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Libor Pešek

Jarmila Novotná Festival

The Volánek Family

Národní  divadlo

opera

UVÁDÍME
V NÁRODNÍM
DIVADLE

Bedřich Smetana

▼
**DVĚ
VDOVY**

Dirigent: **Robert Jindra**
Režie: **Jiří Nekvasil**
Scéna: **Daniel Dvořák**
Kostýmy: **Theodor Pištěk**

Premiéra:
30. 5. 2013

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Dear readers,

the summer issue of our magazine contains an exceptional number of interviews, three. In a certain sense of the word, however, the only "standard" interview is the title interview, with one of the most prominent Czech conductors on the occasion of his eightieth birthday - Libor Pešek probably needs no introduction to anyone with an interest in Czech music. The other two interviews relate more to specific projects than to those interviewed. They concern the stage performance of Schubert's Winterreise, prepared by the director Jiří Heřman for this autumn, and Jan Vičar's CD Hey, Johnny, the most representative output to date of his compositional work with folk material

and thus a relatively rare release. Moreover, I would like to draw your attention to the musicologist Viktor Velek's text dealing with the Volánek musical family, primarily working in Vienna at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. It is worthwhile to be reminded occasionally that the cultural milieu of a society is not only created by the "grand" history of arts, but also the "small", often overlooked, if not almost forgotten, history too.

Have a beautiful summer

Petr Bakla



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cover: Robert Volánek Jr. and the Tovačovský Tamburica Ensemble (1903)





PHOTO © CNSO 3x

“THE ORCHESTRA AS A FABULOUS RACE-HORSE”

On the eve of his eightieth birthday, the conductor **Libor Pešek** talks about life and music, classical as well as his first love, jazz. Apparently, artistic success is not the main source of his satisfaction, and neither has he approached life with too great a seriousness. His personality weds creative singularity, concentrated diligence, distinctive grace. And despite the fact that music is the centrepiece of his existence, he does not consider it the be all and end all.

It is no secret that this year you are celebrating a round anniversary.

It seems as though it's someone else who is turning eighty, but you've got to see the humour in it all.

Fortunately, you are still fighting fit and your memory is excellent.

Only my legs don't serve me when walking up stairs as they once did (*laughs*). Yet I can still remain upright on stage throughout Mahler's grand symphony and only feel the same degree of tiredness after a concert I have felt all my life.

Have you always fully trusted your abilities, fortune, or have you believed more in a lucky star?

In retrospect, I have the feeling that I have had a lot of luck in my life and that I might have been granted much more than I actually deserved.

Were you always certain that you wanted to be a conductor? You could have chosen to be a pianist, trombonist, or become a jazz musician.

At the time when I was finishing secondary school, I was a jazzman with my own band, but I was also a well-guided pianist. I had a strict teacher, a pupil of Vilém Kurz, and a very fettered training, without being afforded musical freedom. Only when I enrolled at the Academy of Performing Arts did I take a definitive decision. After years with jazz, I was entirely captivated, totally gave myself over to music and fully focused on classical.

So musical talent runs in the family?

I have to admit that I don't actually feel that I've been blessed with any specific musical gift. If I do possess any talent, then it is perhaps of the generally human, maybe artistic, variety. I have inherited neither perfect pitch nor an amazing musical memory from my ancestors.

Studying conducting at the Academy of Performing Arts with Václav Neumann, Metod Doležil, Robert Brock Václav Jiráček, Alois Klíma and Václav Smetáček was a superb start to life. What did these great conductors teach you?

I dare say they only showed me how to approach orchestral life, since my esteemed teachers didn't actually turn up at lessons all that often. As my older colleague Zdeněk Košer once quipped: "I am an autodidact from the class of Professor Václav Smetáček." We were simply left to our own devices. We were taught most by theoreticians, Karel Janeček or Jaroslav Zich, who gave regular lessons and whose teaching was of a truly high quality. At the time, Professors Klíma and Smetáček were still extremely active conductors and had relatively little time for teaching. They just told us to go and see the rehearsals and we would learn what was needed there. Some of the teachers/conductors, however, had a particular professional pride and loathed it when we wanted to peep under the lid. Yet Smetáček was broad-minded in this respect and allowed us to visit his rehearsals.

Fortunately, the Czech concert scene at the time abounded in guest conductors.

That was a remarkable feature of the time. The most celebrated conductors would frequently come to our country – Charles Munch, Georg Szell, Erich Kleiber, Charles Cluytens, János Ferencsik, Igor Markević and other towering figures. And we learnt the most at their rehearsals.

When you enrolled at the Academy of Performing Arts, you were most likely a devotee of Romanticism and Classicism, yet soon you embraced contemporary music too.

Oh no, not at all. I had no inkling what it was all about. At school, the content of compositions was talked about all the time, and I didn't understand it for a long time. As I emerged from swing and jazz, I couldn't grasp that music can have content. Only later did I get the hang of it.



PHOTO: JANA PERTÁKOVÁ

During the long hours of preparations above a score, you grow together with the music, and its covert, unutterable message creeps under your skin. The musical content is impossible to describe, that's why our teachers in the first years couldn't explain it to us.

After graduating, you soon had a lot on your plate...

I was a répétiteur at the ballet company in Plzeň and at the National Theatre for three years. Subsequently, under totally new conditions, I assumed the post of music director of the North Bohemia Philharmonic in Teplice. I was suddenly working at a fast pace and entrusted with large scores, which I hadn't had the opportunity to conduct previously. My job also included the open-air colonnade concerts. My time in Teplice, from 1963 to 1969, was an important school of life.

Working with a live orchestra must have taken you by surprise then.

I was completely inexperienced. Despite studying a huge amount of scores at school, I didn't get to know even a negligible part of them. I only had to get familiar with this large quantity of scores during the everyday operation of the Teplice regional orchestra, at the time a slightly second-rate ensemble, with its quality being incomparable with its level today. It was a bizarre situation. I had no choice but to sink or swim. And only in Teplice did I discover the technical deficiencies of my gestures. It wasn't like standing in front of a pampered chamber orchestra, when you need to do hardly anything but steer it in some direction. At the colonnade, where all kinds of compositions are played, you perform right away, without rehearsing. You really bend your arms when doing that. I was lucky that at the time there were already subscription concerts in Teplice during the season. Bohumil Berka, the director of the orchestra, was a broad-minded man

who afforded me scope in the repertoire. There I learnt that what I didn't know, Brahms, Beethoven and Dvořák symphonies in their entirety.

In 1959, you founded the famed Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra (Komorní harmonie). This ensemble was a little miracle of professionals on an amateur basis.

I didn't find enough strings players but, on the other hand, I got together eleven winds. We started at the Na Zábradlí theatre in Prague and worked really hard, so we soon managed to enter the audience's consciousness and capture the attention of music-lovers. Thanks to the incredible noble-mindedness of the director, Jaroslav Šeda, we even made Supraphon recordings. It was a happy time at the crossroads of my life, when I was given the opportunity to put across my intentions with the help of educated, understanding people. We even succeeded in appearing at Prague Spring two years in a row. We performed a wide, modern, precisely explored repertoire made up of interesting 20th-century music: Hindemith, Milhaud, Berg, Strauss. We had a splendid audience. Since the Communists scorned free speech and freedom of spirit, people at the time had a keener interest in more valuable art than they do today.

The Chamber Philharmonic wasn't sufficient for you, so between 1965 and 1969 you also helmed the Sebastian Orchestra.

Initially, I actually wanted to extend the Chamber Philharmonic with more wind instruments and miniature strings, yet its members were against it. And so a new ensemble emerged and the Chamber Philharmonic continued to pursue its own path.

And on that path, you took up the reins of the East Bohemia Chamber Orchestra in Pardubice (today's Pardubice Chamber Philharmonic) too.

In 1969, I was invited to work with the Frysk Orkest in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, and at the same time I received an offer to helm the East Bohemia ensemble. I had always aspired to lead such a classical orchestra, and I also wanted to get beyond the borders, out into the world. So, from 1970 to 1977, I concurrently headed the two orchestras.

The two orchestras worked with a wide-ranging repertoire, which was an asset.

We played all sorts of things, and I broadened my knowledge. At the same time, I performed as a guest throughout Holland, including Amsterdam. I learnt to be a guest conductor and gained the ability to prepare a programme with an unknown orchestra within two or three rehearsals. What's more, I got to know intriguing soloists and learnt how to get along with them, which is quite important.

On top of that, besides working with two orchestras you began appearing as a guest with the Slovak Philharmonic too.

I was even offered the post of music director in Bratislava. 1981 and 1982 were amazing years, full of contacts with wonderful people, a good orchestra, and

I was abounding in energy. But this came to an end when, instead of a Czech artist, the Minister of Culture summoned a Soviet conductor, Vladimir Verbitsky. At the time, the entire Prague scene behaved splendidly, and I immediately received offers to become concurrently second conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, the Prague Symphony Orchestra and the National Theatre Orchestra. Then I remained with the Czech Philharmonic from 1982 to 1990. We made a number of recordings for Supraphon, in my opinion the best of all my recordings, above all pieces by Suk, Honegger and Poulenc. And I worked as guest conductor for the other two Prague orchestras too. It was a wonderful time.

Throughout your life, you have changed your workplace and had the fortune to lead great ensembles. And from 1987 to 1998 you were music director and chief conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

When the Slovak Philharmonic and I were recording for a German label, I was invited to London to record Brahms's symphonies with the Orchestra Philharmonia. In the middle of the work the money ran out, yet the orchestra invited me to continue to be their guest conductor. At the time, I recommended Suk's Asrael, but they ultimately played Martinů's sixth symphony. And then the Liverpool Philharmonic's dramaturge afforded me the opportunity to perform Asrael with his orchestra. The concert met with an enthusiastic response on the part of the audience and critics alike, and this determined my next engagement. At first, I didn't feel like going to Liverpool, but my manager kept talking about the significance of the oldest English orchestra and I eventually consented. I stayed in Liverpool for eleven years.

Assuming the post of head of the Liverpool Philharmonic must have been a great milestone in your artistic career.

At the time, I was fifty-three and had already done a lot. Nevertheless, I welcomed the possibility of extending my repertoire, especially with Mahler's symphonies and English music. I brushed up on the Debussy and Ravel from the Czech Philharmonic programmes, and I had free rein, I could do what I wanted. I encountered amazing audiences, open to all types of experiments, and I was at the helm of an orchestra that longed to become acquainted with new things and Czech music they didn't know. We presented large Suk orchestral works, including the Epilogue, in their entirety. We also recorded everything and subsequently performed it in America, Europe and the Far East. All of a sudden, Suk knew no borders.

You have worked with numerous orchestras, many of which you even started from scratch. Did the method of working with them differ significantly?

The most precise work was with the Chamber Philharmonic, the Sebastian Orchestra and the East Bohemia Chamber Orchestra in Pardubice. The young ensemble, fresh out of the Academy and brilliantly trained, was ready to work hard, and its quality rose fast. On the other hand, when I was in Liverpool I had a fabulous management, which I still have today, and it opened the gate to America, to orchestras of which I could previously only

dream: the Philadelphia Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Chicago Symphony. In Cleveland alone, I performed Asrael five times! My work with American orchestras was one of my greatest conducting experiences. They are perfectly prepared, well co-ordinated, used to observing the conductor's every movement and satisfying all his requirements without hesitation. I also



conducted five London-based orchestras. These were great experiences. I've simply been terrifically lucky.

Is it more important that a conductor performs at home, abroad, across the ocean or that the conductor and the orchestra understand each other?

Over many decades, one learns how to speak less and less, to make more use of non-verbal communication instead. Orchestras do not need lectures on the content of a work. We just simply get down to it, and they know who is standing in front of them and react accordingly. The best English and American orchestras are extremely co-operative partners. They know that they have to play well, that there isn't much time for preparation, and all of them do their best. Yet American orchestra players have much better conditions for their work than, for instance, those in England, who aren't much better off than those in the Czech Republic. Celebrated London orchestras rehearse in various rented halls, ballrooms even, and they only get to the concert hall itself for the general rehearsal. The only exception is the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which, as an ensemble paid by the government, have outstanding material conditions.

Conductors gain their reputations at prominent concerts and festivals. One such for you was the Proms.

During my time in Liverpool, the director of the London Proms, John Grummond, became really fond of our work and invited us to the Albert Hall ten years in a row. I was there with the Czech Philharmonic too. These experiences are unforgettable. When you enter the hall for six thousand people, like an ancient coliseum, it takes your breath away. There are no seats in the parterre, just young people, backpackers, standing. In general, the situation is democratic, up to the upper boxes where the champagne flows. But it is exactly this informal chance that creates the atmosphere for young people. They are welcome guests there.

In addition to appearing at the London Proms, you have also performed as a guest at Prague Spring on numerous occasions.

I was invited to participate for a number of years and, after Rudolf Firkušný died, from 1994 to 1999 I was the festival's president.

... and today you are the president of the Prague Proms.

We founded the festival as a supplement to the summer musical life in Prague, half of it presenting classics, the other half meeting the audiences' more popular requirements. This year, the eighth edition will take place.

Since 2007 you have held the post of chief conductor of the Czech National Symphony Orchestra.

I've never wanted to be a "chief" anywhere. And whenever I was, someone else gave the orders on my behalf. Everything was taken care of by the management, I was just a name there. The Czech National Symphony Orchestra is an extremely hard-working ensemble, and I conduct their classical concerts, five or six within a season.

Let's now have a look at the core of orchestra, the art of communicating with it.

When I was young, I had occasional disputes. At that age, you're not a psychologist and you have your perfectionist ideas which, sometimes rightly, you put across somewhat insensitively. Only as time goes by do you unlearn this behaviour. I have to admit that orchestras under my baton only began playing once I had begun respecting that which people knew. If you approach an orchestra with a certain respect, but also with requirements, a balance forms, which I would call kind but demanding understanding.

Working with a specific ensemble over the long term also results in the development of relationships.

Yes. Over the course of time, people begin understanding each other without words, and they know what is required from them. This was the reason why, after eleven years, I left Liverpool. I had the feeling that I had nothing more to say and I thought the orchestra deserved a new face. But I was proud when the critics

wrote that the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic is the best Czech-sounding orchestra beyond the Czech Republic.

Sometimes it's difficult for the conductor to enforce a requirement for the orchestra's programme.

In Liverpool I could have whatever I wanted, yet it was always subject to discussion. The dramaturges were acquainted with the terrain and knew what had to be included in the programme. I was really lucky to have an amazing team in England, a crew par excellence, with a great sense of humour yet working with the utmost seriousness. And my priorities? Suk is a heartfelt matter, Dvořák didn't need any discussion and, as regards Smetana, in 1993 the Liverpool orchestra and I were the first foreign ensemble to open Prague Spring with My Country.

With the distance of time you can talk about the cornerstones of your repertoire.

They differed in different phases of my life. In the beginning, it was largely 20th-century music, Stravinsky and new compositions (at the time, in close cooperation with, among others, Jan Klusák). My middle period was dominated by the great Romantic repertoire and the final phase by Strauss's and Mahler's monumental symphonies and large-scale Impressionist pieces.

Has it ever happened that you had to include in the programme a work that really disagreed with you?

Yes, there have been a few such works. It happened for some external reason, because of a festival organiser or sponsor. But I accepted it and never regretted it, since I always found out something about myself and learned something. Holst's The Planets, for instance. The work is more alien to me than virtually any other I know. Nevertheless, I conducted it several times.

Many a time, it is necessary, especially when appearing as a guest, to reshape an orchestra's deep-seated interpretation. Have you always succeeded in doing so?

It depended on the ensemble's flexibility. Some things turned out well, others worse, it didn't make sense to force the issue. When an orchestra is accustomed to something different, it is difficult to get it to change its ways. Slight and continuous pressure is far more effective than dramatic change. But there was no time for long rehearsal periods, or root-and-branch changes either.

Has it sometime been difficult to make the orchestra be attentive, more musical and perfectly concentrated?

Everything depends on your authority. It grows from the absolute zero of a young conductor to the sometimes undeserved authority of an old person. Old age and grey hair do bring a certain confidence in someone's personality, even though it is not always justified. Conductors have to work really hard so as to earn attention and concentration. When I appear as a guest today, I know that the orchestra



probes my intentions. It is similar to the situation when a fabulous race-horse recognises the person who is about to sit on it.

A good outcome is undoubtedly abetted by the acoustic conditions of the concert hall.

They are crucial. But you have to adjust to any situation. Acoustic conditions are not ideal everywhere, although I do marvel at how many good halls there are around the world today. The problem arises when you give guest performances. Every day a different city, a different venue. Some of them are deaf, in others the sound comes back at you. Fortunately, a smart orchestra is able to handle it, it can somehow accommodate to worse acoustics. And the audience's response helps too. It is a part of the performance, and when it's good, the conductor and the soloist are better as well.

*Can you say that the young man's dream of working with orchestras has come true?
Is the present day the apex of your conducting career?*

No, definitely not the apex. But when I look back, I think I've done almost everything I ever wanted to do. I would say that more has happened to me than I expected.

Perhaps you remember a few of the obstacles you have faced in your life.

No, this I cannot say. All the obstacles, or things that were against me, always stemmed from myself. I've been lucky not to have found myself in a situation so

hostile that it would make my work more difficult or even make it impossible for me to work at all. All the errors have always been on my part.

Over the years of your activity, you have received a number of official acknowledgments and decorations. Perhaps most notably, Queen Elizabeth II honoured you with the Order of the British Empire and the Czech President with the Medal of Merit of the First Degree.

I don't take these honours too seriously, such things simply happen. They do give me a warm glow, yet I don't attach great weight to them. I only realise how fast my life has flowed by, in a single great joy and sorrow. I look back and ask myself did it really happen.

Your artistic plans?

I don't have any. Neither do I have desires or wishes. I would say, though, that old conductors are obliged to support young conductors, to create friendly conditions for their work, remind them of certain good old musical habits they should adhere to, and be the guardians and bearers of traditions. When it comes to contemporary instrumentalists' mastery, it's something my generation couldn't even have dreamt about, and the technical skills of orchestras are unprecedented. The only thing I would like to point out is that they should go more to the depth of the orchestral culture. Not everyone can be a soloist, yet from a great chamber culture the path leads to improving the orchestral performance. This is the way the path leads.

There is no choice but to trust in the audiences, their interest in a high-quality concert life.

A crucial role is played by the personal development of the individual. Everyone encounters the moment when he/she needs first-rate art, be it music, literature or visual arts, yet one has to mature into it. Family and friends have a significant impact in this respect. They draw a person like a magnet into the atmosphere of high-quality interests. It is necessary that these circles continually widen. I know a lot of young people who love classical music and pursue it. All is not lost.

Tell us something about the skeletons in your cupboard.

I don't have any. I have no secrets, nothing I would like to change, rectify in my life. There's nothing that would make me lose sleep in the twilight of my years.

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RESTORING A LEGEND - FROM THE GROUND UP *JARMILA NOVOTNÁ FESTIVAL*

*A little history,
a little irony, an artistic
legacy, and a dash
of Hollywood –
that’s the story
of the Czech-born
Metropolitan Opera
star Jarmila Novotná.*



Ironically, what you know about Jarmila Novotná (1907-1994) depends on not only your age, but your location.

That’s because Jarmila Novotná’s name is revered by her American contemporaries (now the older generation of opera fans) who remember her unique, expressive soprano voice from performances in US films, on television, and at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. But due to restrictions and property confiscations by the Nazis and, later, the communists, Novotná left her mother country known as Czechoslovakia in 1939, and settled in New York. Today Czechoslovakia is known by the name The Czech Republic. But in her native country, Mrs Novotná’s own name is virtually unknown. Now her family, and some complete strangers, are working to change that.

Not-Quite-Buried Treasure in the Tiny Town of Liteň

“My husband and I were looking for a quiet, countryside property,” says the young Czech woman with twinkly blue eyes. And when Petr and Ivana Leidl took a look at the crumbling old estate outside the west Bohemia village of Liteň, yes, they were attracted by the artistic challenge of restoring its former beauty, but even more so by the quiet, somehow spiritual atmosphere of the old buildings.

Their desire to renovate with historical accuracy the barn, the brewery, the sala terrena, the three-floor mansion, and other buildings led the Leidls to investigate the property's history. "We began to uncover its past only from hints, scant and scattered evidence in archives, and some old-timers' stories," Mrs Leidl recalls. Eventually the trail led to the Leidls jumping on a plane for New York to meet one of the property's original-family former owners - Jarmila Novotná's son, George Daubek, a retired businessman. The more they chatted with him, the more intrigued the Leidls became. They realized that in their search for the right property, they had stumbled on to an artistic, now almost-buried, treasure. Mrs Novotná's home, originally her husband's family-owned brewery, had in its inter-war years heyday been a gathering point for musicians, artists, writers, painters, and sculptors. "At that point, we knew we had to acquire this property, not only for our home, but to restore its name, history, and - most importantly - the artistic legacy of Mrs Novotná," Mrs Leidl recalls.

No Beds, No Bathrooms, Just Beautiful Music

They started - what else would you expect from arts lovers? - not only by plunging into repairing roofs, but also by throwing a kind of house-warming

party. They inaugurated the Jarmila Novotná Music Festival, Sept 7-9, 2012. Even though the mansion, called "the Castle," was mostly just a shell. Even though there was little lighting and no working plumbing. (Portable toilets were trucked in for the thousand guests.) But no matter. For the first time in decades, that first-festival weekend, children from the village came to play on the wide lawn and on the new swing and trampoline. In addition, students from the Prague Conservatory performed brass selections in the graffiti-tagged sala terrena. Rising young mezzo-soprano Alžběta Vomáčková sang selections from the Czech repertoire in the beautifully restored library. There, decades before, house guest Svatopluk Čech had sequestered himself to write some of his poems and novels. (Janáček later adapted one for his opera about Mr Broucek's excursions.) But befitting any festival, there had to be a Gala concert, too, of course. And this one, held on Saturday and Sunday evening, starred Jarmila Novotná's own grand-daughter, Baroque violinist Tatiana Daubek, a Julliard graduate from New York. Gonzalo Ruiz, an oboist and Julliard professor, performed a selection by Bach; young soprano Martina Šehylová offered Mozart; and the Czech Republic's Musica Florea Baroque Ensemble accompanied. They performed under portable spotlights and traces of the remaining



The Chateau and the so called "Čechovna" (a house where the poet Svatopluk Čech lived as a child), current state



delicate flower garlands stencilled on the ceiling of the Castle's ballroom, to an overflow audience settled comfortably on folding chairs.

Making Progress Making History: Festival 2013

Now the property is a flurry of activity, preparing for the festival's return Sept 6-8, 2013. The guest beds and luxury bathrooms haven't been installed, but all festival events are scheduled to provide a pleasantly full day of activities and refreshments, allowing visitors enough time to return to hotels in nearby towns or in Prague (about 20 miles away). This year again Tatiana Daubek, along with Gonzalo Ruiz and Musica Florea, will provide the music centerpiece.

The restored park will play host to a short, open-air opera, Händel's *Apollo and Daphne*. Apollo (baritone Tomáš Král) will dress as a high-powered business executive; Daphne (soprano Monika Sommerová) will be suitably attired as the Nymph; and even Liteň-area children will get into the act, escaping from the story's dragon, explains Dita Hradecká, festival artistic director.

True to the festival's aim to attract children, families, and especially young artists of all types, this year children will be entertained at an adult-chaperoned music-and-arts workshop based on characters from the opera. Prague Conservatory musicians will return once again to the sala terrena, and recitals will be offered by several young singers and musicians.

There will be a presentation on the early part of Jarmila Novotná's film career (1930s-1940s), and Czech Radio will do live remote broadcasts to describe events throughout the day Saturday. And of course, the two-evening Gala will be another highlight, this year to be held in the spruced-up, former barn. In keeping with the restoration motif, a special highlight of this year's festival is the world premiere of a newly-restored song cycle by Bohuslav Martinů. Martinů wrote the song cycle *Nový Spalíček* specifically for Jarmila Novotná. "He wanted to orchestrate it," explains Ms Hradecká, "but he died before finishing this plan." Now the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation in Prague has commissioned Czech composer Jiří Teml to re-set the piano work for five wind and five stringed instruments. *Nový Spalíček* will be performed by mezzo-soprano Lucie Hilscherová with Harmonia Mozartiana Pragensis and the Prague Conservatory String Quartet. The performance is set for 1 o'clock on Saturday afternoon.

A Grand-daughter Remembers 'Grandmother'

As with last year's festival, this year Tatiana Daubek will give a violin recital at the local church in Liteň on Sun, Sept 8 at 11:30 am. This is where, as a child, one Sunday Tatiana sat in a pew next to her grandmother. She recalls: "When I was 7 my parents wanted me to be baptized in the town where my father's family came from, in the church there in Liteň. I was very scared. I remember being completely mortified, because there were a lot of people there. Grandmother sat next to me and I remember her kind of giving me a shaking, you know, like 'Shape up,' because I was probably acting badly," Tatiana smiles softly at the memory. Tatiana adds with admiration, "She was definitely a stern woman, you know. She was very strong and she was a Diva."

Yet it can be supposed that Jarmila Novotná had a very tender side, too. In a 1988 interview with Chicago writer Bruce Duffie, Mrs Novotná explains

that she adored singing the role of Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*: “She’s a lovely, beautiful character,” she says, continuing, “I was so pleased because my son has a child, and they named her Tatyana.”

A Work in Progress

Despite a continually weakening economic climate coupled with sometimes overwhelming financial costs, the Leidls have vowed to continue their mission. The 2014 festival promises even more opportunities to revitalize the Novotná legacy, with that September’s 20th anniversary of Mrs Novotná’s death. It will also be a “Year of Czech Music,” a state-supported project promoting Czech music here and abroad, held every year ending with the numeral 4. So the energetic Leidls, the non-profit Association of Chateau Liteň, and other festival sponsors plan to inaugurate yet another ambitious project in 2014: The Jarmila Novotná Center for the Arts.

Renewing the tradition of Mrs Novotná and her husband George Daubek Sr, the estate will widen its scope to once again be a residential gathering point for young artists. In the Castle, musicians will hold public rehearsals. Singers will audition and receive master class voice coaching. In the Orangery (greenhouse), artists’ studios will provide the light and the workspace for promising young painters and sculptors from art academies. Even the old blacksmith shop will be restored to activity, as a multi-purpose space for music and theatre performances and exhibitions. It’s clear that all these projects require massive financial and other forms of support – from donations of a piano for auditions and rehearsals, to cash for repairs and renovations. The Association of Chateau Liteň (www.zamekliten.cz) is seeking sponsors – general donations, one-time and long-term sponsors, financial donations, and in-kind and service contributions.

And the Search is On for Museum Materials

The Jarmila Novotná Museum is another project in future plans. Right now, Mr Daubek, the son, is scouring remaining family records for memorabilia to be digitized for the museum and shared electronically with researchers and students worldwide. So far, he’s discovered



This year the festival takes place from 6th to 8th September

historical evidence of a very full life: his mother’s old passports, visa applications, train tickets; and correspondence with Toscanini, Czech presidents Edvard Beneš (1884–1948), TG Masaryk (1850–1937) and family, and American presidents Dwight Eisenhower and George Bush.

Most of the family’s personal memorabilia at Liteň, including documents, photos, programs, and letters, has been lost – confiscated during the two regimes, vandalized, or destroyed in the empty buildings before the property came once again into family hands. Sadly, “All the inventory was dissolved into different places after 1948,” Ms Hradecká says, “and – much was stolen, of course.” The Association is also searching for archive and documentary materials from museums and galleries, either as a permanent loan or as a gift.

So, especially valuable for the project right now is the collection of Jarmila Novotná archive material from outside the Czech Republic. Lurking anywhere in the world – but surely in the US – letters, photos, concert programs, reviews, magazine interviews, home movies, TV and film clips are buried treasure, just waiting to be unearthed from friends’ and fans’ attics, to be sent back home to Liteň.

It’s About Time... Legacies ... and Grand-daughters...

In fact, already one item has recently been rescued and restored: the large clock that traditionally sat atop the Castle. Its chime will mark the opening of this year’s festival at 6 pm on Fri, Sept 6. It’s



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News

A new issue of Czech Music Quarterly

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 Růžičková, Josef Suk. Further information here

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easy to imagine generations of people casting anxious glances up at the tower clock – whether to check on quitting time at the brewery or the arrival time of an important internationally-known artist. Unfortunately, the Leidl discovered that the clock’s original mechanism had been stolen, probably years ago. Only a few random pieces remained. So the Leidls called in clock restoration experts, the family-owned L Hainz firm that had worked on restoration of Prague’s famed Astronomical Clock in Old Town Square, several times between 1865 and 2005. Sorting through the remains of the old Castle tower clock, L Hainz’s restoration expert Mariana Nesnídalová picked up one of the clock hands laying in the tower’s dust. She turned it over. On the back, she found “L Hainz” inscribed in the metal. She is his great-great-great-grand-daughter. And so, legacies of many kinds, for many kinds of artists, continue at the Jarmila Novotná estate in the tiny town of Liteň.



Ivana Leidlová and Jarmila Novotná’s son George

The Jarmila Novotná File

Jarmila Novotná Daubek in a nutshell:

She was a Prague dress-maker’s daughter who took voice lessons from legendary Czech soprano Emmy Destinn. Her opera debut at age 17 at the National Theatre, Prague, saw her as Mařenka in *The Bartered Bride*. After singing in Berlin and Vienna, and taking roles in several films, in 1940 she was invited by Arturo Toscanini to sing at New York’s Metropolitan Opera. Due to political events in Czechoslovakia, she stayed in New York and continued to perform at the Met, until 1956. After that she gave occasional recitals and worked as an advisor to foster young singers. She died in 1994, and her remains are buried in the family tomb in Liteň.

Significant highlights:

- Sept 27, 1907 – Jarmila Novotná born in Prague
- 1921 – rejected by Prague Conservatory as too young (14 years old); thereafter takes private singing lessons from Emmy Destinn
- prior to 1924 – ‘discovered’ by Vinohrady Theatre actress Zdenka Baldová and recommended to the National Theatre as an unsalaried probationer
- 1925 – debuts as Mařenka in Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* at Prague’s National Opera House
- 1925 – begins film career, with a silent film
- 1926 – becomes a full member of the National Theatre; performs 9 characters in 72 evenings
- c. 1925 – meets Baron Jiří Daubek, landowner and businessman
- 1928 – performs in several operas in Italian opera houses
- 1929–33 – sings in the Kroll Opera, Berlin State Opera House
- 1930 – debuts in German films
- 1931 – her image placed on 100-crown (Czechoslovak) bills designed by painter Max Švabinský
- 1931 – marries Jiří Daubek
- 1932 – daughter Jarmila born
- 1933 – moves to Vienna State Opera to avoid German fascism
- 1934 – begins French film career
- 1935 – meets Arturo Toscanini
- 1938 – son George born
- 1939 – Toscanini arranges her permanent contract with The Metropolitan Opera, New York; she performs in San Francisco, and debuts in New York in 1940
- 1941 – sings for 60,000 Sokol members in Chicago
- 1942 – records patriotic songs (accompanied on piano by Jan Masaryk) in memory of the Lidice tragedy
- 1943 – tours in South America
- 1944–45 – broadcasts war morale messages and music to Czechoslovakia
- 1945 – undertakes series of post-war concerts in Czechoslovakia
- 1948 – Soviet Army takes over Liteň residence
- 1949 – returns to the US
- 1950 – begins US film career
- early 1950’s – begins US television career
- 1956 – finishes career with The Metropolitan Opera, continues to give occasional recitals
- 1972 – first permission granted for a visit to Czechoslovakia
- 1981 – husband Jiří Daubek dies; she remains with her family in the US
- Feb 9, 1994 – dies suddenly after simple surgery

JIŘÍ HEŘMAN: SCHUBERT IS FOR ME A JOURNEY TO PARADISE

After leaving the post of Artistic Director of the Opera section of the National Theatre in Prague, the stage director **Jiří Heřman** has continued to helm projects through which he is making his long-time dreams come true. One such is the stage performance of Schubert's song cycle **Die Winterreise**. The production, with sets by Pavel Svoboda and costumes by Lenka Polášková, in which a major role will be played by Daniel Tesař's light design and the vocal parts will be performed by Jiří Hájek, Jiří Brückler, Matěj Chadima and Kateřina Kněžiková, accompanied by Ivo Kahánek on the piano, will be premiered within the Strings of Autumn festival on 23 October 2013 at a non-traditional venue: Barrandov film studio No. 4.



How and when did the idea of staging Schubert's Winterreise cross your mind, and what inspired you?

After leaving the National Theatre, I began to have more time to focus on dream projects I had not previously had the time to carry out. Schubert's songs inspired me back at the time when I was studying solo singing. Later on, when I started to devote to stage direction, I found powerful inspiration in songs. I dealt with the performance of the sung word in space, I created a musical tableau in which the interpreters made use of as wide a scope of expressive means as possible, with great emphasis being placed on the development of physical movement and relation to the formed space. The idea of staging Die Winterreise crystallised last autumn. The management of the Strings of Autumn festival agreed with my vision and I am really pleased that we can link up to our fruitful collaboration when producing Britten's *Curlew River* at the Czech Museum of Music in 2006.

Will, in terms of the mood, the production have something in common with the 2000 "Northern Nights" project, evidently your first attempt at rendering on stage the song genre?

Northern Nights was a performance made up of three song cycles (by Schumann, Eben and Křička), with the overarching theme being the woman, her ideal and ill-fated amorous relationships and finding inner peace. The main character of Die Winterreise will be an abandoned, lonesome man who tries to cope with the separation from his beloved. Just as I did in Northern Nights, I will evolve the idea of a musical-scenic tableau. Imagine that you are reading a poem and then, on the basis of your feelings, you draw a picture from it. In Die Winterreise, we will enter the landscape of a lonely man.

Owing to its unbroken narrative line, the cycle actually forms a self-contained story, something similar to an opera. Has anyone previously had the idea of conceiving it as a stage performance?

Die Winterreise has inspired plenty of creators, both musicians and writers. The work has previously been given the form of a stage performance, at least in the German-speaking

countries, where songs enjoy great interest. I think there are various film versions too. I haven't actually seen any of them, but not out of lack of interest. Whenever I stage a new production, I concentrate solely on that through which the work speaks to me in its original form. That's what my work is about, listening to the music and the text, as though I were hearing them for the very first time. I let them work on me to evoke new ideas and images. It will be a loose treatment of the cycle though; the production will also contain other Schubert songs related to this inspired piece. For instance, Die Taubenpost (Pigeon Messages), reputedly the last song Schubert composed.

What does the cycle contain for you in terms of metaphors, meanings, and the like?

Schubert's songs are permeated with love, they harbour gentleness, defiance, struggle against fate. Unfulfilled love is one of the eternal themes of human life, and it's wonderful to immerse oneself in it in the poetic and tender form of Schubert's song cycle. It teaches us to see ourselves as though in a mirror. It unveils to us the most delicate forms of amorous feeling; it is a landscape of our sensitive soul.

How will the whole come across in your production? Will it involve catharsis, conciliation, or merely resignation?

I believe it will come across in a positive manner. I draw upon the conviction that with every birth we continue on our journey to "paradise". Even though on this journey our ego may often tell us "No, it's not paradise, because no one here loves me", and our vision many a time becomes cold and emotionless, despite the reality being totally different. I perceive Die Winterreise as one of the phases of the journey to paradise. It teaches us how to listen to our heart. We are confronted not only with personal and selfless love, but death as well. Is it a blessing for the wayfarer, or is it an insurmountable obstacle in the form of fear?

Are any of the songs especially close to you and do you consider any of them pivotal for the cycle as a whole?

All of them are close to me, but I find one



Jiří Heřman

of the keys to this production in the ninth song, Irrlicht (Will-o'-the-wisp): "I'm used to going astray; yet every path leads to one goal. Our joys, our woes, are all a will-o'-the-wisp game."

Did you have any specific singer or singers in mind? Why are there so many performers in the production, what roles do they play?

Although Die Winterreise is written for a single solo voice, I kept hearing three different voices in it. Later on, I identified them as the inner voice of the lover, which I decided to personify in our production. This has given rise to an interesting dramatic "trialogue" amid the landscape of the abandoned lover's imagination. The male landscape blends together with a female landscape, which will be formed by the character of a girl. I have chosen the cast on the basis of my previous work with the singers, who for me are a guarantee of unfettered creative energy.

How will the "winter" atmosphere of the songs be projected into the set design?

When we are in a disconsolate state of mind, we see even a heavenly landscape as cold and ominous. I am obsessed with seeking relations between

the space and the music; the space here is for me the landscape of the soul, the image of our inner world. The film studio at Barrandov is an inspiring space, its large area and rising multi-storey wooden footbridges evoke something special immediately after you enter the room. It's a dramatic space that directly urges you to create distinct theatre. Suggestions of the winter atmosphere will certainly be projected in the production, but not obviously.

How do you imagine the hero of the cycle? What kind of character is he?

He is a person of desire.

How long does it take to complete such a production and what do the preparations involve?

Initially, there was an idea, a vision, one that I have borne in my head for several years. Eleven months will have elapsed from taking the decision on the staging to the actual premiere. Each implementation of a performance at a non-theatre space is extremely demanding in organisational terms and when it comes to the technical equipment. On the other hand, non-theatre spaces are unique in that you possess absolute freedom as to how to grasp them: for instance, in the actual decision of where to place the audience. The authentic space itself already forms in part the set design. We will be rehearsing the project in four phases. The first three will take place in the National Theatre rehearsal rooms, the final one will be at the Barrandov studio. I consider it crucial for there to be time intervals between the individual phases, during which some already rehearsed parts of the production will settle down and we will also gain a sufficient distance from that which we have created. When it comes to the singers and the pianist, Ivo Kahánek, it will be a totally new type of creative work. In this project, I would like to attempt a novel theatre form. I want to progress further in the performance of the sung word. More significant than the story itself is the aspect of contemplation.

In our country, the song genre doesn't have a background comparable with that in German-speaking countries. Why do you think this is so?

I'd rather ask the question of how many artists devote to performing songs in the Czech Republic. As regards Schubert, I don't know of any singer systematically pursuing interpretation of the genius's music. His songs are not only about love, they also deal with our existence as such, they have a lot to say to us today. They compel us to profound perception of our lives. That is the reason why I would like to make the audience more familiar with songs. They are a treasure we have almost forgotten about. The time has come to rediscover it.

How will you make it easier for the Czech audience to understand the performance - will it be with subtitles or do you rely on the fact that it will be attended by those who already love Schubert's songs, who are very well acquainted with the work?

The songs will be performed in the original language, it wouldn't be possible otherwise. They are, after all, direct settings of Müller's poems, which are absolute and cannot be changed. During the performance, the Czech text will be projected so that the audience can sufficiently comprehend every song. As I have mentioned, it will be a theatre of contemplation, i.e. a standstill and immersion in oneself.

What other productions and stage projects have you given thought to?

There are plenty of them. I would like to continue staging operas in non-traditional spaces. At the moment, I'm preparing a large-scale Czech opera project, yet I can't reveal any details at this juncture. Everything is in the preparation phase; I am seeking suitable people to work with and benefactors. I want to provide an impulse for the renaissance of the Czech operatic repertoire.

What are you working on right now?

In addition to *Die Winterreise*, I'm preparing to direct my first-ever drama, Lorca's *Yerma*, and I'm also preparing for the National Theatre Fibich's final opera *The Fall of Arkun*, an inspired musical drama, today virtually unknown.

Jiří Heřman

One of the most distinguished Czech stage directors of the present day, Jiří Heřman's productions bear a distinct hallmark and gravitate towards an abstract, ritual even, light-permeated form. He studied voice at the Conservatory in Plzeň and opera direction at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Following Northern Nights, a stage performance of song cycles by Robert Schumann, Petr Eben and Jaroslav Křička (2000), in 2001, in co-operation with the Contemporary Opera Club, he implemented the Dvakrát nová opera (New Opera Twice) project, a double bill made up of chamber one-acters by Michal Nežtek (Dementia praecox) and Marko Ivanović (The Maiden and Death), for which he received an award at the Opera 2003 festival in Prague. In 2002 and 2004, he staged at the J. K. Tyl Theatre in Plzeň Saint-Saëns's Samson et Dalila and Wagner's Der fliegende Holländer, with the latter being nominated for the 2004 Alfréd Radok Award in the Production of the Year category and receiving the Sazka and Divadelní noviny Prize for direction and the Alfréd Radok Award for set design (Pavel Svoboda). In the autumn of 2004, Jiří Heřman staged at the NoD Universal Space in Prague the first independent project of his in spe association, the original production Lamenti (Michal Nežtek and Francesco Micieli), inspired by Claudio Monteverdi's Lamento d'Arianna, which was subsequently also performed at the Schlachthaus Theater in Bern. This production represented the Czech Republic at the Riocenacontemporanea festival in Rio de Janeiro. With in the 2005 Strings of Autumn international music festival in Prague, Heřman's production of Benjamin Britten's church parable Curlew River was staged to great acclaim. In April 2007, he was named Artistic Director of the National Theatre in Prague's Opera section. He held the post until the end of 2011. At the National Theatre, he created acclaimed productions of Claudio Monteverdi's L'Orfeo, Antonín Dvořák's Rusalka and Bohuslav Martinů's opera The Miracles of Mary. Heřman's productions of Wagner's Parsifal and Dvořák's The Jacobin earned plaudits too. Another event of major significance was the Czech premiere of Britten's Gloriana, directed by Heřman.

JAN VIČAR: TRANSFORM, BUT DON'T MANGLE

The Olomouc native Jan Vičar is an active musicologist and pedagogue who for a number of years headed the Musicology Department at the Faculty of Arts of the local Palacký University. At the same time, he is a composer who defines himself as a post-modern musical traveller. The latest item in his discography is the CD *Ej, Janku!* (Hey, Johnny!), containing folk song arrangements for chorus. Vičar selected songs from various regions of Bohemia and Moravia and entrusted their performance to first-rate Czech ensembles, including Bambini di Praga, the Czech Radio Children's Choir, Jitro, Gentlemen Singers and Martinů Voices. Our interview mainly focused on how a contemporary composer gets to folk material.

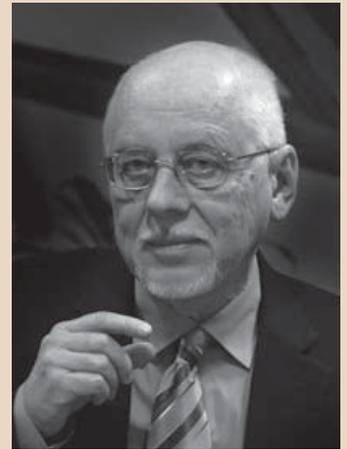


PHOTO: PETR ZATLOUKAL

How did you encounter folk music? Did you grow up in a milieu in which it had a marked presence?

No, I was born into a family in which folk songs were not present. Neither my mother, a doctor, nor my father, a lawyer, sang them to me. And besides classical music, which I performed in my childhood as a concert accordionist, as a city child I rather absorbed the period pop music. One of my very first songs, which I wrote together with my friend when I was about fourteen, was a Czech “big-beat”.

I only began to realise the value of folk songs while attending the Philosophical Faculty of Palacký University, under the influence of Professor Robert

Smetana, a noted Czech musicologist and folklorist. My relationship further deepened after 1975, when I became chorus master of the Olomouc Female Teachers' Choir and we performed a few robust arrangements of folk songs, Alexander Moyzes's *Trávnice*, for instance. I myself first tried to stylise folk material during my studies of composition at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno and the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in the *String Quartet* (1978), the *Nonet* (1979) and the cycle *Japanese Year* (1979), with the latter being replete with folk Nipponisms. During my frequent visits to the Orava region in Slovakia, I attended several editions of the festival

in Východná and the Podrohácké Folk Festival. Then in Zuberec I met the autodidact violinist “ujo Vidiečan” whose song *Žajača* (Hare Song) years later served as the basis of my piece *Pocta hudcům* (Homage to Fiddlers) for violin and cello (2006). My gaze from the non-folk city of Olomouc and later on Prague’s Lesser Town thus turned east, first to the Walachia region, then Slovakia, until it finally rested on the Moravia-Slovakia borderland – the area of “Kopanice” (Moravian Highlands).

When listening to choral singing, especially if it is music linked with country traditions, I get the feeling that it is a sonic parallel to the “collective identity”. Do you think that music is capable of expressing something like national identity (however problematic defining this term may be)?

The musical expression of various nations and ethnic regions differs – in terms of melody, metre and rhythm, modality, declamation of vocals, sonority of voices, etc. Its evolution is intricate, yet the resulting musical structures are relatively stabilised at the given time in the respective area and are thus conceived as characteristic.

At international choir festivals and competitions, both the audience and the juries expect that the ensembles will also perform something from the repertoire of “their” country and, in addition, sing it “correctly”. And if they don national or regional folk costumes during their performance, the success is all but guaranteed and apposite information about the national identity (before the eras of industrialisation and globalisation) is communicated. Children’s choirs make do with simple folk song harmonisations, while mature ensembles perform sophisticated stylisations of folk material. The Estonians, for instance, sing Veljo Tormis’s folk-inspired compositions, Filipino choirs present arrangements of their folk songs, US ensembles perform Afro-American spirituals, and Czech ensembles sing, say, “Hoj, hura, hoj!” from Otmar Mácha’s *Lašské halekačky* (Lachian Whoopings). Fortunately, Czech music – as regards folk music, especially that from the areas of Moravia and Czech Silesia – has something to offer the foreign public. When the Czech Philharmonic is on tour abroad, the local promoters require it to perform works by Dvořák and Smetana in particular. The audience is then astonished by the sheer “Czechness” and

“authenticity” of the performance, which may be borne by the softness and loveliness of the sound of the strings, lyrical expression, and the like.

A more complicated situation occurs when a composer does not quote folk dances and folk songs in their entirety, including the lyrics, but employs just a few of their idioms. In this case, the music does not directly express national identity yet – within the period reception context – certainly refers to it. In the sphere of high art in Europe over the past centuries, a musical work of art was (besides other things) a special unity of the individual, national and universal, namely in various proportions. In the long run, however, the artistic value of a work proved to be more important than its ability to fulfil a short-term social function. This “value”, as a complex quality of the musical structure, was then gradually appropriated by the national cultural elite, who projected into the work their ideas and requirements – until the work was accepted and acknowledged as a national treasure. Thus Bedřich Smetana, a champion of Wagner and Liszt – irrespective of the extra-musical subjects in his creation – became a Czech national composer primarily owing to the fact that he was a truly great and peerless music creator, whereas folklorists, diligent yet minor artists, have fallen into oblivion.

Choral singing has a strong tradition in the Czech Republic, and it is still thriving at the present time. What, in your opinion, is it that makes it so attractive?

The human voice is the most natural and therefore most beautiful musical instrument there is. Choral singing a cappella, which multiples its possibilities, is attractive in both social and psychological terms. Some type of secular or sacred form of choral singing can be found in all epochs and everywhere around the world. Although in the Czech lands it has changed the centre of gravity of its social functions – ideological, educatory and artistic – and has experienced waves of interest or disinterest on the part of the public, it still exists. About a hundred years ago, an innovation of crucial significance was Janáček’s choruses as performed by the Moravian Teachers’ Choir, headed by Ferdinand Vach. Over the past few decades, we have witnessed an impressive development of children’s choral singing and the establishment of Czech regional choir schools. Beyond the traditional centres, such

Ej, Janku

Upravil Jan Vičar (Sušil 507)

J. ca 72

Soprani *mf* Ej, Jan-ku, ja-ni-čku, vo-ňa-vý hřebí-čku, jakšty mně za-vo-něl, v toméi-řem po-lečku. *f* To mo-je

Mezzo-Soprani *mf* Ej, Jan-ku, ja-ni-čku, vo-ňa-vý hřebí-čku, jakšty mně za-vo-něl, v toméi-řem po-lečku. *f* To mo-je

Alti *mf* Ej, Jan-ku, ja-ni-čku, vo-ňa-vý hřebí-čku, jakšty mně za-vo-něl, v toméi-řem po-lečku. *f* To mo-je

Coro secondo
o tre Soli

10 sr-den-ko tak si ho-ře-ku-je, že si le-da-ko-ho věr-ně za-ma-lu-je. *mp* To mo-je sr-den-ko tak ve mně

sr-den-ko tak si ho-ře-ku-je, že si le-da-ko-ho věr-ně za-ma-lu-je. *mp* To mo-je sr-den-ko tak ve mně

sr-den-ko tak si ho-ře-ku-je, že si le-da-ko-ho věr-ně za-ma-lu-je. *mp* To mo-je sr-den-ko tak ve mně

10 *mf* Sr-den-ko bu-cho

20 bu-cho-ec, jako ta ry-běn-ka v hlubo-kém po-to-ec. *ff* Ej, Jan-ku, ej, Jan-ku

bu-cho-ec, jako ta ry-běn-ka v hlubo-kém po-to-ec.

bu-cho-ec, jako ta ry-běn-ka v hlubo-kém po-to-ec. *ff* Ej, Jan-ku, ej, Jan-ku

20 *Solo* *ff* Ja-ni-čku,

schools were set up, for instance, in Liberec by Milan Uherek and in Hradec Králové by Jiří Skopal. They have succeeded in enthusing children, intriguing composers and inspiring today's first-rate young chorus masters.

How do you approach composing folk-inspired pieces?

Folk songs attract me owing to their naturalness, viability, as well as formal refinement. Sometimes all you need to do is to “lighten them up”, as was the case of *Ej, Janku!* (Hey, Johnny!), or combine them, as in the case of *Ej, horeňka* (Oh, Woodlands) and *Uspávanky* (Lullabies); or their melodies can be imitated, varied or “decomposed” and subsequently re-stylised. I strive to work with motifs in compliance with the properties and the natural musical energy

they potentially comprise. For the most part, I take the path of loose variation work with the theme, while the resulting “variations” can take the form of added ornaments, as is the case of the cycle *K horám* (Toward the Mountains), or increased tempo, as in *Gorale* (Hillbillies) and *Vejr* (Owl), or changed timbre or “space”, as in *Daleko široko* (Far and Wide).

I understand Václav Trojan, who in his folk-oriented compositions aimed to show “how beautiful it is”. In my arrangements and technically demanding stylisations, I myself try “not to mangle it too much”. I had a peculiar and powerful experience in this respect. Some time in the 1970s, at the Festival of International Choral Art Jihlava, Zdeněk Lukáš and his choir Česká píseň (Czech Song) presented in the first part of the evening selected unique folk stylisations by Antonín Dvořák and Bohuslav

as unquestionable creators of this type of music. Yet towering high above them is Leoš Janáček, who is so singular that it is impossible to link up to him. Serving as a certain general model is his *Moravian Folk Poetry in Songs*, in which Janáček simply exposes the songs, merely adding the minimum of ornamental flourishes, brush strokes and artful elements.

So I'd rather not speculate about my affinity to anyone and conceive a selected folk formation as an impressive *objet trouvé* that can be either polished or, contrariwise, sharpened. I merely deem myself an occasional "folklorist". I only set about composing my first choral cycle, *K horám* (Toward the Mountains), in 2004, after being called upon to do so by the chorus master Jakub Martinec, for Boni Pueri's tour of the USA and Japan. At the time, my colleague, the music aesthetician Roman Dykast, otherwise also first violin of a cimbalom band, recommended to me the folklore of the Kopenice region in Moravia. The local "musical stories" intrigued me.

Some use the word "post-modern" in connection with your work, and you have branded yourself as such in an interview as well. What does this term mean to you?

For me, it represents the possibility of being a "musical traveller" who, regardless of that which is momentarily deemed proper and modern, changes inspirations and switches between compositional techniques, styles and genres. It's enjoyable,

colourful and there's a touch of adventure in it too. But it's not easy, because every musical style or genre, including folk, requires special preparation and concentration. Now and then, I envy some of my colleagues for continuing to be original, discernible, and delightfully piling up their opuses in a life-long pitch class set or a singular style one after another.

A few years ago, you co-founded the MusicOlomouc festival, focused on contemporary music. How has the festival evolved since then? Has it found its audience?

After the five editions so far, I can say that the project represents a new quality in Olomouc's musical life and perhaps Czech musical culture too. To date, approximately 150 pieces by contemporary Czech and foreign composers have been performed in Olomouc for the first time, some even in world premiere. The main organiser is the Musicology Department of Palacký University and the audience is largely formed by university students and the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra subscribers. At the end of April, all the concert halls were packed, and since it is a poly-style festival, every even minimally sensitive listener had something to savour. I consider the most interesting concert within the latest festival the complete performance of Sofia Gubaidulina's string quartets by the Stamic Quartet, which took place in the exquisite milieu of the Palacký University Arts Centre Chapel.

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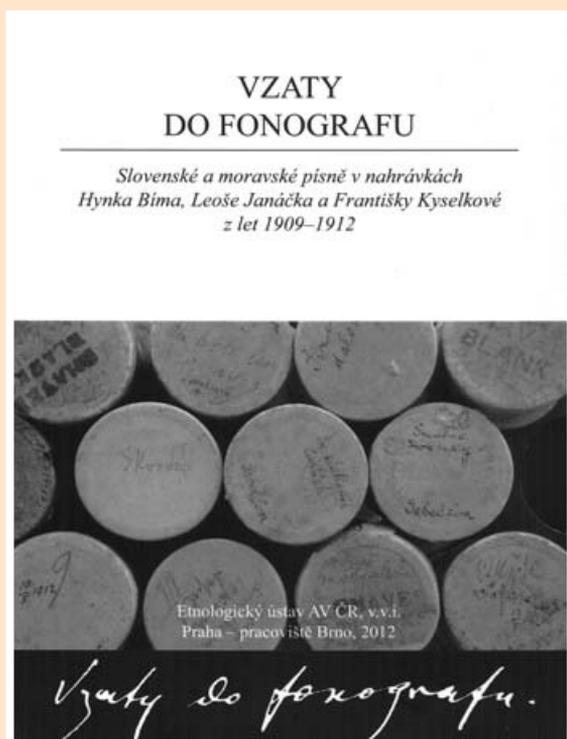
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VOICES FROM WAX CYLINDERS

EARLY 20TH-CENTURY RECORDINGS OF FOLK SONGS

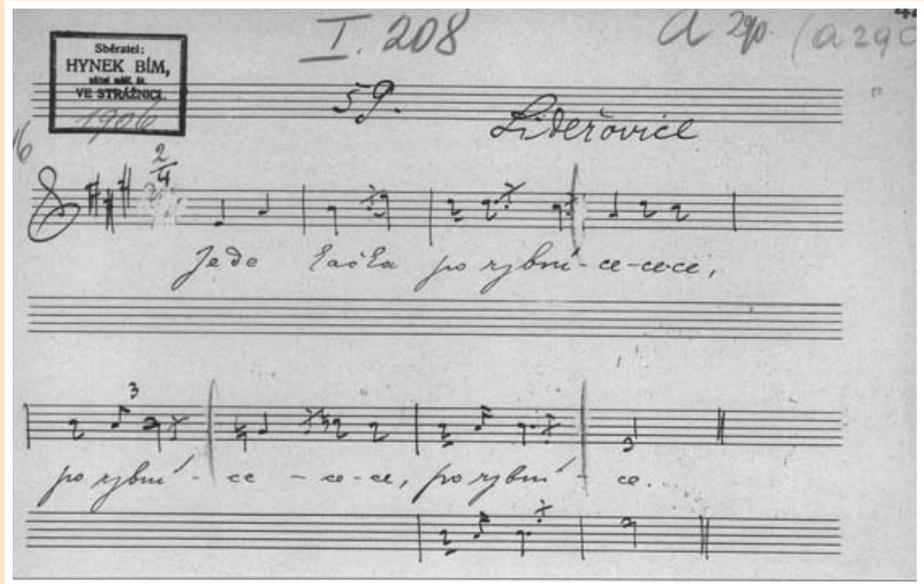


Composite authors: Jarmila Procházková, Gerda Lechleitner, Hana Urbancová, Alžběta Lukáčová, Lucie Uhlíková, Franz Lechleitner, Milan Fügner, Václav Mach, Michal Škopík: *Vzaty do fonografu. Slovenské a moravské písně v nahrávkách Hynka Bíma, Leoše Janáčka a Františky Kyselkové z let 1909–1912.*

(Taken to the Phonograph. Slovak and Moravian songs in recordings made by Hynek Bím, Leoš Janáček and Františka Kyselková from 1909 to 1912.)

Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v. v. i. Brno 2012

Audio recordings of the human voice possess something magical - especially when it comes to recordings in whose case the listener is divided by a long period of time from the recorded narrator or singer. Naturally, in the case of ethnomusicology, rather than magic it concerns the fact that audio recording itself formed it as an independent domain and had a significant impact on its methodology.



The song "Jede kačka po rybníce" as sung by Tomáš Kúsálik and recorded by Hynek Bím in Vnorovy, 1911

In recent years, there have been a growing number of editions of historical recordings worldwide, including those from the very dawn of audio recording. In this respect, folk music in the Czech Republic has clear milestones: the oldest preserved audio recordings date from 1909 and were made in Bohemia by Otakar Zich and in Moravia by Leoš Janáček and his associates Hynek Bím and Františka Kyselková. In both cases, they formed part of the *Das Volkslied in Österreich* (Folk Song in Austria) project, whose aim it was to map folk music culture throughout the entire former monarchy. Zich's recordings of bagpipe music made in South Bohemia were digitised and released in 2001. The collections initiated by Janáček came out three years previously, yet at the time they only represented a selection. What's more, the recordings were not produced from the original wax cylinders but from copies recorded on to foils and subsequently on to magnetic tape.

The new publication contains a much greater quantity of recordings which, in co-operation with the Phonogrammarchiv of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, were digitised directly from the original wax cylinders. Recordings on three CDs and one data DVD accompany two volumes, the first comprising transcriptions of the song lyrics

and spoken word on the recordings, the second containing studies dealing with the various aspects of this unique collection. These studies markedly increase the value of the historical recordings, manifesting the significance of this type of material for ethnomusicological research.

Jarmila Procházková's introductory study describes in detail the course of the recording events: when and where a particular type of repertoire was recorded, as well as which singers participated in it. In the next chapter, Gerda Lechleitner supplements the historical context and shows how collections of songs in Moravia were involved in the *Das Volkslied in Österreich* project. Three studies analyse individual groups of recordings in terms of the regions from which the performers hailed. Hana Urbancová devotes to songs from Strážovské vrchy and the Javorníky mountains, Alžběta Lukáčová to the village of Terchová and environs, and Lucie Uhlíková to recordings of songs in the village of Vnorovy. Each of the chapters details the characteristics of the musical culture in the particular region, which is then juxtaposed with that which is recorded on the wax cylinders. The reader also acquires an idea of what research into folk music at the beginning of the 20th century was like, owing to the diaries kept by Janáček, Bím



Tómas Kúsalík in Petrov, 1912



Hynek Bím (1874–1958)



Františka Kyselková (1865–1951)

and Kyselková: *After dinner, we went to visit the Slovaks at the manor. It was already twilight. In the courtyard, women and children were washing by the water-pump. We entered the bedroom. At the sides, there were beds from planks laid askew. Two or three kerosene lamps twinkled. In the middle, men and women were sitting on the ground around large bowls, girls, boys and children by kettles – they were having their dinner. Some of them were already on the beds and looking at us with curiosity. When we told them what we wanted, we heard laughter. The girls peeped at us from their beds and the boys lounged on the other side. They pointed at each other, saying that he or she knows songs, and they pointed to the others. “If they had the courage they would sing.” Finally, they began singing, in demonstration. They sang nice songs and sang them well.*

The core of the project is, of course, the actual recordings, whose digitisation and further processing was a challenging process, the details of which are described in the texts penned by Franz Lechleitner, Milan Fügner, Václav Mach and Michal Škopík. Naturally, they are not recordings that one would put on in the background for “easy listening”. The voices struggle to make their way through an intense hiss to which the ears of the contemporary listener are not accustomed. Back at the time of making the recordings, Leoš Janáček noted that each replay of the cylinder reduced the signal as a result of mechanical wear and tear (the cylinders were replayed so that the recordings could be transcribed and analysed,

during presentations of the research, and were also replayed for the singers who wanted to hear their voices captured by the device), which was later compounded by other negative factors, such as, for instance, the mould that formed on the cylinders. Digitisation was thus carried out at the last moment, when it was still possible by means of a computer to acquire the maximum from the grooves, including from the cylinders that in the meantime had fallen apart into several shards.

Although the recordings were made in Moravia, the overwhelming majority of the performers hailed from Slovakia. They were farm labourers who had arrived from various Slovak regions. Accordingly, two of the three CDs comprise Slovak folk songs: from the Strážovské vrchy and Javorníky mountains, and the Terchová valley. The third CD contains recordings made in the village of Vnorovy, near Hodonín. The bulk of this disc is taken up by church songs, a type of repertoire that is scarcely available on recordings. There are songs for individual annual occasions, such as Christmas and Easter, and also songs sung at the time of drought as a plea for rain. Despite the hiss and crackle, we can hear well the specific style of the songs’ performance, changes in the tempo and intonation, phenomena that were hard to capture in the traditional music notation. Back in 1910, when the activities pursued by Janáček and his colleagues started to be known to the public, the period press highlighted the merits of the then

state-of-the-art technology: *“The phonograph captures the character of the singer’s voice, the ornamentation of the melody, which can only with difficulty be written down in music notation; many songs are indeterminate in terms of their key, they are sung in both major and minor, with their tunes being sung by singers differently each time. And the phonograph? It captures everything.”*

The publication is an extraordinary accomplishment that provides a wealth of valuable information about folk music in Moravia and Slovakia, as well as about the history of the research into it. In addition, it relates to more general issues of historical exploration in ethnomusicology. The book is the fruit of team work and would also warrant attention on an international scale – and not only owing to the name of Leoš Janáček, a sure-fire allurements for many foreign readers. This, however, gives rise to a critical remark: The publication is not overly friendly towards readers with no knowledge of Czech. The volume containing the studies only provides a general summary in German. Only in the second volume have the titles of the songs and the short notes

pertaining to them of the “sung by a group of women” type been translated into English. The situation is better in the case of the DVD, which contains English versions of the comments on the list of songs and some other information. What is laudable, however, is the fact that the DVD also provides music transcriptions of the recordings in the original manuscripts and, in a few cases, contemporary transcriptions too.

For Leoš Janáček, folk music served as an essential source of inspiration and this unique collection makes it possible for us to understand what it was that so attracted him in folk songs. Furthermore, the publication is a superb historical probe into the development of culture in Central Europe.

Peter Ablinger
Petr Bakla
Carola Baukholt
John Cage
Franco Donatoni
Morton Feldman
Jon Gibson
Philip Glass
Johannes Kalitzke
Petr Kotík
Bernhard Lang
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WHERE IS MY HOME?

OR THE FATES AND PATHS OF THE VOLÁNEK FAMILY OF MUSICIANS

We often come across the claim that when visiting the Czech lands in 1772 the English music historian Charles Burney (1726–1814) described them as “the Conservatorium of Europe”. This is, however, inaccurate with regard to both its formulation and content, as Hubert Reitterer recently explained in detail in his Mozart study.¹ Over the course of time, Burney’s statement acquired in the Czech environment various nationally or patriotically inspired music-history slanting interpretations. How did this come to pass? Music historiographers referred the term “the Bohemians” in Burney’s publication solely to the Czech-speaking musicians and institutions, not those belonging to the music culture of Czech Germans. The reformulation “Bohemia is the Conservatorium of Europe” thus replaced Burney’s original idea, one which is both commendatory and critical: *“I had frequently been told, that the Bohemians were the most musical people of Germany, or, perhaps, of all Europe. [...] Nature, though often partial to individuals, in her distribution of genius and talents, is never so to a whole people.”*²

The mentioned inaccuracy notwithstanding, at the time music really was one of the major associations for the culture of the population

in the heart of Europe. Burney did not perceive the Czech lands as merely an isolated territory teeming with musicians, composers, singers, music pedagogues, etc., but primarily as a centre from which musicianship spread throughout Europe, the world even. The plethora of capable musicians within so small a music scene led to their extensive migration into neighbouring, as well as more distant, countries. Therefore, the Czech music lexicographic literature abounds in the phrases “a musician abroad”, a composer abroad”, “a representative of the Czech musical emigration”, “a musician of Czech origin” and the like.

It frequently even occurred that Czech musical communities originated beyond the Czech borders. These could either take the form of extended families (as was the case of the famed Benda clan), or groups with a bold representation of musicians of Czech origin (e.g. the Mannheim School with Jan Václav Stamice/Stamitz, Antonín Fils/Filtz and František Xaver Richter, Jiří Čert/Czart), with a specific phenomenon being the music scenes of Czech communities abroad, in Chicago and Vienna, for instance.

Vienna: one of the centres of Czech music abroad

Vienna was the city with which the significantly extended Volánek family of musicians connected a great part of their lives. Can it be deemed as being at the same level as more famous Czech musical families, such as the Brixis, Foersters, Urbáněks or Míčas? Indeed it can, in a certain

¹ The paper was presented at the international conference *Musik im Spannungsfeld nationaler Bewusstseinsbildung – Prag in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (18-20 November 2009, Regensburg).

² Charles Burney: *Hudební cestopis 18. věku*, translated by Jaroslava Pippichová (orig. *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*). Prague 1966, p. 276. Further quotations on p. 277 and p. 279.



Robert Volánek, Sr. (a portrait from 1895)



An advertisement for Robert Volánek (“Robert Volánek, music director and chorus master, offers his services, provision of concert and dance music, at the very reasonable prices. He also teaches singing, the violin, piano, etc.”)

sense. Yet not owing to the family’s compositional genius or virtuosity; the Voláneks’ main specificity lies in their long-term contribution to the development of the Czech compatriot music scene in Vienna. Let’s be frank, precious few individuals, let alone musical families, are known in this area. If the association with the proverbial “böhmisches Musikantentum” (or “every Czech is a musician”) crosses our mind, then the Volánek family is the best example. Music culture did not only develop due to several dozen towering figures, but also a basis made up of the so-called Kleinmeisters. Czech music historiography has had a harsh approach to the disseminators of Czech music abroad, as well as to the music culture of our compatriots around the globe in general. This essay strives to set this wrong right, at least somewhat, and to show that, if provided (preferably systematic) support a lot of interesting personalities and events can be discovered in this field.

Building up a compatriot cultural scene in Vienna was an effort in many respects far more complicated than, for instance, building up Czech musical life in Prague or Brno. The German population in Vienna even considered the Slavonic enclave in Vienna to be dangerous. The minority could not lean on historical roots linked with the place, while there was no evident cultural elite. Nationalism, suggesting to the Slavonic nations the idea of being inferior, and the anxiety at losing its German character made the capital of the monarchy not only the proverbial “melting pot” (Schmelztiegel) but, occasionally, also the imaginary powder keg. According to an unofficial estimate, around half a million people hailing from the Czech lands were living in Vienna circa 1900. The majority of them soon assimilated with the German population, with only a small percentage devoting to patriotic activities aimed at strengthening the Czech national identity. And when it comes to music, the Volánek family had great merit in this regard.

The 1st generation: Jan Volánek and Anna Volánková

The first family member to arrive in Vienna was Robert Jan Volánek (for the sake of lucidity of the text, hereinafter referred to as “Robert Volánek, Sr.”). So as to maintain the chronology, let us first mention his parents, the village tailor **Jan Volánek** (1822–1912), born in Pátek u Poděbrad, and **Anna** (1823–1899, née Krejčí),

Regional Society), in which he served as deputy chairman for many years. The genesis of this prominent organisation dates back to the 1880s, yet it was only founded in 1895, as documented by Volánek's letter dated 24 February 1895 to the chorus master of the Prague-based Hlahol society, Josef Klička, in which he asked to be sent the articles of the *Jednota zpěvácých spolků českoslovanských* (Association of Czech-Slavonic Choirs) with the following substantiation: "We in Vienna too intend to set up a choral regional organisation, hence I am also turning to you..." So as to outline Volánek's significance, we will again refer to 1895: at the time, he was one of the chorus masters who led associated Czech-Viennese choirs at the Czech-Slavonic Ethnography Exhibition that year in Prague.

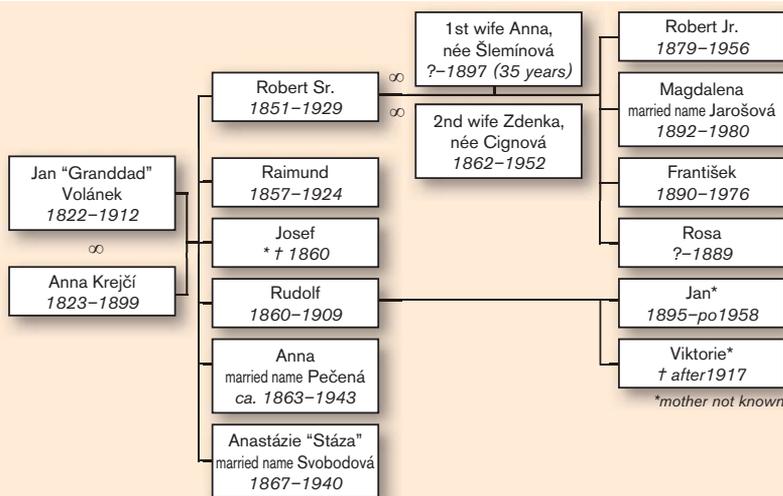
Typical of the Viennese Czechs was membership of the sports organisation *Sokol* (*Vienna Sokol*). Robert Volánek, Sr. was by turn its deputy chairman, chairman, managing director, and in 1893 was even elected chairman of the *Sokolská župa dolnorakouská* (Lower Austria Sokol Association), an organisation associating all regional Sokol societies. One such, from 1888, was the *Sokolská jednota Tyrš* (Tyrš Sokol Association) in District XV. The members of the organisation, in which Volánek served as vice-chancellor, chairman and managing director, initially convened in his pub at Turnergasse 9 (Volánek was an innkeeper and later on also a property owner), the very same building in which a significant centre of Viennese Czechs – the National House in District XV – was founded. Another typical aspect of the Viennese Czechs' life was their engagement in amateur theatre. In the still active society *Vlastenecká*

omladina (Patriotic Youth), Volánek worked as chorus master for some time, and in the pre-war years he also conducted the orchestra accompanying drama productions. Furthermore, he was an honorary member of numerous societies in Vienna, including the *Jednota Sv. Methoděje* (St. Methodius Society), in whose 1st department he played the organ. From 1877 to 1887, he also played the organ during Czech masses at the St. Anna Church. It would not be easy to list all the organisations in which Volánek was an active or contributing member; to name but a few: *Klub rakouských národností* (Club of Austrian Nationalities), *Komenský pro Šestidomy* (Komenský for Šestidomy), *Politická jednota* (Political Association), *Slovanská beseda* (Slavonic Society).

Robert Volánek, Sr. also proved to have an organisational acumen when arranging trips and concert tours to the Czech lands.



The First Czech National House in Vienna (Turnergasse 9, District XV)



Family tree of the Voláneks

The commemorative record of a trip made in the summer of 1900 even reveals Volánek as the writer of the article *I. Český národní dům ve Vídni* (The First Czech National House in Vienna).³ And in all likelihood it was he who in 1878, under the initials “R-r.”, wrote for the *Vídeňské zvěsti* (Vienna News). Volánek was also an exemplary host to visitors coming to Vienna from Bohemia and Moravia. When on 16 April 1906 the famous *Pěvecké sdružení moravských učitelů* (Moravian Teachers’ Choir) gave a performance at the Musikverein, Volánek was among those who welcomed them at the railway station in Vienna. As a patriot, he was active during the census in the Austrian capital too.

Following the summary of his copious social activities, we should give a brief outline of Volánek’s education. He took private voice and chorus-mastering lessons from the doyen of the Slavonic music scene in Vienna, Arnošt Förchgott-Tovačovský; in 1883 he passed the exam at the organ school of the Cecilian Wiener Ambrosius-Verein. Ten years previously, his whole family had moved to Vienna from Bohemia: his parents, brothers Rudolf and Raimund, and sisters Anastazie and Anna. Robert Volánek, Sr. was married twice, yet he evidently only had children – the sons Robert and František and the daughter Magdalena – with his first wife, Anna (née Šlemínová/Schleming); his second wife was Zdeňka (née Cignová), whom he married some time after 1897.

The oldest generation of Viennese Czechs can still recall their parents and grandparents talking about the performances given by Robert Volánek, Sr.’s ensemble, the Czech National Orchestra, established by him and his brothers Rudolf and Raimund in 1878. It was the very first ensemble of its type and for many years to come was the ensemble in the greatest demand. Although numerous subsequent national orchestras emerged, Volánek’s was the only one to maintain continuity and a consistently high quality. Evidently, the greatest honour paid to him was his being invited to perform for the Russian ambassador in Vienna (Prince Paul von Oubril). As documented by, for instance, the magazine *Lev* (II, 1880, Issue II, p. 144), Volánek garnered



Arnošt Förchgott-Tovačovský, singer, composer, chorus master and teacher (including of Robert Volánek, Sr.)



Advertisement for Robert Volánek, Sr.’s First Czech National Orchestra (1903)

such success that he had to repeat his programme featuring Slavonic compositions. The Czech National Orchestra enlivened hundreds of patriotic events and occasionally remitted part of its fee to the benefit of the *Komenský* school society – this was mentioned in the press and owing to this we know the names of the musicians and their number, which varied in dependence on the repertoire requirements, as well as the client’s financial possibilities. Therefore, it is also possible to read in the Czech-Viennese press about ensembles “derived” from the National Orchestra: a string orchestra, a salon orchestra, a salon sextet, a quartet, a theatre orchestra, a Moravian Slovak band... By and large, Volánek was able to adapt to the promoters’ orders – he even put together an ensemble made up of 42 members for the masked ball of the *Sokolská župa dolnorakouská* (16 February 1913)! An event of great importance was the orchestra’s independent concert at the National House in District XV on 2 October

3 –ek [Volánek]: Pamětní list v upomínku výpravy českých spolků vídeňských sdružených v I. Českém národním domě ve Vídni, XV. do Jičína a Skal Prachovských ve dnech 29. června až 1. července 1900. (Commemorative record in memory of a trip of the Czech Viennese societies associated in the First Czech National House in Vienna XV to Jičín and Skály Prachovské from 29 June to 1 July 1900.) Jičín 1900, pp. 6-7.

1913. Volánek was also able to set up a string or vocal quartet from members of his family (his brothers Rudolf and Raimund, and son Robert).

“Old Volánek’ was a good musician, music was the mission of his life. Hence, his orchestra did credit to the reputation of Czech musicianship.” – So wrote the chronicler of the Viennese Czechs, František A. Soukup, in his book *Česká menšina v Rakousku* (The Czech Minority in Austria, Prague 1928, p. 412), on the basis of many period testimonies and personal experience. Of no less importance is the praise from the music critic and composer Břetislav Lvoský, published in the journal *Dalibor* (XIV, 1892, p. 333): “the Kapellmeister of the ‘national orchestra’, the most renowned Czech ensemble in Vienna.” The orchestra probably ceased its activities when Volánek left for Bohemia in 1921, yet it seems that he revived it briefly for special events. At least we can judge so from the programme for the festival marking the 40th anniversary of the society *Vlastenecká omladina*, which took place at the beginning of December 1925 and at which a theatre performance was accompanied by “Robert Volánek’s music”.

Robert Volánek, Sr. was stated as “music director”, as well as “owner of a music institute”. The institute in question was a music and voice school, which at the beginning of the 20th century was situated at Vivenotgasse 21. He also occasionally gave lectures on music; for instance, on 15 December 1889 at the *Sokolská jednota Týrš* on the topic “The first fruits of musical art”. Noteworthy too is that Volánek maintained close contact with the spa town of Luhačovice, Moravia, where he led the spa orchestra for several years. His name can also be found among the Viennese Kapellmeisters and conductors associated in the *Musikerbund*.

Given such a wide spectrum of musical activities, it would come as a surprise if Robert Volánek, Sr. had not entered history as a composer too, or at least as an arranger. He arranged plenty of pieces for his instrumental ensembles, including those by Viennese Czech composers (e.g. he added wind instruments to the chorus *Válečná píseň Táborů* (Taborite War Song) by Arnošt Förchgot-Tovačovský). Volánek’s own works included male

choruses, mixed choruses, and he had a penchant for treating Slavonic motifs, folk and Sokol song motifs. He also wrote solo songs, dances and music for theatre performances. Unfortunately, his compositions were not published and today we only know their titles or characteristics, as described in the newspapers. “The melodies composed by Mr. R. Volánek, Sr. to the lyrics by Mr. Doubrava splendidly chimed with the text and their light rhythm pleasantly entertained the audience, who left the concert with the best impression,” is how Jarkovský (*Věstník XXVII*, Issue 51, 18 December 1909, p. 7) characterised the songs for the comedy *Osudný manévér* (Fateful Manoeuvre) performed by the *Komenský XV* society on 5 December 1909.

An interesting chapter is compositions created for special occasions. These include the march *Pochod Velebův* (1886), to mark the 20th anniversary of František Veleba’s amateur activities; the 1891 male chorus *Naše hesla* (Our Slogans), for the ceremonial unveiling of the banner of the *Sokolská jednota Týrš* organisation; the male chorus *Heslo spolkové* (*Heslo spolku Tovačovský*), for the *Tovačovský* society; the piece *Pochod cyklistů* (*Pochod českých cyklistů, Hymna cyklistů*, 1895), for the *Český klub cyklistů* (Czech Cyclists Club); the march *Pochod Harrachův* (1902), for the unveiling of the bust of Jan Nepomuk, Count of Harrach (1828-1909, who was nicknamed “the knight of the Czech disciples in Vienna” for his patriotism), on the National House in District XV, for which the Count honoured Volánek with a votive inscription written in his own hand and a diamond pin.

During the years preceding WWI, Volánek mainly devoted to conducting his orchestra (concerts, theatre performance accompaniments, etc.). The war had a devastating impact on his financial situation. Yet it was evidently not just the end of the pre-war boom and the subsequent economic crisis in Austria after the war, but also the desire to live out his last days in his homeland that made Volánek return to Bohemia. In all likelihood, he left Vienna in 1921 for Prague, where following a long illness the “friend of the people” died on 26 October 1929. “The Viennese Czechs will never forget all that Volánek did for them. There was no society in Vienna of which he was not an

official, or at least a member. (...) Hundreds of musicians will remember Rob. Volánek with gratitude. He was not only their Kapellmeister but also, and above all, a good adviser, almost a father," wrote Julius Janeček in the obituary published in the bulletin *Hudební věstník* (XXII, 16 November 1929, Issue 17, pp. 2-3). During his time in Prague, Volánek co-organised the activities of *Česká Vídeň*, a society associating Viennese Czechs who after 1918 had moved to Czechoslovakia, primarily to Prague.

Brothers and sisters of Robert Volánek, Sr.

The other children of "granddad" Jan Volánek, Robert Volánek, Sr.'s siblings Raimund, Anastázie, Anna and Rudolf, possessed artistic talent too.

Raimund Volánek was born in 1857 in Žiželice and died in 1924 in Vienna. Music was his true passion but he is still known as a painter and his works are quite frequently offered at auctions. He created sets for theatre performances given by Czech-Viennese societies (especially those of *Slavoj*). He was active in the organisations *Sokol Vídeňský*, *Sokolská jednota Týřš*, *Tovačovský*, sang in the bass section in the *Lumír* choir and served several times as an official for *Slavoj* and *Komenský pro Šestidomy a okolí*. He was briefly a chorus master in the *Čechie* society circa 1905, and he also co-operated with the *Vlastenecká omladina* society. He played the viola in the Volánek family quartet and was also a member of vocal quartets.

Anastázie "Stáza" Volánková (married name:



Svobodová/Swoboda) was born in Žiželice on 21 April 1867 and died in Vienna on 22 October 1940. She began performing with *Slavoj* at the tender age of eight, she was also an alto and official in *Lumír*. In December 1888 she sang in the first opera staged in Czech in Vienna: Blodek's *V Studni* (In the Well), performed by the *Pokrok* society.

Anna Volánková (married to Vojtěch Pečený) was the most active of all Jan and Anna Volánek's daughters. She was born sometime between 1863 and 1865; on 19 November 1894 she married Vojtěch Pečený. On 2 November 1943 she was buried in Vienna. She first performed with *Slavoj* when she was a child and later on was a member of its committee. In the spring of 1896, the society *Vlastenecká omladina* celebrated two decades of her dramatic activity with a great festivity, other festivities took place in 1907 (30 years) and on 24 January 1932 (55 years). She was among the first artists involved in the *Palacký* society (founded in 1888), served as an official in *Lumír* and sang in its mixed quartet. Just like the other members of the Volánek family, she was an active member of *Sokolská jednota Týřš*. She occasionally worked for the societies *Pokrok*, *Občanská beseda IV*, *Kollár*, *Slovanská beseda*, *Tovačovský*, *Komenský*, *Barák*, *Národ*, *Dobročinný spolek svatováclavský*. She co-founded a female choir in the *Blaník* society and was active from the outset in the organisation *Družstvo pro vystavění spolkového domu v XV. okresu*.

If we disregard **Josef Volánek**, who died a few days after his birth, on 30 January 1860, his twin **Rudolf Volánek** rounds off the listing of Jan and Anna Volánek's children. Rudolf, the youngest of the sons, was born on 21 January 1860 in Žiželice and died on 4 January 1909 in Warsaw. Following his private double-bass studies with František Simandl in Vienna, he abandoned his profession of goldsmith and began devoting solely to music. He was stated as double-bass of the Carltheater in Vienna. When it comes to the Czech minority, he was active in the organisations *Slavoj* and *Sokolská jednota Týřš*, starting approximately at the age of twenty. After leaving Vienna for Poland, he performed with the Warsaw Military Band, directed by Karel Komzák, Sr. During the eighteen years he lived in Warsaw, he worked as a professor at the local conservatory and first double-bass in the Imperial Kapelle

František Simandl (composer, double-bassist, pedagogue)



Magdalena Jarošová, née Volánková



František Volánek

and the Imperial Philharmonic Orchestra. He was a chorus master of the *Česká beseda* (Czech Society) in Warsaw. Following Rudolf Volánek's death, his family returned to Vienna.

The 3rd generation: Children of Rudolf Volánek

Rudolf and his wife Apolonia had two children. Their son, **Jan Volánek**, was born on 26 January 1895 in Warsaw, where he studied the violin with Jan Buchtele. Although after his father's death he and the rest of the family returned to Vienna, where he attended Otakar Ševčík's master class at the Neues Wiener Konservatorium (graduating with a gold medal as the best student) and where he was briefly a member of Nedbal's Tonkünstlervereinorchester, he remained a Pole at heart. He continued to spell his name "Wolanek", his family spoke Polish at home and their relationships with the other Voláneks were minimal. As regards the Czech minority in Vienna, his contact was evidently confined to a single performance at an event held at the National House in District XV when he was twelve years of age, guest appearances at concerts given by the choir *Zpěvácký spolek slovanský* in 1914 and 1915. In 1916 he performed at a party organised by the Polish society *Stzechka*. Jan Volánek returned to Poland in 1916 at the latest, where in Krakow he was soon appointed a violin professor. Later on, he worked as a professor at the Krakow Conservatory. After he moved to America, he served as concert master in the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, as a teacher at the University of Buffalo and conductor



František Volánek's grave in Prague-Vršovice

of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra (1949-58). He co-founded and conducted the St Catharine's Civic Orchestra (Niagara Symphony Association, Niagara Symphony Orchestra). Jan's sister, **Viktorie Volánková**, was a pianist. Prior to WWI, she worked as a professor at the Krakow Conservatory. She evidently did not engage herself in the musical activities of the Czech minority in Vienna.

Children of Robert Volánek, Sr.

Magdalena Volánková (30 May 1892 – 21 May 1980, married to František Jaroš) was an actress in the society *Pokrok*; at the end of 1920s she, like her father Robert Volánek, Sr., moved from Vienna to Bohemia.

František Volánek the second son of Robert Volánek, Sr. and brother of Robert Volánek, Jr., was born in Vienna on 28 August 1890. A conductor, organist, music teacher and composer, he only began devoting to music after completing his grammar-school studies and having worked in a technically oriented job. Between 1912 and 1915, he studied the organ and composition at the Neues Wiener Konservatorium; he subsequently served as an organist at several churches in Vienna. When it comes to the Czech minority in the city, he engaged himself as a Kapellmeister of Czech troupes and theatres, yet he also worked with purely German societies, starting as a Kapellmeister during WWI. He co-operated with the Czech societies *Slavoj* and *Komenský*, in March 1910 he was appointed conductor of the tamburica ensemble *Čechie*, and he occasionally conducted his father's orchestra during theatre performances given by *Vlastenecká omladina* and *Slavoj*. In 1919 he was Kapellmeister of the spa orchestra in Luhačovice and after moving from Vienna to Prague he taught music privately. He died some time after 1955. His oeuvre is relatively diverse, ranging from dance pieces and marches to larger forms, songs, vaudevilles, compositions for tamburica orchestras, operettas, arrangements, occasional and chamber pieces. Some of his works were performed by the Prague Radio Orchestra; his *Pohádka* (Fairy Tale) for cello and piano was printed in 1929 by the publisher Sádlo. In 1923, his *String Quartet in B minor* was awarded an honorary mention at the competition of the Brno-based Chamber Music Society. It is possible that he was the selfsame František Volánek who in June 1938 wrote an article titled "A new electrical musical instrument" for the music bulletin *Hudební věstník*.

Robert Volánek, Jr. was the member of the family in whose case the greatest number of sources has been found. Born on 9 August 1879 in Vienna, he was a violinist, organist, chorus master, pedagogue and organiser. He studied the violin, organ and composition at the Vienna Conservatory and passed two state exams – in 1905 in voice and in 1912 in violin and piano. From 1903 to 1906, he was a violinist in the *Konzertverein* (he also played in Prof. Duisberg's chamber ensemble). He actively participated in the musical life of the Czech minority in Vienna, performing with



Robert Volánek, Jr.

a number of chamber ensembles. Circa 1901, he was the violinist in a piano trio (Josef Háša: cello, Margita/Markéta Volavá/Volavých: piano). As a violist, he was a member of the string quartet of the *Konzertverein* (alongside the violinists A. Svoboda and A. Reich, and the cellist Josef Háša); in 1902 he was a member of a string quintet (A. Svoboda, A. Reich, Robert Volánek, Josef Háša and Adolf Míšek). Circa 1900, Robert Volánek, Jr. was deputy chorus master of the choir *Slovanský zpěvácký spolek*. In the history of the society *Tovačovský* (founded in 1892), his name was mentioned back in 1896; he played the piano and the violin, in 1900 he succeeded his father as chorus master. He also conducted the first purely Czech-Viennese tamburica ensemble.

Between Vienna and Kyjov

In 1904 a dispute broke out among the tamburica players of the *Tovačovský* ensemble, which resulted in the departure of several members (including Robert Volánek, Jr. and Josef Auer) and the establishment of the *Čechie* tamburica ensemble by Robert Volánek, Jr. and his brother František. In 1909 the two societies reconciled and began giving joint



Robert Volánek, Jr. (in the middle, without an instrument) and the tamburica band Lýra Poděbrad

concerts. Robert Volánek, Jr. conducted *Čechie* until February 1907 – on 3 February the ensemble held a farewell concert in his honour. He then moved to Kyjov, Moravia, where from the middle of February 1907 until 1910 he taught voice as the local Czech grammar school and served as the town Kapellmeister. He also taught at his own school. We can be certain that he lived in Kyjov up until his departure for České Budějovice in 1910. During his time in Kyjov, he continued to participate in Czech-Viennese cultural life, collaborating with *Čechie*.

In České Budějovice and Hranice na Moravě

From the middle of September 1910 to 1914, Robert Volánek, Jr. gave voice lessons at the grammar school and the “Realschule” (some sources state “secondary schools”) in České Budějovice; at the same time, he taught at

the school of music directed by Bohuslav Jeremiáš. He was a member of Jeremiáš’s piano quintet, in which Otakar Jeremiáš played the cello. On 29 May 1914, Robert Volánek, Jr. was appointed director of the municipal school of music in Hranice na Moravě, yet following the outbreak of WWI the school was turned into a hospital. The employees had to take a holiday for an indefinite period of time and Robert Volánek decided to move again.

In Poděbrady – first period

In 1914, Robert Volánek, Jr. settled in Poděbrady. He soon began running his own school of music, from 1916 to 1918 he was the spa Kapellmeister. We know more details about the school’s curriculum from a statement issued by the Vice-Regency in Prague, which on 27 July 1917 acknowledged Volánek’s notification submitted

on 1 October 1914 concerning the establishment of a private school “for teaching voice, the piano, violin and organ, as well as the theory of harmony”. He operated the school with various pauses, in 1923 he headed a music quintet and sextet.

In Trenčianske Teplice and Prachatice

In 1923, he led the spa orchestra in Trenčianske Teplice, Slovakia. Upon the instigation of Prof. Antonín Hromádka, inspector of music schools in border areas and Moravia-Silesia, he was appointed director of the School of Music in Prachatice, founded on 1 March 1926 (at the time, Volánek officially assumed his post and taught voice, piano and violin). On 8 May 1926, the school already presented itself at a musical performance at the local grammar school. In all likelihood, Volánek did not stay in Prachatice until 1929, as is commonly claimed and as he himself stated, as documented by the records from meetings of the board of trustees of the School of Music in Prachatice. Sources deposited at the State District Archives in Prachatice reveal that Volánek was actually forced to resign from his post and move from the town. We can only assume that he either fell out with the board or that he had caused a scandal.

In Poděbrady – second period

Following his return to Poděbrady, Robert Volánek, Jr. pursued activities for the *Hlahol* choir and conducted the amateur ensemble *Jirí*. Moreover, he conducted music at performances given by visiting theatre companies. He also appeared as a solo violinist and pianist. He directed the music section at the Sokol cinema for twelve years and headed the tamburica ensemble in Poděbrady. In August 1928, he asked for renewal of the permit to run his own school, yet in the spring of the next year withdrew his application. It is not clear when he reopened the school; the fragmentary official documents only reveal that his school operated again from 1932 to the end of 1934. Afterwards, Volánek only gave private lessons. The Poděbrady audiences also knew him as a composer – mainly owing to a concert made up of Volánek’s pieces, which took place at the end of August 1949 on the occasion of his 70th

birthday. The major organiser of the concert was Karel Pečka, then conductor of the spa orchestra in Poděbrady.

Composing and writing

When it comes to writing, Robert Volánek, Jr. confined himself to reports about the performances of tamburica orchestras. Composing, on the other hand, played an essential role among his activities. He created dances, songs, mixed choruses, pieces and arrangements for tamburica ensembles, with the majority of his works being performed by military bands and tamburica orchestras, and occasionally played on the radio.

Robert Volánek, Jr. died on 25 March 1956 in Poděbrady, where he was buried in the tomb of his wife’s family. For the time being, we know more about his significance for the Czech-Viennese music scene, while the two Poděbrady periods are still being researched into.

Conclusion

Although this essay mapping the fates of several generations of the Volánek family of musicians would seem to be exhaustive, we can, however, assume that ascertaining details of the next generations would further confirm the musicality of the entire extended clan. Their benefits for Czech compatriots in Vienna between 1870 and 1920 were great indeed, and they were in part transferred to Bohemia, Moravia, Poland and the United States of America. This study demonstrates how important a role community life played in the development of the Czech compatriots’ musical culture. At the same time, it confirms the significance of figures like Robert Volánek, Sr. for the formation of this community basis.



French Horn in Prague

**Přemysl Vojta - French horn,
Tomoko Sawano - piano.**

Recorded: Nov. 2012 and Jan. 2013, Kleiner Sendersaal, Haus des Rundfunks, Berlin. Released: 2013.
TT: 60:05. DDD. 1 CD
Supraphon SU 4125-2.

This recording is my investment in works by unknown composers who experienced World War II, the German occupation, liberation, occupation by the 'liberators' and the bullying by the communist regime. May this recording be a reminiscence of that time and the people who lived through it." So writes the thirty-year-old Czech horn player **Přemysl Vojta**, currently solo horn of the Konzerthausorchester Berlin and overall winner of the 2010 ARD competition in Munich, a talent of the Radek Baborák calibre, in the booklet. And it is also an investment on the part of Supraphon, whose policy has for a long time given me the impression that for economic reasons it has given up releasing music of the 20th, let alone 21st, centuries. Perhaps this remarkable album is a signal that when a superlative artist serves on a tray a modern music recording the label will not be afraid to release it. Mr. Vojta's project is one of those CDs you have to listen to repeatedly; you have to keep returning to its individual pieces. Then, as I have, you may realise that this is indeed extraordinary music. I must, however, point out that the album would not be as interesting as it is had it not been for the outstanding performance given by the horn player, who is reliably accompanied by the pianist **Tomoko Sawano**. You will certainly be captivated by hundreds of technical horn details (especially in the case of the Slavický pieces) and Vojta's exceptional tonal dispositions, yet the main thing is the music itself, which thoroughly deserved to be taken out of the archives. For me personally, the central role on the CD

is occupied by the two compositions by Klement Slavický, who really was bullied by the previous regime. *Musica per corno solo* alone is such a splendid piece of music that it should be part of every horn player's regular repertoire. To a differing extent, the other compositions are permeated by Moravian and other inspirations too, some of them extremely challenging, others rather instructive. Yet all of them are high-quality works of music, adhering to time-honoured inspirations. Přemysl Vojta's Supraphon solo debut is of such a high quality that one sincerely hopes that his co-operation with the largest Czech label will continue.

Luboš Stehlík

**Leoš Janáček
Sonata for Violin and Piano
Bedřich Smetana
From My Homeland
Sergey Prokofiev
Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115
Sonata for Violin and Piano No.1
in F minor, Op. 80**

Josef Špaček - violin, Miroslav Sekera - piano. Text: English, German, French, Czech. Recorded: Dec. 2012, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2013.
TT: 67:18. DDD. 1 CD
Supraphon SU 4129-2.

Following his previous CD (*Ysaÿe: 6 Sonatas for Solo Violin*, ArteSmon, 2006), it took almost seven years until a label appeared to release another recording by **Josef Špaček** (b. 1986), concert master of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and a promising violin virtuoso. With this project, Supraphon has thus indicated that it intends to continue to promote and support extraordinary talent. (The company recently also released debut albums of the bassoonist Václav Vonášek and the horn player Přemysl

Vojta.) Mr. Špaček's album features Slavonic composers and he has declared that he chose to record the Prokofiev works alongside those created by Czech musical giants not by reason of the Russian master's anniversary but simply because he loves his music and its perfect blend of melodiousness and rhythmic pulsation thoroughly agrees with him. On all accounts, the CD is definitely a pleasant refreshment of the not overly interesting post-2010 Czech violin discography.

Since the time he recorded the Ysaÿe album, Špaček has improved immensely – he is now more experienced, more sensitive, more thoughtful about music; he has refined his tone and technique, and he has matured like a fine cognac year by year and with each significant project. I personally consider the CD's apex Janáček's *Sonata*, a true gem. Špaček and the pianist lead an equal dialogue, which was recorded by a seasoned team (Milan Puklický – director, Karel Soukeník – sound engineer). Although the superlative **Miroslav Sekera** has not yet attained the level of the previous creations of Jan Panenka or Josef Hála, his degree of empathy for (or telepathy with?) his partner is remarkable indeed. Špaček's more lyrical than harsh delivery is among the best, and most intriguing, I have ever heard, at least in the past few years. It is nice to possess perfect technique and a brilliant instrument, yet it is crucial that the notes are backed by content and that intellect and emotion are in symbiosis. I think that Josef Špaček has been fast approaching this condition. Another masterpiece of Czech music – Smetana's duets *From My Homeland* – is also delightful to listen to as conceived by Špaček in a humble, unimpassioned, refined manner and delivered with a number of delicate nuances. In this case, the dialogue between the violin and the piano is exemplary too. Alongside Janáček and Smetana compositions, Josef Špaček presents two major chamber works by Sergey Prokofiev. It was a brave decision, since he has thus exposed himself to international comparison. Špaček opted for the *Sonata for*



Solo Violin, Op. 115, and Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 in F minor, Op. 80, with the latter being more appealing. What is his take on Prokofiev like? Highly melodic, the way it should be. On the other hand, in my opinion, Špaček could have put more stress on drama and harshness in some passages. Although the contrast of the solo violin following the Smetana piece is great, the change in expression could have been starker. Špaček is en route to authentic comprehension of Prokofiev and one day he will undoubtedly reach the destination. Yet for the time being, he may have got halfway on his journey, which can be heard when his performance is compared with, for instance, the recent Prokofiev album recorded by Janine Jansen, featuring the same Sonata in F minor. Nevertheless, I think that the Czech violinist has faced up to Prokofiev in a respectable manner and has done a great job he can rightly be proud of. The CD not only possesses a very good sound but is also furnished with an excellent graphic design and photographs.

Luboš Stehlík

Jean Fournet in Prague

Franck, Falla, Debussy

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, František Maxián, Sr. – piano, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic Chorus, Josef Veselka – chorus master, Jean Fournet – conductor.

Text: English, German, French, Czech.

Recorded: 1963–1967, Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2013. TT: 51:01, 70:46, 64:45. AAD. 3 CDs
Supraphon SU 4122-2.

The 3-CD set featuring recordings made in Czechoslovakia by the distinguished French conductor Jean Fournet is a truly commendable project, one particularly beneficial for Supraphon's presentation abroad. Fournet was a remarkable figure who at

the time of the massive taking up of stereophony at the end of the 1950s, as well as in the following decades, may not have dazzled in the Karajan or Bernstein mode yet always gained respect and aroused awe, which are still recalled today. By the way, Fournet was conducting until virtually the end of his life. In 2002, at the ripe old age of ninety, he performed with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in Prague and even toured Japan! Last but not least, the new Fournet album is salutary owing to the fact that the recordings it contains are of top-class quality and stand their ground with honour and forcibility today. They represent yet another splendid example of the high level attained by two leading Czech ensembles in the 1960s – Ančerl's Czech Philharmonic and Smetáček's Prague Symphony Orchestra. All the recordings included in the set were made at the time when Supraphon was systematically building up its music archives. With a few exceptions, during the era of Communist dictatorship, gramophone records from the West did not reach our country. Therefore, the catalogue of the then one and only Czechoslovak label had to substitute for dozens, even hundreds, of recordings of the essential works of all historical periods. French music, naturally, occupied an important position among them. At the time, the Czech Philharmonic paid great attention to French creation. Back in the 1950s (prior to the accession of stereophony), the outstanding French conductor Roger Désormière, who in 1982 received the Grand Prix National du Disque de l'Académie du Disque for the 1950 recording of Bizet's *L'Arlésienne* with the Czech Philharmonic, appeared in Czechoslovakia. Another welcomed guest at concerts in Prague was Charles Munch, yet only Désormière made disc recordings, thus providing us with wonderful testimonies. It's a pity that these days Supraphon cannot afford to release more historical recordings that have been surpassed in technological terms. When listening to these old LPs, we realise that Jean Fournet, and Serge Baudo after him, taught Czech orchestras how to play the French Impressionists so well that the ensembles started to be considered

their ideal performers. Fournet recorded with the Czech Philharmonic already in the era of stereophony and his recordings of Debussy's *La mer* and *Nocturnes* came across like an apparition. Later on, he added to them two sections (regrettably, not the complete work!) of *Images pour orchestre* (*Ibéria* and *Rondes de printemps*). As the masterfully digitised recordings (Jan Lžíčar) show today, the Czech Philharmonic revelled in the colours of its instruments and their groups, and was able in a stylish manner to embrace Fournet's sense of expressive nuance – far more colourfully and poignantly than we can hear on the (albeit brilliant and internationally honoured) recordings made by Serge Baudo. A case in point is the fascinatingly flowing, excitably breathing second movement of *Ibéria* (*Les parfums de la nuit*) and the engrossing dance nature of its first and final movements. The same applies to the popular mini-suite of the *Three Dances* from *De Falla's El sombrero de tres picos*. Fournet's take on French Romanticism can be deemed a separate chapter. This type of music has to be approached with a fair amount of sense for orchestral flamboyance and peculiar agogic accent, one rather distant from the German and Czech. For this reason, at the time it was very wise to engage Jean Fournet in recordings of César Franck's symphonic poems. In this respect, the album's most valuable track is the complete recording of *Psyché*, the version with choral entries of the female choir and tenors, which is still rather hard to find on discs. The Prague Symphony Orchestra's performance is laudable, and despite slight nuances and minor deficiencies (sonic homogeneity, occasional tuning) it is an equal competitor to the Czech Philharmonic, which recorded with Fournet the remaining three Franck poems and the symphonic interlude from the oratorio *Rédemption* (the solo piano part in the poem *Les Djinn*s was performed by František Maxián, Sr.). When it comes to the choir under Josef Veselka (at the time, still the Czech Philharmonic Chorus), who were invited to participate in the recordings of *Psyché* and the *Nocturnes*, they are deserving of high praise indeed.

Bohuslav Vitek



Antonín Dvořák

Orchestral Works & Concertos

Ivan Moravec – piano, Josef Suk, Václav Hudeček – violin, Miloš Sádlo – cello, Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Prague Philharmonia, Václav Neumann, Sir Charles Mackerras, Jiri Bělohávek, Bohumil Gregor, Jakub Hruša.

Text: English, German, French, Czech.

Recorded: 1968–2007, Rudolfinum, Smetana Hall, Domovina studio, CNSO studio. Released: 2013.

TT: 74:28, 65:46, 78:25, 69:18, 62:21, 70:40, 50:14, 52:28. DDD, AAD. 8 CDs
Supraphon SU 4123-2.

With this 8-disc set Supraphon brings to a close the complete series of Antonín Dvořák's orchestral, chamber and piano works. The CDs, packed in neat, graphically uniform boxes, encompass virtually his entire oeuvre, with the exception of the operas and vocal compositions (song cycles and vocal-orchestral works). This final – violet – album contains all Dvořák orchestral pieces except for the symphonies, some of the overtures and symphonic poems to Erben's ballads, which are included in the previous – blue – album. Supraphon has previously released a dark-blue album comprising Dvořák's string quartets, a yellow with piano works and an ochre with chamber compositions. Supraphon is the oldest existing Czech label and as such possesses the largest, and unrivalled, Dvořák archive. When looking at the discographies of international labels, we find that they offered such sets containing the complete works of a single composer years ago, even on vinyl. Cases in point are the magisterial Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and other editions implemented by Deutsche Grammophon to mark the composers' anniversaries. Yet to date, Supraphon has only released a single edition of this type – the Smetana (on vinyl),

which also included all his operas. Such extensive projects, naturally, make collectors happy, yet they cause the labels headaches since they cannot sell on such a grand scale as individual discs do. Nevertheless, it is really praiseworthy that Supraphon has finally opened its archives, thus elevating Dvořák discography to a level similar to that of his great foreign colleagues.

The violet album features recordings we already know from previous editions, but putting them together was no easy task for the label. Besides the artistic aspect, perhaps disputable for many, a significant role was undoubtedly played by the technical facet. Accordingly, the selection of compositions for this album was not overly surprising. In the case of the *Slavonic Dances* and *Legends*, the choice was their most recent recordings, made in a studio by **Sir Charles Mackerras**. When it comes to the *Legends* and *Scherzo capriccioso* in particular, the great and unforgettable champion of Czech music made one of the finest recordings in artistic terms, whereas his *Slavonic Dances* are disputable. A similarly logical position is taken by the relatively recent recordings of the two suites and serenades with the **Prague Philharmonia** conducted by **Jakub Hruša**. On the other hand, it is a pity that the album does not contain the artistically intriguing recordings that have yet to be released on CD, for instance, the *Slavonic Rhapsodies*. The recording made by the **Czech Philharmonic** under the baton of **Bohumil Gregor** is now appearing on CD for the third time, although it is a recording of a standard artistic quality and one sonically too restrained, whereas the more convincing and markedly juicier recording dating from the onset of **Václav Neumann's** era is still in the archives awaiting digitisation. The same applies to the yet to be released 1971 Neumann recording of the *Slavonic Dances*, certainly more artistically forcible than the rather lukewarm recording made by Mackerras, as well as Neumann's 1985 recording – albeit technically better (DDD) yet routine in artistic terms.

The previous (blue) Supraphon album was far more appealing in this respect. It contains Neumann's excellent 1970s symphonic



cycle – although somewhat sonically duller compared to the new digital recording dating from the 1980s yet definitely more artistically absorbed. As regards the recordings of the concertos (those from Neumann's era), they were chosen with the utmost forethought. I only felt regret that in the case of the *Concerto in B minor* preference was again given to **Miloš Sádlo**, who is also featured on the recent Dvořák "concertante album" and on this one is already represented by the *Concerto in A major*. In my opinion, Josef Chuchro would certainly deserve to be recalled after all these years. As I have said, the dramaturgy of such projects is always a controversial matter, which, after all, isn't a bad thing! What is important, however, is the result, and in this case it is beyond doubt. It is an extremely valuable project, one that will contribute to the still necessary promotion of the Czech composer at home and worldwide alike. I would like to see other box sets released – featuring Dvořák's operas and, above all, grand vocal works.

Bohuslav Vitek

Vilém Veverka

Telemann and Britten

Vilém Veverka – oboe.

Text: English, German, French, Czech.

Recorded: Sep. 2012. Released: 2012.

TT: 72:50. DDD. 1 CD

Supraphon 4121-2.

The distinguished young Czech oboist **Vilém Veverka** has chosen for his profile CD, on which he presents himself as a soloist for the first time, two cycles created by two significant composers divided by more than two centuries: Georg Philipp Telemann, the German Baroque master and an incredibly prolific artist who enriched the history of music with over one thousand works, and Benjamin Britten, evidently the greatest, or at least the most influential, 20th-century English music creator. Vilém Veverka has

been one of the most acclaimed contemporary oboists for a decade or so. In 2009 he debuted as a chamber player with Supraphon, which released the CD *Risonanza*, recorded together with Kateřina Englichová (harp) and Ivo Kahánek (piano), and in the same year Arco Diva issued his solo recording of Martinů's Oboe Concerto. The new title too confirms Veverka's reputation as a brilliant soloist in both technical and breathing terms. Telemann's *Twelve Fantasias for Solo Wind Instrument*, originally the flute, severely test the oboist's technical skills, as well as his musicality and imagination. And this applies to an even greater extent to Benjamin Britten's 1954 piece *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid*, which not only comprises a plethora of expression and styles, determined by the poetic programme and its six individualised variations, but also places increased demands on the breathing stamina and dynamics of the oboist.

Veverka's stylistic range is naturally wide: he plays everything, from Baroque concerti grossi to contemporary music. This is natural for him because, given the relative scarcity of original compositions for the oboe (an instrument even more neglected than the flute), he has precious little to choose from and simply has to perform that which has been written for it. Yet Veverka possesses great flexibility and a delicate sense for the style and needs of specific historically determined compositions, without anyhow flirting with historically informed performance practice. He plays everything on a modern instrument and there are no indications of an authentic approach, with perhaps the exception of a more moderate vibrato, which, however, relates more to his modern, de-romanticised sentiment than the endeavour for historically informed performance. After all, he is a seasoned orchestral player, thus possessing sufficient sobriety in himself, as well as in his instrument. The two years he spent with the Berliner Philharmoniker was a great school of orchestral performance whose fruits Veverka now also brings to bear as a soloist of the Brno Philharmonic. Moreover, he regularly appears at concerts with the harpist Kateřina Englichová and other noted chamber musicians.

Veverka plunged into recording Telemann's fiendishly difficult *Fantasias* with a verve and youthful élan, and the result is truly respectable (although I have nothing to compare it with). The long reverberation at the St. Francis of Assisi Church in the Convent of Agnes of Bohemia in Prague has helped to create the impression of a full and vibrant tone, one seldom connected with the oboe. Veverka's spontaneous approach discreetly accentuates the dance element in a quiet suggestion and the experienced oboist is also able to cope with the higher requirements placed on the mobility of the more adept flute, for which the cycle was intended. The structure of movements is lucid, the indicated polyphonic texture comes forth where appropriate, the tempos are natural, and his take on Telemann is pleasant to listen to. Given that it is a thesaurus representing the sum of the entire art of playing a wind instrument, it is understandable that the cycle is performed in its entirety. Nevertheless, I do feel obliged to remark that almost an hour of listening to a solo oboe playing one Baroque fantasia, not overly differing from the previous one, after another stretches the listener's goodwill to breaking point. The music is good, a work written by an experienced master, yet it is still not of the calibre of Bach's suites, either violin or cello. In other words, I was somewhat relieved to notice that Britten's *Metamorphoses* opened the door to a different universe. A universe that may not have the word "fantasia" in its title yet all the more makes it ring through its body. The vivid poetic portraits of figures of ancient mythology, the amorous Pan, the frivolous Phaeton, the wretched Niobe, the gleesome Bacchus, the contemplative Narcissus and the fleeing Arethusa, created by Britten for the "water" section of the Aldeburgh Festival, represent a great challenge affording the oboist plenty of wonderful possibilities how to persuade the listener that his instrument is not only able to give the concert pitch at the beginning of the performance but also to conjure up a timbre-differentiated expression and, in the case of someone like Vilém Veverka, a surprising dynamic range as well.

Ivan Žáček



Bedřich Smetana

The Bartered Bride

**Dana Burešová – soprano,
Tomáš Juhás – tenor,
Jozef Benci – bass, Aleš Voráček –
tenor, Gustav Beláček – bass,
Lucie Hilscherová – soprano,
Svatopluk Sem – baritone,
Jaroslav Březina – tenor, Kateřina
Kněžčíková – soprano, BBC Singers,
Andrew Griffiths – chorus master,
BBC Symphony Orchestra,
Jiří Bělohlávek – conductor.**

Text: French, English. Recorded: 2011,
Barbican Centre, London. Released:
2012. DDD. TT: 64:30, 71:48. 1 CD
Harmonia Mundi HMC 90211920.

The time when labels rolled out one complete recording of an opera after another is long gone. We used to face the dilemma of which was the ideal disc to choose. Each of the recordings prided itself on superlative soloists, outstanding conductors and orchestras. The situation whereby two of the most renowned conductors recorded Wagner's *Ring* almost concurrently for two competing labels (Solti and Karajan in the 1960s) appears like a pope dream today. Although new complete albums – even with model performances – do crop up, they are usually re-editions. In some cases, we re-encounter artistic accomplishments that are difficult to surpass and it is good, necessary even, that they are constantly available. They are, however, mere documents of bygone eras. And it would seem that our era will remain a great unknown for future generations, not only when it comes to artistic conceptions but also actual performers themselves. Yet distinguished soloists gain their renown not only by means of appearing in stage productions, which can be seen by just a fragment of music-lovers, but also, and primarily, through recordings. The current

generation does not even know its domestic stars! As regards new complete recordings, the situation of the Czech opera scene is catastrophic. Relating to this is the global awareness of the Czech repertoire. It may beggar belief, but the most recent Czech recording of *The Bartered Bride* (cond. Zdeněk Košler) was made 31 years ago. That is why the new CD (which should, naturally, have been produced in the Czech Republic yet was not) will at least in part serve to eradicate the rumour that we are not able to put together exquisite singers for the best-known and most typical Czech opera. The question arises of to what extent the new recording will be able to revive the erstwhile inner relationship to the opera that was common among Czechs, and not only in music circles. Yet this is a question for a quite separate discussion.

The new studio recording drew upon the concert performance of *The Bartered Bride* at London's Barbican Centre on 20 May 2011. It was a production of BBC Radio 3 and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, helmed by Jiří Bělohávek. Other Czech operas were performed under his baton in this manner, yet not all of them have appeared on commercial audio discs. In 2007, *The Excursions of Mr. Brouček* was recorded and released on CD by Deutsche Grammophon. In the case of the latest *Bartered Bride*, the CD was produced by Harmonia Mundi. The project's artistic guarantor, Jiří Bělohávek, carefully and thoughtfully selected soloists from the Czech Republic and Slovakia and, above all, managed to imprint the hallmark of authenticity on the two superlative London orchestras. This is by no means a matter of course – let us recall the many globally renowned recordings of *The Bartered Bride* and *Rusalka* received with quandaries in our country. The splendid **BBC Singers** have admirable Czech diction, whose attainment was certainly preceded by painstaking preparations. The **BBC Symphony Orchestra** plays with the typical Smetana melodiousness, without a trace of Romantic burden in the lyrical passages, with style and very nimble-witted gags in the folksy sections (frolicsome grace notes

of the flutes in the Polka!). Perhaps only in the case of the Furiant does the orchestra play at too fast a tempo, during which dancers would only with the utmost difficulty be able to retain the basic attributes of the dance steps. But this is the problem of Smetana's original metronome, which for these reasons – in this case for the sake of the thing – is not generally adhered to. In the traditionally performed score, Jiří Bělohávek even found passages that bring new elements into the interpretation, which serves as a prime example that even familiar music is still open to new inventions on the part of performers without losing its identity. The rhythmically pregnant introductory fanfare "fired off" without exalted sound ensures perfect comprehensibility of individual parts right at the very beginning and establishes the requirement for faultless technical follow-through. The same situation occurs in the *Skočná*, in the case of which, unlike in older recordings, the snare drum is put to extremely effective use. Precision in abiding by the music notation, including the slightest details, is undoubtedly easier for an orchestra who are just discovering it and are not burdened by tradition.

Dana Burešová is a wonderful Mařenka. Her performance on the CD is yet another proof of her being a soprano predetermined for great roles in the international opera repertoire, as well as, and most notably, an excellent and ideal young dramatic Smetana singer. The voice of the tenor **Tomáš Juhás** (Jeník) possesses a pleasant lyrical timbre, with his diction only slightly revealing his non-Czech origin. The vocally perfect **Gustáv Beláček** in the role of Vašek is rather serious, which may have resulted in a slower drift of his scene with Mařenka in Act 2. **Jozef Benci** is a brilliant Kecal, with his comical ceremoniousness, even minor funny neighbourly displays, making him a nigh-on ideal performer of the character. The two parents fully meet the requirements of their roles. The recording is immensely irradiated by the dramatic moments of the "comedians" in Act 3. No Czech recording since the time of Ostrčil has featured a more convincing Ringmaster than

that portrayed by **Jaroslav Březina**, without any traits of convention!

The studio recording was made at the Barbican Centre, where the opera was given a concert performance. The acoustics are different to those in Prague's Domovina studio or the Rudolfinum yet still very pleasant indeed. The booklet is furnished in a standard manner, precisely within the label's intentions. The French and English translations of the libretto are placed separately. The absence of the Czech text, however, is beyond comprehension. The listener should have been provided with the original libretto, in the form it is presented by the majority of labels, including Czech ones – with the translations in columns right next to the original text.

It would be interesting to juxtapose this indisputably engrossing and, given the place of its making, remarkably stylish recording of *The Bartered Bride* with the Czech recordings released to date. Without resorting to perhaps tempting yet not always earnest superlatives, we can claim that Jiří Bělohávek has become an equal to Ostrčil, Vogel, Chalabala and Košler. With his CD of *The Bartered Bride*, the former music director of the BBC Symphony Orchestra has essentially enhanced his endeavour to present Czech opera abroad big-time. If only this were true at home too.

Bohuslav Vitek



Marek Kopelent

Black and White Tears

Věra Galatíková - actress,
Kristýna Valoušková - mezzo-soprano,
Marie Hřebíčková - soprano,
Milada Boublíková - soprano,
Vlasta Průchová - jazz contralto,
Irena Trouponová - soprano,
Pavel Janda - violin,
Marek Zvolánek - trumpet,
Vilém Veverka - oboe,
Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra,
Musica viva pragensis, Prague
Chamber Soloists, Ensemble 21, Petr
Vronský, Zbyněk Vostřák, Tomáš
Hála, Libor Pešek, Ondřej Kukul and
Jakub Hruša - conductors.

Text: Czech, English. Recorded: 1999, 2003, 1992, 1968, 1962, 2011, 1971, 1982, 2002 and 2005 at Czech Radio Prague studios, 1968 at the Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2012. TT: 140:00. DDD, AAD. 2 CDs Radioservis CR0619-2.

The cross-section album presenting chamber works by Marek Kopelent, one of the most distinct contemporary Czech composers, whose oeuvre mirrors virtually the entire second half of the 20th century and the first decade of the new millennium, has been commented on by the artist himself in a very brief yet cogent manner. The circumstances under which the works came about need not be revealed to the listener in detail, since the nature of the music, application of compositional strategies or titles indicate many a thing. The CD opens with the piece *Nářek ženy* (Lament of the Woman), a melodrama for an actress, female voices, children's choir and brass instruments (1980). In the 1999 recording, the voice of **Věra Galatíková** is absolutely flawless in conveying an onerous statement whereby despair grows into the strength of defiance and hope for

love. Next up is the 1991 composition *Co zpíval kos zatčenému* (Le chant du merle au détenu) to Jan Zahradníček's verses translated into French, recorded in 2003. The music reflects the sorrow of as well as encouragement for all those living through difficult times. The mezzo-soprano **Kristýna Valoušková's** performance is moving yet her diction is not precise throughout, with the recording's sound engineering showing certain inaccuracies too. The 1972 piece *Black and White Tears* has given the title to the project and the 1992 recording does very good service to the composition of contrasts, playfulness and demandingness, which the soloist **Marie Hřebíčková** fully renders with an admirable expressive register. The following track, 1967's *Snehah* for soprano, jazz alto from a magnetic tape and chamber ensemble, a work dating from the New Music period, is venturesome, experimental, jocose and flaring in compositional terms. The voice of **Vlasta Průchová** can easily be distinguished as the lead line in the recording made in 1968, when progress in music seemed to be within reach. *Něnie s flétnou za zemřelou Hanu Hlavsovou* (Nenia with Flute for the Deceased Hana Hlavsová), written in 1960–61, returns to the onset of the New Music and is a seeking, finding and blending of onomatopoeic passages with drama and harshness. In addition, on the 1962 recording the sublime performance of the **Kühn Chamber Choir** augments the power of the composer's message. The *Agnus Dei* for soprano and chamber ensemble also corresponds to the time of its origination (1983), during which the grip of "Normalisation" in Czechoslovakia was slowly releasing yet still unceasing and nothing was possible to foresee with certainty. The recording, which was only made in 2011, with **Irena Trouponová** singing the solo part, is, however, more focused on the performance than the message and thus comes across as somewhat academic. The compilation's instrumental section starts with 1966's *Rozjímání* (Contemplation) for chamber orchestra, recorded in 1969 at the Rudolfinum with *Musica viva*

pragensis conducted by **Zbyněk Vostřák**. A breathtaking piece breathtakingly delivered, with the connection between the composer and the ensemble being peerless and rendering the atmosphere of the year in which the developing drama with an anxious catharsis was tragically fulfilled. Dating from the same year is the *Zátiší pro komorní soubor* (Still-life) for chamber ensemble, which **Musica viva pragensis** still managed to record (in 1971). This work is not lyrical either, dealing as it does with conflicts, and cannot (and does not want to) be conciliatory. The 1972 Sonata subtitled *Veroničina rouška* (Veronika's Veil) already indicates the atmosphere of the beginning of Normalisation; the recording made in 1982 features superb performers: **Libor Pešek** and the **Prague Chamber Soloists**. The composition *Zastřený hlas nad hladinou ticha* (Thick Voice Above the Level of Silence), written in 2000, takes the listener to an entirely different milieu – the exhibition of works by the Chinese painter Qin Shi Huang, which at the time was on display at Prague's Rudolfinum. Kopelent depicts the pure whiteness of the canvases with indicated outlines of nature scenes with an illustrious conception of a trumpet solo with the necessary dimensions of tension and beauty. The final piece on the CD, *A Few Minutes with an Oboist* (1972), was written for the festival in Aspen. Although it has been brilliantly performed on other occasions, the 2005 recording with **Vilém Veverka** is simply unrivalled. The soloist's primary focus on contemporary music affords the interpretation of Kopelent's composition with the accompaniment of **Ensemble 21** under **Jakub Hruša** an excellent sound.

Marta Tužilová

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