadcasting. Today taken for granted as an entirely common part of everyday life, at the time of its invention radio meant a complete revolution. It was part of the major transformations that came at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century: apart from the capacity to address by radio signal the wide circle of listeners, a huge growth in music production and the development of a new performer-listener relationship, these changes also included new possibilities of sound recording and later equipment making it possible to process the recording further.

Aside from advances on the technical side, which at the very beginning were the prime concerns, the first years of the activities of Czechoslovak Radio saw a general stabilisation of the structure of broadcasting: the establishment of specialised departments and development of programme schemes and formats. Radio involved an entirely new approach to listeners and here we can clearly see the efforts of the first radio staff to create a specific kind of repertoire programming to match the character of the medium. It is interesting that the form of broadcast and programme scheme (types) that the radio created and that stabilised within roughly the first decade of its activities are not so very different from those of today.

The Very Beginnings of Czechoslovak Radio

Regular broadcasting of the Czechoslovak radio, known as Radiojournal, started on the 18th of May 1923. The name “Radiojournal” was the official name of the radio from its inception until December 1938, following the dismemberment of the country by the Munich Agreement, when it was renamed Czecho-Slovak Radio inc. and later Czechoslo-



PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

Crystal radio

vak Radio Ltd. (The expression “Radiojournal” was used for the whole institution, and was a synonym for Czechoslovak Radio; it should not be confused with the radio news station of the same name in the Czech Republic today). Radiojournal could pride itself on getting on the air early by international standards – the London station was established only a year earlier, and neighbouring states started such services in the same year. Since radio was a complete novelty and initially households lacked a basic element of it – receiving sets – the first radio production was reproduced publicly in the Sanssouci cinema on Prague’s Wenceslas Square.

The people who came up with the idea of founding a radio station were Eduard Svoboda, an entrepreneur in the film industry

and future director of the radio, and Miloš Čtrnáctý, the cultural editor of the *Národní politika* [National Politics] daily newspaper. The original premises of the radio corresponded to the initially improvised operation of Radiojournal. The first transmitter was created by converting the radio-telegraph station in Kbely in Prague. The house in which the transmitter was located, however, was too small for a studio to be created in it – so a studio had to be constructed provisionally in a Scouts tent. The first years of broadcasting were accompanied by a hunt for more suitable premises; after its improvised beginnings the radio had a series of different homes until the end of 1932, when it moved to the building on Vinohradská třída in Prague, where it is still housed today.

The Omnipresent Radio

The year 1925 saw one of fundamental changes for future radio broadcasting. In the first decade of radio, music broadcasting was based wholly on transmission of live music (from 1926 music played from gramophone records was part of broadcast music, but the only music transmitted in this way was popular music). At the beginning live production struggled with serious technical problems – the limited capacity of the first microphones meant it was impossible to record larger musical ensembles, and the conditions of the radio studios were hardly ideal. One important innovation, which reflects the character of technical advance in the period of the beginnings of radio, was the setting up of a station with a new transmitter in

the Prague suburb of Strašnice. The station went into operation in mid-January 1925 and as early as a month later, its new possibilities were exploited for live transmission of a performance from somewhere outside the radio studio – specifically Smetana's opera *The Two Widows* from the National Theatre building. Regular transmission of concerts by the Czech Philharmonic was introduced, and Radiojournal conductors were later to be involved in the broadcasts. These broadcasts initially raised fears among concert organisers that concert audiences might drop when people had the oppor-

tunity to listen on household receivers. For this reason the number of broadcast concerts or opera performances per season was determined by contract, contracts forbade the broadcast of premieres of opera productions and also stipulated fees for permission for radio broadcasts. Live broadcasts aroused great interest among listeners, as we can see from reports of the time, and were also a very important attraction on radio schedules: these broadcasts of opera performances, concerts and later performances from many other settings, including sacred buildings, became an important part

of the radio programme and the crown of technical advance and the innovative efforts of Radiojournal in its initial phase. The reorganisation of the radio in 1925 was another major change. Because of lack of finance for the radio, the Czechoslovak state took the decision to enter the radio company as a partner holding more than half the shares and so to provide adequate funding for the radio's operations. Financial stability and solutions to the initial technical problems meant that the radio could now concentrate fully on the character of radio broadcasting and on stabilising its form. Greater independence of financing from concessionaries probably also allowed the radio to support more "educational" activity rather than just "entertainment". These factors, together with the ever increasing length of daily broadcasting, led the radio to an awareness of its own specific features and to the gradual creation of an original radio dramaturgy. This was essentially a matter of developing programming and individual programme formats, with the continuity of broadcasting guaranteed by regular thematic series. Different and specialised radio programmes emerged, but with an understanding of the need to be up-to-date and to focus on important events and anniversaries. All this was supported by the establishment of specialist editorial desks in the overall framework of the radio, including the spoken word and music departments. This was also the period of the



*First issue of the
Radiojournal bulletin
(September 1923)*



The radio building in the Vinohradská street (photo from the year 1933)

beginning of the first permanent radio orchestra, known as the Radiojournal Orchestra, which was officially founded on the 1st of October 1926 (the orchestra is still in existence, renamed the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra). Having its own symphony orchestra enabled the radio to expand broadcasting programming to include a broader repertoire.

From the beginning listeners to Czechoslovak radio had their lives made much easier by the publication of regular programme bulletins, which first come out in September 1923, three months after the start of regular radio broadcasting, and included a detailed programme

including commentaries, in much the same form as we know them today.

The Radio Creates a Network

More stations were eventually set up to cover an ever larger territory in the Czechoslovak Republic. The emergence of different radio branches, each of which produced its own programme, led to the idea of network links between them. What was known as the “simultaneous radio” was developed, with more efficient transmitters allowing the signals of different stations to be connected, so that they could transmit or share programmes from more distant



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Otakar Jeremiáš, director of the Prague Radio Orchestra

areas. The very first simultaneous broadcast took place on the 24th of December 1926. The first network consisted of the Prague plus the Brno station (regular broadcasting started on the 18th of April 1926) and on the Czechoslovak radio level, the Bratislava station. Gradually others were added – the newly founded station in Košice in 1927 and a branch in Moravian Ostrava in 1929.

A further level of connection between stations was link-up with radio outside the country and the emergence of what was known as international radio. In Czechoslovakia international transmission was first exploited as part of a broadcast in March 1927, when a symphonic concert by the Czech Philharmonic was transmitted abroad from the Smetana Hall of the Municipal

House. It was broadcast by all Czechoslovak stations and in Germany, Austria and Poland. Link-up with France came in 1928 as part of what was then the biggest ever project of simultaneous radio, when thirty European radio stations transmitted the same programme (the so-called European concerts). The occasion was the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic – involving a production of Bedřich Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride* broadcast from the Paris Opera Comique. According to available sources, after this successful broadcast international programme exchange became common practice, especially in the Central European region. The originally Central European network then gradually

expanded into other European countries. In 1930 stations in London, Brussels and Berlin were linked up, and at the same period there were experiments in broadcasting to the American continent.

The possibility of exchanging programmes had a major effect on radio programming. This was above all because up to the mid-1930s, when radio stations increasingly started to exploit the chance to make their own recordings, it was live performances that took up most of music broadcasting time, and since simultaneous link-up with other radio stations made it possible to transmit a programme to any station, the choice of music was much enlarged. For example, sharing the concerts of the radio orchestras of different stations allowed these stations to broad-

cast several symphony concerts in a single day. This also applied to the major broadcasts, foreign concerts and concert of the Czech Philharmonic.

The Radiojournal Programme and the Emergence of Radio Direction

The initial phase of Czechoslovak Radio culminated in the 1930s, when its production settled down into a form close to that of today. Radio had become a distinctive institution capable of planning and fulfilling its own repertory concepts and practice independent of other cultural institutions. It had its own orchestra and numerous chamber ensembles, and worked with leading Czech and foreign performers and music theoreticians. The radio was also formed by the strong professionalisation of its staff base, which had the main influence on the choice and quality of the music programmes broadcast.

The man who became first planning chief of music broadcasting at the separate music department was the composer and conductor Otakar Jeremiáš, who at the same time held the post of director of the Radiojournal orchestra, while K.B. Jiráček, likewise a composer and conductor, became head of the music department itself. Until his appointment Jiráček had worked as a teacher of composition at the Prague Conservatory, and was in constant contact with the youngest generation of composers and musicians, many of whom he was to persuade to work for



Karel Boleslav Jiráček

the radio. The presence of these individuals had a major effect on the whole concept of broadcasting, and also on the ever greater specialisation of radio work. The 1930s even saw the development of a whole new discipline – radio music direction, since work in the studio where broadcasting and later recording involved not only a conductor but also a music director who took care of the whole sound concept and balance of the production. For this new post the new head of the music department K.B. Jiráček chose his pupil in the field of composition, Miloslav Kabeláč (see CMQ 2/04).

Kabeláč talked about his work as a music director in an interview for the magazine *Hudební rozhledy* [Musical Outlooks] (1969): “*This activity helped to broaden my horizons from the point of view of*

quantity and quality. By quality here I mean depth of insight into a work, its structure and content. To prepare a piece for live broadcast as a music director or even as a conductor is something more than the most concentrated listening or mere, even if extremely thorough, reading of a score.”

Radiojournal went on to engage a series of other young musicians in conducting and musical direction posts: from 1933 Karel Ančerl worked at Radiojournal, and a year later Iša Krejčí and Klement Slavický joined the radio, as subsequently did Václav Trojan, Jan Kapr and others.

Radiojournal and Contemporary Music

Contemporary classical music, by Czechs or from abroad, made up a significant part of the

broadcasting of Czechoslovak Radio. This was to a great extent the result of the influence of the management of K.B. Jiráček, O. Jeremiáš and their circle of collaborators. Contemporary composition even had its own series, *Evenings of Contemporary Music* but was also broadcast as part of other series such as programmes of chamber music, symphonic concerts by the radio orchestra or concerts held to commemorate various anniversaries. The programming included works by composers of the generation of L. Janáček, J.B. Foerster, V. Novák and O. Zich, composers of the younger generation – L. Vycpálek, J. Křička, B. Vomáčka, E. Axman, V. Petrželka, V. Kaprál, J. Kvapil, K.B. Jiráček, V. Kálík, J. Jindřich, J. Kunc, and V. Štěpán and the post-war generation – B. Martinů, members of the Mánes music group (P. Bořkovec, I. Krejčí, J. Ježek and F. Bartoš), E. Hlobil, P. Haas, O. Šín, E.F. Burian, E. Schulhoff, A. Hába, K. Hába, M. Ponc, K. Reiner or O. Chlubna. From the very youngest generation composers whose works were broadcast included V. Kaprálová, V. Trojan, M. Kabeláč and others. Of composers from abroad, those whose works were most often broadcast were P. Hindemith, S. Prokofiev, D. Shostakovich, French composers (especially the ones of *Les Six* group), I. Stravinsky and A. Schoenberg. The radio produced the world premiere of L. Dallapiccola's *Six Choral Pieces on words by Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger*, directed by M. Kabeláč.

Radiojournal and Historical Music

A significant part of programming was devoted to the discovery of historical music, the Czech Baroque and Classicism, and above all the presentation of “forgotten works” of Czech music. These were mainly works by composers of the 17th and 18th century, often found in archives (the collection of historic archival material kept in the radio archives, including the so-called Balling Archive, is testimony to this part of radio production). At the Brno station this programme was associated with the activities of Vladimír Helfert and his pupils Jan Racek, Ludvík Kundera and Karel Vetterl. Helfert's scholarly interest in the field of the Czech Baroque, and the composer Jiří A. Benda and others was clear in the historical programmes produced by the Brno station. The high points of performance of the music of the Czech Baroque were the live broadcasts from the “Prague Baroque Festival” in June 1938. Programming included historical music of foreign as well as Czech origin, and programmes were devoted to composers' anniversaries, for example in 1935 when numerous pieces by J. S. Bach were broadcast for his jubilee. Earlier, pre-Baroque music was also increasingly included in the historical music programmes. The Prague Singers' Chamber Association (later appearing under the name “The Czech Madrigalists”), the Association for Sacred Music and the “Pro arte antiqua Association”

orchestra playing on old instruments took a leading part in this broadcasting. At this period the radio had a special “Czech Vocal Polyphony Series”. In addition to the expanding repertoire there were also an increasing number of educational programmes and lectures, and well-known musicologists made programmes with historical themes. Naturally the music of Czech composers played a great role in radio programming, and above all series to mark the anniversaries of B. Smetana, A. Dvořák, L. Janáček and composers of the younger generation.

Radio as a New Medium

The birth of the radio and its quite rapid spread represented major social and cultural changes in the 1920s. As “one of the basic media of contemporary mass communication” through the possibilities of wireless transmission of sound signal using electromagnetic waves, the radio aroused great enthusiasm and hopes in terms of its wide accessibility and at the same time expectations of its entirely new means of expression. There were also, however, negative reactions to the medium; the acoustic imperfections of transmission were the subject of criticism, and there were fears of the mass character of radio entertainment and a bias towards the cheap and popular. From its inception Radiojournal was very much aware of the entirely new mode of audience reception and response that radio involved, as we can see from the discussion and comments



Czechoslovak president T.G. Masaryk speaking to American citizens (22 February 1932)

on the pages of the programme bulletins and other documents of the period that were based primarily on immediate experience of practise.

The basic feature of the new mode of reception was the absence of the visual element that had hitherto been an almost inseparable part of all music production – not only in opera or music theatre but also in concerts. The work of music now found itself in a new environment in which the audience's attention was focused purely on the sense of hearing; this change also implied a change of social meaning, for it meant the disappearance of the immediate performer-listener relationship and its mutuality. Here we might

mention the parallel with the developing gramophone industry, which involved similar changes in the mode of reception of the work of music, but in the 1920s and 30s gramophone records were not yet as widespread and accessible as radio broadcasting. The question of the specificity and originality of the programme broadcast by Czechoslovak Radio – Radiojournal, was thus from the beginning a serious issue. The first ideas on issue were influenced by many considerations, and often these were purely pragmatic. At the beginning, radio broadcasting struggled with major technical problems and the resulting limitations on choice of music and size and composition of ensem-



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The team of Prague radio music directors standing, left to right: Klement Slavický, Miloslav Kabeláč, Jan Fadrhons; sitting, left to right: Iša Krejčí, Jan Kapr, Václav Trojan

bles must have been one reason behind the demand that a music suitable for radio production be created. On the other hand, the demand for “radio-suitability” was also to some extent the result of justified fascination with radio as a new medium as well as the desire to capture as many listeners as possible and convince them of the importance of the newly emergent medium. It is well-known that the idea of the radio and original music for radio, known as “radiophony”, i.e. work that would not just reproduce but create a new form of art, aroused enormous enthusiasm in the inter-war avant-garde. It was the spoken word department of the radio that first established itself in the field of

an original radio genre. This produced programmes with the various category titles of *radio revue*, *radio scene*, *drama scene*, today often known as the “radio play”. The first important creators of original radio plays on Czechoslovak Radio were Miloš Kareš and Václav Gutwirth, and later it was the Brno station that was particularly prolific in the field. In 1930 Jan Grmela attracted attention with his perfect radio mystification, “sound play”, entitled *The Fire at the Opera*. This was a play that simulated the events of a fire; many listeners did not realise that it was actually just a radio play. The result was a panic caused by the idea that it was a live broadcast of a tragic event. There is a parallel

with Orson Welles’ famous radio production of *The War of the Worlds*, realised by CBS in America in October 1938, which convinced many listeners that the earth was really being invaded by Martians.

Dramatic art, which in its theatrical form was hard for radio to adapt, sought new techniques that would work without the visual element of stage presentation. One definite inspiration in this direction was the method of montage. The idea of combining spoken text with sounds to evoke atmosphere and action led to new approaches to presenting a text and its setting, the visual element being replaced by a “sound” staging. Montage found wide applica-

tions in broadcasting not only in drama, but also in the creation of sequences of an educational or informational character that combined various sound levels – using music, background bustle, recitation etc. as well as the spoken word.

The New Possibilities of Sound Recording

The distinctive character of radio production was greatly supported and encouraged by advances in recording. In 1929 the idea of permanent recording on gramophone records appeared within the framework of what had hitherto been live recording, at first just with the aim of archiving the speeches and voices of famous figures. At the time this was possible only by collaboration with foreign gramophone companies. Three years later Radiojournal set up its own recording department to make recordings on wax disks, but the maximum recording capacity on these was around 4 minutes and their durability was minimal. The Blattnerphone machine, based on magnetisation of steel tapes, made possible a thirty-minute recording, but this steel tape was three kilometres long and weighed twelve kilograms. The breakthrough came with recording on celluloid tape, which apart from the high quality of the sound made editing possible – and this was to be exploited especially for the recording of music. The technical advances of the 1930s meant a major shift in Radiojournal broadcasting. In addition to allowing the radio to

make its own recordings (there was a 42-fold rise in the number of programmes transmitted from recordings in the period 1935–1938) and to broadcast them whenever desired, recording on celluloid and later magnetic tape brought the possibility of halting the recording process and editing. Further innovations came with mixing consoles, equipment connected to microphones and capable of mixing several live broadcasts and sound recordings into one track. In radio drama this principle was used in the reproduction of different sounds and background noises serving as the sound setting for the dramatic action. The radio gradually built up a library of such real “concrete” sounds.

Radio Opera

Although compared to radio drama, new works of music written specially for radio were much fewer and slower to appear, radio opera in particular still crystallised as a new genre exploiting the specific features of radio. Definitions of the genre of radio opera were various but mainly characterise it as a “specific type of production, primarily bound to radio and so on the one hand limited by radio and its acoustic possibilities”, but on the other having the potential to develop as a “separate kind of art, where the material is created on the acoustic field in such a way that it manages for the most part to free itself from visual depiction and to exploit new means of expression”. Typical features mentioned

include above all comprehensibility of the action, which should avoid complex plots and secondary intrigues – thus affecting choice of themes, a smaller number of characters and good acoustic contrast between the voices, and frequently the use of a narrator. a chamber-size orchestra is also preferred, with the inclusion of real sounds and background noise, as well as use of the advantages of studio broadcast such as the insertion of sound detail using the microphone and above all the exploitation of the placing of performers in the room at different distances from the microphone. Bohuslav Martinů's *Comedy on the Bridge* was undoubtedly the high point of radio opera in inter-war Czechoslovakia. It was completed in December 1935, and premiered on the radio two years later, in March 1937. Although this opera has been staged quite a number of times, its original conception was purely for radio. This is already clear from the choice of literary source, which is the one-act play of the same title by Václav Kliment Klicpera. The action takes place on a single stage set, the central element of which is a bridge with a guard on either side, friendly and unfriendly. The characters gradually arrive on the bridge, where they remain imprisoned. Martinů chose this theme for his radio opera, where in the studio the bridge and the two guards can be exploited as spatial axes, defining and as defined by the relative distances of the characters from the microphone.

In the preface to the score Martinů talked about the advantages of the literary text that he chose: “(...) *Excluding a real stage and leaving it to the fantasy of the listener to imagine the play is a rewarding task for the Radio, which in this way heightens the intensity of both the play and the attention and as it were the participation of the listener (...) Apart from this, on the acoustic side the play itself provides an opportunity to exploit the relationships of the relative distances between the characters (the two guards and the events on the opposite ends of the bridge), and it is on these that the operation of radio is based as well (...)*” Apart from his comments on the choice and use of literary base, the composer’s views on the production of the opera on radio, determined by musical direction, are very fundamental: “*Production on the Radio chiefly emphasises the relations of distance. The beginning of the bridge (on the left in the theatre) and the unfriendly guard are close to the microphone. The other end of the bridge*

with the friendly (...) guard is distant from the microphone. This creates an acoustic distance that can be exploited to very good effect in the parts of the two guards. Otherwise the rest of the action takes place in the middle of the bridge, i.e. likewise quite close to the microphone. (The voices diminish depending on distance but not the orchestra). (Scenes with the friendly guard taking place in the distance are marked). (...) In the score Martinů was careful to indicate whether the scene in question takes place away from or close to the microphone, and also includes explicit directions on when characters should move away from or close to the microphone. The acoustic distance between the two ends of the bridge given by the ratio of distance from the microphone becomes the central principle of the radio production of the whole opera. Although the aspect of distance was clearly established practise in radio studios of the time, Martinů

takes the concept further in his treatment of spatial listening, anticipating with the presence of two sides and capacity to identify the direction and movement of sources of sound the much later possibilities of stereophonic listening.

The original post-war work of recording studios is today relatively well-known and discussed in the literature, but the conditions for post-war developments had their roots in the ideas and advances of the 1930s. Unfortunately, while the sound recording was at that time being rapidly improved and ever more exploited in broadcasting, no recording of the original works primarily written for radio has survived.



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Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber Missa Salisburgensis, Plaudite tympana

**Tibicines, artistic directori Igino Conforzi,
La Stagione Armonica, conductor Sergio
Balestracci.**

Production: Gian Andrea Lodovici. Text:
Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded:
Dec. 2003 in the Church of Santa
Maria Assunta, Villa Lagarina
– province of Trento, Italy.
Released: 2008.
TT: 52:28. DDD. 1 SACD
New Classical Adventure NCA 6092.

Every performance and recording of Biber's *Salzburg Mass* is a remarkable event – thanks to the extraordinary character of the piece itself, the demands that it makes and its history. It was only in the 1970s that scholars discovered from the paper used, the writing of the copier and the use of flutes and oboe that this mass was composed not for the consecration of Salzburg Cathedral in 1628, but clearly for the celebration of the eleventh anniversary of the founding of the Salzburg Archbishopric in 1682, and that the composer was most probably not Orazio Benevoli but Heinrich Ignaz Biber. The *Missa Salisburgensis* is among the most exceptional works of world sacred music not just for the monumentality of its conception but for its supreme use of multiple ensembles: it is composed for fifty-three parts divided into seven separate ensembles, five of them with vocal and instrumental parts and two trumpet ensembles. One could spend a great deal of time analysing the mass, for example the plastic exploitation of all the parts in solos and chorales, the competition of the vocal parts with the instruments, the exceptional sound and colour contrasts, large and small, and also the immensely effective changes or musical-rhetorical figures. All this makes the work extremely difficult to perform, as I myself had the chance to find out for example at a concert of the *Musica Antiqua Köln* and *Gabriel Consort & Players* ensembles at St. Paul's Cathedral in London in July 1997, after which the mass was recorded; the CD was released by Deutsche Grammophon as long after as 2003. In the same year Biber's mass and motet *Plaudite tympana* were recorded by the Italian ensembles **La Stagione Armonica** and **Tibicines** with **Sergio Balestracci** con-

ducting. The London recording has more punch and is tighter; it puts more emphasis on the spatial contrasts and is more massive in sound (for example there is more than one player on the continuo). The Italian recording offers a clearer recording of the soloists, who have more colourful voices, and is generally more relaxed and juicier in Romance style. It is a pity that the accompanying booklet does not more than repeat the basic information on the mass and its composer and does not contain more information on the revision and transcription of the work by the conductor Sergio Balestracci (for example he divides off a string ensemble), or on the Biber Contra Benevoli project devoted to music in the time of the Archbishop of Salzburg Paridus Lodron, as part of which Biber's *Salzburg Mass* was first performed in Italy and then recorded – information that one can, of course, find on the internet. This does not, however, detract from the quality of the recording of both Italian ensembles, which definitely deserves attention.

Jana Slimáčková

Leoš Janáček Lachian Dances, The Cunning Little Vixen (suite in the arrangement of František Jílek), Taras Bulba

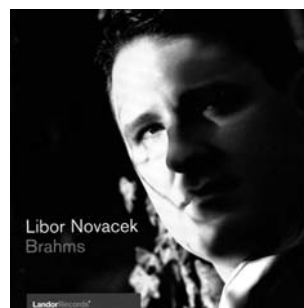
Brno Philharmonic, Jakub Hruša.
Production: Matouš Vlčinský. Text: Cz.,
Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: Mar.-Apr. at Stu-
dio Stadion, Brno. Released: 2008.
TT: 63:11. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon
SU 3923-2.

In the Janáček discography of our oldest record firm we find a whole range of different recordings of basic titles. For example, the symphonic rhapsody *Taras Bulba* was recorded a very long time ago on old breakable 78 discs by the Janáček expert and conductor Břetislav Bakala – with the then still existing Brno Radio Symphony Orchestra. In the 1950s what were known as long-playing (LP) records appeared and the same piece, this time performed by the Czech Philharmonic conducted by Václav Talich, was released on LP. The beginning of the 1960s saw the arrival of stereo and the next version of *Taras* caused shockwaves. This was because Talich had retouched the score in places and thus romanticised it somewhat while Ančerl, who returned to the original score, brought out



its modern, ravishing and above all authentic musical idiom, and showed that the retouches were a mistake. Ever since the Philharmonic have played *Taras* only from the original score (e.g. recordings with Neumann, Bělohlávek or Mackerras). Recordings made in Brno form a special chapter of their own. Thus after Bakala, the young Jiří Bělohlávek recorded *Taras Bulba* but most notably the long-term chief of the Brno Philharmonic František Jílek. One would expect that in this new recording **Jakub Hruša** would to some extent adopt and develop Jílek's acclaimed conception of the piece. This is the case, but here what we have first and foremost is another individual opinion, even if it may not have so great a historical impact as Ančerl's interpretation, which to this day remains hard to surpass, and Jílek interpretation, which is considered highly authoritative. In terms of sound Hruša's orchestra does not have spectacular dimensions or massive density, but it is rich especially in the details, which are carefully worked out. Perhaps there could have been more of that keen rawness and quality of vivid drama. But in the suite from the opera *The Cunning Little Vixen* the plusses – i.e. greater attention to details and careful dynamic treatment in culminating passages – are even more welcome. What is more, here we find an excellent dramaturgical choice has been made here, i.e. that it is František Jílek's version that has been chosen. This differs from Talich's better known version (compiled only from music of the 1st Act and also rather unfortunately re-instrumented), in keeping roughly to the opera plot and making no serious changes to specific parts, which are practically original instrumental extracts from the opera (it is just a pity that Jílek did not include the prelude as an opening!). There are points of special interest even in the apparently problem-free popular and so very familiar *Lachian Dances*. For example *Pilkas!* Most conductors include Bakala have taken them at a relatively very brisk pace. But not František Jílek! Jakub Hruša chooses a tempo very close to the latter's. From the point of view of folkdance scholarship this is in fact correct. And it allows for excellent and more persuasive acceleration at the end. This new Janáček album is Hruša's fourth CD with Supraphon (he made the first with the Prague Chamber Philharmonic) – and is once again a success. So let us hope it is not the last! At the same time it is a very good advertisement for the current artistic level of the **Brno Philharmonic**.

Bohuslav Vitek



Bohuslav Martinů
Chamber Music with Viola
Three Madrigals (Duo no. 1) for Violin
and Viola H 313, Duo no. 2 for Violin
and Viola H 331, Sonata for Viola and
Piano H 355,
Chamber Music no. 1 for Clarinet,
Violin, Viola, Cello,
Harp and Piano H 376

Alexander Besa - viola, Bohuslav Matoušek - violin (H 313 and 331), Jan Talich - violin (H 376), Ludmila Peterková - clarinet (H 376), Jiří Bárta - cello (H 376), Jana Boušková - harp (H 376), Petra Besa - piano (H 355), Karel Košárek - piano (H 376).
 Production: Matouš Vlčinský. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Czech. Recorded: studio Jan.-Feb. 2005, concert hall of the hospital in Kroměříž (H 313, 331, 355), live Jan. 2006, Olten, Switzerland (H 376). Released: 2008. TT: 68:07. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon Music SU 39522.

The unifying foundation of the CD is the viola, the creative dynamism of **Alexander Besa** and the legendary American viola player Lilian Fuchs (1902–1995) to whom Martinů dedicated both the duo and the viola sonata. The author of the accompanying text in the booklet, **Aleš Brežina**, rightly reminds us that although at the beginning of his career Martinů was a very capable violinist and also knowledgeable about the viola, surprisingly it was much later, to be precise after the end of the way, that he turned to composition for the viola; the first duo was written in 1947. Today it is the *Rhapsody Concerto for Viola* that is probably his best known work for the instrument, but all the pieces on this CD show that he also created superb chamber music for it. *Duo no. 1* and *Duo no. 2* are essentially carefree pieces of quasi serenade type; it is characteristic of the composer that he embodies the main “message” in the long slow movements. For me the high point of the CD in terms of composition is the *Viola Sonata*, which is moving in its quiet lyricism and echoes of folk music. The *Chamber Music no. 1* (the planned no. 2 was probably never written) has a peculiar position given by its musical content, instrumental combination and dating

(Martinů completed the work in the early spring of 1959, half a year before his death). We can most probably see the choice of the rather unusual combination of piano and harp as reflecting a certain bond with impressionism, to which Martinů had affinities (especially the second movement). It is a delicate, musically rare and unfortunately rarely performed piece, which makes the decision to include it on the CD even more laudable.

As far as the performance is concerned, I have nothing but praise. The combination of Alexander Besa with **Bohuslav Matoušek** is the best I have heard. They both love the music of Martinů, know it intimately and present it with brilliance. The two pianists are excellent; if forced to choose I might prefer **Karel Košárek** with his mastery of touch, but that is a purely subjective feeling. In the Chamber Music, the soft tone of clarinetist **Ludmila Peterková** and the tone colour of **Jiří Bárta's** cello play are used to wonderful effect. **Jana Boušková** is a master of her instrument, but Martinů assigned her what is more the role of “impressionist” shading.

Luboš Stehlík

Brahms

Libor Nováček - piano.
 Production: Landor Productions Ltd.
 Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: Jan. 2008, Potton Hall, Suffolk. Released: 2008. TT: 75:48. DDD. 1 CD Landor Records LAN285.

Last year in England the pianist **Libor Nováček** recorded what is already his third CD title, this time devoted to the music of Johannes Brahms. This CD can boast generally enthusiastic reviews and praise in the most prestigious magazines – for example the recording won a five-star rating and the honour of “Instrumental Choice” in the BBC Music Magazine and was “Editors’ choice” in The Gramophone selection. Both of the pianist’s preceding CDs had also won considerable acclaim, earning Nováček the reputation of one of the greatest piano hopes of the present (in 2007 he made a CD devoted to Franz Liszt and the year before he recorded pieces by Janáček, Martinů, Ravel and Debussy). All

three compact discs have been published by Landor Productions Ltd., which focuses on the support of major talents at the beginning of their careers. Victory in the first year of the competition held by this company (2005) brought Nováček a long-term contract to record CDs.

Since 1999 Libor Nováček (*1979) has been studying and living in London, where he graduated summa cum laude from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2004. In the same year he was selected to represent the Young Concert Artist Trust in London and won a number of important awards at international competitions (John Lill Piano Prize, The AXA Dublin International Piano Competition 2006). The repertoire of this Brahms title is chosen with care: beside a poetically virtuoso, surprisingly mature composition by the young Brahms (*Sonata in F sharp minor, op. 2 of 1852*) we find the *Eight Piano Pieces, op. 76* from the creative zenith of Brahms’s career and then *Three Intermezzos, op. 117*, from the last phase of Brahms’s work.

Robert Schumann called Brahms’s early piano sonatas “veiled symphonies” and they indeed prefigure much that the composer later developed and elaborated in his symphonic work. With his colourful, delicate play, Nováček captivates the listener from the very beginning. His play is cultivated but never sleek, and the virtuosic passages (for example the thematic octave runs in fortissimo in the first movement), are played with masterly ease, but in a moderate spirit, without dazzling brilliance. Nováček is apparently not concerned with traditional bravura, and in his interpretation the romantic hothead is seen through the prism of his later, classicising work. Each of the four movements of the sonata comes across as very compact, with every smallest detail subordinated the structure of the whole in the way demanded by the composer’s musical thinking. My only criticism is that perhaps the tempo of the second movement (*Andante con espressione*) might have been a little more lively, and at some points in Nováček’s interpretation the melodic line, which typically in Brahms is reminiscent of a sentimental old song – seems to lose the necessary expressiveness (see the performance instruction “sempre marcato ed espress. la melodia”). The recording of all the *Eight Piano Pieces* of 1878 is an especially praiseworthy move in terms of CD dramaturgy, especially since



Nováček manages to imprint each piece with a unique mood through his very heart-felt and expressively nuanced play. There are few pianists who can play a larger number of Brahms's compositions with higher opus numbers without the risk of the listener becoming a little bored sometimes. The three intermezzos from 1892 date from a time when the rapidly ageing and ill composer was succumbing to ever more oppressive feelings of nostalgia and melancholy. These too Nováček performs with great inner understanding; this is real, chiaro-scuro Brahms, with all the delicate beauty of its musical poetry and all its bitter life experience. The success of the CD will certainly be enhanced by the accompanying booklet, which is excellent in both textual content and graphic design and contains – apart from several artistically striking and tasteful photographs of the performer – two photographs showing the composer in his youth and mature years.

Jindřich Bajgar

The Smetana Trio Tchaikovsky, Dvořák

**Smetana Trio: Jitka Čechová – piano,
Jana Vonášková-Nováková – violin,
Jan Páleníček – cello.**

Production: Matouš Vlčinský. Text: Cz., Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: Apr–May 2008, Bohemia Music Studio, Prague. Released: 2008. TT: 73:12. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 39492.

Few Czech chamber ensembles play with such huge personal commitment as the Smetana Trio, and this CD is no exception. Tchaikovsky's major three-quarter-of-an-hour Piano Trio in a minor is among the most difficult of piano trios and as performed by the Smetana Trio it has an almost symphonic lift and expansiveness. The first movement rises in great excited waves, full of Russian melancholy and extreme emotionality; the two funeral marches (in the middle of the movement and at the end) are desolate with emptiness and darkness. By contrast in this essentially gloomy movement the following variations introduce light and poetry into the composition. Here the musicians work brilliantly with contrasts of mood and cast wonderful spells with sound.

In their performance every variation is an exquisite, very colourful picture. The movement culminates in the magnificent finale, which is charged with élan and optimism. This makes the breakthrough into the final funeral march, with which the whole work again falls into bottomless silence, all the more powerful. Here the Smetana Trio have provided an exceptionally intense musical experience for listeners. They play Tchaikovsky in a truly unique way and their members put so much energy and emotion into the music that they literally "draw us in" to their play. I can admit that after first listening to the Tchaikovsky I felt the same way as after watching a very suspenseful film and I even had to turn off the CD player for a moment to give myself time to recover. The Dvořák Piano Trio no. 2 in G minor, op. 26, which follows, fortunately provides space for relaxation. In expression this is incomparably less momentous music than the Tchaikovsky Trio. The performers have imbued the piece with delicate and very tender colours, and their more airy interpretation is greatly benefited by the faster tempos of the 3rd and 4th movements. The highly original graphic design of the booklet and excellent accompanying text by Jan Kachlík help to make this brilliant Smetana Trio recording one of the most important Supraphon projects in recent times.

Věroslav Němec

Darius Milhaud Le Boeuf sur le toit Benjamin Britten Suite for Violin and Piano Bohuslav Martinů Sonata no. 3 for violin and piano

**Jana Vonášková-Nováková – violin,
Petr Novák – piano.**
Production: Pavel Vlček. Text: Eng., Cz., Recorded: Nov. 2007, Studio ČRo Plzeň. Released: 2008.
TT: 61:45. DDD. 1 CD Cube-Bohemia CBCD2841.

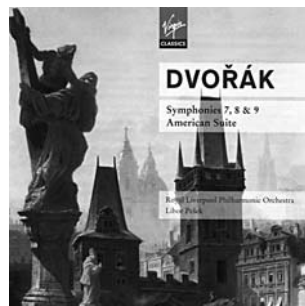
I have been following the career of **Jana Nováková** (today also known under her married name, **Vonášková**) ever since hearing her in the Talent of the Year competition. In

terms of speed of development, and ripening as a musician, she is unrivalled among her violinist contemporaries. It is remarkable how far she has come since the period when her main features were extraordinary musicality and psychological unevenness. Today she is a complete violinist, and outstanding chamber player (since 2003 a member of the Smetana Trio), soloist and a mother. The fact that she has made this CD with her brother gives it added marketing appeal, but in fact **Petr Novák** shows that he is a promising chamber performer and much more important than the family relationship is the unorthodox programme and its brilliant interpretation. The masterfully played, technically very difficult *cinéma-fantaisie Le Boeuf sur le toit op. 58b (Ox on the Roof)* by Darius Milhaud opens the CD. In this country the violin version is presented much less frequently than the orchestral version or version for four-handed piano. The now quite old recording by Gidon Kremer and Oleg Maisenberg for Warner Classics is even more effortless in technical terms, but the new recording can compete with it in "French" charm.

Britten's *Suite op. 6* was a discovery for me. I had never heard it and had simply gathered that our violinist is probably the second to have recorded it, while the first (Zambrzycki – Payne, EMI), is now apparently unavailable. Conservative in mood, the showy piece from the 1930s does not yet show the typical Britten idiom and displays all kinds of past and present influences, but it is instrumentally a rewarding piece and a chance for musicians to shine.

There is no way of avoiding comparing the present recording of Bohuslav Martinů's *Third Sonata H. 303* with the benchmark recording from Bohuslav Matoušek and Petr Adamec (Supraphon). Jana Vonášková-Nováková plays it with a healthy disrespect for tradition (Suk, Snitil, Ženaty, Matoušek), convincingly bringing to the performance a view of her own, which the listener may but need not necessarily accept. For me is her rendering of the piece appealing. And surely she is bound to develop a broader outlook as she gets older. The Nováks' album is one of the most positive Czech violin projects of 2008.

Luboš Stehlík



Terezín/Theresienstadt

(Weber, Švenk, Strauss, Roman, Taube, Ullmann, Krása, Haas, Schulhoff)

Anne Sofie von Otter – mezzosoprano, **Christian Gerhaher** – baritone, **Daniel Hope** – violin, **Benct Forsberg** – piano, **Gerold Huber** – piano, **Bebe Risenfors** – accordion, double bass, guitar, **Ib Hausmann** – clarinet, **Philip Dukes** – viola, **Josephine Knight** – cello.

Production: Valérie Gross, Marion Thiem. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: Berlin, Studio Teldex, Feb. 2006, Munich, Studio Bavaria-Musik, Feb. 2007. Released: 2007. TT: 71:40. DDD. 1 CD Deutsche Grammophon 477 6546 GH (Universal Music).

The quality of performance in any **Anne Sofie von Otter** recording is something that we have long come to take for granted, but the singer also untiringly searches out new and adventurous repertoire and so far she has always made inspired choices. Her capacity to move between genres allows her a very wide choice of material, each one of her recordings has a distinct idea behind it and none are just recorded to add bulk to her discography. Every recording brings something interesting. This time, in collaboration with the baritone **Christian Gerhaher** and instrumentalists she presents music written in or associated with the Terezín concentration camp. She does so at a time when the wave of interest in this theme – unfortunately for a time exploited in a rather commercial spirit – has receded and audience reception is now of a more sober and objective kind. This timing is reflected in a sensible choice of repertoire – a decision not to be carried away by the main wave, but to create a whole that will not be just an ephemeral document of (pardon me) fashion. The recording contains songs of grief, songs of everyday Terezín life, songs from theatre productions, moments that that sound almost frivolous and carefree, and then serious compositions of the highest artistic quality. Listening to them one after another it is as if we were sharing the experience of arrival in Terezín, the feelings of prisoners who behind its walls long for their lost homes (*A Walk through Terezín* by **Ilse Weber**), but who even in the constrained space of un-

freedom manage to experience love (*Under the Umbrella* by **Karel Švenk**) and give each other strength (*All can be done* by **Karel Švenk**). Yet their fate is dark; many say their goodbyes, knowing that they are final (*Ilse Weber, Adieu my Friend, And it's raining...*), or reaching for rays of hope (**Adolf Strauss, We shall Certainly See it Each Other Again**). Here we find the song of the Terezín prisoners with an anonymous lyric to a melody from **Kálmán's** operetta *Countess Marica*: the contradiction between the operetta hit, the words, "We here in Terezín take life as it is, for if we took it any other way, it would be a tragedy", and the circumstances in which it was sung, sends shivers down our spines, as do the memories of childhood (*We Ride on Wooden Horses* by **Martin Roman**) and *Lullabies* by *Ilse Weber*. The recording also contains *Three Songs on Words by Rimbaud* by **Hans Krása**, *The Jewish Child* by **Carl Taub**, a selection of songs by **Viktor Ullmann**, *Four Songs on Chinese Poetry* by **Pavel Haas** and *Violin Sonata* by **Erwin Schulhoff**. Schulhoff's Sonata deviates from most of the rest of the repertoire on the album, but not because it is the only purely instrumental work included – as such it actually forms a moving culmination, where words have already run out and music itself speaks. However, the Sonata was written in 1927 (Viktor Ullmann's *Sonnets* on texts by **Louiz Labé**, unfortunately not complete on the CD, was also written before the war, as were some other pieces on the album) and above all **Erwin Schulhoff** was not imprisoned in Terezín, and so the CD title does not in fact entirely correspond to the composers included. The author of the text in the booklet must certainly have been aware of this, and it would have been enough if she had just given brief reasons for the inclusion of the Schulhoff piece. Both singers cope very well with Czech (the songs by **Karel Švenk**, **Hans Krása** and **Pavel Haas**). In most cases the foreign accent is hardly detectable; naturally problems occur where a syncopated, quasi-jazz rhythm fights with the Czech phonetics; not everyone can manage to turn this to good account and into a speciality, as **Voskovec** and **Werich** did, and it is really an insuperable task for foreigners. We should stress that also the editors of the text supplement to the booklet have done a good job with the Czech.

Vlasta Reittererová

Antonín Dvořák Symphonies 7, 8 & 9, American Suite

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Libor Pešek.

Production: Andrew Keener. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 1987, Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool. Released: 2008. TT: 75:12, 67:12. DDD. 2 CD Virgin Classics/EMI 50999 5 22039 2 3.

The engagement of the leading Czech conductor **Libor Pešek** in Liverpool enriched musical life in Britain but also had an important feedback effect on the development of music interpretation here in the Czech Republic. The indisputable talent of **Libor Pešek** brought to the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic** a new spirit combining professionalism with emotional warmth and passion. Dvořák's *7th Symphony* was originally premiered in London in 1885, with the composer conducting, and it was to have major consequences for the entire future direction of his life. In the first two movements the composition is generally grave and dreamy in mood, but in the Scherzo it already stands on firm ground in its own rhythmic and fresh spirit. The final Allegro is once again shot through with melancholic melodies and an unrelenting rhythm. In the *8th "English" Symphony*, one is fascinated by the delicacy of Pešek's treatment of the introduction, which quite unambiguously characterises the work. Unlike the preceding symphony, the Eighth is vibrant with optimism and lightness. It is here that Pešek really demonstrates the mastery with which he leads the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic: rich and luminous strings, balanced wind, every detail of the score brought out. The moving melodic passage in the middle of the first movement almost brings tears to the eyes. This is a Dvořák that is finely chiselled and so internally rich that the individual notes seem to be like light balloons flying with more or less energy around us. The second disc starts with the *American Suite* written towards the end of the composer's stay in New York. This famous and very familiar work sounds entirely fresh here, and so melodious that we have the feeling that the conductor has conceived it in a quite new way. The orchestra plays with admirable precision, purity and with an élan that is truly uncommon. And what can we say of the *New World* with which the whole album ends! Pešek's tempos are so well worked out that together with the refined dynamics they leave a magnificent impression.

Marta Tužilová

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