

*Ivan Moravec*

*Český Krumlov Castle Theatre*

*Czech Interwar Avant-Garde*

*Jana Vöröšová*

4 | 2010

# EXPOSITION OF NEW MUSIC 2011

24<sup>TH</sup> YEAR > MARCH, 2-6, 2011 > BRNO

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IT IS FINANCIALLY SUPPORTED BY MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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**DAS MECHANISCHE?!** (AT)

VERONIKA ZOTT, CHRISTINE GAIGG, WINFRIED RITSCH  
RITSCH > LANG

MARCH 5, 2011 > 10.00 > JAMU > KOMENSKÉHO NÁM. 6

**AŞURE**

LECTURE OF THE TURKISH COMPOSER MEHMET CAN ÖZER ON HIS PROJECT  
AŞURE CONNECTING TRADITIONAL TURKISH ART (FINE ARTS AND MUSIC)  
WITH LIVE ELECTRONICS AND A IMPROVISING

**ASSOCIATED PERFORMANCE OF THE EXPOSITION  
OF NEW MUSIC**

MARCH 3, 2011 > 17.00 > THE BRNO HOUSE OF ARTS > MALINOVKÉHO NÁM. 2

**PUMPKIN DAEMON**

**IN VEGETARIAN RESTAURANT** (CZ)

ENSEMBLE OPERA DIVERSA

OPERA BY TWO BRNO COMPOSERS ONDŘEJ KYAS AND PAVEL DRÁBEK

Dear Readers,

This is not the first time we have carried an article about Český Krumlov, for the castle there has a rich and important musical history (and present, in the form of several festivals held there every year). If you should happen to be coming to the Czech Republic in the winter, Martin Voříšek's article on the unique Baroque theatre at the castle might well inspire you to a visit. Český Krumlov is a truly magical and splendid place – and like all such places in the country it tends to be overwhelmed with tourists. This means that winter is probably the best time to go and see it.

In this issue we also offer a short epilogue to our year-long serial on the history and present of Czech jazz. I have to admit that currently we are unsure whether we should cover jazz more systematically on the pages of Czech Music Quarterly in future. We would therefore much appreciate hearing your opinions on the matter. As usual we can be contacted at the address [info@czech-music.net](mailto:info@czech-music.net).

Finally I should draw you attention to the title interview with world-famous pianist Ivan Moravec. He is not a man with much interest in self-publicisation and definitely does not give interviews at the drop of a hat – and this makes us all the more delighted that we can share this one with you.

I wish you a happy and successful New Year

P. Buz



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## CONTENTS

4 | 2010

### Ivan Moravec:

**Listening teaches us to recognise beauty**

by Dita Hradecká

page 3

### The baroque castle theatre in Český Krumlov

by Martin Voříšek

page 10

### Czech Jazz - inventory 2010

by Vladimír Kouřil

page 21

### Jana Vöröšová: I take everything that appeals to me

by Iva Oplištilová

page 29

### The Czech Interwar Avant-Garde

by Petr Haas

page 34

### Reviews

page 46

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

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

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

MK ČR E 7099

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



PHOTO: ZDENĚK CHRAPEK  
COURTESY OF PRAGUE SPRING FESTIVAL

# IVAN MORAVEC: LISTENING TEACHES US TO RECOGNISE BEAUTY

**The pianist Ivan Moravec is a model of artistic honesty, noblesse and poetry. His soft and melodic tone is legendary. Although willing to cast light on the secrets of his art, in this interview as in others he keeps to his conviction that “the small talk about themselves, the great talk about others.”**

*You are eighty years old. Several times in the course of your life, and recently, you have had to suspend your concert activities because of health problems. a pianist, like an athlete, is very dependent on the body.*

The apparatus has to be working properly, that is the basis. a pianist of Murray Perahia's calibre has had repeated problems with his hands for many years, and Brendel has problems with his back. I myself broke my arm six months ago... But there are many young pianists who strain their hands and don't know what to do about it. In my view this is the result of an incorrect way of playing - I'm sure Sviatoslav Richter never strained his hand.

*Although you no longer make so many live appearances, at least some of your older recordings have been coming out in re-editions.*

I consider it immensely important when the old recordings are brought to life again. I'm truly grateful for the fact that during the bad times, under communism, I was able to travel abroad and make recordings. These recordings from the 1960s are still alive! For example, we were in New York and my wife went into a second-hand record shop. She asked for Chopin's Nocturnes played





by Ivan Moravec – and they told her they had a list of sixty customers who were looking for precisely that record.

*The record of Chopin's Nocturnes was greatly acclaimed...*

Even this year, when the critics at the New York Times were asked to say which Chopin record was an event for them, one of them remembered mine. Once it was on sale here, but you can't find it now – many recording companies have got into financial difficulties and so cheap editions like Naxos and so on are taking over.

*Recordings are permanent treasures. Haven't you ever been a little sorry that concert performance is something terribly fleeting, which people can never go back to?*

But for many people the live experience of a concert is something much more intense than listening to records. The experience of a concert is unrepeatable, and talking about how much the behaviour and figure of the performer influences the resulting impression would fill a whole book. On the other hand, today there are quite genuine enthusiasts with a refined feeling for music who concentrate on listening to and comparing different recorded performances.

*How far do you let yourself get carried away by the moment, the momentary mood, on the podium? Do you ever find something new in a piece you are playing for the hundredth time?*

Certainly, there are those happy moments when everything is going well at a concert and something like that can happen, but I think that a performer must above all be prepared. It is like an actor – he has to be able to repeat his role at any time faultlessly. The theatre theorist Stanislavsky distinguishes between different levels of dramatic art in descending order: the art of real feeling, the art



of presentation, craft, and “hamming it up”. Hamming in music – that would be quite a theme too... I don’t want to speak ill of the most famous people, but Horowitz’s taste for example is very problematic – he is a completely gigantic pianist, but the aspect of taste is in his case debatable.

*Taste is a word that is crucial for you. Is it something inborn? Can taste be to some extent taught? What is it that refines taste?*

Here I would like to quote the famous words of Josef Hoffmann – next to Rachmaninoff he was piano king of America. He wrote that the performance of a musician on the podium is a kind of striptease: when you play a piece, you are actually revealing what you are. He says that what is important is how far the performer has matured: intellectually, emotionally, physically, technically, but above all in terms of taste. He put great emphasis on taste. By the way, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli constantly used the words “bon gusto”. Lying was something that didn’t exist for him – basically you can say that someone who knows how to lie is not good at taste. We might take Dinu Lipatti. He was legendary for the fact that there were never any false, lying tones in his conceptions. One listener even said to me: When I listen to Dinu Lipatti, I become a better person. Sviatoslav Richter – if I had to characterise his art I would say that Truth with a capital T is always present; he never lied, never pretended, never exaggerated.

*So taste means being faithful to oneself, to one’s idea, standing up for it?*

It means reading the pages of the music and trying not to add anything alien to it. It is hard to talk about it... We can see how our politicians come across of the television, for example. With some of them you can say this is a person of taste, because whatever he says he does it with a certain simplicity, noblesse and authenticity, so you believe him. The same is true in music.

### *Nothing can be camouflaged on the podium...*

I've often observed Vladimir Ashkenazy, for example, I've often heard him play in America. He is a simple, pleasant person and all that is inscribed in his art. He has recorded the whole of Chopin's works. I think – I hope this isn't rudeness on my part – that he didn't manage everything on the level of his first recordings – the task was simply immense. But – if we are talking about the emotional experience of the piece – he never lies, you always believe in the sincerity of his playing.

### *What goes on in the mind of a concert pianist on the podium?*

I'm listening. Only someone who learns to listen to himself can go on growing. But perhaps you are asking about the moment when something new occurs to a performer on the podium. It can happen that you succeed in playing without great effort. All at once it flows. And that can be when the rare moments of so-called inspiration are born... But I don't like the word inspiration, because everything has to be founded on what you are pursuing, what you have painstakingly and laboriously prepared, and otherwise it doesn't work. An actor learns his lines, and if you ask him what he is thinking, he will say that he is reciting his lines. He is submerged in them. And as regards off-putting moments – people were asking me if it disturbs me if people cough. I answer – at least it means my mistakes can't be heard (*laughs*)

### *But you don't usually make mistakes!*

Performers' mistakes, that's a whole chapter too. I used to tell my pupils – if you make a mistake, carry on... You experience it as something dramatically calamitous, but unless they are specialists who play this piece, the audience probably haven't even registered it. And it is necessary to learn to forgive yourself and to keep going. But forgiving yourself is an art – people who are used to constantly making mistakes don't find it difficult, but it's a problem with perfectionists. For example, I believe that for someone like Michelangelo making a mistake was a thrilling experience (*laughter*).

When he was getting older Artur Rubinstein used to play very badly – he writes about it himself in his book – his friends were always distracting him from practising. But then his children grew up and he started to be ashamed... Vladimir Horowitz was famous for being so nervously keyed up that the first half of his concerts was always full of mistakes. It was only after the interval that he would lose this anxious self-consciousness.

### *Are young pianists still coming to you for advice?*

Those who come to me are people who are already trained, and need someone to tell them intelligently and with sympathy where they are. This is why I like them to come more than once, so I can find out if they have managed to capitalise on my advice, to repeat it and eventually develop it. Teaching is a great school for young artists who have something to say. They have to learn to formulate what they want to say intelligently. As a boy I taught small children, but only from a certain level – let us say from the Bach Inventions. There is one aspect there





I consider important: this is learning to play with the weight of the arm. Usually the “prestidigitators” who raise their fingers too much do not produce a nice sound. This can be achieved instinctively if you can hear the sound ideal. If you ask me what makes my tone different from the others, it consists precisely in this sound ideal. This is something you have to have in your ear. It’s like painting. I once asked František Tichý how it was that his line had such grace and elegance, and he answered, “You have to see it. If you can see it, then your paw will learn it.”

*Have you ever heard a pianist play, for example at admission auditions or competitions, and said to yourself that “he would have been good if he had had a better teacher”?*

I believe that if that person really has something to say he will break through in the end. If he has an ideal in his ear and cultivates the development of that ideal for himself. That is possible provided that the person has a great deal of listening experience. You will never change my mind about that. I remember the first time I heard Johannes Brahms’s Concerto in D minor, at the Music Theatre. At first I wasn’t at all enthused or engaged by the piece, and it was only after a fifth listening that I realised I was the stupid one, not Johannes Brahms.

*But today young people don’t much go to concerts.*

What is sad is that they don’t go to the concerts of their colleagues – in my youth it was unthinkable not to do that, and the halls were crammed with students. The experience of listening teaches us to recognise beauty. It is important to know how to appreciate the work of another artist. Performers can thank me for my attention because I have listened a great deal and with pleasure. Wherever I have been able to learn something I have learned something, and today there are very few people from whom I could still learn something.

*But there are strong personalities in the coming generation of pianists.*

I would say that the young generation of pianists today is more thorough. Dilettantism is on the way out. Among romantic performers there was a lot of “slovenliness”. There are a number of big talents here, but the question is what they will do with their talent over the years. As Pierre Fournier used to say, up to your fifties you are always learning, but then comes the big test – finding the strength in yourself not just to maintain your standard, but to go further. That is the task for each performer on his own. For young pianists it’s a good thing for them to find an artist who appeals to them, and to say to themselves – I don’t know how to do that but I want to get the instrument to sound that way.

*Have you ever considered writing a master piano course or perhaps an essay about this?*

My recordings are the evidence of the development of my ideas and what I believe today.

*You are famous among other things for your great care for the instrument. You have very exacting demands on how it should be tuned.*

In my lifetime I’ve known a few real masters who managed to prepare and tune the piano perfectly: one with Steinway in New York, another in London, and the third in Holland. When these gentlemen go up to the piano I can go and have coffee, because I have no fears. But there are technicians who can hear the pitch of a note but have no clue about colour. They can’t hear that the piano becomes unbalanced when you press the left pedal. My philosophy has always been to prepare the piano with the help of the technician in such a way as to give all those 88 tones the same power.

*But the balance you mention is historically something new. Pianos did not have it in Chopin’s time.*

I don’t much believe people who swear that music has to be played on period instruments. Most of my more famous colleagues are faithful to modern instruments and just try to make sure that Steinway doesn’t get big-headed and will accept criticism.

*So you cannot even rely on the legendary Steinway?*

I can tell you that when Jan Panenka and I first went to Hamburg to choose an instrument, we didn’t know which to take – they were all superb. It is only today that we are seeing something like technical defects, keys sticking. And nothing so puts a pianist off as unbalanced keys and sticking. I have never wanted anything special – only that there should be nothing that disturbs and puts me off. Steinway needs to provide more service, and better service. I mean not just tuning, but above all intonation. The tuner has to be able to hear the colour of the tone, since even just in the tuning there are huge differences.

*A layman would say that if a piano is tuned precisely according to the tuning fork, then it is in order.*

There is a big difference between correct tuning, which is precise from the point of view of frequencies, and what a very gifted tuner is able to do. There are tiny deformations involved, for example he will stretch the descant just a little upwards, and this gives the sound shines so much you would be astounded. When an instrument is tuned by a machine it can be correct, but not alive.

*For more than a hundred years people have been hearing the same at piano recitals. Bach, Beethoven, Liszt, Brahms... Why do listeners continue to enjoy it?*

So long as people have some ideals they will keep coming back to the sources of beauty and order. Look at contemporary painting and you see this terrible decline... I cross my fingers for every artist, hoping he will bring something that will enrich us. But truth is as old as mankind and we yearn for it, we pursue it, and people will gulp down order, strength, enthusiasm, beauty. I have many musical loves, but right now it has occurred to me L'enfant et les sortilèges by Ravel – he must have penetrated the mystery of nature! Listening to it I ask myself how it is possible for a human individual ever to hit on this.

### ***Ivan Moravec***

*(born 9th of January 1930) is today the only living Czech pianist ranked among the world's top players. This is evident for example from the fact that he was included in the selection of Great Pianists of 20th Century, published twenty years ago by Philips, from the re-editions of his recordings, which are still in great demand, and from his numerous concerts in prestigious concert halls and enthusiastic reviews. The distinctive features of this modest artist include cultivated interpretation, an empathic understanding of different styles and a melodious tone. He refined his art at the Prague Conservatory, Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and on courses with Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, and above all by listening – to recordings by his colleagues and his own recordings. Students at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts who have had the good fortune to be taught by Ivan Moravec bring to their concert lives a rare knowledge and skill always instilled with noblesse and consideration.*



PHOTO: ZDENEK CHRAPEK



*Production of Antonio Caldaro's opera Scipione Africano il Maggiore, by the Hofmusici company  
directed by Ondřej Macek, choreography by Helena Kazárová and Hana Slačálková, 2006.*



# THE BAROQUE CASTLE THEATRE IN ČESKÝ KRUMLOV

**The conditions that enable historical objects to survive in original form are rather paradoxical: their creators must have thought them important enough to invest time and resources in making them beautiful, but subsequent generations must have thought them too unimportant to merit major alteration and renovation. This is roughly the story of one of the most historically precious theatres of Europe**

## **The Theatrical Past of the Castle of Krumlov**

The Castle and Chateau in Český Krumlov is the second largest noble residential complex in Bohemia (after the Prague Castle), and this fully reflects the role of its former owners in the hierarchy of the Land aristocracy. This South Bohemian seat belonged from medieval times to highly influential families whose leading figures could compete with kings and lend money to emperors. In happier times they also had the resources to progressively enlarge



and alter the original mid-13th-century Gothic castle – first with a view to comprehensive fortification, but later mainly in the interests of comfort, prestige and entertainment.

The first reliable reports of theatre performances at the Castle of Český Krumlov date from the period of the rule of the last Rožmberks (i.e. in the late 16th and early 17th century), but the earliest dramatic texts surviving from the castle milieu are a hundred years older. If these plays were “performed” at the Krumlov Court, then most probably this was only in the form of dialogic readings in closed noble company, with no stage decoration. For quite a long time, then, theatrical activity at the castle required no specialised interior, even though over the time these activities evidently became increasingly ambitious.

With the arrival of the Baroque, however, so characteristically fond of splendour and ostentation, the scale of such entertainments changed entirely. In towns and in noble residences theatres were built to meet the considerable demands of the new dramatic genre – opera. The Castle of Krumlov, too, acquired a separate theatre, built in the years 1680–86 on the wishes of the lover of music and art Johann Christian I. von Eggenberg. In line with the customs of the time, this theatre served for private productions for invited guests and was small by the standards of theatres today. To judge by a surviving plan, there was a relatively large stage and quite small auditorium. Although we have no clear idea of the repertoire staged here, it seems likely that under Johann Christian the theatrical entertainments at the Castle were the liveliest in its history. The prince employed a troupe of actors and the extensive period catalogue of theatralia (including Italian operas) to be found in the former Eggenberg library suggests the range of entertainments involved.

## **The Theatre of the Schwarzenberg Princes**

The next important chapter in theatrical life at the Castle of Krumlov opened under Prince Josef Adam von Schwarzenberg, whose father acquired the Krumlov estates by inheritance after the Eggenberg family died out in the male line in 1719. Josef Adam was extremely fond of social entertainment and so had major building works carried out at his Krumlov seat for this purpose. The prince had various decorative and recreational parts of the castle garden constructed or rebuilt in the Viennese rococo style, renovated the castle’s grandest reception rooms (which became the Masque and Mirror Halls), and went on to make extensive changes to the castle theatre in the years 1765–67. The immediate impetus for the theatre renovation seems to have been the grand celebrations planned for 1768 to mark the wedding of Josef’s son, Johann Nepomuk von Schwarzenberg. The young prince personally designed some features of the new interior, although naturally most of the tasks were assigned to professionals invited from Vienna. The interior painting and stage decoration was created by the painters Hans Wetschel and Leo Merkel (in part copying models by the Italian stage painter Giuseppe Galli-Bibiena). a system of machinery allowing for rapid changing of scenery and all kinds of stage special effects was an inseparable part of Baroque theatres. For the Krumlov theatre this machinery was designed by the carpenter Laurentius Makh, using the model of the Italian theatre architect Giacomo Torelli.

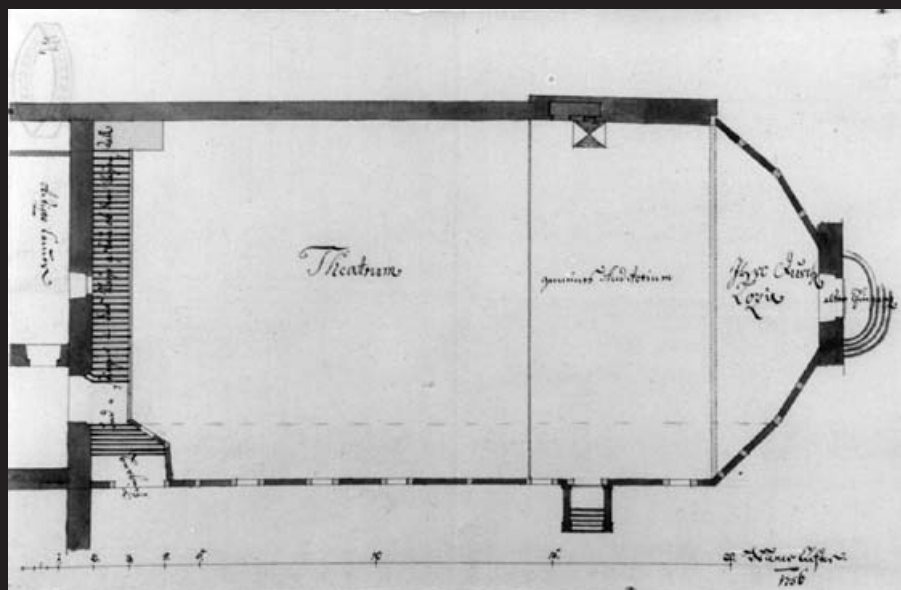
Thus a typical Late Baroque theatre was created at the Castle of Krumlov. The proscenium stage had several lines of wings of diminishing size, creating the illusion of a view into open space or a room. In addition to the ingenious





*Modern premiere of Johann Joseph Fux's opera *Giunone Placata*, by the Hofmusici company directed by Ondřej Macek, choreography by Helena Kazárová, 2005.*

*Plan of the Eggenberg Theatre, 1756. The caption "Theatrum" indicates the stage, "gemeines Auditorium" the auditorium for the "ordinary public", "Thro Durch. Lozie" the prince's box.*





*Under-stage machinery with traps or elevators and winch for changing the side wings.*



*Above-stage machinery with winches for changing drops and backdrops.*

exploitation of the principles of perspective, the rather dim and flickering candle lighting contributed strongly to the resulting impression. Because at the time it was not usual to have special decor made for specific productions, Wetschel and Merkel created a few basic stereotypical scenery sets adequate to the needs of almost any kind of production: a garden embodied the idyll of cultivated nature, which found its opposite in a wild forest, while other exteriors included a military camp and a city street. Interior scenes also offered various standardised possibilities: a grand church, an ordinary city room, a noble's chamber or a grim prison

cell. The sets of wings could additionally be combined and supplemented by different backdrops (for example a vista onto an open sea). The ingenious machinery meant that scenes could be completely changed in just a few seconds before the eyes of the audience, with other visual and accoustic effects to enhance the impression.

Unfortunately, not even in this case do we have any precise records or reports of the repertoire performed here. One rare mention of a specific work is of Giuseppe Scarlatti's opera intermezzo *Dove è amore è gelosia* [Where there is Love there is Jealousy], which was presented for the wedding of Prince

*Stage and auditorium of the castle theatre in 1978.*



Johann, already mentioned. Even this musical trifle shows that noble society did not just enjoy such closed theatre performances as viewers, but liked to take an active part in them. All four roles in this Scarlatti opera were entrusted to wedding guests (one was taken by the bridegroom's younger sister, Marie Theresa von Schwarzenberg).

Otherwise we have to deduce the nature of repertoire from more general comments and the theatralia in the castle library. These sources indicate that the theatre was used for performance of ballets, pantomimes, plays and opera, and sometimes productions on the boundaries between these genres (above all comic operas with ballet intermezzos). Priority was given to light repertoire in German, Italian and French. We can assume that up to the end of the 18th century the Schwarzenbergs used their theatre for private productions in which family members and their guests performed. The musical accompaniment would probably have been provided in part by members of the prince's eight-member wind "Harmoniemusik", but it is very likely that local musicians associated with the Church of St. Vitus in Český Krumlov were also engaged for the purpose.

We should note that the surviving evidence suggests that the castle theatre was

used only on an irregular basis. Although in 1723 the Schwarzenberg princes had been granted the title of Dukes of Krumlov, for practical reasons they spent most of the year in their city palaces or other Bohemian estates, and would reside in Krumlov for only a few weeks annually. Furthermore, it must certainly have been difficult organising productions that would fully exploit the capacity and technical possibilities of the theatre building. The general changing historical context is also important here. The Český Krumlov castle theatre was built in its Baroque at a time when a new epoch was already coming, with Baroque ostentation starting to yield to Enlightenment sobriety; the leaders of the former sovereign land nobility were increasingly becoming high-ranking officials of a centralised state apparatus. At the same time there was a gradual process of democratisation of art, to which Enlightenment optimism attributed the power to ethically cultivate society at large. The aristocracy of the 19th century therefore no longer spent so much on costly court festivities, but tended to use their money to support semi-public or public cultural events and projects. This did not mean that noble society entirely gave up closed musical and theatrical entertainments,





*Scenery Forest.*



*Scenery Forest with backdrop Sea and sea waves decor.*



*Scenery Town with backdrop Sea and sea waves decor.*



*Scenery Prison.*

but these recreations became significantly more modest in scale.

As early as 1778 the Schwarzenbergs had a very small theatre (with chamber dimensions that were now considered entirely adequate for the purposes of purely private performances) built at their chateau in Hluboká nad Vltavou. Here all kinds of musical-dramatic scenes were staged right into the 20th century, for example as active entertainments to accompany the autumn hunting parties. In Český Krumlov, however, the era of theatrical activities by the princely family ended at the turn of the 18th/19th century. When in Bohemia at all, subsequent generations of Schwarzenbergs gave precedence to their smaller and more comfortable chateaux, which they also altered to suit their modern needs. The Český Krumlov Castle became a kind of historic family jewel and none of the descendants of Prince Josef Adam made any major renovations to it.

### **The Castle Theatre in the 19th and 20th Century**

The Krumlov Castle Theatre nevertheless continued to serve its purpose, even if in rather changed circumstances. From 1814 the prince's office started to receive requests from theatre companies for permission to hire the theatre for public performances. Often the response to these requests was hesitant. The most important reason for reluctance was the risk of fire, but there may also have been doubts about the reliability or artistic qualifications of those interested in hiring the theatre. Furthermore, the Schwarzenbergs did not wish in any way to undermine the efforts of the town theatre by promoting competition. On the other hand the castle theatre had a certain glamour that made it attractive in the eyes of the public, and so up to the end of the 19th century performances

here were quite frequent. In 1885 the number of permitted productions was even limited to three per year, but this regulation was not in fact strictly observed.

The majority of these productions in the princely theatre were put on by Český Krumlov amateurs, who won the favour of the castle owners because the performances were in the cause of charity. It should be noted that even in the other cases, when the theatre was hired out to a professional company, the prince's office donated the proceeds to local charitable activities. Not even for the 19th century do we have complete records of the titles of all the productions, but to judge by surviving sources, audience-pulling attractive comedies, comic operas and operettas predominated. In view of the national (ethnic) composition of the population of the town it is no surprise that the great majority of productions were German, but towards the end of the 19th century Czech was also to be heard several times on the castle theatre stage. For example, in 1896 the Krumlov Czech societies managed to organise a performance of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* (by the Brno company of Pavel Švanda ze Semčic) and in May 1897 the very last two performances before the official closure of the theatre were by the Plzeň company of Vendelín Budil (Smetana's *The Kiss* and a translation of *The Little Lord*).

It was above all safety considerations that led Prince Adolf Josef to decide to close the theatre in 1897. Since the 1760s there had been only minimal alterations and repairs. Most of the equipment had remained practically unchanged, even after the inspection of theatres throughout the state prompted by the tragic fire in the Vienna *Ringtheater* in 1881. A few additions to firefighting equipment had been the only changes made in the unheated castle theatre, which had neither gas nor electric lighting, and in later years performances needed the permission of the district gover-



nor's office. In 1897 the state fire commission ruled that further productions would only be permitted if a number of safety risks were removed. Although the proposed solutions to the problems identified were not in fact very expensive, the prince evidently did not want responsibility for the risks associated with performance in the old building, and ordered that it be closed for good. With the exception of the occasional social event, this order was respected.

The theatre was not to be used again for performance until 1958, i.e. ten years after the nationalisation of the property of the elder branch of the Schwarzenberg Family. The programme directors of the South Bohemian Theatre (based in nearby České Budějovice) decided to use the attractive setting of the Český Krumlov Castle and extend their revived summer theatre festival to include venues here. An open air revolving auditorium was built in the middle of the castle garden and in the theatre building the company started to stage productions that would at least approximately correspond to the character of the space (the first production was Rossini's comic opera *Il Signor Bruschino*). At the least the academic public became aware of the unique value of the Baroque castle theatre, but monument conservation was not one of the priorities of the communist regime. While the revolving auditorium in the garden was progressively enlarged to its current controversial proportions, after eight seasons the castle theatre was closed once again and despite fitful attempts at conservation its state tended to deteriorate.

### **The Present and Future of a UNESCO Monument**

The political changes of 1989 brought a turning point in attitudes to the unique castle theatre. In addition to the general

attempts to remedy the crimes and negligence of the communist era, the inclusion of the castle and historical core of Český Krumlov on the UNESCO world heritage list in 1991 was immensely important. This finally made it possible to draw international attention to the unique Baroque theatre, to which only the theatre of the Swedish royal palace in Drottningholm of 1766 is comparable in terms of size, age and state of preservation. Overall reconstruction of the theatre began with domestic and international funding in 1990, and its main phase was completed in 1997. Since then the theatre has been open to the public as one of the tour circles of the Český Krumlov Castle. In addition to the auditorium, visitors can see some of the authentic preserved scenery and look at the understage machinery. On special occasions they can also view at least part of the theatre depositary, which includes original decorations, props and an abundant costume collection.

Naturally, the question of the actual theatrical use of this historic building remains. Here we find ourselves facing the paradox that we mentioned in the introduction to this article: the Krumlov theatre has been preserved in its original form mainly because it was relatively rarely used in past times. The main rationale of all the current activities (including repairs) is the goal of handing down this heritage to further generations in the most authentic form, because it is in this way that the theatre testifies most vividly to the life of our forebears. Severe restriction on actual theatrical use of the building is therefore a necessary expression of respect for a monument that we simply cannot expose to the ordinary demands of theatre operation without damaging it.

On the other hand, nowhere else can period staging and performance conventions and possibilities be tried out as effectively

and vividly as in this original setting. Following completion of renovation, the first experimental productions were presented here. They showed above all the remarkable power of the harmony of Baroque theatre principles, and also made it possible to check the level of load on different parts of the theatre consistent with conservation. Thanks to these experiments, in recent years the public have had the chance, roughly four times a year, to see performances of period operas or ballets here by leading Czech early music ensembles. An inseparable part of this fascinating experience is the use of the original stage machinery, which is worked by hand by the team of castle machinists.

*The photographs used are from the collection of the State Castle and Chateau of Český Krumlov*



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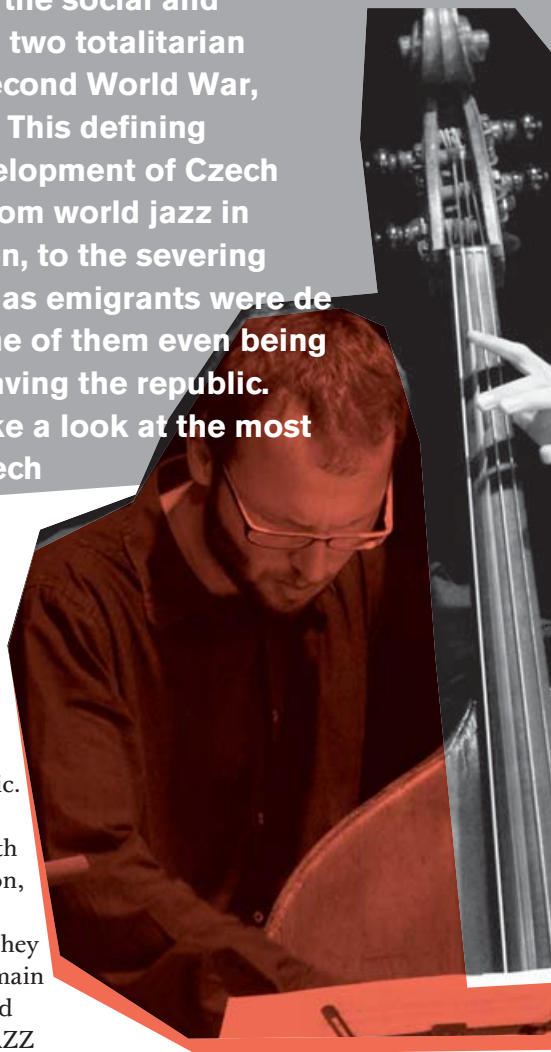
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## CZECH JAZZ – INVENTORY 2010

In a series of articles in this year's issues of Czech Music Quarterly we have tried to outline the development of Czech jazz music from its earliest history to the present, with an eye to the social and political contexts in which jazz survived through two totalitarian regimes – the German Occupation during the Second World War, and the following forty years of communist rule. This defining experience created various problems in the development of Czech jazz, from the isolation of the domestic scene from world jazz in terms of performance, education and information, to the severing of contact with its own successful jazzmen who as emigrants were de jure “enemies” of socialist Czechoslovakia, some of them even being charged and condemned in their absence for leaving the republic. In this final installment of our serial we shall take a look at the most important current activities of contemporary Czech jazz musicians.

### Who's Who in 2010

Since the times of the Jazz Section (1972–1986) and its regular periodical Bulletin Jazz (1972–1982) there has been no survey enabling readers or jazz specialists and critics to rate the contribution of established musicians and draw attention to rising talents in the Czech Republic. Nor currently does the Czech scene have any specialised magazine of the traditional American Downbeat type with its well-known and authoritative surveys. Jazz information, articles, interviews and reviews in this country are today scattered through a whole series of periodicals in which they have their own limited space as a minority interest. The main print media that regularly provide some space of this kind for jazz are the monthlies UNI (published by the UNIJAZZ association for cultural activities), which is musically more





Tomáš Liška



broadly orientated to alternative genres, blues, world music, and culture generally, and HARMONIE, which is primarily a classical music magazine enlivened with a certain amount of material on jazz and world music.

While there are no surveys-ratings of jazz musicians, there are two annual survey-competitions rating jazz recordings made in this country, and these give us an indirect view of at least a narrow selection of the important musicians. This year the *Czech Jazz Society's* "album of the year" (selected by survey), was the CD *Little Things* by the double bassist Jaromír Honzák, with the runners up being double-bassist Tomáš Liška's CD debut *Invisible World* and the Infinite Quintet's CD debut *Point*. In another survey-competition, which is a genre offshoot of the Czech music academy of pop music, and involves award of the *Golden Angel/Zlatý Anděl* after the gold figurine presented to winners, the specialist jury for the joint category "jazz & blues" also gave the accolade to Honzák's CD *Little Things*. We should add at this point that never before in the history of Czech jazz have there been so many new recordings – this year there were more than thirty. On one



thing the jurors of these awards could agree: there was plenty to choose from.

Also interesting is the extent to which foreign musicians have been involved in the prize-winning recordings. The band led by the double bassist, composer and teacher at the Prague Jazz Conservatory, Jaromír Honzák has had a permanent international line-up since the beginning of the 1990s. The drummer Lukasz Żyta and pianist Michał Tokaj from Poland are among top-ranking European jazz musicians and the involvement of the well-known American soprano and tenor saxophonist Chris Cheek further enhances the musical quality of this particular line-up. In fact only one native Prager is now playing with Honzák – and that is guitarist David Dorůžka, who has long been a big name throughout Europe. The second outstanding recording last year, *Invisible World* from bassist Tomáš Liška's trio, is comparably international. Its bandoneonist from Italy, Daniel Di Bonaventura, stands somewhere midway between tango nuevo and Italian Mediterranean folk, and his sound strongly influences the colour of the whole recording. It is no surprise that at the side of Liška and Di Bonaventura we once again find David Dorůžka playing the acoustic and the electric guitar. The Liška Trio's music, however, departs from pure jazz playing in the direction of Ibero-American modern music. It marries Di Bonaventura's urban port folk style with Dorůžka's guitar play, influenced by the Spanish school, on an appealing foundation provided by the melodic double bass play of the band leader Liška.

The third award-winning album is *Speak Slowly* from the Infinite Quintet. This band is part of the wave of new young faces in Czech jazz over the last decade (with the exception of the experienced double-bass player Petr Dvorský, who came on the scene right at the start of the 1990s), and in style it takes off from the musical peak of pre-electric jazz, its hardbop essence. The performers include three very distinctive musicians: the trumpet and bugle player Miroslav Hloucal, the alto and soprano sax player Petr Kalfus and the pianist Viliam Béreš. The whole line-up is sensitively complemented by the drummer Martin Novák.

## Jazz Recording Companies

One of the most crippling aspects of the ideological campaign against jazz under communism was great restriction and censorship of recordings. This means that the sound documentation of Czech jazz remains incomplete to this day, and the problem is exacerbated by a continuing reluctance to transfer the recordings of the 1960s–1980s onto CDs which seems to be entirely at odds with publishing practice elsewhere in the world. Of course contemporary Czech jazz musicians no longer have this kind of problem: on the one hand if no recording company shows an interest any band can now publish an album itself (good examples include the recordings by the trio of the excellent double bassist of the middle generation *Robert Balzar*, whose most recent album *Tales* even features guitarist John Abercrombie as guest), while on the other hand new publishers with their own catalogues of contemporary jazz have already entered the market.

If we take a look at the catalogues that are the richest in jazz titles, we find four labels setting the pace: *Animal Music*, *Cube-Metier*, *Arta* and *Multisonic*. To these we might add *Amplión Records* and *Radioservis*. Only the first two plus *Amplión Records* are purely jazz labels. *Arta* also has an interesting repertoire of early music, as well as contemporary titles. Together with *P&J Music* it was the first jazz label in the former Czechoslovakia after the revolution. While *P&J Music* today only rarely releases albums and concentrates



Miroslav Hloucal

on the organisation of jazz festivals, the *HP* label of the *ARTA* company has been mapping Czech jazz on a running basis and currently organises the seasonal series of concerts of the international *Agharta Prague Jazz Festival* focused primarily on bands close to fusion or funky jazz. Among *ARTA*'s most recent releases, the recordings of the bands of the pianists Matej Benek *Times Against Us*, Martin Brunner *Behind The Clouds*, and Ondřej Kabrna *Timeways*, or of the double bassist Jiří Šimíček's *Cesta domů/Road Home*, can be considered first-class on the domestic scene. *ARTA* can also take the credit for one title recorded directly in the USA in the cradle of jazz, i.e. the blues and soul-jazz orientated *Make You Wanna Hala* from saxophonist and flautist Jiří Hála, consisting mainly of his own pieces and recorded in New Orleans exclusively with local musicians.

While *Amplión Records* publishes titles infrequently, it can nevertheless be credited with launching the first important bands of the decade on the market; these are saxophonist and bass clarinetist Marcel Bárta's *Vertigo Quintet* and the *Limbo* quartet, likewise led by a saxophonist and bass-clarinetist, Pavel Hrubý. While the *Vertigo Quintet* represents the contemporary form of modern jazz, in which introspective passages alternate with the highly expressive, *Limbo* develops a hard bop moulded by ethnic influences and free jazz. At present *Limbo* has two formations differing in line-up as well as style: one plays its original music, while the other is moving towards the exploitation of electronics, a more meditative approach and also freer improvisation. The first face of *Limbo* owes much to the experienced veteran from the era of Czech jazzrock, the trumpeter František Kučera, while the new face of the *Limbo* is much influenced by the keyboards player and composer, Michal Nejtek, who is also active in modern classical music. The members of the *Vertigo Quintet* are today among the most sought-after jazzmen on the Czech scene, despite the fact that three of them are Slovaks (although today settled in the Prague jazz environment): the outstanding versatile trumpet player Oskar Török, the double bassist Rastislav Uhrík and the drummer Daniel Šoltis. The youngest member of the quintet, the pianist Vojtěch Procházka (1981) is today studying music and playing mainly in Finland.

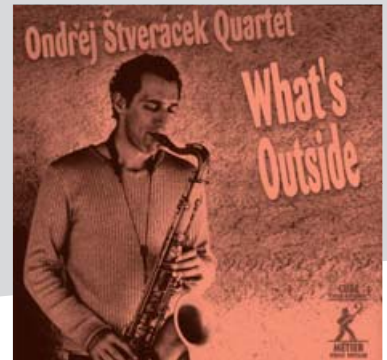
Marcel Bárta and Jaromír Honzák







Oskar Török



The founding and development of the repertoire of the Czech-English publishers *Cube-Metier* since 1997 is another fascinating chapter. The label's owner, Pavel Vlček lives in Britain. Originally he wanted to map the Prague club scene with an eye to the fact that many jazzmen of the middle and older generation had not had the chance to record under communism, when the monopoly publishers Supraphon and Panton in Bohemia/Moravia and Opus in Slovakia had restricted jazz recordings to a trickle as well as exercising censorship against particular individual musicians. These firms had worked on the basis of so-called annual publishing plans, getting state money for production and distribution regardless of the interest or indifference of the public. The unfortunate effects of this system lingered on after the fall of communism, for example it was not until 1998 that the Vlček company issued recordings of the world-class trombonist Svatopluk Košvanec, who was by that time sixty-two. Vlček's publishing range pays homage to the best home mainstream and takes into account the younger generation too, as is evident from the recording of the twenty-five-year-old saxophonist Karel Růžička Jr's *Spring Rolls Quartet* in 1998, or last year's autumn release of *What's Outside* from the outstanding "Coltranesque" tenor saxophonist Ondřej Štveráček. The Štveráček Quartet features the pianist Ondřej Krajňák, bass player Tomáš Baroš and drummer Marián Ševčík, with the drummer and percussionist Radek Němec performing in some numbers as guest.

The Czech Radio recording company, now under the label *Radioservis*, can draw on its own extensive recording archives from the 1960s to the present. It has released a series of painstakingly produced historical CD documents of the swing era from the 1920s up to the communist putsch in 1948. This was a series on which the producer František Rychtařík was collaborating until his death with the collector of old shellac discs Gabriel Gössel. Carrying on from this series *Radioservis* has issued several titles of Czech jazz from the 1950s to sixties, including the music of the jazz radio orchestra (JOČR) set up by the clarinetist and saxophonist Karel Krautgartner (who died in exile, having emigrated after the occupation in August 1968), and recordings of various different line-ups of the SHQ bands led by vibraphonist Karel Velebný.

This year *Radioservis* has released an excellent live recording of the Karel Růžička – father and son, a pianist and a saxophonist. Růžička Jr have been living and working in New York for many years and today plays with the bassist Georg Mraz, the guitarist George Benson, the saxophonist Ravi Coltrane and the trumpet player Roy Hargrove, and teaches at the Lincoln Centre in New York.

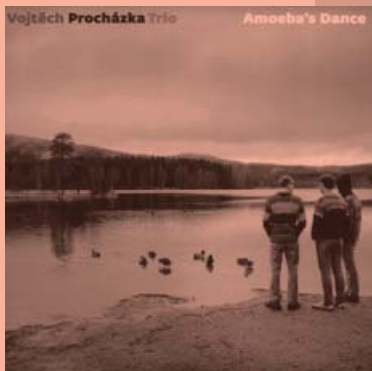
As far as re-editions are concerned, we are witnessing the paradoxical phenomenon of new publishing companies purchasing the rights of the original owners (Supraphon, Panton) in order to be able to release albums in CD format. One result of this process has been the recent release of a fundamental albums of 1970s Czech jazzrock with the groups *Combo FH*, *Energit*, *Impuls* and *Mahagon* on the Brno label *Indies Happy Trails*. The release, shortly afterwards, of the complete recordings of the trumpet player (now living in the USA) Laco Deczi's *Celula* band group from the end of the 1960s to the 1980s was artistically an even more admirable project. The only *Celula* albums not yet available on CD are just the older titles published by the Slovak recording firm OPUS. Generally, there are still at least three dozen high-quality recordings of the Czech jazz of the communist era that are waiting for someone to reissue them on CD because the owners of the rights have neither the will nor the resources to do so.

One special contribution to the discography of contemporary Czech jazz is the series on the *Multisonic* label which maps the concerts, *Jazz at the Castle*, organised on a monthly basis by the presidential office in the historical halls of the seat of the Czech kings and presidents since 2004, on the initiative of the current president Václav Klaus. Today this series boasts more than forty titles and the most interesting are the recordings of the usually international line-ups of Czech band leaders – collaborating not just with leading contemporary Slovak musicians,

but with jazzmen from literally the whole world. These concerts have at the same time been comprehensively mapping the whole Czech scene, so that alongside the “veterans” of jazz modernism, the jazzrock era or Czech exiles regularly returning to play at home (including the bassist Georg Mraz, the guitarist Rudy Linka, the trumpet player Laco Deczi, the bassist Miroslav Vitouš and many others less well known in the world), and female jazz singers in various styles, they feature interesting bands from the youngest generation. These albums are easy to identify, since they have a graphically standardised jacket dominated by a portrait of the bandmaster. For hi-fi discophiles *Multisonic* has also published the first recording in LP format – a concert by the *Hank Jones Trio*, which was one of the last recordings before his death.

In my outline of this year's releases I have deliberately left to last the young label that has caused great excitement on the publishing scene by its freshness of repertoire, and has been giving young, talented and clearly promising bands or individuals a chance to present their music on disc at an early stage of their careers. This label was founded by the former rock guitarist and singer Petr Ostrouchov, who called it *Animal Music*, and its first recordings appeared in 2007. The very first titles presented two of the youngest talents: the pianist and above all player on the Hammond organ *Ondřej Pivec* (1984) and the guitarist in his original trio *Libor Šmoldas* (1982). In fact this was not their first album – which was the recording made by the Pivec Quartet soon after its founding in 2005 on the *Cube-Metier* label. Both musicians belong to the generation of Czech jazzmen for whom long-term experience and periods of study on the American scene were already normal, and both recorded for *Animal Music* with American colleagues over the ocean. This year's recording from Ondřej Pivec *It's About Time*, was also born in a New York studio. It features Pivec in a duo with the pianist of the middle-generation *Jan Knop* aka *Najponk*, here playing a Fender Rhodes Piano. This keyboard set

creates an entirely original harmony accompanied by the American drummer Gregory Hutchinson. *Animal Music* can also take credit for all the albums that received awards in specialist surveys for 2009, i.e. *Little Things* from double bassist Jaromír Honzák, *Invisible World* from double bassist Tomáš Liška and *Point* from the Infinite Quintet.



Another young musician presented by Animal Music this year is the drummer *Tomáš Hobzek*. Bassist Tomáš Liška is another star from this publisher's stable. His debut this year, *Stick It Out*, was a big success. Just a few months later Hobzek, Liška and with them guitarist David Dorůžka found themselves performing together in Cyrill Oswald's Czech band debut *The Wrong Present* (Oswald has been living in Prague for some years with his family). Another interesting project that Animal Music has brought to a wider public is the debut of the *MUFF* quintet, which consists of already experienced musicians of the younger generation. Their jazz is a synthesis of different influences, particularly the increasingly electric jazz and experimental rock of the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies, and includes oriental motifs. I would like to end this list of the more important events in the contemporary Czech recording field by mentioning the album *Amoeba's Dance* from the already mentioned pianist *Vojtěch Procházka*. It was made in a trio with the pianist's current Finnish fellow- students. In his repertoire Procházka pays homage to a whole constellation of brilliant hard bop pianists, with Thelonius Monk as its centre of gravity. He also includes a few standards that the young generation in this country generally avoids.

### Jazz Festivals, a New Tradition

Until the Velvet Revolution of 1989, the dominating official jazz event in Czechoslovakia was the Prague International Jazz Festival, which was ideologically and financially supported by the state as a proof of the incorporation of jazz into socialist culture. Apart from this, various amateur local festivals (among which for example the Czechoslovak Amateur Jazz Festival in Přerov in Moravia had international festival status) tended to come and go, usually by political decision. These smaller festivals depended almost exclusively on the organisational enthusiasm of local jazz fans. The specific case of the Prague Jazz Days in the years 1974–75 has been described in the preceding issue of our magazine. After the revolution there were a number of attempts to establish a new big festival to replace the dying original Prague international festival, but these failed to take off. Jazz was finding its new limits, and these were not just economic but also reflected a change in the public perception of jazz – it was no longer music defying and provoking the ideological establishment, but just one minority musical genre in the spectrum of domestic music. The most important attempt to get a big annual festival off the ground was the summer open air *Agharta Prague Jazz Festival* starting in 1992, which had difficulty attracting audiences even with such names as Betty Carter, John Patitucci, John McLaughlin, Trilok Gurtu and a whole constellation of jazz exiles who could

finally come back to play in Czechoslovakia – for example the guitarist Rudy Linka, and the baritone saxophonist Jan Konopásek. Alas, APJF suffered the same fate as the other attempts at festivals; they fragmented into a running seasonal series of concerts, or were cut back to weekend events of local character.

The one international festival that has a week-long programme in one town is the *Jazz Goes to Town* festival, held since 1995 in the East Bohemian regional capital of Hradec Králové. It was conceived and today is still run by its arts and programme director, the jazz flautist and teacher Martin Brunner. This year it was held in October for the sixteenth year running and consisted of ten concerts involving twenty groups or orchestras, all in eight venues in the town. One of the venues is a church, in which there was a performance of the famous *Celebration Jazz Mass* by the pianist, composer and important jazz teacher Karel Růžička, seventy this year. The programme credo of this festival is to present exceptional foreign musicians, with the important criterion being not so much “star” status as artistic contribution to contemporary music: this year such guests included the saxophonist Marty Ehrlich, the cellist Hank Roberts, the reedman Pentti Lahti and the flautist Nicole Mitchell. In addition there was a balanced presentation of projects by the older generation and talents of the coming generation.

In Prague there are currently another two annual festivals that have some value but unfortunately only minority appeal even within the jazz community. These are the September *Free Jazz Festival* (in its 5th year) and the November *International Jazz Piano Festival* (in its 15th year). Both festivals are held in small halls, usually consist of just 2–3 concerts and feature mainly foreign musicians from all over the world. The existence of the Free Jazz Festival is somewhat ironic, because this phase of modern jazz was never very popular among Czech jazzmen or the public, and it could even be said that free jazz was least regarded here when it was at its peak in the jazz world.

The *Bohemia Jazz Festival* is a chapter all to itself. Its father and artistic director is the leading Czech-born guitarist *Rudy Linka*, the pupil of the world authorities of the jazz guitar Jim Hall, John Scofield and John Abercrombie. He was first

an exile in Sweden, and is now a resident in New York and stalwart of the jazz scene there. The festival takes place in the open air at the beginning of the summer vacation and after two days moves from Prague’s Old Town Square to several South Bohemian towns. This year it was extended for the first time to the South Moravian capital Brno. Linka has been achieving something extraordinary in local conditions: despite the problems arising from the world financial crisis he has been managing to find money to pay even stars from the USA while charging audiences nothing for the concerts. It is worth mentioning that among the local festivals there is just one that has been held annually without interruption since 1967. This is the *Slaný Jazz Days* in the small town of Slaný (around 30 km from Prague), which was often a refuge for Prague jazz life in the worst years of ideological pressure on the jazz community under the regime of President Husák. The beginning of the autumn also saw the twenty-seventh year of the Czechoslovak jazz festival in Písek and the Jazz Fest in Karlovy Vary, both events that usually have foreign guests.

### Gaudioso in jazzissimo

The first decade of the second jazz century has developed very well for the Czech jazz scene and so for its audience too. Prague is full of purely jazz clubs, currently the most famous being the Jazz Dock on the Vltava Embankment, which offers two concerts a day and nightly jam sessions. The youngest generation of musicians is very strong. They have been managing to capitalise on experience with good foreign players and can now hold their own in West European or New York clubs. Of course, it is difficult for Czech bands to get much of a foothold in the world recording market, given the enormous amount of competition. Still, at least the domestic jazz public now has the chance to compare Czech jazz with foreign production, to appreciate the best and not automatically to assume that everything coming from the wider jazz world is superior, as they did during the forty years of separation from that world by the “iron curtain” on the Western borders of Czechoslovakia, and even for some years after the revolution.

# JANA VÖRÖŠOVÁ: I TAKE EVERYTHING THAT APPEALS TO ME

*Rubble and Sands* for symphony orchestra; the string quartet *Pet Wet*; *Turum durum* for violin, electronics and two percussion players; *The One-Eyed Fish* – a chamber cantata for choir and orchestra on her own text...

These are just a few random titles from the dynamic composer Jana Vöröšová. Her pieces are anything but boring. How she arrives at her surprising associations, what she admires and what she rejects, how she works with performers – these are all subjects she talks about in the following interview.

*What is usually the impulse that makes you start writing?*

My greatest inspirations are experiences, feelings, moods that can be evoked by basically anything. An eagle flying over a mountain valley where I've been hiking all afternoon, the wagon of a train rattling on a bend in the track, the soft sound of freshly fallen snow, a story, a poem, a feeling...



PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER 4x

*You have been writing music for film, for dance choreography, for texts. How do projects of this kind start? Do you have an idea and look for people to realise it, or are these projects more the results of chance stimulating meetings?*

The first alternative tends to be harder and also takes longer. It's far simpler and maybe even more inspiring



to get ideas from meetings, and to collaborate with friends and acquaintances.

*The winner at the NUBERG competition was your piece **Havran a moře / The Raven and the Sea**, inspired by an Eskimo story. But the instrumental combination is very un-Eskimo – accordion, harpsichord and strings. How did you arrive at that combination?*

What is a proper Eskimo combination? I read the story in a collection by Ivan Wernisch, called *Head on the Table*. What is Eskimo about it is the austerity, and the directness of narrative. From the start you sense the somber premonition of a bad end in the story. What most fascinated me was the moment when there is still quite a lot of time left before the raven's death – before the water rises high enough – but everything is lost, death is certain, and there is no point in fighting. The waters will close, the waves wipe the tracks from the sand, as if nothing had happened. Everyone must have experienced those moments of apprehension, when something has happened that cannot be undone. I wanted to put this feeling into music. There are two versions of the piece: one orchestral and one for three trumpets. The trumpet version was written for the opening of an exhibition of painting by my friend Vladimír Větrovský. The exhibition was in the huge glass atrium of a bank and the idea was for the players to stand in the various offices and play from windows into the atrium space, while there were supposed to be dancers down among the pictures. The original plan was dropped, but the music had already been written, and so we played it and danced it at the Prague Premieres series in the courtyard of the Rudolfinum Gallery. But the story and the atmosphere just kept coming back to me, and when Peter Vrábel [the conductor of the Berg Orchestra] came and offered me a new premiere, I decided to go back to the Eskimos. The colour of the accordion struck me immediately and the idea of the harpsichord was Peter's. I agreed because I thought that in sound it fitted well with the character in the story – the swarm of tiny crabs. The strings are the Berg standard line-up.

*Now we are on to the subject of premieres – the organisers of the contemporary music festival CONTEMPULS have commissioned a premiere from you for this year. What is the piece like?*

The piece was commissioned for the concert ensemble *Adapter*, which has a very unconventional line-up: flute, clarinet, harp, piano and percussion. I hesitated for a while – I was tempted by the acoustic idea of harp, piano and vibraphone/marimba, but in the end I used all the instruments. The musicians offered me a change to take part in rehearsals for a whole week. It's an immense benefit if the performers

truly identify with what they are playing, understand it and tune themselves to the same wave-length. If they can do that, then they can find their own solutions, think up the best ways of achieving the required sound, or character. Once, in a piece for six percussionists, I wrote a siren at the end with the idea of producing a fading away effect, but the instrument didn't quite correspond to my ideas. I didn't say anything at all about the acoustically bad quality of the instrument, but the players themselves still came up with a substitute solution, and they "sang" the noise of the fading siren entirely authentically.

*When you know who is going to play a piece, do you tailor the composition to the players?*

Yes of course. For example when I was writing a violin concerto I had consultations on everything with the performer, Anna Veverková. When we needed a solution to a problem passage in the introduction, where there was supposed to be long glissando in pizzicato, she came up with the idea of having a plastic extension piece on a finger of her left hand, which got over the difficulty of the immediate damping of the strings and gave the sound greater resonance.

*In which aspects of a composition do you give performers freedom and where do you keep control?*

I've found it works to write out even passages that are more aleatoric. Everyone has a different idea and detailed verbal explanation is sometimes pointlessly complicated and time-consuming.

*What is your experience with improvisation? Why is it so unpopular with our professional players? Or it isn't?*

Improvisation is a complicated matter and requires several things all at once: technical skill, the ability to think fast, imagination and a certain vision of the whole. It is simpler to play something that is already written down than to become emotionally involved and stick your neck out.

*To what extent do performers understand what you write?*

That differs from person to person. With some people you have an immediate understanding, with others you have to spend a lot of time finding a way through, and there are some people who simply are not on your wavelength even if you are contact with them every day. Of course, it is terrific to write for friends and people I know already, but that isn't always the case. For example, it was thanks to a twenty-minute cycle of songs for harp and voice I met the outstanding harpist Kateřina Englichová (after several harpists had taken a look at the notes and refused to play the piece). Otherwise I might never have got to know her, and now if I write something for harp, I shall go back to





her and collaborating with her will be as delightful as before. My worst experience was with a certain unnamed Czech orchestra, which did the orchestral concert for the department of composing, and made a lot of very impolite comments on our pieces. I even had to show them how to play a problematic passage: luckily it was on the vibraphone, I couldn't have managed it on the violin. It would be a good thing if all the musicians who make their living by performance in the CR were professional in approach, and not just technically professional.

### ***Must a composer be original?***

Not just a composer, but any kind of creative artist, and actually probably every person, has to be original. That originality is reflected in the sincerity and authenticity of what I say and what I live. Andrei Tarkovsky wrote about this brilliantly in his book *Beauty is the Symbol of Truth*. But of course these are very personal matters for each one of us and no one but we

ourselves can judge how far we are straying from our own path or finding ourselves.

### ***Which composers do you rate very highly? And which do you listen to most often?***

I have great respect for the approach of Charles Ives. What do I listen to? There's so terribly much. I have a great weakness for vocal polyphony, Scarlatti, Dvořák, Wagner, Janáček, Webern, Ligeti, all Iannis Xenakis's pieces for percussion, K. Saariaho's ballet *Maa* and *Six Japanese Gardens* are favourites of mine, and Stockhausen's *Zodiac* and *Stimmung*, Dusapin's *Requiem*, and Manoury's *Le Livre des Claviers*. Apart from classical music, my biggest favourites are Yat-kha, all the recordings from the Alan Lomax collection and so on... When I'm driving in the car with my husband, we listen to all kinds of stuff – Frank Zappa, Download, Fourtet, Manu chao, John Zorn's *Naked City*, Dunaj...

### ***What about parody, and references to music that already exists? When is that all right, and when isn't it?***

Parody is brilliant, but it has to be done with love for what is parodied, or else it's nothing but ridicule. If I refer in my music to something already written, usually I am trying to achieve a certain atmosphere. In its abstraction, music is far richer in different associations than other forms of art. Are there any colours, instruments, that you prefer? From childhood I sang in a choir and so what most appeals to me is the colour of the human voice – whether solo, or as accompaniment, or in choir texture. Recently I've become especially fond of chamber groups of the same instruments, where the colour of one instrument is multiplied. So I have written music for three trumpets, three cellos, three violins. And the dulcimer enchanted me so much just by its sound that I decided to learn to play it. Accordion and harp are fixed stars in my sound heaven. I can't stand banjo, but Stockhausen has convinced me that even banjo can be used in an unheard of way. Otherwise I just take everything that appeals to me. When I was at the composer-percussionist workshop in Trstěnice, where Tomáš Ondrůšek keeps a barn full of instruments, in the end I chose a shopping trolley and wastebin for my miniature at the final musical séance...

### ***Do you write your choral pieces for a particular choir?***

When I was studying at the conservatory, I and my classmate Radka Vranková dreamed up PĚSDUM (Pěvecké Sdružení Dobrovolných Umělců/Choral Association of Volunteer Artists) – a society of friends, musicians, fellow students who all had a taste for singing and making music. Concerts, Christmas meetings,



graduate performances. We devoted a huge amount of care to rehearsals – we would have as many as twenty-six rehearsals for one concert. My last PĚSDUM venture was doing the choral parts in my Bachelor's piece *Jednooká ryba/The One-Eyed Fish*. It was then that I first met the conductor Peter Vrábel and the Berg Orchestra.

***Who has moved you forward and who has held you back?***

Rather than people, it has been all kinds of musical encounter that have spoken to me at a certain moment. For example, *Three Small Liturgies of the Divine Presence* by Olivier Messiaen, which I had the chance to sing. Or the live appearance of musicians from Tuva, Huun-Huur-Tu, a concert of the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Seiji Ozawa, *Letter from Cathy* by Louis Andriessen at the Prague Premieres Festival, the solo performance by the frontman of Einstürzende

Neubauten Blixa Bargeld at the Présences festival, and many, many others. All my trips abroad have made a big positive difference to how I think, and not only in music, whether it was my scholarship in Brussels, my creative stay in Paris, holidays in the Spanish Pyrenees or a week in the Tatra Mountains.

***Can you say a bit more about what you discovered on your periods of study abroad, and compare them with your studies at home?***

The biggest difference in Brussels was the professors' approach to contemporary music. It was completely taken for granted that when the school organised a concert, the cherry on the cake would be the appearance of one of the teachers with a difficult modern piece. For example I remember a brilliant performance of Berio's violin *Sequenza*. In analysis classes, all the students would get copies of analysed piece, whatever it was, Mozart or Xenakis. When we were learning to record in Pro Tools, we immediately went out and recorded a graduation concert. At the beginning of the year we would get a list of various projects that we would allocate among ourselves and then be responsible for. For instance, I got the task of filming and producing a dance performance on music by Eric Satie and John Cage. As far as the compositions themselves are concerned, though, I must say that at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague is better than average in its service for organising concerts and above all the number of concerts. At the Brussels Conservatory they only have one chamber concert a year. And then of course there's the usual lament about the poor resources of our libraries compared to the ones in cities like Paris, London and Berlin.

***What do you see as the point of studying composition?***

It confronts you with a huge quantity of opinions and information over a short time period. You meet a lot of interesting people, experts. Also, even if it doesn't seem that way at the time, there really is also a lot of time for your own work. For a composer it's a huge advantage to be able to hear everything she has just written. Especially with pieces for larger ensembles it's a brilliant service that later can't be taken for granted. Maybe you get almost too much in the way of stimuli and advice on how to compose, but I think that the most important thing is to have something to write about, and no school can teach you that anyway.

***Do you have any piece that in your view is just as good as, say, your prize-winning Raven and the Sea but just hasn't had the same chance?***

Yes, for instance the version for the trumpets... The biggest benefit of the NUBERG Competition run by the Berg Chamber Orchestra is that every year

it provides a space for the creation of seven or eight new pieces and the chance for not all but at least two of them to be performed more than once. New pieces are being written but the fact that they only get played once is a great pity, not just for the works themselves but for listeners. Absorbing a new piece of contemporary music on just one listening is a super-human task. It is also good for the piece itself if the performers can digest it and present it on the podium several times. For example, I had a chance to hear my piece *Turum durum* three times, always in a slightly different version. Despite this, the reactions were positive each time, and when people had heard it for the second or third time they pointed out details that they hadn't had the chance to notice the first time.

*You have been teaching for some time now. Have you had a chance to promote contemporary music?*

I was playing and teaching at the Duncan Centre Conservatory at a time when there was a wonderful teaching staff and a wonderful management open and responsive to ideas and creative initiatives both from teachers and students. I used to take the students to workshops at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts, and to public dress rehearsals at the Rudolfinum, and no-one ever tried to interfere and tell me what I should do and how I should do it, what to listen to and what not to. At the annual Jarmila Jeřábková Dance Competition a piece of music by a contemporary composer is always chosen as the basis for a choreography competition. This has meant the dancers getting to know the music of Marek Kopelent, Martin Smolka, and Kryštof Mařatka. The students in the higher years can also choose optional courses and lectures on contemporary music, given by young composers. Brilliant musicians like the percussionists Ganesh Ananda or Jaroslav Kořán played at the dance classes. As a performance coach what I liked best was the improvisation sessions, when you have a chance to influence the mood of what is emerging physically in the room through the music, and you can still compare, notice the reactions, see what works and what isn't communicable and so on. In theory, we mainly sang and made music, and listened to everything from Renaissance madrigals to electronic music and Joy Division. We sang folk songs (not just Czech and Slovak but English, Scottish, Turkish and Hungarian), we tried playing the didgeridoo, and we thought up various rhythmic-dance exercises.

*You now have the new role of mother – is that changing your “composing self”?*

The priorities are really different, but my “composing self” is still the same, perhaps a little humbler. And an album of lullabies is already on the way.

**Jana Vörösová**


*(1980) She gained her initial musical education at the Prague Conservatory. Then she continued in her study of composition at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. In 2006 she had a year's scholarship at the Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussels, where she was introduced to the most advanced technologies of electronically processed sound but also a wide range of methods of sound analysis. She took part in workshops run by well-known contemporary composers and regularly attended classes with leading Belgian teachers. She also had a three-month creative fellowship in Paris. Since childhood she has been actively involved in choral singing, and she is now a member of the Prague Cathedral Choir, which concentrates on performing music of the Baroque and Renaissance. Her pieces have been played at the Orfeo Festival (Slovakia), Prague Premieres (CR), the Festival Delle nazioni Citta di Castello (IT), and the Festival Calliopée (FR).*





*The Mánes building in the 1930s*





# THE CZECH INTERWAR AVANT-GARDE AS A REVOLUTION OF RETURN, CIVILISM, THE MICROTONAL SYSTEM AND THE ATONAL STYLE

The Czech interwar avant-garde represents one of the most striking and distinctive periods in Czech music. It is familiar to the international professional and semi-professional public largely thanks to the microtonal system developed by the composer and theorist Alois Hába. Its leading representative Bohuslav Martinů is among the most internationally renowned of Czech composers and his music is frequently performed both at home and abroad.

In Czech-speaking milieux the term “avant-garde” first appeared in the mid-19th century, i.e. at the period when the originally military expression came into political usage where it was used first in France and later in other areas of Europe to denote a primarily leftwing political grouping and later also artists in the forefront (“advance guard”) of progress. In the most famous Czech modern lexicon, *Otto's Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, the entry “avantgarda” dates to the 1930 edition, in which its author speaks of the artistic avant-garde as progressive art and states that “the avant-garde in literature, theatre and cinematography is an expression denoting an energetic, pioneering movement in a particular field of the arts [...] and so people write of avant-garde literature, painting, theatre and film.”

In Czech-speaking society, the term “avantgarda” related to artistic activity appears first at the end of the year 1920 with the formation of the socially and



*The Devětsil Almanac cover by Karel Teige*

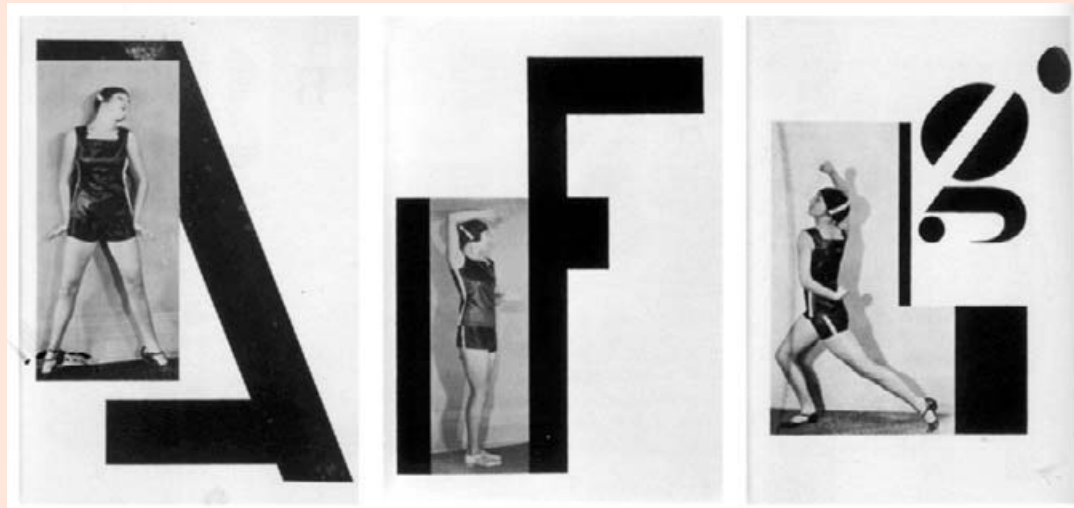
“avant-garde music” since the beginning of the 1930s. It was then the founder of musicology at the Masaryk University in Brno, Vladimír Helfert, for example, who employed the term in his respected writings.

### **The Czech Modern Movement, Social Expressionism and the Transition to the Avant-Garde**

The protagonists of the Czech inter-war avant-garde are very closely linked to the Czech modern movement in music, which in its first generation included the composers Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) and Vítězslav Novák (1870–1949), and also Josef Suk (1874–1935), who like Novák had been a pupil of Antonín Dvořák, as well as Otakar Ostrčil (1879–1935), not only a composer but an enlightened promoter of avant-garde music in the years when he was head of the opera of the National Theatre in Prague.

In the case of Leoš Janáček, we can also justifiably speak directly of a “social expressionism” with ideological links not just to the Czech literary modern movement but also to future avant-garde movements. In the words of the Czech musicologist and composer

artistically avant-garde group known as *Devětsil Arts Association*. Its members were first and foremost literati but later included composers (see below). In its manifesto, *Prague Monday*, of the 6th of December 1920, the founder artists did not define themselves as avant-garde but the main instigator of the *Devětsil*, and leading Czech critic and theorist, Karel Teige, used the word in a speech made at the *Prague Revolutionary Stage* on the 6th of February 1921. Czech musicology has employed the term



*Karel Teige's illustrations for Vítězslav Nezval's book of poems Abeceda [Alphabet]*

Miloš Štedroň, Janáček's "social and Slavonic expressionism" consists in the "exaggeration and acoustic compression of the expansive action". Janáček's vocal and vocal-instrumental work took on a social dimension through its partial orientation to folklore; the folk quality in his music consists not of mere citation of folk songs but of the highly individual transformation of the folk idiom leaving an "authentic core" of characteristic harmonic and melodic elements. In this way one of the unspoken but real and practiced programme principles of the Czech interwar musical avant-garde was essentially fulfilled in his work. Janáček's music was played at the concerts of the *Přítomnost* [*The Present*] association and did so at a time when this group was already focused exclusively on avant-garde music (see below). Other expressions of the sympathy for Janáček felt by avant-garde movements included his honorary membership of The New Music Society of California (1925), where in 1927 he found himself at the side of e.g. Béla Bartók, Alois Hába, Arnold Schönberg, Darius Milhaud and the society's founder Henry Cowell. It is clear that Janáček attracted the attention of the avant-garde with works written after the First World War, for example the opera *Káťa Kabanová* (1921), and then particularly his chamber music (*String Quartets nos. 1 and 2* of 1923 and 1928, *Concertino*, 1925).

One very important factor for the emergence of the Czech avant-garde, especially in the institutional sense, was what was known as the Novák School. This consisted of the pupils of Vítězslav Novák and was a circle that provided the impetus for the founding of the *Society for Modern Music in Prague*. From 1927, when Alois Hába became head of this *Society*, it became an important formative centre of Czech music avant-garde.

### The Character of the Czech Inter-War Avant-Garde in Four Words

The range of concerts organised in the interwar period, the activities of the composers' and music societies and critical feedback provided by the reactions of the specialist public offer a picture of a Czechoslovak inter-war musical life that was clearly responding to the new influences coming particularly from the German-speaking world and from France. Key works of most of the world avant-garde movements in music were performed and often even premiered in Czechoslovakia, and their influence was formative and enables us to gain a better understanding of the development and opinions of composers later considered

members of the Czech interwar musical avant-garde. Analysis and comparison of a representative sample of Czech pieces written in the inter-war period then enables us to describe the Czech inter-war music avant-garde using three headings: "civilism", "atonal music" and "the revolution of return". The fourth heading is the microtonal system of Alois Hába, which is also a specific original feature of the Czech inter-war avant-garde.



Bohuslav Martinů

### The Revolution of Return

The term "revolution of return" was coined by Bohuslav Martinů and precisely sums up the character of the two more prominent movements of (not only) the Czech interwar musical avant-garde. These are neo-classicism as a reaction to romanticism and neo-folklore in the form of an analogous expression of the need to regain authenticity and rawness in the sense of rejecting beautification. In both cases these were movements of return that in the attempt to move forward looked backward and defined themselves in terms of opposition to sentimentalising subjectivism and then, more positively in terms of trust in the possibility of using the past as a point from which a new advance could be made in a different direction. The French composers' association *Les Six* with its principled neo-classicist orientation was very warmly received in the Czechoslovak Republic. This was particularly the case with the music of its members Arthur Honegger

and Darius Milhaud. Another strong influence was Igor Stravinsky, who was first hotly rejected by the professional public but then accepted and acclaimed with the same intensity. Last but not least, there was much discussion and awareness of the representative of the “new objectivity” Paul Hindemith, who in Czech circles was regarded as very similar in approach to composers identifying with neo-classicism.



Left to right:  
Alois Hába, Pavel Haas, Iša Krejčí

### Neo-Classicism and Constructivism

Neo-classicist approaches were embraced in particularly pure form by the *Mánes Music Group* of composers, and even included simple revival of the musical language of the 18th century, for example in works by the composer Iša Krejčí. The more usual form of Czechoslovak neo-classicism, however, involved its structural integration into a music that came to be called constructivism, which was akin in austerity and proclamative titles to civilism. For this music, the leading musicologist and founder of musicology at Masaryk University in Brno, Vladimír Helfert, used such apposite if subjective-sounding terms as “asentimental” or “atonal” or “mechanical” or “motoric” constructivism.

Prototypical for Czech constructivism were Pavel Bořkovec’s symphonic allegro *Start* (1929), Bořkovec’s song cycle *Stadium* (1929), his *Suite for Piano* (1930), *Wind Quintet* (1932) and his first *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1931). To these we should add a number of compositions by Bohuslav Martinů, and specifically his orchestral movements *Half-time* (1924) and *La Bagarre* (1926), the ballet *Kdo je na světě nejmocnější* / *Who is the Most Powerful in the World* (1923), the ballet *Vzpouřa* / *The Revolt* (1925), the second and third *String Quartet* (1925, 1929)

and the *String Sextet* of 1932. Other composers temporarily inclining to constructivism included Pavel Haas, Karel Hába (the brother of Alois Hába) and the Iša Krejčí already mentioned. Later the term “constructivism” was also used pejoratively to mean music lacking in imagination and therefore merely “contrived”.

The inter-war symphonies of Erwin Schulhoff, for example no. 3 (1935) or no. 5 (1938) present

an interesting variant of Paul Hindemith’s intellectually kindred “revolution of return” in the spirit of “new objectivity”.

### Neo-Folklore

Neo-folklore was not embraced as a major influence by avant-garde orientated composers in inter-war Czechoslovakia to any great extent and certainly never acquired the kind of atavistic urgency that it has in the case of Igor Stravinsky. The lyrical quality of Bohuslav Martinů’s cantata *Kytice / Bouquet* (1937) using the words of folk poems is illustrative in this respect, as is his sung ballet *Špalíček / The Chap Book* (1932). Other composers of the Czech musical avant-garde who took up folklore to a limited degree included Alois Hába (Five Songs, 1944, the opera *Mother*, 1929), Pavel Bořkovec (choral music *Folk Sayings*, 1936), and the director and composer Emil František Burian – largely because he wrote so much music for the stage.

### Civilisms as Mechanical Rythm, Sport and Jazz

As on the international scene, civilism in inter-war Czechoslovakia was expressed in two forms. On the one hand (as we have mentioned) as constructivism with the accent



on pregnant and motoric rhythm and sports themes declared in the titles of composition, and on the other as the fusion of art music and jazz. Sport had become part of the modern life of the new and above all emancipated world following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Like jazz entertainment, sport was not sentimental or nostalgic, but unaffected (unpretentious in the sense suggested by the word “civilism” in Czech), everyday and contemporary. And what is more it was dynamic, and so resonated not just with the character of the inter-war period, but also with other art avant-garde movements such as futurism. Bohuslav Martinů’s *Half-time* (1924) or Pavel Bořkovec’s symphonic allegro for large orchestra simply entitled *Start* (1929), are examples of how sport could be an inspiration when regarded in this way.

Jazz inspirations were attractive to composers for much the same reasons. Very little liturgical music was written in inter-war Czechoslovakia, but a vast amount of music was produced celebrating movement and dance. What is more, jazz became a welcome invigorating element and a means by which composers could ironically cock a snook at the music of the past with its heavy philosophical trappings. This avant-garde current was highly congenial to composers of the Czech inter-war avant-garde, as is apparent from both the quality and the number of jazz-inspired or even just jazz pieces that they wrote. For the Czech public the composer most closely associated with jazz at this period is Jaroslav Ježek (1906–1942), whose *Bugatti Step* (1931) has become a popular classic and can certainly compete honourably with the more famous *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) by the celebrated George Gershwin. Other composers strongly influenced by jazz – even if only for a short time – included Erwin Schulhoff, especially in his *Fünf études de jazz* (1926) for piano, and *Hot sonata* for alto saxophone and piano (1930). Schulhoff also wrote the very unusual jazz oratorio *HMS Royal Oak* (1930). Explicit jazz models or influences are obvious in the work of the composer and director František Burian (e.g. the opera *Bubu from Montparnasse*, 1927), and of course Bohuslav Martinů, whose ballet and suite *La revue de cuisine* (1928) perfectly conjures up the atmosphere of the time of its creation (1927), even simply in the title.

Erwin Schulhoff’s *Fünf Pittoresken*, especially the third, “dadaist” picturesque *In futurum* (1919) which consists just of rhythmically



Erwin Schulhoff and his “*In futurum*”  
(from *Fünf Pittoresken*, 1919)



differentiated pauses and reflects Schulhoff’s experience with the work of Dadaist groups in Berlin and Dresden, belongs in this category of avant-garde musical production. Also worthy of mention are *Cocktails* (1927) composed by Emil František Burian on texts by the major Czech poet and founder of the *Group of Surrealists in the Czechoslovak Republic*, Vítězslav Nezval.



E. F. Buian

### Atonal and Athematic Music, Reactions to the Second Viennese School

As in the wider world, for the Czech inter-war musical avant-garde too the key figure in moving beyond the limits of tonal music was Arnold Schönberg, and by extension the whole *Neue Wiener Schule*. The nature of the of Czech inter-war composers' response to this pioneering movements says much about the character of new music in the CSR in this period, and specifically its particular needs when it came to adoption of new trends in music. Schönberg's rigorous twelve-tone approach was alien to Czechoslovak composers in the great majority of cases, and this was also true of the hermetically compact and in Czechoslovakia virtually unknown music of Anton Webern. On the other hand, the lyricising and in many respects more conservative work of Alban Berg found a much warmer reception, as did Arnold Schönberg's free atonalism, which surprisingly enough was a declared source of inspiration for a number of composers influenced by neo-classicism or by extension constructivism. The almost negligible interest in Schönberg's dodecaphony and the freely atonal and later music of Anton Webern was paralleled by the almost complete lack of response to the work of the futurists, who were little known in the CSR and/or seemed too radical and so incompatible with the desire of most Czechoslovak inter-war composers to synthesise avant-garde influences and so exclude or tone down extremes. Futurism was the subject of some reflections and newspaper articles by Alois Hába, for example. We can also find a view illustrative of the period in a book by E.F. Buian, laconically entitled *Jazz*, where the author

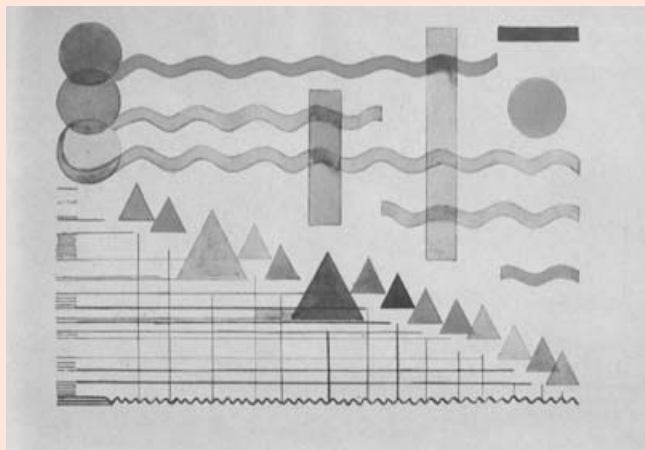
suggests that its "rumble and drums" makes jazz the musical analogy of all futurist activities.

The avant-garde movement represented by the *Neue Wiener Schule* was one of the starting points for the work of Miroslav Ponc, who belonged to the circle of composers around Alois Hába and even studied privately with Arnold Schönberg in the years 1927–32. In addition to atonal and microtonal music he experimented on the boundaries between music and visual art, especially as a member of the Berlin avant-garde Sturm group. The *Neue Wiener Schule* was likewise important for Viktor Ullmann, and episodically for other composers in the circle of Alois Hába, who may be regarded as the most prominent representative of athematic music and promoter of the atonal style.

### The Microtonal System, Alois Hába and His School

Alois Hába (1893–1973) was undoubtedly one of the most significant and distinctive figures of the inter-war music avant-garde. He was active as a composer, teacher, organiser, promoter and theorist. He created and from 1921 used his own system of bichromatic and polychromatic composition, i.e. a system involving quarter-tones and third- up to twelfth-tones. This makes him the only Czech composer of the inter-war period to have been truly avant-garde in the conceptually pioneering as well as the creative sense; he published his conclusions on micro-interval and athematic music as well as employing them in his own music. He attracted many followers, thanks to whom we can speak of a Hába School in the latter half of the 20th century. From 1923 he taught a class in microtonal thematic and non-thematic composition at the Prague Conservatory and from 1946 to 1950 he lectured on microtonal composition at a specialised department of the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. His pupils included the famous conductor and composer Karel Ančerl (1908–1973), and the important Czech composer Miloslav Kabeláč (1908–1979).

Alois Hába's most significant and distinctive pieces written using his microtonal system in the inter-war years include the quartertone opera *Matka / Mother* (1930), and the sixth-tone *Duo for Two Violins* (1937) and sixth-tone *Six Pieces for Harmonium* of 1937. Particularly worth of note among his works of the time outside the microtonal system is the *Nonet no. 1* in a twelve-tone system (but not "twelve-tone" in the sense of Arnold Schönberg's dodecaphony)



Miroslav Ponc's music graphics

from 1931, and *Nonet no. 2* in a seven-tone system (1932). One of his fundamental theoretical works is the study *Harmonické základy dvanáctitónového systému, tematické a nethematické hudební sloh / Harmonic Principles of the Twelve-Tone System, Thematic and Non-Thematic Musical Style*. (The reader will find a lengthy article on Alois Hába in CMQ 3/2005.)

### The Environment and Institutions of the Czech Inter-War Musical Avant-Garde

An important role in forming and above all promoting the Czech inter-war musical avant-garde was played by music journals, especially *Rytmus: revue pro soudobou hudbu* [*Rhythm: a Review for Contemporary Music*], *Hudební revue* [*Music Review*], *Listy Hudební matice* [*Music Foundation News*] or *Dalibor: hudební listy* [*Dalibor: Music News*] and also the review *Hudební rozhledy* [*Musical Outlooks*], which still exists today and which was edited in the years 1924–1928 with the subtitle *Critical Paper for Czech Music Culture* by Vladimír Helfert.

### Devětsil and Mánes

Several associations bringing artists together from different branches of the arts were founded in inter-war Czechoslovakia. Emerging in these associations was a common denominator proclaimed as the motive for their creation, i.e. identification with the “avant-garde” as such. The clearest example was the first such programmatically avant-garde society, the *Umělecký svaz Devětsil / Devětsil Arts Union* (1920). Its founder members were mainly writers, for example the novelist Vladislav Vančura, the poet and later Nobel prize-winner Jaroslav Seifert and the theorist, critic and major figure of Czech poetism Karel Teige. These were later joined by the composer, playwright and director Emil František Burian, the composers Iša Krejčí and Jaroslav Ježek and the music critic Josef Löwenbach. None of the latter developed their musical activities purely on the basis of *Devětsil* activities and principles, however, and they were soon founding other societies and organisations. At the beginning of the 1920s the Czech inter-war musical avant-garde was only just beginning to emerge.

The *Hudební skupina Mánesa / Mánes Music Group* came into existence in a similar way. Its name reveals its relationship to the Prague *Mánes Socie-*



*The Mánes Music Group in 1937  
(left to right: František Bartoš,  
Václav Holzknecht, Iša Krejčí,  
Pavel Bořkovec, Jaroslav Ježek)*



*Pavel Bořkovec*



ty of *Fine Artists*. This society held exhibitions and social and arts meetings in its own functionalist building (designed by the architect Otakar Novotný, and from 1932 it also hosted concerts of the new *Mánes* “music club”. The members of the MMG were the composers Iša Krejčí, Pavel Bořkovec, Jaroslav Ježek, the composer and musicologist František Bartoš and the pianist and music writer Václav Holzknecht. Holzknecht’s book *Hudební skupina Mánesa* cites an article by Walter Seidl printed in the newspaper *Prager Tagblatt*, which vividly describes the course of the opening of the exhibition *Poesie 1932* in *Mánes* on the 27th of October 1933. Seidl’s article was entitled *The Avant-Garde at Night*. He reports that, “a hypermodern celebration was held for the opening of the Surrealist exhibition *Poesie 1932* in the *Mánes* Building. After an introductory address by the world famous architect Prof. Gočár, the temperamental poet Vítězslav Nezval gave a speech of welcome. The audience then got to hear a radio broadcast of a *Capriccio*, written for the occasion by the composer Ježek [...]. With elegant wit, Holzknecht then performed *Les Trois Valses Distinguées du Précieux Dégoûté*, whose author is the least serious joker among composers: Erik Satie”. The first experiment in *Mánes* was therefore – in Holzknecht’s words – “a success” (no irony intended).

*The Mánes Music Group* was first and foremost an avant-garde orientated to “return” with the emphasis on Neo-Classicism but also on the unaffected music of the “every day” and jazz. In 1937 the MMG lost the right to use the premises of the *Mánes* building and basically ceased to exist, merging (now without Jaroslav Ježek) into the *Přítomnost / Presence* association.



## **Přítomnost, an Association for Contemporary Music**

The society's full name was *Přítomnost, sdružení pro soudobou hudbu / an Association for Contemporary Music*. The idea behind *Přítomnost* was to encourage both the writing of contemporary music and its performance by bringing together composers, who were supposed to create a core repertoire, with musicians who were supposed to perform it, and also music critics to provide feedback and the chance of popularisation. The association was formed in 1924 by the merger of several smaller societies. Avant-garde music, however, was only to come to the forefront of the association's activities with the arrival of Alois Hába in 1934. From that point on, important members were to include the outstanding Czech conductor Karel Ančerl, the composers Emil František Burian and Vladimír Polívka (1896–1948), the composer and theorist Karel Reiner (1910–1979), and Vít Nejedlý (1912–1940, son of the important Czech musicologist, historian and later politician in the communist dictatorship Zdeněk Nejedlý).

## **Tam Tam**

In 1925–1926 a group of musicians, writers and theatre artists got together, mainly on the initiative of E.F. Burian, in an association known as *Tam Tam*. Those who explicitly joined the group included the composers Jaroslav Ježek, Erwin Schulhoff, and Jaroslav Svoboda, the librettist and writer Jiří Mařánek and the natural scientist and music journalist Ctibor Blatný, but its meetings were also attended by the poet Vítězslav Nezval, the director and translator Jindřich Honzl, the director and writer Jiří Frejka and others. The activities of the group were far from limited to music, and like Devětsil or Mánes, Tam Tam provided a platform and meeting place for people from different branches of the arts. In 1925–1926 the group published its own review or more precisely leaflet, *Tam Tam*.

## **The Society for Modern Music in Prague**

*The Spolek pro moderní hudbu v Praze / Society for Modern Music in Prague*, sometimes also known as the *Moderní spolek / Modern Society*, substantially overlapped with and indeed represented what was known as the “Prague Modern” movement in music and was also partly the creation of composers of the Novák school (see above). The founding declaration of the *Society*, made clear that membership was not dependent on orientation to avant-garde music, and that on the contrary, in the words

of one of its organisers composer Emil Axman, the *Society* “opposed deviation to the left” and so “the chimeras of atonal music”. This all changed, however, when Alois Hába became vice-president in 1927. The Czech composers whose music was most often performed under the *Society*'s aegis subsequently included the representatives of avant-garde music Alois and Karel Hába, Pavel Bořkovec, Jaroslav Novotný (1886–1918), Erwin Schulhoff and Leoš Janáček, and among foreign composers the work of Arnold Schönberg, Darius Milhaud, Alban Berg or Paul Hindemith.

In 1923 the Society became part of the Czech section of the *International Society for Contemporary Music* (ISCM, 1922), whose programme of concerts played a very important role in encouraging new Czech music and familiarising Czech audiences with the work of major modern composers abroad. The national sections of the ISCM were run by local organisations and in the CSR, which was among the first member countries, these were from 1923 the *Society for Modern Music in Prague*, *The Club of Moravian Composers* and the German association, *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen* (1918).

Otakar Ostrčil was the president of the ISCM section and Alois Hába was one of its most active members. From 1933 the *Přítomnost* association also represented the ISCM. Its official periodical was the *Listy Hudební matice / Music Foundation Paper*, and from 1935 *Rytmus / Rhythm as well*.

## **Theatres**

Theatres, where projects combining all the most progressive visual, literary and musical ideas could be staged, were natural meeting places for avant-gardes. In Prague the most important theatres and theatre companies in this context were the *Osvobozené divadlo / Liberated Theatre* (1925), the *Dada Theatre* (1927) and especially E.F. Burian's *D-34* company (1934), familiarly known as the “Dee” (the number in the title changed with the year, so in 1935 it became *D-35*, a year later *D-36* and so on). The ten-year collaboration of the composer Jaroslav Ježek and the avant-garde Liberated Theatre of Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich from 1928 to 1938 is a well-known and model example. The composer and theorist Karel Reiner was also closely involved with the “Dee” theatre (*D-35* – *D-38*).

The Liberated Theatre and “Dee” were a specific inter-war avant-garde phenomenon and also classic representatives of Czech theatrical avant-garde.

## The Czech Inter-War Musical Avant-Garde in a Nutshell in place of a Conclusion

We can date what is known as the “Czech inter-war musical avant-garde” from the beginning of the 1920s, and more precisely from 1924, when the *Přítomnost* association was formed and shortly after it *Tám Tám*, and composers and other music performers and specialists started to create an environment suited to the development of new directions. Geographically, the Czech interwar music avant-garde was basically the Prague avant-garde, which was influenced above all by trends from Vienna, Paris and Berlin,

The Czech inter-war musical avant-garde was not a centralised movement, like a school or one tight group. It had no unifying programme or manifesto and at the beginning no organisations comparable with those of the literary and visual art avant-garde.

The playwright, director and composer Emil František Burian, and the composers Iša Krejčí, Jaroslav Ježek, Pavel Haas or Pavel Bořkovec may definitely be considered leading representatives of the Czech inter-war musical avant-garde. All these composers meet the definition of avant-garde attitudes and activities, whether in terms of tendencies to return, civilism and/or interest in atonal or microtonal composition. Alois Hába and Bohuslav Martinů were the most prominent Czech avant-garde figures in music internationally, and their importance is not confined geographically or chronologically to the inter-war period. Alois Hába is worthy of attention not only as a composer, but as codifier of composition techniques in the microtonal system. The composer and pianist Erwin Schulhoff also had a European reputation well-beyond the confines of the CSR.

## The Czech Inter-war Musical Avant-Garde in a List of Works

The following overview of composers, their activities and a choice of their works illustrates the content and direction of the Czech inter-war music avant-garde. While the latter had no explicit manifesto, a programme of a kind was de facto created and realised in

the work of the composers on the list. Naturally the list of works is limited to music composed in the inter-war period.

**Bohuslav Martinů** (1890–1959), became world famous, successes in France, the USA, promoter and populariser. He fulfilled the programme of the avant-garde most notable in the orchestral movements *Half-time* (1924) and *La bagarre* (1926), and then *Jazz Suite* for 11 instruments (1928), *Sextet* for flute, oboe, clarinet, two bassoons and piano (1929), and also in the *Double Concerto* for two string orchestras, piano and kettle drums (1938), in the ballet *La revue de cuisine* (1927) and in exemplary form in the operas *Julietta aneb snář / Julietta or Dream Book* (1937), *Les larmes du couteau* (1928), the radio opera *Hlas lesa / Voice of the Forest* (1935), and the sung ballet *Špalíček / The Chap Book* (1932).

**Alois Hába** (1893–1973), important composer, teacher and creator of microtonal systems. The central protagonist of the Czech inter-war musical avant-garde. *Nonet no. 1* in the twelve-tone system (1931), *Nonet no. 2* in the seven-tone system (1932), *String Quartet no. 2* (1920, quarter-tone) and no. 5 (1923, sixth-tone), chamber piece *Music* (1921, quarter-tone), piano *Suite* (1925, quarter-tone), *Duo for Two Violins and Six Pieces for Harmonium* (1937, sixth-tone), the choral *Vocal Suite* on interjections from folk poetry (1922, quarter-tone) the opera *Matka / Mother* (1929, quarter-tone) and others.

**Erwin Schulhoff** (1894–1942), European reputation, sought after pianist, personal contacts with Webern, Schönberg and his pupils, and with avant-garde artists and poets. The piano cycles *Fünf Pittoresken* (1919), the Dadaist *Fünf Burlesken* (1919), *Hot-Sonata* for alto saxophone and piano (1930), *Streichquartett no. 1, no. 2* (1924, 1925), *Double Concerto* for flute, piano and orchestra (1927), *Concerto* for string quintet and wind orchestra (1930), eight symphonies (1924–1942), oratorio *HMS Royal Oak* (1930), ballet *Die Mondsüchtige* (1925, prem. 1931), opera *Plameny / Flames* (1929). Influential essay *Revolution and Music* (1922).

**Pavel Bořkovec** (1894–1972), one of the most interesting figures of the inter-war music avant-garde. Especially with the symphonic allegro *Start* (1929), the songs for chamber ensemble *Stadion / Stadium* (1929), *String Quartet no. 2* (1929), *Sonata for Solo Viola* (1931), the songs

*Rozmarné písně / Humorous Songs* (1932), *Seven Songs for Vítězslav Nezval* (1931), the orchestral *Partita* (1936), opera *Satyr* (1938), ballet *Krysař / Pied Piper* (1939).

**Emil František Burian** (1904–1969), leading and radical composer, theatre writer and director, publicist. The songs with jazz orchestra *Cocktails* on texts by V. Nezval (1927), the *String Quartets nos. 1 and 2* (1927, 1929), operas *Bubu from Montparnasse* (1927), *Maryša* (1940), the ballet *Autobus* (1927), songs from the 1920s *Chlupatý kaktus / The Hairy Cactus*, *Malá panna / The Little Girl* and a great deal of stage music.

**Pavel Haas** (1899–1944), *Wind Quintet* (1929), *Předehra pro rozhlas / Overture for Radio* (1931), a very unusual phenomenon for the period: the vocal-orchestral *Psalms 29* (1932), *String Quartet no. 2 From the Monkey Mountains* with the jazz group ad libitum (1925), opera *Šarlatán / The Charlatan* (1937), *Study for String Orchestra* (1943) and other pieces.

**Jaroslav Ježek** (1906–1942), piano *Etudes*, *Bagatelles* (1933), *String Quartet nos. 1 and 2* (1932, 1941), *Concerto for Piano* (1927), *Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra* (1933), ballet *Nerves* (1928), a great quantity of stage music, including the famous and now popular classic orchestral *Bugatti Step* (1931), co-operation with the theatre avant-garde (Osvobozené divadlo), film music (e.g. *Pudr a benzín / Powder and Petrol*, 1931; *Peníze nebo život / Your Money or Your Life*, 1932) and much else.

**Iša Krejčí** (1904–1968), *Divertimento – Cassation* for 4 wind instruments (1925), *Five Songs* on texts by V. Nezval (1926), the operas *Antigone* (1933) and *Pozdvižení v Efesu / Disturbance in Ephesus* (1943), the ballet *Small Ballet* on a libretto by V. Nezval (1927), *Malá smuteční hudba / Small Funeral Music* for alto and chamber ensemble (1936) and other pieces.

**Miroslav Ponc** (1902–1976), *Five Polydynamic Pieces* for clarinet, xylophone and string quartet (1923), *Tři veselé kresby / Three Merry Drawings* for wind quintet (1929), orchestral *Předehra ke starořecké tragédii / Prelude to an Ancient Greek Tragedy* (1931), ballet *Osudy / Fates* (1935) and other works. Ponc was also a member of the Berlin avant-garde group *Sturm*, where he created projects on the boundary of visual art and music, often based on “colour listening”.

**Karel Reiner** (1910–1979), piano cycles *5 Jazz Studies* (1930) and *Suite with Fantasia* (1932), orchestral *Suite* (1931), incidental music etc.

**Viktor Ullmann** (1898–1944), *Variations and Double Fugue on a Theme by A. Schönberg* for piano and orchestra (1929), *Sonata for Quarter-Tone Clarinet and Piano* (1937), opera *Peer Gynt* (1929) and other pieces.

**Emil Hlobil** (1901–1987), orchestral suite *Weekend* (1933), *String Quartet no. 2* (1926) and other pieces.

**Karel Šrom** (1904–1981), *Symphony no. 1* (1930), orchestral *Suite* (1934) and other pieces.

Also e.g. **Karel Hába** (1898–1972), **Fidelio Finke** (1891–1968), **Vladimír Polívka** (1896–1948), in some respects **Hans Krasa** (1899–1944), **Hans Walter Süsskind** (1913–1980), **Karel Janeček** (1903–1974).



Miroslav Ponc

## Bedřich Smetana

### Má vlast

Prague Philharmonia,  
conducted by Jakub Hruša.

Production: Matouš Vlčinský. Text: Cz.,  
Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: live, May 2010,  
Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2010.  
TT: 78:58. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon  
SU 4032-2.

**M**á vlast /My Country, as recorded by Supraphon at concerts given by the **Prague Philharmonia** and **Jakub Hruša** in the Rudolfinum on the 13th and 14th of May 2010, is without question a pearl among recordings of this work and generally among recordings of Czech music. The hall and acoustics are perfectly matched with the smaller size of the orchestra. And the fresh view of a young conductor on a classic work, unburdened by excessive piety yet honouring tradition at the same time, is matched by the intense motivation of the players, leading in this rare project to the highest possible concentration and also to perfection of detail. Hruša's My Country delighted and enraptured during the live performance at the time. The setting of the Smetana Hall, where the first of the three performances as the gala opening concert of the Prague Spring took place, was somewhat less conducive to the best possible impression, and in the Dvořák Hall (Rudolfinum), where the orchestra twice reprised the concert and recorded, the music sounded easier on the ear. On the CD this repeated performance sounds much better even than that. Where many others choose a romantic expansiveness or even epic grandeur, Hruša finds more subtle shades – in tempos, in dynamics, in expression and in individual accents. This is clear in Vyšehrad, superbly relaxed and even slow, unhurried, lofty and pensive, and in Vltava, immensely lyrical. In both poems we could mention a series of places where the mellowness and elegance in detail is not just admirable but even pioneering. The approach makes us realise that with this music it is far from necessary to "struggle" for something, and it is just as legitimate to seek in a spirit of enchantment.



The smaller scale of the Prague Philharmonia is audible – there is no forest of strings covering up everything else with its massive sound, but space opens up for the interior parts and counterpoints, for poetic subtlety and finesse that is rarely to be found in other performances. It is precisely in this respect that the interpretation is so unique but at the same time – we must emphasise – wholly and fully legitimate. In Sárka the lyricism also comes to the fore, but also elan and with it the orchestral virtuosity that makes possible the choice of a strikingly fast tempo. In parts of From Bohemia's Meadows and Woods, the contrasts of tempo and expression are pronounced, the positive and dancing character of the music enhanced, but in the overall design of the cycle it is clear that the two most serious and momentous poems – Tábor and Blaník (on the recording with a smaller interval between them than at the concert, but still more emphatically separated than is usual), are approaching. Yet in these poems too there is no exaggerated thundering, and the sound is always transparent, rounded and pleasant. Here there is often space for an expression reminiscent of the most beautiful passages from Smetana's operas. The lyrical chamber episode with wind instruments in Blaník is perfect! Overall Hruša's approach (even with slower tempos) is characterised by lightness, balance and limpidity of sound, and at the same time flexibility in the sense of changeability and richness. Nothing escapes him, and no detail is left to its own devices. This is precision but not pedantry, subtlety but not effeminacy, real solemnity and joy and not their empty substitutes. This is of course not so surprising – we are familiar with Hruša's orchestra, and from the time when it was founded under Bělohlávek. In Má vlast too we can see that its qualities are lasting, structural and enviable. If Kubelík's Má vlast from the Prague Spring of 1990, full of emotion and generosity, was a great event on the domestic recording market, then this recording, much more restrained and detailed, has a chance of equalling it in importance and unique value.

Petr Veber



## Josef Bohuslav Foerster

### Pieces for String Quartet

#### Stamic Quartet.

Text: Cz., Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 2009  
in the Church of Jacob's Ladder in Prague.  
Released: 2010. TT: 2:12:28 DDD. 2 CD  
Supraphon Music 4050-2

**D**espite its demanding programme of concerts, the **Stamic Quartet** continues to devote time and energy to seeking out forgotten treasures of Czech music. As a result they have already introduced us to the quartets of J.K. Vaňhal, P. Vranický and L. Koželuh. Now in the same spirit the Stamic has brought us the quartet work of Josef Bohuslav Foerster (1859–1951). Their recordings of his five quartets, one quintet and three one-movement pieces are issued on a Supraphon double album. Today Foerster is known above all as the author of choral music and songs and the rest of his extensive oeuvre is more or less passed over. Undoubtedly this is partly because of Foerster's form of musical expression and compositional style, which he never developed beyond what was already a conservative and traditional idiom at the turn of the 19th/20th century. Foerster's music is lyrical to the point of sentimentality, kindly or melancholy with a light nostalgic wistfulness, and without any great dramatic "action" or stormy catharses. It is pleasant in the manner of a reverie in a warm greenhouse full of flowers. The first CD contains the string quartets nos. 1, 2 and 3. The then twenty-nine-year-old composer dedicated his *Quartet no. 1 in E major, op. 15* to Tchaikovsky, whom he had met in Prague at the premiere of Eugene Onegin at the National Theatre. At the very start of the 1st movement he consciously identifies with Smetana's legacy: in response to the challenge of the first violin, the melodic theme of the viola, then passed on to the cello, spreads out over the tremolo of the second violin. Yet despite the Smetanian inspiration, the whole work sounds very Dvořákan, including in its architectonic structure. Among Foerster's quartets this is the only one to have four movements: Allegro – Scherzo. Allegro con brio – Adagio – Allegro con brio. The Stamic



Quartet takes it up with commitment and an understanding for the spirit of the music, and the same can be said for the performance of all the music on the set. In the Stamic interpretation of this work a lyrical tenderness (Adagio) is brought out together with a dancing lightness (Scherzo) and the whole impression is of youthful freshness and poetry corresponding to the age and temperament of the composer. Foerster wrote the *Quartet no. 2 in D major*, op. 39 as an already experienced and successful composer in his early thirties. The three-movement composition (Lento. Allegro – Andante – Andantino) flows in a tranquil tempo and is infused with a nostalgically pensive melancholy and painfully wistful tenderness. The introduction to the 1st movement is an evocative resigned meditation, strongly recalling the Molto adagio from Beethoven's *Quartet op. 132*. Hints as to the inspiration of the work include its dedication to a certain married Mrs. Marie Volfová, a quotation from Foerster's song on a poem about a vanished dream and finally the composer's own comment that the quartet, "arose from impressions lived through at the time." The *Quartet no. 3 in C major*, op. 61 was written in Vienna at the height of Foerster's creative career and his social and artistic success, when after ten years working at the conservatory in Hamburg he had been appointed professor at the New Conservatory. The one-movement work is dedicated to his wife, the outstanding soprano Berta Lauterer (the Foersters always moved to the city where she had a solo opera engagement). The piece is prefaced by some lyric verses by the composer. The original version of 1907 was in fact only completed in final form as late as 1913. Here, on the model of Liszt, Foerster casts the form of the sonata cycle into a single continuous work, employs unusual harmony full of chromaticism and surprises us with a dramatic section enhanced by tremolo or the use of *sul ponticello*. Of all his quartet works this one is the most engaging for its overall structure and musical charge, and what is more it is written in a distinctly more modern way and perhaps deserves the renewed attention both of quartet ensembles and concert organisers. The second CD contains quartets nos. 4 and 5, the one-movement "Prayer", and "Memory" with harp, a two-movement quintet with double bass and a quartet Allegro giocoso. Foerster wrote the *Quartet no. 4 in F major*, op. 182 as late as

1943, when he was eighty-five years old and had been living in Prague since the establishment of Czechoslovakia. He dedicated it to Dr. R. Černý, with whom he had stayed when his opera *Eva* was being staged by the theatre in Kladno. Unmoved by the passage of time, even after four decades he was still composing in the style of his earlier pieces of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Foerster never abandoned his elements of composition and mode of expression; he sincerely rejected what he called "pointless novelties". Paradoxically, despite the fact that Foerster was poles apart from the communists in philosophical and intellectual orientation, in musical aesthetics his opinion was very congenial to the proponents of socialist realism (especially Z. Nejedlý), who tried to exploit him – although this was futile because Foerster was always completely apolitical and in any case was by then a living icon of Czech musical history. In the three-movement composition (Allegro grazioso – Adagio cantabile. Allegretto malancolico. Adagio – Allegro) he makes abundant use of older motifs from his preceding works, but here we also find a kind of suggestion of a medieval dance and nursery-rhyme passages. Under the German "Protectorate", the Prague Quartet performed this piece from manuscript. Foerster completed his last, *5th Quartet in G major* "Vestec" in the year of his death, in the village of Vestec where he spent the last years of his life in seclusion. The quartet is his last work and is dedicated to his second wife Olga (Berta Lauterer had died in 1936). In his own words, this is a work that is deliberately not finished in the sense of closed – by this he wanted symbolically to express his faith that the journey of the human being did not end with physical death. "Prayer for String Quartet" (Moderato, ma appassionato) of 1940 is an eight-minute introvertedly meditative work in which the ninety-one-year old composer patiently ruminates on a theme like the beads on a rosary. *Erinnerung (Memory) for Harp and String Quartet* (Andante comodo) of 1901 is a small two-minute musical delicacy that is very charming and colourful in form and where one can truly sense the closeness of the spirit of Mahler, if in sweeter or milder guise – at the time when he wrote it Foerster was working in Hamburg and saw quite a lot of Mahler. The harp in the hands of **Jana Boušková** always sounds like an integral part of the

Stamic Quartet. With the *String Quintet for two violins, viola, cello and double bass*, op. 3 we return to the young composer as a twenty-seven-year old, and its two lyric movements have poetic titles: *Viola odorata* (Andante cantabile) and *Rosa mystica* (Allegretto). The piece is full of symbolism and links the blossoming of nature (*Viola odorata* is the violet) with religious mysticism (The Secret Rose is an attribute of the weeping Madonna). Like the preceding pieces it is no way especially exciting or dramatic, but in its individual way it is very charming and tender. As has already been suggested, it breathes with the scent of a time now lost to us, with the voices of people of very refined taste and cultivated sensitivity of spirit – all this now destroyed by the horrors and uproar of the 20th century. The Stamic musicians with double bassist **Jiří Hudec** have nonetheless been able to resurrect this atmosphere and present it to us like a perfect musical time machine. The *Allegro giocoso for strong quartet* was written two years earlier (1894), and was originally the finale fourth movement of the 2nd Quartet, op. 39 before Foerster decided to make the latter a three-movement piece and leave out the finale. The Stamic Quartet deserves our respect and thanks for the painstaking and sensitive recording of pieces that are undoubtedly often considered unrewarding in today's repertoire, and the project is all the more creditable given that much of this music is not easily available in print or exists only in manuscript, and most of it needs specialist revision and detailed editing. The Stamic Quartet, i.e. **Jindřich Pazdera** – 1st violin, **Josef Kekula** – 2nd violin, **Jan Pěruška** – viola, **Petr Hejny** – cello, have realised this project with perfect musical direction from Milan Slavický and Jiří Gemrot, and with sound direction by Jan Lžičář. The recording is distinctive for its broad range of expression and colour. At concerts the tone of the first violin sometimes surprises me with a kind of violent intensity – but on the recording it is superbly soft and very plastic, and this in fact goes for the whole quartet. This unique recording of many hitherto unperformed or long unplayed pieces by an important figure in Czech music can be warmly recommended to everyone interested in the development and rich history of Czech chamber music.

Pravoslav Kohout

## Magdalena Kožená

### Lettere amoroze

Magdalena Kožená – mezzo soprano,  
Private Musicke, Pic Pitzl.

Recorded 2009. Released 2010.

Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. TT: 61:34. DDD. 1 CD  
Deutsche Grammophon 00289 4778764  
(Universal Music)

**M**agdalena Kožená's new album has been foreshadowed for some time by concerts of renaissance songs. A year ago she appeared with renaissance repertoire at the jubilee Smetana's Litomyšl and Concentus Moraviae festivals. The chamber-style programme of early music heralded the singer's return to the world of early music from which she originally came, and the technically brilliantly controlled voice, feeling for the text and pioneering dramaturgy made these concerts exceptional events. What is more, as is the marketing habit, the release of this CD will be followed by another series of concerts.

The title *Lettere amoroze/Love Letters* is taken from a piece by Claudio Monteverdi, which is not in fact on the CD – indeed the famous Monteverdi himself is represented only once, but all the pieces are from this period or a little later: Vitali, deIndia, Caccini, Merula, Sanz, Marini, Kapsberger, Foscini and Strozzi. The CD offers a total of twelve songs and five instrumental pieces for renaissance stringed instruments. The common theme is love and with the exception of a few joking pieces the prevalent tone is serious. The recording contains not only short pieces, but two long "monologues" with dramatic elements. Of these the most moving is Merula's Lullaby – *Canzonetta spirituale sopra all'anima: Hor ch'è tempo di dormire*. The Virgin Mary is singing the infant Jesus to sleep, but gradually the song comes to reflect fear and a premonition of the suffering of the future Christ. Although some pieces are brief little songs, it is worth while following them with the text, which is not trivial. The unobtrusive and rhythmically lively accompaniment by the ensemble *Private Musicke* very convincingly evokes the salon atmosphere of renaissance palaces.

The new title is visually slightly surprising because of the unconventional and very stylised photograph on the cover, but this is an issue



for graphic designers. On the other hand, a high degree of stylisation is characteristic for the mode of performance as well. This is closer to arias than to intimate salon songs, and a certain naturalness of expression and straightforwardness perhaps suits the renaissance better. There is no doubt that Magdalena Kožená remains very much her own woman, original in both choice of pieces and approach. The recording wins you over when you accept her license and also the setting of the voice, which has neither light soprano heights nor colourful mezzo depths. We can (partially) compare the album with the now several-year-old renaissance title from Anne Sophie von Otter, *Music for a While*. Otter, however, chose wittier pieces, mainly English, which are also presented with more of a spark and humour, and there are more contrasts and general immediacy. Kožená's album is a kind of serious opposite pole to the courtly amusement side of the renaissance. Although the singer says herself – in a quotation in the booklet – that this is a return to the music in which she was brought up, and which is founded in simplicity, it offers a highly refined and technique-based form of singing in one expressive register.

Jindřich Bálek

## Johannes Brahms

### Piano Trios (vol. II)

Guarneri Trio Prague  
(Čeněk Pavlík – violin, Marek Jerie – cello,  
Ivan Klánský – piano).

Production: not stated. Text: Eng., Ger.,  
Fr. Recorded 2009 and 2010 in the hall  
of the Music Faculty of the Academy  
of Performing Arts in Prague.

Released 2010. TT: 58:27. DSD. 1 CD Praga  
Digitals PRD/DSD 250 273 (distribution  
Classic).

**A**fter a certain time gap the *Guarneri Trio Prague* have finally come up with the second (last) album of their set of the complete piano trios of Johannes Brahms. This top Czech ensemble has been maintaining its high standard and the longer the same musicians continue to play in the trio the more impressive its recordings have become.

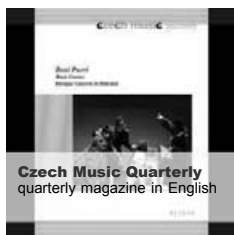


The trio repertoire can be played successfully by three soloists who have at least a little time to rehearse together – and this makes permanent ensembles all the rarer in this field. For three players of soloist quality to have played together for twenty-five years is most unusual and one more reason for noticing the recordings. What is more, this makes it possible to identify development in their interpretation of pieces that they have recorded more than once, for example the Trios of Antonín Dvořák. In the case of the Brahms trios they have chosen a more demanding path by including Brahms's early *Trio in a major, op. posth.* composed around 1850, where many ensembles and publishers of the "complete" Brahms trios have preferred to add a horn or clarinet trio instead. Brahms's trio juvenilia, discovered only after his death, has all the romantic features of Brahms's early style; it is interesting to discover how a certain musical loquaciousness and formal expansiveness link the young Brahms with the young Dvořák. The *Trio in C major, op. 87* of 1882 is a mature multifaceted work where it is not in fact easy to keep hold of a single line of thought. To describe the style of the Guarneri Trio, which after years of collaboration even seem to breathe in unison, is no easy matter. This is because everything sounds so natural and logical that you feel as if there could be no other way to play it. That magical quality of the natural and the trio's musicality even succeeds in transforming a piece that very much resists such a conception – and this is certainly true of Brahms's intricately composed and densely textured second trio. In my view comparison with the classic recording by the *Beaux Arts Trio* (DECCA) of 1987 is instructive. In the latter we hear a profound emotional submersion in the work together with a precise order – but it is surprising how much more energy the Guarneri Trio manages to invest in the music without sacrificing the sense of close and careful thought invested in the lines of every part. The recording is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Milan Slavický, who contributed as musical director to most of the trio's recordings, including the Trio in a major on this CD.

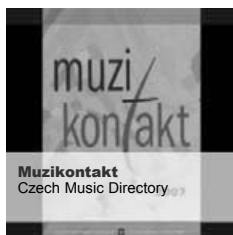
Jindřich Bálek



**HIS Voice**  
Bimonthly magazine in Czech



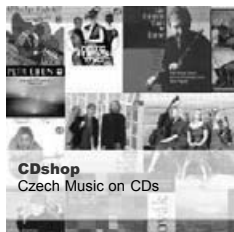
**Czech Music Quarterly**  
quarterly magazine in English



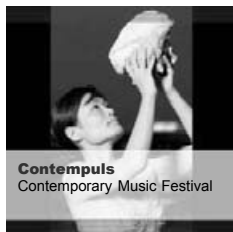
**Muzikontakt**  
Czech Music Directory



**Anthology of Czech Music**  
Texts, music samples, pictures



**CDshop**  
Czech Music on CDs



**Contempuls**  
Contemporary Music Festival

## Nearest concerts

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

## News

### A new issue of Czech Music Quarterly

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



### CD samplers

Offer of promotion CDs with Czech co



### Ivan Polednak, Musicologist and

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

### Bohuslav Martinů Revisited 2009

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

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

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**CD shop**



Richard Wagner

# PARSIFAL

Premiere: March 19, 2011

Reruns: March 27, April 3 & 22, May 15, 2011

**Conductor: John Fiore**

**Stage director: Jiří Heřman**

**Featuring: Alfons Eberz, Eva Urbanová,  
Tomasz Konieczny, Ulf Paulsen, Robert Holl,  
Manfred Hemm, Svatopluk Sem, Ivan Kusnjer**

## **Tickets:**

+420 224 901 448, +420 224 901 319, +420 224 901 668

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