

**Miroslav Srnka**

**Graham's Subversive Etudes**

**Pavel Bořkovec**



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# Dear readers,

it is almost six years to the day since Czech Music Quarterly published our first interview with the composer Miroslav Srnka and it simply beggars belief to observe how much ground Srnka has covered within this short period of time, both when it comes to the "immanently artistic view" and the "outer success". I think it is no exaggeration to claim that the Czech Republic has gained in Srnka a composer of international significance – and I am pretty sure that another, just as short, six years will confirm my thesis to the full. Srnka's intelligence, his extraordinary ability to industriously focus on work and the sophisticated nobleness permeating everything that he does conceal in themselves a potential that will continue to take us all by surprise. After all, I guess I myself will be more surprised than anyone – I still remember the doubts I had about Srnka's music a mere six years ago, at the time of our first interview. Yes, at the time Miroslav's music was on the surface more about what he liked listening to than about that which he himself conceived, so to speak, yet there were many people who, unlike me, saw beneath the surface and afforded Srnka opportunities complying with his true abilities. They were right, not I. Fortunately.

# Have a nice summer Petr Bakla



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## MIROSLAV SRNKA'S FOREST PHASE AND FLYING CARPET

This interview took a relatively long time to come to fruition. There's no point pretending that it's the result of a spontaneous conversation – it took place in writing, entailed innumerable exchanges, and the interviewee approached the matter with great care and deliberation. Yet the interview as a whole revolves around the themes that have resonated every time we have got together over the years; it started, so to speak, with a sufficient degree of spontaneity. The phenomenally successful composer Miroslav Srnka (\*1975) has something to say about his work, and he is able to say it very concisely. And this fact not only bears witness to Srnka's ability to express himself but also, and primarily, to the qualities of his music as such. There is indeed truth in the expression that music is the sound of thinking.

*If I had to introduce your music to someone, I would show them the compositions for strings...*

I write most naturally for strings. I began with the violin when I was six and have a “physical” relation to strings. I would perhaps show a single miniature: *Simple Space* for cello and a harmonic instrument.

*Yes, that is a really beautiful piece. But why this one in particular?*

Because when I was writing it I ceased pushing. I was composing it for my own joy, gave it all the time it needed, and actually ventured to eschew pigeonholes. The extremely avant-garde cello is accompanied by totally non-tonally guided major chords. Everything that I am doing today started in this composition. But at the time I didn't have the slightest inkling. I considered it a miniature I'd produced solely to please myself, aside from the "essential" pieces.

*Your String Quartet No. 3 and piano quintet Qu'une vague are divided by four years, during which you as a composer covered a lot of ground, which seems to have culminated another few years later in other string pieces – the trio Tree of Heaven and the quartet Engrams. From your viewpoint: from where to where did this journey lead?*

From the notion of how one should compose to the awareness of how I myself imagine composing.

*I would like to have a closer look at how you imagine composing. At first glance, it is striking that the compositions from recent years are in terms of sound and articulation about twice as slim but double the length. Why?*

When I was a student, it seemed to me that contemporary music revolves around two prototypes: "fast noisy dynamic ten-minute" or "slow soft contemplative half-hour" pieces. At the time, the "sportier" alternative agreed with me. Yet I soon realised that such writing is easy: in such a form it is not about the bearing capacity of the concept or the particular elements themselves, but thickening of the material that is not possible to absorb in real time. The listener never stops marvelling, the musicians are satisfied with the geyser of techniques and the critic is certain that this is "hardcore" contemporary music. But I don't want to malign these compositions (*Les Adieux*, *String Quartet No. 3*, *Magnitudo 9.0*, *Quiet Now*), they served to create my basic repertoire of essential instrumental configurations and I am grateful to them for being my primary springboard.

Later on, however, I began being interested in questions with which compositional technique doesn't tend to overly deal, above all memory and expectation, connection and contiguity, balance and reverse proportion. How long a segment of time is still rhythm, how big a segment of time is already the form? How long does memory retain an element and expect its repetition? When does memory forget the element so that its return can come as a surprise? To what extent must an element stand out from the current so as to act independently? Can I offset the compressing of one parameter by thinning another one so that it gives rise to the feeling of change, but not gradation or degradation? I re-composed my work for this purpose. And the result was "non-fast twenty-minute pieces" with lower density of detail.

*You mentioned the possibility of "absorption in real time". There is a certain crossroads here: whether to conceive compositions more as refined "objects" that must be penetrated through repeated listening or rather as "epic" forms that lead*





PHOTO © WILFRIED HÖSL-2x

*The opera Make No Noise at the 2011 Munich Opera Festival*

*the listeners and do not leave them behind, yet at the price of a certain redundancy and rhetoricity that may stunt the composition upon repeated listening. How do you feel about this discrepancy, if we take into account that you create solidly fixed scores, “opera perfecta for repeated use”?*

I try to attain slow changes at the borderline of rhythm and form, which are neither so fast as to give rise to gradation drama nor so slow as to cease to be observable. I need precisely timed tempo and non-haste. On the edge of redundancy. Yet redundancy can also be a subjective perception drawing upon a preset expectation of a certain density of musical information. We listen differently to charged Rihm sound orgies, differently to Renaissance polyphony, differently at a dance party, differently in Feldman trance (which could be termed an ingenious embodiment of redundancy). On each occasion we have set up a different mode of time perception. And those slow transformations of mine need their own mode, not trance, not orgy, not gradation. I would say, a winding “road” on which the performers accompany you. This works fine during long-term co-operation: in the case of *Engrams*, Diotima pulled it off perfectly after performing it for three quarters of a year, when all the areas suspected of being redundant were afforded meaning and sense. Until that time, I had heard on numerous occasions that the composition was too long. The listeners were only divided on whether this applied to the first or second half. I set out in the direction that leads neither to epic shape nor detailed refinement but to a transformation shape entailing strengthening of the performer’s freedom as regards the detail of the “opus perfectum”. I increasingly require the musicians to make more decisions themselves, and sometimes this discomforts them, since my scores are becoming more and more limited to just the pitch and duration of notes. I haven’t abandoned refinement either, but use it selectively, there where marked memory stops emerge, which I aim to mould precisely.



*I've perceived this for a long time now - as though all the "advanced techniques", those amazing inventions of new music, have lost energy and run dry. Coincidentally, the music that interests me is made up almost exclusively of "normal notes". Is this how you feel too? About yourself, about others...?*

All the music that has ever interested me was perfectly executed in terms of "normal notes". But I wouldn't say that "advanced techniques" have exhausted themselves. Granted, as a principle they are weighed down. They no longer possess the sheer magic of the newly discovered, that is, we can detect quickly when they are self-serving and soon lose interest. Superhumanly capable performers, however, are inspiring and dangerous: we, as composers, can still easily succumb to their endless offer of instrumental techniques. Today, it is necessary to involve "techniques" equally, not to tack them on to a composition like peacock feathers. To assess them not as techniques but as colours and sounds possessing a meaning. I enjoy seeking connections between them and a structure from "normal notes". When music from "normal notes" can organically, continuously pass into colour and technique, then it starts to be thrilling.



*You have spoken of a transformation, of a journey... So that means that there is some "from somewhere" through "some way" to "somewhere". Let me ask you directly: do you tell stories?*

It is interesting that you have asked about this just now, because in a previous answer I talked about a journey in listening modes and about transformation of the musical structure, not about stories. Didn't you want to ask outright whether I write symphonic poems? I have been asked similar questions frequently.

Perhaps the reason why people have asked me about stories is that I formerly revealed the sources of inspiration for my compositions: mostly narrative and emotionally charged. Maybe too narrative and too charged.

Nowadays, I don't do it any more, since the inspirations have become more abstract and since stories can lead to vulgarisation. I don't know why exactly, maybe on account of the sacred notion that "bona fide" contemporary music can only spring from abstract and rationally controlled compositional structures.

And I evidently provoke being asked the question about stories by the fact that I work in detail with the evocative charge of the sound and its timbre. For this I am most indebted to Dvořák and Janáček. If I had completed my doctorate in musicology, I would have dealt with computer assisted acoustic analysis of these components in Janáček's late works. But seeing that I didn't complete my studies, I only applied them. In *Reading Lessons*, for instance, the sounds are derived from possible sonic imageries, stress perception and hallucinations at a time when we are engulfed in darkness over the long term. Following the premiere, one gentleman, who had either mixed up the Czech Republic with Yugoslavia or the composer with James Blunt, came up to me and asked whether I myself experienced it during the war. And said that he could hear it all there... Owing to the evocative sonicality, the music is dramatic in detail. But not programmatic. I consider the programme nature or story a question of form. And the form of my compositions is not determined by a "story", I don't write "symphonic poems" ending with the confluence of two rivers. The form of my compositions – just like their other components – is mathematically and meticulously apportioned. If you could just see a several-metre graph of the time spiral, which is in the foundation of the form of the opera *Make No Noise...* The American musicologist Michael Beckerman has a theory that the melodic line of the New World Symphony – this crystalline embodiment of "absolute" music! – is in actual fact a verbatim setting of the text of Longfellow's Song of Hiawatha. And he is able to recite it alongside the recording completely. If this is true, would the reputation of the New World Symphony have been damaged if Dvořák had confessed to it? Or, contrariwise, what if Strauss had deleted the mountains from the title of the Alpine Symphony?

And just as I ceased to reveal the inspirational stories, so did I vow not to talk about the compositional techniques, since this dulls the reception of the music itself.

*If we admit to the "evocativeness" of detail, it follows that there is no reason not to accord it to the whole too – and your compositions simply do evoke some narrativity, even in cases when you don't advertise it. That was what spurred me to ask that question. I can't, however, really agree with the assertion that you would harm your*

*music by revealing something about the background of your compositional strategies, no matter if they are “rational” or “emotional”. Perhaps Smetana didn’t write about a confluence either, but the image for him was the result of some heuristics of compositional inspirations which enabled him to work. So tell me straight!*

First of all, I construct networks of all the parameters that overlap. This is the lengthiest and most difficult part: how do you construct such an area from all the partial networks? For instance, when a melodic succession forms an infinite loop as a result of its repetition, and at the same time a polyphonic structure by means of its being plied over, and this polyphonic structure in turn corresponds to the chosen harmonic progression at every moment. It always has to fit at all the cross-sections. Sometimes it seems there’s no way forward. But usually there is one correct and surprisingly simple solution. An abstract plane, which lies “behind” the specific composition, originates. A “carpet” from one corner to the other. When I have finished weaving it, I have in front of me an immense structure, geometrically regular, repeatable in all directions. The “forest phase” then ensues. For days on end, I go out walking, preferably somewhere in the forest, and try to “absorb” the structure in my head so as to be able to comfortably imagine how it sounds and be able to discover the “nice spots”: the structural knots in which something special is happening as a result of overlap. And then my work is quite the opposite to that which is customary in contemporary music: when I write, I basically no longer sandwich layers, don’t add, don’t append anything, but, contrariwise, pick, isolate, take up elements from that big plane of possibilities.

*Does every composition have its own carpet, or do you make from it several pieces, which are then always the result of a different walk on the same carpet?*

That’s an excellent question, it delves deep into the substance of such a method of writing. If the carpet is sufficiently plush, it is possible to write from it several totally different compositions. This is how it was at the beginning. For instance, *Les Adieux* and the pieces dating from around that time are from a more or less identical material. It was hard enough learning how to work with that carpet, hence changing it after every piece was simply beyond my mental capacity. When it comes to the first compositions, I actually wasn’t even aware that I was working with a carpet. But once I’d got the knack and an overview, I began observing this method of work more generally and discovering the great openness in it. When in 2009 I received the Siemens Award, I made use of the opportunity not to have to write anything for half a year, yet, without claiming an immediate result, I explored this type of composing – I tried on, sketched, jettisoned, trained, learned. I again began taking consultations from Milan Slavický. It was immensely edifying, I felt like a singer with his vocal coach. At the time, he was already seriously ill. Then the first piece hewn from the new “metacarpet” was the monophonic *Coronae* for solo horn, dedicated to Slavický. Since that time, I have been changing carpets much more markedly for every composition. The transformation often rests in the fact that an unworn layer still remains and is overlapped by something entirely new in a different parameter.

*You have mentioned geometrical regularity. When weaving a carpet, does having a visual image or analogy from the visual world help? 2D or 3D?*

Bingo! The stave is actually a simple 2D object too. But one irregularly crimped, because it has the inbuilt difficulty of bearing the diatonic basis, thus staggering between semitones and whole tones. I have always been irritated by the fact that the simple chromatic scale does not have the note heads on the stave in a straight line. Therefore, I have abandoned the stave in my work and sketched on a continuous plane, on a simple graph with time on the x axis and frequency on the y axis. You can comfortably put on it individual structural networks. I often imagine the movement on it first as lines and curves, which are then quantised by means of intersecting with the discontinuous grid of the networks. Recently, a third axis, the z axis, has accrued too, since I am now also probing the “depth and distance” of some parameters. A distant forte becomes inaudible. Timbre is filtered by distance. Chords and rhythm thin into indiscernible grain in the distance. Harmony bulges from the plane. Owing to the “depth”, the structure can continuously glide into silence, melt into noise, noise glides into articulation, articulation into rhythm, thus gaining plasticity, interconnecting the parameters.

The carpet of mine began to warp, it is now more and more variable. And less material – it is becoming a set of rules as to how this and that parameter can or cannot behave. It is similar to the mathematical models that inquire into the movement of individual birds within flocks or fish within shoals. Each individual abides by several simple rules and reacts to the movement of the individuals around him. This is how the movement of a mass originates. Lately, the lying carpet has often become a flying carpet.

Only at the end do I have to set it into the knotty 2D stave. Therefore, I find writing music on lines flattening, it is the very final phase. And often a very rapid one, since then I only recode everything into a comprehensible medium called the score. Sometimes, this drives those who have commissioned the piece crazy, because they cannot see any sample from the score until the very end.

*Have you ever considered remaining more in the phase of the initial “set of rules” and less “coding into 2D”?*

The principle of walking on a carpet also opens up possibilities for improvisation. I am considering writing a frenetic composition for ensemble in which the musicians will only get the carpet and the rules of their passage on it. Then it is sufficient to co-ordinate them in time, and the result should be a structurally very solid improvisation. As though the carpet became a jazz standard.

If I’ve ever totally left the carpet and put something completely different into a composition, it has turned out badly. I really struggled with myself in the case of my two stage works last year, because they are not merely about music. How to comply with the requirements of the stage and not betray my principles?

And when it comes to the “opera comic” for children at the Semperoper, I really pushed myself edgewise. Structurally rigorous composers really do have difficulties with writing music for the stage. This notwithstanding, I have really begun enjoying theatre.

*We’ll get around to your stage works soon, but first I would like to talk about your approach to vocal music as such. What does working with voice mean to you personally? What type of text? And how to, and why, set it to music at all? How do you, as a “structurally rigorous composer”, square up to the semantic aspect of the text?*

It took me quite a long time to get to vocal music. I got to stage works through someone else's encouragement, and the vast majority of my pieces are instrumental. Yet, perhaps owing to the "narrativity" in my instrumental music, some have encouraged me to compose vocal pieces since the very beginning... The human voice truly fascinates me. It is a category in its own right, one tainted by the greatest clichés, stylistic mannerisms, technical limitations, as well as human "demandingness" (one female soloist, for instance, gave me the finger at a rehearsal). Yet, at the same time, the human voice is capable of attaining an effect that simply takes your breath away.

I definitely incline towards structurally very simple, semantically very open texts. I approach them from above, from the syntax, not from the detailed semantics of the words or the quality of the syllables. I analyse them thoroughly, rewrite, pare to the bone and simplify them until a structure that can be considered another layer of the carpet appears in this text and consequently interacts with the sound. Yet the listeners don't perceive this: I think that they focus far more on the colour of voice, the movement in registers, the compression or, vice versa, expansion of the text in time, and even

Solo Cello

♩ = 50

pppp

flaut.

flaut.

senza rigore

pppp

pp

p

pppp

pppp

tr

tr

tr

tr

cantabile

mf

pppp

mf

p

p

mp

ppp

mp

mp

tr

tr

p

mf

iv

pp

mf

sfz

pppp

mf

*Simple Space for violoncello solo and a harmonic instrument (pre-definitive version)*

the frequency and length of breaths. I strive to put all this into accordance with the carpet.

*Can you say something about the genesis of perhaps the most significant stage (and vocal) work of yours to date, the chamber opera **Make No Noise**?*

We would have to go back to my first stage creation, *Wall*, dating from 2005. It just dropped into my lap, there wasn't much time. And it turned out to be a unique encounter – the libretto was written by Jonathan Safran Foer, the soprano part was sung by Anna Prohaska, who was just starting out at the time. Yet the first contact with a large opera house was a crushing blow. The fact that what the composer has written is not respected (although he was initially invited to closely collaborate with the production team...) made me swear to myself that I would never set foot in an opera house again. Yet two years later the publisher recommended that I apply for a scholarship in Britten's Aldeburgh. I approached it in a devil-may-care manner, dashed off the cover letter after the deadline had elapsed and then, a few months later, was informed by phone that I had been selected for the year-long programme for young professionals involved in opera. After the first three stays in Aldeburgh, I got together with the Australian director Matt Lutton, who contacted his compatriot Tom Holloway, a librettist, and asked for the second part of the scholarship to support writing a piece based on Isabel Coixet's screenplay for the film *Secret Life of Words*. To our utter amazement, Aldeburgh supported us in our work and during our study trips between Prague, Aldeburgh, Copenhagen, Oslo, Melbourne and Sydney. The project was subsequently joined by Ensemble Modern, Olivier Pasquet (a freelance sound designer from the Ircam stable) and the premiere was ultimately produced by the Bavarian State Opera within its 2011 Munich Opera Festival. Today, I really find it all rather difficult to believe... When it comes to the composing, it meant three years of working on and off and a bunch of related minor pieces, which functioned as testers. My second experience with a large opera house was the polar opposite to the first, there was great respect and humility. One of the reasons may have been that the stage director, the librettist and I co-operated throughout the time, long before the first note was written in the score. At the very beginning, I had no idea that it would turn out to be my greatest experience. It taught me to swallow my composer's ego.

*The subject matter of **Make No Noise** (a raped and tortured woman and a burnt man haunted by guilt try to restart their lives) is, if I may, typically Srnka-esque, in that it is definitely a continuation of the line of inspirational stories which you have revealed in many a concert piece of yours. Why are you attracted to unwinding your music from these tragic matters?*

Yes, I am attracted by extreme life situations, though I may not term them "tragic" but "existential". Why, I don't know. It is not about knowing. I can perhaps better say what it is about them that attracts me – that they are a singularity whereby "central questions" suddenly arise: why, for what, for whom, how... When in 2004 I gave the first German interview, I said that art is merely about love or death. I hesitated for a long time then about whether I should actually put it this way. But I did, and paid the price for a long time. That it is embarrassing, fogeyish, hopelessly romantic, empty, clichéd. Yet I still



think so today. I don't mind being a fogey... Today, I probably wouldn't have the courage to put it in that manner, and now I'd add "freedom". For me, no art is about structures. They are just a vehicle for taking the listeners to a state where they begin thinking differently and in another way, and they ask themselves those unsettling questions. Some are provoked into it by graffiti, some by Star Wars, others by Duchamp's urinal.

*You refuse to accord your music the semblance of value by not talking about the sophistication of the composing process. So, talking about someone else's pain is better?*

Our European lives at the beginning of the 21st century are so secure and flat. They lack derangement. I seek it elsewhere. The grand, catastrophic, as well as thickly "pathosised" themes (*Magnitudo g.o.*, *Reading Lessons*) date from the period that ended circa 2007, and since that time this groping has been proceeding to a more private, subtle and abstract level. For the first time – and unexpectedly for me too – in 2006's *Simple Space* (actually composed between 2004 and 2006; I toiled over this seven-minute piece for one and a half years, it lived its own life beside larger things). And then in the opera *Make No Noise*. The central character, Hanna, has gone through unimaginable things, yet the entire opera only takes place "afterwards", it is about her return. About how Hanna "learns" to sing on stage so as to ultimately manage to articulate her life in a new, calm voice – the voice with which we sing in the shower or when cooking. It is also about my own learning how to convey something more delicate.

Matt, Tom and I went to Copenhagen to visit the centre of the multiple Nobel Peace Prize candidate, that astonishing lady Inge Genefke, where they put back together the lives of people who have undergone physical torture, just like Hanna has. And Inge organised a private meeting with two of her former female patients. We, with our secure and flat lives lacking crucial questions, were sat there in front of them, listening to them being able to tell us in calm voices about what they had gone through. About how they had got there where Hanna needs to get too. Do we have the right to treat something like this at all? Inge replied that we simply had to, because within a single evening we could communicate something that she has been doing for years by means of her medical methods and scientific language. That was an obligation of the third kind and encouragement that such themes as these are relevant when superficiality and emotional blackmail is eschewed. We strove to create an intimate story devoid of pathos. And Inge is one of the *dramatis personae*. She attended the premiere so as to see herself onstage from the first row. Our knees were trembling.

*I hear what you're saying, but – and now we will slightly diverge from your opera – the cardinal question for me remains whether the possibilities of music as such are overestimated. On the whole, I have no doubts in the case of literature, film and the like, simply the verbal and portraying artistic disciplines, that they are able (and rightly so) to deal with these "singularities of human existence". Yet, to all intents and purposes, music is only capable of it through the literature (text or libretto, authorial comment, title) surrounding it. The fact that Hanslick wrote this one hundred and fifty years ago does not change anything a jot in this respect. Then it is just a more or less credible suggestion, endeavour for a sort of symbolism (deep clusters vs. high strings and bells as a compulsory requisite of "spiritual" compositions, for*

*instance). A heart-rending programme note can be appended to virtually any piece and it is not possible to verify it in the slightest, scepticism compels one to deem it as the creator's endeavour to furnish the composition with an alibi, which would make possible aesthetic question marks irrelevant, tasteless even. It is more difficult to say of a piece dedicated to victims of this or that atrocity that it is tedious, derivative crap. Wouldn't it be more honest to admit that by choosing music and not, for instance, novel-writing, certain types of statement about the world are not accessible to you?*

But I do agree that specific notional statements are inaccessible to music. You have to separate the accompanying texts from those singularities. The accompanying texts talk about the inspiration for instrumental music. I don't say through them that the music then predicates about something notional and specific. Disclosing inspiration can serve to concretise the listener's associations. With some, it stimulates the imagination; with others, it simply irritates. And now we have come full circle, back to Hiawatha and the New World Symphony.

For a long time, I racked my brain about whether to provide any texts at all for compositions. Writing a commentary seems to have become part of the packaging of contemporary music today. Dramaturges want original texts that will make the listening easier, add an authorial hallmark, sophisticatedly toss in a value and depth. About half a year ago, however, I decided not to write commentaries any longer. For the reasons you have described. With the aim to avoid blackmailing and not to provide an alibi.

Formerly, I used to think that unconditional openness and sincerity belong to the arts. And if something was an inspiration, it should be revealed as such. A pipe dream... In recent years, I have inclined to the Kundera approach, that everything is purer without a commentary. And more convenient for me, to boot!

But those singularities that open up another dimension and provoke questioning, that is a completely different kettle of fish. There are tons of foolscap out there filled with all possible aesthetic theories. Everyone terms it differently, no one is able to denominate it universally, yet everyone together guesses what it is about. You can just as well be taken there by Brahms's First, Wagner's Liebestod. And by Ligeti's Piano Concerto, as well as Grisey's Quatre chants. By music and a poem, a novel and a film. It doesn't matter whether notionally or non-notionally. Literature and film don't directly utter "central questions" either. They enwrap them cunningly and are able to lead you to the state of asking them yourself. And this is the point: the state. Music transports us into it using its own means, which I myself refer to as the energy current (after all, physically it actually is an energy current...). It is able to lead a packed auditorium there simultaneously. It is amusing to sit on the gallery at the Rudolfinum during a concert and observe the audience. The eyes clearly reveal those who have been transported. Recently, neuroscientists researching into the human brain have allegedly found out that language and music stimulate similar areas of the brain. Perhaps the notional aspect is not relevant at all. I am curious about what else the neuroscientists will find out and what piece of aesthetics they will steal for themselves. A sort of Hanslick with a tomography machine.

*Could you then specify the fundamental difference between a composer and a methamphetamine producer...?*

Composing is legal... Otherwise, music and drugs have a surprisingly lot in common. Music is said to be able to invoke “chills”, pleasant excitements giving rise to blood flowing into the parts of the brain that are also affected by dopamine when taking narcotics. But at this juncture we should really consider inviting a neuroscientist over...

*The “opening into another dimension” is undoubtedly one of the abilities of art. Yet you are talking about music more from the position of those listening (for example) to someone else’s work. For the most part, one doesn’t rave about his own artefacts, and if he does then that’s pretty embarrassing. What does composing bring to you personally? Regardless of the external confirmation, which certainly is pleasing, what satisfaction do you derive from your own music?*

I don’t listen to my own artefacts, except for at concerts. I find it narcissist. But, yes, composing does bring me external confirmation and, since last year, it has been my sole source of income. It’s my passion, and it’s addictive. After the double bar line, there’s the same sense of satisfaction as after finishing a thesis. The “chills” from working and rehearsing with superlative musicians are also worth it. Yet the greatest satisfaction of all is the feeling during the writing when you really begin to hear and obey that which the music and material are asking for. Then you feel like a filter. And the best results come when one is really obedient. Sometimes they are totally different from that which the “composer” originally planned.



### *Miroslav Srnka (\*1975)*

*is currently perhaps the most successful Czech composer operating on an international scale. His pieces are commissioned and performed by top-class performers and ensembles (e.g. Ensemble Intercontemporain, Klangforum Wien, Ensemble Modern, Quatuor Diotima, ensemble recherche and many others) and appear at prestigious European festivals. Among other accolades, Srnka has received the Composers’ Prize from the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation. His most recent triumphs include the staging of his full-length chamber opera Make No Noise within the Bavarian State Opera Festival in Munich and the “opera comic” for children Jakub Flügelbunt...und Magdalena Rotenband oder: Wie tief ein Vogel singen kann at the Semperoper in Dresden. The premiere of Srnka’s piano concerto is scheduled to take place this November at the Musikverein in Vienna. Miroslav Srnka studied musicology at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University and composition at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in the class of Milan Slavický.*

## Peter Graham's *Subversive Etudes*

Are children at music schools taught that which they really need? Do we make full use of their abilities? What is the training's objective? Does it respond to contemporary music? These are the questions I, as a piano teacher, have kept asking, questions I would like to deal with in this article. The starting point for my deliberations is the currently prepared collection of the Brno composer Peter Graham's piano pieces for children, which I am testing out on my pupils within the preparation of the final version.

Over the more than twenty years I have been teaching, I have observed that the centre of gravity of my work has more and more shifted from exercising fingers and muscles to working on imagining the sound that precedes playing from the sheet music. Children should not begin playing until they can hear with their inner ear at least a rough outline of that which they are supposed to play. We seek melodies, examine their shape, structuring, we clarify phrasing by means of singing. We practise motor skills by clapping on thighs - we purify the rhythmic notion of compositions and face up to passages demanding in terms of the independent motion of hands. We estimate the qualities of consonances, design the dynamic structure of the whole, mull over sound effects, pedalling. Some of the younger children are taken by surprise - what's

the point of coming to a piano lesson when all we do is clap, read and sing? Only after our notion has been polished do we seek the means of implementing it sonically. Accordingly, an essential part of the lessons is nurturing of discrimination abilities – we constantly compare, evaluate, choose. Yet the literature for children often derives from the presumption that children are initially only able to distinguish very rough differences. I, however, do not believe this to be true. Children are able to distinguish at the same level as, and frequently much more sensitively than, adults – all they are lacking is our vocabulary to capture that which they perceive.

That is why I have welcomed Peter Graham's compositions for children with great pleasure. Actually, there are two series of compositions. The first one, created many years ago, was written by Graham for his own children and he originally did not intend to publish the pieces. When they happened to get into my hands, they intrigued me. I am familiar with Graham's music and I know in which respects its interpretation is difficult. It places high demands on the performers in the sense that in most cases it requires some sort of disavowal of classical training and throws into doubt customs and conventions. Discussions of the first series gave rise to the second series, which was already written with an awareness of piano methodology techniques. Clear limitations (above all, the requirement for less frequently changed hand positions) were considered a challenge by the composer. In my case, his ideas compelled me to reassess some of the seemingly solid methodological rules, mainly pertaining to the difficulty of the rhythm (to be explored in detail at a later juncture in this article).

Graham's compositions are extraordinary owing to their not underestimating children's sensitivity. It is not, however, possible to just hand one over to the pupil and say "read through it and bring it back in a week". It is necessary for the child to plunge into them together with the teacher. When exploring these compositions, children come to see how vastly different can be the "clues" that make their study easier. At the same time, they are compositions requiring extremely sensitive performance, not overly resistant to misunderstanding. In comparison with, for instance, William Gillock's compositions, they are merciless. When it comes to Gillock's compositions, any teacher can work with them, even with a very mediocre pupil. They are "foolproof",



Peter Graham

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

their structure is crystal clear, the material lucid. Gillock's compositions in most cases imitate a style through the most distinct idioms to such an extent that even when the notation is performed mechanically the result is satisfactory. They are highly rewarding. Yet this is precisely why I consider Graham's compositions more suitable as literature for children, especially for the gifted ones – they preclude thoughtless playing.

Approximately ten years ago, my former conservatory classmate, today a piano pedagogue, Zuzana Hančilová and I began drawing up a series of music theory workbooks for pianists, which we titled *Klavírhártyky* (Piano Rollicking). While doing so, both of us continued to study piano playing and methodology alike. During our studies – primarily with Professors Ludmila Šimková and Alena Vlasáková – both of us underwent a sort of second wave of training when, already as teachers, we started to realise how unsuitably conceived methodology can actually destroy even a very strong musicality. And how, on the contrary, slow yet consistent work can result in attaining a spontaneous musical delivery even in the case of children facing motor skills problems and possessing a low degree of talent. We drew up a comprehensive map of all that which a child should pass through. The aim was to help us cultivate the pupils' skills equally in all respects – to develop their overall musicality and eschew working on one skill to the detriment of the others. Accordingly, the workbooks are conceived as a sort of window into the pupils' mind – they aid in maintaining the teacher's contact



## Children's Carnival

Peter Graham  
\*1952



with the pupils' train of thought, ascertain and record what is unclear to them so as to enable the pupils to discover various musical phenomena in their own way and retain a balance between all the areas cultivated. The exercises are motoric, auditory, as well as improvisational and analytical. Compositional training is involved too. Musical thinking is enhanced. The children/interpreters gradually learn how to distinguish whether their problem pertains to rhythm, intonation or logic - and resolve it in a goal-directed manner.

Yet, over the course of time, our map started to change. The children themselves guided us to "shortcuts" - our map was not nearly as definitive as it seemed to be at the beginning. We began comprehending (and, above all, sensing personally) the pitfalls of any methodology - unless flexible, it can easily degenerate into something positively harmful.

I would term Peter Graham's compositions "etudes" not only because each of them is focused on a specific problem but also because they bring about unaccustomed situations for the teacher too. They subvert the teacher's self-confidence, yet in a refreshing and stimulating manner. That which seems to be complicated can be trained easily when a proper idea emerges, and, contrariwise, that which at first glance looks simple may be difficult even for a fairly advanced pianist. What's more, they largely present music that is beyond the classical-romantic framework. Hence, they can serve as preparation for some technical pitfalls in pieces written by other contemporary composers.

### CHILDREN'S CARNIVAL

Essentially, they are etudes focusing on problems different to those that instructive compositions usually target: rhythmic cycles and polyrhythm, work with the sound mass, purity of articulation and the use of the phraseology of a particular style. And we mainly merely proceed in the rigorous, only sometimes extended, five-finger position! That is another extremely uncommon aspect. Five-finger pieces, yet they are not only compositions for absolute beginners.

Although... For instance, the *Children's Carnival* would not be applied by a teacher adhering to the traditional methodology earlier than after a year of playing - it is jazzy and includes syncopation! Yet when practising rhythm syllables and exploring the rhythm first by means of clapping and only then playing the mastered rhythm it was easily played even by a five-year-old girl. And instead of the two bars she was asked for she brought an entire tiny composition. And as is happens, after a class performance at which she presented it, everyone wanted to try out the piece...

### AFRICAN GAMES

I consider *African Games* even more interesting. The tonal material is extremely limited. Again, it is about playing in the five-finger position, and all the notes are not even used. It concerns repeating short models. But just try to play the composition sight-reading it! It too puts up great resistance - if the objective is to play fluently without pausing,

## African Games

I.

Peter Graham  
\*1952



6. 6. 2011

with slight accents on the beginnings of the small groups. Wherein lies the problem? In momentum. The hand resists the irregularity of rotation, rests and tiny changes in models. Exploring the composition without the instrument is essential here – it is necessary to perceive a system in the succession of patterns, gain a clear idea of the structure, think with a great advance prior to the actual movement of the hands. Considerable aid is provided by rhythm syllables in groups of three and four notes, for instance, those that are taught at tabla drums lessons – they can be rapidly pronounced well and lead to the sensing of impulses at the beginnings of groups. Our European counting is totally inappropriate. Accordingly, the composition is an etude for precise transition from one momentum to another, maintaining of exact and flowing eighths in an irregular grouping. The performer must follow the cycles at several levels in parallel: groups of three or four notes, division of these groups into cycles, repetition of patterns from these cycles. African Games is popular among the pupils themselves, yet my colleagues react to them like a bull to a red rag... Why, for heaven's sake, should we occupy ourselves with such music! Is it music at all? It's just a few notes going round in circles... Well, because such problems appear in, for instance, minimalist compositions. At the same time, they serve as good

training in orientation and structural thinking, which may also be useful in other styles: similar requirements are placed by the piano textures of late Romanticism, with its differently vaulted phrases and parts layered one above the other.

Whoever begins practising this composition won't even notice the hours going by. Similarly compelling is *Devanagiri* in 5/8 meter, yet it is already a piece for highly advanced pupils. As against the five-finger ostinato in the left hand, a seemingly simple melody unwinds in the right hand, but it is structured independently of the ostinato. The player thus has to pursue two independent, competing rhythmic areas, which places great demands on his/her motor skills and concentration. Compared to this, Chopin is a piece of cake.

### LITTLE BELLS

Yet these paradoxes apply to Graham's compositions in general. That which is simple and that which is difficult is only revealed once the piece is actually attempted. Technique learned within traditional training rather stands in the way. The uniform, polished classical sonic ideal simply won't suffice and another one must be sought. And the presented compositions afford the opportunity for the children

to try out this seeking. There is no single sure-fire method, a single technique – it is necessary to listen through, seek, reject, and seek again.

Such a composition is *Little Bells*: primitive on paper, playing each hand separately with sustain pedal feels easy as well, yet when both hands begin playing together, with sustain pedal, the ear loses orientation very easily. I worked on this piece with a highly talented boy who primarily relies on his ear; when he was little he learned how to read music as isolated notes, was not taught how to imagine chords. He found the composition extremely difficult and it took him a long time to learn how to read the intervals, imagine them and listen in such a manner as to be able to distinguish which note is linked with which finger. The effect of bells is perfect – given the minimal means. And, in addition, every part has its own phrases. In point of fact, quite an exacting polyphonic independence is being tackled here.

### THREE LINES

Mastering the sound aspect is usually part of only the final phase of working on a composition. A tried-and-tested method is still frequently applied in teaching: the whole composition without sustain

pedal, only subsequently with it. Yet it concerns quite a substantial change for more musical children who do not rely on muscular memory but the ear. They actually study a new composition. To remedy such a practice, I would recommend playing with overtones in the piece *Three Lines*. During a lesson, a pupil happened to let go quietly pressed and held keys earlier than he wanted. He squirmed and then said that it was as though someone had waved a wand and broken a wonderful spell. He was subsequently careful to never let this happen again.

I think that such experiences have a much greater impact than young pianists simply learning to play a single composition well. They begin perceiving sound very intensively, they will come to revere notation, they will imagine in advance that which is about to be heard. They will also respond to the sound they created at the given moment on the given instrument – they will not count on a fixed motoric pattern. It is a slow process, granted, but if the teacher succeeds in making use of such happenstances, he/she can begin working on a much higher level. As regards early music, the pupils will be able to listen to the ends of notes and articulate sensitively. And in Impressionist compositions they will perhaps quite spontaneously begin considering

## Little Bells

$\text{♩} = 72$  Peter Graham \*1952

Ped. sempre

*p* *mp* *p* *mf* *mf* *f* *sub. p*

15. 8. 2010

## Three Lines

Peter Graham  
\*1952

Neslyšně stisknout dlaní klávesy v dané poloze.  
(Depress silently the keys within indicated range with the palm of the hand.)

18. 9. 2010

the dynamics of individual notes within consonances and work with the sound mass itself.

Etudes need not only focus on mastering the piano sound, they can also serve for exercising the seeking of style. And such are the compositions in the last section. Within a few bars, Graham has succeeded in rendering the singular language of various composers – Janáček, Satie, Debussy, Haydn, Mozart, Stravinsky, as well as Carlos Santana. He was inspired by the portraits of famous composers that children drew, in which they captured their characteristic features. In these compositions, children have the opportunity to try out the phraseology of a particular style before they have mastered the necessary technical skills. *The First Time in Opera* is a masterful stylistic contraction with a comical effect which I play to the oldest pupils when I want to acquaint them with the scale of moods in Mozart's sonatas. By means of conversations about style, pupils get to know themselves, seek and realise their taste – and perhaps even refine it.

The work on these compositions and the reactions to them by some of my colleagues have led me to ponder what technique actually is and what I actually want to teach children. The first question was concisely answered by Daan Vandewalle, an

accomplished pianist specialised in contemporary music: “Technique is mastering the sound.” When one thinks about it one realises that the objective of etudes is to automate some processes, yet they also contain moments whereby the presently running automatism must be immediately gained control of and switched to another one, the change mastered. In this respect, Graham's etudes do not differ from classical etudes, only they deal with disrupting habits more than their nurturing. The training relates more to thinking and imagination than the muscles themselves.

Perhaps I do not approach teaching the piano as a purely piano matter. The piano is just one of the possible means of creating sound, learning how to master it, thus fulfilling the role that music should in the interpreter's opinion have at the given moment. That which pupils arrive at can be made use of when playing other instruments too, in ensembles during free improvisation, and even when creating their own music. The point is to cultivate a musical intelligence wider than mere piano aptitude. Accordingly, I strive to put my pupils in various situations so that they realise the possible roles of music and – above all – gradually become independent within the world of music.

# rAdioCUSTICA 2011



In January 2003, Czech Radio 3 - Vltava broadcast the first premiere edition of the Radioateliér (Radio Studio) programme, which since that time has been dedicated to contemporary acoustic art. This December, the hundredth original composition specially created for the programme will in another manner show what it means today when we “think through sound”.

Over the past decade, Radioateliér has striven to explore miscellaneous nooks and crannies in the area of sonic composition and demonstrate the sheer variety of contemporary acoustic art – from electro-acoustic music through various forms of experimental vocal and Hörspiel creations, the popular soundscape form to the extreme limits of contemporary features. In Radioateliér’s anniversary year, the eighth CD featuring selected compositions, created over the course of 2011, aims to reflect this broad variety – not only within the Czech acoustic art scene but also in its more global context. The Berlin-based Argentinian artist **Mario Verandi** presents a splendid musique concrète piece in which he treats “waste” sounds which, especially in the environment of computing technology, originate as products of failure.

The soundscape composition *Walking Sound* is the fruit of co-operation between the Canadian radio artist and researcher **Andrea Dancer** and **Michal Kindernay**, two artists who have met in Prague in previous years.

On this year’s CD, the piece *Tramvestie* represents a remarkable documentary-oriented feature, a position that has yet to become common in the Czech Republic. Over several years, the Liberec-based poet and Germanist **Pavel Novotný** recorded passengers travelling on the unique Liberec-Jablonec nad Nisou intercity tram line. He asked them to describe in their own words that which they saw when looking out of the window. The tram passengers’ narration takes the form of wandering through memories to individual places, human fates, stories...

**Jan Trojan** represents a contrastive approach to soundscape composition, one based on a powerful experience from the Saint James pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. The gentle and rather abstractly conceived atmosphere of an urban sonic walk in **Andrea Dancer** and **Michal Kindernay**’s composition is followed by this bold acoustic narration and endeavour to build up a sort of sonic polyphony.

Even though the pieces featured on the CD encompass a relatively wide spectrum of the contemporary expressive positions of acoustic art, they still form just a selection. In the archives of the Radioateliér premiere broadcasts, which are also available in English, you can listen to all the other compositions that have been aired since the beginning of 2003.



## EUROPEAN DANCE REPERTOIRE IN CZECH MANUSCRIPTS

### OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND THE PERSONALITY OF JIŘÍ HARTL

Notwithstanding the paucity of sources, the musical repertoire of country and town dances in the Czech lands in the 19th century is one of the subjects of current Czech ethnomusicology since it bears witness to an interesting encounter between pan-European trends and the domestic tradition.



A portrait of Jiří Hartl dating from 1836  
(oil on canvas, E. Janata from Jilemnice)

At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, the popularity of the originally French minuet faded and in the 1840s the entire Western world was overwhelmed by the fashionable wave of the Viennese waltz, which up to the present day is the most popular component of the compound-time social dance repertoire. In the meantime – virtually throughout the first half of the 19th century – the role of the most popular dance was played by the direct predecessor of the waltz, the *ländler*, also originally a German/Austrian dance. Its extreme popularity is documented by a unique monument to Czech dance music: a set of manuscripts by the Stará Paka schoolmaster Jiří Josef Benedikt Hartl (1781–1849). To date, the general public knows little about Jiří Hartl's life, merely in connection with the discovery of the precious manuscript titled *Partibus pro Violin Prim für mich Georgius Hartl* dating from 1811. The professional public has known of its existence since the 1870s. Several extracts accompanied by a specialist commentary by the music folklorist Jaroslav Markl were published in the journal *Český lid* (1979, 1986),

yet the manuscript itself remained the property of the family. After research was revived, in 2004 another notebook, bearing the Czech title *Partyska pro Jiřího Harte*, comprising instrumental melodies dating from between 1820 and 1843, was discovered in Hartl's personal effects in Stará Paka. In 2006 a new evaluation of these precious sources of dance music of the first half of the 19th century, which will result in a critical edition and a set of musico-historical and analytical studies, was facilitated by Hartl's manuscripts being purchased for the collections of the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in Prague. The two notebooks contain a total of 840 notations of instrumental dance tunes which the Stará Paka schoolmaster and first violin of the local band wrote down for his own needs from 1810 to 1843. They represent a comprehensive series of melodies and typical solos, called *cadentia*. Hartl noted down the first violin part with instrumental notes, cues of solo sections of other instruments, included the names of the majority of the dances and made



The former Stará Paka school on a historical photograph  
(photo from the Hartl family archive, undated)

other verbal notes of various meaning. Owing to this abundance of data, we can reconstruct the configuration of Hartl's band. Its line-up varied but was most likely made up of a maximum of ten members: at least two violins, probably a viola, a double-bass, one or two clarinets and a trumpet, occasionally a flute and a bassoon. The bandmaster's notes are written in both Czech and German, documenting the period's bilingualism.

I should at this juncture point out the manuscript's purpose: for the practical needs of the Stará Paka bandmaster. It is not a collection subject to aesthetic or any other (self-) censorship, neither is it an anthology aiming in addition to represent or educate. Hartl's notations thus bear faithful witness to the performance of entertainment dance or utility music as it was practised two hundred years ago, as well as the period dance repertoire itself. And this testimony is fascinating indeed.

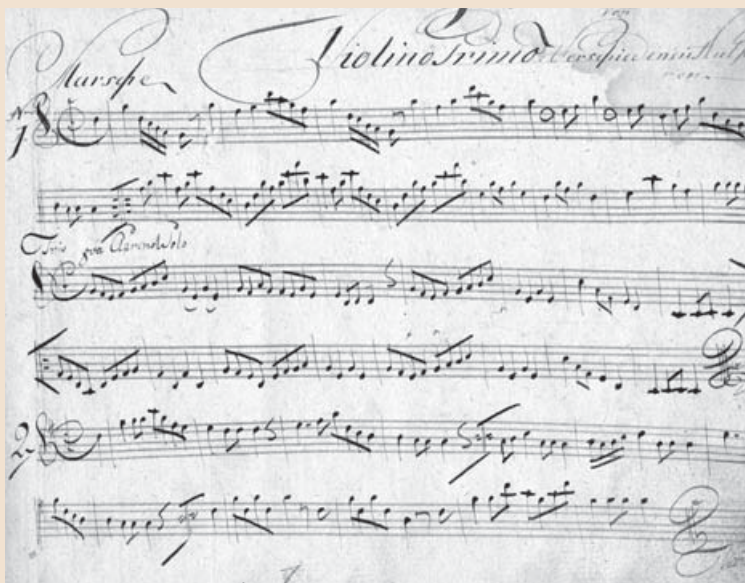
In general, the repertoire of the town dances in the Czech lands at the turn of the 19th century reveals the growing popularity of dances of foreign provenience. Besides the *polonaise*, *schotische*, *galop*, *mazurka*, *contretanz* (*quadrille*) they primarily include the German dances *ländler* and *steirisch*, and later on various types of waltz akin to them. All these dance types are mentioned in Hartl's manuscript too. On the last pages of Hartl's *Partibus*, twelve Czech folk dances are added alongside one waltz: the *furyant*, *schotysch* (dated 5 June 1814), *marsch-tanz*, *bažant*, *švihák*, *bauer*, *kalamajka*, *husa*(r), *hulán* (in G major), *hulán* (in D major), *třinožka* (in D major) and *třinožka* (in G major). It is worth mentioning that the said folk dances were noted down a year after the Austrian Emperor Franz I visited the nearby town of Jičín. According to the documentation preserved, during a festivity which took place on 14 June 1813 in Libosad, forty pairs of villagers in all their finery danced the *hulán* twice and the *skákavá* once. This, or another similar occasion, was undoubtedly a stimulus for Hartl's band to include folk dances alongside the then fashionable social dances in its repertoire.

Table: Summary of dances in Hartl's manuscripts

Dance	Number of melodies
Ländler	51
Steyrische	80
Marsch	45
Egose (egoso, schotysch)	44
Ungarisch	31
Untitled	30
Deutsche	20
Zweytritt	13
Contra	7
Menuetto	4
Hulan	2
Třinožka	2
Italian	1
Kögeltanz	1
Bonapar	1
Furiant	1
Englese	1
Bažant	1
Švihák (sviňák?)	1
Bauer	1
Kalamajka	1
Husa or entepatka	1
Walzer	1



Title page of Jiří Hartl's manuscript *Partibus* with records from 1810–1822



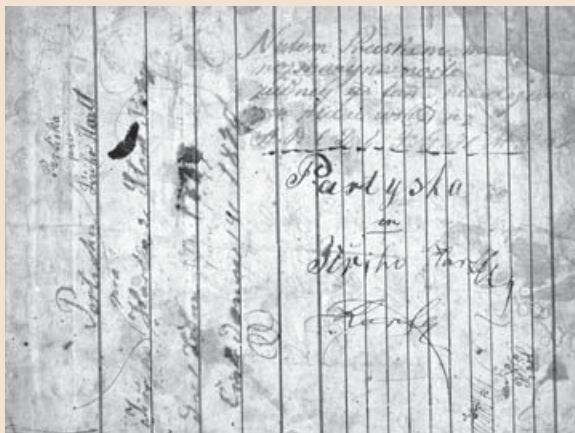
Extract from the Partibus manuscript



Extract from the Partyska manuscript

The manuscript's author **Jiří Josef Benedikt Hartl** was born on 23 March 1781 in Lužany, North Bohemia, into a family of teachers. Of his 14 siblings, four brothers were teachers too. Jiří was first an assistant at his father's school, subsequently worked in Rousínov near Brno, and in 1802 and 1803 in Buda near Pest, Hungary. In 1803 he began teaching at the general school in Stará Paka, where he would remain for 44 years. In 1807 he got married, and his wife Marie would bear him 10 children. Hartl was an outstanding musician (he played and taught the violin, clarinet, organ and bassoon). As was customary at the time, he was also an organist and choir-loft caretaker. Besides notebooks of dance music, Jiří Hartl wrote several other manuscripts: memoirs, a collection of prayers, funeral and liturgical songs. Moreover, he had ambitions to compose, with his signed autograph pieces *Concerto and Aria in D sharp* having been preserved. The family's property also includes portraits of Jiří Hartl and his wife Marie (oil on canvas in gilded frames). The Stará Paka teacher's personal effects and life story, reconstructed according to school records, private records, letters, family and municipal chronicles, depict the Czech schoolmaster's challenging, responsible and important work in a small town in the first half of the 19th century. In the period of the first conscious efforts for national awakening (which, by the way, culminated in the tragic fate of his son František Hartl, also a teacher, following the revolutionary year of 1848), Jiří Hartl divided his precious time between God, work with children, providing for his family and, above all, music. He made use of his ample experience as a practising musician and educated other instrumentalists, not only for the local needs, mainly for performing figurative choir-loft music, music for processions and parades.





Title page of Jiří Hartl's manuscript *Partyska* with records from 1820–1843

The preserved manuscripts document the quality and scope of activities pursued by Hartl's band, which played at dance parties and on other occasions in the village and nearby. Partly owing to the experience gained from his travels at the beginning of his career as a teacher and musician, and partly through the at the time common borrowings and copies of entire music archives between teachers-bandmasters, Hartl enriched the cultural life of a small town in the Krkonoše mountains region with contemporary European trends, especially ländler-type dances in the case of utility music. At the general level, the scope of activities of countryside teachers at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries reveals to us the necessary foundations upon which the rich community life in the Czech lands in the future decades was built, a solid support for the cultural blooming of the national revival. After all, Hartl's contemporary and the leading intellectual figure of his generation, the philologist Josef Jungmann (1773–1847), wrote: *"The village teacher is an important person. Where there is a sufficiency of good teachers, there in the time of peace there are fewer regiments, fewer gaols and poorhouses necessary."*



The former Stará Paka school – at the present time (photo: L. Tyllner, 2004)

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# “THE QUEEN ELISABETH COMPETITION IS A BIT LIKE A REALITY SHOW”

**The violinist Josef Špaček has been constantly on the go of late. Yet for reasons absolutely delightful. He spent five gruelling weeks in Brussels, where, alongside twelve other contestants, he made it to the final of the Queen Elisabeth Violin Competition. And at the moment he is busy preparing for his wedding.**

*You have taken part in a number of international competitions. Was the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels anyhow exceptional?*

**It was a tremendous experience, perhaps the biggest I have ever had. You could term it the “Violin Olympics”, a competition perhaps only rivalled by the one in Indianapolis. The Brussels event is supported by the royal family and has immense publicity not only in Belgium but worldwide too – the festival organisers, managers, etc. are milling around...**

*Do the people of Brussels consider it as big a deal as those of Warsaw do the Chopin Competition?*

**It is paid significant attention to by the newspapers and the performances of all the contestants are analysed. A lot of people watch it on television. It reminded me a bit of a reality**





show. It lasts over a month and the musicians who progress through the rounds are more frequently on TV. People actually came up to me in the street and said they would be voting for me...

*What is the best strategy to take if one wants to succeed in such a competition?*

Seventy-eight performers arrived. I've never seen anything like that. With such an amount, it's crucial to stand out from the crowd, that's what the jury focuses on - personality, individuality... The point is how a musician is able to "sell" it on stage. The sheer variety of performers was incredible.

It also depends on the make up of the jury - it's not about who is better and who is worse, but about how they impress this or that juror.

*How did you rate your chances before you got there?*

Originally, I didn't even want to go to Brussels. My self-confidence was at a low ebb, a week and a half before my departure I was working a lot at the Philharmonic and studying two new violin concertos that weren't part of the competition's repertoire. In short, I was busy with things that didn't relate to the competition, I didn't have a good feeling about it. I didn't even buy a plane ticket. One by one, I played the set compositions to my classmates and colleagues so as to simulate the competition nervousness and my self-confidence gradually returned. Two days before the competition, I talked my mum into lending me her car and set off.

*You drew number one. Not the best pick, to put it mildly...*

I managed to rewrite the competition's history - it's never previously happened that a competitor

who was the very first to play has advanced even to the semi-final! But the time schedule suited me - after I'd played in the first round, which I knew I was best in, I had a whole week to rehearse for the second. Prior to the final, there was less time, we shut ourselves away...

*Really?*

It's a tradition in Brussels: the finalists are dispatched to the Chapelle Musicale, surrounded by beautiful gardens. They're not allowed to leave the complex. Upon arrival, they receive a new composition, one that no one has seen previously, and then they just practise and practise. Over the first two days, I just drilled the piece, ten hours a day. Then we had one rehearsal with the orchestra.

*Did you listen to the other participants?*

Some do it but I don't. We know each other, I am their friend and if I had listened to them, I would have viewed them in a negative light, as competitors. Therefore, I did my best to remain above all the hullabaloo. I didn't even read the reviews.

*How many pieces in the repertoire were compulsory?*

A Schumann concerto, a Mozart concerto, three Paganini capriccios, a Bach sonata. At the recital, I performed Smetana's From the Homeland, a sonata by Ysaÿe and one commissioned piece, then in the final a Prokofiev sonata and two concertos.

*How did you manage it physically?*

The final was probably the hardest thing I have ever experienced in physical and psychological terms - I stood on the stage on my own for an hour and twenty minutes without any break. This never happens in the real world. Perhaps I shouldn't have put so much energy into it from the very beginning. I plunged into it emotively and with

verve - by the end I was shattered and couldn't wait for the whole thing to be over. Yet it was a good experience.

*Did Brussels mark the end of your competing?*

I am a really competitive type, hence I immediately planned several other competitions, but we will see whether I will feel like taking part in them. Now I have the feeling that I need to rest, so that my arms can recover.

*You were smiling almost all the time you were up on stage. So you didn't suffer from stage fright?*

Of course, I always have stage fright. The point is to be able to relax on stage - when you sink into the music, you forget about the stage fright. That's my objective: to overcome stage fright simply by forgetting all about it. It's not easy though to keep thinking positively, your brain often has a mind of its own.

*Were you addressed by any agency in Brussels?*

I did get a few offers, which I'm now in the process of considering.

*When you completed your studies at Juilliard a year ago did you consider staying in America?*

No, I like it more in Europe; I think that a young musician has more opportunities here. Just take the sheer number of orchestras... London alone has seven symphony orchestras, whereas in the USA there is only one good one in every major city. In Prague, a tiny city, there are so many openings for musicians. Another thing is that when it comes to the New York Philharmonic you are financially secure... I know plenty of people in America, great talents, who have to scramble for work, whereas in Europe they would assert themselves as soloists. A handful are lucky enough to enter the highest circle of musicians at a young age - there is a group of people who repeatedly appear on all the significant stages and at the big festivals...

*What has the post of concert master of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, which you assumed last September, given you?*

It's been really positive. It has given me a certain status, helping to smooth my return to my homeland. For seven years I tried to come back and perform at concerts so as not to be forgotten, and joining the Czech Philharmonic made it easier for me to do so. I cherish the fact that we work with top-notch conductors, and I, since I am right by their side, communicate with them, play to them, contacts and opportunities arise. Perhaps I'm being incorrigibly positive about it all, but I have really enjoyed every one of the concerts that I have performed with the orchestra to date.

I make use of my time off from official duties to pursue solo and chamber activities. I have founded a new quartet, it's just getting off the ground, but we haven't actually played anywhere yet... The ensemble's other members are Jakub Fišer, Michal Sedláček and Jakub Tylman. Coincidentally, all of them are concert masters...

*What solo performances have you lined up for the next few months?*

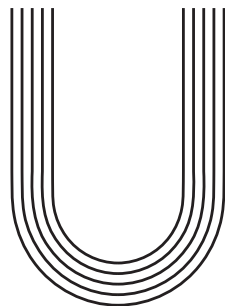
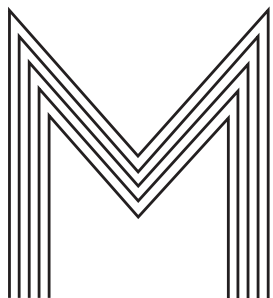
With the Czech Philharmonic I will be playing Suk's Fantasia in Australia, Bruch in Zlín, Brahms in Switzerland. The Prague Symphony Orchestra, my brother and I will perform Brahms's double concerto... So I have a lot on my plate, I can't even get my head round it all, I just take one thing at a time.

Owing to his family background, Josef Špaček (\*1986) was surrounded by music from an early age. He started learning the violin at the age of six with Hana Metelková at the Primary School of Arts of the City of Prague. In 1997 he began studying with Pavel Prantl at the Jan Neruda Grammar School of Music and in 2002 he enrolled at the Prague Conservatory, where he was in Jaroslav Foltýn's class. He subsequently went on to study in the USA, where he has graduated from the most prestigious institutions: the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia (with Ida Kavafian and Shmuel Askenasi) and the Juilliard School in New York (Itzhak Perlman's class).

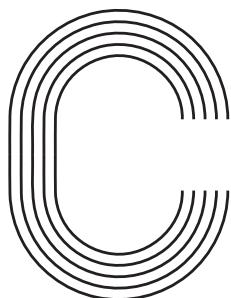
The most noteworthy of the numerous accolades Josef Špaček has received at competitions since his childhood are success at the Michael Hill International Violin Competition in New Zealand, 3rd prize and the young jury prize at the Carl Nielsen International Violin Competition in Denmark, 1st prize and laureate title at the Kocián Violin Competition in the Czech Republic. This June, he advanced to the final of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels.

During his time in the USA, he performed at Carnegie Hall on several occasions. He has also appeared as a guest with the Philadelphia Orchestra, played with the Prague Philharmonia, the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, the Russian Chamber Orchestra of St. Petersburg, L'orchestre de Chambre de Genève, the Kansas City Symphony, the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra, and has worked with conductors of such renown as Christoph Eschenbach, Jiří Bělohlávek, Ondrej Lenárd, Roy Goodman, Jakub Hrůša, etc.

Together with his brother Petr and the pianist Marek Šedivý, he has recorded a CD for the Japanese TV station NHK and toured Japan. His solo debut album features Eugene Ysaÿe's sonatas and for Naxos he has recorded an album of Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's music. Since September 2011 he has been concert master of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.



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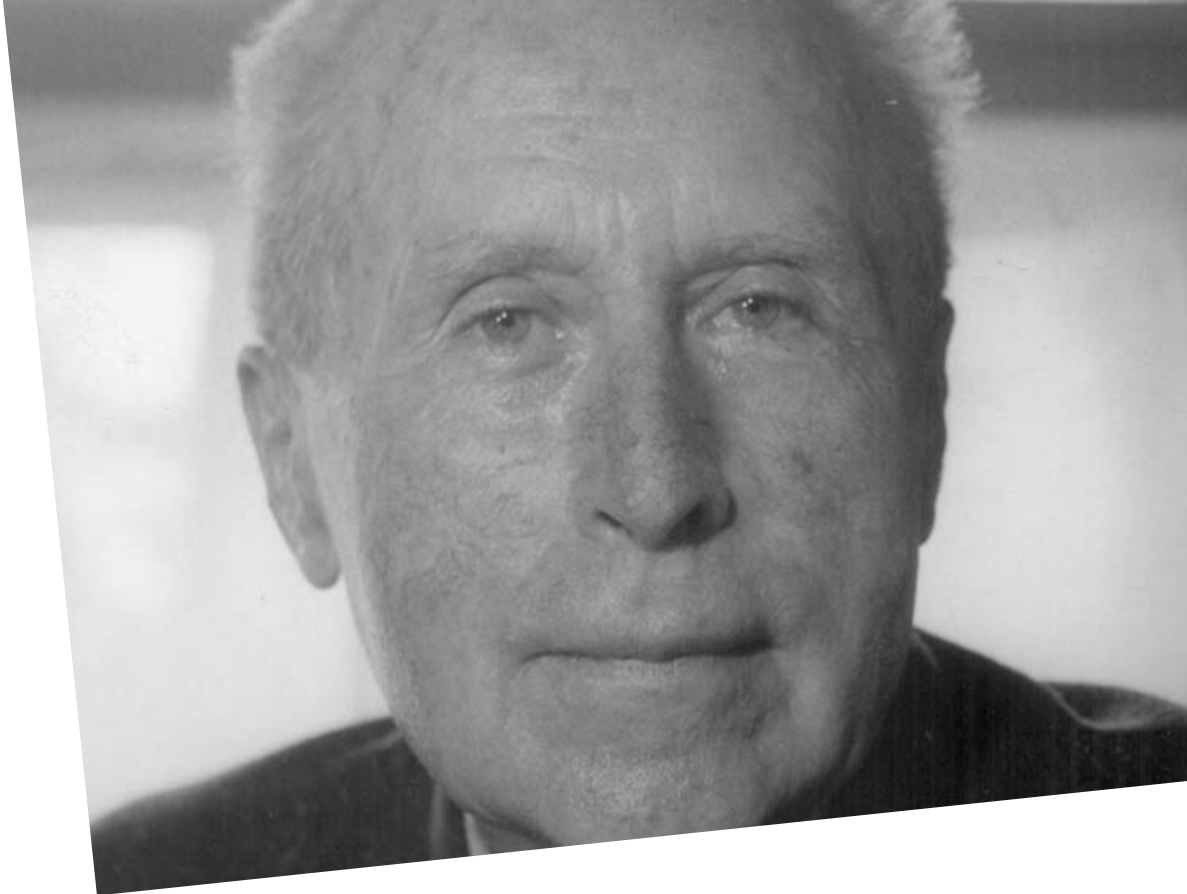
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## **Pavel Bořkovec between Constructivism and Lyricism**

*by Petr Haas*

**The composer and pedagogue Pavel Bořkovec is a distinct figure of the Czech interwar musical avant-garde, while his subsequent post-war creation represents a specific synthesis of post-Romantic and interwar avant-garde elements. Commemorating the composer's work seems fitting on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of his death, as well as in the light of his having gradually fallen into oblivion and the subsequent boiling down of distinguished representatives of the Czech interwar, neo-Classicism-oriented avant-garde to one name: Bohuslav Martinů.**

In the history of art, the terms “Constructivism” and “Lyricism” are commonly used to define opposite approaches to creation. The history of Czech 20th-century music, however, contains a number of composers who embraced distinctively rationalised compositional methods and at the same time strove to apply them in creating pieces with an expressiveness akin to Romanticism. One such is Pavel Bořkovec. Born on 10 June 1894, he studied philosophy at Charles University in Prague yet in 1915 was conscripted and would never complete his studies. After World War I, he decided to pursue a career as a composer. He first began taking private lessons from the traditionalist Josef Bohuslav Foerster, later on he was a student of Jaroslav Křička, and from 1925 to 1927 he attended the Prague Conservatory, studying in the master class under Josef Suk. In 1946 he was appointed professor of composition at the Faculty of Music of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. He taught until 1964, with pupils of his such as Jan Klusák, the currently acclaimed Petr Eben, as well as Luboš Fišer, Pavel Blatný and others, later going on to achieve fame. In the second half of the 1960s, Bořkovec stopped actively composing and soon abandoned public life too. He died following lengthy health problems on 22 July 1972. Bořkovec above all wrote orchestral and vocal-instrumental compositions, with the most esteemed being the symphonic allegro *Start* (1929), the ballet mime *The Pied Piper* (1939), *Concerto Grosso* (1941), *Madrigals about Time* (1958), *Symphony No. 3* (1960), *String Quartet No. 5* (1961) and *Simfonieta in uno movimento* (1963, 1968).

### **String quartets as a gauge of creative development**

String quartets occupy a special position within Bořkovec’s oeuvre. He always wrote them in a period of transformation or constitution of compositional techniques


and hence they provide an illustrative statement of the composer’s changing aesthetic preferences. At the same time, they represent Bořkovec’s three markedly different creative phases. Although such division of an artist’s life is usually a rather facile act, in this case it is well-founded. In his first period, Bořkovec was influenced by late Romanticism, by the work of Bohuslav Foerster and Josef Suk in particular. Its nature is illustrated by *String Quartet No. 1* (1925). His second period, the most relevant in terms of stylistic progressiveness, began in the late 1920s and is characterised by the composer’s inclination to the Neo-Classicist and Constructivist interwar trends. As regards the quartets, it is represented by *String Quartet No. 2* (1929), which can also be considered the first turning point in Pavel Bořkovec’s musical evolution. *String Quartet No. 3* manifests comparable aesthetic foundations, yet the work remained unfinished, with the last notes dating from 1940.

After World War II, Bořkovec synthesised his previous creative methods. The initial phase of this synthesis is reflected in *String Quartet No. 4* (1947), while *String Quartet No. 5* (1961) bears witness to its final form.

### **Post-Romanticism**

Until 1928, Bořkovec was influenced by the lingering late-Romantic tradition, which can be appositely termed “post-Romanticism”. According to the prominent Czech musicologist Jiří Fukač, it is a specific continuation of the 19th-century ideational framework in the music of the composers who are sometimes defined as the “first generation of Czech modernism”, with the leading representatives being considered Vítězslav Novák, Leoš Janáček and Josef Suk, Bořkovec’s teacher at the Prague Conservatory master school. And it was under Suk’s guidance that Bořkovec created his *String Quartet No. 1* in 1925.



The piece is evidently influenced by Bořkovec's teacher, his favourite composer, whose lyricism, endeavour for monumentality, harmonic standards of extended tonality, as well as conventionalised manners of formal structure, tributary to late-Romantic music, are audible in it. The composition possesses a single movement, with palpable features of the sonata cycle. In compliance with other specialists, in the most recent monograph, with the laconic title Pavel Bořkovec (1994), its author, Alena Burešová, directly talks about the "Sukian" one-movement sonata form with parts corresponding to the sonata cycle. A salient feature of the composition is the employment of the rhythmic figure  which is continually present in all the instrument parts. Its dance nature is bolstered by the lyrical idiom, supplementing it with a positive picture of idealised countryside. The same category of expressive types and compositionally technical and aesthetic concepts applied in the creation of *String Quartet No. 1* also encompasses Bořkovec's works written until 1927. These include, for instance, the romantic symphonic poem *Twilight* (1920), under the sway of B. Foerster, as well as the first significant chamber work, the *Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello* (1922), and *Symphony No. 1 in D flat major* (1927), markedly inspired by Josef Suk.

### Foretokens of the future style

Its entirely post-Romantic nature notwithstanding, *String Quartet No. 1* bears traces of Bořkovec's future compositional thinking, already influenced by the avant-garde – or the bulk of that which makes up the substance of his Constructivist approach to creation and is also germane to Constructivism as such. First and foremost, it concerns the application of short self-contained parts of the composition, which are treated as monothematic dramatic arches constantly developing in a linear manner.

Another closely connected phenomenon is the work with contrastive, "hard" transition between the composition's individual parts, conflicting in terms of motif and metre. This appears in *String Quartet No. 1*, for instance, always in the repetition after the end of a dramatic arch followed by a contrastive part with significant participation of ostinato figures, primarily placed in the bass. The contrast between the formal parts is not accentuated here, yet it would be refined and duly become one of Bořkovec's characteristic expressive means in the new, avant-garde-oriented creative period. This is also the case of the ostinato bass figures. Their pertinacious, almost "mechanical" progression in the following pieces, would be supported by the effect that is peculiar to Constructivist compositions declaring their rational, primarily non-Romantic, nature. Yet highlighting these phenomena in *String Quartet No. 1* is only possible with an awareness of the composer's subsequent artistic development.

### Inspiration and the Mánes Music Society

Contact with the contemporary and avant-garde European music of the time was above all mediated in interwar Czechoslovakia by concerts organised in Prague by the *Internationale Gesellschaft für Neue Music* (IGNM), the Society for Modern Music in Prague and, later on, the *Přítomnost* association. Czechoslovak music professionals responded the most positively to composers representing Neo-Classicist approaches, particularly Igor Stravinsky, the Paris-based *Les Six* and followers of the "Neue Sachlichkeit" (New Objectivity) movement, mainly represented in the dramaturgy of the concerts by Paul Hindemith's pieces. To define the term "Neo-Classicism" as an avant-garde trend, it is appropriate to quote directly from *Les Six's* manifesto, which declares "the necessity of a new style, clear and stern [i.e. non-Romantic, accentuating

dissonances, mechanical metric rhythm]. The return to Classicism [...] does not mean a return to the former technique". Pavel Bořkovec began reflecting these tendencies after 1928. In 1932 he became a founding member of the *Mánes Music Society*, which operated out of the building of the *Mánes* artists' society in Prague and during the time of its functioning (1932–1939) was one of the institutional foundations of the Czech interwar musical avant-garde.

### Neo-Classicism and Constructivism

Closely connected with Neo-Classicism is the term "Constructivism", which is firmly established in Czech musicology. *The Dictionary of Czech Music Culture*, for instance, defines it as an "artistic trend emphasising the role of construction or constructional methods in the structure of a work [...], which in music is primarily associated with Neo-Classicism, with its anti-Romantic and anti-Impressionist tendencies. The main features of Constructivism are deemed the intensified linearity and enhanced motoricity, and the creation conceived in this manner is ascribed the qualities of anti-Sentimentalism [...]". The volume *History of Czech Music Culture II* states as the key attributes of Constructivism manifestations of the "Constructivist (rational) calculus" and "musical ornaments [...] units as though extracted from the musical process – figurations and ostinatos whose rational provenience is beyond any doubt". Highlighted too is the fact that musical Constructivism "did not manifest itself as an independently homogeneous style but accompanied the Neo-Classical, Expressionist and Neo-Baroque strains". The term "Constructivism" is also linked with terminological neologisms illustrating the efforts to precisely render the nature of the music termed in this way. Period critics and later specialist studies used such terms as "linear Constructivism" and "Neo-Classical Constructivism". Pavel Bořkovec is branded the "prototype"

of a composer directed in this manner, and his symphonic allegro *Start* (1929) and *String Quartet No. 2* (1929) are considered exemplary compositions.

### Inclination to the avant-garde

Bořkovec's first piece influenced by the Neo-Classical avant-garde is *String Quartet No. 2*. Its four movements generally conform to the sonata cycle, yet they are treated in turn as fugue, scherzo, aria and rondo. The employment of old forms and related compositional methods reveals his being inspired by the "New Objectivity" movement, which significantly intersects with Neo-Classicism, primarily in terms of its rejecting the Romantic and Impressionist subjectivism in favour of a "pragmatic" and "objective" approach to music. Change in the harmonic thinking is evident at first glance. Bořkovec abandoned post-Romantic standards and inclined to application of dissonances as legitimate aesthetic units. Yet dissonances are attained not from the position of free or other types of atonality, but by means of complicating the traditional formations of Classical-Romantic harmony. The typical method is disturbance of consonance of the interval of the perfect fifth and octave by chromatic flexion or adding the upper or lower major and minor second. The distinguished Czech theorist Emil Hradecký drew attention to the fact that the primary objective of such a structure of chords is to attain the dissonant effect of the major or minor second interval and, at the same time, an indefinite tonality of the originally major or minor triads. In this respect, *String Quartet No. 2* is a key phenomenon in Bořkovec's oeuvre, one that cleaves to the majority form of (not only) Czech Neo-Classical-oriented music creation.

### Dramaturgy of music events

Another salient feature of *String Quartet No. 2* is the specific conception which Bořkovec went on to apply frequently

Andante ♩ = ca 72  
semplice (quasi uno corale)

Largo

in his following pieces. Individual elements of the musical structure are first afforded a dramatic potential, according to which they are subsequently “mechanically” treated. Adhering to this musico-dramaturgic conception has a form-creating nature. One of the results of its application is the sharp contrasts between individual elements differing in motif and metre, which are a notable aspect of the majority of Constructivist compositions. The application of motor “mechanical” rhythm, as well as “mechanically” progressing ostinato figures, then serves to enhance this effect. *String Quartet No. 2* is Constructivist owing to the use of motivic-metric conflict, the pregnant rhythm of the ostinato figures and the rhythmicised chord progressions. Palpable too is the attention to balanced formal arrangement and the symmetry manifesting itself in, for instance, the setup of dramatic climaxes and the dynamic plan.

The conclusions pertaining to *String Quartet No. 2* can be used to characterise

the bulk of the significant works that Pavel Bořkovec created from 1929 until the end of the 1930s. Exemplary is above all the aforementioned symphonic allegro *Start* (1929), the just as proclamatorily titled vocal cycle *Stadium* (1929), and the *Little Suite for Piano* (1929), which, according to the Czech musicologist and aesthetician Jaroslav Jiránek, is “remarkable as a laboratory of Constructivist experimentation”. Similar is the nature of *Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra* (1931) and the *Sonata for Solo Viola* (1931). Evidently linked to *String Quartet No. 2* was the third quartet opus, yet Bořkovec never managed to complete it (the last note in the autograph dates from 1940).

### Period of synthesis

Towards the end of World War II, Bořkovec’s music underwent a visible transformation. The musicologist Alena Burešová refers to the beginning of the period of synthesis, which was preceded

The image displays a musical score for String Quartet No. 5, specifically the beginning of the second movement. The score is written for four staves, representing Violins I, Violins II, Violas, and Cellos/Double Basses. The time signature is 4/4. The music is characterized by a very slow tempo, indicated by the marking '36 MM' (36 measures per minute). The notation includes various musical elements such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key markings include 'senza vibr.' (without vibrato) for the Violins, 'f espr.' (forte, esprimo) for the Cellos/Double Basses, 'pizz.' (pizzicato) for the Violins, and 'f marc.' (forte, marcato) for the Cellos/Double Basses. The score also features a variety of note values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The overall texture is dense and complex, reflecting the Constructivist style mentioned in the text.

*String Quartet No. 5, work with sound detail at the beginning of the 2nd movement in a very slow tempo (♩ = 36 MM)*

by a phase of “mature style”. From the late 1930s, this maturity manifested itself in a turn away from the “asentimental” Constructivism, reflecting in a more tonal anchoring of compositions and the reapplication of lyrical types of expression. Whether one prefers to term this period the beginning of synthesis or “maturity”, its nature is in either case represented by the ballet mime *The Pied Piper* (1939) and, most notably, *String Quartet No. 4* (1947). The final form of synthesis is then convincingly documented by *String Quartet No. 5* (1961).

### String Quartet No. 4

The quintessential traits of Bořkovec's interwar and avant-garde-influenced compositions were sharp contrasts in the transition between their parts, as well as “mechanically” progressing ostinato figures. These also occur in *String Quartet No. 4*, yet they no longer serve to declare the presence of an intellectual structural element but become a tool for dramatisation, an instrument aimed at gradating the emotional expression. The harmonic thinking is changed too, as evidenced by, for instance, the second movement, introduced and concluded by a harmonisation of the hymn *Lord God and Maker of All Things*. The part is not quoted precisely and neither does its harmonisation correspond to the period practice when the song originated. The same part of the tune can already be found in the *Little Suite for Piano*, dating from 1929. Accordingly, a comparison suggests itself. The respective part of the Suite is treated with emphasis being placed on neutral tonality of the harmonising consonances using the fifth-second harmony. In the String Quartet, the same place is resolved contrariwise, with a clear tonal anchoring the dissonant effect of the minor second is no longer stressed to such an extent, and the harmonic texture, at first glance complicated, is basically only thickened up by traditional melodic notes designated within Classical-Romantic

harmony as suspended notes. The turning away from any terseness and the return to traditional techniques is not only characteristic of *String Quartet No. 4* itself but also the majority of the compositions created from the end of the 1930s. Evident too is the presence of a specific lyricism, which is not merely post-Romantic and whose starting points have been ascribed by some specialists to Bořkovec's interest in poeticism and his contacts with representatives of the literary avant-garde. In point of fact, it only concerns transformation of the expressive type, led by the endeavour not to return to the Romantic ideal yet still attain an emotional effect. Prime examples in this respect are the mentioned ballet mime *The Pied Piper* (1939), the *Concerto grosso for two violins, cello and orchestra with piano obbligato* (1941) and the later *Chamber Sinfonietta* (1945).

### Fruition of synthesis and String Quartet No. 5

The final phase of synthesis of Bořkovec's creative techniques occurred after 1950. It entailed levelling out of the conflict between the intended lyrical expression and rationalised compositional technical concepts. In this sense, *String Quartet No. 5* possesses a predicative value. None of the structural elements of the piece remain isolated, they are an integral part of the context while retaining their specific character. The formerly applied motivic and metric conflict no longer serves to declare the piece's Constructivist nature, nor to increase the emotional poignancy. Its sole objective is to provide kinetic energy to the relatively delicate structure of the work, which does not turn to any extra-musical programme and in the spirit of absolute music only deals with its own technical and aesthetic issues. Mirror symmetry and the proportional canon of the so-called golden section are evidently used for planning of the construction. The effect of balance is enhanced by regular placement not only of dramatic apexes





*Last page of the unfinished String Quartet No. 3*

but also motivic returns and variations on the main and subsidiary themes. Owing to this, this paramount work of Bořkovec's is "Neo-Classicist" too, yet this time not in the name of anti-Romantic tendencies but in relation to selected musical and aesthetic ideals of high Classicism.

### Sound detail

*String Quartet No. 5* contains other elements too. Firstly, it reflects an increased interest in sound detail, which in the spirit of Constructivism is also an exposed structural detail. This manifests itself in, for instance, the making use of minimal yet present differences between holding and re-attacking the pedal note in a very slow tempo at the beginning of the second movement, as well as in prescribing the hitherto unused mutes and employing glissandos in broad intervals. *String Quartet*

*No. 5* is one of Bořkovec's crowning works, one that also represents the end of his active composing. It originated at around the same time as comparatively focused compositions, none of which, however, represents such a forcibly balanced synthesis. These primarily include *Symphony No. 3* (1960) and *Simfonieta in uno movimento* (1963, 1968).

### Between Constructivism and Lyricism

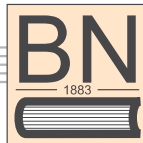
Contemporary specialists always highlighted Bořkovec's endeavour to attain a balanced combination of lyricist and avant-garde tendencies. In the first half of the 1930s, the leading Czech musicologist Vladimír Helfert designated the materialisation of this endeavour as a "new form of Czech modern music", while lyricism was perceived as that which enriches avant-garde influences and shifts



them into a position acceptable for Czech music. A number of other specialists, including the distinguished Czech theorist Karel Janeček, spoke in a similar spirit in the period following the end of World War II. Although Janeček branded Bořkovec “an entirely non-Romantic composer”, at the same time he strove to prove that he was never “merely” a composer of “cold intellect”. Indeed, Bořkovec’s work does meet the requirements for a modern and concurrently emotional type of music, which above all applies to the mature pieces created after World War II. In the words of the Czech musicologists Jiří Vysloužil and Jiří Fukač, at the same time Bořkovec remains a “prototype of a Constructivism-focused composer”, and thus a key figure of the Czech interwar music avant-garde. Without Bořkovec’s symphonic allegro *Start* and *String Quartet No. 2*, the picture of its Neo-Classicism-oriented, and dominant, trend would not be complete. And this picture cannot be reduced merely to highlighting the oeuvre of the more internationally renowned Bohuslav Martinů.

#### **Selected recordings of Pavel Bořkovec’s compositions**

*String Quartet No. 1*, Supraphon SUA 10 354; *The Pied Piper* – ballet mime, Supraphon H 15 0085 – 7; *Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra*, Supraphon DV 5810; *Symphony No. 2 for Large Orchestra*, Supraphon DM 5477; *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, Supraphon DV 5698; *Symphonieta No. 2*, Panton 11 0300 ST H; *Nonet*, Panton ST 110317; *Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra* (3rd movement) and *String Quartet No. 5* (3rd and 4th movements), as part of the profile gramophone disc “Pavel Bořkovec, Portrait of the Composer”, Supraphon ST 1 11 1263 G1; the symphonic allegro *Start* and *Symphony No. 3*, as part of the CD “Pavel Bořkovec, Orchestral Works”, Panton CD 81 1366-2 011.



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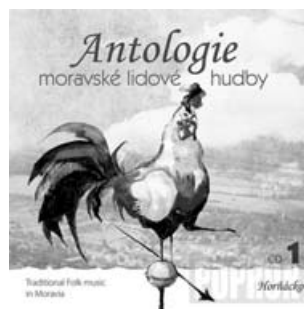
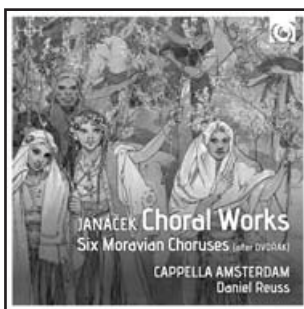
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Text: French, English, German.

Recorded: Nov. 2010, Waalse Kerk, Amsterdam. Released: 2012.

TT: 71:42. DDD. 1 CD Harmonia Mundi France HMC 902097 (distributed by Classic).

I don't know whether it is a price that a journalist who has listened to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of recordings must pay, but today hardly anything really takes me by surprise. Yet from the very first minute of the project by Cappella Amsterdam I was astonished and the inner feeling of satisfaction and joy at music and its performance kept growing. But first of all, a few words about the chorus. Although formed back in 1970, it was only after the arrival of the chorus master **Daniel Reuss** in 1990 that **Cappella Amsterdam** became fully professional and began rapidly developing in artistic terms. At the present time, it is one of the world's finest chamber choruses. The singers (of various nationalities) are among the best that can be found in the Netherlands, with Reuss being the main magnet. In addition, of late Reuss has won increasing recognition as an orchestra conductor and is a strong competitor to such luminaries as Herreweghe, Koopman, Norrington and Harnoncourt. He is a master of dealing with both early and contemporary music, bearing witness to which are his acclaimed recordings featuring Sweelinck and Ligeti pieces.

Choosing Leoš Janáček's choral works was a logical move since the popularity of his music has been growing in Holland (and throughout Western Europe in general for that matter). A good many people are fascinated by the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century there was a composer who possessed modernity as regards the tension of harmonies, as well as the power of romantic sentiment, forcibility and directness. The first thing that captivates on the CD is its dramaturgy. I for one cannot recall ever hearing in our country the splendid Janáček arrangement of Antonín Dvořák's *Moravian Duets* (the pianist **Philip Mayers** is simply superb, and not only here) and in *My Father* the harmonium instead of the organ. I have never before encountered such a suggestive, intimate interpretation of *Elegy on the Death of My Daughter Olga* (a little-known but truly inspired work!), *My Father*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Wolf's Trail* and *Lyre*. This impelled me to seek out other recordings made by Cappella Amsterdam. In *Rhymes*, Reuss plays with details and I seemed to be able to feel the singers' sheer joy at the music. Yet the absolute apex for me was *My Father*. The power of the delivery is simply breathtaking.

Janáček's Czech idiom is not only about the actual words but also the extremely specific musical cadence, accentuation, sense for semantic stresses and the course of the tone. Although the insight into the language is not always ideal on the recording (in places it does leave something to be desired), the overall picture is fabulous. This is largely facilitated by the vocal and musical maturity of the chorus-singers and Daniel Reuss's exploration and conducting. What's more, the solos are sung by **Thomas Walker**, an exciting discovery for me personally, whose voice is incredibly flexible. I am convinced that the young Scottish tenor, originally a trumpeter, who is not a newcomer to Janáček's music (he participated in Charles Mackerras's recording of the opera *The Makropulos Case* for Chandos), has a magnificent career ahead of him.

Luboš Stehlík

### Anthology of Moravian Folk Music 1, 2, 3 Hornácko, Dolnácko

Text: Czech, English. Released: 2011, compilation. Indies Records MAM 486-2 (Hornácko), 487-2 (Dolnácko).

Indies Records has taken another significant step in reflecting folk music in Moravia by releasing a four-album compilation aiming to present the forms and transformation of folk music-making in the early 21st century in large and small regions of Moravia. The project has an exquisite form (package, booklet and overall range), as well as content, since it includes recordings made by the finest contemporary folk ensembles and singers in Moravia. The music has been compiled from original discs, with the main selection criterion being the repertoire structure. According to the label, preference was given to natives without formal musical training who learned how to play their instruments and sing in local folk bands. Hence, the listener can better understand the continuity of the tradition of the 20th and even 19th centuries. The first album, dedicated to Hornácko (a small region in south-east Moravia), features the cimbalom bands **Hornácká cimbálová muzika Martina Hrbáče**, **Hornácká muzika Mirka Minkse**, the fabulous **Hornácká cimbálová muzika Petra Mičky** from Hrubá Vrbka and **Hornácká cimbálová muzika Petra Galečky** from Lipov, **Hornácká cimbálová muzika Jarka Miškeřika**, and the modern **Musica Folklorica**. Every connoisseur will savour listening to **Martin Hrbáč**, **Dušan Holý** and his brother **Luboš**, **František Okénka**, the faultless **Martin Prachař**, **Anna Kománková** and other singers. The Hornácko CD culminates in a real gem, the love song performed by the female ensemble **Ženský sboreček** from Lipov. Although a small region, when it comes to folklore Hornácko is incredibly compact and buoyant.



The second album is devoted to a part of the Dolníčácko region (Uherský Brod, Strání, Kopanice, Uherské Hradiště, Veselí) which shows a greater interpretational scope. This disc too presents the best local musicians: the cimbalom bands **Cimbálová muzika Kunovjan**, **Cimbálová muzika Jaroslava Čecha**, **Cimbálová muzika Hradišťan**, **Cimbálová muzika Stanislava Gabriela**, **Cimbálová muzika Radošov**, **Cimbálová muzika Olšava**, **Cimbálová muzika Husličky** from Strání and **Muzika souboru Kopaničar** from Starý Hrozenkov, and a plethora of outstanding singers, including **Lubomír Málek**, **Jitka Šuranská**, **Alice Holubová**, **Jitka** and **Tatána Málková**.

The third album maps other parts of the Dolníčácko region (Strážnicko, Kyjovsko, Podluží, Hanácké Slovácko). Thirty-three beautiful songs are rendered by splendid singers – **Jan Gajda**, **Magdalena Můčková**, **Tomáš Pánek**, **Blažena Potyková**, **Jožka Severin Jr.**, **Jaroslav Kovařík**, the female choirs from Kyjov and Vacenovice, and a number of cimbalom bands.

Naturally, the anthology represents a subjective selection of the editor, yet it has succeeded in reflecting the astonishing musical treasures of the main folklore regions of Moravia. From the viewpoint of a pampered 21st-century audiophile, there is just a single (relative) problem – the unequal audio quality of the recordings, which, however, is inevitable in the case of compilations of this type. Nevertheless, in my opinion, this is actually an advantage that enhances the project's authenticity and credibility. I recommend that all lovers of Moravia and its folk music go and seek out in shops CDs with the "Moravian cockerel" on the cover. (The fourth album, which was not available at the time I was writing this review, is dedicated to the Moravian Walachia, Lachia, Zlín and Luhačovské Zálesí regions.)

Luboš Stehlík

## Musica Folklorica

### Spal bych, žena mi nedá

Text: Czech. Recorded: 2010 – 2011.

Released: 2011. DDD.

1 CD Indies Scope MAM 502-2.

**H**ot on the heels of the Anthology of Moravian Folk Music, at the end of last year the Brno-based label Indies Scope released an album of "titillating" songs. The CD is not a mere appendix but a fully-fledged project, comprising a selection of little-known songs from Horňácko, a region in the south-east of the Czech Republic. Today, we primarily know Moravian folk melodiousness from the morally filtered collection put together by the Roman Catholic priest František Sušil. Hence, the project of the superlative ensemble **Musica Folklorica**, featuring a selection of more or less erotic (some may even brand them pornographic) songs, is a fundamental accomplishment, one indicating the musical wealth of another layer of Moravian culture. The songs are at times downright bawdy, while in the case of the titular song *Spal bych, spal bych, žena mi nedá* (I want to sleep but my wife won't let me), it would indeed perhaps be possible to use the adjective "pornographic". Nevertheless, for the most part it concerns symbolism, metaphors that are further developed. There is no doubt that the selected songs have a high value, as regards both the melody and rhythm. What's more, they are brilliantly interpreted. **Musica Folklorica**, featuring the magnificent cimbalom player **Petr Pavlinec** and headed by the first violin **Miroslav Kolacia**, have felicitously invited as a guest the cimbalom band **Hornácká muzika Martina Hrbáče**, in which Kolacia plays the second violin or the viola. Noteworthy too are the fabulous performances of all the singers (**Miroslav Dudík**, **Luboš Holý**, **Martin Hrbáč**, **Veronika Malatincová**, **Martin Prachař**,

**Tomáš Svoboda**, and the girls' choir **Oskoruša**), as well as the arrangers (**Dudík**, **Hrbáč**, **Kolacia**). I believe that the era of moral censorship has long gone and that this exceptional album will be received by our society positively. The musicians' virtuosity alone is worthy of immense appreciation.

Luboš Stehlík

## Antonín Dvořák

### Gypsy Songs, Moravian Duets, Biblical Songs

**Genia Kühmeier – soprano, Bernarda Fink – mezzo-soprano, Christoph Berner – piano.** Text: French, English, German. Recorded: 2010, Teldec Studio Berlin. Released 2012. TT: 65:46. DDD. 1 CD Harmonia mundi HMC 902081 (distributed by Classic).

**I**t is difficult to imagine a more ideal interpretation of Dvořák's vocal gems by foreign artists than that captured on the new disc released by Harmonia mundi. Nor is it easy to recollect a better performance by Czech singers. In musical terms, the first two thirds contain a subtle and sparkling delivery, with the Czech sounding surprisingly correct and lucid. Granted, **Bernarda Fink**, the Argentinean mezzo-soprano of Slovenian origin, is known to understand and speak Czech owing to having lived in Prague, yet when it comes to the Austrian soprano, one would expect certain problems and inaccuracies in her diction. **Genia Kühmeier**, who sings the *Gypsy Songs*, as well as the soprano part in the *Moravian Duets*, is a Mozart singer with international experience and acclaim, most notably in opera, over the past decade. In the song cycle, one



needs some time to get used to her clear voice since, especially at the beginning, it comes across in a few of the highest notes as somewhat narrower and shriller than totally beautiful. Yet in the duets all the remaining doubts are dispelled – Kühmeir and Fink form a tandem whose two voices knit together splendidly, possessing the same approach to interpretation and only mildly influenced by the operatic style, a tandem not only singing together but also breathing and tenderly vibrating as one. Also borne in this spirit is the identically felt piano, an attentive, diversiform and interesting accompaniment. Thanks to the interpretation and comprehensive sound, the Moravian Duets, with their positive charge and immaculate consonances and expression, modest restraint (devoid of exaggerated showboating and battling for supremacy), fine nuances and gentle dynamics, are the natural centre and climax of the recording. The ensuing *Biblical Songs*, with their extraordinary charge, embodied into the music by the composer, as well as the mood created by the singer and the pianist, are immensely moving. Bernarda Fink affords the song cycle a sincere and profound intimacy and, through a few tremulous tones in particular, captures their quintessence precisely, and in a forcible manner. She does not overstrain or exaggerate, and the fact that Czech is not her mother tongue is only revealed slightly and in the case of a few syllables. Yet perhaps a more levelled tone would be more pleasant in some places. As performed by Bernarda Fink, the Biblical Songs are rounded off without unnecessary pathos, possess an airiness and lightness greater than in the case of many other male or female interpreters, while at the same time not disguising the devoutness that inspired the composer to create the cycle – on the contrary, the piety is naturally present in the pleasantly simple delivery. The captivating album cover features a detail of an Alfons Mucha poster. While not entirely apposite and perhaps not overly suitable

when it comes to the Biblical Songs, at least it makes a change from the customary red-and-white folk costumes. We should, however, bear in mind that the CD has been released by a French label. It is a unique solution, one that immediately sets this recording apart from all the others.

Petr Veber

## Josef Bohuslav Foerster

### Piano Trios

(No. 1 in F minor, Op. 8;  
No. 2 in B flat major, Op. 38;  
No. 3 in A minor, Op. 105)

**Janáček Trio (Jiří Pospíchal – violin, Marek Novák – cello, Markéta Janáčková – piano).**  
Text: Czech, English, German, French. Recorded: 2009 and 2010, Studio Mártínek, Prague.  
Released: 2012. TT: 75:23. DDD.  
1 CD Supraphon SU 4079-2.

In 2002, Supraphon released a CD featuring J. B. Foerster's piano trios, as performed in an intriguing manner by the Foerster Trio in 1969 and 1978, the very first complete collection within a single album. The fact that the label recently issued a new recording of these works, featuring different interpreters, is noteworthy indeed, since Foerster's music can by no means be deemed "commercial", while the previous disc is still listed in Supraphon's catalogue. The new recording was made by the **Janáček Trio**, who we can hear in the original line-up: **Jiří Pospíchal** – violin, **Marek Novák** – cello, **Markéta Janáčková** – piano (last year, Irena Herajnová replaced Jiří Pospíchal). All three musicians approached the recording

with a delightfully youthful élan. The fast movements are played at a significantly livelier pace than in the case of the Foerster Trio, with the music coming across as utterly refreshing. The trios have a zing that would many a time not be expected in the case of the "earnest and serious" Foerster (the brisk introductory movements of the first two trios, the lovely scherzo of the first trio). In addition to the sprightly tempos, plaudits are due to the Janáček Trio for the cultivated and cantabile tone of all three instruments, the smoothness of the musical flow and gentle colour of the sound, most admirably applied in the slow movements (the suggestive nocturne mood in the introductory part of the first trio's Adagio, the absorbing second movement of the final trio). Although these compositions are intellectually demanding, the Janáček Trio have imbued them so much light and fresh air that we simply do not perceive them as such. And if we add to this CD's fortes the excellent accompanying text by Vlasta Reittererová and the booklet's extremely forcible graphic design, featuring a picture by Zdenka Braunerová, we can deem this a project that definitely does Supraphon credit.

Věroslav Němec





**Jan Dismas Zelenka**

**Responsoria pro hebdomada  
sancta / Lamentatio Ieremiae  
Prophetiae**

**Collegium 1704 & Collegium  
Vocale 1704,**

**Václav Luks - conductor.**

Text: English, German, French.

Recorded: 2011. Released: 2012.  
DDD. 2 CDs Accent ACC 24259.

**C**ollegium 1704's latest album is one of the most engrossing early-music recordings to have appeared on the Czech and foreign markets this year. It extends the currently long series of CDs featuring Zelenka's compositions with another significant title – music for Tenebrae, Christian religious services celebrated since the Middle Ages that take place on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the last three days of Holy Week. Zelenka started to compose his *Lamentatio Ieremiae Prophetiae*, ZWV 53, and *Responsoria pro hebdomada sancta*, ZWV 55, in 1722 to commission for the Dresden royal court, most likely upon the initiative of Maria Josepha, Archduchess of Austria, wife of King Augustus III of Poland. The *Lamentatio Ieremiae Prophetiae* was first performed at the Catholic court chapel in Dresden at Easter of the same year, while the *Responsoria pro hebdomada sancta* was only completed in 1723. Following their premiere, in most likelihood neither of the compositions was performed again – in 1724, Tenebrae were replaced in Dresden by Italian oratorios, played on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Collegium 1704's recording combines the first of Zelenka's lamentations intended for Maundy Thursday (the composer never finished the cycle, with the lamentations being created only for

the Tenebrae on Thursday and Friday) and the responsories for Good Friday and Holy Saturday. This CD provides those who cannot attend Easter masses in person with the possibility to hear how Catholics in Protestant countries celebrated them secretly at their homes and chapels in attics. Today, Zelenka's lamentations and responsories too more incite contemplation and concentration on their spiritual content than offering pure listening pleasure. As for the delivery of the music, this album represents a model of informed interpretation. Both Collegium 1704 and **Collegium Vocale 1704**, made up of top-class soloists, are ensembles enjoying Europe-wide renown. The solo part of the *Lamentatio* is splendidly sung by **Marián Krejčík**, a member of Collegium vocale, while **Václav Luks** conducts the performance of the lamentations and responsories energetically, knowledgeably, placing emphasis both on the overall area and minor detail, with a sense for conveying the expressive and semantic nuances of the text. The recording is technically superb and the album is accompanied by a readable and well-informed specialist text by the German Zelenka expert Gerhard Poppe in three languages (English, German, French), and the pieces' lyrics in the original Latin wording, as well as English, German and French. (The recording was made in collaboration with France's Festival de la Chaise-Dieu, at which Collegium 1704 are regular guests). All in all, it is a highly welcome addition to the domestic Zelenka discography and a must-have for anyone interested in the music of the greatest Czech composer of the first half of the 18th century.

*Michaela Freemanová*



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### FESTIVAL PROLOGUE

#### **Pavel Haas Quartet**

*Bedřich Smetana - String quartet No. 1 E minor "From My Life"*  
*Franz Schubert - String quartet No. 14 D minor "Death and the Maiden"*  
 Monday 18th June, at 19:30  
 Praha, Rudolf gallery - Prague Castle

### OPENING CONCERT

#### **Prague Filharmonia**

**Gaetano d'Espinosa – conductor / Italy**  
*Gioacchino Rossini - Overture from „The Italian Girl in Algiers“*  
*Antonín Dvořák - Czech Suite in D major, op. 39*  
*Ludwig van Beethoven - Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67*  
 Friday 21st September, at 19:00  
 Jablonec nad Nisou, The Town Theatre

#### **Kateřina Choboková – organ**

**Yasuko Tanaka – trumpet**  
*Charpentier, Händel, Telemann, Pärt, etc.*  
 Saturday 22th September, at 19:00  
 Nový Oldřichov, Church of the Holy Cross

### Musica Florea

#### **Marek Štryncl – conductor**

*A. Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*  
*A. Reichenauer: Instrumental Concerts*  
 Sunday 23rd September, at 17:00  
 Kravaře, Church of virgin Mary's Birth

### ST. WENCESLAS CONCERT

#### **Schola Gregoriana Pragensis** **David Eben – artistic director**

*„Bohemorum sancti - Bohemian Saints in Heavenly Jerusalem“ - Songs celebrating the most important Czech medieval saints (st. Vojtěch, st. Ludmila, st. Václav)*  
 Friday 28th September, at 19:00  
 Jezvė, St. Lawrence Church

### TRADITIONAL CONCERT BY CANDLELIGHT

#### **Tomáš Jamník – violoncello**

*J. S. Bach - Cello Suites (selection)*  
 Saturday 29th September, at 20:00  
 Zahrádky, St. Barboras's Church

#### **Pavel Steidl – guitar** **Gabriela Demeterová – violin**

*N. Paganini, Pavel Steidl, etc.*  
 Sunday 30th September, at 17:00  
 Česká Lípa, Basilica of All Saints

#### **Dan Bárta a Robert Balzar Trio**

*„Theyories“*  
 Monday 1st October, at 19:00  
 Nový Bor, The Town Theatre

#### **Joel Frederiksen – bass, lutes / Germany**

*“The fire and passion in the English lute song”*  
 Friday 5th October, at 19:00  
 Děčín, Castle - Library hall

#### **Baborák Ensemble**

#### **Radek Baborák – French horn**

*“Via regia - Music between Prague and Zittau”*  
 Saturday 6th October, at 19:00  
 Großschönau,  
 Evangelical - Luther Church Waltersdorf

### Musica Florea

#### **Marek Štryncl – conductor**

*A. Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*  
*A. Reichenauer: Instrumental Concerts*  
 Sunday 7th October, at 17:00  
 Filipov, basilica of Virgin Mary the helper of Christians

#### **Children's Opera Prague**

*Minioperas of Zdeněk Svěrák and Jaroslav Uhlíř*  
*Sleeping Beauty, The twelve months, Budulíněk, Little Red Cap*  
 Friday 12th October, at 10:00 and 11:30  
 Česká Lípa, Jirásek's Theatre

#### **Martinů Voices**

#### **Lukáš Vasilek – conductor**

*“God's Grace for Zdislava”*  
 Saturday 13th October, at 19:00  
 Jablonné v Podještědí,  
 Basilica minor of St. Zdislava

#### **Zuzana Lapčíková – vocal, cymbalom** **Josef Fečo – contrabass**

*“The Tree of Life”*  
 Sunday 14th October, at 17:00  
 Česká Lípa, Textile museum

#### **Tara Fuki**

#### **Dorota Barová – vocal, violoncello** **Andrea Konstankiewiczová – vocal, violoncello**

*“Sens”*  
 Friday 19th October, at 19:00  
 Česká Lípa, Basilica of All Saints

#### **Barbora Sojčková a Hana Blažilková – vocal, gothic lute**

*“Per alegrezza - For pleasure” - Spiritual and secular love in music of the Italian late medieval*  
 Saturday 20th October, at 19:00  
 Česká Lípa, Biber's Chapel

### Schola Gregoriana Pragensis

#### **David Eben – artistic Director**

*„Let us sing together“ - Vocal music of Czech and German Reformation*  
 Friday 26th October, at 19:30  
 Zittau, Citizens Hall

#### **Czech Chamber Orchestra**

#### **Andreas Sebastian Weiser – conductor** **Vocal Concert Dresden**

**Peter Kopp – Choirmaster**  
**Anna Hlavenková – soprano**  
**Markéta Cukrová – alto**  
**Jaroslav Březina – tenor**  
**Tomáš Král – bass**

*W. A. Mozart - Requiem, KV 626*  
 Friday 2nd November, at 19:00  
 Česká Lípa, Basilica of All Saints

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