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**Milan Guštar**  
**Dvořák's music**  
**on period instruments**  
**Marko Ivanović**

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## Dear readers,

This issue contains another two articles on topics we have dealt with several times recently. Martin Jemelka, a connoisseur of Antonín Dvořák's discography, rounds off a series of texts with an essay on "authentic interpretation" of Dvořák's music. It may seem surprising that such a phenomenon exists – there are no doubts as to the validity of historically informed performance of Baroque music, but late 19th-century Romanticism? These and other questions are focused on in Jemelka's article. The other "thematic" material is an article by Petr Haas, who deals with the interwar musical avant-garde in the Czech lands in terms of which music by contemporary international composers was played (and which wasn't) in Czechoslovakia at the time, and how it was reflected by domestic creators. I would also like to draw your attention to an interview with Milan Guštar, who is above all presented as a composer. Guštar, however, is also a leading expert in historical electronic instruments, and in everything pertaining to electronics and music in general. It is worth recalling to what extent the development of musical possibilities has gone hand in hand with that of technology – from the invention of archery to the microchip.

Pleasant reading  
Petr Bakla

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# Milan Guštar

## THAT WHICH IS LEFT AFTER SOUND HAS DIED AWAY

**Milan Guštar, musician, programmer, electronic gadget designer, organologist, pedagogue and writer, has been creating his own music for over three decades. His original compositions, audio and multimedia installations, in which he has frequently applied mathematical principles and algorithmic techniques, are influenced by Minimalism. For his music performances and audio installations he has produced compelling video projections that sensitively add to the overall impression. In addition to creating his own works, Milan Guštar has also devoted to research straddling the boundaries of science, technology and art, above all in relation to mathematical principles in music, the theory of tonal systems, electronics, informatics and applied mathematics. He has frequently collaborated with leading Czech visual artists (Veronika Bromová, David Černý, Floex, Kurt Gebauer, Krištof Kintera, Lukáš Rittstein, Miloš Vojtěchovský, etc.).**

*Humans can hear much earlier than they are born. But there is hearing and hearing. When did you first hear, and when did you consciously register the existence of music?*

I don't know how and when exactly it was. Some time towards the end of primary school, my friends and I began exchanging recordings, that is rewinding songs on reel-to-reel tape-recorders. This continued at the grammar school, when new classmates appeared and with them new music too. And that is when I most likely really "heard" for the first time. And at the time I also had my first profound musical experiences. I recall that first listening to the Rolling Stones album *Black and Blue*, which had just been released by Supraphon, made a really powerful impression. I still don't actually know why it was this disc in particular. And Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* was released too at around the same time. That album spawned my interest in getting better-quality audio equipment and building amplifiers and hi-fi systems. From there it was just a small step to building synthesisers and other electronic musical instruments. Then, the Beatles, of course. From them I got into many other types of music,



J. S. Bach, for instance. And also Indian and through it other ethnic music. Of significance too was my encounter with Frank Zappa's music, from which there was a direct path leading to Edgard Varèse and 20th-century classical music. At the time, I also got hold of the first recordings by Czech underground and alternative bands, which revealed to me that music can be done in a totally different manner.

*We would like to know more about your musical development, both as a listener and composer. Did you have any idols, or did you pursue your own, unexplored path?*

The basic impulse for me was when, some time around the turn of the 1980s, I heard a fragment of some minimalist piece on Radio Free Europe. It struck me really deeply and as a matter of fact I still haven't fully recovered. Minimalism led me to ponder what in music is essential, how its individual components work, what can be perceived and what effect things take. But I was certainly influenced by all the other music I listened to. And not only music.



Yet I didn't have any idols as such, I rather sought the techniques and principles that don't overly appear in our music. Either because they are considered inapplicable or because, for some reason, they have edged away. One such area is microtonality, that is, making use of pitches and chords different to those offered by our twelve-note, equal-tempered chromatic scale. Perception of chords is related to the timbre, which is another not overly explored area. Moreover, I am interested in rhythm and time in music, gradual changes of tempo, as well as the areas of stillness-movement transition, extreme tempos, and the like. I have also researched into the possibilities of serialism and dodecaphony, which in connection with minimalism and microtonality are nowhere near exhausted.

As regards sound and synthesis, I like timbres that you can't tell whether they are natural or artificial. I like applying, for instance, synthetic piano sounds that don't imitate the tones of the traditional piano absolutely faithfully but retain their typical character. I have also devoted to synthesis of the human voice, again with the aim to attain the status whereby it is no longer possible to recognise whether the voice is natural or not. Plenty of possibilities are also provided by combining parameters from several sounds.

The drawback to this approach is that the created compositions are difficult to implement. In most cases, microtonal pieces can't be played on standard instruments, and musicians don't master complicated and unstable tempo-rhythmic structures and common music programs do not support them. What's more, since there are no off-the-shelf instruments to synthesise sound with an extremely uncommon timbre, creators must arrange everything on their own.

*The profile drawn from sources available on the internet reveals the scope and diversity of your activities and skills. Can you tell us which of them is primary, or most characteristic?*

No one of them is primary; I like alternating and combining them. Even though it may not appear so at first glance, all of them are related. I am mainly interested in

their extreme positions and the connections between them in particular. One of the links between them is numbers and numeric relations. The world was already viewed through numbers by Pythagoreans, two-and-a-half-thousand years ago. And numbers have always played a significant role in our civilisation. The current all-embracing digitisation indicates that many a thing can be expressed by means of numbers. Digitisation directly relates to electronics, which in comparison with the previous mechanics allows for working on a more precise level. Digital and other data are related to informatics, which deals with their processing. And art associates with all this to a much greater extent than is evident at first glance. The medieval architect Jean Mignot, for instance, wrote: "Ars sine scientia nihil est" (Art without knowledge is nothing). This holds especially true with music, whose fundamental components are various symmetries, relations, regularities, repetitions, structures. Rhythm, forms, melodies, harmonic relations, tuning, microtonality, properties of sound, construction of traditional and electronic musical instruments, all this is directly connected with numbers. Perhaps it is the reason why music is the closest of all the arts to me.

*In the past, art glorified God and accompanied ecclesiastic ceremonies. These reasons have gradually withered away and today it is merely humans and their individualities that occupy the top position in modern art. What do we actually need art and/or music for nowadays?*

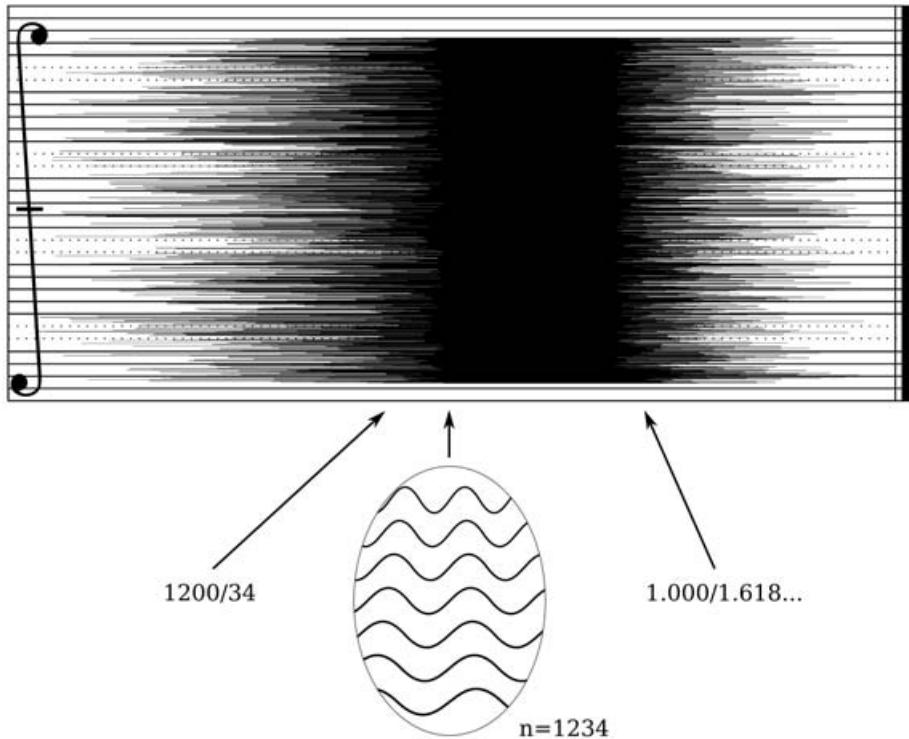
What we need music for today may be too broad a question. It is not even clear what art actually is and what music is. By no means do I agree to the statement attributed to Pierre Boulez, that music is sound. I rather incline to the opinion voiced by Charles Ives, that music is that which remains after sound has died away. I consider music to be the most abstract of all the art forms. And since it is only itself, the creator/composer possesses absolute freedom to conceive his/her own musical universe. It is similar to mathematics - it's also independent of that which surrounds it and it is possible to create new worlds in it at large. And the yardstick of their quality in both music and mathematics is aesthetics. Hence, it comes as no surprise that mathematics and music have always been related. At least this is the case of our civilisation.

Music and sound still belong to church and other ceremonies, they can strongly affect the psyche and emotions, and unlike visual perception we cannot easily avoid the impact of sound - we can close our eyes, yet we cannot close our ears. This all comes in handy at ceremonies. This is perhaps the case in all cultures, and it is interesting that many a time this type of music is not deemed art and music according to our standards. It is simply part of the ritual.

Sacred music or music glorifying God has always been composed. Many a time, composers conceive it in a goal-directed manner, it also frequently originates somehow incidentally, as a result of the principles implicit in the origination of music, which respect and reflect the world's order. Steve Reich wrote that musical processes can make it possible for a person to directly contact the superpersonal. And the spiritual aspects of music based on mathematical principles have also been observed by others. It can be said that the less the composer's personality is imprinted in the music and the more it is based on impersonal, more general principles, the more spiritual it is. Where Ludwig Wittgenstein says: "What we cannot talk about, we must pass over in silence," Aldous Huxley offers the solution: "After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music."

## Flex Nr. 10 1+2+3+4=10

Milan Guštar (2010)



*Composing music for self-made electronic instruments, or audio software, according to mathematical principles, on the one hand, and composing for, or playing, classical musical instruments in the band Flao YG, on the other. How do you combine in yourself these two different musical worlds?*

These two musical worlds are not overly different and distant from each other. My instruments in Flao YG in the 1980s were electronic too, and I designed and built most of them myself, similarly to today. The difference is that at the time it was analogue electronics and today it is programs.

The stuff we played in the “rock” band Flao YG wasn’t traditional rock. Perhaps it could be labelled as alternative music; towards the end especially, our style was markedly influenced by Minimalism. And some mathematical principles were applied in the majority of my compositions for Flao YG. The band’s name too was created by means of a mathematical principle – at the beginning of the 1980s, I programmed a simple algorithm for generating words in the processor code of the Zuse Z23 computer, which then generated a page of text that contained the band’s name.

At some point in the mid-80s, I began experimenting with algorithmic processes when generating music and graphics, using an eight-bit ZX Spectrum computer. Yet owing to its low performance and the absence of a D/A converter it didn’t actually achieve much. Then, for a short time, I used an Amiga, which already had a sound generator and was able to do simple sampling. An Atari computer followed, which

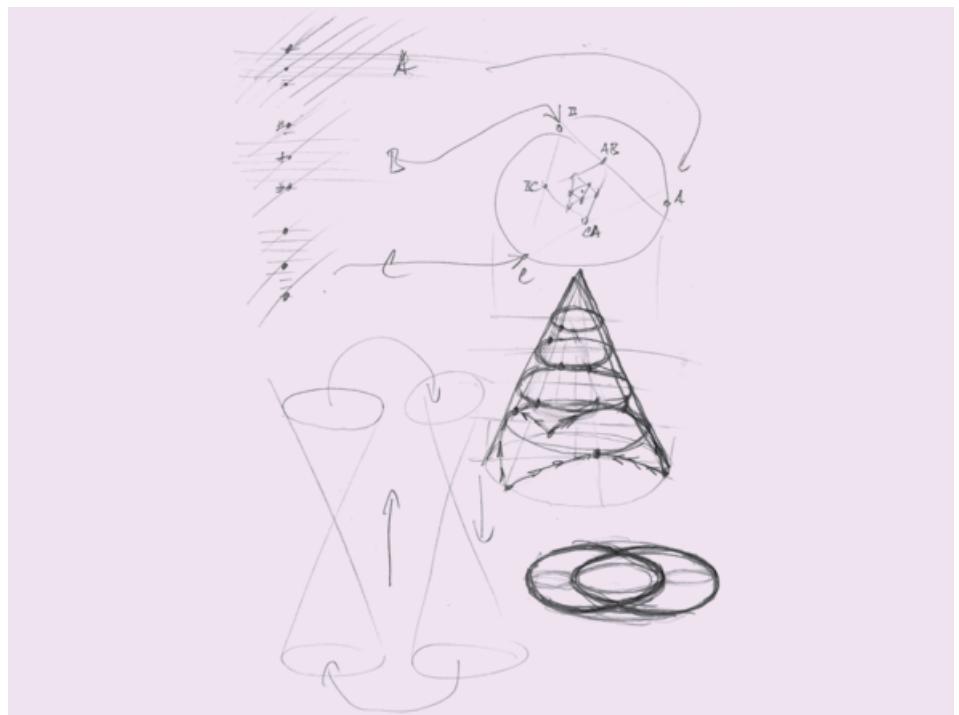
possessed excellent MIDI sequencers on which I recorded and transcribed pieces written in notation. This is how most of the music for the Bulšitfilm movies came into being. By the end of the 1980s, I already had a PC available and in the middle of the 1990s finally a sound card of a reasonable quality. Since then, I have been using a computer more and more when composing and recording music. I have processed the majority of the recordings by means of a computer; many of them originated in a computer through sampling, some of them are entirely generated, from composition to sound synthesis.

Yet I am still using “traditional” electronic and acoustic devices. Many a time, I find that it is simpler to play something on an instrument than to enter it in the sequencer or write a program that would calculate it. And, what’s more, I still enjoy playing something for pleasure occasionally.

*Standing out among your discography is the Flex series, which you have frequently performed live too. Although it dates from approximately the past five years, it was engendered much earlier. Can you specify its genesis?*

The initial idea, dating from circa 1999, was to compose several short pieces, formed by unanchored, constantly changing pitches. I then began systematically exploring individual notes, simple chords and chords made up of many thousands of notes of variable pitch, constantly changing rhythmic structures or harmonies, which coherently alter. Through these experiments I got from the originally intended short compositions to much longer formations, which may last up to several hours.

*Flex Nr.33 (draft)*



Ultimately, a series of studies originated, mostly based on a single principle or a single structure, all of them having in common simplicity of sounds used, and sonic and formal purity. In addition, in most cases they can be represented well graphically and hence the works also contain graphic scores or, perhaps, algorithmically generated graphics.

Back in 1999 it would simply have been too time-consuming to generate the proposed compositions. Then, from time to time, I returned to Flex and added other parts. After 2005, I began “materialising” some of the pieces. To generate sound, I chose the Csound program, which directly links up to Max Mathews’s more than half a century old MUSIC programs. It is thus wonderfully archaic, yet allows for programming anything.

Flex should be made up of a total of 99 compositions. One third of them are complete, one third semi-finished and one third haven’t been created yet. Perhaps, for the sake of symmetry, it would be good to leave it this way.

*Let’s stay for a while with this series. Flex Nr. 10 (1+2+3+4=10) has been played live a few times. What form does a live performance of one thousand sine waves actually take?*

The sheet music of traditional compositions intended for live performance never contains everything. The interpreter always has to supplement that which is not there in the notation. And the situation is similar when it comes to algorithmic compositions. Unless all the piece’s parameters are determined absolutely precisely and the score affords the possibility of choice, such a choice can then sometimes be made in real time during the performance. The visual component, the possibility to observe the musicians playing, is always significant at concerts. If the musical instrument is a computer program that is controlled by a mouse or in a similarly subtle manner, there isn’t much left to see, for the most part a person bent over a laptop. During my performances, I like to let the audience have a somewhat deeper insight. I mostly project the computer console so that they can observe everything that’s going on. Sometimes, the booting up of the entire system is part of the projection. This could be compared to the musicians tuning their instruments and the final preparations prior to the beginning of a concert.

And this is also the case of Flex Nr. 10, a piece in which approximately one thousand tones are played. At the beginning, there is the start-up of the sound server and the console, which contains about a thousand keys for controlling individual generators. Then I only have to attend to when this or that note is played, as with any other type of instrument.

*Last August, you performed Flex Nr. 96 within the “Liběchov Chapel” project. It was different there.*

Playing some compositions live doesn’t make sense. They have been created by means of a given algorithm, without any contribution from the performer. They could be presented in the manner that they are calculated in the concert hall in real time or played from a recording, as was done years ago in the case of music for tapes. Many a time, the form of sound or multimedia installation is better. I like it when the audience can come and go as they please and move freely around the space of the concert hall or gallery. Since the majority of my compositions of this type have a score according to which a “virtual orchestra” plays, this score is often displayed during their presentation too. Usually in some animated form, which also makes it possible to observe the piece’s flow in time.

As regards the event in Liběchov, I prepared this very type of audio-visual installation. For three quarters of an hour, the chapel resounded to eleven simple tones with slowly changing pitches, while the character of the resulting chord passed between the sound of the organ and the bells. Thanks to the reverb, the sound was also different in different parts of the chapel's interior. The bare oval windows functioned as speakers and the entire building thus became a large sound system for the audience standing outside. The score, made up of eleven lines that intersected in the chancel, was projected in the space of the chapel. The ongoing transformations were also underlined by nature itself, since during the performance day changed into night.

*Are your compositions only intended for listening or do you create them with the intention of bringing about changes in human consciousness and perception?*

Every listening experience changes human consciousness and perception. Yet there is a sound installation of mine, *Prázdnota* (Void) from 1995, whose aim it was to change consciousness directly. An empty room was filled with an inaudible ultrasonic wave modulated by infrasonic vibration whose frequency corresponded to brain waves in the state of relaxation or meditation. The objective was to tune the listeners into these waves.

*What is your priority when creating music pieces based on mathematical principles and algorithmic processes? Do you first have a notion of the resulting sound and only then seek a mathematical model to express it, or do you first select a mathematical model and the sound is rather a secondary product of it?*

When it comes to algorithmic compositions, by and large there is initially a notion of a structure or process. This process can be entirely abstract or can from the beginning relate to the development of a certain musical element or parameter. But I also have compositions that came into being through the "traditional procedure", from the notion of a melody, harmonic process or rhythmic pattern, or on the basis of improvisation and instinctual playing, inspired by, for instance, a timbre. Then I mostly discover in them the buds of some structures or processes, which I subsequently develop.

I perceive two poles in composition. On the one hand, there are the components that are important, the components that form the composition's substance. I like them to respect the given rules and be the closest to the ideal state. Then there are the unsubstantial components, which can be of virtually any type and their shape can mostly be entrusted to chance. Many of my compositions aren't clear-cut in this manner, yet some of them are. Their substantive components then originate according to a strict regulation, an algorithm, and everything else is provided by a generator of random numbers. Yet since I know that only God can make chance operations, I mostly let several versions of the composition be calculated and from them I choose the one to be presented. So, I am not able to avoid participating as a composer even in the case of totally algorithmic pieces.

*What are your plans and dreams for the future - especially as regards composing? Do you have any specific objective you would like to achieve, or is the journey itself the goal?*

If you bear in mind the Journey, then it is a journey. I don't have any specific objective in the sense of a definite goal. Yet I do have some plans for the near future. I would



like to have some of the prepared compositions performed. The majority of my pieces take a long time to come to fruition: years, decades even. The basis is mostly incepted very quickly, but then it takes me a long time to complete the composition. I repeatedly return to it; it is a sort of alchemy, a long-term treatment of the matter, that which is within and without. If the basis is all right, it gradually crystallises, new connections emerge, individual items interlock. And a technical solution appears too: how to write or calculate the individual parts. At that moment, I consider a composition finished. Then I need an impulse, so as to try to flesh it out - program, generate, play, record.

### **Milan Guštar**

studied electronics, informatics and applied mathematics. He has devoted to research straddling the boundaries of science, technology and art, above all in relation to mathematical principles in music, the theory of tonal systems, organology and electroacoustics. Since the 1980s he has pursued his own musical and intermedia creation, influenced by Minimalism, in which he has frequently applied algorithmic techniques, mathematical principles and microtonality. He has created electroacoustic music, as well as compositions for traditional instruments. In the 1980s and 1990s, he headed the band Flao YG and made music for film and theatre. He has recorded several CDs featuring his pieces, which he has occasionally performed live too. Milan Guštar is the author of the extensive, two-volume encyclopaedic book *Elektrofony* (Electrophones), in which he sums up the development and principles of the functioning of electromechanical and electronic musical instruments. At the present time, he works at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague as a pedagogue and researcher into music acoustics, and at the Film Faculty teaches at the centre of audiovisual studies. He also leads occasional seminars at the Academy of Fine Arts and other schools.

A selection of Milan Guštar's works can be found on the website UVNITŘ ([www.uvnitr.cz/summasummarum/index.html](http://www.uvnitr.cz/summasummarum/index.html)).

# RECORDINGS OF ANTONÍN DVORÁK'S MUSIC MADE ON PERIOD INSTRUMENTS

For a considerable part of the second half of the 20th century, it may have seemed, at least in the Czech lands, that the interpretation of Antonín Dvořák's music, as codified by Václav Talich, his successors and Czech chamber ensembles, starting with the Czech Quartet, would remain an unrivalled model with the ambition to become the "official benchmark". The foreign Dvořák performance tradition, many a time based upon the creations of the leading artists of the pre-Talich generation (Dvořák's "court" conductors Hans Richter, Hans von Bülow, Artur Nikisch), was often considered in the Czech lands a mere interesting alternative not entitled to gain complete artistic sovereignty. Over the past two decades, however, the natural development of Dvořák interpretation has been significantly affected by two impulses: access to a number of digitised archive recordings dating from the interwar period, and the movement for informed interpretation of older music, which in the past fifteen years has also focused on Dvořák's oeuvre. This article concentrates on the recordings of Dvořák's music made by artists specialised in so-called authentic performance practice.

## "Circling round Dvořák"

The versatile musician and instrument-maker with Czech roots **Arnold Dolmetsch** (1858–1940), who at the beginning of the 20th century in England initiated the origination of one of the first festivals of early music; the German gambist **Christian Döbereiner** (1874–1961), who in the 1920s created in Germany his own interpretational school; the Dutch collector and patron of the arts **Hans Eberhard Hoesch** (1891–1972), who together with the flautist **Gustav Scheck** (1901–1984) in the 1930s put together a group of chamber musicians; the Basel-based cellist **August Wenzinger** (1905–1996); the founder of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, **Paul Sacher** (1906–1999); and the Austrian pedagogue **Josef Mertin** (1904–1998), who in 1934 founded in Vienna a concert series dedicated to Baroque music, evidently didn't have the slightest inkling



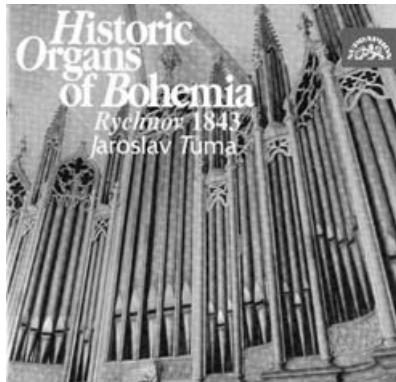
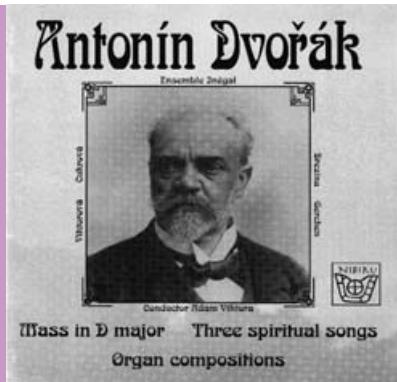
that the movement for performing early music on period instruments would, besides Renaissance and Baroque music, one day seriously devote to the music of the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, also interpreted using period instruments and applying period interpretational practice. Yet it was only a matter of time, and a natural chronological evolution, before performers and audiences turned their interest to informed interpretation of music of the second half of the 19th century on period instruments, soon to be followed by increased interest on the part of the record labels too.

The recording industry began focusing on interpretation of Romantic music of the second half of the 19th century on period instruments or their copies in the early 1990s, with the primacy, or at least one of the chronologically first positions, belonging to **Sir Roger Norrington** (b. 1934) and his orchestra **London Classical Players** (1978–1997), who back at the end of the 1980s recorded some of the preludes to Wagner's operas (1988, 1994), soon to be followed by recordings of Brahms's symphonies, A German Requiem and selected orchestral and vocal-instrumental scores (1990–1995). In addition to Bruckner's Symphony No. 3 in D minor (1995), the LCP's final albums included a live recording of Smetana's My Country (1996), the first recording of Czech Romantic music of the second half of the 19th century on period instruments. Norrington's orchestra was followed seven years later by the **Orchester Wiener Akademie** (1985), founded by **Martin Haselböck** (b. 1954), who recently began recording music from the period after 1850 interpreted with the original style and sound (Bruckner's Symphony No. 1, 2005; the project of Liszt's symphonic poems, five parts to date, 2010–2011). In 1989, **Sir John Eliot Gardiner** (b. 1943) founded the **Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique**, specialised in historically informed performance of 19th-century music, applying the principles and employing the original instruments, who to date have recorded Brahms's A German Requiem (1992, 2008), Verdi's Falstaff (2001), Bizet's

Carmen (2009) and the complete Brahms symphonies, supplemented by vocal and vocal-instrumental pieces (2007–2008).

The most interesting results in terms of interpretation have to date been attained by the **Orchestre des Champs Elysées**, headed by its music director **Philippe Herreweghe** (b. 1947), who in addition to the tried-and-tested Brahms (A German Requiem, 1995; a project of vocal-instrumental works launched in 2011) and Bruckner (Symphonies Nos. 5 and 7, 2008 and 2003; Mass in F minor, 2007) have recorded compositions by Fauré, Franck (2002), Noskowski (2011) and Mahler (Des Knaben Wunderhorn, 2005; Symphony No. 4, 2009). Yet when it comes to the dramaturgical and chronological scope of the repertoire, the ensemble that has delved deepest is Belgium's **Anima Eterna** (1987), under the conductor **Jos Van Immerseel** (b. 1945), whose recordings of music by Johann Strauss Jr. (2002), Tchaikovsky (2003), Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin (2004), Ravel (2005) and Poulenc (2007) have reached into the 20th century, with the orchestra's repertoire also including pieces by Barber, Britten, Debussy, Dukas, Elgar, Grieg, Martinů and Wolf.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, this brief overview clearly reveals that the mentioned ensembles have for some time now been "circling round" Dvořák's music, a fact that, by the way, was confessed years ago in an interview with the Harmonie journal by Sir John Eliot Gardiner, who referred to Philippe Herreweghe, to date the only one of the mentioned conductors to have explored Dvořák's Cello Concerto in B flat minor, Op. 104 (the solo part was undertaken by **Steven Isserlis**, who had previously performed it with **Sir Simon Rattle** (b. 1955) and the **Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment**). Gardiner himself has so far devoted to Dvořák's scores only with symphony orchestras using standard instruments (Symphonies Nos. 7 and 8, Czech Suite, Symphonic Variations, Carnival, The Noon Witch). The perhaps surprisingly overcautious procrastinating of the "authenticists" around Dvořák, while taking an intensive interest in Brahms's oeuvre,



can be easily explained by Brahms's significantly more profound collecting, editing and compositional interest in the creation of composers of the previous three centuries. Yet, also with regard to the unceasing interest in Brahms's scores as performed by orchestras playing period instruments or their copies, it was just a matter of time before interpreters of "old" music and record labels approached the music created by Brahms's contemporary Dvořák.

### **"Good music must sound good on the piano too"**

The "interpretational revolution" in the history of performing Dvořák began with two, originally rather obscure albums made by the Czech pianist **Radoslav Kvapil** (b. 1934), who in October 1998, in relation to the reconstruction of Dvořák's 1879 Bösendorfer piano, at the Hluboš chateau recorded for AMAT France (Association Musique et les Arts Tchèques, Paris) ten piano pieces dating from the composer's mature and American periods (they were most recently released by the British label Alto). In connection with the use of Dvořák's very own piano, whose purchase at the end of the 1870s was, besides an increasing number of commissions for undemanding or less-demanding works for piano amateurs, the main impulse for writing no fewer than about three dozen minor piano pieces and small pieces grouped in 1879 and 1880 into several collections and cycles, the adjective "authentic" in relation to the interpretation of Dvořák's piano compositions using period instruments has thus been afforded a double meaning: the recordings of the Silhouettes, Op. 8, B. 98; Waltzes, Op. 54, B. 101; Eclogues, B. 103; Piano Pieces, Op. 52, B. 110; Mazurkas, Op. 56, B. 111; Dumka and Furiant, Op. 12, B. 136-137; Suite in A major, Op. 98, B. 184; and Humoresques, Op. 101, B. 187, were made not only employing a period instrument but directly on the instrument whose technical and acoustic properties must have had an impact on the formation of Dvořák's

conception of the intimate nature and the technically by no means trivial content of his piano music primarily intended for home music-making, not for regular performance at public concerts.

For decades, Kvapil has evidently been the most sought-after performer of Czech and, in particular, Dvořák piano music. In addition to two complete recordings of Janáček's piano compositions and a recording of the complete Voříšek pieces, and besides partial recordings of Dvořák's piano oeuvre for the Accord (1998) and Unicorn/Regis (1992) labels, he made the historically first album of the complete Dvořák piano pieces (Supraphon, 1967, 1969-1970). Listening to Kvapil's recordings of Dvořák's compositions is extremely illuminative, at least when it comes to the dynamics and creation and timbre of the tone. According to Kvapil, unlike other 19th-century composers, Dvořák surprisingly did not use the piano in order to attain a symphonic sound (as did Liszt, Schumann, Brahms, etc.), yet rigorously drew upon its technical properties. In his case, the technical possibilities of the Bösendorfer instrument, whose tuning is 435 Hz (currently common pianos are tuned at 441-443 Hz) and whose tone is extremely colourful and short, yet with a longer reverberation, which may have led the composer to employ keyboards so as to naturally give preference to shorter phrases. The very technical limitations of the Viennese mechanics of Dvořák's piano may have influenced his rejecting the spectacularly virtuosic playing which Dvořák's piano oeuvre principally resists as a result of its giving preference to polyphonic voice leading, preventing the performers from treating the tempo in a looser manner.

The attractiveness of Kvapil's instrumental authenticity has to date been repeated on just a single occasion, in 2001, when at the chateau chapel in Lužany on Karl Eisenhut's two-keyboard organ dating from 1887, which Dvořák himself played, at least at the premiere of the Mass in D major, Op. 86, B. 153, in September of that year, the composer's early organ preludes and fugues, B. 302 (1859), were recorded by **Adam Viktora**, who also



accompanied **Gabriela Viktorová** on the instrument with renditions of three sacred songs, Op. 19b, B. 68, 82, 95A (1877–1879). Viktorová's recording can be deemed a documentarily attractive rarity, since Dvořák created music for solo organ only temporarily, during his earliest period of studies at the organ school in Prague, and the Lužany organ was a rather small instrument, at least in comparison with the monumental organ at the Holy Trinity Church in Rychnov nad Kněžnou (1843, Jiří Španiel), on which eight Dvořák student organ pieces were recorded back in 1999 by **Jaroslav Tůma**.

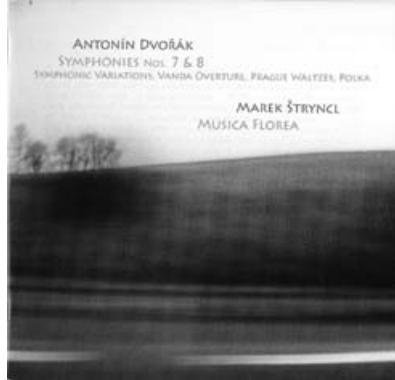
While the documentary value of Kvapil's recordings made on Dvořák's Bösendorfer piano is indisputable, when it comes to the actual artistic qualities, they are, in my opinion, definitely surpassed by the recording made five years previously by the Belgian pianist **Jan Michiels**, who, also playing a Bösendorfer piano from Chris Maene's collection, recorded for the Eufoda label the Dumka and Furiant, Op. 12, B. 136–137; the Suite in A major, Op. 98, B. 184; the Humoresques, Op. 101, B. 187, and a representative selection of eight of the thirteen pieces from Dvořák's most extensive piano cycle of a programme nature, the Poetic Moods, Op. 85, B. 161. When compared with Kvapil's robust playing, Michiels's recordings come across as much more intimate, delicate, more dynamically and expressively sophisticated, making listening to Dvořák's piano music not only an intimate experience but also rehabilitating it, similarly to the older recording made by **William Howard** (Chandos, 1990), as an independent component of Dvořák's oeuvre, one encompassing many gracious compositions imbued with a number of specific technical requirements placed on the interpreter. The sonic aspect of Michiels's recording presents Dvořák as a composer with a specific style of piano utterance, with the interpretation of the two piano cycles created during his American period clearly revealing Dvořák's ability to express himself by means of a compositionally progressive language in minor piano pieces, permeated by the American idioms of his New World period, to an even greater extent than in

the case of the orchestral works dating from the same time.

### New sonic horizons of Dvořák's chamber music

Similar, if not even more forcible, results have been achieved by those performing Dvořák music on period instruments or their copies in the chamber segment. In 2001 and 2002, conceptually interesting and artistically cogent recordings of Dvořák's String Quintets in G major, Op. 77, B. 49, and E flat major, Op. 97, B. 180, supplemented by a quintet version of the Nocturne in B major, Op. 40, B. 47 (2001), and the String Quartets in E flat major, Op. 51, B. 92, and F major, Op. 96, B. 179 (2002), originated, whereby the Dvořák discography was entered by the ensemble **L'Archibudelli**, playing in the line-up of **Vera Bets** (violin, Antonio Stradivari, Cremona 1727), **Marc Destrubé** (violin, Jean Batiste Vuillaume, Paris 1874), **Jürgen Kussmaul** (viola, William Foster, London 1785), **Guus Jeukendrup** (viola, Max Möller, Amsterdam 1947), **Anner Bylsma** (cello, J. B. Pressenda, Turin 1835) and **Marji Danilow** (double-bass, Paolo Maggini, Brescia 1620), and the **Antiquarius Quartet Praga**, made up of **Václav Návrat** (violin, Anton Wild, Brno 1792), **Simona Tydlitátová** (violin, Johann Christian Partl, Vienna 1791), **Ivo Anýž** (viola, Michael Wüller, Prague 1785) and **Petr Hejní** (cello, Pellegrino Zanetto, Brescia 1581).

Whereas a number of other recordings of Romantic music performed on period instruments are marred by an absolute reliance on mere playing historical instruments and its current commercial attractiveness, the two aforementioned ensembles, albeit in respect of the experience gained from performing old music divided by a gap of one generation, clearly possess sufficient artistic qualities and familiarity with interpretation of 18th- and 19th-century music. Both ensembles made studio recordings using not only period string instruments, including bows, but also with an evident endeavour by means of a more pregnant



rhythmicising, bolder accents, briefer phrasing and suitable ornamentations to comply with the notions of the way chamber music was performed prior to 1900. Both recordings met with a tremendous response on the part of music professionals (including Czech), yet the listener immediately recognises the difference in the form of the nasal sound produced by the Antiquarius Quartet Praga.

In connection with the, unfortunately, still one-off albums made by L Archibudelli and Antiquarius Quartet Praga – it would be greatly welcomed if other mature Dvořák chamber works were to be recorded on period instruments – it is appropriate to mention two more discs on which contemporary and period instruments are combined. In 2007 and 2009, **Tetra Lyre** (Jan Michiels, piano; Nana Kawamura, violin; Tony Nys, viola; Geert de Bièvre, cello) and the **Prometheus Ensemble** (Jan Michiels, piano; Nana Kawamura, Igor Semenoff, violin; Tony Nys, viola; Geert de Bièvre, cello), made up of superlative Belgian instrumentalists headed by Jan Michiels, produced studio recordings of Dvořák's Piano Quartets in D major, Op. 23, B. 53, and E flat major, Op. 87, B. 162 (2007), and Piano Quintets, Op. 5, B. 28, and Op. 81, B. 155 (2009), using a 1875 Steinway piano from Chris Maene's collection. Recordings featuring mixed instruments, a period piano and contemporary strings, may be viewed by the purist with a certain distrust, even though using combined instruments in symphonic music is a successful, tried-and-tested formula (Harnoncourt's recordings of music by Beethoven, Schumann, Bruckner and Verdi with the original timpani, natural horns, historical trombones, etc.). Yet both in artistic and technical terms (dynamics, timbre) they are recordings of a high quality notable for the instrumentalists' restrained and controlled delivery.

## Seeking the possibilities of Dvořák's orchestra

No other segment of interpretation of Dvořák's music on period instruments or their copies while respecting the principles of historically informed performance has

to date been accompanied by as many controversies, doubts and resulting perplexities as in the case of the mere three CDs featuring his symphonic and orchestral music made in 2004, 2005 and 2008 by **Musica florea**, headed by **Marek Štryncل**, and **Le Chambre Philharmonique**, conducted by **Emmanuel Krivine**. For a Czech, it is heart-warming that the first live recordings of Dvořák's orchestral and symphonic music played on period instruments originated in the composer's homeland. In 2004, at a concert held at the Czech National Bank's Congress Hall, the Symphonic Variations, Op. 78, B. 70, and Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70, B. 141, were recorded. The forte of the older, Štryncل, recording are the cautious approach to vibrato as an ornament, not a permanent manner of playing, especially as regards the string instruments; the dialogic seating of strings players on the stage, as was the period custom, with the double-basses on the left, allowing for communication between the instrument sections, also important in many Romantic compositions; a more transparent sound of catguts and wind instruments with a narrower mensura; and more sprightly tempos associated with sonic transparency, as documented not only by the oldest audio recordings but also, for instance, the correspondence and written statements of composers of the second half of the 19th century (Richard Wagner). Timpani with natural skins giving a shorter tone and the relatively sparse string section – Štryncل's recording employs 11 first and 9 second violins, 7 violas, 5 cellos and 4 double-basses – are just additional means serving to attain a clearer tone, a more precise articulation and phrasing by applying rubato, portato or staccato. It's a pity that Marek Štryncل missed the opportunity to record the second movement of the Seventh Symphony in the original, longer version, as was chosen by the late Sir Charles Mackerras for his concert in Berlin, which was, however, conducted by Tomáš Netopil instead – the note "modern concert premiere" in the CD booklet would then acquire a more relevant meaning.

Although the double album by Musica florea headed by its artistic director Marek Štryncل, released in October 2009 and supplemented by Symphony No. 8, Op. 88, B. 163, the prelude to the opera *Vanda*, Op. 25, B. 97, the Prague Waltzes, B. 99, and the Polka for Prague Students, Op. 53/A/1, B. 114, recorded at the Rudolfinum in Prague in November 2005, met with a positive response on the part of some of the Czech and foreign critics (James Ross, Mark Todd), I personally am far less enthusiastic about Štryncل's albums, especially when it comes to their artistic conception. In the case of both CDs, I consider there to be scope for improving the phrasing and articulation, and, unlike other Czech critics, I do not deem it sufficient merely to rely on the use of period instruments. After all, I am not sure whether the average listener, not being familiar with the circumstances of the CD's origination, actually recognises them, a case in point being the run-of-the-mill account of the Symphonic Variations. The interpretational precocity and conceptual immaturity of Štryncل's recordings has to date been revealed the most by the Prague Waltzes, in which the conductor attempted to imitate Viennese musical idioms of dance and concertante-dance music (arrhythmic accentuation of the second and delaying the third beats in Viennese waltzes), yet with an unconvincing result in the form of fragmentation of the Prague Waltzes. Rather embarrassing too is the somewhat puerile polemic against Harnoncourt's interpretations of Viennese dance music, which resulted in Štryncل's erroneous deliberations in the booklet text and the Prague Waltzes' conception being wrecked by illogical general pauses.

In 2008, Štryncل and a bolstered Musica florea's recordings were followed by a disc featuring Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, B. 178, as explored by **Le Chambre Philharmonique**, a French ensemble specialised in historically informed performance established by the conductor **Emmanuel Krivine**. Their recording of the New World Symphony gave rise to numerous controversies, with one of the most noteworthy being the withering review penned by David Hurwitz in December 2008 (*Classics Today*), in which he even called into question the very idea of performing the late-Romantic repertoire on period instruments. The CD's shortcomings include its conceptual limitations and the number of orchestra members: Krivine employed for the New World Symphony fewer players than was customary at the time of its origination and fewer than at its premiere in New York, which resulted in frequent overstraining and an unequal ratio between the instrument sections. The ratio between the string instruments expressed by the values  $9+8+7+6+5$  is more reminiscent of a mathematic riddle than the necessary proportioning of the period, not modern string instruments with different dynamic possibilities. The group of wind instruments is mostly made up of two players per instrument, which in

a number of cases proved to be problematic too. For me personally, Krivine's recording of the New World Symphony is more an experiment than a viable musical undertaking, and one falling well short of many older recordings, starting with that of Szell (1937) and ending with those of Harnoncourt (1999) and Norrington (2008), to mention at least two major figures from the world of "old music" performing the New World Symphony on contemporary instruments.

## Vocal and vocal-orchestral music

When it comes to Dvořák's numerous oratorios and cantatas, in which the composer reflected the music of the previous centuries to a greater extent than in any other part of his oeuvre and which should thus attract the attention of artists harbouring ambitions in the area of "old music", only the Mass in D major, Op. 86, B. 153m, and the Requiem, Op. 89, B. 165, have been recorded to date. The pieces' explorations by **Ensemble Inégal**, headed by **Adam Viktora**, and **Kantorei der Schlosskirche Weilburg & Capella Weilburgensis**, conducted by **Doris Hagel**, highlight all the contradictory limitations as well as fortés of interpretation of Dvořák's music by ensembles specialised in historically informed performance of early music.

In 2001, Adam Viktora and his Ensemble Inégal, together with **Gabriela Viktorová** (soprano), **Markéta Cukrová** (mezzo-soprano), **Jaroslav Březina** (tenor), **Mathias Gerchen** (bass) and **Christoph Bossert** (organ), recorded the original version of Dvořák's Mass in D major at the Lužany Chapel, where the piece was premiered in 1887, using a two-keyboard mechanical tructure organ with a conical resonator and seven registers from the Prague workshop of Karel Eisenhut (1887). Despite the fact that the recording was made in an authentic milieu on an authentic instrument and involving a chamber, 13-voice formation, similar to that at the Lužany premiere, upon careful listening it sounds anachronistic and is rather reminiscent of a performance of Renaissance or early-Baroque vocal music (even though Dvořák was well familiar with Baroque articulation and declamation, as evidenced by the oratorio *Stabat Mater*, Op. 58, B. 71, the archaising *Saint Ludmila* Op. 71, B. 144, openly linking up to the Handel and Mendelssohn tradition, or the *Requiem*, Op. 89, B. 153, influenced by Baroque rhetoric and symbolism of keys).

It is the 2005 recording of the Requiem made by Germany's Capella Weilburgensis, the Kantorei der Schlosskirche Weilburg choir with the soloists **Mechthild Bach**, **Stefanie Irányi**, **Mark Schäfer** and **Klaus Mertens**, as explored by Doris Hagel, that, in my opinion, is for the time being the unquestionable artistic apex in performing Dvořák's music on period instruments, in terms of both the conception and interpretation. The recording was made in November

of that year at the Schlosskirche in Weilburg, Hessen, during the remembrance marking the centenary of the death of Adolf, Grand Duke of Luxembourg and Duke of Nassau, and its main figure was Doris Hagel, conductor, singer, organist, musicologist and organiser of concert series in Weilburg, who studied church music at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Frankfurt and alongside working as *Kantorin* at the Christuskirche in Mainz also studied historical performance practice at the Mozarteum in Salzburg under Nikolaus Harnoncourt and musicology, philosophy and history of art at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz. The choral part of Dvořák's Requiem was undertaken by the Kantorei der Schlosskirche Weilburg, who in addition to collaborating with German early-music ensembles have regularly appeared at significant ecclesiastical holidays at the Schlosskirche in Weilburg, while the orchestral part was performed by Capella Weilburgensis, an ensemble playing period instruments and their copies, whose members hail from Germany and neighbouring countries and who since 1992 have regularly got together to explore grand oratorios, as well as chamber music. Capella Weilburgensis, conducted by Doris Hagel, evidently chose to perform Dvořák's Requiem in as small a configuration as possible: seven first and six second violins, three violas, four cellos, two double-basses, an organ, two flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, one English horn, bass clarinet and double bassoon, four French horns and trumpets, three trombones and one tuba, one harp, and two percussion players (timpani and tam-tam, bells). Dvořák most likely did not imagine that his Requiem could be performed by a mere 49 players, and it was not premiered by such an orchestra, yet I assume that Doris Hagel drew upon the acoustic possibilities of the chapel in Weilburg, not upon the oft-repeated yet erroneous premise that old music should on principle be performed by a small formation. In this respect, it is worth citing the examples of Mozart, who praised the sound of the sixteen first violins when his Salzburg symphonies were performed (today, however, they are played by as small an orchestra as possible), and Dvořák, who similarly relished the opulent orchestral configurations when his oratorios were played in England. Although I expect connoisseurs and admirers of Dvořák's Requiem to miss in Doris Hagel's recording the mighty sound of the late-Romantic orchestra and even feel dissatisfied with the selection of some of the soloists, the tenor in particular, in possession of frail voices perhaps better suited for singing Baroque and Classicist music, on the other hand the sonically excellent recording featuring a chamber orchestral configuration and period instruments allows one to observe the piece's vertical structure, providing a trouble-free view of the middle voices, in which the musical action itself often takes place. As regards the articulation, phrasing, as well as the communication



between the music and the space, this recording is exemplary.

### Experiment or alternative?

If it is at all possible, given that there are approximately thirty recordings of Dvořák's compositions (on half the number of discs), to recapitulate the recording activities in the area of performing Dvořák's music on period instruments or their copies, the pertinent summarisation is fairly incomplete and accompanied by a large number of question marks. Perhaps the overview above makes it evident that performing and recording of Dvořák's music on authentic instruments is the fruit of the work of both Czech and foreign artists, although there are a higher number of recordings made by Czechs. At the same time, I cannot shake off the impression that when it comes to performing Romantic music using period instruments, Czech artists, with a few notable exceptions, lack the generational experience possessed by their Western European colleagues, at least in the area of symphonic and orchestral music. In comparison with the forcibility of the currently existing recordings of Dvořák's piano and chamber pieces, it is the recordings of his symphonic and orchestral music that come across as experiments, not convincing alternatives to standard recordings made with modern instruments. It is as though the evident limitations of the recordings released to date have given rise to the essential question of whether performing Romantic and late-Romantic music using period instruments actually makes sense, given the fact that the current symphony orchestras differ only slightly from the orchestras from the period circa 1900. Without a correlation to the recording space and the period performance practice, the problems relating to the numerical configuration of orchestras and their instruments appear to be marginal, with the problem also being other than literary sources, which should serve as a guidance to informed interpretation of Romantic music – despite the inertia

of interpretational approaches of the second half of the 19th century, at least in the first third of the 20th century, when researching into tempo-rhythmic matters, it is not possible to rely on interwar or older recordings, which are significantly determined by the recording technology of the time and its possibilities.

These objections notwithstanding, performing Dvořák's music on period instruments will undoubtedly establish itself as a relevant alternative to standard concert performance and audio recordings. At the present time, this process is anticipated by at least the existing recordings of the piano and chamber music. And it is the chamber music in which similar recordings, attractive to the listener owing to their being made by erudite artists, which may bring many a key piece of knowledge, especially if they keep abreast of the latest critical editorial work pertaining to Dvořák's scores. As for contemporary performing artists, Dvořák's specific interpretation markings have only been paid attention to by Nikolaus Harnoncourt, who, despite being misunderstood by the music critics, strove to transpose them into his 1999 recording of Symphony No. 7 in D minor. When exploring Dvořák's scores, he did not only draw upon the knowledge of the critical edition and older publications of the score, but also the knowledge of the composer's autograph score. And

it is this unfamiliarity with the issue of the composer's interpretation markings, not reflected in the commonly available critical edition of Dvořák's scores, that has resulted in some Czech music critics disparaging Harnoncourt's recording of Symphony No. 7 as being simply too remote from the conventional performance practice.

Although Harnoncourt's younger successors, Gardiner, Herreweghe and others approach performing Dvořák's music on period instruments with caution, it is they who over the next few years may take us by surprise and bring modern-time revelations, at least when it comes to the composer's oratorios and cantatas, both in conceptual (the linkage of Dvořák's sacred pieces to Baroque music) and technical-interpretational (the parts of woodwind instruments, often situated by Dvořák into lower and deep registers, that are difficult to play on current instruments) terms. Dvořák's music itself has remained a provocative challenge, not only for artists specialised in historically informed performance, as it is also a permanent part of the canon of European music of the second half of the 19th century. From this perspective, performances and recordings using period instruments as explored by erudite artists are only to be encouraged, as evidenced by several of the recordings made to date.



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## CZECH WEEKEND AT THE STYRIARTE FESTIVAL

**Since the mid-1990s, Austria's prominent music festival Styriarte, whose twenty-seventh edition took place from 22 June to 22 July 2012, has not primarily reflected composers' anniversaries but revolved around carefully selected and thoroughly implemented dramaturgic themes. This year, the motif of family, family relationships and family people (Familien Menschen) was chosen.**

*Nikolaus Harnoncourt conducts Dvořák's Stabat mater in Stefaniensaal*



Accordingly, the festival concerts thematically focused on distinguished musical families and their members (the Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Wagner, Dvořák, Strauss, as well as the Harnoncourt, Savall and Kopatchinsky families), families significantly supporting musical culture (the Borgias, Medicis, Habsburgs, Eggenbergs), and also metaphysical transformations of family relationships, be it in the form of the Holy Trinity, Jesus' family, or "relatives" of Jews, Christians and Muslims, descendants of Abraham. As has been a matter of course at the festival over the years of its existence, the pivotal motto was ingeniously fleshed out in chamber and vocal recitals, vocal-orchestral concerts, open-air projects, stage readings and a new format, called *styriarteSOAPs*, combining vocal and chamber music with stage readings, usually in two one-hour blocks taking the form of theatre performances or television programmes (fictitious texts, together with original texts from composers' diaries and correspondence, were created and compiled by the festival's director **Mathis Huber**, and **Karl**

**Böhmer** and **Thomas Heft**). The festival's guru is the erstwhile Graz resident **Nikolaus Harnoncourt**, the resident choir and orchestra are the **Arnold Schönberg Choir** and the **Chamber Orchestra of Europe**, and regular festival guests include leading European singers and instrumentalists. In addition to regional folk music, Styriarte has also been a platform for distinguished early-music ensembles and artists specialising in informed interpretation, headed by **Jordi Savall** and Harnoncourt's companions from the **Concentus Musicus Wien** ensemble.

#### A chamber monument

One of this year's key projects was the exploration of Dvořák's oratorio *Stabat Mater*, Op. 58, B. 71, which together with the **Arnold Schönberg Choir** (choir master: **Erwin Ortner**) and the **Chamber Orchestra of Europe** was undertaken by **Nikolaus Harnoncourt**, who also participated in another two programmes: *Mozart auf Reisen*, within the *styriarteSOAPS* concert series, and *Mozart in Stainz* (the opera project was skipped this year). Harnoncourt first conducted concerts of Dvořák's sacred music back in 2004, the year marking the centenary of the composer's death, when he performed *Té Deum* and, on several occasions, the *Biblical Songs* (Thomas Hampson, Christian Gerhaher). Three years later, he and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir explored *Stabat Mater*, to which he returned this year at the Stefaniensaal at Graz's Casino, a cosier version of Vienna's Musikverein (my review is of the last of the three performances, on 30 June). The limited space necessitated the conductor's choosing a markedly smaller orchestra to play the oratorio, which on Czech stages is usually performed by a full orchestra and choir formation, and is thus many a time unduly opulent. The chamber conception not only manifested itself in the sound but also resulted in a finer gradation of essentially identical tempos (Andante) and a dynamically more restrained performance of the collective ensembles, only attaining expressive sonic apices in the oratorio's first and final parts, immediately broken up by Harnoncourt's signature decrescendos. Sharp brass accents then lucidly framed the inner architecture of the 90-minute performance by carefully

emphasising the motifs from which the work is constructed. Sturdy buttresses of Harnoncourt's at times risky execution (the conclusion of the 10th part with perilous general rests in the a capella finale) were the ideally selected soloists: **Lubica Orgonášová**, **Elisabeth Kulman**, **Saimir Pirgu** and **Ruben Drole**. The vocal quartet was dominated by the "Slavonically" fervid timbre of the soprano and tenor, whose solo and joint numbers possessed the ardour and earnestness of Baroque religiosity, unusually expressive in the tenor's case (the introductory tenor solo and *Fac me vere*, initially simple like a children's song or prayer, eventually assuming monumental proportions against the backdrop of the male choir). Another dazzling presence was the superlative Austrian mezzo-soprano Elisabeth Kulman, in my opinion a bright new star in this category. Despite having a narrower lower register, the young bass Ruben Drole rose to the occasion too, although his role was not made any the easier by the conductor's choice of a very slow tempo in the solo 4th section and placing emphasis on the rhetorical figure during the words *Fac, ut ardeat cor meum* (similarly, the *Fac!* exclamations in the choral *Eja mater*). The only thing marring this extraordinary concert, which in a delayed broadcast was heard by listeners and viewers of the Austrian Radio and ORF television stations (a DVD recording will be produced) was the sweltering heat in the auditorium, demanding enough for the audience, let alone the singers and orchestra members, whose instruments began disobeying them as the evening progressed. Yet it was a truly unforgettable concert, as confirmed by the standing ovations of the audience who, beyond the traditional framework of the Easter holidays, were afforded the opportunity to get to know Dvořák's oratorio as the composer's reflection of Mary's pain at the loss of her only son, a sorrow Dvořák and his wife felt acutely when they themselves lost their first three children.

#### Chez Dvořák

On 1 July, the **Zemlinsky Quartet**, performing in the line-up of **František Souček**, **Petr Střížek**, **Petr Holman** and **Vladimír Fortin**, appeared at the festival for the third time in a row with an exclusively Czech repertoire. Within the framework of the family motto, the ensemble played Dvořák's



The soloists Luba Orgonášová, Elisabeth Kulman, Saimir Pirgu and Ruben Drole (*Stabat mater*)

*String Terzetto in C major, Op. 74, B. 148*, which he originally wrote for his neighbours' and his family's home music-making; string adaptations of the *Cypresses*, B. 152, a cycle of twelve marvellous songs created in 1887; and the *String Quartet in D minor, Op. 34, B. 75*, which Dvořák completed shortly after finishing *Stabat Mater* and dedicated to his later family friend Brahms. The Styriarte festival has become a home from home to the Zemlinsky Quartet: last year they appeared with a programme featuring Smetana, Dvořák and Janáček Quartets at the Minorites Monastery and this year returned to the splendid Planet Hall of the Eggenberg residence on the outskirts of Graz. The matinee, which was recorded by the ORF radio station, flowed smoothly: from the very first bars of the Terzetto in C major, the Zemlinsky Quartet took the audience's breath away, and thus it remained until the last note. The final variation movement of the Terzetto, performed with extraordinarily expressivity, the contrastive and, compared to the executions of other quartets and recordings, livelier tempos of the Cypresses, imbued with beautiful first violin and viola solos (the solo in No. IX *Ó, duše drahá jedinká*, delivered at the border of audibility), and the Quartet in D minor, with a dramatic

course of the first movement without repetition, winsome rubatos in the polka second movement, the captivating violin duet in the nocturne third movement and the spontaneous finale, raised increasingly satisfied and appreciative smiles on the faces of the spectators, to whom the Zemlinsky Quartet bade farewell with the scherzo from Suk's String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 11. The gamble of performing in the stifling heat of the first July morning, during which it became virtually impossible to keep the strings in tune, certainly paid off for the ensemble: I simply cannot recall a more impressive chamber matinee, to say nothing of the fact that after witnessing Střížek's ebullient performance, I have vowed never to use the phrase "to play second fiddle" again.

#### A Czech-tinted soap

When it comes to the *styriarteSOAPS* series, I attended a three-hour concert at an improvised TV studio at the Helmut-Liszt-Halle on 1 July, given over to music by Robert and Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms. Besides a superb piano trio made up of **Eszter Haffner**, **Julian Steckel** and **Alexander Schimpf**, the stellar German actors **Mavie Hörbiger** (Clara) and



Nikolaus Harnoncourt with the soloists Luba Orgonášová, Elisabeth Kulman, Saimir Pirgu and Ruben Drole

**Michael Maertens** (Robert Schumann) and the superlative baritone **Thomas E. Bauer**, the evening was dominated by the outstanding Czech soprano **Martina Janková**, who was appearing at the Styriarte festival for the second time. The first half of the performance, focusing on the fraught relationship between Clara and Robert Schumann, opened with seven songs from the cycles *Myrthen*, Op. 25, and *Liebesfrühling*, Op. 37, in which the two singers took turns; Bauer with a pleasant, higher voice timbre and restrained delivery, and Janková with a wonderfully rounded soprano and constantly heightened sense of drama. It was interesting to hear Clara Schumann's take on Friedrich Rückert's poem *Liebst du um Schönheit* (If you love beauty), by no means eclipsed by Gustav Mahler's far more famous setting (*Rückert Lieder*). Another piece created by Clara performed within the evening was the four-movement *Piano Trio in G minor*, Op. 17, an interesting work, albeit not one kissed by the Gods, at least when juxtaposed with Robert's emotionally charged *Adagio and Allegro for cello and piano*, Op. 70. The second half of the long, yet by no means overlong, evening, during which Maertens and Hörbiger (husband and wife) read on stage extracts (some funny, others chilling) from the Schumann ledger and family diary, as well as Clara's own personal diaries and correspondence with Brahms, opened with the baritone *Songs from Op. 32* and magnificent duets from Brahms's Opp. 75, 84 and *German Folk Songs*. Janková and Bauer's joint performances were a truly thrilling experience, unforgettable not only owing to the perfect integration of their voices but also the sensitive communication and delivery of the

sung text. The evening concluded with Brahms's *Piano Trio in C minor*, Op. 101, which originated against the backdrop of the doomed relationship between the composer and Clara Schumann. When it comes to the instrumentalists, I was above all impressed by the cellist Julian Steckel (b. 1982), a great talent among his German contemporaries (Maximilian Hornung, Danjulo Ishizaka), who also produced a fine tone in unisons with Eszter Haffner. The romantic looking pianist Alexander Schimpf, a sensitive partner to the singers and a superlative chamber player, was dazzling too. A more intimate atmosphere in the spacious Helmut-Liszt-Halle was created by a live video projection of that which was happening on the stage, wittily evoking the atmosphere of a television studio and, at the end of the evening (to the satisfaction of the male component of the audience), updates of the score of the European Championships football final between Spain and Italy. If the festival dramaturgy even included the pregnancy of Mavie Hörbiger, faithfully embodying the eternally gravid Clara Schumann, I raise my hat to those who planned the evening with a Czech tint. The full-stop to the action-packed Czech weekend at the Styriarte festival was the Monday performance of the **Arnold Schönberg Chor** (choir master: **Erwin Ortner**) and the pianist **Pierre-Laurent Aimard** featuring Dvořák's *Moravian Duets* in Leoš Janáček's arrangement (2 July).

## MARKO IVANOVIĆ CONDUCTOR AND COMPOSER

At the beginning of the millennium, Marko Ivanović started to enter the consciousness of Czech audiences as a composer belonging to a generation no longer burdened by the past, who without prejudice absorbed stimuli from all sides, embracing both avant-garde and pop and seeking their own path towards a synthesis of all this. A decade later, Ivanović is working with the National Theatre in Prague, for which he first arranged the jazz opera *A Walk Worthwhile* (directed by Miloš Forman) and at the beginning of this year staged his own opera, *Enchantia*.

PHOTO: MICHAL KLÍMA





PHOTO © IRENA VODÁKOVÁ, NATIONAL THEATRE PRAGUE 3x

Marko Ivanović's "Čarokraj" (*Enchantia*) at the National Theatre in Prague

*It seems that over the past few years your conducting activities have taken up most of your time. Have you any time and energy left over for composing?*

I try to continue composing. Above all, I create incidental music (for theatre, film), occasionally arrange (which is related to most of my conducting activities), and approximately once a year write an "autonomous" piece, largely instigated by a specific performer. At the present time, however, I really don't have enough time left over for composing.

*A significant exception is the opera of yours that was premiered at the National Theatre in Prague this year. Enchantia serves as a good example of the fact that an opera production is the fruit of team work, and in this case the creative team was quite large. The opera is based on Gerald Durrell's book The Talking Parcel, the libretto was written by Ivan Arsenjev, Radek Malý and Petr Forman, who also directed it. How much did you influence each other?*

The team was large, yet quite well co-ordinated. I have been working with the people around the Forman brothers' theatre for a number of years and we understand each other both as humans and professionals fairly well. From the very beginning of the work on the opera, I wanted us to create a piece in which all the components (word, music, sets, stage direction...) communicate together and lean on each other. The actual process of seeking the theme and writing the libretto took place in the form of multi-hour sessions, often attended by dozens

of people. The process was lengthy but I think it was useful. After a year of intensive work, I received a libretto I knew exactly what to do with. Of course, the subsequent composing took place behind closed doors, but every single completed section of the music was immediately recorded and then served as a source of inspiration for the set designers, stage director and choreographer. They only made minor changes to my music, generally pertaining merely to the duration and tempos of some of the interludes.

*In addition to being "in the thick of it", at present you mainly spend your time with the Pardubice Philharmonic Orchestra. What is it like working there in comparison with Prague? Is the audience different?*

Compared with Prague, in Pardubice there is much greater peace to work, which, naturally, is much more pleasant for me and the orchestra alike and affords us a greater scope for working with detail, for instance. And the audience is different too - very large, welcoming, yet cautious when it comes to unknown, especially modern, music. In this respect, I strive to be something like an "apostle of modernism", but I have only been successful to a limited extent. Nevertheless, I am pleased that the dramaturgy of the Pardubice Chamber Philharmonic has markedly expanded over the past few years in stylistic terms and that we have succeeded in reaching out not only to "mainstream" classical music fans but also a "fogeyish" audience, "modernists", as well as the eternally seeking intellectuals.

*In comparison with other orchestras in cities of similar size, the Pardubice Chamber Philharmonic has in the past worked with a number of truly distinctive conductors: from its founder Libor Pešek to Petr Altrichter. Is such a legacy anyhow perceptible when working with the orchestra?*

It is evident both with the orchestra and their approach to work, as well as the Pardubice public, who are really proud of their orchestra. The Pardubice Chamber Philharmonic is still one of the best orchestras in the Czech Republic. I'm not saying this because I happen to be chief conductor but as one of the many contemporary conductors who feel generally gratified from working with this ensemble. A major role is undoubtedly also played by the fact that it is a chamber orchestra in which no player can "hide" and high quality is expected from each and every individual.

*You have devoted to popularising classical music by means of concerts for children. Can you tell us what exactly works well with such an audience and what is a "dead-end"?*

Children don't tend to have prejudices when it comes to style or consonance. They above all want to

understand music, they like being enraptured, and this is best attained by expressive compositions with a story. From there, the journey continues towards more abstract musical themes and more complex forms. Music by, for instance, Janáček, Dvořák, Shostakovich, Kabeláč, hits the spot splendidly... As regards the actual concerts, they must be as interactive as possible and, in the ideal case, should be visited by a selected audience who have at least a minimal interest in music. In a crowd of several hundred children, a handful of "ignoramuses" are enough to ruin your well-planned concept. I personally most like working with students. They are in fact adults who starve for cultural self-realisation, and my task is to convince them that classical music is able to mediate to them an experience comparable with that of any other type of art.

*In 2001, you concluded your studies at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts with the chamber opera *The Maiden and Death*. How has your compositional style changed since that time?*

I don't know whether it has changed essentially. Naturally, I am more experienced in instrumentation, I am familiar with more music, and have also come to appreciate a number of other composers. Yet I still build my compositional language on multiple styles and more or less avowed tonality and modality. Yet in the wake of *Enchantia*, in which I also had to bear in mind the specific taste of a young and uninformed audience, I am now in good spirits and feel like raising anchor and setting sail towards lands I have to date only been familiar with by hearsay...

*What precisely do you have in mind? Which musical areas remain unexplored lands for you?*

Work with sound, spectral analysis, tonal decentralisation, for instance... and, conversely, abandoning the tried-and-tested certainties in the form of minimalist repetitiveness, pedal points... I don't think that my musical "language" will transform entirely, but it could evolve and enrich.

*Do you have the feeling that there is any kinship between the composers of your generation (for instance, Michal Nejtek, whose opera was performed next to yours at the time)?*

Michal Nejtek and I are close friends, we get on very well and have similar musical taste. I consider him my "musical brother". Otherwise, there are other fellow-travellers (e.g. Slavomír Hořínka, Roman Pallas, Tomáš Pálka...), each of whom, naturally, is different, yet they have one thing in



common: they do not link their style to any ideology and do not close it in an unbreakable cage. Back in my student days, some of our professors were convinced that music had to be either “classical” or popular, traditional or avant-garde, listenable or “cacophonic”, “socialist” or “Western-progressive”... Fortunately, this pigeonholing has disappeared and it has also been gradually disappearing in the heads of our audience. The creative freedom today’s open, globalised and decentralised world affords may scare a lot of people, but our generation, I think, perceives it as a wonderful challenge and inspiration.

*Yet despite all the openness there is still a border between popular and classical music. And despite the creative freedom, you give preference to composing for orchestra rather than writing songs for a pop band. What today, in your opinion, is the sense of something as seemingly archaic as symphonic music and classical music in general?*

We’re skating on thin ice here. What exactly is symphonic music? A Mozart symphony? A Berio symphony? Or a Hollywood soundtrack? And what exactly is classical music? How can you define it? If we choose a more apposite term, “art music”, for instance, we have to admit that many compositions by, say, Frank Zappa cannot be considered pop music and, on the other hand, Mozart’s divertimenti, although beautiful, are primarily intended as entertainment. But you most likely have in mind traditional orchestras and their concert series. It’s true that 80 per cent of their repertoire is made up of music of the 17th-19th centuries and that this proportion has only been changing very slowly. The previous centuries have bequeathed us a host of superlative and timeless pieces, which make it worth visiting a concert and which orchestras can therefore afford to play over and over again. Nothing compares to, for instance, Mahler’s Second, absolutely unique and unparalleled, and this has not changed an iota even after more than a century. The problem is, of course, that in addition to its timeless content every work of art bears within itself a larger or smaller footprint of the time when it originated. The contemporary listener is thus confronted with the task of transcending this “anachronism”, and to do so, you need experience and a certain amount of education. And, at the same time, it holds true generally that “art music” is difficult to listen to in a passive, consumerist manner. And this is precisely what I consider the main problem when it comes to the future of performing traditional symphonic classical music. As music has gradually become mere background and entertainment for an ever-increasing number of people, the willingness



to deal with more complex music has been waning and hence it is doomed to become (in my opinion, temporarily) a mere museum exhibit.

*You have included in the final subscription concert of the next season a composition of yours titled Farewell Overture. Does this mean that you intend to leave Pardubice and seek pastures new?*

I’ve always resisted making use of my position as conductor to promote my own music. Yet I have been repeatedly asked in Pardubice to present some of my own pieces to the local audience. In terms of both its configuration and duration, the Farewell Overture immensely befits our subscription series and, owing to its title, it also works as a witty “opener” to the season’s final concert. But it most likely won’t be my last concert in Pardubice, since I have another full season ahead of me. And then we will see. In general, I am of the opinion that it doesn’t benefit a conductor to stay in one place too long, nor is it good for the orchestra. Yet I would be glad if I left some footprint in Pardubice.



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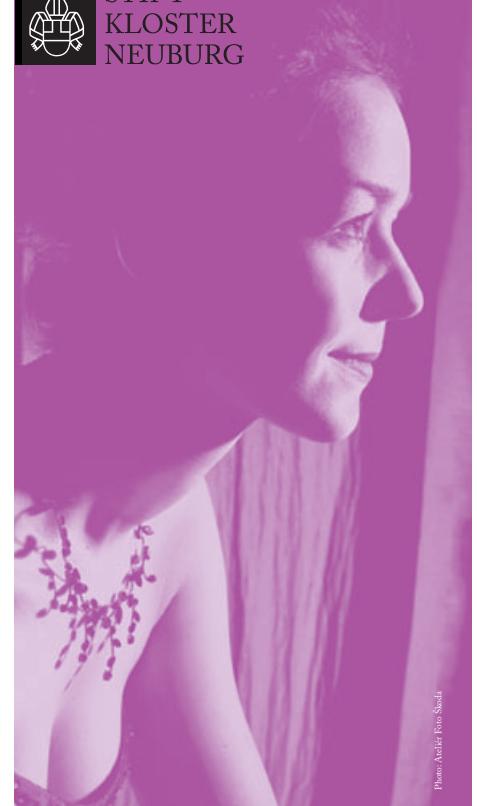


Photo: Archiv Foto: Študia



### **Marko Ivanović**

was born in 1976 in Prague. He studied composition (with V. Riedlbauch) and conducting (with R. Eliška and J. Bělohlávek) at the Prague Conservatory and the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. In 2008 he received a PhD. in composition and composition theory. Since 2009 he has been chief conductor of the Pardubice Chamber Philharmonic. As a conductor, he works with other Czech orchestras and festivals, as well as abroad. Notable successes include an acclaimed production of Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa* in Malmö, Sweden. In collaboration with the Czech Philharmonic and subsequently the Prague Symphony Orchestra, he has held a series of concerts targeted at a young audience. He has recorded two CDs with the Pardubice Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra (*Arco Diva*) and made a number of recordings for Czech Radio. At the present time, he is recording the complete symphonies of Miloslav Kabeláč with the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra (*Supraphon*).

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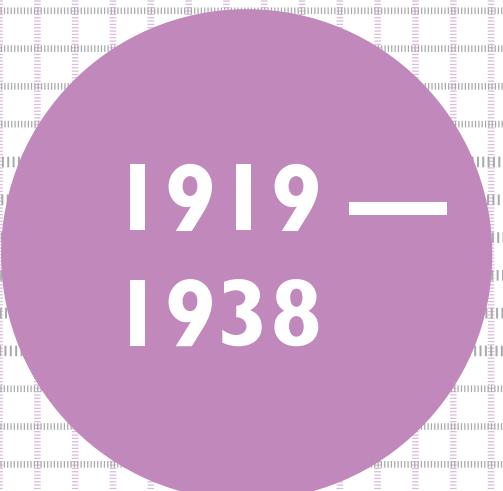
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# foreign and international music in interwar czechoslovakia

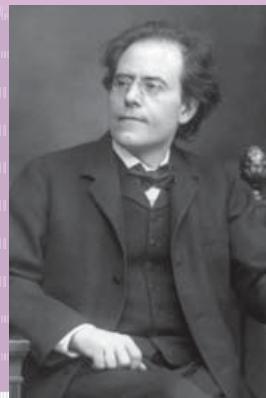
The period between World Wars I and II almost precisely coincides with the period of the “first” Czechoslovak Republic (1919–1938). The new state was established following the region’s separation from the disintegrating Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which the Slavonic population of the Czech lands also perceived as an untying from the German and Austrian cultural influence. The politico-social models for the new, independent republic were Western European democracies, primarily represented by France, which was also reflected in the changing tendencies in musical life and art in general. Yet the historically contingent influence from the space of German-speaking areas persisted. Another specific trait of the musical life in interwar Czechoslovakia was the continuing demand for the lyrical expression of music and the minimal attention paid to some of the international avant-garde trends.



1919 –  
1938

The establishment of the independent Czechoslovak Republic was accompanied by a wave of euphoria, which still manifested itself as post-revolution exaltation during the first half of the 1920s. One of the by-products of the building up of state sovereignty and a direct consequence of the previous frustration resulting from the subordination to the Austro-Hungarian Crown was the numerous manifestations of chauvinism. Initially, such a stance was even taken by reputable music journals, already published in an independent republic and hence no longer threatened with sanctions on the part of the German-speaking authorities. Articles with titles such as "Let's de-Germanise art" appeared, with a frequent target of criticism being the figure of Richard Wagner, personifying within this irrational discourse the German cultural hegemony and hence German "oppression". Yet such excesses were in the minority, did not last long and most representatives of the music-loving public were not interested in nationally tinged attitudes to Germanic culture and

music written by German and Austrian composers, bearing witness to which is, for instance, the co-operation between the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and the orchestra of the Opera of the New German Theatre in Prague. The very existence of the institution of a German-language theatre visited by the Czech public too serves as sufficient evidence. What is, however, primarily illuminating is the continuously positive relation to late-Romantic music of German and Austrian provenance. Well received too were selected pieces by distinguished representatives of the Second Viennese School and Paul Hindemith's works. Accordingly, the calling into question of German and Austrian music ultimately did not manifest itself as a negative attitude to its tradition and present. Owing to the social changes following the announcement of independent Czechoslovakia, an alternative in the form of "new" and "bright" French music and Romanic art in general was embraced. Paris, in addition, was attractive as a centre of contemporary European art. A similar status was held by Vienna too, yet Paris seemed far more alluring since it was situated



Richard Strauss  
Gustav Mahler

beyond the cultural radius demarcated by the former borders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

### The late-Romantic tradition

Irrespective of the heightened nationalist passions, an integral part of the musical life of interwar Czechoslovakia was the late-Romantic creations of **Richard Strauss** and **Gustav Mahler** in particular. Mahler's symphonies were among the core repertoire works of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and were one of the crucial inspirational stimuli for the generation of composers who had come on the scene prior to the outbreak of World War I. This was above all the case of Josef Suk, Vítězslav Novák and the lesser-known Otakar Ostrčil. The former two, together with Leoš Janáček, represent that which Czech musicology terms the "first generation of Czech modernism". Yet late-Romantic music played a key role for the younger generation too, since it served as a haven for the traditionally minded composers who rejected the interwar avant-garde experiments of their contemporaries. What's more, the late-Romantic repertoire enjoyed great popularity among the general non-professional public. This applied both to music intended for concert performances and stage works. In the interwar period, the musico-dramatic works of Richard Strauss were presented almost thirty times in Czech and Moravian opera houses and were among the most successful when it came to audience numbers. In addition, Strauss's powerful instrumentation art was taught at the Prague Conservatory at the time, and there are no records of any voices calling for

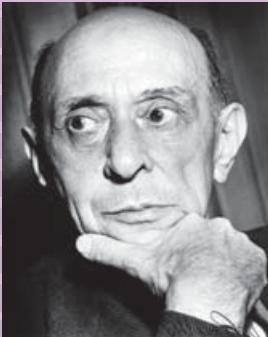
the banishment of "German" or "Austrian" instrumentation idioms.

From the 1920s, another late-Romantic composer to appear in the repertoires of leading Czechoslovak orchestras was France's Vincent d'Indy. Yet when gauged by the number and intensity of responses on the part of the music critics, as well as the degree of his influence on Czechoslovak composers, his music was merely a marginal phenomenon.

### The Second Viennese School

In the interwar period, the composers of the Second Viennese School were still perceived in close relation to their late-Romantic starting point. As a result, their subsequent, above all, atonal music was received in an ambivalent manner and was spoken of as music overly rationalised and "extremely modern". The greatest popularity was enjoyed by Alban Berg. Arnold Schoenberg was largely admired by avant-garde composers grouped in associations, while Anton Webern remained, with the exception of a few individuals, virtually unknown to both the general and professional public.

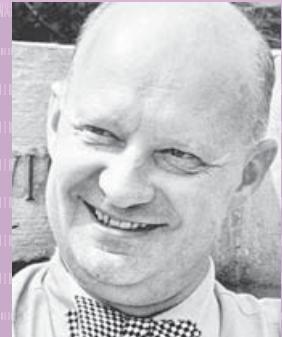
The work of **Arnold Schoenberg** was well known in the Czech lands back before World War I. The first Schoenberg piece presented in the interwar Czechoslovakia was the *Kammersymphonie* (Chamber Symphony), performed by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in 1920. The critics responded to the composition, still influenced by late Romanticism, positively, or at least with respect. Five years later, in the composer's presence, the cantata *Gurre-Lieder*, drawing upon the same tradition, was performed in Brno. The critics lauded the work,



Arnold Schoenberg  
Alban Berg



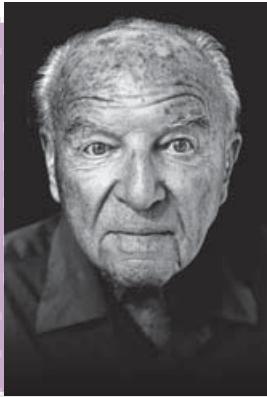
Paul Hindemith



some of them gushingly, and branded it the “apex of German late Romanticism”. Yet Schoenberg’s music dating from his subsequent atonal period and the phase following the devising of the dodecaphony technique was largely apprehended as “nihilistic” and merely “mathematical”, or “spectacularly ponderous”. The one and only expressively positive review was given to the performance of the chamber melodrama *Pierrot lunaire*, executed by the Prague branch of the Wiener Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen in 1921. On the other hand, almost unnoticed by the Czech music journalists was the world premiere of *Erwartung* on 6 June 1924 at the New German Theatre in Prague within the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music, attended by the composer. One of the most influential Czechoslovak journals, *Listy Hudební matic*, chose to completely ignore the event, not deigning to pay the slightest attention to it. In the 1930s, the majority of critics were more appreciative of Schoenberg’s works, albeit while always retaining a specifically dismissive attitude and distance. Serving as an example are the responses to the 1937 performance of the basically traditional *String Quartet No. 4*. Following a positive evaluation of the moderation of expression, they highlighted its third movement’s “fervent emotional content”, forming a stark contrast to the “dryly artificial sound” of the other movements.

Music by **Alban Berg** was first performed in public in Czechoslovakia in 1924, at a concert organised by the Society for Modern Music in Prague. A year later, fragments from his

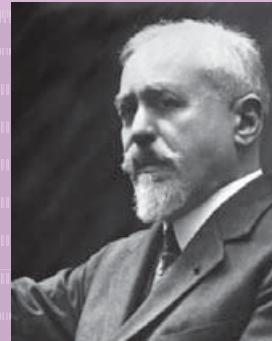
opera *Wozzeck* (“Vojcek” on the period Prague poster) were heard within the Prague festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music. The work’s subsequent premiere at the National Theatre in Prague on 11 November 1926 was the musico-dramatic event giving rise to the greatest furore in interwar Czechoslovakia. The reason was not, however, the high level of interest displayed on the part of composers and the music-loving public, but the politicisation of a chauvinistically tinted dispute about the opera’s quality and the eruption of a media-fuelled scandal following its second rerun. The many a time truly unscrupulous attacks targeted the “cosmopolitan” and “perverse” management of the National Theatre Opera company, headed by Otakar Ostrčil, who initiated the opera’s staging. The critics savaged *Wozzeck*, and Berg’s music as such, as “pathological” and “decadently Impressionistic”, distant from “natural musicality”. Similarly formulated condemnations were even voiced by reputable music journalists too. Only at the beginning of the 1930s did Berg start to gain respect and, unlike Schoenberg, became, owing to his closer affinity to Romanticism, one of the most popular contemporary Austrian composers of the time. In 1932, an entire issue of the revue *Klíc* was given over to Berg and his oeuvre. Three years later, the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra performed several extracts from his new opera *Lulu* and Berg gradually became an icon, a composer who was modern and concurrently sufficiently emotional, thus complying with the Czech notion of what contemporary music should be like.



Ernst Křenek



Claude Debussy  
Paul Dukas



## Hindemith, Křenek and other German and Austrian composers

Besides Alban Berg, **Paul Hindemith** was another contemporary German-speaking composer positively received in interwar Czechoslovakia. His music was favoured by the period critics owing to his employing instrumental polyphony techniques and the absence of the endeavour to abandon the aesthetic and structural dichotomy of consonance and dissonance. This approach, devoid of any radicalism, evoked the impression of his respecting tradition and it was, at the same time, deemed an acceptable version of modern music. Hindemith's work was embraced by both the general public and music professionals, and thanks to his efforts to create in the spirit of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) an "objective" variant to Romantic subjectivity, he gained recognition even on the part of the Czech composers inclined to Neo-Classicism. The Czech public got the first opportunity to hear his work in 1922. Until the end of the 1920s, however, virtually only Hindemith's chamber pieces were performed, yet, owing to their general acceptability, they gradually became a fixed part of the dramaturgy of chamber ensembles focused on contemporary creation. The popularity of Hindemith's music was markedly boosted by performances of his musico-dramatic works during the second interwar decade at the New German Theatre in Prague. Yet Hindemith only fully established himself in the consciousness of the Czech music-loving public in the second half of the 1930s, following the performance of his *Concerto for Viola and Chamber Orchestra* by the Czech Philharmonic in 1932.

In addition to the composers of the Second Viennese School and Hindemith, **Ernst Křenek** was the name that among contemporary Austrian and German creators most frequently appeared in the interwar dramaturgies of music ensembles.

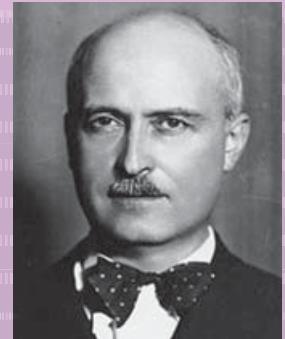
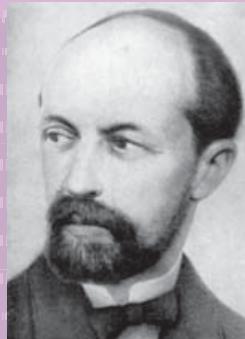
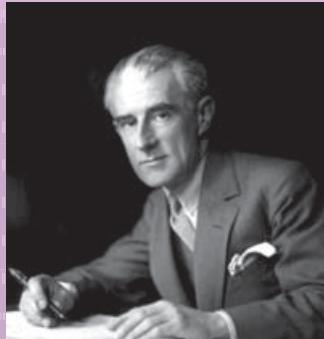
The specialist critics paid attention to his early works, still tributary to the late-Romantic tradition, back in the middle of the 1920s. The most significant Křenek event was the staging of his opera *Karl V* at the New German Theatre in Prague in 1938, which was preceded by performances of several less ambitious musico-dramatic works, including the "jazz opera" *Jonny spielt auf*. When it comes to other German and Austrian composers, the Czech critics also paid attention to Kurt Weill and Hans Eisler. Noted too were Max Brand, Ignac Lilien, Ernst Bloch, Max Butting and Herrmann Reutter.

## French inspirations and the ambivalent reception of Impressionism

Cultural and political contacts between the Czech lands and France date back to the Middle Ages, yet, in line with the social changes that took place after the announcement of the first Czechoslovak Republic, they were most intensive in the interwar period. The designation "First Republic" after all originated as an echo of the French model, and France was also the first country to recognise independent Czechoslovakia.

In 1920 the French Institute opened in Prague, with its main objective being systematic familiarisation of the Czech public with French culture. Increased interest was recorded especially in the area of the fine arts, with the traditionally-oriented

Maurice Ravel  
Albert Roussel  
Jacques Ibert

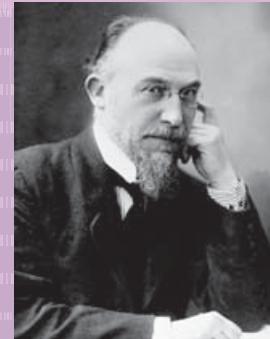


groups of painters and sculptors focusing on the previously not overly known French sculpture and painting of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Avant-garde artists, however, maintained contacts with their French colleagues from the end of World War I, absolutely independently of the official French propaganda. This mainly applies to the artists linked with Surrealism and abstract painting. Yet as regards the general public, French art of the first quarter of the century remained little known, and this was the case when it came to music too. Bearing witness to this is, for instance, the very belated response to Impressionism, with the bulk of composers and critics only acquainting themselves more closely with it during the 1920s, notwithstanding that the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the seminal orchestral piece of musical Impressionism, had been performed in Prague back in 1905. Even though **Claude Debussy's** works quickly became in interwar Czechoslovakia part of the repertoires of ensembles, including the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, the frequency and popularity of their performance were very low. Similar was the case of **Paul Dukas's** music too. Much greater acceptance was experienced by **Maurice Ravel's** Neo-Classicism-inclined compositions and **Albert Roussel's** Impressionism-influenced pieces. Specialist and audience interest was also enjoyed by the music of **Jacques Ibert**, whose works the Czechoslovak public only encountered in 1927 at the French Music Festival in Prague. Nor was Impressionism embraced by Czech composers, who merely acknowledged its existence. The only exception in this regard is the several compositions influenced by Impressionism created by Bohuslav Martinů, one of the

most prominent figures of the Czech interwar musical avant-garde, and Vítězslav Novák, a representative of the first generation of Czech modernism. The ambivalent reception of Impressionism primarily rested in the conservative conviction about the "peril" of its formal ease, the criticised absence in the created compositions of a "solid structure" and the emphasis on "mere effect". This is one of the reasons why the rather Neo-Classical Maurice Ravel and Albert Roussel were more popular among composers and music journalists than Claude Debussy.

## Les Six

The most distinct French source of inspiration for Czechoslovak composers was the artists associated in Les Six. This, however, almost exclusively applied to the creators belonging to the so-called Czech interwar musical avant-garde and, in particular, those who became founding members of the Mánes Music Society (see CMQ 4/2010). Les Six's programme statement, as well as the actual music of the grouping's members, offered an acceptable form of disavowal of the Romantic tradition. By the end of the 1920s, Czech critics, ultimately followed by audiences public, had got used to it, the reason being the fact that this type of opposition was comprehensible and, in a certain sense, "folk". Yet it wasn't a folksiness in the spirit of idealisation of the countryside according to the 19th-century model but a folklore of the big city, with its bustling cafes, ballrooms, boulevards and industrialised everydayness. Foregrounded were motoric rhythm and expressive idioms devoid of pastoral and rural lyricism. In their proclamation, Les Six called for a "music



Arthur Honegger  
Darius Milhaud  
Eric Satie

of the everyday”, a “new classicism”, and advocated the “necessity of a new style, clear, direct and stern”. The proclaimed everydayness and civil conception also corresponded with a penchant for jazz, connected with the milieu of dance halls and bars, where people went to enjoy themselves, not to earnestly seek out art. Jazz served to inspire composers owing, on the one hand, to its specific melody, harmony and rhythm, while on the other it was also a slightly ironic sneer into the face of the tradition of 19th-century music. Enriching compositional techniques with jazz idioms or creating purely jazz pieces was simply just as avant-garde as writing an orchestral movement with pulsating dissonances and subsequently naming it, in the spirit of the feverish interwar period, after a modern steam locomotive. For the Czech composers embracing such bases for creation, the most acceptable representatives of the “new French music” were **Arthur Honegger** and **Darius Milhaud**, both of whom in the second half of the 1920s gained respect and recognition on the part of the period critics. Honegger’s music was presented in Prague on several occasions immediately after the end of World War I, yet the breakthrough came with the performance of his symphonic movement *Pacific 231* at the first Prague concert of the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in 1924. Two years later, the piece also appeared in the programme of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. By the time, however, both Prague and Brno audiences were familiar with Honegger’s oratorio *Le roi David*, which the critics lauded as “one of the best works of recent times”, and Honegger, applauded for his “clarity, which is not primitive” and

for his “formalism, which is not paper”, became the “most agreeable representative of young music”.

Darius Milhaud’s music established itself in interwar Czechoslovakia in a very similar manner and at the same time. The first concert of the 1924 festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Prague featured fragments of scenic music for Claudel’s play *Protée*. One year later, four of his five symphonies were performed and the Prague Conservatory presented at the prestigious Estates Theatre the Prague premiere of the ballet, or “music hall spectacle”, *Le boeuf sur le toit* (*The Ox on the Roof*). In 1926 the National Theatre in Prague staged the “ballet chanté” *Salade* and Milhaud, the previous occasional criticism notwithstanding, duly became another French composer firmly established on Czech concert stages. Yet his music was only included in the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra’s repertoire in 1933.

In connection with the encroachment of Arthur Honegger’s and Darius Milhaud’s music, attention was also paid to the “spiritual father” of Les Six, **Eric Satie**. And even though he had a reputation as an “awkward” composer and the “enfant terrible” of French music, the Estates Theatre, for instance, presented Satie’s symphonic drama *Socrate*, while other stage works of his, such as *Parade* and *Jack in the Box*, were known too. In the mid-30s, amidst the establishment of Les Six composers, their works aroused keener interest in their oeuvre, mainly owing to the concerts given by the composers’ association Přítomnost with a focus on contemporary music. At the time, the critical responses had already become more positive and Satie had ceased to be perceived as



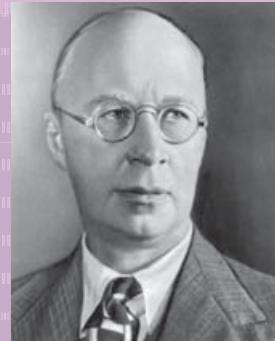
Igor Stravinsky

a purely obscure creator. Yet his often showy aesthetics, in line with the civil nature of Les Six, remained suspicious to the Czech critics.

### Igor Stravinsky

Alongside Les Six, Igor Stravinsky was the most influential source of inspiration for the Czech interwar avant-garde of neo-Classical orientation and gradually became the most frequently performed contemporary non-Czech composer in interwar Czechoslovakia. This undoubtedly resulted in part from the fact that he had never been perceived as a fledgling Russian artist seeking attention. The very opposite was true – he enjoyed a reputation as a composer established in Paris who associated with distinguished local artists, including Pablo Picasso himself. Albeit received with scepticism by some, from the beginning of the interwar period he was supported by a few Czech music critics, who systematically acquainted the public with Stravinsky's aesthetics and pointed to his acclaim not only in France but also the USA. Nevertheless, the professionals initially approached his works with disapproval, and even erudite critics occasionally voiced scathing opinions. He was castigated for, among other things, "stylistic eclecticism" and "ignoring the form", which was also the case of the suite for the stage work *Petrushka*, the first of his pieces to be performed in Czechoslovakia (1921). Fiercely criticised three years later was the production of *Petrushka* at the National Theatre in Prague. Circa 1925, the negative attitude started to change and Stravinsky began to be slowly accepted as a "new and attention-worthy composer of pure and strict lines". His works were

gradually included in concert programmes even beyond the main musical centres, Prague and Brno. At the end of the 1920s, numerous laudatory reviews were published, especially with regard to the second staging of *L'Histoire du soldat* in Prague in 1927, as were several studies on contemporary music that portrayed Igor Stravinsky as its leading figure. The interest in Stravinsky on the part of the music professionals was definitively confirmed by the Czech Philharmonic giving a concert to mark his 50th birthday in 1932. In the second half of the 1930s, Stravinsky became one of the most frequently performed foreign composers and during his visits to Czechoslovakia he received various honours (for more details of Stravinsky's visit to Ostrava, see CMQ 4/2011). In 1937 he even became an honorary member of the Mánes Association of Fine Artists, which in its building in the centre of Prague hosted the Mánes Music Society, associating composers affirming Neo-Classicism and representing the Czech equivalent of Les Six. With a few exceptions, the subsequent reviews of any performance of a Stravinsky piece were very positive, glowing even. A case in point is the response to the performance of his *Concerto for Two Pianos* on the grounds of the aforementioned Mánes Music Society, with the music journals highlighting the work's "singularity" and the "mature mastery" of the composer. All in all, Igor Stravinsky not only had a crucial impact on the music scene as a whole, including dramaturges of orchestras and theatres, musicologists and critics, but, together with Les Six, he also influenced a new generation of up-and-coming composers. This mainly applied to Bohuslav Martinů, an ardent champion of Stravinsky's



Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin  
Sergey Prokofiev  
Dmitry Shostakovich

music, who, owing to his embracing Stravinsky and undoubtedly being inspired by his oeuvre, was sometimes spitefully dubbed by his detractors (and not only them) the “Czech Stravinsky”.

### Russian music

The second half of the 19th century marked the beginning of more intensive cultural exchange between the Czech lands and Russia. Prior to the establishment of the First Republic, the Czechs were primarily familiar with the stage and orchestral works of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky, and, to a lesser extent, Alexander Viktorovich Glazunov. With the notable exception of Leoš Janáček, Russian music, however, was not markedly reflected in the oeuvre of Czech composers, and neither did it meet with increased enthusiasm on the part of the music professionals or music-loving public in general. There was a distinct lack of interest in Alexander Mosolov’s famous (and labelled as “Soviet”) orchestral work *Iron Foundry*, performed in 1931, first in Brno and then by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in Prague. On the other hand, avant-garde circles embraced the music of **Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin**, who was perceived as an expressionist and the “counterpart to Schoenberg” but remained virtually unknown to the general public. His pieces were almost exclusively performed at concerts held by the Society for Contemporary Music in Prague and the association Přítomnost.

When it comes to the reception by music professionals and the general public, the most successful and popular composer in interwar

Czechoslovakia was **Sergey Prokofiev**. His conflict-free music was favoured by conservative audiences and critics alike, as well as by composers with an affinity to various styles. Just like Stravinsky, he had garnered acclaim in Western Europe prior to the first performances of his compositions in Czechoslovakia and was perceived as a well-established, and thus remarkable, composer and a celebrated pianist to boot. What’s more, his early works, unlike Stravinsky’s, did not manifest a significant deviation from the Classicist/Romantic tradition and were digestible both to conservative critics and those critics with an affection for modern music. The first significant success Prokofiev attained in Czechoslovakia was at the first concert of the 1924 festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Prague, which featured his violin concerto. Two years later, the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra performed his *Piano Concerto No. 3*, and by the beginning of the 1930s Prokofiev had already become a fully respected contemporary composer. Most of his major works had been performed in Czechoslovakia by the end of the interwar period.

Similarly embraced at the time were the early works of **Dmitry Shostakovich**, which offered to the professional and general public an acceptable degree of modernity, yet one not outweighing the evident reverence for the Classicist/Romantic tradition. Truly remarkable was the speed with which the previously unknown young composer gained popularity in the wake of the success attained by his compatriot Prokofiev. In 1928, the Czech Philharmonic performed the orchestral suite to the opera *The Nose*, and over the next few years



Béla Bartók

Shostakovich became a fully established artist whose works were acclaimed and positively received. The premiere of his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* at the New German Theatre in 1936 was thus an event eagerly anticipated and drawing significant media attention.

### The domesticated folklore of Béla Bartók

The first reports about the music of Béla Bartók appeared in interwar Czechoslovakia as early as at the end of the 1920s, in relation to his piano virtuosity, as well as his piece *Allegro barbaro*. Its name gave rise to the term “style barbaro”, still used (not only in the Czech lands), which defines music employing motoric rhythm and accented dissonant chords with the aim to arouse atavistic emotion. Owing to the compositional techniques applied and the intended effect, this “barbarian” type of music is akin not only to the Neo-Classical compositions termed “Constructivist” but also those seeking an alternative to the Romantic subjectivity through an unpolished folklore in a similar manner; the early pieces by the then already famous Igor Stravinsky, for instance. The popularity of Stravinsky’s music in circles inclining towards the avant-garde also led to a rapid rise in the popularity of Béla Bartók. What’s more, as was the case of Prokofiev, he had the reputation of being a superlative pianist. In 1924 the first edition of the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music presented Bartók’s more traditionally conceived and critically acclaimed *Dance Suite*. Following repeated guest appearances with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra between 1925 and 1930, Béla Bartók became, alongside Stravinsky, Honegger and Prokofiev,

the most frequently performed non-Czech contemporary composer.

### Marginalised avant-garde trends

In the period between the two World Wars, the majority of contemporary types of music filtered through to Czechoslovakia, with audiences being acquainted with the latest developments, especially in Europe. Some tendencies and major figures, however, were overlooked, either owing to their being too radical or possessing no inspirational value, or simply due to the fact that their existence was unknown, even to artists with a keen interest in avant-garde trends. This most strikingly applied to **Futurist or Futurism-influenced music**, which, because of its penchant for noise aesthetics, was only paid attention to by a small circle of jazz musicians grouped around the composer and theatre-maker Emil František Burian. Virtually ignored too was **Feruccio Busoni’s** 1907 pamphlet *The Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*, promoting, among other things, expansion of the traditional instrumentarium and the making use of non-musical sounds. The general music-loving public in Czechoslovakia were only familiarised with it at the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940, when it was published as a supplement to the journal *Rytmus*. The composer **Edgar Varèse**, who was influenced by Futurism and went on to play a significant role in the development of music in the second half of the 20th century, only entered the consciousness of most Czechoslovak music professionals in the 1960s. A similar degree of ignorance applied to the creation of **Anton Webern**, notwithstanding the fact that, both personally and in aesthetic terms,

he belonged among the composers of the Second Viennese School, whose music established itself on Czechoslovak stages back at the end of the 1920s. Nevertheless, given the responses to Arnold Schoenberg's freely atonal and dodecaphonic compositions, the possible responses to Webern's rigorously conceived work, transcending the borders of dodecaphony in the direction of a totally organised musical structure, could have been anticipated. Neither this type of rationalisation of compositional work, although in Webern's case generating an extremely high aesthetic value devoid of any of the maligned "dry artificiality", nor radical reconsideration or modification of the sonic potential of the traditional set of instruments found any champions in Czechoslovakia and would remain disregarded until practically the beginning of the 1960s.

### **Interwar Czechoslovakia within the European context**

The first Czechoslovak Republic had the ambition to be a modern civic society along the lines of the Western European democracies. Corresponding to this was its foreign-policy orientation, as well as the endeavour to participate in cultural life within the European context and become a respected centre at the geographical heart of the continent. Accordingly, the dramaturgy of concerts and opera houses strove to offer the works of contemporary Czech and foreign composers, above all, those who had garnered acclaim abroad. This was driven by the desire to present the independent Czechoslovakia as a country in which significant artistic events took place. Gauged by the number of visitors to concert halls and theatres, the responses on the part of the general public bear witness to an understandable persisting preference for the Classicist-Romantic repertoire. The situation only started to change towards the end of the 1920s, by which time more and more people had begun to attend

concerts featuring modern music. For their part, music professionals adapted during the first half of the 1920s, yet from the very beginning of the interwar period there were groups of critics and journalists primarily promoting music of neo-Classical orientation. Corresponding to these tendencies were the works of the domestic composers today referred to as the "Czech interwar musical avant-garde", for whom Neo-Classicism was the most influential aesthetics. This was, largely due to the use of pregnant rhythm, connected with the aesthetics of neo-folklore or "style barbaro", as well as the aesthetics of the "Neue Sachlichkeit", owing to the endeavour to attain objectivity as the very opposite of Romantic subjectivity. Until the middle of the 1930s, the majority of critical responses to this type of music railed against the absence of "natural musicality" and emotionality. Seeking to emphasise the rebuked rational nature of this music, the critics customarily used such terms as "asentimental" or "dissonant Constructivism". Similarly motivated was the criticism of "artificial" atonal music. The demand for lyrical expression and the belief that it was able to establish a link between modern and traditional music was typical in interwar Czechoslovakia and, in the form of highlighting the necessity to attain the effect of cogency, this mindset persisted throughout the bulk of the 20th century. And the conservative circles have held sway until the present day.

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## Magdalena Kožená

### Love and Longing

Magdalena Kožená -  
mezzo-soprano, Berliner  
Philharmoniker,

Sir Simon Rattle - conductor.

Text: English, German, French.  
Recorded: live, Jan. 2012, Berliner  
Philharmoniker Saal, Berlin.

Released 2012. TT 64:13. DDD. 1 CD  
Deutsche Grammophon  
DG 479 0065.

**M**agdalena Kožená's latest album has been released soon after its live recording. This is the very first time that the singer's name has appeared on a CD featuring the song repertoire together with the **Berliner Philharmoniker** and **Sir Simon Rattle**. Although the disc's title, Love and Longing, is undoubtedly commercially alluring and promising, the question arises of whether or to what extent it aptly renders the inclusion of Dvořák's *Biblical Songs*, on which, quite understandably, a Czech discophile will focus his attention first of all and, perhaps, even the most. By the way, neither is this explained in the accompanying text in the booklet, which mainly elucidates the circumstances of the origination of Dvořák's cycle at the level of his desire for the homeland, while the songs' spiritual depth is only mentioned in passing and the characteristic Czech in which the Bible of Kralice is written is (quite understandably) not paid any attention to whatsoever. After a considerable time, we again hear on this album Magdalena Kožená's voice (nowadays more often used as a soprano) to the full, even in the lowest registers. The CD lists Viliém Zemánek as the creator of the orchestral arrangement of the accompaniment for all the songs, but the first five are the work of Dvořák himself. The mightier symphonic foundation evidently leads the soloist to drama and pathos, which is markedly audible right off in the introductory song (and

in the others too). The orchestral accompaniment, willy-nilly, turns the cycle into something different – not as intimate as we are used to from the piano version, and not as spiritual as evoked by an organ accompaniment. The music presented in this manner more illustrates that which is going on: a storm really does break out, the apprehensions are really gloomy. Of course, there are also beautifully softened passages, such as the clarinet solo in the third song; there is poignancy too, and the music is able to thaw both in the solo part and in the orchestra, as in the conclusion of the first song. The singing – in the sixth song, for instance – is splendidly vaulted, in places sounding sweet and tremulously hushed... Nevertheless, at the end of the cycle, which could be a true and buoyant hymn, merely a rather encumbered accentuated dance is heard. When it comes to Magdalena Kožená's delivery of the third song *Hospodín jest můj pastýř* (The Lord's My Shepherd), the melodic line and the text's declamation are gorgeous, yet the music is not imbued with absolute spirituality. On this recording, the Biblical Songs venture into the universal neighbourhood of the global repertoire of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, which is all well and good since at the present time the cycle is not performed abroad that often and they totally stand their ground in this interpretation, yet at the same time I cannot shake off the impression that they have lost some of their singularity. Ravel's cycle *Shéhérazade* is wholly symphonic, pretty much Impressionistic, with all the attendant gradations and colours of the orchestra, fantasy and magic in the instrumentation and sound, as well as transformations of moods and pictures. Magdalena Kožená's singing (in comparison with the Dvořák pieces much higher, in a brighter timbre and with soprano high tones at the top, a certain nostalgia in the voice and a nice use of the characteristic ruffle on some syllables) has a similarly wide spectrum, ranging from eeriness to impassionedness. The second song, with a markedly exposed flute, has the atmosphere of elusiveness and is so beautiful that

one has the feeling that it is over too soon. The third part of the cycle begins with an even more airy feel, in an even slower tempo, more softly, wistfully and lugubriously, and its masterfully written and masterfully delivered gentle orchestral accompaniment beautifully trails away. In the case of Mahler's five *Rückert-Lieder*, comparison with Dagmar Pecková's interpretation inevitably suggests itself. As we know, Pecková is able by means of darker registers to attain in Mahler's music the feeling of being persistently and exaltedly pulled into the piece's atmosphere, the feeling of cogency and exaltation. The forte of Kožená's account is not a similarly deep immersion, her delivery is somewhat more extrovert (however paradoxical this finding or claim may sound with respect to the impression evoked by the cultured performances of both the singers). Whereas Pecková may find in Mahler a sad, resigned, inwardly composed approach, if she may make one want to listen with closed eyes, then Kožená applies a more impassioned, livelier, as though unsought sincerity, with an earnestness stemming from as if it were not being reconciled, and may make one want to listen with the eyes wide open, when the soul has yet to find peace. Her Mahler draws the listener in through her vaulting of cantilenas and voice timbre, fine even in a brighter and higher register. It is emotive in a different way than the Mahler of Pecková's. And here the Berliner Philharmoniker are perhaps at their best. Their at times almost vocal accompaniment and the utterly marvellous postlude to the final song simply leave one speechless.

Petr Veber



### František Benda Violin Concertos

Ivan Ženatý - violin,  
Prague Philharmonia.

Text: English, German, French,  
Czech. Recorded: May 2011,  
Jan. and Jun. 2012, Studio Martínek,  
Prague. Released: 2012.  
TT: 72:26. DDD.  
1 CD Supraphon SU 4064-2.

**H**ot on the heels of a similar title released by Radioservis (Roman Patočka, Prague Philharmonia), Supraphon has issued an album of the Violin Concertos of František Benda (1709–1786), featuring Ivan Ženatý. The two CDs invite comparison of two different manners of interpretation, since from among the 28 hitherto discovered Benda concertos both soloists coincidentally chose two identical pieces (C major and D major). Ivan Ženatý (b. 1962) has won numerous international competitions and is today one of the most accomplished Czech violinists. His technically faultless playing clearly reflects a strict intellectual discipline, keenly observant of the form and degree of emotional delivery. This approach may sometimes be risky and not to every listener's taste. On this recording, however, it strikes me as being an approach that made it possible for the entire score to radiate in its original purity and sparkle like crystal in the southern sun. At the time of their origination, Benda's Violin Concertos were interpreted in two different ways. In Dresden, they employed more instruments with additionally written horn parts, which in the slower tempos most resemble the style and sound of the Bach orchestra (Patočka). Yet the original Berlin configuration was more chamber-like, and Ženatý gives preference to this alternative. And I think that in doing so he reaped the benefits. All the work's colours and shapes, with a surprising freshness and clarity, stand out even more. The recording is superb owing above all to the equally fine performances of the soloist's partners,

the Prague Philharmonia players (Jan and Jakub Fišer – violin, Stanislav Svoboda – viola, Lukáš Pospíšil – cello, Pavel Klečka – double-bass, František Šťastný – harpsichord). Executed in this line-up, the quality of the delivery is akin to that of a superlative string quartet. Ženatý doesn't shy away from reconstructing the assumed period elements of virtuosity, including emphatic spiccato, double-gripped arpeggios or broken chords – not only in his part but also in the case of the other strings. As a result, the performance attains a youthful lightness and glitter, with František Benda clearly arising as the Czech counterpart to Antonio Vivaldi, with his groundbreaking violin technique and poetic cantilena being conveyed by Ženatý on his splendid Guarneri del Gesù (1740) instrument in his typically modest cantabile tone. Ženatý's tempos are markedly more sprightly than those on Patočka's recording (in the concertos in C major and D major), yet both conceptions will have their advocates and champions. The CD comprises the *Concertos for Violin, Strings and Basso Continuo in C major* (Lee II-I), *B flat major* (Lee II-18), *D major* (Lee II-2) and *A minor* (Lee II-16) and is accompanied by an interesting scholarly text written by Václav Kapsa. The whole package, including the print of Bellot's period Dresden scenery (1755) on the sleeve, is extraordinarily balanced in all respects. Benda's Violin Concertos are certainly deserving of a complete treatment similar to that presented by the Japanese violinist Shizuka Ishikawa in the still underestimated recording of Václav Mysliveček's concertos.

Pravoslav Kohout

### Bedřich Smetana *Dalibor*

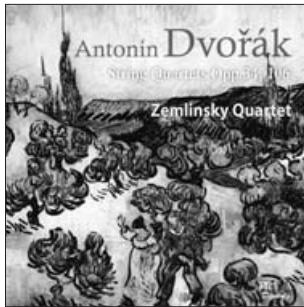
Václav Zítěk – baritone, Vilém Přibyl – tenor, Bohuslav Maršík – bass, Jaroslav Horáček – bass, Miloš Ježil – tenor, Eva Děpoltová – soprano, Naďa Šormová – soprano,



Chorus of the Opera of the State Theatre in Brno, Josef Pančík – chorus master, Brno State Philharmonic Orchestra, Václav Smetáček – conductor.

Text: Czech, English. Recorded: 1979. Released: 2012. TT: 79:16, 65:19. AAD. 2 CDs Supraphon SU 4091-2.

**B**edřich Smetana's third opera was premiered on the very day the foundation stone of the National Theatre in Prague was laid. Even though at the time the critics accused the work of being overly "Wagnerian", today we rank *Dalibor* among the great composer's pivotal operatic pieces. The Czech nation regarded *Dalibor* as a symbol of the struggle for freedom and accordingly compared it to Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Smetana brought to bear his experience with compositional structure, instrumentation and creation of dramatic effect so masterfully that the opera still enjoys interest on the part of Czech and foreign audiences alike. Supraphon's recording, made in 1979 at the Stadion studio in Brno, offers high-quality performances of the soloists, chorus and the Brno State Philharmonic Orchestra, all of them steered by the steady hand of the legendary Václav Smetáček, a seasoned orchestra (and abroad frequently also opera) conductor. The part of Dalibor was entrusted to Vilém Přibyl, a tenor with a technically perfect tone, singular voice timbre and sense of phrasing. He garnered deserved acclaim as Dalibor in Edinburgh in the mid-60s during his first foreign tour with the National Theatre company. Milada, Dalibor's accuser and eventually loving advocate, was portrayed by Eva Děpoltová, who gave celebrated performances both at home and abroad. Her delivery is characterised by great musicality and dramatic sentiment, clearly manifesting the influence of the renowned Russian soprano Elena Obraztsova, whose rigorous training resulted in Děpoltová's extensive concertante and operatic range. The performances of the other soloists were flawless too: Václav Zítěk as the Czech King Vladislav, Bohuslav Maršík in the role of the captain of the castle guard Budivoj, Jaroslav



**Horáček** as the jailer Beneš and **Náda Sormová** as the peasant girl Jitka. In their time, all these singers were stellar artists and they, the chorus and orchestra were firmly conducted by Smetáček. Smetana's melodies are delivered with pathos and emotion, the introductory *Today a verdict will be pronounced* expresses choral resolve and the people's apprehensions, while the final love duet of Dalibor and the dying Milada raises respect. The first-rate remastering of the archive recording of Dalibor assures that it will occupy a dignified place in Supraphon's Czech Opera Treasures series. This reviewer would only like to address two requests to the creators of the booklet for this intriguing and beneficial project – to add to Jan Králik's brief yet erudite text at least some basic data about the artists, and to pay greater attention to the title's graphic aspects. After all, in this day and age an exemplary recording should come in an exemplary package.

Marta Tužilová

**Antonín Dvořák**  
**String Quartets in D minor, Op. 34,**  
**B. 75 (1877), & G major, Op. 106,**  
**B. 192 (1895)**

**Zemlinsky Quartet:** František Souček, Petr Strížek (violin), Petr Holman (viola), Vladimír Fortin (cello)

Text: French, German  
Recorded: 2012/13 (Studio Martínek, Prague). Released: 2012, TT: 70:08  
DDD.1 SACD Praga Digitals (Harmonia Mundi)  
PRD/DSD 25029

**O**ver the past few years, Antonín Dvořák's quartets have enjoyed increasing interest on the part of record labels, as evidenced by the CDs made by, for example, the Martinů Quartet (Arco Diva, 2011, Opp. 105 & 106), the Cecilia

String Quartet (Analekta, 2011, Opp. 106, 54, Cypress), the Pavel Haas Quartet (Supraphon, 2010, Opp. 96 & 106) and the Emerson Quartet (DG, 2009, Opp. 51, 61, 97, 106, Cypress). This spring, another interesting studio album was released, this time from the workshop of the **Zemlinsky Quartet**, an ensemble whose recordings of Dvořák's first seven string quartets (PRD/DSD 350 028) and Franz Schubert's first twelve quartets (PRD 350 030) have been enthusiastically received abroad. Most recently, the quartet's Dvořák discography was extended by the sonically superior and spatially realistic SACD of the *String Quartet in D minor, Op. 34, B. 75* (1877, not 1878, as is erroneously stated on the CD's sleeve) and the *String Quartet in G major, Op. 106, B. 192* (1895), book-ending Dvořák's mature quartet oeuvre and paramount works in general. Among the twenty-four commercial recordings of the Quartet in D minor I personally am familiar with and at the least thirty-five recordings of the Quartet in G major, the Zemlinsky Quartet's creation, packaged in a graphically first-rate sleeve featuring Vincent van Gogh's Evening Walk and with a booklet whose text is written by Pierre E. Barbier (regrettably though, with errors in Czech diacritics), definitely stands out. The SACD, respecting the chronology of the pieces' origination, opens with the Quartet in D minor, dedicated to Brahms, in whose repetitive first movement the ensemble already present themselves with precise interplay, including dynamic proportions (unlike in other recordings, the 1st violin solo in exposition in the second theme does not sound at the expense of the other instruments in terms of dynamics, and similar is the case of the solos delivered by the other instruments too), immediately recognisable cello entries and a beautiful tone of the viola. The Zemlinsky Quartet play the second movement like a really high-spirited polka with lovely rubatos and a dance-like starting of the theme in the cello. The piece's third movement is a gem among Dvořák's quartet works and the ensemble duly deliver this nocturne con-

sordino in an atmosphere akin to the discrete grief of *Stabat Mater* as a reminiscence that is not uttered aloud (the wonderful trio of violins and viola). The finale of the Quartet in D minor bears a number of traits typical of Dvořák's late, in comparison with his earlier string quartets opulent in sonic terms and in thematic terms pronouncedly expressive, Quartet in G major: sharper accents (Op. 106/3+4), variable work with rhythm (Op. 106/1), sonic expressiveness (Op. 106/2), graceful glissandos and rubatos (106/3) and non-concealment of the folk background – the first bars of the final movement of the Quartet in G major possess the simplicity of a folk tune. The first movement of the Quartet in G major has a lucid structuring, with a horizontal separation of individual parts, while the finale does not lack a certain degree of flamboyant pointedness. I consider the second movement of the Quartet in G major the apex of the recording – the gnarled agogic and constant tempo-rhythmic changes elevate the movement from the world of "absolute music" and duly plunge it deep into the epic, or rather narrative, ocean of chamber music. When it comes to the tempos in general, in comparison with the majority of older recordings, the Zemlinsky Quartet have chosen livelier tempos in the fast movements, while the slow movements are more placid. In the final analysis, perhaps only the first violin's restrained delivery and the endeavour for completely balanced dynamics of individual instruments have deprived the first violin's ecstatic final solo at the end of the fourth movement of the Quartet in G major of the intoxicating effervescence transcending the borders of chamber music. The Zemlinsky Quartet's new SACD, designated as Vol. V (hence, it hopefully is not the last one and we can still dream of a recording of the complete Dvořák quartet works), provides a truly exceptional listening experience and as such is a cause for celebration.

Martin Jemelka



### Karel Šejna Great Czech Conductors

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra,  
Maria Tauberová - soprano, Karel  
Šejna - conductor.

Text: English, German, French, Czech.  
Recorded: 1950–1962, Domovina Studio  
and Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2012.

TT: 70:30, 75:19. AAD.  
2 CDs Supraphon SU 4081-2.

This year, CDs with rather inconspicuous grey sleeves have been appearing on the market. Individually, they do not give the impression of being part of an exceptional project, yet the growing series in a uniform garb simply attracts attention. After all, such is the trend worldwide. Record labels strive to create entire editions made up of compilations of recordings previously released. Not so long ago, the Supraphon label, undoubtedly possessing the largest and most significant archive of Czech recordings, was reproached for concealing in its safes musical treasures that deserve a comeback. The recent re-editions of Talich and Ančerl albums, however, have confirmed that it is not about nostalgia or memories of the old days but, on the contrary, a fully-fledged offer that can easily compete with newer recordings, which may be technically more sophisticated yet are many a time much less compelling in artistic terms. The *Great Czech Conductors* series comprises double albums – the first was dedicated to Rafael Kubelík and his previously unreleased studio and live radio recordings dating from the era prior to his emigration. The second featured recordings made by **Karel Šejna** and the third – most recent – presented the artistry of Martin Turnovský. In the case of Karel Šejna, the CDs are an especially salutary achievement. Although there are quite a few re-editions of his recordings out there, their selection to date has nowhere near corresponded to the conductor's artistic significance. The text in the booklet is titled by its author, Petr Kadlec, very appositely: "Second in Command for

Fifty Years". Throughout his long career at the **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra**, Karel Šejna was indeed overshadowed by his great bosses. The only exception was a single period following Rafael Kubelík's emigration, when the Czech Philharmonic was left without a music director and, owing to his tender years, Václav Neumann was not considered quite ready for this position. Karel Šejna, however, gave preference to working rather than commanding, and in 1950 he willingly handed over the chief conductor's baton to Karel Ančerl. This may be one of the reasons why he has never been appropriately appreciated. Yet those who are familiar with Šejna's accomplishments know very well what a distinguished figure he was. His 1957 recording of Suk's *A Summer's Tale*, released on CD some time ago, undoubtedly ranks up there with Talich's *Suk* creations (Israel, Ripening). Karel Šejna recorded with the Czech Philharmonic the complete orchestral works of Bedřich Smetana (the first *My Country* on LP no less!), with the distance of eighteen years his 1959 recording of the Slavonic Dances received a prestigious French award. Unfortunately, only the Slavonic Dances and several other albums (besides Vítězslav Novák pieces, an outstanding disc containing Bohuslav Martinů's Double Concerto) could have been recorded in stereo. Yet, as has been documented by the new Šejna project within the *Great Czech Conductors* series, a mono version does not equate to diminished artistic value. The album's apex is the legendary recording of Mahler's *Fourth* – the only symphony that does not have its digital premiere on this CD (it was released years ago as a covermount to an inconspicuous edition of the magazine *Mladý svět*). Similarly to the mentioned Suk recording, the Czech Philharmonic's performance, lauded at the time by all prestigious music journals, is truly spellbinding. The recording is marvellously rounded off by the forcible solo of **Marie Tauberová** in the fourth movement. Beethoven's *Pastoral* symphony as explored by Šejna was a benchmark recording on the Czech



market for a long time, until it was superseded by Kletzki's stereophonic disc within a complete Beethoven set and Šejna was rather forgotten. Now we have found out that its value is equipollent to many later recordings and, what's more, it serves as yet another demonstration of the artistic level of Talich's, Ančerl's, as well as – this should be stressed – Šejna's Czech Philharmonic. The recordings of Mozart's *Prague* symphony made in 1953 and the overtures to *Le nozze di Figaro* (the only stereophonic recording on the album) and *La clemenza di Tito* illustrate the virtuosity and (for their time) stylistic finesse with which the Czech Philharmonic played Mozart's music. Perhaps to a certain degree, primarily in terms of expression, the 1950 recording of Schubert's *Unfinished* symphony can be deemed one of average standard. This may explain the reason why a recording brought from Vienna (Scherchen) was given preference when the work was re-recorded on to LP discs. The Supraphon archives contain numerous other recordings Šejna made with the Czech Philharmonic, in many cases superlative, and one hopes that they will all be gradually re-released. Although when it comes to its dramaturgy this album may give rise to discussions, the argument that they are recordings previously not available on CD is reason enough to embrace this release.

Bohuslav Vítek

### Solo for the King

Jana Semerádová - Baroque transverse flute, Lenka Torgersen - Baroque violin, Bertrand Cuiller - harpsichord, Hana Fleková - cello.

Text: English, German, French, Czech. Recorded: Church of Francis of Assisi, Prague, December 2011. Released: 2012. TT 58:25. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 4087-2.



**F**or many years, the flautist **Jana Semerádová** has been a leading light of the Czech early-music scene. The most recent of her remarkable projects is the CD titled *Solo for the King*, released a mere three months after it was recorded. The album features the music that was performed at the court of the Prussian King Frederick the Great (1740–1786), known not only as an enlightened monarch and successful military commander but also as a passionate lover of music, flautist and composer. He grew up surrounded by renowned artists and later on employed accomplished musicians at his court, founding an orchestra and opera. Jana Semerádová selected for the CD compositions by J. S. Bach, including two parts from the celebrated *Musikalisches Opfer* (Musical Offering), alongside pieces by J. P. Kirnberger, J. J. Quantz, C. P. E. Bach and František Benda, bearing witness to the changing musical taste of the time, an era marking the transition from late Baroque to Classicism, with examples of the Galant and the sensitive (*Empfindsamkeit*) styles. The collection is even suitably arranged according to keys. Within the historically informed performance, the winsome soloist (as evidenced by the photographs) has succeeded in differentiating the individual compositions, their movements, sections and phrases, duly highlighting the harmonically extreme passages and making the slow parts stand out expressively. In this, Jana Semerádová is sensitively accompanied by the French harpsichordist **Bertrand Cuiller** and the Czech cellist **Hana Fleková**. The *Duetto* in *E minor* (violin – **Lenka Torgersen**), created by Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, J. S. Bach's second eldest son, is a true feast for the listener. I luxuriated in the sound of the solo flute in Quantz's *Sarabande* in *G major*, yet I was a little disappointed by the disturbance of the regular metre as a result of a loose and mannered delivery, typical of some of the interpreters of early music. The CD has been created with loving care and natural professionalism, which we have become accustomed to in the case of Jana Semerádová. The album

takes the form of an imaginary royal concert at Postdam's Sanssouci chateau and in doing so splendidly illustrates a certain area and period of music history.

*Jana Slímačková*

### **Antonín Dvořák** **Poetic Tone Pictures, Op. 85, B. 161**

**Claudia Schellenberger (piano)**

Text: German, English, Recorded: 2011/11, Released: 2012 TT: 56:38, DDD, 1 CD CAVI-music 8553228

**R**egrettably, precious few pianists will have the courage to play them all one after another (they last almost ¾ of an hour), but only thus can the listener form the right picture of that which I may have had in mind, since this time I am not only an absolute musician but a poet. Don't laugh at me! Unfortunately, these prophetic words of Dvořák's in his letter to Emanuel Chvála dated June 1889 have proved to be true – to date, few pianists indeed have mustered up the courage and taken the opportunity to record one of the most extensive of Dvořák's piano works, the thirteen-part programme cycle *Poetic Tone Pictures*, Op. 85, B. 161 (1889), known in fragments from recordings made by the pianists Jan Heřman, Rudolf Firkušný, Antonín Kubálek and Jan Michiels, and in its entirety from recordings by Radoslav Kvapil (1969 Supraphon, 1992 Unicorn/Regis), Gerald Robbins (1972 Genesis Records), Květa Novotná (1992 MPC Classics), Roglit Ishay (1995 Kontrapunkt), Stefan Veselka (1995 Naxos), Inna Poroshina (1997 ESS.A.Y., Brilliant Classics) and Julian Jakobson (Meridian). Towards the end of 2011, the handful of intrepid voyagers into the specific sonic and interpretational world of Dvořák's piano oeuvre was joined by **Claudia Schellenberger**, a German pianist with Moravian roots on her mother's side, a fact she proudly highlights in her erudite and interesting text for the booklet to the CD released in May 2012

by the German label CAVI (it has previously released the pianist's CD *Danzas Argentinas*, featuring compositions by Gottschalk, Ginaster and Lecuon). Claudia Schellenberger approaches Dvořák's piano opus summus with an undaunted technique and interpretational engagement: her delivery of *At the Old Castle* evokes an eerie and enchanting atmosphere; the gloom-ridden *Sorrowful Reverie* is reminiscent of a tango; evidently no other pianist has to date delved so deeply into the fiddly *Goblins' Dance*; and the broad-breathed *Serenade* is a masterstroke. Whereas in the dances (*Furiant*, *Goblins' Dance*, *Bacchanale*) Schellenberger foregrounds the composer's "grand piano technique" (double thirds and octaves, tenths), in the musical tales (*Toying*, *Spring Song*, *Peasant Ballad*, *Serenade*, *Title-Tattle*) and, above all, the musical pictures (*On the Road at Night*, *At the Old Castle*, *At the Hero's Grave*, *At the Holy Mountain* (*Svatá Hora*)), she comes across as a warm-hearted renderer of images almost impressionistic in sonic terms. The only thing one could take issue with is the pianist's emphasising in the accompanying text Dvořák's folk inspirations and the allegedly "orchestral" sound of his piano pieces. Although Schellenberger does point out the genetic connection of Dvořák's piano works with Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words, Schumann's Album Leaves and Grieg's Lyric Pieces, the booklet contains music-history clichés. The artist's engrossment with Dvořák's compositions for piano two-hands is, however, evident not only in her text but also, and primarily, in her honest and winsome playing. Germany's CAVI-music (whose motto reads: "The label for chamber music, artists and surprises") has thus bolstered its catalogue with another fine Dvořák album that comes in the wake of recordings of the Sextet in A major, the *Serenade* in D minor (repeatedly), the String Quartet in G major, pieces for violin and piano (Antje Weithaas) and other Dvořák chamber works made by superlative performers (Christian and Tanja Tetzlaff, Sharon Kam, Boris Pergamenschikow, etc.), mainly connected with the Spannungen music festival, which takes place in the imposing Heimbach Hydroelectric Power Station in Germany under the patronage of Lars Vogt.

*Martin Jemelka*

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Claude Debussy

# PELLEAS & MELISANDA

Premieres: 30. 9. and 2. 10. 2012

Reruns: 10., 23. 10. and 4. 11. 2012

Director: Rocc, Musical preparation: Jean-Luc Tingaud

# Contempuls 5

Pražský festival soudobé hudby  
Prague Contemporary Music Festival

La Fabrika



**6/11/2012**

**Steffen Schleiermacher (D)**

John Cage: *Music of Changes*

**Talea Ensemble (USA)**

Gee, Hodge, Mincek, Neuwirth, Wubbels

**9/11/2012**

**Harris / Vandewalle (USA/Belgie)**

Morton Feldman: *For John Cage*

**16/11/2012**

**MoEns (CZ)**

H. M. Górecki: *Lerchenmusik*

**Ensemble Mosaik (D)**

Parra, Poppe, Riehm, Streich

**23/11/2012**

**Gareth Davis (UK)**

*The Standards Project*

**A NAP (SK)**

Graham, Mrkvička, Steinecker

**Gareth Davis & Machinefabriek (NL)**

Festival pořádá Hudební informační středisko, o.p.s., za podpory Ministerstva kultury ČR, Magistrátu hl. města Prahy, Česko-německého fondu budoucnosti, Velykyslanectví USA a dalších partnerů

