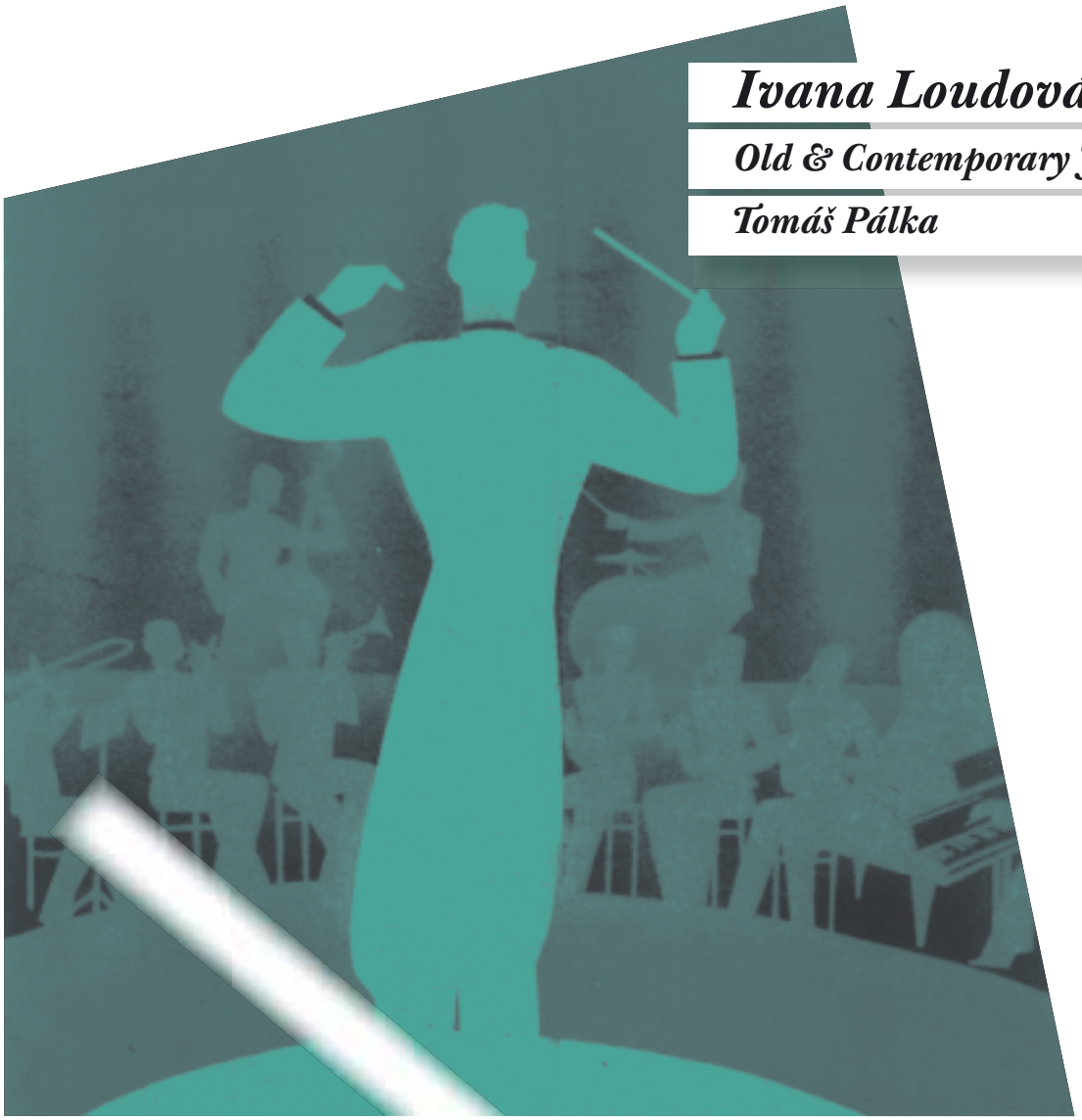
czech music quarterly



Ivana Loudová

Old & Contemporary Jazz

Tomáš Pálka

1 | 2010

MEZINÁRODNÍ FESTIVAL KOMORNÍ HUDBY EUROART PRAHA 2009/2010

www.euroart.cz

EUROART PRAHA

EuroArt Prague Festival is an independent, not-for-profit festival dedicated to promoting the performance and appreciation of chamber music in Prague and neighbouring communities in the Czech Republic. Monthly, from September to June, the guests of Festival EuroArt Praha are invited to perform in the famous Prague Martinů Hall at the Liechtenstein Palace in Malá Strana. All concerts are organised under the auspices of the wife of the President of the Czech Republic, Mrs. Livia Klausová. Co-partners is the City of Prague as well as Cultural Institutes and Embassies of participating countries. Almost all concerts are repeated also in regional towns of Czech Republic.

13. 4. 2010 Praha, Martinů Hall, Liechtenstein Palace at 7. 30 p.m.

Václav Vonášek – bassoon,
Prague Bassoon Band - Václav Vonášek, Martin Petrák, Radek Dostál, Tomáš Františ, j.h.

W. A. Mozart: Divertimento in B flat Major
J. S. Bach: Partita in d minor BWV 1014 (arr. for bassoon solo W. Waterhouse)
J. S. Bach: Chorals overtures
K. Stockhausen: In Freundschaft
K. Hába: Quartet for 4 Bassoons op.74
A. Piazolla: Tango

18. 5. 2010 Praha, Martinů Hall, Liechtenstein Palace at 7. 30 p.m.

Danish String Quartet
Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen, Frederik Øland – Violin, Asbjørn Nørgaard – Viola, Fredrik Sjølin – Cello

F. Schubert: Quartet movement in c minor, op. posth.
J. Haydn: String Quartet in d minor No. 2, op. 76
C. Nielsen: String Quartet in g minor, No. 1,op. 13

15. 6. 2010 Praha, Martinů Hall, Liechtenstein Palace at 7. 30 p.m.

Apollon Musagete Quartet (Polsko)
Pawel Zalejski, Bartosz Zachlod – Violin, Piotr Szumiel – Viola, Piotr Skweres – Cello

L. van Beethoven: String Quartet in c minor, No. 4, op. 18
W. Zelenski: Variations and Theme original
R. Schumann: String Quartet in a minor, op. 41, No. 1

PARTNERS OF THE FESTIVAL:

SKUPINA ČEZ

PRAHA PRAGUE PRAGA PRAG

MÖVENPICK Hotel Prague

Projekt se uskutečňuje za finanční podpory Ministerstva kultury ČR

Vinotéka TERRA VINA® www.terra-vina.cz

EKORA společnost s ručením omezeným

MEDIA PARTNERS:

Vltava ČESKÝ ROZHLAS 3

HARMONIE

czech music quarterly

Dear Readers,

In this number we are opening up a theme that hasn't previously appeared much on the pages of CMQ – jazz. In fact it's quite a usual theme in classical music magazines. After all, one can speculate and debate on the connections or the misalliances between jazz and classical music, but: why not? Jazz naturally has its place in Czech music culture too and it would be a pity to pretend that it doesn't exist. It is a music with a century of tradition behind it, and the beginnings of jazz in this part of the world form the subject of Martin Voříšek's article here. His text is at the same time the first in a four-part series that will map the history of Czech jazz right up to the recent past. The vibrant present-day Czech scene is then presented in an article by one of the most prominent men of Czech jazz writing, Vladimír Kouřil.

Once again I would like to apologise for the delay in the appearance of the first number of 2010. The reasons for the delay were economic and I hope there will be no repetition of the problem.

Happy spring days.

CONTENTS

Czech Music Information Centre
Besední 3, 118 00 Praha 1, Czech Rebublic
fax: +420 2 57317424, phone: +420 2 57312422
e-mail:info@czech-music.net
http//www.czech-music.net

Czech Music Quarterly is issued by the Czech Music Information Centre with support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Czech Music Fund.

Editor: Petr Bakla, Producer: Lenka Hradilková
Translation: Anna Bryson-Gustová
Graphic design: Ditta Jiřičková
DTP: HD EDIT. Print: Tiskárna Macík.

ISSN 1211-0264 (Print), ISSN 1804-0586 (Online)

MK ČR E 7099

Price and subscription (shipping included):
Czech Republic: one issue Kč 60, subscription (4 issues) Kč 200
Europe: one issue € 6.25, subscription (4 issues) € 25.
Overseas countries: one issue $ 9, subscription (4 issues) $ 36 or respective equivalents

PHOTO: ZDENĚK CHRAPEK

by Iva Opištilová

TO BE ABLE TO STRIKE OUT EVEN A BRILLIANT IDEA IF IT'S IN THE WRONG PLACE

Ivana Loudová, our leading woman composer, is renowned for her inventive treatment of musical timbre and time, with an accent on percussion. In this interview we find out about the environment in which her musical idiom crystallised, and the amount of patience, energy and systematic work she has put into furthering the cause, in this country, of the most progressive movements in contemporary music.

Can you recall a particular moment when you realised that you were a composer?

I think it may well have been in 1958, in June, when I got to the middle round of the Creative Youth Competition (STM) in Bratislava, where apart from Beethoven's *Sonata Pathetique* I played my own composition, *Ten Variations on a Theme of My Own*. The jury rated my piece much higher than my piano play and recommended that I become a composer. And so I said, "Good, I'll compose."

So originally you had started on a career as a pianist?

Yes, my mother taught the piano and I played it practically from birth. Later I started trying to make improvements to the classics, but mother didn't approve. She used to say, "What's given in the notes has to be played according to the notes. If you want it to be different, then write it yourself, separately". And so I started to write small piano pieces; I dedicated a waltz with glissandos to my brother.

You studied with very strong composer personalities – in this country with Kabeláč and Hlobil, and later in France with Messiaen and Jolivet.

I studied with Kabeláč after taking my school-leaving exams at 17 years of age – the influence was considerable, mainly in terms of principles: melody built up

consciously on the basis of modality, tone rows, dodecaphony; when concerned with melody he also taught tectonics – the "musical architecture". Later I discovered that the old Italians had taught this way as well. The use of modes, modal types, the stretching and squeezing of intervals, changes of tonality... I adopted this and taught my students in Prague in the same way. In my book on modern notation I included a map of the relative lengths of time that the different styles had lasted. It makes it beautifully clear that modality is the longest lasting – the individual styles are ever shorter in duration, but modality remains. Hlobil – that was teaching the traditional forms and craft of composing, which was very important especially for practical life. Messiaen – an open embrace of love, tolerance, encouragement. He didn't like it if anyone imitated him. He was very taken with my timbre plan for the orchestral piece *Spleen – Hommage à Charles Baudelaire*, a work with the basic mode expanded into the twelve-tone scale, the technique of layering and timbre-tectonic articulation. He didn't like aleatorics – he reproved me for that, because he demanded that everything be precisely written out. Jolivet – he was a force of nature. He was also interested in non-European music, modality, rhythms, the magic and the ritual. For every composition he invented another modal system, expanding it into atonality. He had a marvelous sound imagination – after all he was the only pupil of Edgard Varèse.

How did you create your own musical language? Tell us about the process of emancipating yourself from the influence of your teachers – in what aspects did they help you and in what aspects did they inhibit your search for your own voice?

I learned something from all of them and became aware of what I wanted and didn't want. I can say that it takes only a few bars for me to recognise the music of my teachers, as with our Leoš Janáček or Luboš Fišer. I never wanted to imitate them. I adopted a series of principles, or ethical fundamentals, but I tackled them in my own way, thought up my own modes, particular combinations of instruments, specific tectonics, or the integration of space into the composition, for example in my piece Hymnos or Veni etiam for six oboes in space and Caelestam harmoniam for eight cellos and mysterious voice. An interest in percussion, new sounds from traditional instruments, and new sound combinations I linked up with my own distinctive tectonics... that it how I would characterise my further development.

Even back then you exploited a great many percussion instruments, which presumably was unusual at the time?

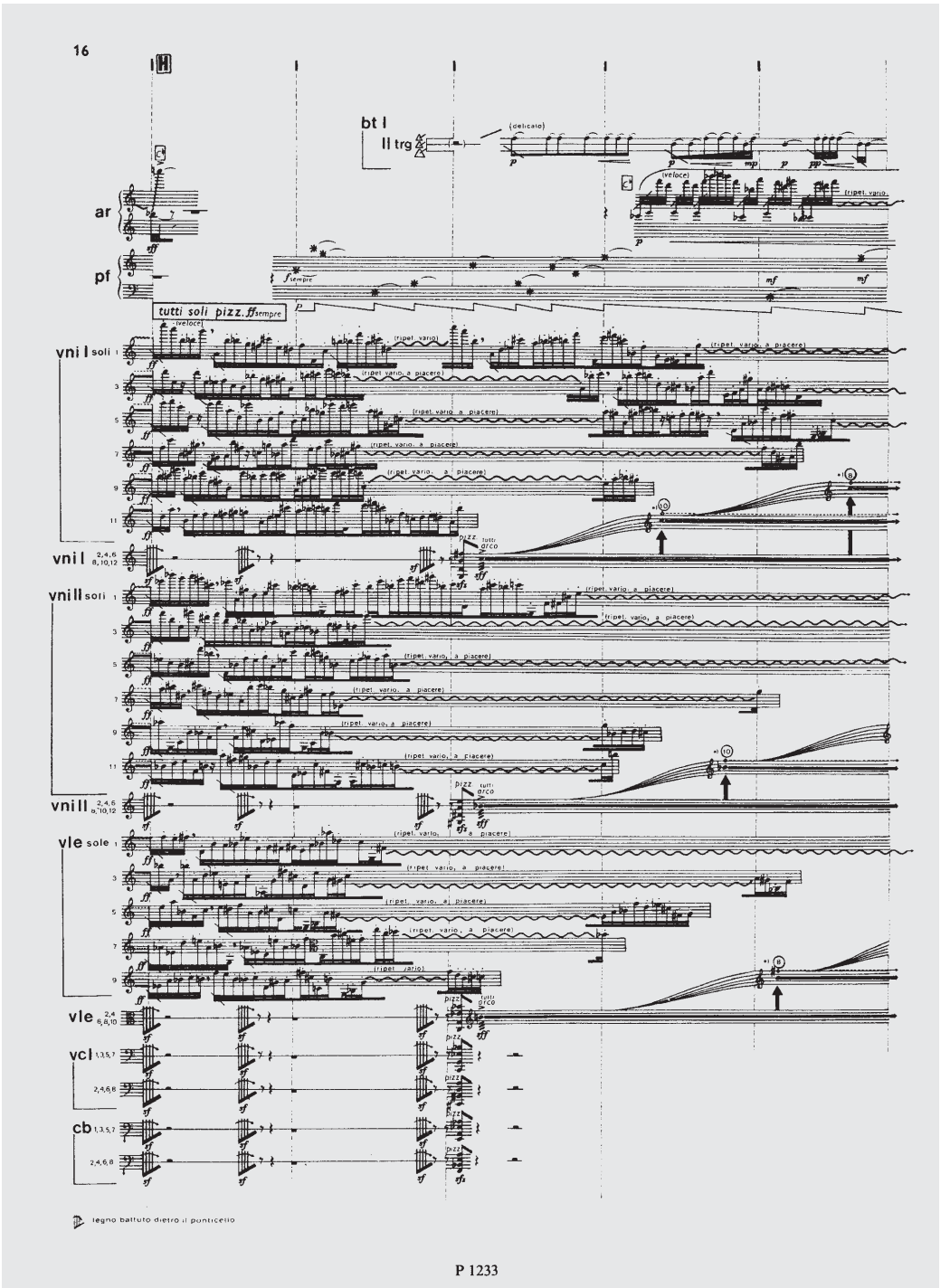
In this country perhaps, but abroad, especially in the USA – it was common. As early as my *Rhapsody in Black* (1966) I have two concertante percussion players alongside the solo oboe, and two in Spleen (1971); then in 1973 I wrote *Agamemnon* – a suite for percussion solo, and in a series of pieces for the American Wind Symphony Orchestra I usually have six percussion players (*Chorale, Concerto*). It probably wasn't an accident that in 1979 I was one of 12 selected composers from throughout the world to get a commission for a concerto for Solo Percussion and Wind Orchestra (*Dramatic Concerto*), an obligatory piece for the 3rd round of the 1st International Interpretation Competition for Wind, Brass and Percussion (Pittsburgh 1980).

With the class of Olivier Messiaen, 1971

I have been constantly aware of Kabeláč's principle that "percussion is played, not struck", and I make sure to get that across to my students. This is why I try to think up "music" for percussion too. When I wrote my *Double Concerto for Violin, Percussion Instruments and Strings*, I said to myself, "Kabeláč would be pleased that I put the violinist and percussionist on the same level, that they are equal partners on the podium". Percussion is in its way a visual matter on the podium. It is a kind of magic, and it depends on the performer how he treats it and uses it.

***In 1998 you published the book** Modern Notation and its Interpretation**. It is a book in which you use examples from neumes right up to Logothetis's graphic scores to give readers an orientation in the whole range of composing styles and to get them to think about their interpretation. What was it that led you to compile this book*?

When I started to teach at the Academy of Performing Arts [AMU] (1992), whenever some of my instrumentalist colleagues were supposed to rehearse a contemporary piece for a competition with a student, they would say "run along to Loudová, she'll teach it to you". And when I saw some unprofessionally produced composers' scores, I started to get more interested in notation and remembered my experiences at the Darmstadt courses in 1967–69. There I had admired modern scores, studied them and said to myself, "That's what we need in our country". I amassed extracts for around twenty years and in 1994 I started to write the first chapters of Modern



P 1233

SPLEEN - Hommage à Charles Baudelaire (1971)

Notation. The moment I inherited Karkoschka's *Das Schriftbild der Neuen Musik* from Milan Šolc I took it as sign that I had to finish the book I'd started. Later I added the chapter Modern Notation in Practice about writing a score and new techniques of play on the different instruments. Students often meet me and thank me, saying that the text had helped them a lot with writing their works; one of my former students (Katarina Pejoska) teaches in Holland using Modern Notation, and says it's her bible! That's very kind of her.

***What kind of experience have you had with the performance of your scores? How ready and able are performers to tackle new problems*?**

Over the last 20–30 years performance has come a long way, this is marvellous and I'm very pleased about it. The instruments are far better, the palette of percussion has expanded, there is more information – for example on the Internet, recordings are more accessible, you have the chance to listen "on-line" and of course our students are now going on study trips and scholarships abroad (Paris, London, Berlin, Helsinki, Lisbon...), and they participate in various summer courses. All this gives them the chance to compare, and a strong motivation to improve. Many excellent teachers come to Prague too. As far as my music is concerned, I have always tried to produce a clear score so as to avoid unnecessary conflicts. In America the first orchestra rehearsal was like the dress rehearsal or concert itself here, and musicians would meet you half way in the same spirit in Italy, Germany and France. I myself never had problems with performers. Except perhaps one conductor (Jaromír Nohejl), who was doing my *Dramatic Concerto* with the Prague Symphony Orchestra. At the dress rehearsal he tossed my notes to the floor saying "this isn't a score it's a mess..." The soloists had no problem and nor did the orchestra, and later Jiří Bělohlávek recorded the piece with the PSO without any difficulties at all.

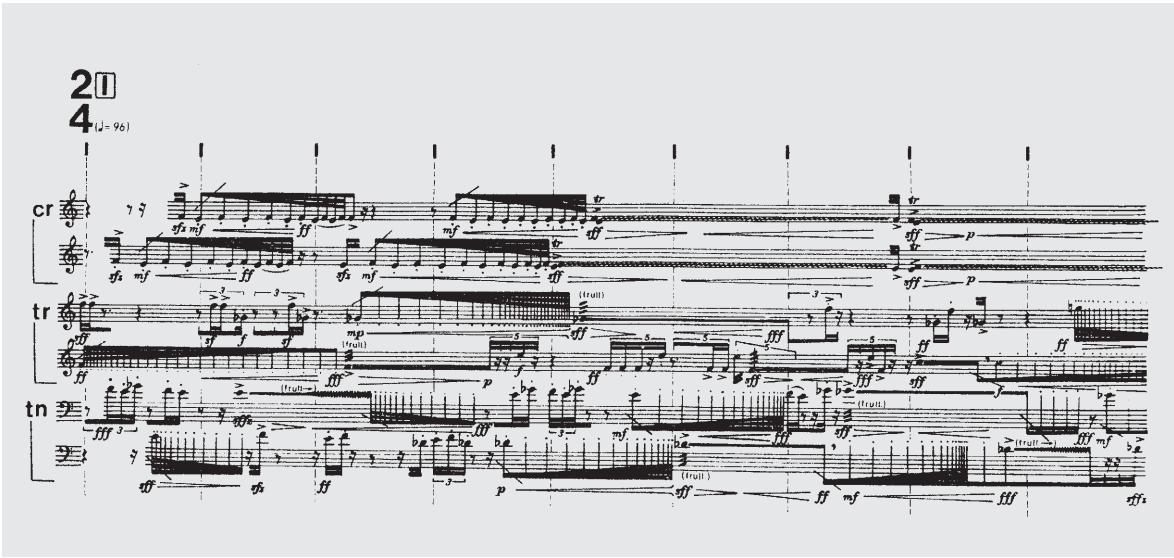
You have experienced the public at contemporary music concerts over many years, from the times when you were studying in France, to concerts in the communist period here, to concerts today. What do you think are the differences between the responses you noticed in the past and those that you encounter today?

Naturally, in France we scholarship students tried to see and hear everything possible. It was a wonderful atmosphere. It was there that I first heard all of Górecki's Genesis, Stockhausen's Gruppen, premieres of the works of the French and world avant-garde... At a festival in Royan I was carried away by Xenakis, who had a programme there from four in the afternoon to dawn the next day. I bought the complete set of his LPs there and later presented his music in this country. It was 1971, Stravinsky died and in his memory Béjart and his ballet group presented The Firebird and The Rite of Spring in the same Théâtre des Champs Elysées where they had once had their celebrated premieres. It was a superb, unforgettable production. As a trainee at the Centre Bourdan at ORTF I also used to got to the old Les Halles, where there were up to five-hour concerts of musique concrète and electronic music. Pierre Henry at the Museum of Modern Art was completely unlike anything else.
Although I was offered the chance to prolong my scholarship for another year (thanks to Messiaen), I was ordered to go back by the 30th of June by the

Ministry of Education and the Interior, and the scholarship lapsed, like a series of others. It was a bad time. You have asked about the communist period: in a way a quite a lot of contemporary music was played, but mainly those preferred, politically "engaged" composers. Orchestras started almost every concert with contemporary Czech or Slovak music – this practice was discontinued after 1990. Even though it was very marginalised, good music was occasionally performed: I recall premieres of work by Luboš Fišer, Josef Berg, Marek Kopelent, Zbyněk Vostřák, Ištvan's *Zaklínání času* and *Shakespearian Variations*, Eben's *Apologia Sokratus*... When good music was played people were always there. Penderecki, Lutosławski, Nono, Šnitke, Kančeli came here... It depended on the people who were patronising and protecting it – that was black-and-white back then.
Today the situation is peculiar. On the one hand the scene is choked up with commercial concerts, musicals, the pop scene... classical music doesn't make much money, it needs to be subsidised, and so it is becoming marginal and essentially fighting for its survival. Less and less money is coming into culture, and grants are the only way of getting something. It depends a lot on the managers, what they back and what they push. For example the Prague Philharmonia has had excellent programme planning for years; it presents a range of premieres, and its series *The Beauty of the Present* is interesting too. Or again my former fellow student, the composer and conductor Petr Kotík, has managed to do the virtually impossible in Ostrava. In collaboration with the Ostrava Philharmonic, the city council and foreign investors, he has founded *Ostrava Days* (international composing and performance courses with concerts) and the Ostravská Banda orchestra, with whom he organises concerts here and abroad. This is the path of a strong personality with contacts. Or another example: the Berg Orchestra performs almost exclusively contemporary music. It provides opportunities particularly for young composers, it holds a competition for the best composition of the season, and records all the pieces and publicises them. Its concerts are held in various halls, or in interesting industrial settings, or the group plays film music and is a success. Probably just because it does this.

Is the unwillingness of most people in this country to expose themselves to new music, to experiment, a contemporary development, or has it always existed? In your compositions do you try in any way to take this into account and overcome it?

There ought to be more concerts juxtaposing classics with the premieres of new pieces. This would mean that the ordinary concert-going public would have a chance to get to know them. I have always appreciated it when a piece of mine has got in between Janáček, Liszt, Mahler... the audience then takes it as an enrichment and likes it.
Reluctance to accept the new and unknown, and laziness, are normal human characteristics, and everything depends on people. Some people are open, ready to meet the new half way, and others are not. There is nothing you can do about it. What is key is for there to be more of the first sort. In this context I'm an optimist; I tend to believe that curiosity and the desire for something new won't die.



SPLEEN - Hommage à Charles Baudelaire (1971)

Apart from your own composing work you also devote a huge amount of your time and energy to furthering the cause of contemporary music itself – on the one hand in your role as a teacher at the music faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts and on the other as an organiser of composing competitions, concerts, seminars with recordings, conferences. What is your understanding of the role of a professor of composition?

Today, when in its way "everything is permitted", it's quite difficult. Intuition, freedom, one's own wishes, "I want it that way..." – all this is a fine thing but in composition you have to engage your reason as well. What I want from students is that their works should have some point, some kind of "why", that they should think through the piece as a whole, create their own tectonic plan, and that they should learn to recognise the quality and the suitability of the material they have chosen to work with. In the wrong place even the most brilliant idea has to be thrown out or stored away for another day. I am very concerned about the purity of work, especially in melody, rhythm, in harmony, in the voice leading, in instrumentation. Craft has its rules in all styles. I am tolerant of highly individual ideas, discoveries in the field of timbre, electronics, the inclusion of other media, but I want their use to arise from, or to be logically integrated into the existing sound current, and to underline the composer's intention and goal. I don't like it when in traditionally felt music multiphonics appear in the wind, or play behind the bridge appears in the strings just as a way of making the music look new. Co-operation and feedback with instrumentalists or singers is very important; the composer has to know what sounds like what and how, and what is or is not possible, and should remain a "humanist" and should never destroy an instrument or liquidate human voices. With young composing students I try to work out where their distinctive individuality lies; I try to encourage it and develop it so that they can then find their own path and mould they own style.

PHOTO: ZDENĚK CHRAPEK

Does your concept of teaching correspond to what your students expect from you?

You would have to ask them. I hope so.

Which of your activities designed to further contemporary music do you consider the most successful?

I think it is Studio N, which I founded at the Academy (AMU) in 1996. In a way it was Messiaen and my experiences from his *classe d'analyse* at the Paris Conservatoire that inspired me to it. Apart from the Mozart piano concertos, which he played and then discussed and analysed, we got to know the most recent work from French and foreign composers, often with the composers participating in the seminars. Messiaen would often invite various instrumentalists as well. For example Jean-Pierre Artaud, the outstanding flutist, who demonstrated the whole family of flutes from the piccolo to the bass to us; we were allowed to ask, or write something and immediately he would play it and present different variants. The first horn player of the Orchestre de Paris was very interesting: Messiaen handed over the teaching of the whole session to him, and went and sat in the first row, and came up with more written examples than the rest of us. He then wrote an excellent piece for solo horn. This was what I wanted to introduce in Prague. Although I had taught a very similar subject (study of compositions) for years at AMU, it hadn't been possible to invite guests. So on the basis of agreement with the heads of the faculty I introduced a separate two-hour block. It became the place where people interested in new music met, every Wednesday from 5.00 to 7.00 p.m. It's already a tradition. Favourite features include debates led by particular composers, listening to recordings with scores, discussions, workshops with instrumentalists and visits from abroad. Among the people who have visited the studio are the musicologist and author of a monograph on Xenakis, Prof. Makis Solomos from Paris, and the composers Sofia Gubaidulina, Valerio Sannicandro, Marco Lombardi, Elisabeth Austin, Iris Szeghy, Vladimír Bokes, Peter Michael Hammel, or Philippe Manoury... Workshops have been led by Almut Rössler (organ), Christel Nies (singing), Florian Hölscher (piano), Valerio Sannicandro (viola), Vilém Veverka (oboe), Josef Horák (bass clarinet), Karel Dohnal (clarinet), Petr Cígler (French horn) as well as many others.

***And what about concerts*?**

From the very beginning I have tried to bring Czech music into juxtaposition and confrontation with music from abroad. At Studio N I formed an orchestra and wind quintet from AMU students and graduates, organised dozens of concerts

and three spring marathons in 2000, 2002 and 2004 (from four in the afternoon to midnight in different interiors of the Lichtenstein Palace). I thought up various competitions, simultaneous presentation of pieces, and involved the theatre and film faculty, the department of non-verbal theatre, in co-operative activities – the atmosphere was excellent and the public enthusiastic. Many new pieces were created precisely for these events. Then I started to do concerts that were Czech-Americans, Czecho-Slovaks, Czech-Italian music, Czech-Hungarian, and last year a concert of Czech-Israeli music. I have been trying to get the relevant embassies interested with a view to inviting their composers or performers – only the Italians and Israelis helped. In 2008 I initiated a composers' competition to mark the centenary of the birth of Miloslav Kabeláč and Olivier Messiaen and in December I organised a minifestival as well. Over these years I managed to establish co-operation with the radio, which recorded and broadcast most of the events.

Ivana Loudová

(born March 8, 1941, Chlumec nad Cidlinou) studied composition at the Prague Conservatory (with Miloslav Kabeláč) and at the Music Faculty of the Academy of performing Arts (with Emil Hlobil), and pursued postgraduate studies at the same school (with Miloslav Kabeláč) and in Paris (with Olivier Messiaen and André Jolivet). She has won numerous prizes at both domestic and international competitions (Jihlava, Mannheim, Prague, Arezzo, Moscow, Verona, etc.), including the 1993 Heidelberg Art Award. She has composed more than one hundred orchestral, chamber, vocal, choral and instructive opuses, some of them published by the C. F. Peters Corporation and G. Schirmer (USA), Computer Music (NL), BIM Editions (CH), Edizioni Suvini-Zerboni (I), Schott International and Bärenreiter (D). Ivana Loudová is fully devoted to composing on freelance basis, since 1992 she has taught at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague as professor of composition and music theory. Here in 1996 she founded STUDIO N (Studio for New Music), with which she has organised numerous activities and concerts. In 1998 her book Modern Notation and its Interpretation was published.

Vladimír Kouřil

A KALEIDOSCOPE OF CONTEMPORARY CZECH JAZZ

Czech jazz has been reborn as a truly contemporary phenomenon since the start of the 1990s, as a result of the Velvet Revolution, which at last gave Czech and Slovak jazzmen free and direct access to the international music scene and its life. Global study possibilities opened up, and of course, many of those who flew over the Atlantic headed for Boston, to study at the famous Berklee College of Music, or to New York for practical experience in the clubs. While in the preceding four decades contact with foreign jazz had for most of the population been restricted to listening to foreign radio stations and the narrow selection of jazz records published on license by the monopoly state music concerns in Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland, suddenly the gates were open to the whole range of world production. All this undoubtedly influenced the generation entering music schools in the 1990s.

The Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory attached to the Higher Vocational School in Prague has become the most distinguished specialist Czech jazz school; the top jazzmen of preceding years started to teach there, as soon did many of their pupils. Because these teachers are still active musicians today, usually with an international reputation at least in Europe, let us start this kaleidoscope of the contemporary Czech jazz scene by looking at the most prominent on the Conservatory staff. The two leading figures at the Conservatory are the double bassist, composer and bandleader Jaromír Honzák and the pianist, composer,

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER 10x

Milan Svoboda

orchestral arranger and bigband leader Milan Svoboda. Here we should note that the school also became a magnet for young musicians from neighbouring Slovakia, many of whom have stayed on as active members of the Czech scene and have made a striking contribution to the quality of Czech jazz today.

The Bigband Tradition of Succeeding Generations

The now fifty-eight-year-old **Milan Svoboda** was a major force in the emergence of a new generation in the mid-1970s. He won a great name for himself in Czech jazz history by founding the big orchestra of his generation, the **Prague Big Band**, which is still fully functional. Of course, over more than thirty years of existence it has undergone several major changes, but it has always been a place where experienced jazzmen and coming talents meet. Thanks to its bandmaster and arranger, the Prague Big Band has a highly distinctive sound: a synthesis of the music of modern orchestras of the 1970s of the Thad Jones and Mel Lewis type with the influences of jazz-rock fusion, as Gil Evans represented them in orchestral form in the 1980s. Svoboda's most striking pieces in fact include Hommage to G.E. – he personally met Evans in 1984 during his brief studies in the USA. Today the repertoire consists mainly of compositions by Milan Svoboda, which in the course of the years have become music with an original stamp. Like every big band without a permanent institutional umbrella, Svoboda's orchestra does not perform on a regular basis. At a concert at the Prague La Fabrika venue in November last year the outstanding American tenor saxophonist and sax teacher Jerry Bergonzi guested with the Prague Big Band in a programme of his own numbers. The Prague Big Band appears at festivals throughout Europe. A good representative album of the band's work in current

form is the CD Good News released in 2008 on the Czech-English label Cube-Metier. It is also worth hearing Milan Svoboda's other ensembles: in the clubs he plays most often with his own quartet or in a duo with the trumpet and bugle player **Michal Gera**. Indeed, Michal Gera is Milan Svoboda's most frequent and long-standing colleague; he is today among the legends of Czech trumpet and for many years has led his own **Gera Band**.
1988 saw the birth, under the supervision of Milan Svoboda, of another generational orchestral project: the pupils of a jazz workshop in Frýdlant formed the **Kontraband** which still appears on an occasional basis to this day.
In recent years the jazz community has been impressed with the performances of Svoboda's latest project, once again founded as a school band – the **Prague Conservatory Jazz Orchestra & Milan Svoboda**. Since its formation in 2005 it has gone from strength to strength – as demonstrated by its unique appearances at the prestigious Czech international festival Jazz Goes To Town in the East Bohemian metropolis of Hradec Králové last October. It gave one concert of pieces by Milan Svoboda, and a second of the concerto for clarinet, trumpet and orchestra by the outstanding European jazzman, saxophonist and clarinettist Gianluigi Trovesi. The solo clarinet part was played by Trovesi himself, and the solo trumpet by Michal Gera. The students in this orchestra are today among the most promising members of the youngest generation of Czech jazz. Many of the soloists already lead their own bands and have already made surprisingly good and musically interesting debut recordings. The most striking talents among the conservatory orchestra soloists include for example the trumpet player **Miroslav Hloucal**, the trombonist **Jan Jirucha**, the tenor saxophonists **Michal Wroblewski** and **Jakub Doležal** and the drummer **Martin Linhart**. In 2007 the Prague Conservatory Jazz Orchestra conducted by Milan Svoboda defended its excellent

Michal Gera

David Dorůžka

reputation as a finalist in the student orchestras' Next Generation Festival in Monterey, USA.

The Starry Time of Bass Player Jaromír Honzák & co.

The head of the jazz department at the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory (the section was set up as late as 2003), is the double bass player, composer and band master Jaromír Honzák. He is one of the handful of musicians representing

the generation of the 1980s, a decade when jazz was crippled by the ban on the weeklong Prague Jazz Days festivals and on the activities of the Jazz Section of the Musicians Union, which had been festival organiser. The communist regime was angry that this enthusiasts' organisation refused any kind of ideological supervision of its activities. **Jaromír Honzák**, alongside several musicians who had played with him since the start of his career, for example the saxophonist František Kop, the drummer **Martin Šulc,** or (from a different group in the same generation), the saxophonist **Štěpán Markovič** or the guitarist **Jaroslav Šindler**, worked their way through to become the top representatives of Czech jazz among those now in their fifties. In the second half of the 1990s Jaromír Honzák was the first to decide to create a band with foreign musicians. His involvement with the Polish jazz scene, which was a great inspiration for the Czech scene in terms of quality and originality from the 1960s, brought the saxophonist Piotr Baron, the pianist Michał Tokaj and the drummer Łukasz Żyto into his band. For his most recent recording LITTLE THINGS (Animal Music, 2009), Honzák engaged the American saxophonist Chris Cheek, who was then replaced by the excellent **Marcel Bárta**. The guitarist **David Dorůžka** regularly collaborates with Honzák. Bárta and Dorůžka are now the most prominent jazzmen among the Czech generation now in their thirties. Jaromír Honzák is a major figure not just as a band leader, but as a composer and teacher. His albums regularly get the top rating in Czech specialist surveys. His starting point is the legacy of modern jazz enriched with the experience of the avant-garde, and he is not afraid of experimenting. On his recent albums he has always included one track on the borders of contemporary classical music – one might say in the spirit of a third current, with a classic string quartet involved in the performance. In 2002 the drummer Martin Šulc got together with the saxophonist Osian Roberts

Jaromír Honzák *Jan Jirucha*

from Wales to form a Czech-American big band. When the leadership of this band later came to include a legendary name in Czech modern jazz, the trombonist **Svatopluk Košvanec**, **George Mraz** became its double bass player. At a spring concert last year at Prague Castle, musicians performing in the orchestra included other prominent personalities in young Czech jazz – the saxophonists **Radek Zapadlo** and Rostislav Fraš, the trombonist **Přemysl Tomšíček** and the trumpet player Miroslav Hloucal. Reflecting the leadership, the ensemble is now officially known as the **Svatopluk Košvanec & Osian Roberts/Martin Šulc Orchestra**.

Marcel Bárta

The orchestra consists of musicians from several generations, with the veterans of modern jazz here being Košvanec himself and the American pianist Hod O'Brien, both born in 1936.

Jazz for the New Century

After the fall of the iron curtain and arrival of a new generation at the turn of the century, hopes that Czech jazz would develop more interesting features and a new sound, at least in Central European context, proved well founded. On the one hand the talents of the 1990s were maturing musically and personally, and on the other the youngest generation of musicians, who had started on their musical careers with the excellent education denied to their elders; the whole jazz world of information, experience and study chances had been open to them. In album debuts of 2000 a whole series of names appeared that are today established and fine representatives of domestic jazz. The other players in double-bassist **Robert Balzar's Trio** are **Stanislav Mácha** on piano and drummer **Jiří Slavíček**, and in 2000 they recorded an excellent first two-disc set *Along*, which showed that they have already mastered modern mainstream, in which they play both standards and their own compositions, with sovereign, natural ease. This trio is one of the most stable ensembles in Czech jazz and its last opus is the CD Tales (2008) with guest guitarist John Abercrombie. Balzar's trio also shared conspicuously in a series of albums recorded by singer **Dan Bárta,** whom they backed on tours for many years. Together they drew a lot of interest with the very first Bárta album, entitled *Illustratosphere* (Sonny Music, 2000). Dan Bárta is a singer with a very distinctive voice and performance style; he mainly sings his own compositions, but also standards in clubs. Although his voice is neither the rich swing kind not the expressive soul kind, with his introverted, unaggressive jazz singer-songwriter talent and his vocal improvisation he manages to move even people who don't understand the language that he writes his texts in. Another proof that a generation enchanted with the possibilities suggested by electric Miles Davis is now being followed by younger musicians capable of looking right back to the beginnings of modern is the pianist Jan Knop. He appears under the pseudonym **NajPonk**, and is a brilliant interpreter of standards, whether ballads, blues of jazz revue numbers.
In the early 1990s, **Stanislav Mácha** started out in the same young talented circle as another of the most dynamic musicians in contemporary Czech jazz – the guitarist and composer David Dorůžka. If his surname is somehow familiar to older jazz enthusiasts, this is because in the second half of the 20th century his grandfather Lubomír Dorůžka was an active organiser of jazz life not only in this country but in the whole of Europe. He organised the International Prague Jazz Festival, and was a correspondent of jazz periodicals all over the world. At one time he was the secretary of the International Jazz Federation, and for part of the 1980s even president of that organisation. His grandson obviously took a lot of notice of what his grandad listened to, because unlike most of his contemporaries he never went through a rock phase, but on the contrary even at the tender age of fifteen could play jazz standards in individual style. His debut recording, made while he was still studying in New York in 2003, and with the accompaniment of his fellow students Massimo Biolcati on double bass and Kendrick Scott on drums, became the jazz record of the year. After his return, Czech musicians replaced his classmates from New York when he played in the clubs, and the double bassist Jaromír Honzák in particular became a regular

collaborator. Others who have been constant partners include the Polish bass player Michał Barański and drummer Łukasz Żyto, and the Swedish singer Josefine Lindstrand (CD *Silently Dawning* dedicated to the poet Emily Dickinson). You will also, of course, find Dorůžka on Jaromír Honzák's album *A Question To All Your Answers*, on last year's Little Things, or on this year's new CD *Invisible World* by the bass player **Tomáš Liška's** trio with the Italian bandoneon player Daniel Di Bonaventura.
Another nest of talents to emerge during the Noughties has been the Vertigo Quintet. This is a line-up of the saxophonist and bass clarinettist **Marcel Bárta**, the pianist **Vojtěch Procházka**, the trumpet player **Oskar Török**, the bass player **Rastislav Uhrík** and the drummer **Daniel Šoltys**. The first three mentioned are today at the absolute zenith of contemporary domestic jazz, and are heavily in demand as soloists for other groups. Since 2005 Vertigo has given us three albums, showing from the very first debut CD named after the band itself that the spirit of the jazz avant-garde has already found its heirs. Bárta and Török in particular, perform today in a whole range of groups/combinations that are exploring the experimental jazz field in all kinds of different ways. The protagonists of the youngest generation, organist **Ondřej Pivec** and guitarist **Libor Šmoldas**, have meanwhile been active in an entirely opposite movement. Both play in the Pivec Trio, which is inspired by the hard bop and soul jazz of the 1960s, the sound of the Hammond organ and guitar. Pivec moved from piano to organ when he was with the excellent guitarist **Roman Pokorný**, in whose jazz and blues band he started his career. With Šmoldas, Pivec also tried out what it was like to play in clubs in the USA. While in the States the two eventually recorded albums with musicians there, and these came out on the Czech label Animal Music: Pivec with guitarist Jake Langley and saxophonist Joel Frahm and Czech drummer **Tomáš Hobzek** recorded *Overseason* (2008) and Šmoldas with the Czech-American George Mraz, pianist Sam Yahel, drummer Jeff Ballard and singer Zeurítia recorded *In New York On Time* (2010). Šmoldas's album is mainly devoted to themes from the musical My Fair Lady by composer Frederick Loew. **Zeurítia**, Šmoldas's wife, who specialises mainly in music from Portuguese-speaking countries in South America, had earlier made her own recording debut published under her own name (2008). Another debut with an international line-up is that of the pianist and composer **Beata Hlavenková** *Joy For Joe*l (2009). She recorded this in a New Jersey studio with Rich Perry, Dave Hasley, Matt Clohesy, Jon Wikan, and most notably the trumpet player, Ingrid Jensen, whose contribution accented the success of the whole album.
The name **Miroslav Hloucal** has already been mentioned in the context of the Prague Jazz Conservatory Orchestra. He is the most sought-after trumpet and bugle player of the

youngest generation and we find him in many groups, including his main ensemble – Infinite Quintet founded with the saxophonist **Petr Kalfus**. Their debut is entitled *Speak Slowly,* with **Viliam Béreš** accompanying on piano, **Petr Dvorský** on bass and the drummer **Martin Novák**. Another ensemble founded by Hloucal, this time with saxophonist **Luboš Soukup**, is the Points quartet. In this group we once again meet the drummer Hobzek and bass player Liška. After recent successes at festivals in Belgium, Poland and Getxo in Spain, where the organisers published a live recording, they are preparing to christen their home debut album. We also find Hloucal among the soloists of trombonist **Jan J. Jirucha's** group Bucinatores, which is an experimentally orientated wind band. It plays in several different instrumental line-ups, in one of them being accompanied by the Ondřej Pivec organ trio. Aspiring young Czech jazzmen are not, however, just heading for Boston; the brilliant Karol Szymanowski Music Academy in Krakow is a lot closer. This was where the trumpet player **Štěpánka Balzarová's** Inner Space ensemble was formed – a Czech-Polish group with Luboš Soukup, **Vít Křišťan**, Michał Kapczuk and Sebastian Kuchczyński. Czech jazz can boast talents not just in performance, but in composition too. One example is the pianist **Tomáš Sýkora** with the Nedoba quintet, in which the youngest generation is reinforced by the trumpet of Michal Gera (CD *Songs About...*, 2009). Its most original project has the absurd title, wrgha POWU Orchestra. The foundation of the sound is provided by a classical string quartet, and the rhythm section by piano, guitar, double bass and percussion, while other tasks are fulfilled by the flute, clarinet and accordion. In this ensemble' jazz we find an often dadaist fusion of various different genres, including references to very old or street musical genres. A fondness for experimentation with free improvisation and electric sound is also characteristic of the new orientation of saxophonist and bass clarinettist Pavel Hrubý's group Limbo (CD Out Of Body, 2009), involving guitarist **Jiří Šimek** and keyboard player **Michal Nejtek**.

Michal Nejtek

Cold War Veterans

Not just the modern swing generation of the 1940s and 50s but also many of the pioneers of Czech modern jazz are long gone, playing in the great heavenly big band. The leading figures in these movements suffered as a result of the ideologically distorted policies of the monopoly state publishing houses, and consequently their careers are mostly insufficiently mapped by recordings. Many of them were never to make their own albums, and others only managed to do so after 1989. One of the latter who is still happily with us is the trombonist Svatopluk Košvanec, today still in excellent form, a great partner in brass sections and so invited to take part in all kinds of formations of Czech and European jazz. Guitarist **Rudolf Dašek** and saxophonist and flautist **Jiří Stivín** became famous as a free jazz duo in the 1960s. Today we can find Stivín playing on podiums throughout Europe. After many years of collaboration with the German guitarist Toto Blank, Dašek made no public appearances for a long time as a result of serious illness, but currently he is making studio recordings in a duo with the

bass player Georg Mraz. In the course of his career Jiří Stivín has demonstrated the huge range of his talent from jazz to contemporary classical music as well as back to historical music, the Baroque and the Renaissance. In jazz he plays mainly with a quartet that has for many years included the guitarist Jaroslav Šindler (CD Jiří Stivín & Co. Jazz System: *Jazz na Hradě / Jazz at the Castle*, 2009, with guest vibraphonist Wolfgang Lackerschmid). Another long-term partner of Stivín's is the German bassist Ali Haurandem, with whom he plays in a duo (CD The Two of Us: *Just More*, 2008) or a trio with the French drummer Daniel Humaire (CD *Live in Hradec Králové*, 2008).

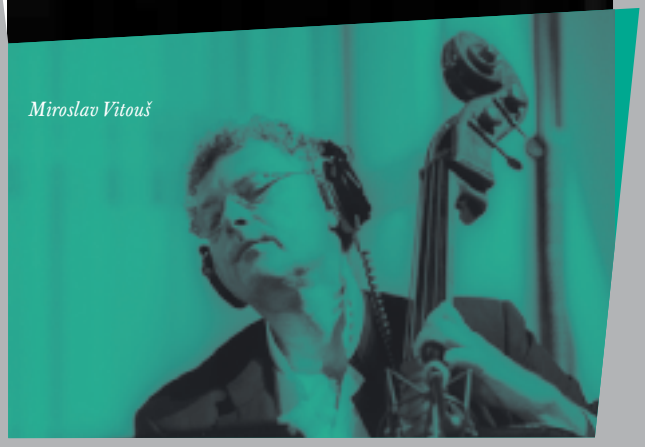
Performers who contributed to forming Czech jazz especially in the 1970s and who are still productive today include for example **Josef Vejvoda**, whose trio boasts the deeply thoughtful pianist **Kryštof Marek**. Another is the one-time winner of composing competitions in Monaco, one of the most important pianists in Czech jazz history, and teacher, **Karel Růžička**. Among protagonists of the jazz-rock era, when the electric guitar entered jazz, we still encounter **Luboš Andršt** or **Zdeněk Fišer**. This is a generation group that includes their former bandmaster, the keyboards player **Martin Kratochvíl**, whose Jazz Q recently reappeared on the scene – otherwise Kratochvíl today plays mainly in a duo with the American guitarist Tonny Ackerman. Or the pianist and composer **Emil Viklický,** today still one of the most active of our jazzmen. For years he has been appearing in European and American clubs, or in a trio with the bassist **František Uhlíř** and drummer **Lace Tropp**, while he also creates film, theatre and opera music as well as experimental jazz on the boundary with contemporary classical, and does free improvisation – here it is worth mentioning his collaboration with the Finnish trumpet player Jarmo Sermilä. His range extends from bop to free jazz, and he is also influenced by the ethnic music of his native region – Moravia, and its modern classic Leoš Janáček. It was to this theme that he returned in his most recent recording, *Sinfonietta – The Janacek of Jazz,* on which Viklický is accompanied by George Mraz on double bass and Lewis Nash on percussion (released by the Japanese label Venus).

During the communist period whole generations of musicians grew up who focused on forms of traditional jazz, the music of New Orelans, dixieland, and early swing. The tradition of these bands goes back to the end of the 1940s, a time when communist cultural ideology came down hard on jazz because of its American origin and cosmopolitan form. When the first green shoots of the jazz modern appeared in Czechoslovakia, however, the ideologues turned their open hatred on them, relieving the pressure on traditional jazz, which then enjoyed a boom. This genre still has its veteran today: the internationally respected Jazz Studio of clarinetist **Pavel Smetáček** last year celebrated its half century of existence. Over the years the group has moved from copying American models of old jazz to its own synthetic work, in which it weaves the style and performance experience of later developments from the field of swing and early bebop into traditional jazz.

In the totalitarian decades 1948–89, Czech jazzmen did good work in very difficult conditions and managed to preserve the continuity of jazz development in this country. Today it is proving possible to progressively publish recordings made long ago – usually in the studios of Czechoslovak State Radio, television, and sometimes abroad. In the Fonogram Czech Radio series we are now getting a representative mapping of the swing period of the 1920s–1940s including the years of occupation by Hitler's Reich. Thus for those who remember the period, their nostalgic memories of the music with which they grew up can finally come

to life on accessible recordings, while the young can appreciate that despite all the problems in Czechoslovakia, and although on the margins of public interest, jazz lived and reflected events in the world, even if the Iron Curtain mean that it could not reflect jazz evolution in its full diversity. Much of the debt to earlier Czech jazzmen remains to be paid, however, since the majority of the titles of the then state publishing houses Supraphon, Panton, and Opus in Slovakia, have not yet been converted onto CD format even after twenty years.

Martin Kratochvíl



Miroslav Vitouš

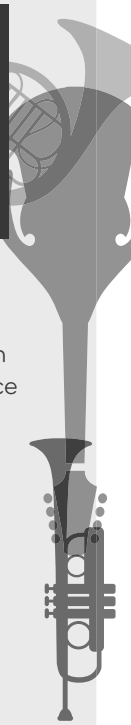
Returns from Jazz Exile

Political emigration from communist Czechoslovakia took place in several waves starting in 1948 and Czech jazzmen were part of it. From the point of view of importance for the world jazz scene we should mention two names first and foremost – and by coincidence both are double bass players. Although they were both of the same generation, in music they represent completely different conceptions. Both have been among the top players on the bass scene since the 1970s. Jiří Mráz, known in the world as **George Mraz**, born in 1944, is a virtuoso player of mainstream character, with a very precise feeling for rhythm, and ingenious melodies and harmonies. The great stars of American music from Oscar Peterson or Tommy Flanagan, to John Abercrombie, John Scofield or Joe Lovan engaged him in their various ensembles. The second world-famous Czech jazz bass player is **Miroslav Vitouš**, three years younger, who is a co-founder of the legendary jazz-rock synthesis band, Weather Report, and for a brief period was also bass for electric Miles Davis. These two great Czech bassists, however, have very different degrees of involvement in the Czech scene today.
George Mraz appeared in the Czech Republic only after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, because if had returned to communist Czechoslovak from exile he would have risked both a ban on return to the USA and criminal prosecution for leaving the republic without permission – something that was criminalised by the laws of the countries of the Soviet bloc. Since the time he was free to come back, however, he has been constantly collaborating with the Czech scene, not just in the domestic context, but on an international basis. As early as 1993, Arta Records, which post-1989 was with P&J Music among the first private purely jazz labels, released his album *Going Home* on which he was joined by the pianist Karel Růžička, the trumpet player Juraj Bartoš and the drummer Martin Šulc. In the first decade of the new century he made another two internationally well received

albums with Czech musicians. First the American album *Morava*, on which Mraz and the drummer Billy Harta were joined by the pianist Emil Viklický and the dulcimer player and singer Zuzana Lapčíková – a CD given a four-star rating in 2001 in the magazine DownBeat. Then, six years later, the album *Moravian Gems*, which was recorded in Prague with Mraz accompanied by Czech musicians – once again Emil Viklický, the drummer Laco Tropp and the star of the alternative music scene Iva Bittová on violin and vocals. Both warmly received albums have a common feature: they connect up idioms of jazz and Moravian folk music in passages where the musicians sensitively identify common musical elements.
Miroslav Vitouš returned to the Czech podium at the end of 1988 with a solo concert. Today he plays in the Czech Republic only rarely. In 2006, for example, he performed in Prague in a duo with John Abercrombie. In recent years his ever excellent play, in which extraordinary technical bravura is married with immense musical experience and a knowledge of European classical music, has been represented by albums released by the Munich ECM, for example *Universal Syncopations, Remembering Weather Report*, but also by others as well – for example the quartet with Knut Rösslere and Johannes Vogt entitled *Between the Times or Takes on Pasolini* in a trio with Antonio Farao and Daniel Humaire. Vitouš's virtuosity is no empty exhibitionism, but is charged with scintillating musicianship. George Mraz and Miroslav Vitouš belong to a long line of remarkable Czech double-bass personalities that goes back to one of the fathers of Czech modern jazz, Luděk Hulan. This tradition has continued through the generations to this day. Among emigrants, it includes for example Jan Arnet, who worked in the USA from 1966 until serious illness forced him to retire, or Vincenc Kummer, who partnered guitarist Dašek through the 1970s, and who since the Velvet Revolution has been appearing at jam sessions with the young generation in his native city of Brno. It has also been carried on by bassists of various generations in contemporary ensembles, such as František Uhlíř, Jaromír Honzák, Robert Balzar, Vít Švec, Petr Dvorský and a whole constellation of successors.
From the 1990s, the trumpet player **Laco Deczi**, who emigrated in the 1980s with his son the drummer Vajco Déczi, has been making regular tours in the Czech Republic with an American ensemble to whom he has given the name of his famous band of the 1970s, Celula: all he has done is add the name of its new home – Celula New York. He regularly records in New York and his former homeland; his music is characterised by synthesis of the style of his instrumental model Clifford Browna with electric fusion and Latin American rhythms, all spiced with his musical and human humour. A good idea of his play, which has an animal energy that has earned him popularity with more than just the purely jazz public, can be gained for example from his album *Big Shot* (2008). One of the emigrant musicians who now divides his time and activities between Florida and the Czech Republic is the baritone sax player, flautist, composer and arranger **Jan Konopásek.** He was born in 1931, was one of the founders of Czech modern jazz and left the republic in 1965. After a few years in West Germany, where he played with numerous American ensembles including those of Stan Kenton, Oliver Nelson and Carmel Jones, he moved to the USA at the beginning of the 1970s. The most famous chapter of his career was his time in Woody Herman's orchestra. Today he occasionally appears in the clubs here with Czech musicians. In 1994 Jan Konopásek released a single album under his name entitled *What Happened at the Picture Gallery* putting together recordings from1991–94 made by Big Band Radio Praha and Jazz Orchestra Radio Ostrava, in which he performed as soloists, band master and arranger.

Since 1990 the guitarist **Rudy Linka**, born in 1961, has been actively involved on the Czech scene. After music studies in Stockholm and then in Boston, he settled in New York in 1986. He regularly appears in the Czech Republic with his own ensembles, and records most of his albums in New York. His teachers were Jim Hall, John Abercrombie and John Scofield, and he now lectures and teaches in Boston himself. In 2005 he founded, and is the president of, the biggest Czech open air festival, known as Bohemia Jazz Fest. Here he invites stars of American and European jazz, as well as the best Czech experienced or rising, talented bands. A distinctive feature of the festival is that it is free, and that it moves through one week to three places in the Czech Republic. It opens in Prague on the historic Old Town Square and continues in the South Bohemian metropolis of České Budějovice and in Prachatice, where Linka has his Czech home. His most highly rated album is the *Czech It Out!* (1994), on which he plays his compositions with Georg Mraz and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith. On his albums we meet John Abercrombie, Mike Fortmanek, Gil Goldstein and many other interesting musicians. He has recorded a few albums under Czech labels, for example the excellent *Mostly Standards* (Arta Records, 1993) or a joint quartet with the trumpet player Miles Evans, recorded live at a concert at the Prague Castle and released under the title *Rudy Linka & Miles Evans Quartet* (Multisonic, 2004).
The most recent returnee to the domestic scene is the tenor saxophonist and baritone saxophonist **Jaroslav Jakubovič**. In the later seventies he and Svatopluk Košvanec were the driving forces behind the success of Jazz Combo Ústí, which won a series of awards on the domestic and European jazz scene. Two weeks after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia he emigrated to Israel. Since then Jakubovičhas lived between homes and engagements in Israel and the USA, where for example he played in Buddy Rich's and Lionel Hampton's orchestras. In 1978 a DownBeat survey put him in third place among the world's baritone saxophonists, just behind Gerry Mulligan and Pepper Adams. In 2009 Jakubovič met George Mraz

SEASON OF LAUREATES 2010



During the Season of Laureates we are presenting you with a seventh annual cycle of concerts by young performers. The main idea behind this year's seasonis to introduce audiences to top-class Czech and foreign young musicians form the up-coming generation and an interesting dramaturgy.

For more information you could visit our website

www.wma2008.cz

29. 4. 2010	**Stravinsky & Company** 19:00 Certovka Theatre, Prague
6. 5. 2010	**String Variations** 19:00 Goethe Institut Prag
10. 6. 2010	**Confrontation of Centuries in Music** 19:30 Nova Sin, Prague
9. 9. 2010	**Nove e Curiose** 19:00 Venue to be announced
14. 10. 2010	**Piano and Two Violoncellos** 19:30 St. Vavrinec Church, Prague
4. 11. 2010	**Eight Hands** 19:30 Martinů Hall, HAMU Prague
9. 12. 2010	**In the Jazz Mood** 19:00 Goethe Institut Prag

Partners:

PRAGUE

GOETHE-INSTITUT PRAG

czech music quarterly

Prague Spring

Jan Neruda Grammar School – music department

in New York and Mraz helped him to set up an ensemble with the trumpet player Randy Brecker, the pianist Phil Markowitz, the drummer Adam Nussbaum and others. It was rightly called the All Stars Band. This year in January he appeared at a concert in the Jazz at the Castle series in Prague in a sextet, bringing in his collaborator of many years, Randy Brecker. The trombonist of the band was Svatopluk Košvanec, the pianist Emil Viklický, the bassist Petr Dvorský and the drummer Laco Tropp.

Czech Jazz on a Path without Barriers

Contemporary Czech jazz is very diverse and ever more internationalised. The advent of the youngest generation can be said to have strengthened its modern-conceived mainstream, in which ensembles most often turn to the legacy of hard bop or cool jazz. A whole range of bands also draw on avant-garde movements, starting with third current or free jazz – usually this is not a matter of specialised focus, but more of seeking and finding inspiration in the abundance of styles and trends from the past to the present, naturally also influenced by contact with alternative forms of the current rock scene and contemporary music in general. Experimentation with electronics is becoming incorporated in this abundance to a reasonable extent. The second decade of the second jazz century has started promisingly for the Czech scene.

Jitka Smutná

EARLY MUSIC SUMMER SCHOOL AND FESTIVAL PRACHATICE

The effects of the Summer School stays are really phenomenal for participants. I find this development very positive, both in early music performance practice and in the educational field.

Peter Holtslag, lecturer at the SSEM

PHOTO: BRONISLAV JONSZTA 3x

Peter Holtslag teaching (SSEM 2009)

Conception of the course

The small South Bohemian town of Prachatice enjoyed its Golden Age in the 16th century as an important trading crossroads between Germany and Austria. Every summer musicians from far and wide descend on it for the Summer School of Early Music (SSEM), which is an intensive workshop focused on professional musical interpretation of early style periods. The conception of the workshop is modelled on the tradition of Jiří Stivín's recorder class at the Meeting of Friends of Chamber Music in Bechyně (1977–1987) and the Summer School of Early Music in Prachatice (1994–2009), when Jan Kvapil was the main organiser as one of the leaders of the Association for Czech Music and Art. As of 2009 the SSEM is now organized by the Summer School of Early Music Association headed by Jitka Smutná, the Organisational Director, and Jan Kvapil, the Artistic Director of the project. This works in cooperation with the town of Prachatice and the Cultural Information Centre.

The project aims to encourage further education in the sphere of early music for both amateurs and professionals, and so to increase the accessibility of this branch to anyone interested, since it is insufficiently integrated into the

Evening concert by Flautando Köln in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul (SSEM 2009)

curricula of Czech conservatories and music colleges. The unique character of this seminar lies in its great concentration of excellent foreign and Czech lecturers, with whom it works systematically. The workshop encourages international dialogue in the sphere of early music and so is preparing the ground for the wider introduction or improvement of special training in the Czech environment. The idea is to develop early music performance practise in our country on the model developed elsewhere in Europe where the branch is already fully established.

Lecturers
The SSEM is proud to work alongside excellent foreign lecturers from all over Europe who teach at the most prestigious European schools: the Royal College of Music in London, the Royal Academy of Music in London, the Hochschule für Musik Hamburg, Hochschule für Musik Köln, Grieg Academy Norway, Hochschule der Künste Zürich, Fontys Hogescholen voor Kunsten Netherlands and many others. This concentration of excellent lecturers is absolutely exceptional in our country. The entire course is therefore irreplaceable in its area of activities and represents an invaluable opportunity for everyone interested in the field.

Programme of the course
The SSEM is open to both amateur and professional musicians as well as to children and students of secondary music schools and academies in the Czech Republic and abroad. The workshop programme consist of individual lessons, group training in technique and stylistic interpretation, chamber music, lectures, research into particular musical literature, and concerts by lecturers and their ensemble. The whole project culimates in concerts by participants.

Concert of participants (SSEM 2009)

The organizers prepare up to 20 classes on different levels for the participants according to the specializations of the tutors. Master classes, ensemble classes, teaching, children's classes focussed on recorder, baroque flute, baroque oboe, panpipes, harpsichord, baroque cello, baroque violin, early singing classes or early dancing classes are just some examples. Individual and group training is focussed on the study of repertoire and related literature with skilled specialists. The specifics of particular musical styles, early music performance and the technical aspects of performing music are all covered. All practical lessons are open to participants and this is a very instructive and positive component of the course that allows beginners and passive participants to be involved too.
One integral part of the event is the series of public concerts that take place in different concert venues in Prachatice. Lecturers perform at concerts during the course, presenting artistic quality to the audience and offering a unique chance to hear leading European early music players in the Czech area. All students are encouraged to present their results at several public concerts as well.
The event also provides a chance for participants to meet European makers of period instruments and sellers of music literature and music media at the course. The course generally has enormous significance for the establishment of contacts between participants and professionals and specialists in Europe.

The Festival and Summer School of Early Music 2010

For this year's course, which will take place on 11th – 25th July 2010, the organisers have invited 19 teachers, 13 from abroad and 6 from our country: recorder – Alan Davis (UK), Carin van Heerden (Austria), Kerstin de Witt (Germany), Jostein Gundersen (Norway), Jan Rokyta (Netherlands), early singing – Rebecca Stewart (Netherlands), Mami Irisawa (Japan), lute – Ariel Abramovich (Italy), panpipes – Liselotte Rokyta (Netherlands), recorder, baroque flute – Ashley Solomon (UK). The Czech lecturers include Julie Braná, Jan Kvapil, Monika Devátá, Ilona Veselovská – recorder classes, Helena Kazárová – baroque dance, and Edita Keglerová – harpsichord. Most of the teachers will also give at least one concert, usually held in Prachatice. The exact schedule for teachers' concerts is subject to negotiation and will be announced on our website in May.

As part of the 2010 programme, the leading British Ensemble Florilegium will be in residence for the whole week. During their residency, these internationally renowned artists will give one public performance at Prachatice's historic Church of St. James and will also provide masterclasses, and individual and group lessons to participants in the Summer School, as well as offering a series of public lectures.
A new feature of the event is that during the course we will be offering baroque dance lessons both for individual participants and for instrumentalists. The children's class will be open for both weeks and we are drawing up a special programme for the participants in this class. We are also planning a sales exhibition of Renaissance, Baroque and modern recorders by Joachim Rohmer and Kliment Musical Instruments. It is possible to apply for places on the course on our website up to May 15th. For further information, please go to www.lssh.euweb.cz.

The Vision of the project
The whole course works as an important meeting point for talented musicians. Many students have benefited from establishing a good relationship with their teachers in Prachatice leading to professional studies abroad, and most of them have then come back to our country to work as teachers. Several conservatories in the Czech Republic have recently introduced or are planning to introduce specialised recorder classes for recorder students. We consider it remarkable that all the current young teachers at these conservatoires have a connection with our course – they studied on it initially, and have returned to teach on it. The standard of recorder playing in our country is constantly rising, mainly because of the impact of this development. We stress the importance of maintaining the long-lasting tradition that stemmed from the Summer School in Bechyně. For over 30 years it has been bringing together musicians and lecturers who are interested in improving play on recorder and other early instruments, and singers as well, and it is now a well-established basis for the future development of early music in the Czech Republic.

For further information, please contact:
Jitka Smutná, Tovéř 185, 783 16 okr. Olomouc, Czech Republic, tel.: +420 603 736 947
e-mail: smutna.lssh@email.cz, www.lssh.euweb.cz

Wanda Dobrovská

TOMÁŠ PÁLKA: WHAT I WRITE IS WHAT I LIVE

Composer Tomáš Pálka is listening with me to his composition *Kapky [Drops]*. We have the score in front of us and are comparing what we hear with the written notes, noticing what comes direct from the notes and where the musicians are improvising. The piece ends with a very long, quiet passage. "These long quiet endings of yours, I like them. And they must take courage…". "In my time I've had quite an argument with composer Petr Pokorný about that. For around half a year he was still criticising my piece *Ukládání,* saying that it was good, but terribly long for a European."

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER 3x

Tell us about your path to music.
My mother played the piano and guitar, and my father the violin. Music was their hobby and they both brought up all seven of their children to embrace it too. I began with the piano – I had an excellent teacher, and then started on violin as well. I wasn't very keen on violin initially, but fortunately I joined the Brno folk band Javorníček and it was there that I came to love violin too. Not that I always wanted a music career from childhood. I thought I would become a doctor when I grew up, and at secondary school I even dropped music completely for a while. But then the real moment of decision came, and even though I put applications in to both the medical faculty and the conservatory, and was offered places at both, I finally opted for music. To this day, though, I have kept looking for connections between music and healing, and I have a feeling that at some general level there really is a link.

Does your experience with folk music still have an affect on you?
I went on playing with the folk group even when I was studying at the Prague Academy, I used to go on tour with them including abroad, and I still write arrangements for them. Most recently last year, when Javorníček had its 50th birthday…

You studied composition for four years at the Conservatory in Brno – a city where the music academy has a very good reputation. What made you head for Prague instead?
I felt that Brno was going through a period of peculiar isolation back then, and that I wasn't managing to get any further into the music scene than just the beyond the gates of the conservatory. Apart from that, I would have wanted to study with František Emmert at the Brno Academy but that wasn't usually possible at the time, and so I would probably have been allocated to Arnošt Parsch. Marek Kopelent, whose music appealed to me a great deal, was teaching composition at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague back then, and so I decided I would try Prague, and it worked out.

Do you see a difference between musical Brno and musical Prague?
To this day Brno is very much associated with the figure of Miloslav Ištvan, and that partly affects the nature of the teaching at the conservatory and at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts. Prague by contrast is more attached to the tradition of Prague personalities like Klement Slavický or Miloslav Kabeláč. Sometimes people talk about a rivalry between the two cultural centers but I have never seen it like that.

Apart from studies at the music academy you had a study stay in Paris for a time and attended composition courses in Dartington (England), Semmering (Austria) and in Český Krumlov (Czech Republic). What did you get out of these different experiences?
The courses probably gave me the most. There you suddenly meet new people and during the week the communication is so intense – with everyone keen to get the most out of it – that it always charged me up with energy. The schools gave me a lot in a different sense. There it was a matter of long-term development, searching and finding – including finding a relationship with the teacher. Me and Marek Kopelent spent a long time finding the route to each other and in the end, I think, we came to understand each other brilliantly. Both aspects were of great importance to me – the personal and the professional.

Tell me about that search for communication with Marek Kopelent – in terms of style you are very different...

We talked a lot about many things. I remember Marek Kopelent asking me why I was always writing quiet music. And I told him there was quite enough noise everywhere around us. So why should I add to it with my music? In the 20th century noise has become the dominant feature of the environment in which we live. You go out in the street – it's noisy there. You go somewhere where you expect some peace and quiet – a restaurant – and something is being played there. The whole day is accompanied by noise and in the evening they people go home where the television is on full blast. The way I see it is that in this kind of social environment you need to find your own peace, your quiet – to get to yourself. To be able to find yourself. Everything around distracts and fragments you, you get lost in it. So that is why I write quiet music – so that the music can take us back into quietness.

In that case, wouldn't complete silence be best – no notes at all?

Perhaps it would. I keep on thinking about that even today – it's related to the meaning of composing and I don't yet have a clear answer to it.

Perhaps composing is your way of looking for the answer.

Sometimes I love absolute silence. When I was still living in the hall of residence, I had one period when I put plugs in my ears. So as to completely isolate myself and submerge myself in the deepest levels of thought and meditation – but on the other had it's true that complete silence doesn't satisfy you in the end. You can bear it only for a certain time, but then it starts to be more like an internal death. You can't completely cut yourself off from the world, and so you actually need that sound. But I was looking for the kind of sound that does not interrupt but harmonises with silence. You have silence and you have sound and they are in mutual balance.

Then there's also the fact that if we've decided to be composers, then we simply have to organise acoustic material, don't we...?

Deciding to be composers – it's still a question for me, even today. Perhaps some day in deeper visits to my subconscious I'll find out why I decided that way – but today it sounds strange to me. To be a composer, to become a composer... It strikes me that it is not a question of "being something" but of "living something". It sounds odd to me – the idea of turning up somewhere and saying, "I'm a composer". The meaning is elsewhere. In the end anyone can create music. For me what is important is what the music is like and where I am steering it – not whether or not I'm a composer.

It's your profession. You make your living by it.

Yes, I graduated in the field. But I'll answer you from the other side, as it were. Sometimes I'm discussing something with my students, something in the field of music that I think is interesting, and I want them to learn something about it, and they ask me – is this going to be in the test too? And I say – probably not, and they say – why are we doing it then? Why are we bothering with it? It strikes me as similar with the answer to your question. Music became something important for me, something I knew I wanted to do, and I knew I wanted to find my path with the help of that music too (!), and this was why I chose it as a profession. But even if I hadn't chosen it as a profession, that level would always have been somehow engaged. What is important to me is not the degree certificate saying I am a composer, but the fact that I am really searching for more through this music than just having the degree certificate.

Does something sometimes occur to you in the night, and then in the morning when you sit down to work on it you realise that it's idiotic?

That used to happen when I was at the conservatory. A brilliant idea – so I would start writing at once, and then the next day I would chuck it in the bin... but today that doesn't happen mostly. In my case everything is terribly slow to be born. And takes a long time too. I think about something, I gestate these things in my head, and then I sit down and write them quite fast. I don't need to write anything progressively; it's more that I have to clarify something, make a sketch, find the right stroke, and then I know the shape and just give it life. But I also have the opposite kind of experience: recently I found some recordings from the conservatory – from the first and second year. I remember that when I listened to them at the end of my conservatory studies I felt like burning those scores. But now I just happened to be fiddling around, pushed the play button, and thought – hey, that's quite good! It's hard to say whether an idea is good or not. It depends on the time when it occurs to you, on time, on its relationship to everything else, if you go back to it some time later for instance...

Do you go back?

I've spent a lot of time discussing the issue with composer Pavel Zemek Novák – whether to go back to earlier compositions and whether to revise them. Pavel is constantly revising, some of his scores are covered in tippex. Only a few of the original notes are still there and it's actually a "new" composition. And for a long time I was in two minds over whether to go back to something that had already been written down in some way – and it's a problem. After a piece was performed at a concert, for example, I decided to change this or that because I wasn't satisfied, but then when I went back to it a year or so later, I found

that I actually wanted to leave what I had changed as it was, and to change something else. So today I make revisions only in the form of cosmetic adjustments.

Do you compose at the piano or with a synthesizer?
I used to, but today I don't. In my last year at the conservatory I started to get the feeling that my music was too much influenced by the piano, and so I began to try – for my degree piece, *Verše psané pro mlčení [Verses Written for Keeping Silent]* – to write alternately at the piano and without it. Today I only use the piano to check on what I have written.

Today if a composer wants to present his work to an audience, he often either plays a piece himself, or programmes it into a computer, or gets an ensemble together – in your case it is the Konvergence ensemble...
It was the composer Ondřej Štochl who came up with the idea of founding the ensemble in 2002 at the courses in Český Krumlov. There were a few of us there with a similar artistic vision, and so we agreed and embarked on it with him. We wanted an ensemble that would play not just our pieces, but the compositions of the people we were meeting at workshops and courses, and we wanted our concerts to have a consistent dramaturgical profile. We had to learn how to fill in grant applications – which wasn't easy because we had all studied music with the idea that we would just be doing music, and suddenly we had to cope with things that we had been completely distancing ourselves from, but we had to face the real situation and learn, and it works. There's a huge amount of work involved. Sometimes I have to force myself – I know I'd like to be composing something but I'll fill in a form instead. Then just you seem to have everything sorted out and it falls apart over some detail, someone has an argument with someone else and refuses to appear and you have to invest energy all over again in something that was ready, and it keeps coming back like a spiral and you sometimes wonder if it's really worth it and if it wouldn't be easier just forgetting it and writing for your drawer. Only I don't like that idea – I need communication with musicians, with listeners. Writing for the drawer savours of smugness to me – as if I expected everyone else would do all the rest for me. And above all – a computer recording isn't enough for me, it isn't proper feedback. I need a live musician and a live listener. A lot of composers who were on those workshops and courses came with scores and computer recordings; they had had no experience with a player, and you can see that what emerges is as it were distorted. There's a lack of consequentiality. They sometimes write things that are more or less nonsense and defend themselves by saying that the idea is the main thing, and the fact that no one can understand it doesn't interest them. These are unplayable scores, which are either perfectly realised by computer, or maybe by a performer too except that a performer breaks his brains and teeth over them – and to no purpose. In long discussions, arguments were being put forward like, "I have a particular vision and it's not my problem if the performer isn't good enough to put it across". My counter-argument is "Why don't you rewrite that line you gave to one pianist for two pianists? One can play the techniques you have in the strings, and the other what you have on the keyboard, and everything will reliably be there. If you only have one pianist playing, it will never be all there." Yes, maybe the Ensemble Intercontemporain will play it, but that's a professional ensemble working in a system that is completely differently set, and so here I get to that smugness – that failure to perceive connection and context.

It's possible for an idea to be communicated without the performer busting his gut in a way that allows the listener to identify with it – that's something I believe that you in particular are making a reality in pieces that include the element of improvisation...
Some composers sometimes take their demand for complexity to absurd lengths and in my view this causes conflict, a lack of understanding on the part of performers and listeners. I try to offer a solution in which space is left for the interpreter, in which the performer is allowed a share. I don't want to "violate" him by dictating to him exactly how everything has to be. We know the problem from life: if I tell someone, "do this, do that" all the time, I am taking away his chance of contributing his share, because I am depriving him of his chance to think independently – I mean for himself. And so I try to find a balance.

What kind of experience has life with Konvergence brought you?
These are experiences on many levels. One is the level of relationship and communication between composers – to know how to say what you think to another and at the same time maintain relations so that the ensemble can function properly, and tense situations aren't arising all the time. Another invaluable experience is the chance to appear as a performer! Right back when I was at the conservatory Pavel Zemek Novák used to tell me – play somewhere, be with musicians, so that you know what their problems are, and that they are people who are living their lives too, and not just people who come and play to order. Maybe that has an influence on why I write the way I do.

With almost ten years of the experience you have had with Konvergence, today you can respond to a commission from the Vienna Platypus association at a level that five or six years you probably would not yet have dared to attempt. Specifically I mean offering them a piece with an improvisation element...
Most of my pieces have been premiered by Konvergence, some have been performed several times and have feedback from performers and listeners; we have played at festivals, and the opportunity to compare my music in performance with that of the other composers in Konvergence and also of more famous composers from the rest of Europe or the world has also been valuable. Recently we have been trying to create a wider spectrum of collaboration at several levels and internationally – more association

links (Konvergence, Klangnetz, Platypus, and others in negotiation), or co-operation between the different arts disciplines of Konvergence and the Duncan Centre dance conservatory, while this year we are appearing for the first time in a series of concerts together with the Canti di Prague choir. In this way new possibilities are opening up, new ways of looking at composition as such, and last but not least, these are a source of new experiences.

Do you have any models or influences that are providing you with a direction?

For a long time I had no model, and no specific direction. At the conservatory we listened to the so called Polish School, Penderecki, Lutoslawski, also German music, Ligeti, Stockhausen, and older music too, Bartók, and I was interested by everything. Even back then I was beginning to feel the greatest affinity for music that you can feel being born, and that doesn't "violate" you. Music that is not vulgar, that doesn't attack you, that you have to find your own path to, for yourself. I found that first in the music of Morton Feldman, and then later in the music of Kaija Saariaho, Toru Takemitsu, and then on courses in the music of Xiaoyong Chen, who is Chinese, studied with Ligeti and talks about music as a process in a spiral that emerges from the core of the sound, and about harmony, and I realised this was what specifically interested me in music. In other words, that it should enable you to tune yourself to a certain frequency that harmonises you or with which you are in harmony. And that what doesn't interest me is music that forces something on you, pushes you somewhere even if you don't want this or find it unpleasant.

You often connect your music with poetry – what kind of connection is this?

The first piece in which I was inspired by poetry was *Vision of the Colour of Night* on a text by Bohuslav Reynek. I realised then that I could harmonise with the poem I was working with to such an extent that in what I then create the point is not to convert the poem into music but to shift the possibility of perception. For me the text of the poem has a value as testimony that is inseparable from the music and figures in it – either directly or as a motto or inspiration. Poetry influences me in life, in my thought, and some poems are so powerful that I decide to work with them further. The poets who most appeal to me are Jiří Jan Vícha and Zdeněk Wolf. Their poetry is about searching as relationship – person to person, person to himself or herself, to God/the universe/everything. They share a capacity to communicate an idea simply. Concisely. Real truth is essentially simple and we just complicate it by winding it into ever more complex constructions.

What is the material of your music?

Essentially everything. Every sound. I had an idea in sounds even before I ever worked with electronics. I was attracted by working with musical instruments and notes as with colours, I looked for sound possibilities as with painting – as a palette. It's not melodies that occur to me, for which I then create harmonies. I hear a complex picture, a complete form.

Music is art in time – how does this picture work for you in time?
It is actually static and only changes slightly. The material consists of fragments of anything – tones, sounds, and these compose themselves into concrete figures.

What does electronics represent for you in this context?
I find it fascinating to combine sounds that are seemingly incongruous, sounds that either remain unchanged or metamorphose and in changed form enter into other relations and create other pictures. In the piece *MoiJeCroisQue* I worked with shapes of the sounds of water, industrial sounds, the sounds of the street and of musical instruments – first in their unmodulated form, out of which by progressive deformation you get inside the sound, you melt sounds, you create complete sound world which is now only a picture or shadow of the original one, and then you get through to the possibility of creating a new musical world from these shadows.

Which of your pieces do you regard as milestones in your development as a composer?
The milestones for me are not so much pieces as such, depending for example on how far I have got in terms of numbers of instruments involved. It is more a matter of how successfully I have managed to communicate what I truly wanted to convey. I have strong feelings bout *Ukládání* (on a poem by Zdeněk Wolf), which was written in 2003 when I was with the Prague Philharmonic Choir in Israel, and it is for viola, percussion and soprano. I also got very close to what I was trying to convey in the piece *O Pater* (2005), which is one of my hardest compositions, although I didn't mean it to be hard. I'm not concerned with the element of virtuosity in music – it says nothing to me. What speaks to me is the gamelan or seeing a man meditating, and just one note sounds, for example, and you hear how this note changes.

Does a life with music fit easily with personal life?
When I'm writing music for a film, it's more a professional thing. Otherwise most of what I create is connected with my life. What I write is what I live. Otherwise I wouldn't write it.

Tomáš Pálka (b. 1978 in Brno)
studied at the Brno Conservatory and the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. In 2002 he co-founded the composer's association Konvergence. Currently he is teaching music subjects at the English College in Prague and at the Brno Conservatory. He lives in Buštěhrad with his fiancée, the composer Michaela Plachka.
www.wisiart.com

Wednesday
July 7th, 2010

Gustav Mahler Jubilee Celebration (GM Day)

under the auspices of Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic

Jihlava

10,30 **Opening of the Gustav Mahler Park with the Mahler Memorial**

Kaliště

14,00 **Opening ceremony in Kaliště near Humpolec**
Planting the roses – presentation of the new rose variety GUSTAV MAHLER 2010 grown by Ing. Urban from Želešice.

15,00 **Song Recital in GM Birthplace Kaliště**
Gustav Mahler: *Lieder*

Thomas Hampson – barytone,
Wolfram Rieger – piano

Speeches of welcome by Thomas Hampson and Marina Mahler

17,00 **Prague Castle Guard and the Czech Police Band**

19,00–20,30

Mahler Gala

G. Mahler: *Symphony No. 2 (parts), Songs*
live outdoor TV-concert Kaliste
Thomas Hampson, Anne Sofie von Otter, Prague Philharmonic Choir, Boni Pueri Boys Choir, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Manfred Honeck – conductor

tickets info:
Fly United – Jana Vondrkova, tel.: +420 271 096 311, e-mail: jana.vondrkova@flyunited.cz, ICQ: 159452068, Skype: jana.vondrkova

The Festival reserves the right to change programme details and cannot be held for inaccuracies.

www.gustavmahler.eu

Jihlava

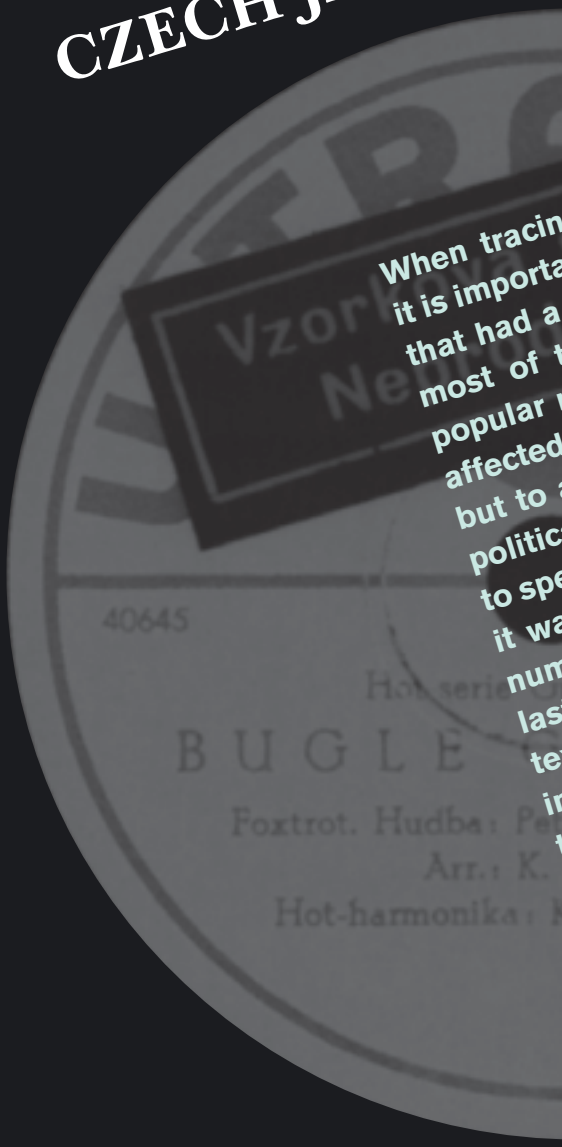
Kraj Vysočina

With the support of the Ministry of Culture Czech Republic.

MINISTERSTVO KULTURY

Martin Vořišek

CZECH JAZZ UP TO 1948



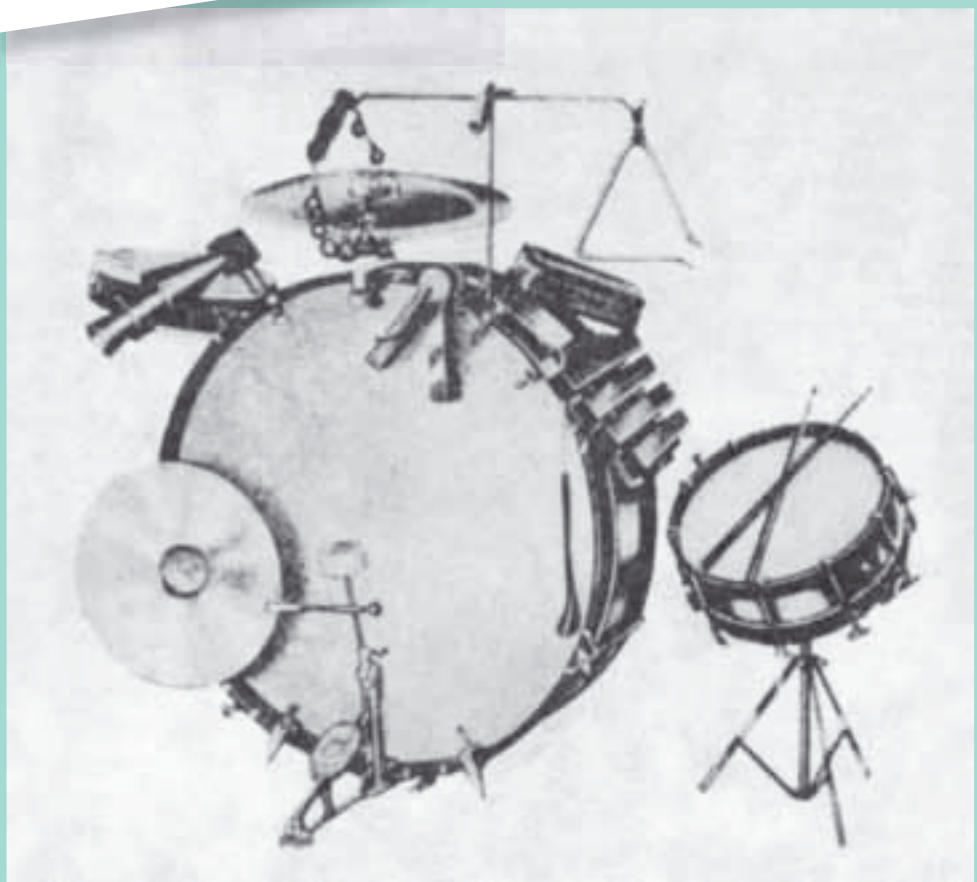
When tracing the story of jazz in the Czech lands it is important to bear in mind certain specific factors that had a major effect on its development through most of the 20th century. First, trends in modern popular music in Central and Eastern Europe were affected not only by the usual market mechanism, but to a much greater extent than in the West by political circumstances. Second, if this music was to speak to the Czech public in its own language, it was always dependent on a relatively small number of performers and listeners. Third and last, jazz was born in a different cultural context, and so in the Czech environment, it was inevitably initially and for some time an attractive, exotic commodity but one to which no clear user guide existed. It is therefore no wonder that the population often understood jazz rather differently from the citizens of its homeland across the Atlantic.

First Responses

If we are looking for the very earliest examples of jazz influence in Bohemia, we have to go back to the period before the wide-ranging changes caused by the First World War. At that period the historical Czech (Bohemian) Lands were part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and not many people were prepared to believe that this was likely to change in the foreseeable future. It was true that the multi-ethnic Habsburg state was facing a range of ever deepening problems, and that growing nationalist movements among its peoples were among the most intractable and urgent. On the other hand, the Czech population enjoyed quite a solid living standard, and this included a broad, spontaneously created spectrum of entertainment. Of course, jazz influences in the prewar decade were a completely marginal element in this spectrum – after all, even in the United States jazz only began spread to any great extent with the great migration of New Orleans musicians after the closure of Storyville and the making of the first recordings in 1917. Earlier, then, what penetrated into Central Europe were at best echoes of American dance music, for the most part mediated though West European centers. This was the way that the tango, boston (the period name for the waltz), ragtime, cakewalk, and the one-step and two-step appeared in Bohema in the early 1910s.

These novelties were of course designed for dance enthusiasts at public social events, but many were also performed as sensational numbers as part of different kinds of variety show. The social spectrum of listeners and dancers was probably relatively quite wide. In pre-

"Jazz", i.e. the drumset of the early jazz ensembles



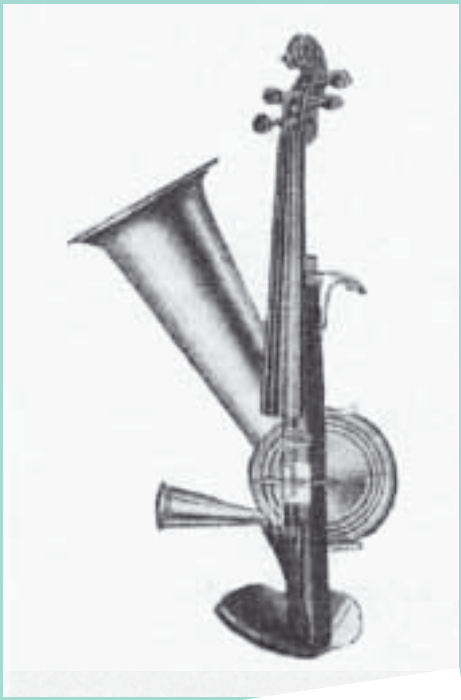
Jazz To 1948

war Prague a particularly important venue for modern dances was the café *Montmartre,* which among its regulars could boast quite a few famous representatives of the Prague Bohemian art scene. These included for example the Czech writers Eduard Bass, František Gellner, and Jaroslav Hašek or the extraordinarily successful author of popular songs Karel Hašler, but also German-language Jewish writers like Max Brod, Franz Kafka, Egon Erwin Kisch, Gustav Meyrink, Johannes Urzidil and Franz Werfel.

But we would also have found a public for modern dance music right at the top of the social scale: around 1910, the Schwarzenbergs, members of one of the most important aristocratic clans of Austria-Hungary, entertained themselves with the two step Indian *Amazon Attack* as performed by the band of their personal guard, based in what was then the entirely provincial Český Krumlov.

The Euphoria of the Young Republic

The twentieth century in Europe is often said to have begun not in 1900 but with the outbreak of the First World War. One of its most visible consequences in Central Europe was the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy. The new successor states included Czechoslovakia, which based its existence above all on the successful national ambitions of Czechs and Slovaks. It was a state that was markedly heterogeneous ethnically and economically. Most of the industrially and culturally advanced towns lay in the western part of the country with predominantly Czech and German populations (which meant that here the conditions for the development of modern dance culture were much better). It should also be noted that only when added together did the nearly seven million Czechs and two million Slovaks substantially exceed the numbers of the other ethnic groups in the state, the largest of which was the German minority. It was this situation that led to stress on the rather artificial idea of a homogeneous Czechoslovak nation (people), although in fact most of the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia never fully identified themselves as ethnic Czechoslovaks.



Violinophon (early 1920's)

Energetic dance music from overseas found what were in many respects favorable initial conditions here. The new state managed to build effectively on its inherited industrial potential and in the inter-war period it became one of the most economically successful of European countries. While Czechoslovakia did not have very strong cultural contacts with the United States, it was orientated culturally to England and France, i.e. the countries that were the first in Europe to get to know jazz. Naturally, then, Czech Bohemians, intellectuals, but also businessmen, wanted to enjoy their "roaring twenties" with the same intensity that they saw in the big Western cities.

The direct experiences of these enthusiasts on foreign trips opened up one vector by which modern entertainment music arrived in Czechoslovakia. Another was sheet music,

Café Montmartre as seen by V.H. Brunner

specifically the arrangements of contemporary dance melodies that the public demanded at social events and dance courses (among attractive novelties we could mention the foxtrot, but also other jazz dances like the shimmy, black-bottom, or the charleston). Starting in the mid-twenties, gramophone records had an ever increasing effect, and from the thirties, radio and the "talkie" movies. Finally, foreign bands coming to the country on tour offered important first-hand experience. In 1928 Prague hosted the English ensembles *Savoy Orpheans* and the Jack Hylton orchestra, famous throughout Europe.

The Czech public, however, lacked any source of theoretical knowledge of jazz, and for quite a long period we find a certain lack of comprehension of what it was all about. Predictably, this public initially registered what was most obvious to them about the mediated jazz music, i.e. unusually sharp rhythms and instruments never seen before. The noisy percussion set caused the biggest sensation, and this led to the emergence of a terminological rarity of these pioneering times: the term "jazz" or "jazzband" was sometimes used just for this instrument, which for greater effect was sometimes equipped with a lightbulb in the bass drum, with a pop-gun, or else was enclosed in a cage with the drummer (as the "bad guy" of the ensemble). Musicians and the public were also intrigued by other novelties of the jazz instrument range. Alongside the banjo and xylophone it was the saxophone that drew the greatest attention, but at the beginning it was as difficult to get hold of one as to find an expert player. This shortage led to the use of quite curious and ingenious inventions, which in Bohemia included above all the violinophone (a violin amplified using a membrane and resonator horn from a gramophone), or jazzophone (a piston trumpet bent into the shape of a saxophone).

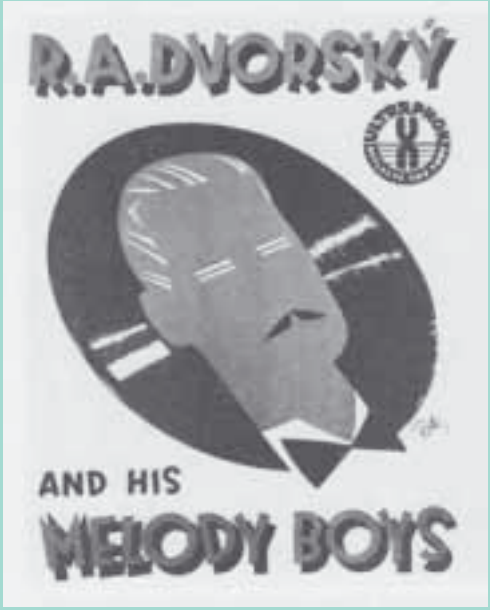
The Melody Makers
left to right: František Cink, Jindřich Kocina, Little Billy, R.A.Dvorský

Jazz that doesn't offend

The degree to which the imported music was really "jazz" is one that needs to be approached with caution. Above all, the improvised jazz of small groups of New Orleans or Chicago type found little lively response even in Western Europe (when it did, this was usually because of audience response to the comedy aspects of the musicians' performance). The public on the old continent were far readier to accept the arranged dance and song melodies played by larger ensembles that essentially followed the model of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. We should also note that popular music in Bohemia continued to be predominantly influenced by the closest Western capitals, i.e. Vienna and Berlin. In Czech society too, it was operetta and salon repertoire, to which jazz influences were usually added just as spice, that was most popular with the middle and upper classes.

The instrumental composition of the ensembles that played modern dance music was quite variable. Usually these were based on the model of the salon or café orchestra in which the melody was entrusted to the violin, augmented at the least by one more melodic instrument (often second violin or clarinet) and with at least one harmonic instrument (piano, accordion or guitar). The "jazz" instruments mentioned earlier were gradually added to this core. Although as time went by dance ensembles took on a jazz character in terms of line-up and repertoire, a sense of the leading role of the first violinist survived for a very long time, as did use of the accordion in the accompanying section. As late as the mid forties we find the particello designated "violins-dir" in printed arrangements of pieces for swing big band.

The development of the domestic popular dance ensemble can by illustrated using the example of one of the most important figures of Czech popular music, Rudolf Antonín Dvorský (his real name was Rudolf Antonín, with the rather romanticising pseudonym "Dvorský" adopted from the name of the native town Dvůr



Dr. Siegfried Grzyb aka Dr. Harry Osten, and his orchestra

Králové). This singer and pianist picked up the dance repertoire working in the music groups of Prague nightclubs and cabarets (including the avant-garde orientated musical-literary cabaret *Červená Sedmá – Red Seven*). From 1919 he wrote and published modern dances (including foxtrots) that were not just among the first but among the most advanced in the Czech milieu. In the years 1925–29 Dvorský played in the four- to five-member ensemble *Melody Makers* and soon became its leading personality. He then built on the activities of this ensemble by founding the orchestra *Melody Boys*, which was progressively expanded until it involved 3 violins, 3 saxophones (clarinets), 2 trumpets, a trombone, piano, double-bass (sousaphone), banjo (guitar), accordion and percussion (vibraphone). His emphasis on precision of ensemble play and refinement of expression, as well as his commercial talent, took Dvorský to the very top in terms of popularity in the thirties. What is more, he succeeded in recasting jazz music elements into a form acceptable for the majority domestic public without succumbing to excessive vulgarity or kitsch. We should stress that throughout its existence (i.e. up to the end of the Second World War), Dvorský's ensemble played not just jazz but the other forms of popular music too.

Naturally orchestras of similar composition and repertoire sprang up in Prague and other larger towns in the thirties. The leaders of the most famous Prague ensembles included for example Harry Harden (a Jewish emigrant from the Ukraine whose real name was David Stoljarovič), Jaroslav Malina, Jan Maudr or Harry Osten (real name Siegfried Grzyb). Of the ensembles outside Prague we should at least mention František Svojsík's Orchestra, working in nearby Kladno, or the Dol Dauber Orchestra in Brno.

We should keep in mind, however, that the musicians and arrangers concerned were only just getting to know jazz. What is more, the professional music community often considered dance music to be an inferior genre, and so musicians often flirted with jazz "incognito", evidently aware that their classically trained colleagues would look down on them. It would be unreasonable to expect to find in this first generation many people capable of giving their ensembles the natural, relaxed feeling of top American performers. Despite all these shortcomings, however, the recordings of inter-war Czech jazz ensembles are worth a listen even today, as much as anything else for the passionate enthusiasm of the musicians of the day.

The Jazz Muses of the Young Avant-Gardes

Although there was a lot of terminological confusion in Czech society when it came to jazz, most of the domestic public agreed with most of the American public on one fundamental question: Czech jazz supporters also saw this music primarily as an accompaniment to dance and entertainment. For the European avant-garde, however, jazz meant much more. Sharp rhythm, thundering sound, elemental vitality, caricature, and a close connection with ordinary life... All this perfectly harmonised with the vision of the period expressed by the Prague

E.F.Burian's pioneering book Jazz (1928)

composer, singer and actor/director Emil František Burian (see CMQ 4/2004) in the first and for a long time the only Czech publication on jazz: *"Electric vibration streams into the place where violets used to perfume the air and the half-witted moon used to shine romantically. The nightingales are warbling now on no more than the musty gate of the demolished ideals of the traditional eclectics, who are doomed to fade away."* (E. F. Burian, Jazz, 1928)

The optimism of the new epoch in the Czech milieu was embodied most intensely in the Devětsil association, through which young, mainly leftist artists from various branches of the arts presented their views between 1920 and 1930. The poetics of jazz did not only attract the musicians among them, but was a source of inspiration for example for the literary theorist and artist Karel Teige (the spokesman of the Devětsil, who wrote a commentary in Burian's book Jazz) and the poets Jaroslav Seifert (the only Czech to have received a Nobel Prize for Literature) and Vítězslav Nezval.

The enthusiasm for jazz in the twenties came together with innovative trends in Czech theatre with extraordinarily happy results. This applies above all to the activities of the *Osvobozené divadlo,* the *Liberated Theatre,* which in its very name announced its emancipation from traditional dramatic clichés. After experimental beginnings, the turning point for this stage came in 1927 with the arrival of two amateur comedian/actors and writers, Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich. In line with the Devětsil poetics of the everyday, in their dadaistically humorous productions they exploited popular melodies which they took over, writing their own lyrics to go with them. In 1929 this duo was joined by a graduate of the Prague conservatory, the composer Jaroslav Ježek, who by this time had studied in Paris and already written a number of remarkable compositions on the boundaries between jazz and concert music. In his theatre music, however, Ježek always gave clear precedence to accessibility over artistic difficulty, and this approach together with Voskovec and Werich's texts created the basis for the general popularity of their songs, which are still old favorites in the Czech Republic today.

E.F.Burian seen by Adolf Hoffmeister

Jaroslav Ježek - with Jan Werich and Jiří Voskovec

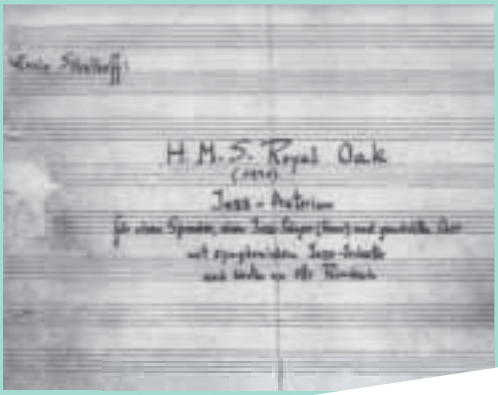
Although never attaining quite the same degree of popularity, the many-sided artistic interests of another member of the Devětsil, E.F.Burian, had a very striking impact in the field of theatre. From the mid-1920s he made use of jazz influences as a director or conductor on various theatre and cabaret stages, and then to a lesser extent in his own theatre company, which changed its name according to the year from D34 to D41. On the margins of Burian's numerous activities we should note that especially in the twenties he was among the composers striving for a synthesis of jazz and classical music and his opera *Bubu z Montparnassu* [*Bubu of Montparnasse*] is one of the few Czech experiments in employing jazz idioms in this type of music drama.

Naturally, jazz and associated American cultural inspirations were also important to authors who were not directly connected with *Devětsil*. One was Bohuslav Martinů, who thanks to a state scholarship went to Paris in 1923 (unlike Ježek he remained there right up to the beginning of the Second World War). Direct contact with the work of Igor Stravinsky and the Paris Les Six is reflected, for example, in Martinů's symphonic works *Half-Time* and *Vřava* (*La Bagarre*) or the ballets *Kuchyňská revue* (*La revue de cuisine*) and *Šach králi* (*Échec au roi*). A rather different milieu left its mark on the music of Erwin Schulhoff, the Prague-born son of a German-speaking Jewish family. His interest in jazz initially developed primarily from the mocking (anti)aesthetics of German Dadaism, but Schulhoff also employed jazz elements up to the early thirties in his later, more serious pieces (the jazz oratorio *H.M.S. Royal Oak* in particular is a work conceived on a large scale).

The Arrival of Swing

Compared with the time lag in response to jazz music, swing reached Czechoslovakia relatively soon after its emergence in the United States. Here a positive role was played by the efforts of the first generation of Czech jazzmen, who provided a basis on which their younger colleagues could build. Another very important aspect was the growth of the domestic market in gramophone records and printed arrangements of popular melodies (in this context we should mention the publishing activities of R.A.Dvorský), as well as the increasing influence of sound film and radio. The publicising activities of enthusiasts who collected recordings and all available information, passing it on to local musicians, likewise helped in the process of the "naturalisation" of jazz impulses in Czechoslovakia.

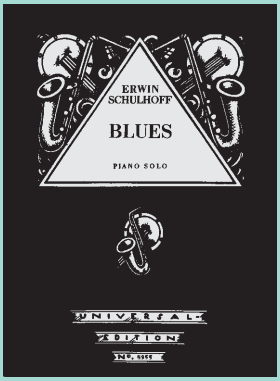
Some early impetus came from a quite remarkable ensemble formed on the initiative of the jazz fan and journalist Emanuel Uggé in 1935 in association with the *Gramoklub* society. The line-up corresponded to that of swing bigbands, and the repertoire was orientated exclusively to hot jazz and early swing. Because the conductor of the orchestra, Josef Šíma, (like



Erwin Schulhoff

Uggé) shared the views of leftist intellectuals of the time on the necessity for cultural political education, the *Gramoklub Orchestra* did not play for dancing, but just for listening. The limited commercial interest of this kind of activity and the ideological tendencies of the two leaders meant that the ensemble disintegrated relatively soon, in 1937, but a number of important later performers and composers drew valuable experiences from the episode (the pianists Jiří Traxler and Jiří Verberger, for example, who combined performance and composing talents, or the drummer and later significant music theorist Jan Rychlík).

In Czechoslovakia as elsewhere, however, the new style of jazz dance music was born above all in the environment of small improvisational groups, from which swing bigbands eventually emerged. One typical example was the pianist Emil Ludvík's *Hot Quintet*, founded in the autumn of 1939. Relatively soon Ludvík developed this group as the core of a bigband set that was Goodmanesque in configuration and purely swing in orientation. In a similar way Karel Vlach, originally a saxophonist who later concentrated wholly on leading his ensemble, formed an orchestra in 1939. In this latter role Vlach demonstrated considerable musical and managerial talent; in 1941 he professionalised the orchestra and remained at its head until his death in 1986. The Brno bandmaster Gustav Brom (real name Gustav Frkal) had an even longer career, leading his band for the incredibly long period of 1940–1995. Thanks to it broader repertoire Vlach's orchestra in particular managed to sustain its popularity or at least its leading place among Czech dance orchestras for the whole period of its existence.



Swing heil!

Despite its euphoric character, swing coincided in Central Europe with a pretty dismal historical period. At the end of September 1938 the leaders of Britain and France recognised Hitler's territorial claims to the border areas of Czechoslovakia, inhabited mainly by Germans. In March of the following year, the Western part of the state was occupied almost without resistance by the German army and annexed to the Reich as the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" while Slovakia declared formal independence.

In the sphere of music it was musicians of Jewish origin or those who expressed their hostility to the Nazis openly who were hit the hardest. This was the case for example with the *Liberated Theatre*, which from the early thirties had moved from dadaist poetics to satirical critique of social conditions and European fascism. At the end of 1938 the theatre was forced

to close, and in January 1939 Ježek, Voskovec and Werich emigrated to the United States. The arranger of the Emil Ludvík Orchestra, Bedřich "Fricek" Weiss fared worse, perishing in Auschwitz in 1944 (the Ludvík Orchestra fell apart in 1942 as a result of the repressive conditions). E.F.Burian survived the war years only by a miracle; in 1941 he was interned in Terezín (the fortified city that in the words of German propaganda, "the Führer had donated to Jews), and then in the concentration camps of Dachau and Neuengamme.

The new conditions affected the whole jazz scene, however, which now found contact with new musical impulses from America and Western Europe very problematic and risky. In any case, just to perform music of "Jewish-negro origin" could be dangerous. Furthermore, after the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, dancing was banned in public places (to make sure that the population of the Protectorate would not be enjoying themselves unconscionably at a time when soldiers of the Reich were dying for a brighter future).

Paradoxically, however, the restrictions and bans brought some positive developments. After student demonstrations in the autumn of 1939, all Czech universities were shut down, and their students and graduates quite often turned to music as a way of making a living (this was how Gustav Brom, for example, started his career). The ban on American repertoire also had unintended consequences: the professional ensembles especially, which were subject to tighter supervision and could not just adopt the solution of renaming American pieces, turned to domestic production for their needs. The war years saw the production of a lot of Czech swing songs, the most famous authors including Jiří Traxler, Alfons Jindra (real name Alfons Langer), the accordionist Kamil Běhounek or the trumpet player Alois Wolf.

We should add that some Czech jazz musicians managed to exploit the situation to advantage. This is still rather an under-researched field and so let us cite the words of Josef Kotek, one of the most competent of historians of Czech popular music: *One embarrassing episode of Czech swing in the last war years was the orchestra of Interradio, a short wave German transmitter located in Prague and propandistically targeted at South America and the allied armies disembarking in Italy and France. For the programmes to be broadcast, the Nazis needed dance music suited to Western taste and standards. Many capable Czech musicians were therefore exempted from the forced labour programme or other obligations and were brought together to form a studio recording orchestra.* [...] *Czech arrangers likewise relieved of work commitments arranged the instrumentation of American and other numbers; they were even probably permitted to listen to the shortwave western stations, which was otherwise punishable by death. Kamil Běhounek was one of those who worked as an arranger in this way.* [...] *It should be added, however, that neither the players not the arrangers were informed in any concrete way of the German propaganda aims for the sake of which their recordings were abused...* (J. Kotek, *Dějiny České populární hudby a zpěvu [A History of Czech Popular Music and Song*], 1998)

The Brief Intoxication of the Nylon Age

The period between the end of the 2nd World War and the communist takeover in February 1948 was one of the most remarkable in Czech history. It was the period of a limited but generally real democracy with a small number of political parties, but at the same time a period when as many as two and a half million Germans were expelled from the republic. And also a time when domestic and foreign politics were pulling Czechoslovakia ever more irreversibly into the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union.

Significantly, the line dividing the Soviet occupation zone from that of the Western Allies ran through Czech territory. The inhabitants of South-West Bohemia enthusiastically welcomed the American soldiers, who brought not only liberation but also a range of modern features of pop-culture previously unknown in the area: chewing gum, Glenn Miller-style swing, and nylon stockings (which was why the writer and amateur swing saxophonist Josef Škvorecký coined the phrase "Nylon Age" for this whole contradictory period.) But the Soviet liberators received just as warm a welcome and their popularity contributed to historically the only democratic electoral victory of the Czech communists in 1946 (even though it was already often starting to dawn on the local population that despite the kinship of their languages, the Russian mentality was very different to the Czech or Slovak). Probably no music embodied the euphoric

postwar mood so unambiguously as swing. The Glenn Miller Orchestra with its lavish line-up became a clear model (the film *Sun Valley Serenade* became immensely popular). Once again it was wholly typical that one of the first to found his own Glenn Miller-style bigband was Kamil Běhounek; and it need not, perhaps, be added, that for his productions for the allied soldiers he probably used his arrangements for the Inter-radio Orchestra...

Czech jazz musicians, for so long parched, were eagerly drinking at other springs of inspiration as well. In 1947 the group *Rytmus 47,* which had existed in the war years as *Rytmus 42–44* (the end figure changed according to the year) was revived. This band was systematically orientated to the most recent jazz trends including bebop, and brought together top performers (including the trumpet player Lumír "Dunca" Brož, the pianist Vladimír Horčík and the singer Vlasta Průchová).

In the same year the Czechoslovak public for the first time got to know a wider range of traditional jazz. In fact, the international communist movement was indirectly responsible for that the first International Festival of Youth was held in Prague, and with the Australian delegation came the traditionalist ensemble *Graeme Bell's Dixieland Jazz Band*. Emanuel Uggé, who had played a major part in getting the Australian dixieland band invited, then arranged for the band to visit Bohemian and Moravian towns on an educational tour. The Bell band's jazz caused a huge sensation and essentially set off the whole wave of Czech jazz revivalism.

Domestic jazz journalism started to develop promisingly as well. Launched in the spring of 1947, the specialised monthly Jazz to some extent carried on from the earlier activities of the *Okružní korespondence [Circular Correspondence]* (an amateur bulletin disseminated illegally in the years 1943–45). Its main contributors and leading figures included Emanuel Uggé, Lubomír Dorůžka, Jan Rychlík and the jazz composer Miloslav Ducháč.

In conclusion we should note that it was towards the end of the forties that Czech jazz ensembles first started to reach a standard of performance that bears comparison with the American scene of the day. Its future seemed bright, had not the Nylon Age ended so soon...

... to be continued

reviews

Antonín Dvořák
Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in B minor

Victor Herbert
Concerto for Cello and Orchestra no. 2

Gautier Capuçon – cello, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Paavo Järvi.
Production: Hans Bernhard Bätzing. Text: Eng., Fr., Ger. Recorded: May 2008, Sendesaal – Hessischer Rundfunk and Alte Oper, Frankfurt am Main. Released: 2009. TT: 61:04. DDD. 1 CD
Virgin Classics 50999 519035 2 7 (EMI).

The second solo project from the young cellist **Gautier Capuçon** (*1981) on the Virgin Classics label brings together Antonín Dvořák's *Cello Concerto in B minor* and *the 2nd Cello Concerto* by the American composer Victor Herbert (1859–1924), the New York premiere of which in 1894 is considered to have been a kind of external impulse and inspiration for Dvořák's concerto. The chance to compare the two works for potential connections is undoubtedly interesting for listeners, even though the project is not unprecedented since two cellists had come up with the idea earlier: Yo-Yo Ma (1995) and James Kreger (2005). Unfortunately, however, the huge gulf in quality between the Herbert's concerto and Dvořák's is only too apparent immediately. As a cellist and long-term orchestral player Victor Herbert wrote his concerto with an understanding of the specifics of the solo instrument and managed to clothe it in a robe of skillfully sewn instrumentation, but in places the piece shows incongruity of style and also rather weaker powers of melodic imagination. Thus it remains above all a historical document, to which probably few would return today had it not been for the minor mentions in one of Dvořák's letters.
In their interpretation of the Dvořák concerto, Gautier Capućon and conductor **Paavo Järvi** with the **Frankfurt Radio Orchestra** are evidently striving for a lyric conception, but this does not always emerge completely persuasively. It is Capućon who gives the most natural impression in this context: his play is not always technically quite brilliant (especially where phrasing is concerned he falls far short of Mstislav Rostropovic's legendary recording with Václav Talich of the 1950s), yet this only highlights his ability to captivate with his superb, darker tone and to bring out the full richness of feeling and mood levels in the music. Inevitably, then, it is the slow 2nd movement that works best for him. If there is a more debatable area is the way that Paavo Järvi has grasped the concerto. The sound of the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra is on the dense side, with less emphasis on the strings than we are used to in Czech orchestras. Given the slower tempos chooses, we might have expected more careful and thought out treatment of detail, but Järvi's conception is arresting in almost no aspect. The only greater surprise is the exposition of the secondary theme of the 1st movement by the French horn, which is presented almost distastefully slowly. Incidentally, this must be one of the slowest recorded performances of this concerto. For example, it is an incredible seven minutes longer than the remarkable live recording by André Navarr and the Prague Radio Orchestra conducted by František Stupka at the Prague Spring Festival in 1951! There are now innumerable recordings of the Dvořák cello concerto on the market. And so when a record company or performer offers us another, as it were "well worn" title, they should perhaps ask themselves how and with what, specifically, this is supposed to attract the listener.

Ondřej Pivoda

Franz Liszt

Années de Pèlerinage – Première Année: Suisse, Consolations

Libor Nováček – piano.
Production: Jeremy Hayes. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: Nov. 2008, Potton Hall, Suffolk. Released: 2009. TT: 79:04. DDD. 1 CD LandorRecords LAN290.

Libor Nováček's play is distinguished by constant qualities: poeticism, transparency, a high culture of touch and light technique. From this point of view the first volume of Lizst's *Années de Pèlerinage* and *Consolations* seem "tailor-made" for him. In the first volume of his Années de Pèlerinage Liszt placed pieces inspired by his travels in Switzerland. The nine numbers of this cycle may be seen as diary entries in which the composer recorded his impressions of the Swiss countryside and his reading of famous works of romantic literature. In several of these pieces we hear effective onomatopoeic effects: the splashing of water, thunder, a gale or the chiming of bells, and in two pieces we even encounter stylisations of Swiss folk music. Although Années de Pèlerinage have a grand, typically Lizstian piano texture, when listening to Libor Nováček we simply do not notice the technical demands that the composer places on the performer. The pianist plays even the hardest passages with admirable lightness – in his conception Lizst's Switzerland is an idyllic landscape with subtle colour reflections in the water of mountain lakes (the one exception in this idyllic world is the fifth piece entitled *Orage / Storm*, which is the most spectacular and technically the most difficult piece in the whole cycle). Although these are supremely romantic compositions, Libor Nováček never descends to cheap romantic effects. He relies not on overblown rubatos and drastic dynamic contrasts but on delicate nuances of touch and on large spaces of time that allow Lizst's music to "fade" in the listener's own mind. The sense of extraordinary transparency is attained not just by the pianist's light technique but by effective and pure pedalisation. (If were to choose a piece from this cycle as an "emblem" of Libor Nováček's approach it would be *No. 8 Le mal du Pays / Homesickness,* which is truly unique both in terms of touch and expression.) In comparison with Années de Pèlerinage, the cycle Consolations is technically incomparably the most accessible, and also among the most frequently performed of Liszt's pieces. After hearing these small "songs without words", we shall be left in no doubt at all that Libor Nováček is really "at home" in the world of delicate lyricism.

Věroslav Němec

Petr Pokorný

Piano Pieces

Jarmila Mrazíková Češková – piano.
Production: AS Happy. Text: Cz., Eng. Recorded: July 2006, Church of St. Lawrence, Prague. Released: 2007. TT: 75:56. DDD. 1 CD AS Happy HMP 0822 P.

Petr Pokorný died on the 4th of February 2008, and we were suddenly forced to ask why his music was heard so little in concert halls or on the radio.
Pokorný means "humble" in Czech, and in his case it seems to have been a very appropriate name. His music does not pander, or impose itself, or assault us, or show off: it is simply there for us to listen to it. It is introverted and almost timid. Pokorný might in some respects be called the James Joyce of Czech music. His intuitive work based on the free stream of ideas finds expression primarily in chamber and solo music. The bass clarinet and the piano came to be his favourite instruments. The sixties, in which every composer came to terms in his or her way with the dodecaphony and serialism, were followed by a seventies dominated alas by political and cultural repression. Petr Pokorný fell silent as a composer, but Pokorný the poet and writer came to the fore. During the eighties his music started to reach the ears of listeners once again. For Pokorný, the piano was a very intimate instrument that he stopped using in 1969, when with a composition significantly entitled *Falling Silent* he said goodbye not only to Jan Palach (the student who burned himself to death in protest at the Soviet Invasion), but to a free society. He did not return to the piano until the mid-1990s, when he wrote nostalgic waltz series, *Evenings under the Lamplight*. It contains sentimental waltzes that seem almost borrowed from Erik Satie.
Petr Pokorný lost the greater part of his family in the concentration camps of the Second World War. It is to them that he dedicated the piano cycle *Tristia*, which encapsulates personal memories and the tragedy of Jewish culture in three "pictures". The third part, Kaddish for Petr Ginz and Ilan Ramon, is a response to the unfulfilled dream of a boy who did not survive Terezín, and the Israeli astronaut who in an attempt to fulfill the boy's dream died in the Columbia shuttle disaster.
The music of Petr Pokorný seems to have risen above its day. It does not succumb to time and refers to the intimately familiar experiences of the cycle of nature and the human being's place in it. One cycle of this kind is his *Music for the Celebration of the Summer Solstice* of 2001. The composer dedicated it to the outstanding Brno pianist Jiřina Rotterová.
At the instigation of one of his Brno friends, Pavel Novák-Zemek, Petr Pokorný produced as it were reminiscences or paraphrases of Liszt's late miniature *Nouages gris*. He wrote this in 1999 and gave it the mildly ironic title *Ferenc Liszt Sitting on the Terrace and Looking at the Sky*; it then became the basis for the larger cycle, *Three Pieces for Piano*. Pokorný composed the series, *Six Forms of the Evening Sky* at the end of the nineties. Here he adopted a simpler texture. Although he gives very imaginative names to his pieces, he never succumbs to the temptation to become a musical impressionist. The simplified piano texture places great demands on the performer who has to create tension, dynamic shading and so forth with minimal means. In its approach this music recalls Schönberg or Boulez, who wrote pieces in which every note is literally crucial. It differs from Schönberg, however, in its expression, which is restrained and even meditative.
The perception and experience of nature informs other cycles as well. There is no need to translate *Quattro Stagioni*. It is the last (and the latest) piano cycle on the CD, and was completed in 2005. The individual sections are wordplays and references to the poems of great poets. This includes the last part of the cycle referring to Heinrich Heine's poem Ein Wintermärchen, which the composer dedicated to another of "his" performers, **Jarmila Mrazíková Češková**. Her committed interpretation faithfully conveys the composer's perceptive vision of landscape and the people around us, present and past, his introverted nature and melancholy of expression.
It teaches us to listen to the delicate inner world of that under-appreciated poet of tones, Petr Pokorný.

Martin Flašar

Josef Bohuslav Foerster

Debora

Eduard Haken – bass, Theodor Šrubař – baritone, Karel Kalaš – bass, Jaroslava Vymazalová – soprano, Drahomíra Tikalová – soprano, Věra Krilová – alto, Antonín Votava – tenor, Karel Nágl – organ, the Czech Radio Choir in Prague, the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by František Dyk.
Editor: Daniela Růžková. Text: Cz., Eng. Recorded: 1959, Studio Czech Radio 1 in Prague. Released: 2009. TT: 69:26, 60:55. AAD MONO. 2 CD CRO465-2 (Radioservis, a. s.)

The operas of Josef Bohuslav Foerster (in 2009 we commemorated the 150th anniversary of his birth) have appeared only rarely on Czech opera stages in recent decades and it is unusual to find opera-goers with experience of any of his six operatic works. Those of the younger generation have had the chance to see only the Plzeň production of *Bloud* staged in 2001. Those who are much older might perhaps have caught the production of Jessika (presented under the title of *The Merchant of Venice*) by the Prague National Theatre in 1969, or the production of Eva (in the past the most frequently performed Foerster opera) by the Prague National Theatre in 1981. One can only regret that the last productions of his operas *The Heart* and *The Unvanquished* were more than seventy years ago. The opera Debora was Foerster's operatic debut and he wrote it at the age of thirty. It therefore represents an important moment on his path to finding his own distinctive musical voice in the service of opera. The plot of the libretto is based on the eponymous play by Salomon Hermann Mosenthal of 1848 and it was created for Foerster by the poet Jaroslav Kvapil. The story of the unhappy love of the Jewish girl Debora for the son of a Christian magistrate is in itself an allegory of the centuries long conflict between Christians and Jews. Here, however, there is a reconciliation of the two mutually hostile religious faiths, at least on the level of individuals. Foerster's Debora was premiered on the 27th of January

1893 at the National Theatre in Prague, with the title role sung by the composer's wife Berta Lautererová. The work was subsequently presented in other productions at the Vinohrady Theatre (1914, 1916, 1917) and then in Brno (1920), Plzeň (1923), Ostrava (1924), Pardubice (1927), Hradec Králové (1927), and Olomouc (1946). It returned to the Prague National Theatre in 1930 and in 1949, which is so far its last Czech staging. For the hundredth anniversary of Foerster's birth this complete radio recording was made, and it remains the only complete recording of the work. It is conducted with empathy and engaged respect for Foerster's score by **František Dyk** and with a cast of outstanding singers of the day. The title role is sung by the colourful soprano **Drahomíra Tikalová**, while **TheodorŠrubař** (as the magistrate's son Josef) impresses with the dramatically expressive power of his baritone at exciting moments in the story, **Jaroslava Vymazalová** (as the priest's foster daughter) has an appealing sweetness of tone and **Věra Krilová** (the old Jewess), **Karel Kalaš** (the priest) and **Antonín Votava** (the magistrate's groom Jakub) all present their roles as beautifully etched miniatures. The part of the magistrate Vavřinec is sung with great verve and commitment by Eduard Haken, the only member of the cast to have had stage experience of his part from the production at the National Theatre in 1949. The recording laid in the radio archive until this year, when Radioservis decided to publish it. The suggestion came from the music journalist Jan Králík, who has also been the force behind another Foerster CD (with a selection of opera scenes) published a few months ago, also by Radioservis. The editor of this present title is Daniela Růžková – the CD has been carefully equipped with a booklet with tracks, an explanatory text by Jan Králík, short profiles of the musicians and the libretto (all in Czech and English). Also pleasant is the simple tasteful graphic design which avoids the aesthetically rather ill-judged impression given by the sleeves of several classical music CDs published recently by Radioservis. The recording is an exceedingly valuable historical document and its release in world premiere on CD may be considered a remarkable achievement.

Daniel Jäger

Jan Dismas Zelenka

I Penitenti al Sepolchro del Redentore

Mariana Rewerski – alto, Erich Stoklossa – tenor, Tobias Berndt – bass, Colegium 1704, Collegium vocale 1704.
Production: Sylvie Brély and Franck Jaffrés. Text: Fr. Eng. Recorded: 2008 Trója Chateau. Released: 2009. TT: 71:40. DDD. 1 CD Zig-Zag Territoires, ZZT 090803 (distribution Classic).

The release of a second Jan Dismas Zelenka CD on a French label shows that interest in the composer and Czech performers on period instruments is a lasting phenomenon. The festival in Sablé, which is the co-producer of the recording, has become a Mecca for all our ensembles on the early music scene; it is a place where they reap successes and attract more interest than at home. **Václav Luks** with his groups **Collegium 1704** and **Collegium vocale 1704** is bringing a new and ever wider repertoire to the domestic scene as well, while his Prague-Dresden Music Bridge project is broadening our musical horizon, and not only just on this geographical axis.
The recording of Zelenka's Italian oratorio (its name in translation means Penitents at the Tomb of the Redeemer), is a continuation of a series after the remarkably successful recording of the Missa Votiva. This present recording lives up to the high standard established by the earlier one, but in my view it is not wholly captivating. The orchestra is brilliant – colourful, precise, with some outstanding instrumentalists. It works very vividly with tempo and accents, and so never sounds monotonous. All the same, the work itself gives a certain impression of monotony, as in part do the soloists' performances.
We know the tenor **Eric Stokloss** from his regular appearances as a guest of Collegium concerts; he was trained in the Kreuzchor and is an excellent interpreter of Bach's music. For repertoire of Italian type, however, his even, German schooled voice, without conspicuous colour, is less suitable. Likewise **Mariana Rewerski's** chamber voice does not offer the kind of scale of colours, emotions and accents of meaning that these extremely long Baroque lamentations need. In the end the most convincing performance was that of the bass **Tobias Berndt,** but his part is the smallest. In this context it is interesting to compare the new CD with the earlier recording of Zelenka's Oratorio of 1994, which was published in a re-edition in 2001 – for it shows that even at the beginning our early music scene had a good standard and momentum in the right direction. Listening to it, we find that while at the very start of her career Magdalena Kožená did not have a bigger voice than M. Rewerski, in terms of expression it was much more interesting even so. M. Prokeš pleasantly surprises for the same reason, although on the other hand the natural bass of M. Pospíšil is completely unsuited to Italian oratorio. In a nutshell, I couldn't choose one recording over the other and it is definitely better to have two solid versions than just one. Today Václav Luks has better or more experienced instrumental musicians than Robert Hugo had in the earlier recording, but the sound quality of the earlier recording is better, and this new recording sounds surprisingly like a live recording even though it is not. The booklet with the new CD contains a text by Václav Luks that summarises all the basic information in remarkably concise form. It also includes Italian, French and English versions of the libretto, and warm words from the artistic director of the festival in Sablé, Jean-Bernard Meunier. So there are plenty of good reasons to enjoy this joint project and look forward to future ones.

Jindřich Bálek

www.musica.cz

Learn more about Czech contemporary music

HIS Voice
Bimonthly magazine in Czech

Czech Music Quarterly
quarterly magazine in English

Muzikontakt
Czech Music Directory

Anthology of Czech Music
Texts, music samples, pictures

CDshop
Czech Music on CDs

Contempuls
Contemporary Music Festival

about us | publications and sale

documentation

event calendar

<< january 2010 >>

Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

programs of festivals | concert venues | jazz clubs

database of compositions | composers

contempuls festival | competitions and courses

music directory | music links

Contact

Czech Music Info. Centre
Besední 3, 118 00 Praha 1
phone: +420 257 317 424
e-mail: his@vol.cz

Nearest concerts

18.1.2010 19:30 Komorní cyklus PKF / Salon Philharmonia, Prague

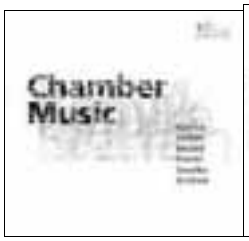
News

A new issue of Czech Music Qua

is just out. Among others it brings anc
in the Czech Republic, articles on Kar

CD samplers

Offer of promotion CDs with Czech co



Ivan Polednak, Musicologist an

We regret to announce that Monday,
musicologist, publicist and teacher Iva
music psychology, aesthetics, theory ar
the Department of Musicology FF UP, Olomouc, and Charles University in Prague a.o.), he also contributed significantly to the several volumes of the Encyclopedia of Jazz and Modern Popular Music. In 2004 he published a comprehensive biography on Czech contemporary composer Jan Klusak. Last farewell to be held on Wednesday 14 October 2009 (11.00) in the great ceremonial hall of the crematorium in Prague-Strašnice.

Bohuslav Martinů Revisited 2009

International anniversary project under the auspices of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Mr. Karel Schwarzenberg. Honorary Board: Gabriela Beňačková, Zuzana Růžičková, Josef Suk. Further information here

visit our new website **www.musica.cz**

Czech Music Quarterly – Archive
Muzikontakt – Czech Music Directory
Anthology of Czech Music – texts, music samples, pictures
Documentation
Event calendar www.dokoncertu.cz
CD shop

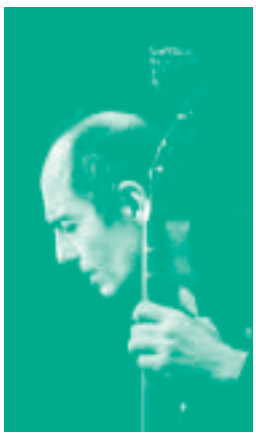
Czech music information centre

29 May – 26 June, 2010

CONCENTUS MORAVIAE

www.concentus-moraviae.cz

15th International Music Festival of 13 Towns



BAROQUE & JAZZ

the adventure of improvisation

financial support

Jihomoravský kraj

Kraj Vysočina

MINISTERSTVO KULTURY

general partner

SKUPINA ČEZ

official partners

Modrá pyramida stavební spořitelna

OHL ŽS