



Vilém Veverka

Beyond Cage Festival

Lucie Vítková

Josef Suk

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Dear readers,

our magazine doesn't customarily contain reviews of concerts, festivals or other temporarily and locally specific events, since CMQ's periodicity is not overly compatible with this type of material. Above all, we strive to publish texts that are relevant over the longer term and useful to those interested in Czech music scattered across several continents. But there are good reasons why this issue includes two exceptions in this respect. The Beyond Cage festival in New York in 2012 was one of the most extensive events marking the Cage anniversary and, as you can read in Boris Klepal's review/report, Czech musicians played a key role there, owing to Petr Kotík's long-term and systematic work. The other exception is the reflections on the Mittelosteuropa project within the Musica Viva festival in Munich. Although just one Czech composer, František Chaloupka, participated in it, it is of relevance to our magazine. As the author of the respective text, I am of the opinion that the Goethe-Institut's project opened up a few topics and raised questions that should be dealt with in connections broader than those directly pertaining to the Czech music scene. I believe that our magazine can serve as a good springboard for a "multinational" discussion.

All the best in the new year

Petr Bakla

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Vilém Veverka: SIMPLE THINGS JUST DON'T INTEREST ME

The thirty-five-year-old oboist Vilém Veverka, one of the most distinguished Czech musicians, talks about his decision to pursue an unbeaten path, the urgency to play contemporary music and his new CD

Your new recording features Georg Philipp Telemann's Fantasias and Benjamin Britten's cycle Six Metamorphoses after Ovid. What do these works have in common and what is interesting about juxtaposing them?

They are two seminal opuses for solo oboe. To be precise, Telemann's piece was originally intended for the flute, but oboists play it too. My album is the very first Czech complete recording of the Fantasias, and I am only aware of another two complete oboe recordings worldwide. It would be by no means going too far to compare Telemann's cycle to Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, above all in terms of the comprehensiveness and versatility.

When it comes to Britten, next year we will be celebrating the centenary of his birth. His Metamorphoses are a true cornerstone of the oboe repertoire, thus I considered it a fitting complementary piece. The CD's digital form, which will be available for downloading, also contains a bonus: Thomas Daniel Schlee's Aulodie et Jubilation.

Is listening to more than seventy minutes of solo oboe "digestible"?

My experience says it is. I performed all Twelve Fantasias within a single concert and the audience remained focused throughout. I have received similar responses to the CD. You can put it in the player, let the music flow... I don't force anyone to sit there with rapt attention throughout.

As a performer, I perceive my path as that of a lone wolf. I play by myself, without accompaniment, any partner. I was compelled by the idea to try it on my own and prove that the oboe can stand its ground as a solo instrument just as well as the violin.

You perform the modern repertoire and new music on a regular basis – aren't you allured to make an album featuring such a programme? What about Berio's Sequenza?

I have been thinking about such a project for a long time and have even given it the working title "K2": recording the pivotal post-war pieces for solo oboe, including Luciano Berio's Sequenza VII. There is a lot to choose from, it would definitely be worth it, and I believe that one day it will actually come to fruition. By the way, I have already recorded the Berio, for Czech Radio.

The CD was recorded at the Gothic Convent of St. Agnes in Prague. How did you feel during the sessions – there in the church on your own, without accompaniment, without an audience?

Initially, I thought of inviting an audience. I even considered making a live recording at a concert; I've had good experience with that. An audience can really motivate the player. Yet in the end I was on my own and hence there was no limitation other than my own abilities.

The recording conditions weren't ideal all the time though. The premises of the Convent of St. Agnes themselves are imposing; you can let yourself be intoxicated by the resonance. Every now and then, we were hindered by the hum of city-centre traffic. At one point, we weren't able to identify the noise that prevented us from recording. (It turned out to be the engine of a steamboat on the river Vltava.) Every morning, we had a break before ten, since that's the time the dustbins were being emptied outside...

In every respect, it was a novel experience, new knowledge for me.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the recording director, Jiří Gemrot, and the sound engineer, Aleš Dvořák.

The CD features pieces from the Baroque repertoire played on a modern instrument. How do you view historically informed performance?

I don't avoid the Baroque repertoire in the slightest. I perceive the music of that era as an antipode to contemporary music, they can suitably complement each other, and such a dialogue can be enriching for the listener.

I think that today an educated interpreter should automatically be familiar with the principles of performing Baroque music. For me, this is made easier owing to my collaboration with keyboard players, who are usually the most advanced in this respect.

For some time, I myself played the Baroque oboe so as to be able to feel the aesthetics and the way of thinking of a Baroque musician. But I cannot imagine confining myself to a single period. I would definitely feel I was missing out on something.

The CD is evidently one of the highlights of your year. Another must have been your performance of Elliot Carter's music at a concert with the Krakow Philharmonic.

The Krakow Philharmonic's director called it a historic moment since it was the first performance of a piece by the doyen of American music after his death: four days prior to the concert, at the age of almost one hundred and four. This significant composer is not generally known in our country, his music is seldom heard at



concerts. Carter's 1987 Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra is perhaps the most demanding piece I have ever executed, a real tour de force. I was stretched to the very limits – and I have previously performed Rihm, Zimmermann, Schnittke, Lutoslawski... Carter's concerto, however, was even more difficult. It is a monolithic twenty-minute piece requiring enormous engagement, without providing any real chance to take a breath. It is the ultimate test of the musician's abilities. I'm able to deliver a number of the concertos I have performed again the next day, if I'm at the top of my game. Strauss, Martinů. Yet I can't say this about the Carter piece.

I very much doubt that many oboists have this concerto in their repertoire...

As far as I know, only two have probably performed it before me – Heinz Holliger, for whom the piece was written, and Britain's Nicholas Daniel. Unfortunately, I won't have the honour of playing it before the composer himself. Nevertheless, I would like to "branch out" with this work to the USA.

How did the performance in Krakow turn out?

Actually, it turned out well – I told myself that I'd done what I could, and now I will try to sell it. If I had fretted over it more, that would have been a manifestation of egoism, putting myself above the composition. That would have been a bad thing to do.

I'm pleased that they in Krakow selected the piece, since it's not always the case that the dramaturge or director displays such courage. The programme also included Charles Ives and, after the intermission, Górecki's symphony. That was something amazing. And both concerts were sold out.

How did the engagement come about?

The orchestra's chief conductor heard me at the 2001 Mahler Festival, where the Brno Philharmonic and I played the Fourth symphony, in which the oboe part

is exposed in a very interesting manner. After the concert, he told me that he would like to hear me playing solo. In anything. So we agreed upon the Carter piece. It was a great satisfaction for me.

After Carter, it can't be easy to find new challenges.

In general, I don't like using the word "challenge". I'd rather give preference to the word "path". Well, Bruno Maderna has three concertos for oboe and I'm interested in the third one. As regards the 20th-century classics, it will perhaps be one of the last great pieces left for me to explore and execute. But other compositions are coming to light – for instance, in 2005 Martin Hybler wrote a concerto for me. Another aim is to pinpoint an interesting foreign composer and have him write a piece tailored to me.

I've done a lot of work in the duo with Kateřina Englichová: we have prepared and performed concertos by Lutoslawski, Schnittke, Frank Martin, Isang Yun. And now we're about to explore Hans W. Henze's concerto.

Not all artists of your generation are as keen on the latest music. Why is it so alluring for you?

One of the reasons may be my nature. Yet if I want to present the oboe as a solo instrument equal to the piano or violin, I must arrive at the conclusion that comparison is only possible when I perform the most demanding scores – it is logical. We oboists do not have concertos from Brahms or Beethoven, our core repertoire begins with Richard Strauss's concerto, completed after World War II. Then we have works by Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Bohuslav Martinů. A number of top-class compositions originated owing to Heinz Holliger, in them the oboe also holds out as a purely solo instrument, alongside the regularly performed instrumental concertos.

It's a pity that the majority of interpreters of my generation still end with the Classicist-Romantic synthesis. How much would I have deprived myself of if I had ended with, say, Strauss!

Is this because the curriculum doesn't urge students to play contemporary music?

Some time ago, I led a seminar at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts solely focused on the performance issues of post-1950 music, or music of the present. The students were asked to explore Berio's *Sequenza* and, within the study of the seminal piece of the Italian great, advance somewhere. Yet they were so devoid of interest that I arrived at the conclusion that not one of them would warrant a credit in this subject. In my opinion, contemporary music should be part of Master's study; the student-player will never have more time to explore the most demanding opuses. Everyone should pass through it, end of story.

Besides occasional teaching, do you earn your living as a solo and chamber player?

I'm also engaged with the Brno Philharmonic. At the present time, however, I am taking a long holiday and will be actively resting. I'll be going to South America with a few friends. Our plan is to climb several 6,000-metre peaks, including the highest on the continent. Mountains and photography are the best escapes

for me. I would like to be a rounded musician and person, with the overlap at the personal level. Being a musician entails such a narrow focus that I'm worried I could end up a "Fachidiot".

Where do you see yourself being in ten years' time?

I consider it a great privilege that I have succeeded in recording and performing live demanding compositions. And hopefully this has served to raise the local standard. By no means do I want to become complacent, but I do feel the necessity to calm down. If explosion is to occur on stage, then those who aim to explode, make sparks fly, communicate, must reach a state of tranquillity. That will be my task, seeking equanimity. Accordingly, for the very first time in my life I will afford myself two months in a different rhythm, not just in the high mountains – that will be my springboard for taking a breather before going on to something else. At this juncture, the question arises of what to do next, where to proceed. I'm 35 years of age and I believe that this recording is the start of something new. The lone wolf within me will undoubtedly continue to dominate, other demanding projects should appear and I should be ready for them. And one such is already looming on the horizon: Jan Dismas Zelenka's complete sonatas. It is an idea that should be implemented with the participation of my colleagues from the Berliner Philharmoniker, including my teacher Dominik Wollenweber.

Where does your resolve to pursue the set objective come from?

Maybe I'm afraid of becoming stunted and therefore I set myself grand goals. Perhaps I'm rather naïve, but people should hold on to their dreams and not be overly pragmatic. If I were more pragmatic, I might be playing in the Czech Philharmonic or some German orchestra, yet I have chosen a different path, one more authentic from my current view. Simple things just don't interest me.

Vilém Veverka

one of the most acclaimed among the current crop of Czech musicians, studied at the Prague Conservatory and the Academy of Performing Arts, and also attended master classes given by the distinguished French oboist Jean-Louis Capezzali. A major role in his artistic development was played by his performing with the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester and subsequent study with the renowned German oboist Dominik Wollenweber at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin, which he followed up with two years of performing with the celebrated Berliner Philharmoniker (Karajan Stiftung). He won the prestigious Oboe Competition of Japan, organised by the Tokyo / Sony Music Foundation (2003). As a soloist, he has appeared with leading Czech (Prague Philharmonia, Brno Philharmonic, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra, etc.) and foreign orchestras (Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Bayerisches Kammerorchester, Budafok Orchestra Budapest, etc.). He has recorded and given Czech premieres of a number of demanding compositions of the second half of the 20th century (Bennet, Berio, Britten, Yun, Zimmermann, Rihm), including Marek Kopelent's concerto "A Few Minutes with an Oboist". Vilém Veverka is a soloist of the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra and a founding member of the Philharmonia Octet Prague. He also performs in a duo with the harpist Kateřina Englichová. He is single and childless.

JOHN CAGE AND NEW YORK IN CZECH HANDS

Alongside the John Cage 2012 festival in Washington DC, the **Beyond Cage festival (21 October – 7 November 2012) in **New York City** was undoubtedly the biggest project marking this year's double anniversary (1912–1992) of the era-defining composer and music reformer. The festival was initiated and organised by the Czech composer, conductor and flautist **Petr Kotík**, who has been living in New York State since 1969. Czech participation in the festival was robust indeed, yet the roots of this go far deeper than to the simple fact that a Czech stood at the birth of the entire project.**

These circumstances were elucidated by Jaroslav Šťastný's presentation, not the most conspicuous event within the festival yet one that clearly explained to the American audience why John Cage and his influence is of such major importance for Czech music. The presentation's theme was the visit John Cage and Merce Cunningham's dance company paid to Czechoslovakia back in 1964 within their European tour, between dates in Helsinki and Warsaw (Šťastný's presentation was also attended by David Vaughan, the manager of the tour, whose participation gave the discussion a truly authentic feel). Cage's works were performed in Czechoslovakia at a time when they were extremely topical, which, with regard to the existence of the Iron Curtain between the West and the East, was far from being common. John Cage left behind a distinct musical and personal footprint in our country and inspired a number of young Czech composers (see CMQ 1/2012).

These composers included Petr Kotík, who would later become Cage's collaborator and friend, as well as a long-time performer and champion of his work. And now he has added to his already significant Cage achievements a truly monumental item: the Beyond Cage festival, monumental if we take into consideration the immense quantity of labour, time and, in the long run, money too, that has gone into this project. The organisational team's work was especially admirable in light of the unforeseeable events that, although entirely in keeping with the Cagean spirit, made of the festival an adventure far greater than anyone could have imagined. New York was battered by Hurricane Sandy and for several days life in the city was paralysed. To make matters worse, the already difficult situation was further compounded two days prior to the end of the festival when a blizzard



PHOTO © BRADLEY BUEHRING, S.E.M. ENSEMBLE 4

The Orchestra of The S.E.M. Ensemble, Carnegie Hall

hit the city. Given these fraught circumstances, it almost beggars belief that not a single concert was cancelled and that everything went smoothly owing to organisational and programme changes, which, however, did not impact negatively the festival's course and level whatsoever. Sheer luck too played a role in this respect – the airports were closed for a long time, but the performers and guests, including the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra Ostrava, managed to land and depart in time, often taking the last or first non-cancelled flight. The largest concerts, which took place at Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall, didn't have to be relocated. Sadly, some people who had bought tickets didn't manage to get to some of the concerts owing to the shutdown of the public transport network, yet the festival's visit rate was still very good. Paradoxically, the most affected was the performance of Petr Kotík's composition *Many Many Women*, which had to be relocated from the Paula Cooper



Petr Kotík's Many Many Women

Gallery to The Invisible Dog Art Center and only featured a 150-minute fragment from the originally planned complete, almost six-hour-long performance. Unforeseen events, and extraordinary coincidences too, would accompany the festival till the very end. Two days prior to its conclusion, Elliott Carter, who also financially supported the project, died at the age of 103. At the last minute, the final concert was dedicated to Carter and, as planned, was rounded off by a performance of Cage's composition 103. Not even John Cage himself, towering over the proceedings even in his absence, could have come up with such a bizarre combination of haphazard coincidences.

The festival's performance basis was secured by the S.E.M. Ensemble and Ostravská banda, chamber orchestras focused on contemporary classical music. Both of them were founded by Petr Kotík, with the former based in New York, the latter in Ostrava, Czech Republic, and both of them are noted for high performance level and shifting line-ups. The S.E.M. Ensemble opened the festival on 21 October at Carnegie Hall, where they essentially replicated the legendary 1992 concert featuring in parallel John Cage's pieces *Atlas Eclipticalis* and *Winter Music*. At the time, the soloists were Ursula Oppens and the late David Tudor, who was replaced at the piano by the Cage connoisseur Joseph Kubera. On 4 November, at the Roulette theatre in Brooklyn, Kubera, together with Ostravská banda, also performed Cage's *Music of Changes* and *Concert for piano and orchestra*. At another concert, Ostravská banda, alongside the mezzo-soprano Katalin Károlyi, gave an outstanding account of Salvatore Sciarrino's dramatic scene *Infinito nero*. I had heard Sciarrino's composition in the same line-up this June in Ostrava, yet the performance given by the Ostrava ensemble at the Czech Centre in New York was simpler in scenic terms, with more attention consequently being drawn to the music itself and the singer's dramatic art.

A remarkable achievement was the participation of the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra Ostrava, which was significantly facilitated by support from the Ostrava City Council, above all its Mayor, Petr Kajnar. They primarily enriched the festival with their excellent delivery of orchestral works by Morton Feldman. The orchestra

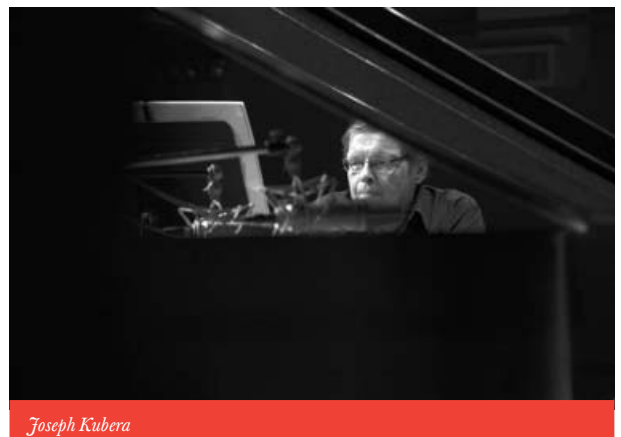
thus presented themselves in a major cultural centre as a symphonic ensemble capable of playing contemporary music in a special manner. The Czech violinist Hana Kotková and performance artist Lucie Vítková stood their ground at the festival too. Enthusiastic receptions were also garnered by the world premieres of the composition for solo saxophone *Red Flower On A Bamboo Pole*, performed by its creator, Roscoe Mitchell, and Christian Wolff's orchestral piece *individuals, collective*, attended by the composer himself.

Many women, views, and music galore (2 November 2012)

Despite its seeming simplicity, *Many Many Women*, to Gertrude Stein's text, is extremely complicated and difficult to play, with high demands being placed on the audience too. It is built on parallel fifths performed by three pairs of instrumentalists (flutes – trumpets – trombones) and three pairs of singers (sopranos – countertenor and tenor – baritone and bass).

The music is essentially tonal, yet the obstinately omitted third affords the listener scope for harmonic imagination and resists unambiguous harmonic interpretation. Each pair pursues their own line, which due to melodic design and parallel fifths evokes a plainchant, independently of the others, but it is not appropriate to imagine a common polyphonic structure. It rather takes the form of several seemingly independent currents, which meet up in “controlled associations”, and it is upon the listener to put together from this musical delta a river, which, all the branching out notwithstanding, makes up a single, compact stream. The composition contains a number of tiny melodic fragments, which keep reappearing in new connections, which is essentially a very classical, I would say Brahmsian, technique. The character of the music splendidly chimes with the text – familiar phrases and seemingly banal statements emerge in an increasing number of connections resulting from the association current without an explicit reference point. We know our whereabouts, yet we can turn the map in any arbitrary manner, the destinations (and the roads leading to them) are everywhere. The manifoldness of views of a single existence is juxtaposed with a single view of many existences.

The performance opened with a duet of baritone and bass a capella, gradually joined by pairs of flutes, trombones and another male voice duet. The music advanced by means of a sort of phase shifts, which create from familiar processes a new, thrilling world. The uncommon instrumentation is so well considered as to make it possible by



means of sparse media to cover the colour spectrum – the sound of the brass instruments is softened by the flutes – as well as the large tonal range, from the highest to very low registers. A surprising turn amid the current of fifths was the sporadically appearing unisons, and the moment when the unison of the sopranos wedged into the fifth of the flutes and created a minor triad came across as a bolt from the blue. Simple means in unexpected connections snatched the music out from its regular flow, which distantly evoked Minimalism.

Besides the octave, the fifth is perhaps the most sensitive interval when it comes to intonation. This very simple fact results in one of the fundamental technical difficulties of execution. I consider keeping the voice pairs in parallel fifths entirely clear throughout the performance practically impossible, and for this reason alone *Many Many Women* could be deemed an “infeasible” work, yet this only serves to increase its attractiveness and frisson. What’s more, each pair of voices is surrounded by the other pairs, has to react to and communicate with them, which further escalates the intonation difficulties, to say nothing of the complexity of the correct entrances within the current of infinite choral melodies.

The festival performers delivered the intricate piece with almost superhuman skill, errors were almost impossible to detect, especially in the instrumental part. All the instrumental pairs communicated with each other impeccably, chimed in terms of timbre and altogether created a compact yet transparent and variegated. As regards the pairs of singers, the performances of Patrick Fennig (countertenor) and Daniel Neer (tenor) were truly dazzling. The sopranos Lisa Bielawa and Michele Eaton were good too, with their duet only slightly inconsistent in the extremely high registers. Compared to the other singers and instrumentalists, however, Elliot Z. Levine (baritone) and Steven Hrycelak (bass) came across as rather vague, withering away somewhat in the performance as a whole.

Morton Feldman: grand orchestral works (5 November 2012)

The concert featuring Morton Feldman’s pieces was dominated by American premieres of two concertos (for flute and orchestra, and for violin and orchestra), which were preceded by a piano concerto and the orchestral *Structures*. It was a special and unique event both in artistic and social terms. The fact that the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra Ostrava, conducted by Petr Kotík, participated in it brought joy to a Czech heart.

Large symphony orchestras focused on conventional music are frequently rather like factories for churning out the Classicist-Romantic repertoire. Some of them produce cutting-edge technologies, others face basic technological problems, yet the principle remains the same – in this respect, there is no difference between the Wiener Philharmoniker and a regional orchestra. Making the members of such an ensemble attend passionately and with engagement to extremely unusual and difficult-to-perform music is a superhuman effort. More than a decade ago, Petr Kotík set out on this formidable task with the Janáček Philharmonic and this co-operation culminated in the concert they gave at the Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall – a beautiful venue next door to the Metropolitan Opera, the seat of the New York Philharmonic and Juilliard School.



The Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra's participation was not just "for appearance's sake", but inspirational and beneficial both for the festival and the orchestra themselves. It goes without saying that a large symphony orchestra cannot make ends meet by just performing the most progressive, recently created contemporary music but has to encompass the traditional repertoire. Yet the ability to deliver, masterfully, pieces by Cage, Brown or, in this case, Morton Feldman, makes it a truly exceptional ensemble. This is something so special as to make it possible to create from the orchestra's name a trademark, even on a global scale. Naturally, the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra simply cannot deprive their subscribers of Dvořák, Janáček or Mahler, but no one beyond Ostrava would ever remember them if they only performed the traditional repertoire.

Although the early Feldman piece *Structures* to a certain degree surpassed the festival programme, in dramaturgical terms it was good to hear this orchestral intermezzo between instrumental concertos. When it comes to his "concertante" compositions, Feldman is far-famed for having a singular approach to the solo instruments. It doesn't concern any showboating with an orchestral accompaniment – the soloist rather gives impulses to which the orchestra responds, with consonant intervals being frequently employed. A repeated note in an ambiguous rhythm is all of a sudden interlaid with a fourth, a short melodic passage returns to "incentive serenity". The music is – by New York School standards at least – classically restrained and lucid. The dynamics are delicate, primarily treading in low levels, with motifs and themes being identifiable.

All three performers delivered their parts with a profound understanding, absorption and discipline, and displayed great technical mastery to boot. The pianist Josef Kubera

– just as in the case of his recent performance of John Cage’s works – was superlative, as was the flautist Erin Lesser. Hana Kotková excelled in her concluding dialogue with the cello, which, among other things, highlighted just how powerful an expressive vehicle vibrato can be when applied with discretion. The Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as the supports from Ostravská banda and S.E.M. Ensemble, played immaculately, remained focused and didn’t slip up at any point. The audience listened to the demanding concert with rapt attention. In the final analysis, it was a tranquil and composed evening featuring wonderful and tender lyrical compositions.

Premieres in homage to Elliott Carter (7 November 2012)

The unexpectedly deceased Elliott Carter became the dedicatee of the Beyond Cage festival’s concluding concert. It kicked off with Petr Kotík and the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra Ostrava giving the world premiere of Christian Wolff’s *individuals, collective*, an extremely diverse, sophisticated, witty, as well as extremely demanding, composition. Wolff inquires more into the possibilities of interaction between individual instruments than between instrumental sections, with the collective of the orchestra really being perceived as a group of individual players communicating with each other in, for instance, twos or threes in a series of mutually corresponding motifs and themes. As regards the delivery, the Janáček Philharmonic didn’t play as masterfully as when performing Morton Feldman’s works. One of the reasons may have been the fact that Christian Wolff only finished his piece during the course of the festival and it was rehearsed at the last minute in New York, whereas the orchestra had no fewer than seventeen rehearsals for the Feldman. Yet I also had the impression that some of the musicians were not sufficiently focused and were less meticulous about the performance.

The next composition, *Accept*, presented in American premiere, was performed by its creator, the accordionist and performance artist Lucie Vítková (see also the interview on pp. 25–28), together with an orchestra extended by a rock percussion set. Vítková’s solo instrument and her voice send impulses that are developed by the orchestra, who serve as a sort of mediator between the accordion and the percussion, actively eavesdropping on their dialogue. The violins make themselves heard in extremely high electrifying pitches, the mechanics of the woodwind instruments clatter, yet all the sounds are de facto derived from the acoustic range of the accordion itself. The composition culminated in an improvised passage of the accordion and the percussion with the orchestra dropping out, with the piece thus acquiring the nature of a one-movement concerto with the final cadence.

The last item on the concert and the entire festival bill was John Cage’s composition *103* (the very first performance in New York) with a simultaneous projection of the film *One11*. The movie was only completed a week before Cage’s death, it was premiered twenty years ago in Germany, and here it was screened as the logical and reverent conclusion of the festival. The “audio track” of the orchestra was thus joined by an independent visual block, which in black-and-white pictures blends light and dark in innumerable intersections. The independence of the audio and visual components is fully in compliance with Cagean aesthetics; after all, the conductor’s role in the composition *103* is specific: he indicates the time intervals within which the given musical events should occur, but he doesn’t dictate them as such.

It would be going too far to claim that the Beyond Cage festival was the talk of New York, there’s simply too much going on in that great musical centre for that to have been the case. What is certain, however, is that, the calamitous weather conditions notwithstanding, it clearly stood out as an extraordinary item on the city’s amazingly diverse cultural menu.

IT HAD TO BE DONE... MUSICA NOVA 2012

This November, the 21st edition of the MUSICA NOVA international electro-acoustic music competition took place in Prague. It was entered by 107 composers from 22 countries; for the most part, musicians professionally trained at established universities and art schools. As a rule, the creators undergo lifelong education, since mastering computer technologies is the prerequisite for their work in this domain.



The competition jury

What “had to be done”? Last year, after evaluating the two decades of their activity, the members of the jury, independently from each other, arrived at the conclusion that composers tend to produce more “projects” and “experiments” than “works”. In other words, in most cases the jury perceived a lack of a sufficient artistic reflection of inner links: WHY / ABOUT WHAT / HOW... I don’t, however, consider us to be a bunch of fogeys who have no idea of what’s going on, unaware that a “work” can have an open-ended concept. I set the “FOR WHOM” to one side since, especially of late, when artistic activity in the European Union has been incorporated into the so-called cultural services, it is necessary to accentuate the discourse at whose centre lies freedom and individuality and its right to express itself irrespective of what is expected from the audience and public-money distributors, without whom, at least in part, a minority creative discipline cannot cope. The other side of the freedom coin, however, is responsibility. And this is one of the things we bear in mind: that creators should weigh up the gift of freedom carefully and reflect on their works before sending them into the “public space”, which is clogged up with information and artistic deadwood. We are aware of the fact that contemporary creation necessar-

ily contains “material” yet to be filtered by time; hence, much more low-quality stuff than in the repertoire refined by history. In this respect, the audience should not be deceived, otherwise we will completely lose their confidence.

Yet history is not a trustworthy filter in this sense either, as Michel Foucault wrote in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Even remarkable works can fall into oblivion, mostly by reason of the fact that they have not found enough support within the social context of institutions, media, or simply “random” interest on the part of a “random fool”, who hasn’t let himself succumb to the ruling stereotypes of perception and evaluation. And this is where our responsibility rests too, in shared responsibility, as those forming the opportunity, financial incentive (albeit quite low), expert evaluation, as well as the entry in the public exchange. Accordingly, we decided to slightly predetermine the shape of this year’s competition by the word “rhythm”, which we didn’t mean anyhow trivially. We simply wanted to draw the attention of the creators to the form, temporality, which in the case of electro-acoustic music can acquire truly varied semblances, particularly within acousmatic music, working with moulding of the acoustic space.

The members of the jury, the majority of whom have long-time pedagogic experience and are also familiar with the situation abroad, have reached the consensus that it does make sense to stimulate aesthetic reflection in education through competitions. At the majority of schools, teachers focus on familiarisation with the functions of new technologies and software, mastering them, and to a much lesser extent deal with aesthetic and philosophical aspects, often with the explanation that “this cannot be taught at school”. In addition, students frequently earn their living through performing commissions in which they can refine creations yet do not have sufficient time for their ripening.

After 1990, we didn't want to direct the competition in any respect, only in the sense that we declared that we were interested in top-quality sound artistic works and that we didn't aim to overly generalise the task by extending it to encompass multimedia creations, since we would have to evaluate material often incomparable, too variable in terms of configuration of its functions. Now, however, this doesn't seem sufficient to us, and, in the wake of the experience with giving a theme to this year's competition, we would like to continue in this direction. Not by furnishing specific themes, as is the case of some international competitions, especially in radioart (e.g. the theme of sport, etc.), but more generally, so as to give rise to deliberations about the possibilities of shaping the sound, its specificity. Moreover, we assume that the aural/sound phenomenology – the ability of the composers, performers and audience to discover sounds, their meaning, the linkage of sound to form, structure and space – has to be retained. Hearing is a sense anthropologically essential for our safety and orientation. By means of the ear, we perceive in a 360-degree range, and we also hear that which precedes an action. Hearing is the first sense that humans evolve in the womb, and the last one to die off. Furthermore, it has a crucial significance for conveying semantic and emotional nuances within interpersonal communication. And this hasn't changed an iota, even in light of the culture's current gravitating towards the visual. Just recall how we feel during a power cut, or when we find ourselves in a strange milieu and get to know that which we have neglected. In this regard, the tradition of *musique concrète* pursued in acoustic music has an inexhaustible task to fulfil. At a seminar with teachers, I found out that they really enjoy “sound hunting” at the moment when the listener is lent a hand, told “how to approach it”, when he/she is provided with instructions as to how to listen, and how relatively easy it is to work with sounds.



Reinhold Westerheide

How, then, has this year's competition turned out? The thematic requirement, which was by no means rigid, i.e. in the sense that the jury wouldn't categorically reject a piece for failing to meet it, was responded to by approximately 30% of the participants. The majority of the composers simply reached for that which they already had at hand, and in their comments highlighted what we wanted to hear (a common reaction not only of musicians). A small proportion of them evidently only skimmed the propositions or acted up to the experience from previous years and didn't read them at all. This notwithstanding, there was enough to choose from. The winner of Category A, purely electro-acoustic music, the young Greek Orestis Karamanlis, worked in his composition *Toys* with rhythm at several levels – not only in the linear temporality but also by creating various spatial events. The experienced Canadian Francis Dhomont worked in his piece *Machin de Machine* with Conlon Nancarrow's polyrhythmic model. Another finalist, Canada's Guillaume Campion, linked a philosophical text about the symbol of the “tree” in spiritual concepts with the form of the tree in sonic implementation too. Chile's Felipe Otondo employed microrhythms of Javanese music in the composition *Irama* (*Irama* is the time interval between two successive sounds or actions). Belgium's Stijn Bovaere worked with the rhythmic complexity of acoustic “clouds” of biological actions (sounds emitted by insects) in his piece *Éntomon*. Italy's Ricardo Mandolini combined magic and dance in the piece *La danza de las sombras*. First prize in the category with a live instrument (in this case guitar) went to the outstanding Dutch musician Roderik de Man for the composition *Music for Maverick*. His method of working with sound is an intersection of the specific dispositions of the instrument, player and the potential of the given theme. His works are always unique, breathing with life and action-packed. Taiwan's Yu Chung Tseng, in his *Fantasy* for alto flute and interactive electronics, works in a manner quite typical of Asians – prolongation of individual sound events



Orestis Karamanlis



Roderik de Man



Peter Graham

to the absolute limit of performance possibilities and our perception capacity. Germany's Hans Tutschku, in his *Behind the Light* for string quartet, composes by means of demanding synchronisation of independent brief sound events in the quartet and their "shadow" (electronics).

As can be seen, the "rhythm"/"temporality" proposition was taken up in a creative and diverse manner. It showed that primarily experienced composers truly held their own.

We would like to keep formulating the competition's mission in a way that would not only serve for presentation of "that which is" but also compel us to think more about what we create, and why. Perhaps we will also be more inspiring and convincing for the audience and other creative disciplines. Part of the work will evidently entail the necessity to teach the potential audience how to "hear". The task for next year is "organic". It is similar to this year's specification, yet with a certain shift (ecological, organic/inorganic, order/chaos, etc.). Well, we will hear what the contestants do with this concept.

MUSICA NOVA 2012

From 9 to 11 November 2012 the international jury, made up of Rudolf Růžička (Czech Republic), chairman; Lenka Dohnalová (Czech Republic), the competition's manager; Rainer Buerck (Germany), Juraj Ďuriš (Slovakia), Pavel Kopecký (Czech Republic), Michal Košut (Czech Republic) and Peter Nelson (UK), evaluated 107 compositions by creators from 22 countries, the bulk of them countries with the tradition of this type of music – Italy, USA, UK, Canada, Germany, Czech Republic, Japan.

The category of purely electro-acoustic music (A) included 71 compositions, 11 of which progressed to the final. Orestis Karamanlis (Greece) came first with the composition *Toys*; honourable mentions went

to the French-Canadian Francis Dhomont for *Machin de Machine*, the Canadian Robert Normandeau for the piece *La part des anges* and the Chilean Felipe Otondo for the composition *Irama*. The other finalists in Category A were: Guillaume Campion (Canada) for the composition *Arboreal*, Lee Fraser (UK) for his *Pteron*, Stijn Govaere (Belgium) for the composition *Éntomon*, Konstantinos Karathanasis (Greece) with *Violins of Summer*, Ricardo Mandolini (Italy) with *La danza de las sombras*, and Hans Tutschku (Germany) with *Klaviersammlung*.

The category of electro-acoustic music combined with an acoustic live component (B) was participated in by 36 composers. Roderik de Man (Netherlands), last year's winner, came first with the piece *Music for Maverick* for guitar and electronics; honourable mentions went to Yu Chung Tseng (Taiwan) for the composition *Fantasy* for alto flute and live interactive electronics and Hans Tutschku (Germany) for the composition for string quartet and electronics *Behind the Light*. The other finalists in Category B were: João Pedro Oliveira (Portugal) for the composition *Intersections* for violoncello, percussion and electronics and Carlos Perales (Spain) with 17 haiku for flute and tape.

In the special Czech round, whose aim it is to motivate domestic creation, two composers received awards: Peter Graham with *Soft Morning City* and Libor Ščerba with *Myrai of Magdala on Golgotha*.

The competition is organised by the Electro-Acoustic Music Society in collaboration with the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and Czech Radio, under the auspices of the Czech Music Council. It was financially supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, Prague City Council and the OSA Foundation. The laureates' concert took place on 14 December 2012 at the Divadlo Inspirace theatre in Prague. For more information, visit: <http://musicanova.seah.cz>.

MUSIC LABELLED MITTELOSTEUROPA



In the middle of December, the **Woher? Wohin? Mythen, Nation, Identitäten in Mitteleuropa** project culminated within Munich's Musica Viva festival. It was intended for composers up to the age of 38 hailing from Central and Eastern European countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic) and its subject was a commission for a new composition for **Ensemble Modern**, reflecting in some way the theme expressed in the project's title. The initiator and main organiser of the event was the **Goethe-Institut**, primarily its Prague branch.



Peter Eötvös conducting the Ensemble Modern

The eight composers who received the commission had passed through a rigorous selection process. Several artists from each country were shortlisted on the basis of a nomination by a renowned musical figure in the respective state. In the Czech Republic, this task was entrusted to the composer Martin Smolka. Subsequently, in May 2011, thirty selected composers got together at a several-day “gathering” with Ensemble Modern at their Frankfurt base. There, the candidates prepared with the ensemble one of their compositions for preliminary performance, presented their previous work and outlined their version of the musical grasping of the thematic task. A jury made up of representatives of the Goethe-Institut, Ensemble Modern and other experts ultimately selected eight finalists from this group. The composers shortlisted from the Czech Republic included Michal Nežtek (1977), Tomáš Pálka (1978) and František Chaloupka (1981), with the latter ultimately progressing. It is refreshing that the final selection (eight countries, theoretically one from each country) evidently wasn’t subject to national quotas: whereas none of the Slovak, Estonian and Lithuanian candidates overly impressed the jury, Latvia was represented by three and Slovenia by two composers. The entire project is conceived in a truly broadminded spirit, a laudable fact. The organisers didn’t take the cautious, considerably cheaper path of the type “to young fledgling composers a young fledgling ensemble with a young fledgling conductor at a young fledgling festival”, with the very opposite being the case. Within its category of ensembles specialised in contemporary music, Ensemble Modern is a legend and without doubt premier league, and the same applies to the conductor Peter Eötvös. Musica Viva, held by Bavarian Radio, has a long tradition as one of the most significant new music festivals with an international renown. What’s more, the two premiere concerts, which took place on 11 and 12 December 2012 at Munich’s Muffathalle (the second concert was, in co-operation with Bavarian Radio, broadcast live by Czech Radio 3 – Vltava), are scheduled to be repeated on several occasions next year in other countries too, for instance, at the Warsaw Autumn festival. In other words, if a composer is afforded the opportunity to showcase his/her works under these conditions, that really is quite a big deal. Yet there’s a certain rub to it.



If I am to evaluate the concerts somehow, I find that whatever way I view the matter, I still end up with the submitted theme of nations, myths and identities. And this strikes me as doubly problematic: at the level of the very principle itself, where music is required to be “about something”, and at the level of the specific factual content and its implications. Take my objections as the reflection of a certain opinion, which I certainly don’t consider the only possible one, but, for many reasons, I deem it necessary to voice and defend them.

The trouble with all the views of music that ask “what does it state” and “what socio-cultural circumstances does it result from” is, it appears to me, the same, be it within musical semiotics or musical gender studies, or anything else: the problem doesn’t rest in the fact that these approaches do not work or have a low value of utterance, the pitfall is that the more mediocre the music to which we apply them, the more functional and possessing the higher value of utterance they are (this may be true in other arts, yet it is especially impactful in music). It’s everyone’s right to scrutinise anything at will. Unfortunately though, the described snag also usually analogically manifests itself at the moment when such categories (semantic, anthropological, social...) are used *ante res* in an active role, as a curatorial starting point: projects calling for music “on the given theme” tend to allure and give preference to, if not downright mediocre composers, then at least mediocre “solutions”, which means that their outcome is not usually good compositions. In this case too, Hanslick’s barrel-organ sang the same song for the millionth time and the Goethe-Institut’s project one again required from music something different to that which it is built for. The result, alas, is foreseeable: the composers either wrote what they would have written “for themselves” anyway, only serving up their pieces with a befitting “sauce” (the title and commentary), or, striving to comply with the task, furnished their music with an explicit “content” by means of a text, theatrical action, props. If we set strict criteria (and there is no good reason for not doing so at this interpretational and festival level), then we have to note that in musical terms none of the eight compositions was markedly original and in any respect distinctly surpassing the common

standard of how new music “should be done”. On the contrary, it was startling how similar the pieces by all the composers, if we look beyond the added flavours of the “content”, were to each other – good-mannered, nice and, many a time, unpleasantly “jeune”.

The first (“sauce only”) group included the composition *Mašín Gun* by the Czech Republic’s **František Chaloupka**. I am familiar with his music, hence I know that even though this time new-age inspirations in titles were replaced by a machine-gun it was still typical Chaloupka at his best and his piece was, at least in sonic terms, the most singular of all the works presented. Yet I was left with the feeling that it finished earlier than it really started, as though at the beginning it promised more than it went on to actually deliver. The other pieces that appeared to me as belonging to this group were those by **Paweł Hendrich** (Poland), **Judit Varga** (Hungary), **Matej**

Bonin (Slovenia) and **Janis Petraškevičs** (Latvia). Hendrich’s composition struck me as featureless and a rather gauche attempt at contemporary hi-tech music. Bonin’s was a much better mastered hi-tech, yet unfortunately still within the bounds of common conventions – avant-garde, to please the professor. As for Petraškevičs’s gentle *Darkroom*, I would really like to listen to it again; in my opinion, placing it at the very end of the second concert did it no good. And I would also return to Judit Varga’s *Entitas*. The second (“with content”) group of composers took a perhaps more honest path vis-a-vis the task submitters, yet all of them failed. **Nina Šenk** (Slovenia) had the percussionist David Haller declaim extracts of various texts and quotations dealing with the fact that everything in Slovenia is going to the dogs. That which is endurable on paper turned through theatrical declamation into a rather tasteless pontifical flagellation of the type “you see how critical I am towards my nation, come and drown your sorrows with me during the intermission”. As for the embarrassing, wishy-washy, rather puerile spectacle to which the musicians were compelled by **Kristaps Pētersons** and **Andris Dzenītis** (both Latvia), the less said the better. You really don’t need Ensemble Modern to do such a thing, and



the composers are lucky that its members approached the matter as true professionals. Leaving aside the declamation, in musical terms Nina Šenk's piece was at a reasonable professional level (but nothing more), yet in the case of Pētersons's the sheer theatricality shrouded the music itself and I am unable to say anything about it, while Dzenītis's music was simply substandard.

A remark in conclusion: I'm not sure that I'd have been able to discern it anyway, but I find it interesting that given the thematic demarcation no one took the path of *music about music* – something along the lines of, say, a remix of a famous national composer, preferably a Romantic one, or, on the contrary, a similarly subversive take on some hideous pseudo-modern music from the Communist era.

That's it as regards my personal impressions of the music presented within the project. However, the entire matter has yet another, dare I say political, aspect. This is something I really don't feel like embarking upon, but I wasn't the one who opened this particular can of worms. At this juncture, I again stress that which has been said above: the Goethe-Institut and the other institutions concerned (in addition to the mentioned Ensemble Modern and Bavarian Radio, the BHF-Bank-Stiftung) deserve plaudits, since it is by no means a matter of course to plunge into such a thing, let alone at such a level and in such dimensions. Moreover, it is evident that if you want to implement a project as large and expensive as this one, you must come up with a comprehensible "substantiation", you must make the project graspable to everyone you ask to fund it. Sad, but true, since if an institution is to lay out cash on the arts, it must have a good reason for doing so (and a safety net for the event that it doesn't turn out well in artistic terms), a clearly verbalised public-benefit veneer. An alibi, to put it bluntly. Today, supporting art for art's sake is perhaps merely the preserve of enlightened individuals. I am fully aware of all this, nevertheless – as someone born and bred in the Mittelosteuropa region (crudely put: "west of Vienna, but still the Russian shambles") – I cannot get rid of a rather bitter taste in my mouth. From a certain vantage point, the whole exercise somewhat resembles an outlet for the wildlife from the Eastern woods. Yes, we will lend you Ensemble Modern and take very good care of you, but please bring along one of those fetching national costumes. Having access to a superlative ensemble with a superlative conductor, working in maximalist conditions and subsequently presenting your music within the context of a prestigious festival

is the dream of every composer. In countries where art couldn't evolve in free conditions and in free communication with the world (i.e. amidst the Russian shambles), this dream is still much further away than in, for instance, Germany, while this incomparableness of opportunities somehow applies, I dare say, to artists on both sides "across the qualitative spectrum".

The Goethe-Institut's project is of the wonderful gesture variety, whereby one country offers its (cultural) wealth to artists from other countries, although it already has more than enough artists of its own. In this case, it does so even though it knows very well that it cannot expect a reciprocal gesture at the same level. It does so, among other things, because it views the addressees of its gesture primarily as artistic individualities, and doesn't tar them with the same brush as the nation that is itself to blame for its lesser (cultural) wealth, that is itself to blame for its inability to raise artistic education to a certain level, that is itself to blame for its inability to get the fruits of its culture into the international consciousness, etc., and that may not even be overly interested in the culture of the country from which the gesture has come. Try as I may, I still cannot shake off the feeling that this very gesture of cultural generosity has somewhat tied itself in a knot when it comes to "artistic individuality". It's as though there were a genuine will to afford a once-in-a-lifetime chance to a few representatives of the up-and-coming generation of composers from countries in which the music scene functions in far more modest conditions (and where even a good work is in danger, through no fault of its creator, of remaining unnoticed by the world), but not so much the will to present the respective composers such as they are and merely by means of their work.



As though the pragmatic grant criterion based on an irreversible past (born in Mittelosteuropa, and “therefore” addressed now) had to be transformed into a groundless artistic limitation, postulating the presumable present and pointed towards the future (you are Mittelosteuropa, and your composition will have to be about it). Was it really not enough to remain with the regionally-based selection? Did the selected composers (whom the jury chose on the basis of assessing the quality of their work hitherto!) really have to bear the shackles of nationality, myths and identity, even though they would much rather have left them at home, preferring instead for their music to be perceived for itself, simply within the context of music as such, not within the context of some national stereotypes? Did they really have to be forced to wrestle with a task that in advance ranks them in a certain category, one which inevitably deforms their work and handicaps them in competition with other artists? Did they have to bow down to a conception that is peripheral, subsidiary towards artistic work, a conception that at the level of the “theme to treat” is, in addition, incompatible with music? Could they not simply, once, for whatever reason, having been given the chance, write their new composition for the splendid Ensemble Modern as best as they could? Just as anyone else would have done, for instance a German composer, who would be considered by someone (anyone) as deserving of being given such a chance?

Sure, the composers weren’t forced to participate by anyone, the rules of the game were clear in advance, and that which I myself deem problematic in principle may not have been construed as such by any of the composers taking part (to be honest, I would have found it tasteless to ask about it). Be that as it may. Yet it is somehow impossible to overlook

the fact that the majority of the composers in all probability made music “as usual” anyway, only serving it up with the befitting sauce (try to prove that this is not so, and try to marvel at them). And that this “as usual” was by and large the interchangeable lingua franca of contemporary music, used by, for instance, the overwhelming majority of young composers hailing from countries to the west of Mittelosteuropa (is it the result of the jury’s aesthetic preferences, or was there nothing else to be had?). And that, without exception, wherever the sauce smothered the composition itself (Šenk, Dzenitis, Pētersons), the composer made a complete fool of himself/herself, as well as of the poor musicians, but nothing more. This is indicative of at least the redundancy of the thematic task. Not that music could not predicate of nationality, myths and identities – this, in a summation of artefacts, it certainly can, but it is perhaps impossible to expect it to happen when we strive after it too hard, à la thèse, upon command, while someone waits. We can speculate that although an artist at the beginning of his/her career finds it really difficult to turn down an offer of this type (“I’m not taken with the theme, but I’ll see what I can come up with; the pros do outweigh the cons, so I might as well go for it”), but what if it were turned down by someone who creates music that stands out from the crowd, someone possessing a true individuality? Wouldn’t that be a pity? There is, I think, one tried-and-tested path of how to be a successful benefactor: choose well a person according to what he/she does, what he/she wants and what he/she is best at, and then let him/her get on with it. Granted, nothing can ever be guaranteed, yet this path does lead to good results (and thus to at least a moral valorisation of the money laid out) more often than other paths.

This is not, I repeat, easy for me to write. Are we to criticise a German institution for giving us its

money *in the wrong way* (especially in light of the fact that it has done so hundreds of times previously *in the right way*)? That it *not entirely ideally* compensates for the fact that our local institutions and political representation (I speak on behalf of the Czech Republic) are totally incapable of systematically and competently exporting the national culture? That it set *somewhat unfortunately* the parameters of a project an analogy of which our own country, addressed among the others, has to date failed to conceive even in the slightest, a project that is otherwise absolutely positive? That Austria, with an even smaller population, has about fivefold the number of excellent composers the Czech Republic possesses and that their music interests European ensembles and festivals in its own right, simply because it's good? That owing to my failing to pay attention at school I'm unable to understand fully the German accompanying texts by Björn Gottstein and others in the programme notes, which, albeit from a different viewpoint but definitely with some legitimacy, see my negatives in a positive light?

Tabooing the matter, however, would be even worse. The canon of the history of modern art and, consequently, the aesthetic canon of the present time too, has been written by the Western world, a world with a long tradition of artistic freedom. This is a well-known fact and there are evidently many reasons for it being so (to put it cynically: who would relish spending a weekend reading a novel whose author couldn't write what he/she wanted to write, when you can read a novel by an author who could?). Many reasons, but not all – for example, the art of the former Soviet bloc is really sometimes unnecessarily ignored and marginalised within the context of Euro-American culture, and to a somewhat greater extent than “we ourselves can be blamed for” (and there indeed is a lot, starting with low quality and sheer provinciality). There's no point making too big a deal of it (and by no means should we seek any conspiracies in it, there are arts galore and dispensing with another is the easiest thing in the world), and we can find thousands of exceptions. Yet nor is there any point in pretending that it's not happening. As has been said, projects of the *Mythen, Nation, Identitäten* type can in the sense

of a sort of positive discrimination (yes, I can hear your groans, and I agree with you entirely) advance things a little for the better, but I'm not quite certain as to the result in this particular case.

The whole matter is too delicate and thorny to be subject to criticism in the true sense of the word. As far as I know, the issue occasionally rises to the surface in Germany itself – some of the composers from the former German Democratic Republic (that's right, this part of Mitteleuropa wasn't included in the project) are convinced that their access to big and prestigious German festivals isn't equal to that of their Western colleagues. This can always be responded to by saying that the only reason is that their music isn't up to scratch – and this may be true in nine out of ten cases. Or is it one out of five, or forty-nine out of fifty? And how many superb “west-German” musicians are overlooked, simply because the world of art isn't “fair” anywhere? Who knows? A matter too delicate, too thorny and above all – given its substance – unresolvable. Nevertheless, I think that the project's entire context, with all its desired overreach beyond music itself, warrants that something like this be voiced as part of the debate, even though it is politically incorrect and, perhaps, even rather tasteless.

And the moral of the story? Twofold and nowise groundbreaking. For composers “from the East”: if you want to write your music for musicians of the calibre of Ensemble Modern and a festival of the calibre of Munich's *Musica Viva just for the sake of it*, bear in mind that you've got to be far more engrossing – and those of you who are, perhaps more patient too.

And for the other, “Western”, party: if you really want to learn something about those national myths and identities and what not, simply play more music from the Eastern woods. Not only that which reminds you of something you already know, and not as a part of a project, but *just for the sake of it*.

TURNING SEWING PATTERNS INTO MUSIC LUCIE VÍTKOVÁ

Lucie Vítková belongs to a generation who have become increasingly visible in recent years. Besides attending composition classes and courses with distinguished composers – the standard shaping processes composers pass through – she has been gaining experience with improvisation and working with various media. Her music can be implemented in orchestral sound, as well as within a project entered into through Skype chat software.



Alongside pieces by Morton Feldman and Petr Kotík, the opening concert of last year's Ostrava New Music Days featured Lucie Vítková's composition *Akcept* (it was recently presented again within the Beyond Cage festival in New York, see the article on pp. 8–14). Now and then, the dense orchestral fabric was pervaded by the wordless vocals of the composer, who was sitting with her accordion in front of the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra. After about fifteen minutes, the whole orchestra fell silent and all the attention focused on the accordion accompanied by a percussion set, whose gradating dialogue led the piece up to the finale. At the same festival, Vítková also introduced herself in a different role, when she and the designer Pavel Korbička played their joint work *Acoustic Painting* in the foyer of Ostrava's House of Culture. By her movements she extracted a wide spectrum of noises from amplified ropes arranged into a geometrical net.

Lucie Vítková studied the accordion at the Brno Conservatory and composition with Pavel Zemek Novák. She subsequently continued to hone her skills with Martin Smolka at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts, where she also began devoting to improvisation under the tutelage of Jaroslav Štátný. Her music ranges from grand orchestral sound to concentrated exploration of the cimbalom with a string, from the chamber composition *Silent Songs*, which truly does credit to its title, to the dynamic piece *4 + 2* for a group of trombones and tubas. In addition to composing, she likes to improvise in various configurations and produce creations straddling the borders of musical and visual arts. For next year's Exposition of New Music festival in Brno, she – again in tandem with Pavel Korbička – is preparing an installation in a greenhouse in the local botanical gardens.

We journalists feel the need to pigeonhole everything: minimalism, spectralism, post-this, neo-that... Sometimes we clutch at the compositional method, at others the characteristic sound. Is it possible to pinpoint any feature connecting your compositions?

My compositions and compositional approach change in dependence on how I develop. You are always at the beginning with every new composition, some elements get settled, others have always been there. In my music, I interconnect numerous aspects – in addition to the musical aspects and aesthetic taste, my pieces also reflect social aspects, such as the composer's personality versus the performer's personality, relationships between the ensemble members, individual versus collective, objectivity versus subjectivity, the relation to the particular instrument, as well as philosophy and science.

My music is affected by plenty of "extra-musical" things (but it's hard to define "extra-musical"). Last year, I occupied myself with translating sewing patterns into music, which resulted in such compositions as *Coat* for ensemble and *Shirt* for harp, oboe and accordion. I was primarily interested in the issues of shaping the musical material and comparing physical objects, such as patterns and fabric, and music as an abstract entity, scoring the process in music, and how the process of creating a composition and sonification actually draws attention to the similar, common structure of everything we know and do. I always have the feeling that I'm working on something new, yet then I look back at my older pieces and find that it has been there previously, only now I perceive it more, and make it more specific, plunge deeper into the problem, or am able to express it better, with a greater awareness of the matter. Of late, I have considerably connected the idea of cognisance with discovering and describing intuition.

Does the transferring of extra-musical stimuli into music notation and sounds take place more at the level of feeling, or do you seek a rational pathway from one to the other? So as to form a specific relation between music and sewing patterns (the number of fibres translated into the number of notes, etc.), or to make the music evoke the same sensation as that generated by the design?

My compositional work mostly reflects both the levels of feeling and reason. My mum used patterns when she sewed clothes for me and my sisters, hence, it is definitely linked with the emotional level and my history, when I acquired a relationship to such

things, but also the subliminal level, with the political history and situation of the country (the materials date from 1989). From these initial stimuli and inspirations, I proceed to practical implementation, striving to interpret the pattern as precisely as possible. I translate individual sizes to time data, thus giving rise to the rhythm and duration of the composition or individual parts, while the shapes and directions of lines are translated into tempos. The material with which I fill this form, this frame, is derived from my musical taste and from the performer's possibilities. On stage, we can then observe a sonic object, which is static yet permanently transforms. My objective is to create music that is not linear but, as it were, three-dimensional.

Many people may find it difficult to imagine what form studying improvisation can take. What was it like with Jaroslav Stastný?

I best remember my first lesson, when he dropped a hint in the sense that tapping stones was better than many a Bach composition. His remark appalled me, but I was compelled to think it over and three hours later, back in his study, I asked what he meant by it. I attended his lessons regularly and only fully understood what he had said at that first lesson a few years later. Now, in retrospect, I realise that one comes out of the conservatory pretty much influenced by traditional approaches and with set musical values. During Jaroslav's lessons, I gradually built up a new, more profound relationship to my instrument (the accordion) and to music itself, which all of a sudden I comprehended and felt much more and it made much greater sense to me. The approaches I took up then manifested themselves in my compositions too. The lessons differed. Sometimes we played, sometimes did various improvisation exercises, had debates, commented on that which had just happened, tried to describe our experience of music and sound.

What, in your case, is the relation to the two areas – composition and improvisation?

Previously, they really blended together: I used to say that improvising is composing live. I still think it is true; although today I view it somewhat differently, it is the same idea. People themselves are actually compositions, and that which they do is a process – composing, there is no happenstance, everything is chaos. But what exactly is chaos? An extremely complicated structure, which pretends to be acciden-



tal, can be perceived as being accidental, but has its precise order, which is extremely complex and hard to discern with our perception. Improvisation is a reflection of the composition of the body and mind of the improviser, who is concurrently a composer and a composition. Improvisation is also affected by other aspects, such as the specific place of performance, the human eye, acoustics, the weather, mood, simply everything that normally affects you can reflect in a composition, created through improvisation, in music. For the most part, the improviser is

extremely sensitive and, if good, we have a chance to recognise and hear all this in his/her music.

***Do you write music by hand or in a computer editor?
Does this part of the composing process have any significance for you, or is it just a capturing of that which has already formed in your head?***

It varies, depending on the individual scores. In the course of my development, I have arrived at three types of scores through which I can express myself

musically – traditional notation, graphic scores and textual scores. Each type has a somewhat different expressiveness and with each type the working process and thinking are different. Previously, I used to write a lot of traditional scores in the Finale engraving program. In the case of the other types of scores, I use MS Excel, Word, graphic editors. At the present time, my work with the computer is preceded by work with real materials. I use tracing paper, ballpoints, pens, pencils, a ruler and a calculator. As regards my compositional process, when something crosses my mind I usually jot it down – mostly a text on the idea – so I have plenty of notes to refer to. Then the idea ripens in my head and I think of how best to express it, what is the closest to the music. I lock myself away and get down to the implementation. The time it actually takes depends on the composition's scope or the difficulty of the notation.

Do you leave scope for the performers to decide about some of the composition's parameters, or do you strive to give them as precise instructions as possible?

The performers are provided with freedom, within my precise instructions! In most cases, I also require an input from the players, who, however, have precise instructions as to what to give of themselves. I want my compositions to be transformed by various interpreters, thus becoming more personal. What I aim at is to see on stage the relation between the performers and the instruments (for instance, their favourite tones), their abilities (e.g. the highest and lowest tones), their personality and taste against the grain of the composer. The parameters are mostly given in such a manner that the composition's nature remains the same, distinguishable, although nuances change with every new performance. But don't think that this is anyhow special; I draw upon this concept and concentrate on it, therefore it is more perceptible, yet in general every composition transforms with a new performance, or with new performers.

The accordion is an instrument whose sound evokes quite strong associations in the majority of people. Folk, pub songs... Similarly burdened is the cimbalom, for which you have written the piece 3 Meditation Stones. Do you work with this "associative burden", or do you go against it?

The latter. I feel more like a warrior for a new perception of the accordion, an instrument possessing many more possibilities than those ascribed to it. I have

mostly ignored folk music and through my playing rather promoted the Baroque repertoire, contemporary and experimental music. I only faced up to Czech folk music two years ago, when I was working with Jolana Havelková and played from remade František Kmoch scores [The *Proposal for Altered Score* project was on display at Školská 28, Prague, editor's note.]. In terms of history, I respect this period, yet today's accordion is somewhere else, and this should be borne in mind.

When it comes to the cimbalom, I find the situation somewhat different. If we call it a folk instrument, it sounds positive, whereas in the case of the accordion, it appears rather derogatory to me. In the piece *3 Meditation Stones for Cimbalom*, I didn't draw upon the folk tradition, but more upon the instrument itself, its tuning and possibilities.

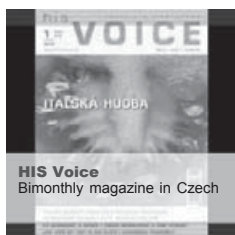
As regards the Proposal for Altered Score, did you draw directly upon the graphically modified score or did you also respond to Kmoch's original music?

The scores had already been remade by Jolana, but, as for the theme, I read about Kmoch's history and his work so as to gain some insight into that which preceded him and then, bearing this new knowledge in mind, I approached the scores. It wasn't just about playing new scores; I also saw something behind them.

In other works you have also set out for areas in which music encounters visual art and space. How does it benefit you?

A lot. I think it can be heard in my compositions and improvisation. Working with space, acoustics. Making music visible and images audible (this theme also occurs in the Acoustic Paintings and Medialogue projects, carried out with Pavel Korbička). But now we have come full circle, back to when I was talking about physical and abstract objects.

It seems to me that if we can both see and hear an object we attain a greater insight, since we perceive the structure in a number of senses. Since I have learned how to perceive the world through the ears, I need to hear everything. I have the tendency to transpose firmly established systems and their rhythm (such as, for instance, the sewing patterns, embroidery patterns, etc.), which have been among the people for a long time and are part of the civilisation, into sound, listen to them and thus better understand them. Initially, these systems are intuitive, and by translating them I get to a common feature of them all.



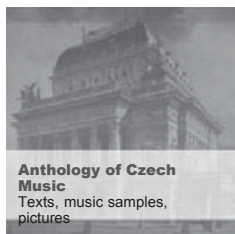
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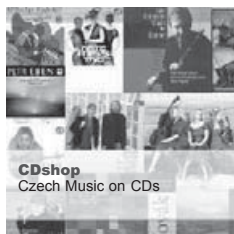
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News

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



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Ivan Polednak, Musicologist and

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

Bohuslav Martinů Revisited 2009

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

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Josef Suk in Riga

by Jonáš Hájek

To scorn authorities skeptically?
Mr. Dvořák has lost a word for me
& Mr. Wihan leaves us room enough
for work. Playing my quartet here

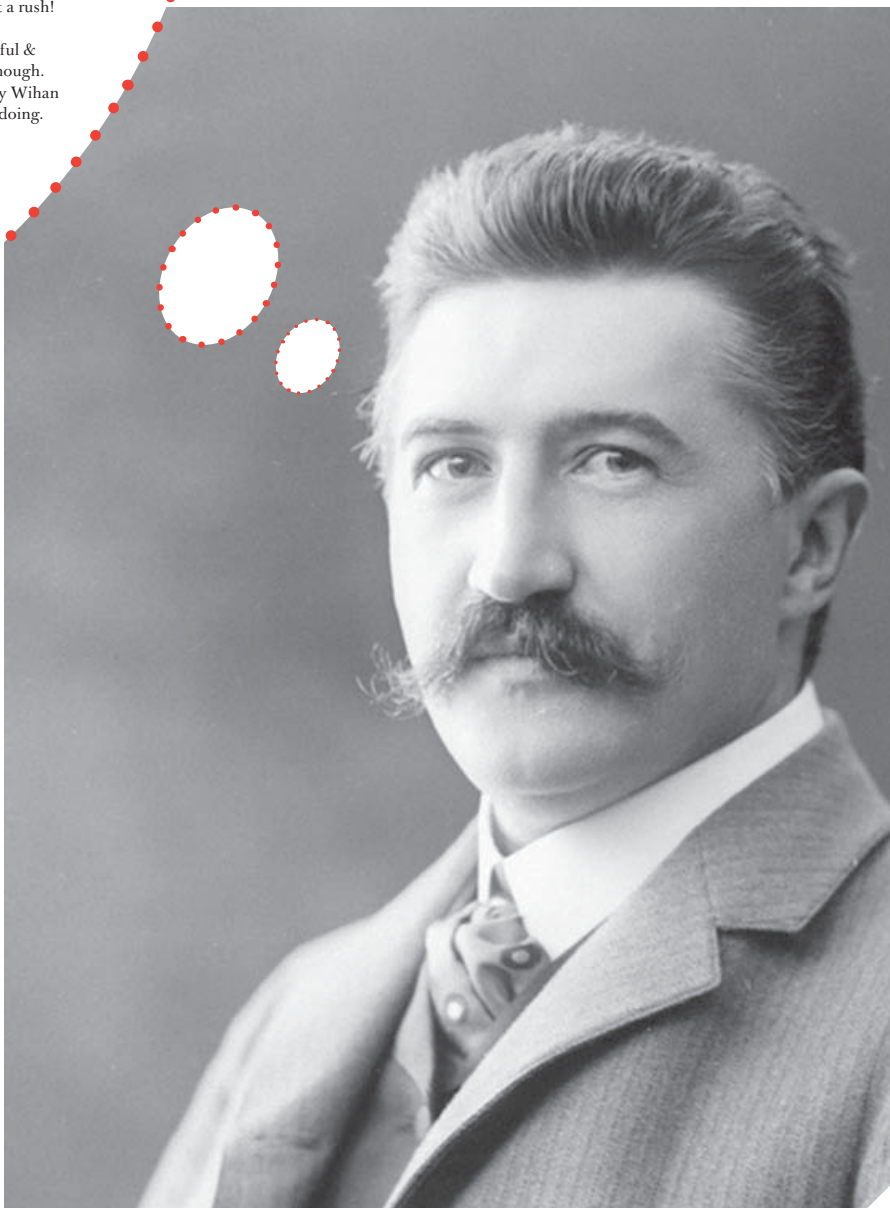
for the 1st time; the hall heated
up by the breath of Riga townsmen
- easier than with Simrock there.
Is it always this chilly in here,

the wind abuzz with its neglected
crescendos? These people can help
me pay off the Stradivari. As for
Otilka: do I ever cross her mind,

will we end up at the altar soon?
I have dragged the first movement
thru Helsinkfors; off to Dorpat &
Mitava & Königsberg. What a rush!

Meanwhile, my finale is gleeful &
merry. Not too much, just enough.
Even Dvořák got rebuffed by Wihan
- he should know what he's doing.

(Translation: David Vichnar)



Things lived and dreamt by a music editor

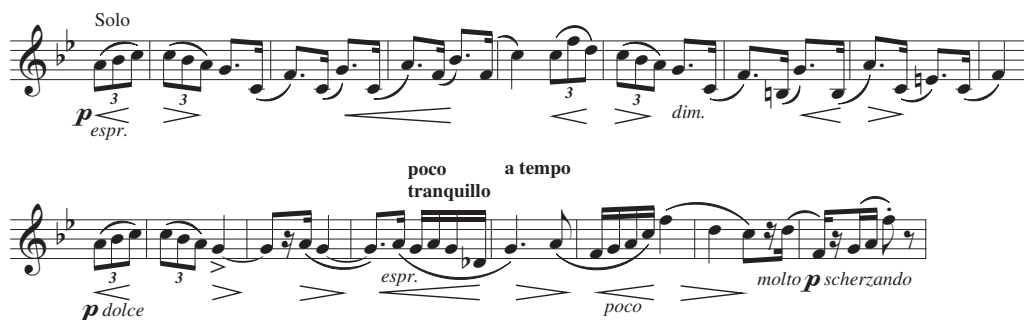
Reflections on Josef Suk's oeuvre

There is no doubt whatsoever that it is not merely because of the expiration of copyrights that over the past few years we have been rediscovering the oeuvre of Josef Suk (1874–1935) and giving it the recognition it so richly deserves. This is certainly owing in large part to the diligent work of conductors and admirers of Czech music who are of the opinion that our national musical culture has not had many composers as talented as Suk was, and may not have in the future – since Czech culture will not, at least not in this manner, be nationally oriented. It would seem that Suk, during his lifetime acknowledged yet also accused of a “cult of pain and passivity”, is only with difficulty now stepping out of the giant shadow cast by his kinships (he was Antonín Dvořák’s son-in-law), his career as a performing artist, his humility. Josef Suk is both great and not matter-of-course.

A full century after Suk created his most significant works, we can now observe a striking phenomenon: the revived interest in Josef Suk in Britain, where his orchestral pieces have been championed by Vladimir Jurowski and Jiří Bělohlávek. As the music director of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Bělohlávek performed the majority of Suk’s orchestral works, including *Asrael* and the lesser-known *Praga*. We heard his interpretation of the symphonic poem *Ripening* at this year’s Prague Spring festival, while the Last Night of the Proms 2012 featured the festive march *Towards a New Life*, extended with choral parts, as arranged by Jaroslav Křička. This year,

Ripening was performed in London twice within a month: on 2 May at a concert given by the London Philharmonic, conducted by Jurowski, and on 24 May at a concert of the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Bělohlávek. Continental Europe hasn’t lagged far behind. Germany has begun to appreciate Schönberg’s peer owing to the superlative Minguet Quartett, who are preparing a CD featuring Suk’s complete works for string quartet. (By the way, Arnold Schönberg, “who took pleasure in failure”, as Josef Suk recalled, “often visited Prague so as to hear my orchestral works”, hence, it is not an accidental reminder.)¹ In Madrid, Libor Pešek presented the *Fairy Tale*, while *Ripening* is in the repertoire of the Finnish conductor Petri Sakari. In the Czech Republic, Bärenreiter this year began publishing an independent series

¹ *Živá slova Josefa Suka*, compiled by J. M. Květ, Topičova edice, Prague, 1946, p. 126.



of urtext editions, which was preceded by two books: a selection of Suk's letters and, most significantly, Zdeněk Nouza's thematic catalogue of compositions.² The 500-page tome, also including David Beveridge's complete English translation, is characterised by thoroughness and consistency, and represents a storehouse of information no researcher can ignore. Especially valuable is the mapping of the existing sources, of which those owned by Josef Suk (1929–2011, the composer's grandson and world-renowned violinist) have in the meantime become part of the property of the Czech Museum of Music in Prague. Let us now have a closer look at that which Bärenreiter has already prepared and still has in store.

The "Bohemians"

The first swallow was a new edition of 1896's *String Quartet in B flat major*, Op. 11, made by a renowned researcher - Zdeněk Nouza. The complicated source situation of the four-movement piece written by the twenty-two-year-old composer was further compounded by the existence of a second version of the finale and the fact that Suk, who liked returning to his already completed

pieces, repeatedly remade the work while second violin of the Český kvarteto.³ These difficulties notwithstanding, in August 2012 a new pocket score was published which contains a detailed historical introduction, as well as an in-depth critical commentary with a summary of the variants. Something like this may be natural in the case of "greater" composers, attended to by research teams and a complete edition, yet it is a truly historic milestone when it comes to Suk, whose work had seemed condemned to being treated by individual editions and publishers without having an institutional background. Also new in the score and parts is the edition of the alternative fourth movement dating from 1915, formerly designated (not by Suk) as the "quartet movement" – the aforementioned second version of the finale. As a result, Suk's significant contribution to the quartet genre has been published in its historical entirety. Every reader or performer can now compare not only the modifications within the original four-movement opus, but also the different structure of the two finale movements, which owing to the identical thematic material document in a fascinating manner the change in Suk's style over two decades. If we compare,

2 Jana Vojtěšková (ed.): *Josef Suk – Dopisy o životě hudebním i lidském*; Zdeněk Nouza – Miroslav Nový: *Josef Suk – Tematický katalog skladeb*. Both titles were published by Editio Bärenreiter Praha, Prague, 2005.

3 The most distinguished Czech chamber ensemble of their time, of which Suk was a member for forty years. The correct translation of its name has been subject to dispute: the adjective "český" means both "Czech" and "Bohemian". The musicians were welcomed and presented throughout Europe as "Bohemians".

for instance, the secondary theme of the original and the new final movements (see examples on previous page), we can immediately see that regular structures were abandoned in favour of a more organic conception of the musical form: accumulation of tension by means of circling around a single note and the subsequent relaxation, during which the melody swings up an octave higher, or the work with “kinetic energy”, as highlighted by the Suk performer, pianist and musicologist Václav Štěpán (1889–1944).⁴ What’s more, the new edition really does offer something different to that provided by the first edition of the “later revision”, published in 1976 by Marie Svobodová. At the time, she did not have the copy of the score in which Suk noted down other changes (in fact, for the fourth time, if we count the first version, the revision of the first version, the second version of the fourth movement dating from 1915, and now these modifications), to which Marie Svobodová had no access since the score was private property. Hence, at one juncture, at the beginning of the development, the edition is two bars shorter and contains several different articulation details, as well as, for instance, an added counterpoint in the viola, which Svobodová did not have available (see pp. 34–35). The music text of the original four movements dating from 1896, as they are customarily played together, primarily draws upon the second Simrock printing, which seemingly only differs from the first one in the title page. According to Zdeněk Nouza, it only appeared after 1901, again in both the score and the parts. Already at the time, a few redundant bars had been removed and the harmony supplemented by several interesting elements. In some places, coincidentally again at the dividing line between the exposition and development, Simrock had to re-engrave entire systems, while in other

places a minor revision sufficed. The list of these changes, specifying the differences between the first and second Simrock printing of the score and parts, comes at the end of Nouza’s volume. Thus, the edition provides the four-movement whole in what researchers term the “Fassung letzter Hand” (the last preserved stage of revision), and the “last hand” was also sought in the fourth movement dating from 1915. Josef Suk was fond of poetry, and many poems have been dedicated to him. The present author too has attempted to create a portrait of him in verse (see the poem on page 30). It captures Suk at the moment when he gave the world premiere of the *String Quartet in B flat major*, on 16 October 1896 in Riga. Three days previously, the “Bohemians” had played the piece in private for Simrock in Berlin. It is truly remarkable that, given the numerous travels and extreme workload – the end of the first movement is dated in Helsinki, the end of the second movement in Vienna – Suk was able to write a composition which the musicologist Hugo Leichtentritt described as follows: “I know of very few string quartets since the time of Brahms which do justice to the style of this artistic form with such certainty as this work of the remarkable second violinist of the ‘Bohemians’.”⁵ May the poem only serve as a document of Suk’s ability to inspire and yet another sketching of the circumstances of the origination of Opus 11.

Prodigy

So, what does Bärenreiter Praha have in store? First of all, the much in demand *Piano Quartet in A minor*, Op. 1, the work with which the seventeen-year-old conservatory student broke through: at the time, the Emperor Franz Joseph Czech Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts granted him a contribution for its

4 Václav Štěpán: *Novák a Suk*. Hudební matice Umělecké besedy, Prague, 1945.

5 *Signale für die musikalische Welt*, Vol. 68, Issue 4, 26 January 1910, p. 134, “Aus Berlin”.

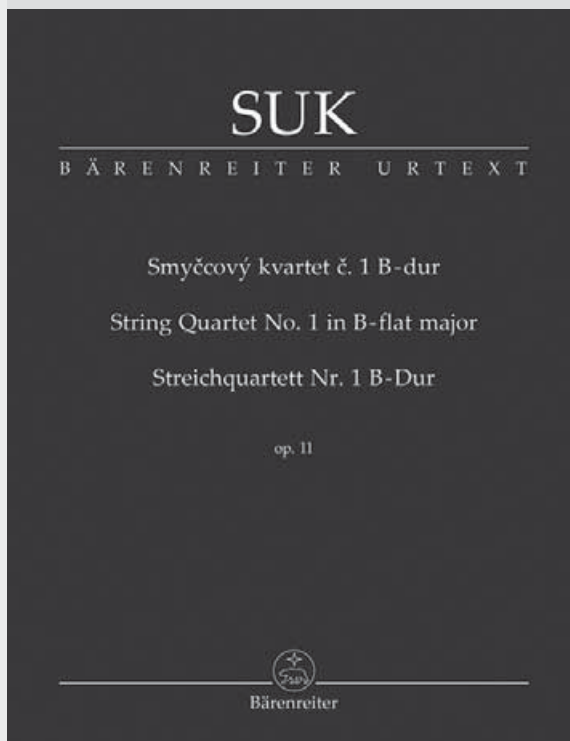
8.

Handwritten musical score for the 1915 finale of the String Quartet in B-flat, page 8. The score is written for four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass). It features complex notation with many corrections, including crossed-out lines and multiple versions of notes. Performance markings include *dimin.*, *pizz.*, *arco.*, *marc.*, *poco pesante.*, and *marcato.*. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats).

9.

Handwritten musical score for the 1915 finale of the String Quartet in B-flat, page 9. The score continues from page 8, showing four staves with complex notation and corrections. Performance markings include *marc.*, *meno fo*, and *poco pesante.*. The key signature remains B-flat major.

The 1915 finale of the String Quartet in B-flat, page from the handwritten score with autograph corrections (courtesy Prague Conservatory)



printing by the Prague-based publisher Mojmír Urbánek. Accordingly, Suk had his first work printed shortly after reaching the age of eighteen, and soon, thanks to the same composition and the orchestral *Dramatic Overture*, upon the decision taken by Johannes Brahms and Eduard Hanslick, he received a state scholarship (of the same type that had once helped Dvořák). Even though written by a very young artist, Suk's *Piano Quartet* is still sought after by musicians and hence a new edition is desirable. First of all, it is necessary to gather all the sources available. The present author has discovered at the Czech Museum of Music an unknown set of manuscript parts of a piano quartet, concealed under a mysterious card bearing the designation "Quartet in C major". A long time ago, a museum employee evidently arrived at the conclusion that it concerns – owing to the absence of the key

signature – a string quartet in the key of C major in which the part of the second violin is missing (in fact, the set does not contain a piano part). For the time being, we cannot make public the conclusions arrived at by Zdeněk Nouza when analysing this and other sources, yet we can premise that also conducive to his successful determination of the date (besides the defining of the phase of the textual process, i.e. comparison of the score with the autograph and the printed editions) was the shape of the letter S in the signature, with which the young Suk furnished this unknown set of parts. The second set of parts written in the same hand is deposited at the Klementinum – at the National Library of the Czech Republic – together with the autograph.⁶ It is signed with the name of V. J. Průša, who from 1888 to 1894 studied the horn at the Prague Conservatory.

6 CZ PU, 59 R 125.

7 *Živá slova*, p. 114.

Suk was encouraged to compose the piano quartet by none other than Antonín Dvořák. In the spring of 1891, not yet his father-in-law, just an admired professor, two years previously Dvořák had written his *Piano Quartet in E flat major*, which in November 1890 had its premiere in Prague. Accordingly, Dvořák had this commission fresh in his memory (he himself was asked to compose a piano quartet by Simrock). Suk recalled how he presented the composition that he was writing at the time at school, the first movement at one lesson, part of the second at another lesson, before his classmates: “I sat down at the piano and played and sang the second movement, *adagio*. I played up to the end of the gradation of the middle section, explaining that I didn’t yet have the rest of the piece, and was baffled by the strange silence. I looked around and saw that the whole school had gathered round the piano, looking seriously at me. I saw the Maestro approaching me and all of a sudden I felt his kiss on my face and heard a single word: ‘Good job!’. And this decided the direction the rest of my life would take.”⁷ At which bar did he stop playing and singing? The autograph, written in great haste, suggests which place it may concern: a continuous pen-written notation stops after bar 71 of the second movement and on the next page ensues the score written in pencil. Actually, it is only a sort of sketch, if we consider the haste in which the piece was created: the first movement was completed at Easter 1891 (in that year, Easter Sunday fell on 29 March) and by 13 May the work had its premiere at the school, for which it was necessary to extract the parts and have at least a few rehearsals! Hence, it comes as no surprise that at the end of the autograph the impatient teenager unwittingly parodies all Bruckner-like pious dedications: “Thank God it’s over.” The quartet was “over” quickly, yet it has reached out to audiences to the present day. Lack of time would plague Suk for the rest of his life.

Last word?

Several other pieces besides the Piano Quartet loom large in the series of new Suk urtexts. The Czech researcher Jarmila Gabrielová is preparing an edition of the mature piano cycle *Things lived and dreamt*, while the English scholar Mark Audus is dealing with the orchestral *Fairy Tale*, a suite set to motifs of the incidental music to Julius Zeyer’s drama *Radúz and Mahulena*. Also in negotiation are the “demonic” *Fantasy in G minor* for violin and orchestra, a one-movement concerto, as well as one of Suk’s most progressive works, *String Quartet No. 2*, which was compared to Schönberg by Suk’s contemporaries. The new editions will most likely not provide any epochal findings as to the correctness of the music text, since Suk was extremely careful about his notation and, since he read through the corrections thoroughly, there are very few mistakes to be found in period printings. A kind-hearted person, Suk liked to give away his autographs, yet these are not essential for determining the definitive music text but interesting as artefacts and evidence of how individual compositions emerged. The editions will be primarily based on prints, although they will also take into consideration all the other preserved sources. Why then is it so important that the new editions come into being? The new music text will above all be guaranteed, with all errors removed and significant variants elucidated. It will be furnished with explanatory notes necessary for understanding the genesis, reception and possible performance oddities. And it will also be graphically laid out in line with the current requirements of the computer age so as to fully meet all the needs of contemporary players. What’s more, a printed edition is not always the last one Suk left. When it comes to *Asrael*, for instance, the most important source is the printed copy into which in 1922 the conductor Václav Talich inserted in his own

hand the composer's additional changes, which extended the orchestra to include the fifth and sixth horns.⁸ Also revised was the *Piano Quartet in A minor*, to which Suk returned allegedly in 1914 so as to remake the development in the first movement (he refined the texture with imitations of the main theme). This revision was printed during the composer's lifetime, yet we should bear in mind that up to now we have only been reprinting sheet music that is basically one hundred and twenty years old. The editions aim to put things in order – to remove the fog wherever possible and, where it is not possible, to say: "There is fog here." Those who so desire will be able to play the definitive version dating from 1914 (or 1924, when it was published), or can return to the piece's original version from 1891.

Some (subjective) thoughts

I personally am most looking forward to a new edition of the cycle *Things lived and dreamt*, Op. 30, "a kind of artist's diary", as Suk put it in his retrospective paper in České Budějovice.⁹ The cycle of ten pieces dating from 1909 is characterised by a varied and, at the same time, minutiose scale of contents, as indicated by the very first subtitle, "With humour and irony, here and there agitated". I am looking forward to the airy undulation of the third composition with a distant echo of the Křečovice bells,¹⁰ as well as the dissonances and heterophony of the fourth piece, the seventh part titled "Simply, later with the expression of crushing might", from which Suk employed 21 bars in the symphonic poem *Ripening*, where this mysterious passage played by the orchestra's deepest instruments not insignificantly foresees the piece's resolution. In general, I am allured by the harmonic and motivic wealth of the cycle, which I subjectively rank within a similar musical category up there with the first volume of the famous *Études* by



Josef Suk with his son in Křečovice, around 1919
(Courtesy Czech Museum of Music)

György Ligeti (1985). Both cycles possess sweep and refinement, as well as the necessity to construct each piece from a simple unifying principle; they have pure musical "logic" and also a plasticity of shape that through the ear allures associations with the other senses too. Both Ligeti and Suk applied rapid movement of harmonies, both of them had sophisticated notation and both of them were fond in various compositions of returning to the same symbolically burdened motifs, certainly with deeper motivations than just for the sake of continuity

⁸ This source was drawn upon by Karel Šrom in his 1965 edition.

⁹ *Živá slova*, p. 114.

¹⁰ Štěpán, *Novák a Suk*, p. 181. It is Štěpán's association. Křečovice, a village south of Prague, is Suk's birthplace and Suk would regularly return there until the end of his life.

between works (in the case of Suk, the famous motif of death made up of two augmented fourths, for instance; as regards Ligeti, a descending chromatic motif, with another example of an individual compositional trope being Bohuslav Martinů's "Juliette cadence").¹¹ Admittedly, this parallel is somewhat superficial and mainly stemming from the ardent feelings the present author harbours for the mentioned composers, yet, in the sense of compositional type, it would be worthy of more profound research.

When it comes to Bohuslav Martinů, it would be misplaced to limit his bond to Josef Suk merely to one seemingly unsuccessful school year, following which the thirty-two-year-old student departed for France. (Martinů enrolled at the Prague Conservatory's Master School in 1922, yet in 1923 left for Paris to study with Albert Roussel.) As we know from the reminiscences of Stanislav Novák, first violin of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, prior to Martinů's entering the Master School, Suk's music was "very close to Martinů, who knew all his works from Talich's impeccable performances [Václav Talich conducted the celebrated premiere of *Ripening* in 1918, JH's note], as well as from private studies [...] What he admired most in Suk's scores was the amazing purity of work, splendid sound and mastery of instrumentation."¹² Martinů also proudly acknowledged his affinity to Suk's music after he had left Bohemia. When the "Bohemians" arrived in Paris, he spent four days with them; and he also participated in a concert marking Suk's sixtieth birthday, made up of songs created by his former pupils, with two of his – unfortunately lost – songs to Apollinaire's texts H.197. And through

Symphony No. 3 (1944), which refers to the *Asrael Symphony* at several junctures, Martinů paid a great tribute to his teacher. If we intend to view Suk's legacy from a new angle, we should also carefully consider these relations – yet this too is a task for an entire independent study.

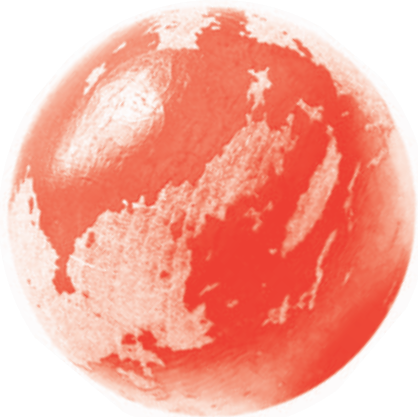
In conclusion, I would like to highlight an idea uttered by Josef Suk, perhaps banal for some, yet an idea that hasn't lost its significance in certain latitudes. It concerns how one artist does not diminish others: "in their desire to exalt a work close to them, many are not able to do it in any other manner than by disgracing at least two other persons [...] Do the Germans consider Beethoven a minor composer because he was preceded by such astounding phenomena as Bach, Handel, Gluck, Haydn, Mozart?"¹³ This exemplary attitude was confirmed not only by Suk's friendship with Antonín Dvořák and his contemporary (and rival) Vítězslav Novák but, later, with Leoš Janáček and, later still, with Bohuslav Martinů too. As regards Janáček, we should bear in mind that it was none other than Suk who recommended to Max Brod that he visit the ground-breaking Prague production of *Jenufa*, thus, as an integral link in the chain, playing a significant role in Janáček's future fame abroad. At one time, Suk was branded a subjective composer, yet from today's viewpoint he may appear subjective only insofar as he entices new deliberation over the relation between life and work.

The author is an editor at Bärenreiter Praha

11 The present author earlier wrote a study on the motif of *Juliette* in Bohuslav Martinů's work, inspired by the theory of Lawrence Kramer (see Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900*; University of California Press, Berkeley 1990). The fundamental finding is that the characteristic element seemingly used by an artist "everywhere" is only assigned to rationally chosen places of compositions and only to some of the spheres of the oeuvre; it is usually linked with certain accentuating elements that specifically draw attention to it.

12 Stanislav Novák: *O Bohuslavu Martinů*. Hudební matice Umělecké besedy, Prague, 1947, p. 12.

13 *Živá slova*, p. 114.



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Jan Dismas Zelenka

Missa Nativitatis Domini

Musica Florea, Barbora Sojková – soprano, Markéta Cukrová – alto, Tomáš Král – bass, Marek Štrnycl – artistic director.

Text: English, German, French, Czech. Recorded: 2012.

Released: 2012. DDD.

1 CD Supraphon SU 4111-2.

The latest title in Supraphon's Music from Eighteenth-Century Prague series features four of Jan Dismas Zelenka's Advent and Christmas pieces: Magnificat in C, ZWV 107; O magnum mysterium – Moteto pro nativitate, ZWV 171; Missa Nativitatis Domini, ZWV 8; and the motet Chvalte Boha silného (Praise God Almighty), ZWV 165, as performed by the ensemble Musica Florea. The latter work is the one and only preserved Zelenka piece composed to a Czech text – a translation of Psalm 150. Using the instruments of his time, Zelenka splendidly characterises the sound of Biblical musical instruments – lutes, zithers, tubas, cimbaloms, drums and fifes. The motet has only been preserved in copies made in Prague in the last quarter of the 19th century (accordingly, we could speculate that it is not the original text but its Czech translation – there are numerous preserved translations of sacred compositions dating from the first half of the 19th century, originally written to Latin or German texts). The other three compositions bear witness to the fact that Zelenka evidently never completely broke off his contact with Prague, even though after 1723 he primarily composed for the Catholic Church of the Royal Court in Dresden. The *Missa Nativitatis Domini*, ZWV 8, has been preserved in the music collection of the Jesuit Saint Nicolas Church in Prague's Lesser Town in a copy dating from 1736; Zelenka completed it ten



years earlier, in December 1726, when it was also first performed. The mass, most likely written in considerable haste, does not include the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*; in all other sources, later copies and records in inventories, the *Missa nativitatis* contains the respective parts identical with those from Zelenka's *Missa charitatis*, ZWV 10, which probably came into being in 1727, yet with different instrumentation. Whereas the oldest Prague copy of the *Missa Nativitatis Domini* features the festive sound of the clarinas, the *Missa charitatis* employs horns, as is the case of the Berlin copy of the *Missa Nativitatis*. Musica Florea's artistic director, **Marek Štrnycl**, chose the pastoral sound of the horn. The Christmas motet *O magnum mysterium*, ZWV 171, is connected with Prague too. It is a revision of part of the aria *Reviresce, effloresce* from Zelenka's melodrama *Sub olea pacis*, ZWV 175, performed in Prague in 1723 to mark the coronation of Emperor Charles VI. The motet *O magnum mysterium* was composed in the second half of the 1720s for the Catholic Church of the Royal Court in Dresden. The Advent piece *Magnificat*, ZWV 107, dates from the same period, perhaps 1727. The recording is thorough in all aspects – the orchestra, ably conducted by Marek Štrnycl, plays energetically, their execution possesses tension, while the soloists confirm their reputation of being specialists in historically informed performance of early music renowned both at home and abroad. The booklet is furnished with an informative and very readable accompanying text by the music historian Václav Kapsa in four languages (English, German, French, Czech), with the compositions' lyrics translated from the original Latin and Czech as well. This remarkable album, which extends Musica Florea's Zelenka discography, should find a home in the record collection of everyone interested in what is currently going on in the early-music domain. It supplements the already ample Czech Zelenka mosaic with a remarkable new stone, or better said, precious gem.

Michaela Freemanová



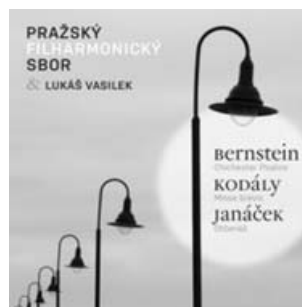
Anthology of Moravian Folk Music Advent and Christmas

Project manager:
Helena Bretfeldová.

Text: Czech, English. Released: 2012, compilation. TT: 79:52. DDD. 1 CD
Indies Scope LC-19677, MAM 515-2.

The *Anthology of Moravian Folk Music* has reached its expected culmination, with its fifth part being dedicated to the Advent and Christmas repertoire. The careful selection and the high-quality accompanying texts are the work of **Helena Bretfeldová**. The album contains 32 songs, performed by the elite of the Moravian music scene in this genre, to name but a few: **Jan Rokyta, Petr Galečka, Vlasta Grycová, Magdalena Můčková, Dušan and Lubomír Holý, Martin Hrbáč and Jan Gajda**. Compared to the anthology's previous four parts, this CD features more choruses, including the renowned female ensembles **Ženský sbor Polajka** and **Sboreček žen z Lipova**. The songs are divided into four sections in accordance with the selected songs: Panenka Maria po světě chodila (The Virgin Mary wandered through the world) – Chvála na nebi Bohu, pokoj nám na zemi (Praise God in heaven, peace to us on earth) – Přiběžali ze salaša pastýřé (Shepherds came rushing from their hut) – Koleda nám nastala (A carol came to us). The highly informed compilation is not only a pleasure to listen to, it also shows the immense diversity of Moravian folk culture. For instance, it contains no fewer than three variants of the song *Byla cesta, byla ušlapaná* (There was a path, a beaten path). Advent inaugurates the Christian liturgical year; Christmas is a celebration of the coming of Christ into the world in the role of *Agnus Dei*. They are encoded in us as an affectionate time, which has yet to be trampled down by modern commercialisation and consumerism. I am convinced that this CD is able to remind us of the original sources of Advent and Christmas, a tradition that should continue to remain an essential part of our country's culture.

Luboš Stehlík



Musici da camera

Collegium Marianum, Jana Semerádová - flute, artistic director, Sergio Azzolini - bassoon, Lenka Torgersen, Helena Zemanová - violin.

Text: English, German, French, Czech. Recorded: July 2012 (CD 1), June 2003 and Sep. 2005 (CD 2), Church of Our Lady Queen of Angels, the Capuchin Monastery, Prague.

Released: 2012. TT: 1:52:31. DDD.
2 CDs Supraphon SU 4112-2.

Today, **Collegium Marianum** are of so consistently high a quality that they never disappoint you. The ensemble can, however, still take you by surprise with something truly special. And this very exceptionality characterises their new 2-CD release, *Musici da camera*. The first disc presents new recordings, while the second contains older ones, a few of them taken over from the titles *Music of Baroque Prague I and II*, which the ensemble originally released themselves. The project is focused on compositions for chamber formations – trios, sonatas, quartets, concertos. In the excellent accompanying text, **Václav Kapsa**, the project's specialist consultant and, I presume, also the author of the music performance material, writes that the recording can be understood as a crossroads since it is made up of works by composers who were somehow related to Prague, and Vienna, the capital of the Habsburg monarchy. Thus it features music by Antonín Reichenauer (the world premiere recording of the *Trio Sonata in B flat major* and the superb *Quartet in G minor for violin, cello, bassoon and basso continuo*), František Ignác Antonín Tůma (the world premiere recording of the splendid *Partita in C major*), František Jirák (the world premiere recording of the *Trio Sonata in B flat major for two violins*), alongside compositions by Johann Friedrich Fasch (*Concerto in C major for flute, violin and bassoon*, *Concerto in D*

major for two flutes), Antonio Vivaldi (*Trio in G minor for violin and lute*, with **Evelina Mascardi** playing the lute) and Antonio Caldara (the violin *Sonata in A major*). Pleasant discoveries for the listener will undoubtedly be the pieces by Christian Gottlieb Postel (*Trio Sonata in A major for two violins*) and Johann Georg Orschler (the world premiere recording of the *Trio in F minor for two violins*, featuring an interesting fugue), composers who spent part of their lives in Prague. The six premiere recordings, making up more than half of the release as a whole, represent a respectable number and an exceptional accomplishment in the small Czech recording world! When it comes to the compositions I didn't know previously, I was most intrigued and totally enchanted by Reichenauer's *Quartet in G minor*, a great treat, as performed by **Lenka Torgersen, Ilze Grudule** (cello) and **Sergio Azzolini** (bassoon). Few early-music recordings I have heard this year are so engrossing and of such a high quality.

Luboš Stehlík

Prague Philharmonic Choir

Bernstein, Kodály, Janáček

Prague Philharmonic Choir, Lukáš Vasilek - choir master, Tobiáš Fanta - boy treble, Jaroslav Březina - tenor, Ivana Pokorná - harp, Jan Horváth - percussion, Aleš Bárta - organ, Prague Philharmonic Choir soloists.

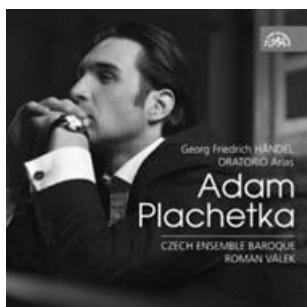
Text: Czech, English. Recorded: Jan. 2011, Feb. 2012, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague.

Released: 2012. TT: 64:13. DDD.
1 CD Radioservis CR0615-2.

The **Prague Philharmonic Choir** have finally released a profile disc and **Lukáš Vasilek** has thus linked up to

the archive projects implemented by Josef Veselka and Pavel Kühn. And the apex of his work with the finest Czech choir has turned out well indeed! The album has an outstanding dramaturgy, recording quality, graphic design, and the choir have presented themselves in the best light – singing splendidly in all groups. Three markedly different compositions, three forms of the basis of Christian civilisation, three types of application of the supporting role of the organ. A truly great achievement (and not only on a Czech scale) is the recording of Kodály's *Missa brevis*, an original celebration of the human voice and the spiritual constants of European Christianity, whose delivery also bears witness to the high quality of the choir's singers/soloists. The organ version of Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* has been performed in our country rarely, and I only know a single recording of the work – that of Matthew Best and his Corydon Singers, more chamber-like – yet the recording made by the Prague Philharmonic Choir is more colourful. The boy solo on the Radioservis CD is of a good quality, but I have heard better "angelic" voices. Janáček's *Our Father* is a piece not so much difficult in technical terms as when it comes to finding the ideal proportions and uncloaking the fine "valeurs" of the autograph, which Lukáš Vasilek has succeeded in immaculately. The tenor **Jaroslav Březina** sings his important solo part well and in style (although I have heard a more forcible vocal delivery). As a whole, however, the album is a significant contribution to Czech discography, one that delights the attentive listener with an hour of beautiful music.

Luboš Stehlík



George Frideric Handel Oratorio Arias

Adam Plachetka - baritone, **Czech Ensemble Baroque Orchestra & Choir**, **Kateřina Kněžíková** - soprano, **Roman Válek** - conductor.
Text: Czech, English, German, French.
Recorded: Aug.-Sep. 2012, Basilica of St. Prokop, Třebíč.
Released: 2012. TT: 70:47. DDD.
1 CD Supraphon SU 4116-2.

The first disc recorded by **Adam Plachetka** for Supraphon pleasantly surprised me for two reasons. Firstly, owing to the baritone's take on Handel's music; secondly, as regards the album's conception. Mr. Plachetka has of late begun to be compared with Ildebrando D'Arcangelo and this CD serves as proof that this claim is basically justified. His voice has a beautiful colour, a distinct personality of its own, the flexibility of youth, and he doesn't just sing the notes. Plachetka is truly exceptional among Czech singers, and when it comes to the European context, he is already well above average in his category. Nevertheless, although his delivery is remarkable, it would be salutary to draw attention to his sometimes excessive vibrato and the power of his vocal expressiveness... As for the latter: instead of the obligatory opera or oratorio recital, in co-operation with the conductor **Roman Válek** he chose a block solution – a selection of instrumental, solo (including recitatives) and choral parts from the oratorios *Alexander's Feast*, *Messiah*, *Acis and Galatea* and *Judas Maccabeus*. This is a solution not quite common, daunting, and so risky a step as to warrant praise. However, to attain complete success, all the components would have to be at the same level. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Adam Plachetka towers above the others (I conclude so only after listening to the recording!) to the extent

that Mont Blanc dwarfs the highest Czech peak – Sněžka. The **Czech Ensemble Baroque Orchestra** plays very well and with enthusiasm, yet as regards this particular repertoire, it is impossible to forget about projects accomplished by, for instance, Les Arts Florissants, Il Complesso Barocco, Concentus musicus Wien and Academy of Ancient Music, which are superior. The Moravian choir sings nicely and has had the parts prepared properly by **Tereza Válková** but does not achieve the quality of the Monteverdi Choir, Rundfunkchor Berlin, Arnold Schönberg Chor or Eric Ericson Chamber Choir. From time to time, it is even audible that it is singing at the very limit of its abilities (e.g. *Sing unto God* from *Judas Maccabeus*). These caveats aside, as a whole, and primarily due to the dazzling soloist, it is a project that has turned out very well. It is praiseworthy that in the wake of Martina Janková's album, Supraphon has afforded scope to another promising Czech singer. I only hope that it won't be a one-off collaboration. Well worth considering would be a project featuring Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, currently Adam Plachetka's flagship composer.

Luboš Stehlík

Petr Nouzovský Kateřina Englichová

Mirror Reflections

Petr Nouzovský - cello,
Kateřina Englichová - harp.
Text: English, Czech. Recorded:
Sept. 2010 (HAMU recording studio).
Released: 2012. TT: 69:22. DDD.
1 CD Cube Bohemia (Cube Metier)
CBCD 21249.

The new dramatically personal and singularly conceived CD made by the cellist **Petr Nouzovský**, who invited



along the distinguished Czech harpist **Kateřina Englichová**, is framed by two works by the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt: the well-known *Fratres* (1977, the 1989 version for cello and piano) and the piece *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978), whose specific sonic world allows the unusual combination of cello and harp to excel. Right in the first composition, *Fratres*, originally written for a chamber orchestra of period or modern instruments and subsequently arranged by Pärt and others into another eight versions, the chordal harp accompaniment has in its archaic nature a far more expressive form than in the piano version, known to us from, for instance, Jiří Barta and Marián Lapšanský's recording (Supraphon 11 2156-2132, 1994). More distinct and sonically forcible too is the adaptation of Bruch's *Kol Nidrei in D minor*, Op. 47 (1880–1881) – instead of the original, eclectically instrumented orchestral accompaniment, the expressive delivery of the cello part against the background of the introvert harp conceals an almost existential potential. The adaptation of Bruch's composition, forming the axis of the compact disc, perhaps impressed me the most (more's the pity then that neither the sleeve nor the booklet mentions the creator of this and the other arrangements). Besides Bruch's concertante piece, the only other excursion into the world of Romantic music is Fauré's winsome *Siciliana*, Op. 78 (1893), again originally written for the cello and piano, with the harp accompaniment imbuing it with an almost Impressionist airiness. The two instrumentalists also present themselves as soloists on the CD: Englichová in Hindemith's 1939 *Harp Sonata*, which, in my opinion, should be performed more frequently on our concert stages (as should, for that matter, Hindemith's works in general), and Nouzovský in Bach's *Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor*, BWV 1008, and Ligeti's *Sonata for Solo Cello*, written between 1948 and 1953. Whereas Ligeti's two-movement sonata, a formally concentrated composition very interesting in acoustic terms and the CD's pleasant dramatic



surprise, sounds novel as performed by Nouzovský, Bach's solo suite struck me as being decidedly old-school, declining as it does to learn lessons, at least in terms of phrasing, from the adherents of historically informed performance of early music. Although in Bach's suite Nouzovský chose the A = 415 Hz tuning, he did not overly impress me with his long-breath phrasing, cumbrous prelude and restrained dances. One would certainly expect an artist of his generation to be more open to the fundamental principles of Baroque music, peerlessly mastered by, for example, the cellist Pieter Wispelwey. The sonically and dramaturgically extraordinary CD ends with Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* with harp accompaniment, distantly reminiscent of basso continuo, following which the listener must only desire deep silence. Frankly speaking, I myself would most likely not have gone out and bought the reviewed CD; by the way, it doesn't have an attractive graphic design and Nouzovský's accompanying text requires linguistic editing. But I can consider the fact that it happened to get into my hands and seep under my skin when listening a happy turn of fate and an indisputable confirmation of the two instrumentalists' artistic and technical qualities.

Martin Jemelka

BBC Symphony Orchestra and Jiří Bělohlávek

**Josef Suk: Asrael
Benjamin Britten:
Sinfonia da Requiem**

**BBC Symphony Orchestra,
Jiří Bělohlávek - conductor.**

Text: English, German, French,
Czech. Recorded: Live, Smetana Hall,
Prague, June 2008.

Released: 2012. TT: 61:50, 21:23. DDD.
2 CDs Supraphon SU 4095-2.

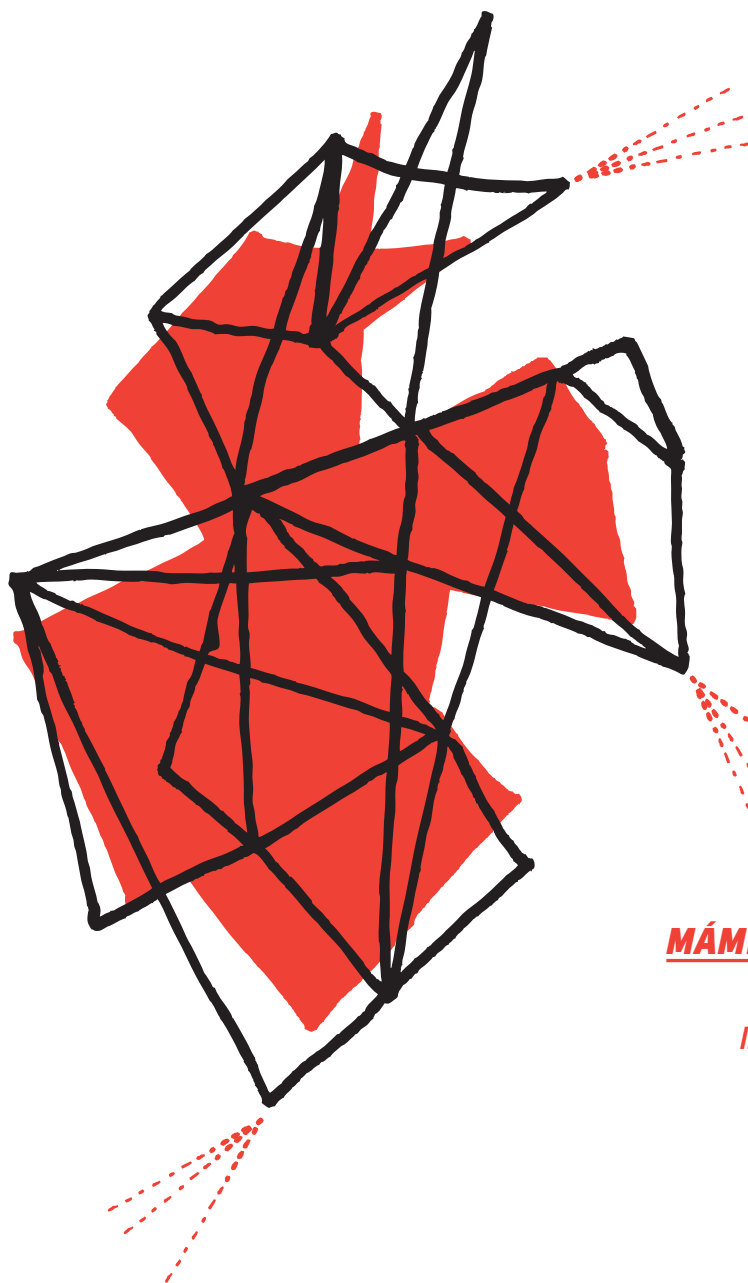
The CD presents a live recording of a concert given at the 2008 Prague Spring international music festival which at the time was also directly broadcast. And it is laudable indeed that it has been released (in co-operation between Supraphon and the BBC Symphony Orchestra) since **Jiří Bělohlávek** and the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** delivered a performance that even in this form has a terrific atmosphere. The music is tragic, yet still "soothing". Suk's mournful symphony in particular has an amazing thrust and tension, with Jiří Bělohlávek building up Suk's extensive areas without them being dissolved in a sonic timelessness. That which was written about the concert at the time: "we have not heard the composition for a long time and probably won't hear it again in this manner for a long time to come" (Petr Veber), still holds true today. The CD provides us with the possibility to relive the experience. The splendidly elaborate lyrical passages in Suk's 60-minute symphony unfold like a pleasant memory of happy moments. In Bělohlávek's conception, Asrael, the Angel of Death, does not evoke horror but brings peace and reconciliation. All this through the dynamic nuances and proportions of the instrumental groups. Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* is by no means just an added bonus on the CD. The piece, written to commission for the Japanese government to mark the 2,600th anniversary of the Japanese Empire, has its own story too. Britten chose to give it a title referring to the Christian requiem, which, quite understandably, was deemed unacceptable, and hence the composition was not played at the celebrations. The dedication to the memory of Britten's parents was more suitable, and this is how the symphony was premiered in New York. The work's basic concept has many a thing in common with that of Suk's *Asrael* since it too reflects sorrow, defiance and final conciliation. In dramaturgic terms, Suk's monumental five-movement piece with

opulent orchestration and Britten's sparse musical language form an interesting juxtaposition. Jiří Bělohlávek, at the time serving as its principal conductor, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra attained a chime that we would like to see in his new post as chief of the Czech Philharmonic. Although in the next season the orchestra is scheduled to perform Suk on only a single occasion (and smaller work to boot), let us hope that now Jiří Bělohlávek has familiarised the British with the composer's music he will pay due attention to him at home too.

Vlasta Reittererová

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