

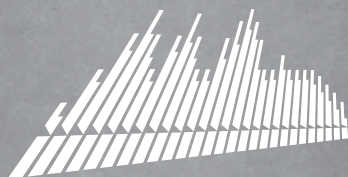
*Emanuele Gadaleta*

*Wilson's Katya Kabanova*

*Luboš Mrkvička*

*Jazz of the 70s and 80s*





Radio Autumn

International Music Festival

# Radio Autumn

12/10>16/10>2010

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**12| 10|** Tue 7.30 pm| Rudolfinum - Dvořák Hall

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**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

Piano Concerto No. 23

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Dear Readers,

I am glad when particular themes can be covered from more than one angle, so revealing new facets and contexts. In his article in this number, our regular contributor the musicologist Viktor Velek once again explores the phenomenon of the music of Czech (e)migrants in the later 19th and earlier 20th century. Having looked at Vienna (CMQ 2/2009) he now turns his attention to the USA. His interest here is not in the usual account of the contributions of Antonín Dvořák to the development of American symphonic music – however important and legitimate, this is a very well-tilled field. He considers instead the American careers of Czech musicians who while less great than Dvořák, unlike Dvořák spent a major part of their lives in the “New World”, and so offers a less usual view that adds depth and context to the overall picture.

Moving from history to the present, this number also presents an unusually conceived piece by Helena Havlíková, a prominent opera critic, on the current production of Káťa Kabanová at the Prague National Theatre directed by the famous avant-garde director Robert Wilson (I can confirm that this is a huge event). Our opening interview is this time with the composer Luboš Mrkvička, and we round off the number with the penultimate instalment of our serial on the history of Czech jazz. I wish you pleasant reading and a beautiful autumn

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PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER 3x

# LUBOŠ MRKVIČKA

## ON OVERCOMING THE SELF

Luboš Mrkvička is one of that minority of composers who obstinately refuse to “communicate something” with their music. Antipathy to the idea that music must have a “message” is actually a far from a self-evident position – just think how many spiritual, humanistic, psychologising or other sauces so many composers have felt it necessary to add to their music in their titles and accompanying commentaries. Not that these should be condemned as mere words tagged on to the music. The more or less transparent semanticisation of music is not only possible, but quite easy. Music is definitely able to express and convey much more than its legendary “self alone” and Mrkvička certainly does not deny its potential in this respect. It is just that he himself wants nothing to do with it, because he doesn’t want to spoil the pure pleasure of music.

*If you were to visualise a style map of music today, where would you locate what you yourself are doing? What do you feel close to, and what do you feel distant from?*

Style in the general sense of the word, i.e. as a set of compositional procedures characteristic of a larger group of composers, has never much interested me. What I find much more congenial is a view of style as a clearly delineated, original and individual musical language, creating a frame in which very diverse elements can in principle appear. Directly associated with this view is my reluctance to be content with any existing state of things and so give up on originality – in other words my resistance to adopting ready-made compositional techniques. From my perspective, any kind of technique that the composer takes up must be

“re-discovered”. And precisely that “re-discovery process” is of far greater value (perhaps even at the expense of “discovering America”) than a mere adoption of compositional approaches however interesting these may be. All the same, while this kind of attitude can in principle be found in the framework of any kind of musical style, it is still far more bound up with the progressive line of musical thinking. Naturally I can’t pretend that what I do has appeared out of the blue – I feel myself strongly influenced by the serial compositional principles of the Second Viennese School (Webern), which were further developed and transformed by composers of the postwar avant-garde (Boulez) and then in the context of my own personal musical history logically evolved into the techniques of what is known as spectral music (Grisey).

*The Webern – Boulez – Grisey chain in fact represents one of the mainstreams of European music – and many composers swim in it. If you are unwilling to give up on originality, could you tell us more about what it is, specifically, that makes your pieces original, and what is unique about them? In what respects do they shift in a new direction what is in its way an existing stylistic and acoustic idiom?*

It is clear that powerful creative individuals to a certain extent determine the direction. And it is clear that even less strong creative individuals have the ability to sense their power. But I would go as far as to say that the great majority of composers who refer to them as models and inspirations, touch only very superficial aspects of their music, or at worst do it only because this is simply what is done at a given time in a given environment. As regards the second part of your question, my feeling is that it always gives a very awkward impression if a composer tries to defend his own pieces by listing their good points as compared with other pieces (ultimately I don’t find this kind of assessment adequate even when someone else does it, because powerful things ought to be able to stand on their own merits – in other words praising one thing need not involve denigrating another). But just to satisfy your curiosity a little, I’ll take the plunge and despite the genuinely deep respect and admiration I have for all the three composers named, I’ll offer some criticism in aphoristic mood. So... Webern – an inability to let music off a tight rein and allow it to be exuberant, a constant keeping of himself on the leash; Boulez – a master of lightness and radiance of style, but that lightness is constantly menaced by a kind of “ornamentalism” caused by a lack of depth, slowness and heaviness, which by contrast is potently mastered by Gérard Grisey – except that his very submersion in his own darkness is sometimes a bit much for my taste.

*Let me try to ask the same question in a slightly different way: what for you is the criterion of “success” in the sense of “this piece has come off right and is good, because...” What would you insert instead of those three dots?*

It might sound a little pretentious, but I think of composing as a kind of overcoming of self. This means that for me a piece is “successful” if looking back on it I can say that a kind of internal shift or advance took place in inside me, and the degree of that shift is the measure of the degree of “success” of the piece. Shifts of this kind can be achieved in the field of formalization in the general




sense of the word by the strict setting of boundaries and by the construction of obstacles, i.e. by deliberately making the composition process difficult. Then it is precisely maintaining the boundaries and the “triumphant” overcoming of obstacles that defines “successful” completion of the piece. Personally I consider it completely pointless to compose in a way that merely maintains and conserves the existing state. My ambition is to treat the ground on which I happen to be standing at any time as just a temporary halt on an individual journey “onwards into the unknown...”

*But what governs that “setting of boundaries and building of obstacles”? These are surely not chosen arbitrarily just to create some, any kind of limitations. Where does all this come from and what is the source of the meaning and rationale of these borders and obstacles? What is the basis of their attraction, and their musically syntactic and so by extension aesthetic potential? Or to put it on a banal level, how do they leave their signature on the resulting sound of a piece?*

I am truly sincerely glad that my preceding answer didn’t satisfy you. I agree with you that any rationalisation or justification of the concrete form of the borders and obstacles ends up as it were empty, because the choice of these borders and obstacles is always essentially a matter of chance. The logic that we ourselves are capable of consciously registering when we create them, and that often (especially with my favourite composers), feels very powerful and even overwhelming, represents only a tiny fraction of what actually conditions the boundaries and obstacles in question – one might even say that perhaps much more than many

## Part B (2009)

**Luboš Mrkvička**  
(\*1978)

\* )  exaggerated bow pressure  
 normal bow pressure

*A kind of heroic principle keeps emerging here – overcoming self, overcoming obstacles, the necessity of choice, conflict, struggle... But isn't composing (and art generally) above all play, the dissolution of the self within it and the pleasure that this brings? When we hear about successful works, the word lightness is often close to our lips...*



I'm sure that these two aspects of composing are not at all mutually exclusive. Pleasure and a sense of happiness are connected with the feeling of power, in other words with the feeling of victory, and without conflicts, struggles and the overcoming of obstacles we would scarcely be able to conceive of these enjoyable feelings. And that dissolution of self in play that you mention is precisely an extreme form of what I described above – that giving up of the self – and is closely linked to what we were speaking about a moment ago, that is the genuine creative acceptance of chance. I absolutely agree with you that in the context of truly successful works the word “lightness” is close to our lips in probably every case. All the same it seems to me that this word is not always properly understood and quite often appears in places where it does not belong. For without the overcoming of gravity, darkness and depth there is no real lightness, but only flatness, superficiality and ornamentality...

*In what concrete sense is chance present in your compositions? After all, you don't write aleatoric things...*

As we said just a minute ago, even when a whole piece is generated by “calculation” in advance down to the smallest detail and then only written down for reasons of performance, the basis of all the operations relating both to choice of musical material and to its treatment is always at bottom a matter of chance. To put it another way, even if the specific form of a whole piece including all its secondary elements is thoroughly pre-determined using some kind of algorithm, the very choice of the given algorithm is essentially directed by chance, by contingency. All the same, as far as I'm concerned personally, I admit that I simply wouldn't get any pleasure out of composing pieces calculated in advance down to the last detail and then just copied down in musical notation. My feeling is that as soon as a notional indicator deviates too much towards the algorithmic side at the expense of what I called the “ideal idea of the sound” that exists as it were “outside logic”, there is a serious danger of the transposability of the musical structure into a different field. To put it in a simplified way, I then see no reason why the given algorithm needs to be applied specifically to musical material and not to visual, linguistic or any other kind of material. Paradoxically this leads to a situation in which the strict consistency of the component operations is in absolute contrast to the total arbitrariness of the connection of the operations to music as such – when in fact a composer's main field ought to remain primarily work with sound. As regards my own pieces, algorithms serve me just as a kind of necessary regulative (and on that is constantly transformed) of the “ideal” sound idea – the specific sound (in other words chance) always has the last word.

*Structuralist compositional thinking, which seems the approach closest to your own, focuses above all on developing the possibilities of basic (“abstract”) musical material. Would you admit to having any external influences (as might say “inspirations”) which in some way affect what you do? I have in mind things like natural processes, analogies to visual percepts, visual art, literature, rock bands á la Nine Inch Nails that you like listening to... or absolutely anything that (apparently?) lies “outside” music itself...*

Not to admit to any external influences would of course be very naive. I love literature, I love films, I love listening to music (including kinds completely different from the music I write myself) and a whole range of other things. It's

entirely clear that my addiction to these particular things and not others must in some way be reflected in what I do. All the same, as yet I've never felt the need or ambition to refer in my own composing in any conscious way to any of this (undoubtedly apparently) "external" world. This is not because I wouldn't want to admit to any influence, but just because my mind set when I'm actually composing doesn't allow me to think about anything else. And it is precisely for this reason that any kind of search for connection with something "external" seems to me superficial, laughable and just an add-on (and that goes for titles of compositions too).

*Of course there is one influence "from the outside world" that you can scarcely avoid – and these are the principles of construction and character of different musical instruments. What is your approach to this? Do you have a tendency to treat instruments as more or less abstract generators of sound, or is their character important input data into your algorithms? And what is your attitude to virtuosity, which – to take you at your Nietzschean word –, is definitely connected to a "feeling of power and victory" on the part of the performer?*

The principles of construction and character of different musical instruments are things I don't in any way try to get around. I always think up both individual algorithms and the strategy I choose to exploit an instrument with a view to the character of the instrument concerned. Probably this contributes to my belief that it is essential to approach compositional technique as something that needs to be constantly transformed and to achieve the maximum degree of flexibility (this means that no technique should be seen as something fixed, ready, self-evident, or regarded as a kind of "area of safety"). I find it very odd and above all boring when a composer who wants to introduce algorithmic procedures for the purpose of organising and generating musical material entirely neglects the specific character of individual musical instruments when creating it. This kind of approach often leads to an undesirable monotony in pieces despite variety in instrumental combinations.

As far as virtuosity is concerned, I agree with you that from the performer's point of view it is indisputably bound up with the feelings of power, victory, and I would add pleasure and happiness that I value so highly... Nonetheless, although my pieces certainly make considerable demands on performers, as yet their virtuoso aspect has never in even one case been something I thought of as a goal at the beginning of the composition process. I try to ensure that the player's virtuosity springs from the character of the music as such – that it is a consequence of that character and not something external.

*I know that you have been writing some of your most recent pieces as it were in installments – Work A, B, C... The individual pieces can be performed separately, and you don't address the question of how many of them will eventually be written. What is the rationale of this work-in-progress, what appeals to you about it?*

You're right. As time went by, I started to find a closed piece (i.e. a piece that has a clear beginning and end) ever less interesting. In the first place because with its unchanging, fixed character it smelt ever more strongly to me of the claim to communicate something "extra-musical". To explain: my experience with listening to music shows me that I perceive music far more as sound that is happening as it were in a single moment (so in a certain sense "timelessly") and not as the

sequencing of different sounds that seek to express and communicate a kind of musical meaning. I have the feeling that because of the very nature of music, this notional “musical meaning” inevitably always stands outside the music. This means that to the extent that music manages to express something, then what it expresses is no longer music itself. And to put the point in a simplified way, I’m not interested in what music communicates (worthwhile music ultimately always communicates the same thing), but the way in which it communicates it. First and foremost then it is precisely the experience of the moment – which of course in some cases may expand into a very long period of time – that I consider the starting point for my musical perception. The length of this “moment” is then dependent on its compression or dilation. For these reasons the kind of perception of music that figuratively speaking takes place vertically has by far the highest value for me. And does so despite the fact that in my pieces the horizontal course of the music is always clearly marked out. In other words, although the length of a piece measured by physical time and its formal arrangement are strictly determined in advance, these boundaries themselves (even if they must be maintained if the desired effect is to be achieved) are not something to which I attach excessive importance. Of far greater value for me – and I say this with full awareness of the vagueness of the claim – is the depth/height that a composition is capable of attaining. In my own pieces all this is also concretely expressed in the way that I approach each individual piece as an open work, which is determined only by instrumental combination. This work may then have in principle unlimited number of different parts of different duration (the shortest I have written yet is around 4 minutes long and the longest about 12 minutes). These parts may then – as well as the possibility of performing them quite separately, or leaving some out – have their order changed in any particular performance; their order is entirely a matter of choice.



*Has the capacity for “depth/height” and “vertical perception” anything to do with what in one of our meetings you once called your “fondness for bubbling over”? Your scores are always very dense and full of movement, remote from any aesthetic of emptying out, reduction and iterative fixation. Your notation too gives a certain impression of horror vacui. Are you able to reflect consciously on this fondness of yours?*

My fondness for exuberant, constantly changing and bubbling-over sound undoubtedly has something to do with that “vertical perception”, but it isn’t a simple, single consequence of it. To me there exist at least two essentially very different types of “fondness for density”. Density may on the one hand be the result of piling up fundamentally independent musical layers, i.e. a certain kind of juxtaposition or superimposition of often very heterogeneous elements, which is then the means by which the principal effect of the music is achieved. This is an approach I regard yet again as an obvious example of a felt need to express and convey (non) musical meanings (it doesn’t matter whether the confrontation of heterogeneous elements takes place on the vertical or horizontal axis), and so it has never much attracted me. I am much more fascinated by the density that is the consequence of a kind of potent exuberance. By this I mean that absolutely everything, even the tiniest detail, and even in the case of extremely thick texture, is connected with the initial musical “cell/moment” (as it were the imagined structural core of the piece), which grows luxuriantly, as one friend nicely put it, in the manner of a constantly burgeoning cauliflower. In this case the extreme density is the result of extreme compression. The actual movement of the music between the poles of extreme compression and extreme dilation is then directly dependent on clearly defined boundaries that I mentioned earlier. So in this way we get back to the beginning of our conversation: it is precisely the maintenance of boundaries and overcoming of obstacles that (even if this might strike some as laborious and exhausting) has as its final effect not just the hardening and strengthening of the composer himself, but at the same time the accumulation of a huge amount of what we might call “musical energy”. And it is precisely this accumulated energy that in the case of extreme compression – i.e. at the moment when it is allowed only a very constrained space – necessarily manifests itself in bubbling over, in quantity, i.e. in the form of dense sound. This is what is behind my insistence on the profound importance of creative play with boundaries, limitations, obstacles – play with musical energy, play with own self.

### **Luboš Mrkvička (b. 1978)**

*After leaving high school he studied for three years at the State Conservatory in Prague with Bohuslav Rehoř and then at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in the class of Milan Slavický (doctorate 2009). During his studies he attended a range of different composition workshops but also a period at the Royal College of Music in London with David Sawer. He composes purely instrumental music, writing for different instrumental combinations from small chamber ensembles to large orchestras. Currently he teaches in the Department of Composition at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, specialising in composition and theoretical subjects focusing on the composing techniques of music of the 20th and 21st centuries. He also teaches composition at New York University in Prague.*



## ELEVEN PERSPECTIVES INTERVIEWS ON KATYA

*Behind the scenes of the new production of Janáček's  
opera Katya Kabanova*

**The latest opera premiere at the Prague National Theatre is Janáček's *Káťa Kabanová* / *Katya Kabanova*. The production brings together Tomáš Netopil, music director of the NT Opera and director Robert Wilson, an internationally respected artist with a very distinctive style in staging and method.**

This is the second time that Robert Wilson has directed at the National Theatre in Prague and once again it is an opera by Janáček, who has a magical attraction for him – his production of *Osud/Destiny* was a breakthrough production and the event of the opera season in 2002.

The ordinary opera-goer often has no idea how productions come into being. “Eleven perspectives” is an attempt to give readers an insight into the genesis of an opera production under one of the world’s leading directors. Through interviews with people who contributed to this *Katya Kabanova* at different phases of rehearsal right up to the premiere and initial further performances, we can see into the mysteries of this process in a contemporary large-repertoire opera house such as the NT. The mix of different cultural traditions, work methods and customs, and of different professions offers fascinating and sometimes contradictory impressions.

There were three phases in the preparation of the production of *Katya Kabanova*. First, a basic concept was formulated and developed at Wilson's Watermill Centre in a process of what might be called creative brainstorming. Then preparations continued in the NT rehearsal hall using stand-ins and a recording of Katya ("stage A"), and then separately with the soloists and orchestra. A month of work on the stage of the NT culminated with rehearsals including finished stage decor, costumes, full lighting and all the soloists, later joined by the orchestra ("stage B"). The premiere took place on the 26th of June 2010.

First we shall hear from Robert Wilson, his colleague the lighting designer A. J. Weissbard and the management of the NT and opera. This is followed by reactions from the "Czech" realisation team – the conductor, soloists and assistant director, who is also the stage manager. We then add some commentary on Wilson's method of work from Aleš Březina, composer of the music to Wilson's planned production of Čapek's *The Makropulos Case* (stage play) at the NT. We end with comments from the legendary opera diva Soňa Červená, without whom Wilson's productions at the NT would never have come about and who will be taking the role of Emilia Marty in his new production of Čapek's play.

Wilson himself compares his work to peeling an onion – so let us try and "peel" *Katya Kabanova* here, revealing its many layers... (The interviews have had to be substantially abridged for Czech Music Quarterly.)

## I Robert Wilson

stage-director

*You have said you like Janacek because his work comes from another world, and there is a mystery in his work. Could you give us more of an idea of what mystery you mean and how you feel it?*

I think that in the music and in the text the opera does not try to explain itself but presents a situation which, on the surface, is very simple. The surface is what is primary. The mystery is

already on the surface. In the text and music this is allowed to resonate.

For me a work is like peeling an onion. You take a layer off, then another layer, then another and so forth, until you get almost nothing. I first try to see the whole work rather quickly, like a thumbnail sketch, and then I review the whole work again. First I study the visual book, all the gestures, all the movements as a silent work, and then I study the music separately and then I put the two together. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't and when it doesn't I change it. During the work process I usually



PHOTO: HANA SMEJKALOVÁ 10x

eliminate a lot. The big challenge is to give the music space. Most works in opera are too busy on stage for my taste. I lose my concentration on the music. My work is formal and I always work with an interior sense of feeling for music and movement, for hearing and for seeing, in addition to an exterior way of hearing and seeing.

*You started rehearsals with stand-ins, and singers were integrated into the process afterwards. The first night showed that the singers accepted your concept and fulfill it. How did the singers react to your concept of Katya? And how does*

*their acting differ from the perfect shape of the non-singing stand-ins?*

The stand-ins are only there to sketch the architectural blocking. When the singers come in, things change and I have to adapt the piece to their needs. All my work is choreographed, so I can do initial blocking and choreography with stand-ins and it is notated. This makes it much easier for me to teach the choreography to the singers. Western singers for the most part have no training in movement and dance. This way of working makes it easier for me to show the choreography to the singers.



From the "stage A" (rehearsals)

*The most impressive was probably the almost surrealistic scene of the storm with Katya on the roof of the sinking house. It has so many meanings in a perfect lighting shape. Did you have any specific, particular inspiration for this scene?*

No, not particularly, other than the house and the fragmentation of the house and the story that can be freely associated with this image.

*What is the most emotional scene of Katya for you and why?*  
I have no idea.

*You form the space through light. What do you think of the lighting equipment of the National Theatre and the people who operate it? Could you compare it with other theatres over the world where you work?*

The situation is a bit easier this time than when I worked here in 2002 on **Osud/Destiny**.

People are beginning to get used to my techniques. That said, it still takes a long time but the theatre has been very cooperative and understanding.

*Are you influenced by current events – political, social, environmental, economic, national – when you prepare your productions?*

A little bit, but I am more concerned with the work itself, regardless of politics, economic and social causes.

IT IS EVIDENT THAT ROBERT WILSON IS AN UNCHALLENGEABLE AUTHORITY FOR MEMBERS OF THE TEAM THAT HAS BEEN WORKING WITH HIM FOR YEARS. IN PRAGUE THESE WERE THE DRAMATURGE ELLEN HAMMER, COSTUME



DESIGNER YASHI TABASSOMI, LIGHT DESIGNER A. J. WEISSBARD AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR JEAN-YVES COURREGELONGUE. THEY KNOW EACH OTHER VERY WELL AND CAN TELL FROM A RAISE OF THE DIRECTOR'S EYEBROWS WHETHER THEY HAVE CREATED A SET IN LINE WITH HIS CONCEPT. A GREAT GURU DEMANDS ABSOLUTE DISCIPLINE, AND HE STARTS REHEARSALS WITH MINUTES OF SILENT CONCENTRATION.

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## 2) A. J. Weissbard

lighting designer

Lighting design in the theatre is actually stage painting, the illumination of the space of the production. Light design is both a craft and an art, all together. Light gives a production meaning; it creates its visual face, the feeling of the space, its size, colour, but also time, underlining the meaning of the action on the stage and the dynamics of the action, for light constantly moves, it is never static.

Light is a unique medium. Light has a material nature but it is not material; you can't grasp it, pick it up, touch it – but you can mould space with it and transform the intimate relationship with the audience. The light designer is responsible for ensuring that the action on the stage is properly visible, but visible in a carefully chosen, “tailor made” way that helps to express the concept, idea. Lighting helps to direct the eyes of the audience where we want them to look, and not to see what we don't want them to notice.

Light design is one of the newest professions in theatre. What directors used to be able to cope with, in collaboration with the stage designer, today demands a specialist. The rapid development of spotlights, lamps, electroluminescent LED lights, intelligent motorized fixtures, filters, dimming and their control has given a tremendous dynamic to this field. Thanks to the vast number of options on the market the possibilities are practically limitless. It is not a question of exploiting them all at once, but of a carefully chosen selection, in such a way, that they can become integral parts of the production and its conception.

Fortunately the fundamental physical properties of light do not change, and so my experience enables me to choose selectively from so many options and plan a specific solution for



a particular light situation. I tell my students that there is no single “correct” answer or approach. Given today’s technologies the choice is huge, but the specific choice often depends on such seemingly banal practical things as the time you have to prepare the production and the available financial resources.

I work with many directors, including Peter Stein, Luca Ronconi and Peter Greenaway, and each has his own way to approach a project: some base their approach very much on the text, others are interested in the mechanism of the stage, and some are more focused on the conceptual dramaturgical work, to structure. I offer them ways of emphasizing their interpretations. The theatre created by Robert Wilson is unique in the extent to which its form is determined by space and light. He devotes a great deal of attention precisely to the visual shape of the production, down to the last detail, and probably more than most other directors. We work together every individual moment of the production – we create a light script broken down into minutes, even into seconds.

*Katya* at the National Theatre was a challenge – lighting design is the basis of this ambitious production, which on the technical side is not exactly typical of the usual repertoire. The lighting park of the NT is very good in part, some materials very modern and some less so, although the situation is just the same in comparable European theatres.

At the National Theatre we appreciated the fact that we had a lot of time to prepare *Katya* and could work out all the details; careful lighting requires time. The first time I came to Prague was to light Robert Wilson’s production of Janáček’s *Osud* in 2002. Back then we managed to rouse a lot of energy in everyone, people’s enthusiasm for doing something new. With *Katya* I get the feeling that there are still many able professionals here, but a dearth of younger technicians... there’s a need to focus on young people and train them in a way that enables them to cope with the new conditions and way of working. Theatre must be a living thing and not a museum. Theatre must be contemporary and respond to our time.



LET US MOVE ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE. HOW DID THE NT MANAGE TO GET ROBERT WILSON AS DIRECTOR FOR ANOTHER JANÁČEK OPERA? HOW HAS THE NT COPEd WITH WILSON'S REQUIREMENTS? WHAT HAS THE WILSON “CURE” DONE FOR THE NT? WILSON'S TEAM OBTAINED MUCH BETTER THAN STANDARD CONDITIONS AT THE STATE-ADMINISTERED AND SUBSIDISED INSTITUTION: THE WHOLE NT OPERATION WAS SUBORDINATED TO THE KATYA PROJECT WITH NO OTHER PRODUCTIONS STAGED FOR MORE THAN A MONTH.

**3) Ondřej Černý**  
director of the National Theatre

The head of the opera Jiří Heřman and I had been thinking about the possibility of asking Wilson to direct another production at the NT



ever since we were first appointed here. In getting him to agree we were greatly helped by Soňa Červená and the fact that we were able to meet him after the premiere of the opera *Zítřka se bude.../ Tomorrow there will be...*, which he had come over to see. Jiří Heřman made the specific proposal of *Katya* because we wanted to get this unique opera into repertoire in an exceptional production. The combination Wilson – *Katya Kabanova* was just a big attraction for us. The negotiations took quite a long time. We spend a long time finding agreement on the financial conditions of the contract, and then finalising the light and stage design budget. Among other things Wilson insisted on having enough time for full day rehearsals on the stage.

Rehearsals with Robert Wilson are a big adventure for the whole theatre. The whole opera company team coped with flying colours. Wilson didn't bother much with the practicalities of the schedule of set and costume manufacture or with clear orders for it, and so this was a really big headache for our

workshops, but they too managed well. The last phase of rehearsals took place under great pressure of time and with a hundred percent commitment on the part of everyone involved. Working with Robert Wilson is an excellent, and extreme, experience for the theatre: it makes great demands on professionalism and so tests and strengthens it.

The result is a quite unique production of *Katya Kabanova* which has not only successfully entered the NT repertoire, but which I am sure will find a place of honour in its annals. For opera-goers Wilson's production opens up new horizons in the interpretation of *Katya*, sets new standards, advances the boundaries of audience perception, and demonstrates the new possibilities of modern staging of opera. The successful production of *Katya Kabanova*, which has also been well received by prestigious foreign opera critics, has raised the prestige of the NT opera abroad, increased its self-confidence and enhanced its credit.

## 4) Jiří Heřman

head of the National Theatre Opera

The rehearsal process was very demanding. Many soloists were not used to having to keep to a blocking with almost centimetre precision. I only realised the magic of this detailed approach to directing when watching Wilson's work – it approaches music theatre as a very evocative picture that is supposed to find a response very deep within the viewer. For me the production is an interior vision of *Katya* – but that is just my view, and the director's may be completely different. In the role of *Katya* we cast the soprano Christina Vasileva, who has made a great contribution to the production. This remarkable singer has the ability to achieve a high level of stylisation of movement and overall interpretation but at the same time is capable of projecting into her role a huge emotional depth, framed by the stylisation – and this feeling erupts with all the more power in the music and musical expression in the interpretation offered by conductor in chief Tomáš Netopil.

AND NOW FOR INTERVIEWS WITH SOME OF THE PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCED WILSON'S UNCOMPROMISING METHODS AT FIRST HAND. WE ASKED THEM ALL THE SAME QUESTION – WHAT IS IT LIKE WORKING WITH ROBERT WILSON AND HOW DID THEY ADAPT TO HIS VERY DISTINCTIVE DIRECTING STYLE AND WORK METHOD?

## 5) Tomáš Netopil

music director of the National Theatre Opera and conductor of *Katya*

I had consultations with Robert Wilson, but to be honest I must say that we didn't have much time together: one three-hour rehearsal and then nothing until the piano full rehearsal and then my orchestral rehearsals which by then he couldn't have much effect on. He was also busy with the *Makropulos Case* in the theatre company

[the production of this play was rehearsed parallel with the opera], and so I spent a lot of time with the singers and his assistant.

From the start I rehearsed the soloists with the music. This was a good thing, because it meant they could practice and fix those unnatural movements, or unnatural timing, which did not correspond at all to the flow of Janáček's music. This is the biggest pitfall of this production because they had to devote a lot of time to creating a split in their minds so their bodies would not be dependent on their singing. This wouldn't have been necessary with a realist directorial concept because the movement would have been naturally based.

I was very surprised by Wilson's principle of drawing the audience into *Katya*'s whole universe during her confession. I found this moment very strong and impressive. It works very well because the scene is not swallowed up in movements, extravagant colours or dramatic elements, but is concentrated on that moment. But I found other places rather short on drama. There are even a few places where it bothers me a little – for example the complete end – that scene strikes me as almost empty, for me it doesn't have the effect of joining up the music and the stage, and so it stays at the halfway mark. These are beautiful pictures, but seem a little minimalist to me; I can't say it is quite my cup of tea.

For me the music of *Katya* is a huge concentration of emotion and dramatic power which never lets you go throughout the opera. It is like a vortex that you get into and can find no way out of, and the stage direction should express that. For me the music is the most important thing and it is a pity there was no chance to talk about it more. This is the first time that Janáček's original version, without later alterations, has been played at the NT. Since the time of Václav Talich it was always Talich's Prague version that was presented, and then this was taken over by Jaroslav Krombholc, Bohumil Gregor, by František Vajnar. It involves added double basses, celesta, a snare drum, harps, additional counterpoints – a kind of romanticising garb. I removed these completely and what remained was pure, severe, terse Janáček. And I think he would have liked our interpretation.



## 6) Eva Urbanová

in the role of Kabanicha

Personally I have always had a very good working relationship with Robert Wilson. The aesthetics of his direction suit me, since I'm not terribly keen on those "modern" techniques – cars on stage, drugs. I did Ortrud (in Lohengrin) with him, and there I learned to combine singing with a stiff position; I found the vocal support I needed, and relaxation. Even though we seem to be standing rigidly, and there has to be a mutual tension, at the same time we have to be able to relax, not to be tight. Now Wilson's stiff positions no longer bother me.

Although rehearsals with Robert Wilson are strenuous and he sometimes takes the demand for precision so far that you think you won't be

able to bear it any more, it is worth it. The most difficult thing was putting together Kabanicha's singing line with the movements when there were so many of these in over short sections, for example in the duet with Dikoj. When I'm walking across the stage in a rhythm different to the one I'm singing in, it's complicated keeping both correct at the same time.

For me Kabanicha is the prototype of the most ghastly mother-in-law ever to walk the earth. She is a dreadfully evil, disgusting woman... hypocritical, selfish, unprincipled.

## 7) Christina Vasileva

in the role of Katya

Working directly with Robert Wilson was very good. But we only saw each other in the rehearsal room just a few times, and after that



he would sit in the auditorium and tell us what he thought at the end of each rehearsal, I worked mainly with his assistants Jean-Yves and Kristýna.

There is nothing remotely easy about it! These are choreographic systems. For example in the third act Katya has 70 movements, steps, work with her hands, over just ten minutes. As soon as I miss one single movement, I have the feeling that I'm going to forget everything. It's all joined up in the brain somehow.

Robert Wilson never told me what emotions I was supposed to be going through. These we either brought or didn't bring to the parts ourselves. Mostly I subordinated my expressions to the situations, movements and gestures.

Combining the singing and movement means being constantly on one's guard on stage, concentrating perfectly: at any precise moment of the music I have to be at a precise point on stage, make the prescribed movement and gesture with complete precision and at the same time keep an eye on the conductor. I've never experienced such a feeling of risk and reward before. It's magic.

At first I didn't believe I would be able to combine singing with this kind of direction. But then I realised that in *Katya* the most important thing is to comprehend and express what Janáček put into the role – both the vocal and emotional side. My vision of Katya is closely connected with myself. It really gets to me and tugs at me. When I sing her, I try to look at her from the point of view of someone who wants to shake Katya up so as to get her to come to her senses, so she won't end so tragically. I feel that in the music Janáček embodied resistance and protest against Katya's unhappy fate. Janáček depicted her on the one hand as a delicate being, but on the other hand – in that melody, in the intensity of the phrasing –, we feel Katya rebelling against the way she is being treated. Even though I want to sing in the most delicate lyrical way, I can't because that resistance is there in the music. Janáček never let go of it. His why, why has this got to happen, and why to her?... it's in the music. You always sing it with a feeling of somehow wanting to pull Katya out of the water at the last minute.

## 8) Aleš Briscein

in the role of Boris

We were prepared for the fact that working with Robert Wilson was going to be very intensive, detailed and demanding. He was altering the nuances up to the last minute, and he was constantly dissatisfied. At least during the ten-hour lighting rehearsals he replaced us with stand-ins. Physically we wouldn't have been able to cope otherwise. I was helped by sport, which toughens you up and makes you able to remain in a very uncomfortable stiff position for some time. We had a struggle, but I think it worked out.

For me Wilson's view of Janáček was very enriching. Someone could say that the things there are hackneyed, trite or unsurprising. I was ravished by the strange mixture of play with the light, with the stage, original, different. To use Boris's words, I found it "hard" to come to terms with Wilson's conception. For me Boris is an emotional matter. I have a certain accustomed approach which means that when singing I give free rein to natural movement. But Wilson's approach was the complete opposite. It is not at all easy when a singer can't relax, but must always be thinking about some position in which a mere centimetre makes a crucial difference, while at the same time singing as perfectly as possible and projecting Janáček's music. I was experiencing situations where I had to sing with my back to the auditorium against the rules of opera theatre, where sometimes the visual effects, the light, the position of the soloists were given priority. The singing was slightly subordinated to the blocking. But we accepted that, Robert Wilson is a strong personality, but on the other hand he was open to our feelings. If someone had a technical problem or didn't agree with a position, which was too much for him, Robert would look for a way to help, a compromise.

Overall in the production Christina and I felt that physical contact was missing... not because we would have wanted to abuse it, but because we both felt that it was needed there to express the emotion and relationship between us.

Although Robert Wilson insisted on us keeping a distance from each other and playing in a large space, in the end he moderated his view and we went and met in deep embrace in front of the backdrop.

What was fundamental for me was that *Katya* is sung by Christina, and she does it marvelously. She is the honest type of artist, you can feel that she really sings from the heart. This is a wonderful inspiration for me. I cross my fingers for her and try to meet her halfway...

## 9) Kristýna Černá

assistant director and stage manager

Robert Wilson has a brilliant professional team – without it he wouldn't be able to achieve what he does. He doesn't have to say much for them to understand immediately what he wants and how things need to look. They know his aesthetics of movement, his way of seeing lights, colours and everything.

For us this was completely different from the kind of work that we were used to in a repertory type of opera company like the NT – and not just me but the technical staff of the theatre. In “stage B” we worked 14–16 hours every day for seven weeks. With this kind of work load and demands for precision people were tired and naturally tempers were frayed and there were outbursts here and there. The technological difficulty of the production was another test for the NT. Even though it may not seem that way, *Katya* is the most complicated production that we have in the NT.

I must stress that not only the people on stage, but the invisible ones, did incredible work. It was amazing that the technicians, lighting engineers, lighting hands, stage master didn't collapse, that they psychologically survived when work used to start at eight and end at ten in the evening, and then there would be consultations until eleven.

The work in “stage A” and “stage B” was different. In “stage B” the basic shape of the production was prepared in the rehearsal room using dancers selected by competition. My task

was to write all the movements on stage into the piano score. Robert Wilson thought up and demonstrated the choreography – his assistant director Jean-Yves and I would then divide the movements into sections using a video, give them numbers, insert them in the piano score, then teach them to the stand-ins and rehearse individual scenes with them to see if it all worked. The stand-ins obviously had an easier time because they weren't singing – the music was played from a recording. It was clear that quite a lot of things would have to be changed for the singers. The soloists were given the video. Some of them came with the movements already very well prepared for “stage B”, when we rehearsed with decor, lights and costumes, while we had to teach others.

There was a huge amount of work involved, above all for Christina Vasileva. It's fantastic how she managed to bring off so difficult a role in such a complicated production, where she not only had to remember to stretch out her hand, but also had to be careful to have it 10 cm to the right so as not to affect the light on her clothes. This is very detailed work on every gesture.

Apart from being an assistant director I am stage manager of *Katya*. This means that I give the cue for every technical change, entry, light. We were used to entering all the changes into the piano score and cueing precisely by the music. But this production is so visually based that you have to take your eyes off the score... and then it's easy to get lost in Janáček. I have to know precisely that when Kabanicha starts to raise her hand in a certain gesture, there has to be a light change, so I have to cue the lights engineers to do it in time and correctly. I also communicate with the lighting hands – there are six in this production – cueing them which singers they have to shine their lights at, how brightly, the side a singer will be coming from. I tell the stage master things that he then divides among his people. For example I might say, “Attention, cue 313 coming up, gentlemen, number two, number five, Varvara entering in your direction from stage left: Now”. I run the whole performance in this way.

The scene changes, for example the chairs moving by themselves – it looks simple but requires absolutely precise co-ordination.

In the stage floor there are grooves with little iron wires in both directions. Technicians sit in the wings at both ends using something like a bicycle mechanism. They pedal in such a way as to achieve the right movement of the chair – one has to pull and the other release at the same movement at the right pace. And if the chair is placed just a few centimetres out, it is no longer correctly lighted. This is hard

on the nerves because if one person makes the slightest mistake it is immediately obvious. For example, when the house is sinking, the floor has to be fixed, there are a series of light changes in just two bars and the path on which everyone is standing slides away. It only takes one singer to be late by a few notes for the whole sequence not to work as it should. The equipment weighs half a ton, so there is no way





of suddenly slowing it down to compensate. Wilson insists on perfection, and doesn't take technical limitations into consideration. If it all has to be perfect within a milimetre, then it actually needs to be done by computer. Or else let's admit it, this is theatre, and theatre depends on the human factor. People aren't machines and theatre would not be theatre if it was done by machines.



ROBERT WILSON IS ALSO PREPARING KAREL ČAPEK'S STAGE PLAY, THE MAKROPULOS CASE, WHERE THE LEADING ROLE OF EMILIA MARTY IS PLAYED BY SOŇA ČERVENÁ AND THE STAGE MUSIC HAS BEEN COMPOSED BY ALEŠ BŘEZINA. INCIDENTALLY, TOGETHER WITH DIRECTOR JIŘÍ NEKVASIL THESE TWO WERE INVOLVED IN THE RECENT HIGHLY ACCLAIMED NT PRODUCTION ŽÍTRA SE BUDE... / TOMORROW THERE WILL BE... INSPIRED BY THE POLITICAL SHOW TRIAL OF MILADA HORÁKOVÁ, WHICH WAS PERFORMED WITH GREAT SUCCESS BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD AND RECORDED IN A FILM VERSION THAT WAS WARMLY RECEIVED AT THE KARLOVY VARY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL.

## IO) Aleš Březina

composer of the music for  
The Makropulos Case

Robert Wilson didn't come to the first rehearsal with a finished plan that he then intended to impose on the production team and all the actors, but with a large measure of intuition, which in his case is unerring and with which he works in a very exact way. With this intuition he looked, together with us, for the best possible path to the definitive form of the production. He looks for the best in each of us and helps us to express it in the most precise possible way.



Thanks to this, working with him we soon lost the inhibitions that are natural when you meet this kind of exceptional artist, and I began to collaborate with him in an atmosphere of great trust. Specifically the way it worked was that at the start of rehearsal of each individual scene I would offer my music for the particular passage and usually he would accept it and immediately begin to mould the scene on the basis of it. It helped me a lot that before the first rehearsal Soňa Červená prepared me for this method of work and so we didn't waste time stumbling about to find a *modus vivendi* and could immediately get started on building the production. I am enormously pleased that there will be a really large amount of music in it, because Robert considers music and dance (or maybe more precisely stylised movement) to be the two basic starting points of his work. And he has an incredible feeling for music, as he showed with both the Prague productions of Janáček operas.

In *Katya Kabanova* Wilson created the ideal space for Janáček's passionate music. The reduction of gestures, movements and requisites allowed the music to come to the fore as the fundamental element of the drama that he underlined with superbly condensed stage tableaux. Scenes like Katya's preparation for confession of her sin, when she climbs into the loft of the house like a victim but also like a prosecutor, are unforgettable images that enhance Janáček's unique music. Generally you can say that the stronger the music Robert has to work with, the more impressive the production that he creates.

I HAVE LEFT TO THE END MY INTERVIEW WITH SOŇA ČERVENÁ, THANKS TO WHOM ROBERT WILSON ACCEPTED THE PRAGUE ENGAGEMENT. ON HER TRAVELS THROUGH THE WORLD AS AN EXILE SHE WORKED WITH ROBERT WILSON OVER MANY YEARS AND SINCE HER RETURN TO HER HOMELAND SHE

HAS PERFORMED IN HIS PRODUCTION OF JANÁČEK'S DESTINY IN THE NEWLY ADDED ROLE OF FATE. SHE WAS A CONSULTANT ON THE TEAM FOR DEVELOPING HIS CONCEPT OF KATYA. AND IN THE FORTHCOMING STAGEPLAY THE MAKROPULOS CASE SHE WILL BE PLAYING THE LEAD ROLE OF EMILIA MARTY.

## II) Soňa Červená

singer, actor, writer and translator

I have worked with Robert Wilson on a regular basis since 1980. Among other things he taught me how to stand on the stage. His approach to theatre and art in general is consistent with my own approach, the only possible one: thoroughness, discipline, dedication.

Robert Wilson's demands on all the elements of the creative team are immense: on stage technology, lighting engineers, spotlight men, stage managers, costumes, make-up, the stage coordinator. Everyone has first to get used to the way he works. At the beginning there were doubts, mistrust, and even unease and annoyance in the air. But slowly that slapdash Czech attitude of ours ("Don't worry, it'll all somehow hang together in the end") disappeared and that whole great wonderful apparatus started to identify with the ideas and principles of Robert Wilson – the greatest of which is *concentration*.

Robert Wilson's signature is always immediately identifiable, but it's not easy to decipher. But if you take the trouble to submerge yourself in its depths, they open up worlds you would never have dreamed of before: the world of Janáček, which Janáček understood in a modern spirit, and the world of Wilson, which he understands in a modern spirit. This is why it is such a ravishing combination, and the National Theatre did the right thing to have Wilson staging Janáček, first *The Destiny* and now *Katya Kabanova*.

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## AMERICAN DREAM - AMERICAN DISILLUSION OR THE CAREERS OF CZECH MUSICIANS ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Today if you ask anyone “which three cities contained the most Czechs around 1900?”, you will be unlikely to get a correct answer. One was Prague, naturally, but the others were Vienna and Chicago. The musical life of the Czech enclave in Vienna has already been the subject of an article in *Czech Music Quarterly* (2/2009), and so now we are going back in time to look for the notes of Czech music in the great country over the “herring pond”. To give readers a better idea, we have framed this journey with the human stories of the cornet player Bohumír Kryl and the composer Jaromír Weinberger. These stories are telling examples of how voluntary and forced emigration was expressed in musical creation. For Czechs, Weinberger’s life history will have distant echoes of the destinies of the actor Jiří Voskovec and the composer Bohuslav Martinů, but with the difference of a tragic end.

(E)migration from the Bohemian Lands in the 19th and 20th centuries is hardly an unknown theme. It would be hard to find a Czech family unaffected by voluntary or forced emigration over the last century and a half. Years of poor harvests and a lack of economic adaptability among an originally rural population, together with growing population, were the main reasons behind emigration beyond the frontiers of the state. The various destinations of emigration are best identified from the lists of Czech émigré organisations abroad. Sometimes people moved to countries that needed their skills, often on their arrival they were given land, and various material and civic advantages, and were not prevented from founding Czech schools, churches, and associations. Emigration to North America had its specific features.

While life on farms in the Banat or Volhynia did not differ so much from home conditions, the omnipresent multi-national environment of North America, its unfamiliarity as very distant and not yet fully explored country, its democracy and open opportunities, meant that to move there was a brave step into the unknown. At the beginning emigration was on the whole welcomed by the Austrian imperial authorities because it seemed a solution to the problem of superfluous labour, but as soon as the exodus started to cause labour shortages and upset social stability, or when the emigrants began to include people with higher skills, qualifications, capital and education, counter-measures were deemed necessary. The regular feature “Letter from America” in the Czech press attracted great interest, for readers were fascinated by the accounts



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## IN FULL ACTION AT THE CHAUTAUQUA

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Make no mistake. Fill your gasoline tank, oil round at every friction joint, load in the loved ones, and hit the trail for the Chautauqua on its day anyhow. The town and date are on the outside of this folder.

of everyday life, nature, customs and so on over the Atlantic. These letters relating to emigration should be divided into two groups: the first were authentic accounts that fully conveyed the fact that even in America it was not easy to secure a decent livelihood, while the second group consists of fictional letters – a strategy by which the government tried to discourage emigration.

Although today hackneyed and above all no longer applicable clichés – “Every Czech is a musician” or “Bohemia, the conservatory of Europe”, they had their relevance in the waves of migration to North America. Czech music making and musicians was part of the migration, and found a place in America on all levels. This happened right back in what is known as the “early period” of Czech migration, following the defeat of the Bohemian rebels against the Emperor Ferdinand II at the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620. In this period Czechs reached America together with Dutch emigrants and the members of the Unity of the Brethren church (Moravian Brothers) in particular were respected for their hard work, tolerance, orderliness, and attitude to education and music. What is known as the “new period of Czech emigration” falls into the period after 1848 when first for political reasons, but later mainly for economic reasons, wave after wave of Czech migrants came to America. It was no surprise to see the emergence of purely Czech settlements, but also Czech minorities in towns – for example in Cedar Falls Czechs made up a third of the inhabitants. In Chicago, at the time of the greatest flowering of Czech minority life there, there were four Czech daily newspapers, while Cleveland and New York had two Czech newspapers each. Antonín Dvořák’s famous and oft-described lengthy stay in America was a bridge between the high cultural world of the concert halls and the rural environment of his Czech-American compatriots. Czech farmers were

generally more respected than the Czech manual workers who worked for lower wages than the others and so became the target of nationalist attacks. On the whole Czechs stuck together longer than for example the numerically comparable Danish, Swedish, German and Norwegian groups of migrants.

The fortunes of Czech musicians across the ocean were very various. Some remained amateurs throughout their lives while others managed to build a professional career. The music activities of Czech Americans may be divided into three groups. The first consists of activity on the minority social scene: the most frequent form was involvement in minority choirs and ensembles or solo activity. Examples include the “First Czech-American Bando-Concertina Club”, a popular band composed of concertina players. Or the “Lyra Czech Workers’ Choir” from Chicago, which in 1928 made a great concert tour of Czech towns. This was made possible by its membership in the Czechoslovak Choral Union, which included many other Czech-American choirs. The second group was that of mixed activity, when the best of the minority scene musicians were capable of performing even outside the framework of minority life but continued to work with their fellow Czechs – Bohumír Kryl’s activities were an example of this. The third group is that of the musicians whom we can already call Americans of Czech origin rather than Czech-Americans.

In general it was the instrumentalists that made the most headway. The number of Czech names in the bands and orchestras shows that there was considerable interest in them. Their good standard reflected the famous musicality of the Czech people and also frequent previous experience in the military bands of the Habsburg Empire.

Let us look at Czech success and failure through the lives and careers of two Czech-Americans.





## BOHUMÍR KRYL

One is an example of a successful self-made man: the virtuoso cornet player, violinist, bandmaster, sculptor, circus acrobat and Honorary Doctor of Letters (1957) **Bohumír Kryl**. He was born on the 2nd of May 1875, according to some sources in the village of Hořice near Hradec Králové, and according to others in Prague. He died nearly ninety years later, on the 7th of July 1961 in Lake Placid (New York). He was one of the major creative figures in American music, and specifically the period known as the “Golden Age of Bands 1865–1915”, which was a time when almost every town had its own band or orchestra. The American press of the period considered Kryl the best cornet player in the world and among the five best band leaders ever, and his cornet performance was compared to Caruso’s voice. Kryl’s play was distinguished for its exceptional range, sparkling articulation, bright tone, trilling and individual phrasing. He was the first cornet player to master multiphonic effects, for example by playing a low note and humming a higher one, producing a difference tone often of a greater volume than the hum itself. Kryl also managed to go beyond the then directly playable low notes of the cornet by using pedal tones. All this can all be heard on surviving and republished recordings (for example on the complete set *Cornet Virtuosos of the Past*), and several recordings are also available for free downloading on the internet. He retired in 1949 but was still a first-class player in his sixties. One of the models of the Conn cornet, named „Conn-queror“, was for a long time nicknamed the “Kryl Model” among players and was very popular with them.

Kryl’s road to fame led from violin play. At eleven Kryl ran away to join a circus, where he learned acrobatics and play on the cornet. If it hadn’t been for an injury, he would never have become a musical virtuoso. He appeared for a brief period with a rural band, but at fourteen he already played so well that he had the nerve and skill to get a place as a cornet player in the band on a transatlantic ship band and sail with it to America. He settled in Chicago, where he started to study sculpture with the English sculptor H.R. Saunders and music with various different teachers. As a professional sculptor, Kryl, under Saunders’ direction, contributed to the *State Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument* in Indianapolis. Here he played at the same time with the “When Clothing Company Band” and decided to give priority to a musical career. After four years in Chicago he settled in Indianapolis and became band master and director of music at the Fairbank Centre. His meeting with the well-known American bandmaster John Philip Sousa proved a turning point. According to Kryl it happened in 1894 in Indianapolis.

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Phillip Cincionne  
*Euphonium*  
James Citera  
*Trombone*  
Anton Westemeier  
*Bassoon*

### BOHUMIR KRYL

*The World's Greatest Cornetist  
and his Band*



IN MUSICAL FESTIVALS

He recounts that he approached Sousa's band at lunch in the Musicians' Hall to ask for a lesson with the band's first cornet player Albert Bode. Kryl's play so impressed Sousa and Bode that they immediately offered him a place in the band, which he was not to leave until the summer of 1899.

In 1899 and the following year Kryl played in "Thomas Preston Brooke's Chicago Marine Band". In 1901 he was with the "Duss Band" playing in Madison Square Garden in New York. While this band was not top class, its frequent tours gave Kryl a chance to present his virtuoso command of the instrument to a broader public in different places. His monthly pay was 800 \$, he was exempted from the duties of the ordinary players, and the engagement gave him a chance not just to play the cornet but to try the work of an assistant conductor (from 1903). For a better idea of the work involved, the reader should consider the fact that this orchestra gave as many as 150 performances during four months, with Kryl usually playing encores as well as two solos. This was the band's period of greatest success, and it is no surprise that in 1905 Kryl, whose distinctive business talent earned him the nickname "robber baron of the music field" put together his own ensemble and left the band. His parting of the ways with the band master Frederick Innes was not entirely without ill feeling; low profits show that in his new cornet player Herman Bellstedt Innes failed to find an adequate replacement either musically or in showmanship.

Kryl's band used to appear under several similar names - "(Bohumir) Kryl and His (Great) Band", "Bohumir Kryl's Concert Band" and so on. Although the golden age of such bands ended with the 1st World War, thanks to Kryl's abilities as a manager the band played right up to 1931, with some sources even claiming that it played for a remarkable 35 years! Its repertoire was composed of pieces for example from works by Wagner, Tobani, Litolf, Myddleton, Bendix, Friedman, Flotow, Strauss, Mozart, Weber, Puccini, Rossini, Tchaikovsky, Massenet, Thomas, Meyerbeer, Boito, Verdi, Ponchielli, Donizetti, Gretry, Beethoven, Grieg, Bizet, Suppé, Mascagni and others. By playing selected scenes from Gounod's opera Faust Kryl's band even managed to make this work very popular in the USA. Kryl toured the USA with the band many times, but also appeared in Cuba, Mexico and Canada. His success is also demonstrated by his frequent invitations to recording studios: Kryl made many recordings, mostly solos and duets, for Columbia, Victor, Zonophone and the Edison Phonograph Company. On recordings for the last named firm, Kryl worked directly with Edison and their recordings were among the first ever. According to Gabriel Gössel, Kryl was the first ever Czech musician to be recorded on phono-cylinders: for the Edison firm he and the

orchestra recorded the *Sextet* from Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* in 1902.

In the years 1917-1919, Kryl - in the rank of lieutenant - occupied the position of "Bandmaster of all the Military Camp Bands in the country". He was the main bandmaster at a concert of military bands in Camp Custor and so created a band of 250 musicians! His importance can be compared with that of Sousa with his enormous and famous naval "Great Lakes Battalion Band". After the war Kryl scored successes above all at the Chautauqua (Redpath-Chicago Chautauqua) Entertainment Centre. He led his own ensembles ("Chicago Orchestra Choir", "Bohumir Kryl and His Bohemian Band", "Bohumir Kryl's Bohemian Band", "Kryl Symphony Orchestra"), as well as an opera company in the winter season. Kryl had a tremendous talent for showmanship - one big attraction were four eskimo dogs (huskies) in leather aprons who played like drummers on an anvil in the Czech band while electrical equipment reacted to the blows by lighting up the dark podium with cascades of sparks. Also appearing at Chautauqua was the group, "Kryl's Orchestral Sextette" led by Irene Stolofsky. Kryl performed with his daughters Marie (piano) and Josephina (violin), in a trio usually presented as "Bohumir Kryl (and) Company". Both daughters were members of the "(Kryl Chicago) Women's Symphony Orchestra", an orchestra formed during the Second World War and conducted by Kryl. Kryl's interest in the professionalism of both daughters went so far that he even offered to pay them 100 000 \$ to promise to stay single up to their 30th year. They both accepted the offer, but only Marie kept her promise.

Although Kryl was extremely busy with his concert activities and the associated travelling, he kept up his relations with Czecho-Americans. The violinist Vlasta Sedlovská toured with the "Women's Symphony Orchestra". The trombonist Jaroslav Cimera played in Kryl's band from 1916 and in 1921 played in the "Chicago Orchestra Choir" with Kryl conducting. Kryl's band included the virtuoso harpist Leo Zelenka-Lerando, Vojtěch Kuchynka's brother the double bass player František Kuchynka, the French horn player J. Frnkla, and the multi-instrumentalist (flute, banjo, violin and xylophone) Alois Bohumil Hrabák. There is a photograph documenting Kryl's friendship with the violin virtuoso Jaroslav Kocián. In the 1910-1911 season Kryl arranged for Kocián to tour America with 75 concerts, and it is possible that the two collaborated on the violinist's previous appearances in America.

In March 1911 Kryl was given a welcome at the Czech settlement of Tabor in South Dakota and his family celebrated its successes here. There was a similar occasion in November of the same year, when Kryl promised to return once his daughters had finished three years of study in Europe. His strong sense of

connection with his native land is evident in the fact that he and his band used to present for example a selection from Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, the love song from *The Kiss*, the overture to *Libuše*, Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*, the *Largo* from the 9th Symphony and *Humoresque*, Komzák's concert waltz *Nový život / New Life*, Friml's *Indian song*, and Fučík's *Marche Fantastique*. Over his career Kryl performed approximately 12 000 solos, and appeared in concert nearly 20 000 times, but he did not engage in classical composition. The exceptions are his pieces *King Carnival* and the *Josephine Waltz* published in 1909 by the Carl Fischer firm. Those who performed with him remembered him as a very modest man who conducted very well without a score or baton. At the beginning of the 20th century Kryl stopped cutting his hair and gradually created a very distinctive image for himself.

### JAROMÍR WEINBERGER

Whereas Kryl went to the USA voluntarily and at the start of his musical career, the composer **Jaromír Weinberger** (born 8th of January 1896 in Prague) fled there, abandoning a career that had been developing very promisingly in his homeland. Evidence of this early success includes the still popular opera *Švanda Dudák / Švanda the Piper* (premiered in the Prague National Theatre on the 27th of April 1927). Thanks to Max Brod's translation into German this opera reached German stages and was soon translated into around 20 other languages. Yet to consider Jaromír Weinberger a "one piece" composer would be unfair, and is a sad result of the fact that after his forced emigration he has been unjustly forgotten in his own country.

Like Kryl, Weinberger, the son of a Jewish businessman in Prague, was already performing as a child. But the difference is that while Kryl played with a rural band, Weinberger was considered a child prodigy. When he was only eleven his compositions were published, and a year earlier he had given a public concert. While still at modern high school in Prague's Vinohrady quarter he was a private student of composition with Jaroslav Křička, Rudolf Karel and František Franěk (the Grove lexicon claims V. Talich as well.) At the Prague conservatory he took a master composition course with Vítězslav Novák in the years 1910-1913 and in the years 1910-1915 he studied in Karel Hoffmeister's piano class. In 1916 he studied in the conservatory in Leipzig with Max Reger and this experience is reflected in Weinberg's fondness for counterpoint. In March 1954 Weinberger recalled the atmosphere of the beginning of the century in Central Europe: *Fifty years ago the whole world seemed to be a haven of security. America was almost a country from another planet, where here or there a family had its "rich uncle". Europe attained the*



Jaromír Weinberger

*summit of its cultural life. Music, painting, literature, every nation had its share and influenced the others.*

After the founding of Czechoslovakia he failed to find a permanent position and made a living as the author of incidental music for theatre plays. In the school year 1922-23 he worked as director of the Theory and Composition Department at Ithaca Conservatory in New York. On his return he still could not find a position in Prague that lived up to his expectations and so he welcomed an invitation to work as dramaturge with Oskar Nedbal at the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava. Later he was director of a music school in Eger in Hungary, but even after a second return to Prague he once again felt the lure of abroad: in 1932 he moved to Baden near Vienna, then to Paris, back to Prague, and then in fear of racial persecution back to France and in January 1939 to America.

Initially he lived in New York and from 1949 in St. Petersburg in Florida. After arriving in America Weinberger succumbed to depression. This is obvious from a text he wrote in *Musical America* of the 10th of February 1939: *I am a composer of the past. I know it, and I am not angry about myself. This time, the time in which we are living, has nothing to say to me and I do not ever expect it to say anything.*

Hope for a change in his fortunes came when the conductor John Barbiroli expressed an interest in his music. In March 1939 Barbiroli promised him that he would present his new work on the 12th of October in the Carnegie Hall. A year later Weinberger recalled this with evident delight: *For the happy mortals who live in the Western hemisphere there is nothing unusual about such an announcement. For a European, who has just come to this country, it opens up the prospect of a completely different world, a world of security and protection. (...) Publishers, conductors, musicians have been approaching me, proposing plans, making suggestion for a year in advance and not asking themselves, "what will the next day bring, what the next hour?". For a year and a day I didn't write*



even a note. Now, after a couple of weeks, I have got my strength and self-confidence back... (March 1940)

In 1948 he obtained American citizenship and his contact with Europe narrowed to the occasional summer visit. Weinberger had one of the main qualifications for making a successful career in the USA – he knew how to compose in line with fashionable demand. Unfortunately, however, his new pieces in different forms did not build on his pre-war success *Švanda the Piper*, for in America a distinctive compositional style was needed as well as sensitivity to fashion, and not just a skilful eclecticism in Reger's style and outstanding instrumentation. Furthermore, Weinberger's inner world had changed completely: a feeling of uprootedness from European conditions predominated over the muse of music. Weinberger achieved some small successes only in the first years of his American exile, and then his work became more and more introverted; a certain isolation in provincial St. Petersburg was also to blame here. A series of church pieces written in the period from the end of the war to his death show a composer gradually cutting himself off. Generally his late period was marked by the uneven quality of his new pieces, and by episodes of depression arising from a sense that his music was unappreciated. Homesickness is evident in his work. In 1941 he wrote the piece *Czech Rhapsody*, weaving into

it quotations from Czech folksongs. Or for example in his opus no. 61 *Préludes religieuses et profanes* written in the 1950s, the fourth of the eight parts is based on the St. Wenceslas Chorale. Shortly after he finished the whole cycle in 1954 he characterised it as, *hymns and prayers, dreams, dances and ballades – memories of childhood and youth, on what is left to me*.

Weinberger's human and so creative crisis was exacerbated by the fact that his pieces were rarely performed in the USA. He summarised the first fifteen years of his life in America in one sentence, *New beginning, illness, the blows of fate*. (March 1954). Weinberger spent the last days of his life playing the piano continuously. When his wife Hansi (known as Jane) left the house on the 8th of August of 1967, Weinberger took his own life with an overdose of barbiturates. There were many whose experiences in the USA echoed those of either Kryl or Weinberger and not a few that deserve if not a film then at least a book. Only a handful of them are well-known and only a handful are regarded by Czechs as a part of our own culture.

Author's note: quotations taken from the following sources:  
Jaromir Weinberger: When Parallels Meet – A Conflict of Composers, In: Musical America, 10. 2. 1939, p. 23.  
Jaromir Weinberger: Was mir blieb – Neubeginn in America, In: Musik der Zeit 8, ed. H. Lindlar, Bonn 1954, pp. 37–41.

FALL TOUR 2010

O  
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## ostravská banda

**Petr Kotík** Conductor  
**Hana Kotková** Violin

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**Thomas Buckner** Baritone  
**Gregory Purnhagen** Baritone  
**Canticum Ostrava**

(co-performing in Prague – La Fabrika)  
**Joseph Kubera** Piano

**Opava** Minorit Monastery  
23. 10. 2010 | 7 pm

Petr Bakla | Bernhard Lang  
Luciano Berio | Somei Satoh

**Ostrava** St. Wenceslas Church  
25. 10. 2010 | 6 pm

Petr Bakla | Luca Francesconi  
Paulina Zátubská | Somei Satoh  
*Svatováclavský hudební festival*

**Prague** St. Vavřinec Church  
3. 11. 2010 | 7:30 pm

Morton Feldman | Petr Bakla  
Jan Rychlík | Luciano Berio

**Prague** La Fabrika  
5. 11. 2010 | 9 pm

Paulina Zátubská | Petr Kotík  
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## EMANUELE GDALETA THE NEW HEAD OF THE CZECH MUSEUM OF MUSIC

**This year the Czech Museum of Music has a new director: cellist and former curator at the museum Emanuele Gadaleta, who was born in the Southern Italian town of Molfetta.**

*What brings someone from Southern Italy to the Czech Museum of Music? Can you remember your first encounter with Czech music?*

My first contact with this music was at elementary school. Back then we used to attend school on Saturdays too and our class teacher Andrea Magarelli devoted those Saturdays to music education. He would play different samples of music to us and tell us about them, and we would paint while we listened to the recordings. Of the music he used to play on those Saturdays it is Smetana's *Vltava* from the *My Country* cycle that I recall.

We also learned to play the recorder and our teacher told my music-loving father I had talent. It was a time when music was considered a good prospect as a profession, and there was starting to be an interest in music education specialists for elementary schools. The cello was chosen for me and our teacher recommended I go to the Scuola popolare di musica Antonin Dvorak, a music school for children in Molfetta. The school was and still is directed by the priest Don Salvatore Pappagallo, who teaches piano, organ and theory – a versatile and very innovative man, and now more than eighty years old.

*So Antonín Dvořák is so popular in Italy that even schools get named after him?*

People in Italy know and love Dvořák. I think he is a composer who is with us every day even if we sometimes don't realise it. When a child watches a Walt Disney film, Dvořák's music is there. For my "Dvorak" I used to go to the outstanding professor Antonin Malisiewicz, a Pole who played at the first desk in the symphony orchestra in Bari. Bari is the capital of Apulia, which especially in the 1970s and 80s was an important Italian musical and intellectual centre. Then came the financial crisis in the 1990s and private schools of the "Dvorak" type and the Bari Orchestra faced problems that affected Malisiewicz as well. At that time I decided to try conservatory entrance exams, and then for ten years I studied at the Niccolò Piccinni Conservatory in Bari with a professor named Vito Paternoster. In Italy conservatories are a combination of secondary school and higher school, not like in Bohemia where they are just secondary schools. The conservatory in Bari has a wonderful history – for many years its director was the composer of film music Nino Rota.

*What brought you to Prague?*

I came here for the first time at the very end of 1992 and beginning of 1993, when I was seventeen years old. A friend from Molfetta, Damiano Binnetti, who was then working in the Czech Republic as a conductor,





came home for Christmas to conduct Christmas concerts. Then he went back to Prague and I went with him. It was just after the split-up of Czechoslovakia; I remember the banknotes had stickers on them to show which were Slovak and which Czech. I still have some at home somewhere.

Prague was magical; it was quiet here, very few cars, and incredibly cold, not a hint of sunshine. I remember the steps down into the metro: the people on them were so quiet, they didn't talk on the trams. In Italy it's always noisy, but here only when people are celebrating something. People wore dark clothes, everything but the red metro seats was grey. Compared to Italy the metro was very clean and the whole transport system struck me as brilliant. I liked it here a lot and in the course of the nineties I was in Prague several times. I started to play with various music ensembles here, including the Prague Madrigalists, whose artistic director is Damiano Binneti. I also got to know the cellist Rudolf Lojda, a former senior lecturer at the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts, and I started to go for private lessons with him – he was already retired and no longer teaching at the Academy. I studied with him from 2001 to 2007, when alas he died after a serious illness. I must say that here in Prague he was something of a second father to me. He was an outstanding man, in many respects opened my eyes and showed me the path ahead. I knew I wasn't going to be a soloist; there can only be a few of those in the world. But when you are at conservatory everything is pushing you to try to be a soloist, and there is a lot of pressure. I look back on that with different eyes now. This approach seems pointless to me and I call it psychological terror – people have to go their own way. My professor was wonderful, he wiped out all my pointless complexes, and I am grateful to him for it.

*In Italy, apart from cello you studied “conservazione dei beni musicali”. What does this field involve?*

Basically it is museum studies focused on music heritage. The course starts with literature and philosophy, and then we had organology studies, discography, videography, music iconography, restoration, conservation, museum laws on export, conveyance etc... When I had to choose the theme of my dissertation I was already living and working in Prague and playing with the Prague Madrigalists. I consulted my discography professor and we agreed I would write about this ensemble. When I mentioned Miroslav Venhoda, my professor was in raptures, saying that Venhoda's performance of Monteverdi was outstanding. Even abroad Venhoda is considered a pioneer of authentic performance, but here there are not many sources and not much literature about his ensemble.

I chose the Madrigalists as a theme because it was so close to my interests and because I would have a lot of sources and materials to hand here. Unfortunately Milada Jirglová, the first soprano and archivist of the ensemble, lost all the relevant documents and concert programmes in the floods of 2002. So I approached the members of the Prague Madrigalists Jiří Bíba and Pavel Jurkovič. Mr. Bíba's memories of the ensemble's travels and where they played were particularly valuable. I collected programmes and photographs, and created a database. I scanned in all the documents and tried to put together a Venhoda biography. I also drew on Jaroslav Šeda's work on the Prague Madrigalists, published at the beginning of the 1980s. I mapped their performances, and so my dissertation is rather like the first stage of a bigger project (it presents all the information I could find from the formation of the group in 1956 up to today), and it would be good to continue with more depth analysis. Of course not

all the programmes from the foreign tours exist, one reason for this being that under communism the group was officially let out just to do two concerts, but in fact they played ten or twenty unofficially. Some of the information deserves analysis and if I have time I should like to continue, or rework the dissertation a little. But it is a good source for people who are researching early music and studying how the mode of performance changed.

### *So your path to the Museum led via the Prague Madrigalists?*

Yes. Jiří Bába, the former singer of the Prague Madrigalists I mentioned, worked in the Czech Museum of Music as the curator of the ARDO Fund, which is the Czech Museum of Music's fund of copies of historical musical instruments from which the Madrigalists used to borrow instruments. Through him I got to know this institution, and when in 2007 they advertised the post of curator of the musical instruments department, I applied and got the job. For the first six months I was curator, and then my position changed and I became head of this department. When I was working in the department all the instruments went through my hands, we organised a depositary and made an inventory after the big move following the floods, photographing and documenting what we could. Today I would say that about twenty percent has been completed, so there is still a lot of work to be done. This spring I was offered the post of director of the Czech Museum of Music. I hesitated for a while, but in the end I accepted. But at the same time I remain head of the department of musical instruments, and so I am carrying on with the work there.

### *What do you think about the way the Museum functions in society? Does the current form of the Czech Museum of Music correspond to your ideas?*

I think it's a matter of finding a balance between the different fields of the museum's activity. These are to create collections and look after them, to make them accessible to the public, and at the same time to do research. I think our museum is working well, and for example in my view the collection of musical instruments is better looked after than the one in Rome. When I first saw the museum and looked at the permanent exhibition here, which had just been opened, I liked the way it was all so new and shiny, but as far as public presentation is concerned, today I would like to have some interactive elements in the exhibition. For example to expand the permanent exhibition into another hall where visitors would have a chance to handle the instruments (replicas) and see them disassembled, and I would like to enliven the

exhibition with touch panels. I would also like to gear the museum more towards children. The museum needs to attract young people, because if they get into the habit of coming here they will bring their families.

### *Do you have a recipe for achieving that?*

That's a difficult question. Currently we already have programmes for children and schools in operation, but it would be good to have more space for these activities and organise them more systematically. Finding someone to think up such programmes is cheaper and more effective than changing the permanent exhibition.

We have beautiful and remarkable things in the exhibition, but some are rather more interesting for specialists and professionals than the general public. If we boast of having a violin by Guarneri del Gesù, that probably won't attract too many people. I think we can tempt the lay public more with an interesting theme than a specific instrument. If I tell the public that we have a Stradivarius on show – people come and say, "Oh it's a violin." We have the autograph of Dvořák's *New World Symphony* and so people glance at it and say, "Oh, so that was how his writing looked..." But if I can actually do something around these exhibits, then immediately there can be more engagement. It needs an accompanying programme, thematic days: one day when someone plays on old harpsichords, another when they play on copies of clavichords. For example in the collection we have experimental stringed instruments made by Jaroslav Machát, or a quarter-tone piano, and I would like to hold a concert where people could experience how these things sound.

### *And that isn't happening yet?*

No, at least not on a regular basis, and alongside the exhibition I would like a programme in which four times a day someone would play instruments and explain the background, perhaps in our beautiful assembly hall. Then people would go on to look at the exhibition. In my view attracting them just with the exhibition itself isn't possible. Why do people come to the "Night of the Museums" programmes that have been very successful in recent years not only in our museum? It's because of the programme, because of the atmosphere. Short-term specialised exhibitions also attract a lot of people.

### *What is currently the state of the less public part of the museum, i.e. acquisitions and preservation?*

We have now obtained new premises that are going to house the central depositary of the Czech Museum of Music. After all the renovation and technical work we shall start moving the musical instruments and

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### „Barokní výzvy“

**28.9. 16.00 hod.** Letohrádek Hvězda, Hodovní síň, Praha 6

Chorea Historica (tanec) – Musica bellissima (hudba)

Součástí koncertu je výstava barevných linorytů Pavla Piekara.

Vstupné: 150,- senioři 80,-

### „Cembalo zblízka“

**2.10. 16.30 hod.** Písecká brána, K Brusce 5, Praha 6

Slovem a hudbou o nástroji a jeho době, koncert je součástí programu Dny seniorů

Eva Tornová

Vstupné: zdarma

### „Varhany versus cembalo“

**3.10. 15.00 hod.** Bazilika sv. Markéty v břevnovském klášteře, Markétská 1, Praha 6

Eva Tornová (cembalo), Pavel Černý (varhany)

Vstupné: dobrovolné

### „Večerní setkání se souborem Musica bellissima“

**24.10. 18.00 hod.** Dům sv. Karla Boromejského, K Šancím 50, Praha 6 Řepy

Světová premiéra skladby Jiřího Pazoura

Lucie Pelišková (flauto traverso), Eva Tornová (cembalo), Miloslav Študent (arciloutna)

Vstupné: 100,- senioři 60,-

### „Historie a současnost“

**7.11. 19.00 hod.** Tereziánský sál, Břevnovský klášter, Markétská 1, Praha 6

René Kubelík ( housle), Eva Tornová (cembalo)

Vstupné: 150,- senioři 80,-



Městská  
část  
Praha

6

HUDEBNÍ  
ROZHLEDY

*Musica  
bellissima*

RTC czech music quarterly

[www.musicabellissima.cz](http://www.musicabellissima.cz)

Tento projekt byl podpořen Městskou částí Praha 6

note archives there, and also the depositaries of the Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana Museums [these museums are component parts of the CMM] because their buildings have insufficient storage space. At the same time we are going to expand the museum's permanent exhibition; we are not just a museum of musical instruments, we are the Czech Museum of Music, yet all visitors see is just an exhibition of musical instruments. Just for the moment we are trying at least partially to fill the gap with temporary exhibitions of manuscripts and historical sheet music, pictures and photographs.

*Investment in musical instruments can be financially very lucrative. Is cultivating a collection of musical instruments in your view of financial benefit for the state too?*

Obviously if a masterpiece by Stradivarius is purchased, its value is certainly going to rise and it's a good investment. On the other hand there are instruments that have only historic value, but which the state should invest in to save and document its culture. In my view it is the state's duty to document its producers, its culture. We may be in the European Union, but the sense of "made in...", that identity, is important. There are instruments that document the fact that a certain Czech violin-maker worked in different places, and provide evidence of how a certain school continued, and how the technology of production was improved. Private collectors who are primarily concerned with financial investment, focus for example only on violins, but an institution like a museum of music ought to collect all musical instruments.

*Apart from a department of musical instruments, the CMM has a big department of music history, while the Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana are special departments, and there is a centre for the documentation of popular music. And the staff of these departments also does research. Does scholarship and research play an important role, or is it only a peripheral activity?*

It plays an important role, and I want to support and encourage this component of the museum's work and continue with what is already well-established activity. We publish an academic journal, *Musicalia*, in which we present the results of our work. Plenty of work is done in the museum, but sometimes this is work that is not visible. Work in the depositary, getting a metre of music material into some order, or documenting photographs, and whole estates of figures in Czech music culture – all this is work that results only in a table or catalogue, but it is still completely essential work. Because of such work people sometimes have little time for their research and publishing. And of course we have to ensure that research has visible

results and people have information about what theme is being researched and who is doing the research. In this respect I want to push a little harder. I generally want greater openness and a better flow of information between staff right across the museum – I mean curators, researchers, restorers and management.

*Is the Czech Museum of Music linked up on the international level? Do you have active contacts with similar institutions abroad?*

Naturally we have international contacts and maintain them. Two years ago when the world violin makers exhibition was held in Cremona (Cremona 1730–1750: Nell'olimpio della liuteria – The Violin Makers of Cremona), a violin from our collection was among the exhibits. This was a terrific international advertisement for our museum because the events attracted collectors and the best violin makers from all over the world. The exhibit was a precious violin, the last but one violin made by Guarneri del Gesù, in 1744. In 2011 there is going to be an international violin making conference in Prague, held partly in our museum, organised by the Entente Internationale des Maitres Luthiers et Archetiers d'Art. In recent years we have not only loaned individual instruments to exhibitions abroad but also sent out whole travelling exhibitions – devoted to Jaroslav Ježek and Bohuslav Martinů – which toured Europe and North America. The latest result of our collaboration with international collectors and institutions is an exhibition devoted to the phenomenon of the Beatles and its reflection in Czech culture. This includes many items from private collectors – Beatlemaniacs. We don't have things of this kind in the museum collections, but I hope we shall be acquiring some in future because we are beginning to create a collection in the Centre for the Documentation of Popular Music.

*Do you have collection of your own at home?*

I'm not a collector personally, I have never collected anything. In the museum yes, but I don't do it at home, and wouldn't want to. Though perhaps I might like to have a small workshop and restore old cars.

*Emanuele Gadaleta was born in 1975 in Molfetta (Apulia, Southern Italy). He attended normal lyceum and studied cello at the conservatory in Bari, as well as museum studies at the history of art and culture faculty at the University of Lecce. Since 2001 he has lived and worked in Prague. He is a member of the Chamber Orchestra of the Dvořák Region and the ensembles Archioni plus and the Prague Madrigalists. Since the 1st of July 2010 he has been Director of the Czech Museum of Music in Prague, one of the most important Czech music institutions. The Czech Museum of Music, which is a part of the National Museum of the Czech Republic, was featured in an article in Czech Music Quarterly 2/2006.*



# JAZZ 25

czech music | history  
Vladimír Kouřil

## CZECH JAZZ OF THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES

The anti-Soviet attitude of the population between August 1968 and the protest demonstrations on the anniversary of the invasion in 1969 was suppressed by the rise of a new hard-line group to the communist leadership. The new masters decided to use brutal repressive measures to ensure the loyalty of a people that had lost their hope of a life of greater freedom. Anyone who openly expressed the view that the invasion of the Warsaw pact forces amounted to occupation lost his or her job, and active resistance resulted in imprisonment.

The new government called this "the normalisation of conditions". More than a hundred thousand people eventually emigrated. The new situation had an impact on the cultural sphere as well: bans, censorship, the repression of non-state cultural activities, the liquidation of cultural periodicals including music magazines followed. All under the excuse of suppressing subversive anti-regime activity. The jazz scene, even though its only "political" sin was to play "American" jazz, was not spared.



# THE BEGINNING OF THE

# SEVENTIES

## The Beginning of the Seventies

Despite the partial relaxation of control of cultural life, the sixties had seen the emigration of many jazzmen (we described several examples of such departures at the end of the article on Czech jazz of the fifties and sixties in the last issue of this magazine). From 1970, any kind of travel abroad for musicians became much more difficult, subject to strict control and selection by the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of the Interior. Up to 1976 no one obtained permission to leave to study at the musical Berklee College in Boston. The first to do so was the keyboards player and founder of the Jazz Q ensemble **Martin Kratochvíl**. During the seventies and eighties only a handful of musicians were able to follow in his footsteps – the pianists **Emil Viklický** and **Milan Svoboda**, and close to the end of the “normalisation” period, the trumpet player **Michal Gera**. Even to these lucky ones, the state provided no material assistance beyond the bare official permission to cross the Western border.

Not just the development of Czech jazz, but also the echo of events in world jazz, was best characterised by the parting of the ways between the founders of the **Jazz Q** ensemble **Martin Kratochvíl** (1946) and the saxophonist and flautist **Jiří Stivín** (1942) at the beginning of the seventies. While Jiří Stivín left the group to devote himself to acoustic expressive music orientated to free jazz, and founded the trio **Stivín & Co. Jazz System** (still existing today with changes of personnel), Martin Kratochvíl with **Jazz Q** decided to go in the direction of electric jazz and blues. Up to the mid-eighties a series of striking talents passed through this band, including the still very active guitarists **Luboš Andršt** and **Zdeněk Fišer**.

The emigration of the bandmaster, composer, alto-saxophonist and clarinetist **Karel Krautgartner** (1922–1982) to Vienna in August 1968 (he soon became principal conductor of the ÖRF big band) also had its impact on the jazz orchestra of Czechoslovak Radio (JOČR). Direction of the orchestra was taken over by the pianist **Kamil Hála** (1931), who had already been working with it for some time before. The repertoire spectrum of both JOČR conductors was broad – from pieces from the workshops of Hefti and Basie through Gil Evans to recordings by members of the orchestra and composers of the Czech Third Stream. In the new decade Kamil Hála also took up the developing fusion of jazz and rock: as early as 1971 the LP *Nová syntéza / New Synthesis* was released, containing Hála’s arrangements of original pieces by the extraordinary guitarist Radim Hladík written for the JOČR and by the instrumentally most accomplished Czech rock band of the sixties, **Blue Effect**.

The politically unfavourable situation crippled the rock scene as well. Its amateur sphere especially, which unhesitatingly expressed criticism of the demoralisation of life in Czechoslovakia, was subject to serious persecution. The state authorities decided to make all public performance subject to official consent, and thus swept away a number of important groups. Many rock and jazz musicians reacted by retreating into the accompanying bands of pop singers. Some, however, founded bands identifying with jazzrock. This had an interesting effect: a young section of the rock public started to get interested in electric jazz. At the start of the seventies a rejuvenated jazz public therefore began to grow and it was only a matter of time before more young musicians began to make headway in the spectrum of Czech jazz.



## BIG THE PRAGUE BAND

*Pierre Favre and Jiří Stivín*

### The Prague Big Band Generation

We can talk of a distinctive jazz generation of the first half of the seventies mainly in connection with various forms of jazzrock. This development was accepted only by a small number of the older musicians, however, and hardly at all by the protagonists of late swing music. A certain temporary alienation between generations set in, and was only to be bridged by one important event. In 1974 **Milan Svoboda** (1951) together with students of the conservatory and friends from the young Prague jazz and jazzrock bands, formed the **Pražský amatérský jazzový orchestr / Prague Amateur Jazz Orchestra (PAJO)**. It gave its first public performance on Svoboda's twenty-third birthday that same year. The orchestra worked up a repertoire of standards in big band

arrangements together with some successful pieces contributed by members themselves. The **PAJO** style was modern swing partly influenced by bigband jazzrock (inspiration ranging from Mel Lewis and Thad Jones to Gil Evans or Don Ellis). The core of the orchestra consisted of members of younger generation bands, the hardbop **Volf Jazztet**, the purely jazzrock **Impuls**, **Energit**, and **Mahagon** and many guests from other bands. But also a few invited experienced older soloists, like Jiří Stivín, the trombonists **Bohuslav Volf** (1940) and **Svatopluk Košvanec** (1936), and the trumpet player **Zdeněk Zahálka** (1932). The orchestra became very popular with the young public and was also well-received by the critics. After his rocket start on the Czech jazz scene the bandmaster Milan Svoboda decided to change the name to the more catchy **Prague**

**Big Band (PBB).** This orchestra, which appears on an occasional basis to this day, has undergone a series of changes in musicians and size (it still makes new recordings). Over the years a whole series of young musicians have played in it, and so today we can speak of its members in the years 1974–1983, and these musicians' own bands, as the Prague Big Band generation. At the same time the orchestra became a bridge for collaboration with the middle generation of jazzmen, who guest performed with it at various times. The smaller group known as **Pražský výběr / Prague Selection** led by the pianist Michael Kocáb was formed from members of the PBB. This group later metamorphised from a jazzrock band into the most popular group of the Czech new wave.

#### The Style Spectrum of the New Generation

The wave of interest in jazz music among the young generation, which was triggered by the rise of the jazzrock synthesis, brought a number of interesting groups to the scene, even though these mostly copied the major models from the American scene. The group **Mudrci / Wise Men** from Liberec played music reminiscent of the trumpet player Bill Chase's band.

**Martina Kratochvíl's** postfreejazz **Jazz Q** with guitarist Luboš Andršt initially owed much to the Mahavishnu Orchestra, but later entirely reoriented itself to electric rhythm&blues. Also to emerge, however, was the highly original (in terms of performance, arrangement and composition) **Combo FH** led by pianist **Daniel Fikejz**, who is today a well-known composer of theatre and film music, and whose music seethed with grotesque ideas and peculiarities of arrangement. Performance of the earliest forms of swing popular music was the *raison d'être* for the **Originální pražský synkopický orchestr / Original Prague Syncopation Orchestra** led by the trumpet player, composer and also performer of early European music, **Pavel Klikar**. Yet the bands of the protagonists of the previous decade continued to exist alongside this new wave and their line-ups started to overlap and bridge the generations.



*Milan Svoboda*

This was particularly the case of the **SHQ** led by vibraphone player Karel Velebný, whose groups were always a workshop for the most talented jazzmen of coming generations. The double bass player **Luděk Hulan** and his **Jazz Sanatorium** continued to play an important role in promoting jazz. The spectrum of Czech jazz was completed by a constellation of rejuvenated dixieland bands, often successful at European festivals (**Jazz Fiedlers**, **Classic Jazz Memorial**, **Classic Jazz Collegium**, **Metropolitan Jazz Band**, and of course the well established **Traditional Jazz Studio** led by clarinetist **Pavel Smetáček**). Among those to enjoy special popularity was the blind pianist and singer **Jaroslav Kos**. The tradition



# CZECH TOUCHES THE WORLD SCENE

of quartets in the Benny Goodman tradition was kept up by the **Swing Quartet** led by clarinetist **Ferdinand Havlík**. The trumpet player **Laco Déczi's Celula** band continued to play vitally animal hard bop. After Déczi emigrated in 1985 he worked in New York with the musicians there. In Moravia the band led by the pianist Emil Viklický, who had moved away from Prague, gave birth to saxophonist Milan Opravil's **Free Jazz Trio Olomouc** – a unique local jazz formation that up to the nineties concentrated purely on free jazz. The saxophonist **Viktor Kotrubenko** experimented with sound generators. While **Eva Olmerová** continued to be the queen of Czech blues singing, **Vlasta Průchová** (the mother of Jan Hammer junior) still reigned in Bebop vocals, and the singer **Eva Svobodová**, in modern jazz interpretation, Mirka Křivánková and also **Jana Koubková** tried out more experimental forms of vocal improvisation. The big orchestras of Karel Vlach and Gustav Brom continued to play, progressively joined by young jazzmen, as did the radio jazz orchestra JOČR, its core provided by the complete Celula line-up.

## Czech Touches on the World Scene

The successes of Czech jazz include the contributions of a number of exiles to the American scene. The main examples here were the double bass player **Miroslav Vitouš** (he played briefly with Miles Davis, and then in the Mahavishnu Orchestra, and with Chick Corea and others) and **Jiří "George" Mráz** (who played with Gillespie, Peterson, Fitzgerald, Getz, the New York Jazz Quartet and many others). The keyboards player **Jan Hammer** was a co-founder of the Weather Report. The concert for trumpet and orchestra *Sidonie* by the Czech "third stream" composer and jazz arranger **Alexej Fried** was recorded on the album *Soaring* by Don Ellis (1973, re-released in 2008). Saxophonist and flautist Jiří Stivín's **System Tandem** with guitarist Rudolf Dašek proved very successful in concerts throughout Europe. This phase in their career is brilliantly represented by the live festival recording *Koncert v Lublani – Concert in Ljubljana* (1974, re-release 1996). In the mid-seventies Rudolf Dašek started a long-term professional partnership

*Super Quartet Praha (Emil Viklický, František Uhlíř, Josef Vejvoda, Jiří Stivín)*





domestic stars Jiří Stivín, Rudolf Dašek and Antonín Matzner but also leading European avantgardists such as Trevor Watts, Willem Breuker, Albert Mangelsdorf and Tony Oxley.

Despite the revival of interest in jazz, which had had its roots in the sixties, the seventies were marked by the intensifying disfavour of the authorities. This had mainly ideological, not primarily musicological roots. The decade saw the suppression of the National Amateur Jazz Festival in Mladá Boleslav, while the international Czechoslovak Amateur Jazz Festival founded in Přerov was constantly forced to switch venues. The International Prague Jazz Festival was no longer a regular fixture, and at the end of the decade the Prague Jazz Days were banned.

### The Prague Jazz Days

Pražské jazzové dny / Prague Jazz Days (PJD) was a festival founded by the Jazz Section of the Union of Musicians. As time went by the originally purely jazz festival came to include ventures into contemporary classical music, experimental music and music that was banned on the official scene for ideological reasons, for example contemporary avant-garde directions in rock. The first PJD took place over one weekend in March 1974. Almost every PJD was striking for an audacious shift in programming. This led to the growth of interest in membership of the Jazz Section but also increasing watchfulness and suspicion on the part of the state authorities, not only the cultural bodies. In the first years of the festival the basis of the programme was a showcasing of domestic groups, which included both the top Czech jazz musicians and talented younger generation bands. The Jazzrock workshop at the 2nd PJD in 1975 was an important event: the concert took place in the biggest hall in Prague, the historic Lucerna, with an audience of almost 3,000. The aim was to present the most up-to-date stream in Czech jazz – the synthesis of jazz and rock. Official circles artificially spread rumours that that the hall would be demolished by a crazy subversive public. In fact the concert was held without problems, and with the huge enthusiasm of the public. The jazzrock workshop became a legend and part of the next two years of the PJD.

with the guitarist Toto Blanke, a member of the band Electric Circus. Dašek also invited Blanke to take part on his album *Dialogy / Dialogues* (1971) alongside Tony Scott and Günter Sommer. Zbigniew Wegehaupt and Andrew Cyrille performed with him in the quartet for the album *Interlanding* (1984). And Tony Scott recorded the LP *Rozhovory / Conversations* (1981) in Prague in a trio with Dašek and Stivín.

The domestic scene tried to make up for the lack of opportunities to collaborate abroad by ever more frequently inviting Western European and American soloists to Czechoslovakia. These artists usually left traces of their visits here in the form of gramophone or radio recordings. The **Traditional Jazz Studio** regularly played with its guests (Albert Nicholas, Benny Waters, Tony Scott, Giorgio Gaslini). From the seventies the orchestra run by **Václav Zahradník** recorded from time to time with an international line-up. One of his bigband formations had the American trombonist Slide Hampton as joint band-master. Zahradník's albums were the spine of the Interjazz series published by Supraphon. In addition to leading soloists from Eastern Europe, musicians like John Surman, Barre Phillips, Stu Martin, Johnny Griffin, Ronnie Ross, and Billy Brooks appeared with his orchestra. The series also included one of the few domestically produced progressive albums, *Starý dobrý cirkus / The Good Old Circus* (Supraphon, 1979), which features not only the





*Jana Koubková*



*Rudolf Dašek*

The quality of the concerts was ensured above all by the Prague groups **Jazz Q** led by Martin Kratochvíl and with the English singer **Joan Duggan**, **Energit** led by the guitarist Zdeněk Andršt, the pianist Pavel Kostiuk's **Impuls** and the Brno group **Ch.A.S.A** with the outstanding singer and vocal improviser **Mirka Křivánková**. The 3rd PJD jazz days broke the established timing rule and took place in the Autumn of 1975. The lack of a regular schedule paradoxically meant that nine "annual festivals" took place in a mere six years, 1974–1979. The saxophonist **Milan Opravil's** **Free Jazz Trio** from Olomouc became very popular with the young generation for its orientation to free improvisation. The 4th PJD in March 1976 saw a further adventurous expansion of the concept of the event, with the festival presenting an all-Prague line-up not only of jazz but of rock bands. This shift once again increased the interest of the youngest generation of the public in the PJD, but attracted yet more suspicious and hostile attention from the authorities, who did not have amateur music-making entirely under control. The 4th PJD lasted a full eight days. The seven-day 5th PJD in April 1977 brought further new features. The musical world opened up to the avant-garde on a wide front. The festival included a rock opera by the group **Extempore** combined with dance and mime. The concert programme was accompanied by lectures on the music of Isao Tomita, Varèse, Zappa. There was an experimental dance studio, and screenings of short avant-garde arts films. The film *Easy Rider* was screened in Czechoslovakia for the first time. This trend of openness to the non-commercial and unconventional world of art continues in the following years of the festival. The rock avant-garde from the ranks of amateurs achieved equal space with jazz, and this led to a wave of criticism from the orthodox side of the jazz community.

At the 1978 spring 6th PJD the Jazz Section reached the limits of its organisational capacities. The eleven-day festival had to be run by volunteer organisers, students and people in normal employment. The accompanying lectures continued: Karel Srp Jr., today an important art historian and curator, and the philosopher Petr Rezek,



# PRAGUE JAZZ

*From the Prague Jazz Days (4x)*

lectured on minimalism, land art, body art, and conceptualism. Extracts from Glass's opera *Einstein on the Beach* were played for the first time. The punk movement was presented and analysed with all seriousness. And of course, the jazz scene was on show in the whole range of its styles. Guests from abroad brought premieres to the festival – the forerunner of world music Ossian from Poland, the Kaszakö Jazz Quartet from Hungary. Contemporary classical music was presented in the midst of the jazz concerts with performances of works by Michael Nyman, Cornelius Cardew or Václav Kučera. The autumn 7th PJD was more modest in scale; over four days there were seven concerts and two lectures devoted to contemporary classical music and John Cage. The five-day 8th PJD in May 1979 confirmed the trend to an open dramaturgy: in addition to

top jazz there were new young musicians with interesting ideas from folk through blues all the way to rock experiments on the same stage. The conceptual drummer and percussionist Pierre Favre came from Switzerland, the Rock in Opposition movement presented the group Art Bears and the sound improvisation duo Fred Frith & Chris Cutler. They were invited without the knowledge of the state monopoly institution for the import and export of musicians (Pragokoncert). The amateur groups were for the first time called the “alternative music scene”. By “alternative” was meant mainly music different from what was played on the official scene, prohibited music, “ideologically harmful” and experimental music.

At the three-day 9th PJD the manifesto *Tasks of Czech Alternative Music* was born, and urged





PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER



openly a music scene that was by now subject to full-scale state disfavour and discrimination to become materially completely independent of conditions determined by the state, to engage in samizdat publishing projects and to reject any intellectual compromise. The fears of those who thought the text too open and likely to cause problems for the future concert activity of the Jazz Section soon turned out to be justified. For the jubilee 10th PJD the Prague cultural inspectorate set such strict censorship conditions that in practice they would have meant the negation of the whole dramaturgy of the event. The conditions included a list of forbidden groups and musicians, required the advance submission of all texts including commentary, and a prohibition on performances by foreign bands. A cloud of bans and penalties gathered over the scene. Under these circumstances the Jazz Section was forced to cancel the festival. An attempt at an 11th PJD resulted in just two illegal concerts on the outskirts of Prague with rock avant-gardists from England and Sweden. The PJD had a major influence on the musical life and opinions of the young generation in the seventies. Its non-existence in the eighties was a mark of the suppression of the Jazz scene, but strengthened the dynamics of the unofficial and underground rock scene.

### The Story of the Jazz Section

There had been attempts to found an organisation concerned with jazz in Czechoslovakia as early as under the

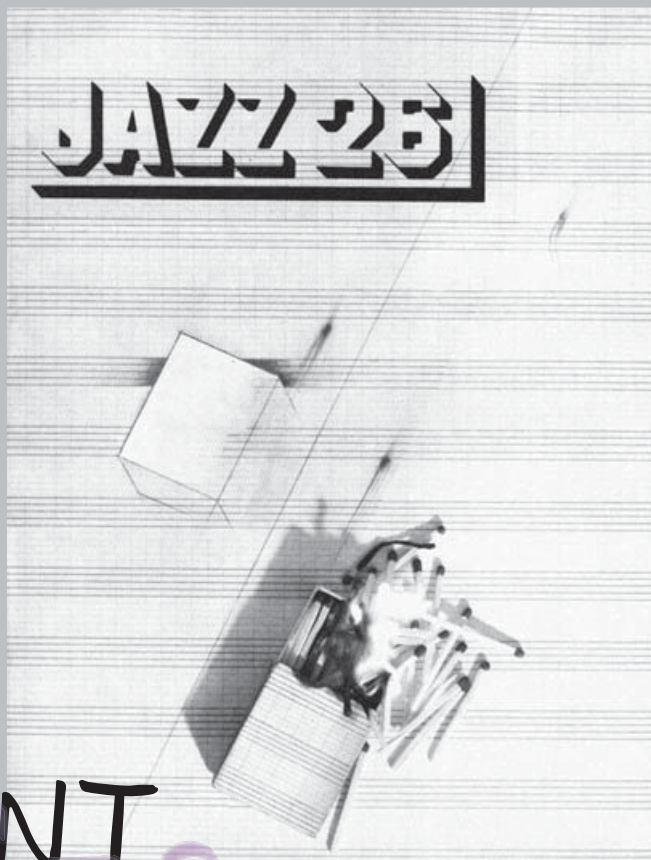
German Occupation. An full-scale plan for a jazz organisation was drawn up in 1969. The conditions of the Soviet invasion, however, meant postponement of state blessing for the idea and so the organisation did not get off the ground until October 1971. Among the founder members were leading jazz publicists including the future member of the committee and president of the International Jazz Federation Lubomír Dorůžka, and a number of active musicians like Karel Velebný and Luděk Hulan. The Jazz Section of the Union of Musicians of the ČSR, as the official title read, defined as its main task that of bringing together and reinforcing the jazz community, providing members with inaccessible information about events in world jazz, reflecting domestic jazz life, founding a periodical and organising concerts. First the journal JAZZ was founded with the subtitle Bulletin of the Jazz Section. Then members of the Jazz Section started to organise local clubs and small local jazz festivals, and as the preceding section describes, organising the Prague Jazz Days. The Bulletin JAZZ mirrored the state of the domestic scene, its orientation to traditional and modern jazz, and gave some marginal information on the more avant-garde forms of jazz, free jazz, and electric jazzrock fusion. Miles Davis was still regarded by many as a heretic to jazz orthodoxy.

Towards the end of the seventies JS publication activity became more ambitious. At this time publishing activity in Czechoslovakia was under the direct control of the state, and all printed material could be produced only for registered members. Even with this limitation, however, the State Security organs decided that the content of the printed texts was ideologically harmful. The reason was authors that were controversial for official culture and a non-Marxist perspective on art. The Jazz Section was also criticised for not keeping to its assigned mission – jazz music – but also publishing titles about other kinds of music, art and philosophy. Among its most popular publishing ventures was the book series JAZZPETIT, which included titles on the *Music of the Terezín Ghetto*, the *Music of Natural Peoples*, the three-volume reference book *Rock 2000, Czech Rock&Roll 1956–69*, and *Rock Poetry*). The unexpected interest of the younger

public inspired people who had survived the concentration camps to offer their memories. These dark stories seemed to evoke the worst of the fifties, still present here in living people and in the behaviour of the totalitarian regime. Apart from the book series, the Jazz Section published catalogues for exhibitions, concert posters, and the informative discophile Diskorama. The content and graphic design of the bulletin JAZZ developed in parallel with the dramaturgy of the PJD, and in 1977 the title of the journal, on the model of Down Beat, was changed to **JAZZ – A Bulletin of Contemporary Music**.

In the years 1984–1986 the Jazz Section was fighting for its existence. Its activities were permanently under the surveillance of the State Security. In the spring of the Orwellian year 1984 its publications were confiscated and banned from public bookshops and in October the whole organisation was effectively rendered illegal. The state refused to recognise the legitimacy derived from the Jazz Section's membership in the International Jazz Federation. Interrogations and house searches multiplied and on the 2nd of September 1986 the committee of the Jazz Section was arrested on charges of “conducting unauthorised business activities”. The Jazz Section with its six thousand members and four thousand registered subscribers ceased to exist in its original form. In March 1987 its committee members were sentenced to prison terms of from four to sixteen months (the graphic designer of all printed material Joska Skalník, Čestmír Huňát, today the president of the group UNIJAZZ, the closest thing to a successor of the Jazz Section, Tomáš Křivánek, today a promoter of Celtic culture, Vladimír Kouřil, then the committee secretary, Karel Srp, the chairman of the Jazz Section in the most difficult period). The trial was the subject of unusual international attention, and the President of the International Jazz Federation Charles Alexander came from London to a court hearing. This solidarity created pressure, forcing the authorities to reduce the originally proposed very heavy penalties. It was not until under the presidency of Václav Havel in 1991 that the verdicts were overturned as illegal and the victims were rehabilitated. The Jazz Section advanced





# THE TURBULENT

the boundaries of free expression and the free dissemination of information, and not just in music. The activities of the Jazz Section set jazz in the context of contemporary free art, which in the conditions of a totalitarian state was an unforgivable offence.

## **The Turbulent Eighties**

The last decade before the Velvet Revolution saw the subsidence of the generational jazzrock wave, perplexity at the increasing bans on local jazz festivals, the prohibition of the multi-genre Prague Jazz Days and the criminalisation of the Jazz Section. The successful Prague jazz club Parnas on the Vltava Embankment was closed. In May 1983 the authorities permitted the founding of the Czech Jazz Society, which was supposed to be more clearly focused on jazz than the Jazz Section. The real reason behind the move was that the state wanted to have a new organisation to hand after the planned liquidation of the Jazz Section. In the international cultural

world the troubles of the Jazz Section were closely watched, including by Amnesty International, and the representatives of the state at international forums kept having to explain that the liquidation of the Jazz Section was unconnected with any ideological attack on jazz. Elected to the head of the new organisation was the important jazz publicist Antonín Matzner, the initiator of a number of avant-garde jazz albums and later for many years dramaturge of the Prague Spring Festival. In 1985 after twenty four years the Gramophone Club, which with its jazz series had offered the domestic public at least a few LPs by world jazzmen each year, terminated its activities.

In Prague to perform and recording with the radio jazzband, the American trombonist Sonny Costanzo invited the trumpet player **Laco Déczi** to the USA for a month's engagement with his own big band. The former drummer of the famous Junior Trio of the sixties, **Alan Vitouš**, was making a new name

for himself. His former co-musicians Jan Hammer and Miroslav Vitouš had already long been part of the elite of world jazz. The young saxophonist **František Kop** appeared in more than one major line up – in the Prague Big Band, in trumpet player Michal Gera's Gera Band, in pianist Emil Viklický's quartet or in the Blues Band led by guitarist Luboš Andršt and singer Peter Lipa. Unfortunately, tragic deaths are also a part of jazz life. One such was the death of the important soloist in many leading bands on the Czech scene, the saxophonist and jazz teacher **Rudolf Ticháček** (1943–82). In 1984 the state authorities sacked the staff of the monthly *Melodie* because of the liberal opinions of the young writers. Since the sixties this had been the only official magazine dealing more seriously with popular music and jazz. Lubomír Dorůžka had been one of its most prominent editors. *Melodie* was for three years deadened in terms of content by the new incompetent staff installed by the regime.

While the seventies were characterised by the wave of jazzrock groups and soloists who were seeking their place among the musicians of the older generations, including those who developed modern jazz from its beginning here, the generational history of the eighties was written above all by the members of two bands. The first was **E.S.P.**, named after the piece by Miles Davis. It was formed in 1981 and its members were the saxophonist **Štěpán Markovič**, the trumpet player **Julius Baroš**, the pianist **Jan Buchar**, the guitarist Jaroslav Šindler, the bassist **Aleš Doucha** and the drummer **Michal Hejna**. All were also members of the **Veleband** orchestra led by jazzman and teacher Karel Velebný, who created it from his pupils. E.S.P. identified with modern mainstream and the repertoire of its leading representatives. The appearance of the talented saxophonist František Kop on the scene heralded the birth of the second generationally important group of the eighties. It was called after John Coltrane's piece **Naïma**. In the course of time the band appeared in trio, quartet and quintet variants. Its core had been the **Zelené kvarteto / Green Quartet** of soldiers on national service made up of **František Kop**, the pianist **Zdeněk Zdeněk**, the drummer **Martin Šulc** and the double bass player **Jaromír Honzák**. At various times the violinist **Martin Zbrožek** used to play with this band. Right of the start of its life in 1985 *Naïma*

won the highest award at the international jazz festival in Karlovy Vary. The prize was supposed to be a competition appearance at the festival in Leverkusen in Germany, but the band was unable to take this up because the Czech authorities were unwilling to give permission for his trip to the „capitalist abroad“. At the same time Jaromír Honzák formed his own first quartet **Květy času / Flowers of Time**. *Naïma* was still appearing in a variable line-up in the nineties. It played mainly its own music influenced by modern jazz and fusion.

In the spring of 1985 the architect of the Prague Big Band Milan Svoboda made a reality of chairman of the Polish Jazz Association Tomasz Tluckiewicz's notion of putting together a joint big band. This appeared under the title, **The Polish-Czech Big Band**. The thirteen-member band included the Czech soloists trombonist Svatopluk Košvanec, trumpet player Michal Gera, the pianist Karel Růžicka and the altosaxophonist and flautist Jiří Stivín. The Polish soloists were the guitarist Jarosław Śmietana, and saxophonists Zbigniew Namysłowski, Tomasz Szukański and Jan Ptaszyn Wroblewski. The band performed at several festivals over the next two years, and made a studio recording that came out in the *Interjazz* series, although today there is as yet no new edition in CD format. Operating difficulties eventually led to the dissolution of the orchestra. In the same year the future prominent drummer on the Czech scene Pavel „Bady“ Zbořil finished his conservatory studies in Plzeň.

In the autumn of 1986, at a time when the leaders of the Jazz Section were in prison, the Prague International Jazz Festival took place again. The main stars were Herbie Hancock and Mike Westbrook and both publicly expressed their support for the banned Jazz Section. The next year for unexplained reasons this festival did not take place. The Parnas Club was reopened after renovation, but the Prague jazz public was to be disappointed – it would never again be a jazz club. In 1988 for the first time no Czech band at all appeared at the Jazz Jamboree in Warsaw. One unexpected piece of excitement came with the arrival of Miroslav Vitouš and his solo double bass concert in the Junior Club – almost twenty years after his emigration. When Supraphon had released

flautist Herbie Mann's album *Memphis Underground* under license just a few years before, Vitouš's name had not been allowed to appear among the performers in the sleeve note. Not just the public but also the leading jazz publicists were starting to sense a crisis of the jazz scene. Nothing was replacing the enthusiastic generation and quantity of talents that had emerged in the earlier seventies. In the eighties the inspirations of jazzrock fusion and the avant-garde of modern jazz were thinning out. Melodie (having regained a competent staff) published the results of a survey of experts which mentioned hardly a single new name in the category of band. On the other hand Milan Svoboda was putting together a new generational big band from young jazzmen – **Kontraband**, in which the future brilliant soloists of the new, and finally free decade had their rough edges smoothed out. In the Czech Jazz Society magazine, the current star of Czech jazz (who won his international name in the nineties) the double bass player, composer, bandmaster and teacher Jaromír Honzák summed up the situation of the eighties in this way: *"In this country there are terribly few young people who play jazz. It is the result of the whole cultural climate. I consider the biggest problem of our jazz to be isolation, the fact that our musicians have no opportunity to play with foreign musicians."* There could be no more accurate judgment on the problems not just of jazz in the decade of the final decline of a communist regime that had ruled for forty years.

Alas, one of the most inspirational jazz men of the Czech modern movement, Karel Velebný († 7th March 1989) never lived to see the Velvet Revolution. All the important musicians of preceding decades had passed through his bands. He wrote two volumes of the basic handbook *Jazzová praktika / Jazz Practice*, with an incredible eloquent gap between the first and second editions (1967, 1983). It was the only "primer" for beginning jazz improvisers that was available in Czechoslovakia. For whole decades musicians had to copy down notes by ear from recordings, often only tape recordings. In the summer of 1989 the official monthly printed portraits of the jazz emigrants Miroslav Vitouš and Jan Hammer Jr. The jazzman Martin Kratochvíl founded the consumer co-operative Bonton, which was the first non-state publisher of sheet music and records for forty years. The members of the former Jazz Section were refused permission to launch a new national organisation under the title UNIJAZZ but they managed to revive activities in Prague under the name Art Forum. All these developments proved to be signals of the approaching political revolution.



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**Bohuslav Martinů**

**Piano Quartet H 287,  
Quartet for Oboe, Violin, Cello  
and Piano H 315,  
Duo no. 2 in D major for Violin  
and Cello H 371,  
Piano Trio no. 3 in C major  
H 332.**

**George Caird** - oboe, **Schubert Ensemble**  
(Simon Blendis - violin, Douglas Paterson -  
viola, Jane Salmon - cello,  
William Howard - piano).

Production: Jeremy Hayes. Text: Eng.,  
Ger., Fr. Recorded: Jan. 2009, Potton Hall,  
Dunwich, Suffolk. Released: 2009.

TT: 67:10. DDD. 1 CD Chandos CHAN  
10551 (distribution Panther).

**T**he British firm Chandos is marketing this compact disk with a sticker indicating that in 2009 it celebrated the 30th anniversary of its founding and its excellent continuing position on the market. Over those thirty years it has built up a catalogue full not only of very successful and often benchmark recordings of British music, but also recordings with rather more exotic music "from the continent" frequently including Czech music – among other pieces a British complete symphonies of Martinů, Fibich symphonies or Hickox's complete *Rusalka*, to name but a few. This recording of a representative selection of Bohuslav Martinů's chamber works confirms the reputation of the British **Schubert Ensemble**. At the end of the 1990s this quartet was awarded a major national decoration for services to British music. Over the last decade as part of the project Chamber Music 2000 it has made more than twenty CDs of studio recordings of works by from Hummel and Brahms to contemporary British composers. The quartet often concentrates on contemporary music and has as many as eighty commissioned new works to its credit. In this context Martinů seems by contrast more a part of the classical legacy, and the musical language and interpretational approach of the British ensemble correspondingly emphasises

the communicative, cantabile character of this music. The CD starts and ends with musical gems that are played with individual and collective brilliance – the piano quartet and one of the piano trios, music with cheerful syncopations and brooding middle movements. Here, particularly the contemplative and ruminative nine-minute adagio in the Piano Quartet of 1942 is played with great empathy, quietly, in a fully lived unending calm and with undemonstrative gravity. The quartet's experience with the Romantic and Viennese classics, i.e. an emphasis on beautiful and full harmony, masculine virtuosity and melodiousness, refinement and sweetness, all intensify in the music of Bohuslav Martinů qualities that there is no need to suppress even if this distances it even more from the avant-garde. In the Quartet of 1948 the oboist **George Caird** joins the quartet in a way that sounds organically integrated, while in the Duo of 1958 the inventiveness of the music depends on only two stringed instruments, but here too the performers reliably identify the essence and typical character of the music of this Czech master. They effortlessly demonstrate why the scores of Bohuslav Martinů so attracted his contemporaries from the ranks of outstanding soloists, chamber musicians and conductors, why these values can be built on today too and why this composer will certainly be performed and recorded again and again in the future.

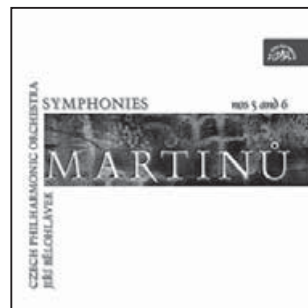
Petr Veber

**Bohuslav Martinů****Symphonies Nos. 5 and 6**

**Czech Philharmonic, Jiří Bělohlávek.**

Production: Matouš Vlčínský.  
Text: Cz., Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: Dec.  
2007 (live – 5th Symphony) and May 2009  
(6th Symphony), Rudolfinum, Prague.

Released: 2009. TT: 58:29. DDD. 1 CD  
Supraphon SU 4007-2.



**I**t was a nice surprise when Supraphon announced the release of the second of three CDs planned and advertised some years ago as a complete set of the symphonies of Bohuslav Martinů in new recordings by the **Czech Philharmonic** with **Jiří Bělohlávek**. The whole project was launched, with appealing publicity, in 2003. It seemed entirely logical and necessary. While the last Czech complete set – Neumann's – can to this day boast probably the highest number of prestigious international awards that a Czech album has ever won in the history of sound recording, it is now three decades since it was made and meanwhile the sound of the Philharmonic has changed fundamentally. The second argument for the project was the fact that Jiří Bělohlávek has been engaged with Bohuslav Martinů's music for almost his entire conducting career. Since 1976, when he started his Martinů activities with Supraphon with a recording of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, he has gradually recorded what is so far the largest Martinů sound archive with this label. It even contains such projects as a complete *Miracles of Mary*, as well as orchestral pieces, instrumental concertos, ballets and much else. A complete set of the symphonies thus seemed like a wonderful culmination of Bělohlávek's achievements with Martinů. But then came news of the indefinite postponement of the whole project. Supraphon tried to soothe the disappointment of music lovers by publishing another complete set in collaboration with Radioservis, and the set is certainly a good advertisement for Vladimír Válek and the Radio Symphony Orchestra. Nonetheless, the world market and many listeners here in the Czech Republic want to see completion of the Jiří Bělohlávek set. With any luck this should happen and in less than the six years between the releases of the first two CDs. There now only remains one CD with the 1st and 2nd symphonies. The first CD of the 3rd and 4th symphonies already showed that Bělohlávek's recording would differ significantly from Neumann's. This is not just a matter of the Czech Philharmonic's sound, once very distinctive but now very much approaching the international standard in which the overall sound culture is taken





for granted. The problematic side of this development, however, is that over thirty years the expressive immediacy that strikes you in the older recordings and could once be used to stress still further the drama and rippling quality of the music has been progressively eliminated. In Bělohlávek's version, the emotional charge is in the deeper submersion, and the greater calm, sometimes perhaps even at the expense of greater dynamism and verve. Examples here might include such small passages as the viola solo after the beginning of the *Fantaisies Symphoniques*, the part with solo flute later taken over by the solo violin in the 1st movement of the *5th Symphony*. Yet we also encounter exquisitely delicate passages that are not to be found in other recordings. The structuring of the *Fantaisies Symphoniques* is interesting – less dramatic than the hardly surpassable Ančerl recording of 1956, but better and more sensitively worked through than in Neumann's version. Bělohlávek's signature is evident and thought through in every bar, and the work of the technicians is so excellent that we can barely tell the difference between the studio recording and the live concert recording. Once again we realise what a pity it is that the present day is for all kinds of reasons so niggardly about new projects. In the future our records of the high standard of current performance will certainly be fewer on the ground than the records we have of the achievements of earlier periods.

Bohuslav Vítěk

### Smetanovo trio

**Mendelssohn:  
Piano Trio in D minor, op. 49,  
Schubert: Piano Trio in E flat  
major, op. 100 (D 929)**

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

Production: Matouš Vlčinský. Text: Cz.,  
Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: May, Nov. 2009,  
Studio Bohemia Music, Praha.

Released: 2010. TT: 73:56. DDD. 1 CD  
Supraphon SU 4008-2.

**T**he extraordinary affinity that the **Smetana Trio** have for Romantic music is something that their concerts and recordings have confirmed time and time again, and this CD is no exception. Here we have the chance to hear two of the most frequently performed of Romantic trios in an interpretation that could hardly leave anyone cold. The players conceive the first movement of Mendelssohn's *Trio in D minor*, op. 49 literally as a drama, in which they have us sitting on the edge of our chairs until the final bars. The charming dialogue between piano and strings in the second movement is enchanting for the sincerity of expression and naturally flowing tempi. The Scherzo flies at a remarkable pace, sparkling with witty moments but never allowing us to forget the hidden dramatic subtext. Mendelssohn marked the final movement *Allegro assai appassionato*, but in the solo piano part in the very first bar added the rather contradictory instruction, *un poco tranquillo*. At the beginning the performers seem to be putting more emphasis on that "un poco tranquillo", but in the course of the movement they let themselves get so carried away by the current of Mendelssohn's music that in the end it is the "appassionato" that triumphs and the whole movement sounds even more passionate and dramatic than the first movement. In the following *Piano Trio in F major*, op. 100 (D. 929) by Franz Schubert, it is as if a completely different world opens up to the listener. It is a world in which there is less passion, less drama, but on the other hand incomparably more vital optimism. The Smetana Trio plays the striking principal theme of the 1st movement with almost infectious verve and brings off the whole movement with a swing that other trios rarely achieve. This makes the moving softening and refinement of colours in the sonata development all the more surprising. The principal theme of the slow movement is stylised in a way that hints at a funeral march, but the performers clearly do not want to make listeners gloomy. The movement is full of warm melodious lyricism and so we sense the funeral march more as just an unobtrusive melancholy background. In the last two movements the main mood-forming elements are playfulness and good humour. The Smetana Trio presents both with irresistible charm and evident

pleasure, and although in the last movement the funeral march is once again suggested, the overall impression of the Schubert Trio is so optimistic that it has us immediately wanting to play the CD all over again.

Věroslav Němec

### Sviatoslav Richter

**Beethoven:  
Piano Concertos no. 1 in C major  
and no. 3 in C minor**

**Sviatoslav Richter – piano, Czech  
Philharmonic conducted by Karel Ančerl.**  
Production: Matouš Vlčinský. Text: Cz.,  
Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: live 1956, 1962,  
Smetana Hall of the Municipal House,  
Prague. Released: 2010. TT: 70:27. AAD.  
1 CD Supraphon SU 4020-2.

**L**ive recordings of two Beethoven piano concertos represent the legendary pianist **Sviatoslav Richter** with the **Czech Philharmonic** and conductor **Karel Ančerl** in the best possible light. The recording of *Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 1 in C major*, op. 15 was made on the 2nd of June 1956. If we forget the rather problematic technical side of the recording, this is a performance that literally fascinates by its vitality. Immediately, in the very first eight bars of the piano solo Richter "narrates" in an absolutely unique way, and what is unleashed after these bars has the listener on the edge of his chair. Richter plays with a limpid, juicy tone and unshakeable rhythm as if carving in granite. Everything is perfectly clear, utterly honest, and the pianist's assurance takes the breath away. This form of play is inimitable and is wonderfully suited to Beethoven's first concerto. The recording of the *Piano Concerto no. 3 in C minor*, op. 37 is six years younger, and was made on the 21st of June 1962. The sound of the orchestra has been captured with incomparably more success than on the earlier recording and we can fully appreciate the orchestral component



of the work in all its delicately worked out detail. Surprisingly Richter is somewhat more reserved in this piece than in the first concerto, but here too in the first and final movements we can savour many places that fully compare in striking vitality and technical brilliance with the performance of the first concerto (the cadenza in the 1st movement, the stretto in the final movement). In contrast the slow movement is infused with a strange and indefinable spirit, as if the pianist is speaking to us from another world. Richter's creative imagination and the richness of his touch palette seem limitless in this movement. What he manages to do for example in the third bar with a mere five identical repeated chords is phenomenal.

Věroslav Němec

## Antonín Dvořák

### Rusalka, op. 114, B. 203 (1900)

Cheryl Barker (Rusalka), Rosario La Spina (Prince), Bruce Martin (Water Goblin), Anne-Marie Owens (Witch), Elizabeth Whitehouse (The Foreign Princess), Barry Ryan (Gamekeeper / Huntsman), Sian Pendry (Scullion), Sarah Crane, Taryn Fiebig, Dominica Matthews (Forest nymphs); Opera Australia Chorus, Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, Richard Hickox.  
Chandos: 3 CD, CHAN 10449(3), recorded March 2007 Sydney Opera House, released 2008.  
Durata: 152:25.

In the 109 years since it was premiered, Dvořák's second to last opera, the three-act lyric opera *Rusalka* on a libretto by J. Kvapil, has never had reason to complain of lack of interest from opera houses and recording companies. So far the latter have produced 15, or 16 audio, video and DVD versions starting with J. Keilberth's recording (1948) and most recently Bělohávek's *Rusalka* from the Glyndebourne Festival (2009). The second most recent recording of *Rusalka*, from November 2008, was that of the British

conductor Richard Hickox, whose repertoire spanned the whole range of music from the 14th century to the present. He always had a fondness for Czech repertoire, as can be seen from his appearance with Dvořák's 1st Symphony at the Prague Spring and concert versions of *Dimitrij* in Vienna and London (2004) or the recording reviewed here, which was made in March 2007 in Sydney. The title role of *Rusalka* was entrusted to Cheryl Barker, who has established herself as an interpreter of Verdi, Puccini and Britten's operas, and whose voice we shall find in an English recording of the Janáček's *Makropulos Affair*. Although Barker does not have the moving and dark soprano of G. Beňáková or the velvet voice of R. Fleming and in the upper register her voice can sound rougher, her capacity to project a fresh, girlish impression stands her in good stead in the role of *Rusalka*. The role of the Water Goblin is sung by B. Martin, who does not possess the rich and concentrated voice of F. Hawlata, but with his higher bass manages to bring out all the contradictions of the character. He makes a more persuasive and characterful impression than the mezzo-soprano A-M. Owens, who sometimes has problems with pronunciation and can hardly compete with the Witch of V. Soukupová. The Foreign Princess is sung by the Australian E. Whitehouse, who has also sung the role of the Kostelníčka in the Janáček's *Jenůfa* with her dramatic soprano. All the secondary roles are excellently cast: the baritone B. Ryan (Gamekeeper and Huntsman) and the young mezzo-soprano S. Pendry (Scullion) sing in appropriate style, are accurate in their characterisations, have excellent pronunciation and improve on the standard performances of these roles. S. Crane, T. Fiebig and D. Matthews form an effective trio of forest nymphs, harmonious and well integrated both in singing and in declamation. In this Hickox production the role of the Prince is taken by the Australian R. La Spina, an Italian both in name and in the light timbre of his voice, who gives a more youthful impression than the heroic tenor B. Heppner in Mackerras's recording and who has a pleasant middle register, although in high registers he sings under pressure and his dramatisation sometimes goes beyond the limits of the role. The complete 3CD set includes a nicely produced booklet with the opera libretto in

Czech and English and a well-informed essay by J. Smaczny. Together with an overview of Dvořák's operatic output this essay offers an interesting interpretation of Kvapil's libretto: Smaczny sees a parallel with the fates of the migrant rural Czech girls defending their honour in Vienna around 1900 and dumb like *Rusalka* because of their ignorance of German. The value of the booklet is reduced by traditional mistakes in Czech diacritics, and we find shortcomings in the translations of Smaczny's text too (in the German version the Czech woman novelist Němcová has been turned into a male writer). There is no disputing the good qualities of this recording of Dvořák's *Rusalka* by the Australian Opera in Sydney. Hickox's recording is characterised by legible treatment of leitmotifs, lucid structuring of the musical passages, clear phrasing, a preference for the wind instruments as against massive string sound, precisely chiselled work with the percussion, and above all rejection of traditional cuts. The recording sounds clean and fresh, the soloists are balanced, the orchestra has highly individualist woodwind players and M. Black's opera chorus sings in the ensemble scenes from the heart and without exaggeration. Hickox's recording cannot be compared with the benchmark recordings of Krombholz, Chalabala, Neumann or Mackerras, but listeners who love *Rusalka* will welcome it and appreciate its undoubted qualities, especially bearing in mind that this is a live recording. If I could say that Dvořák's brilliant score was customarily played on our own stages without a single cut and to the standard of the chorus of the Australian Opera, I might feel able to be stricter in my judgment.

Martin Jemelka

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