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— **Milan Knížák** *broken music*

Pavel Haas Quartet

50 years of Music Information Centre

Miroslav Ponc's colour music



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Dear readers,

By strange coincidence, the current issue contains two texts commemorating fifty-year anniversaries – those of the Music Information Centre in Prague and Milan Knížák's seminal creative achievement: broken music. At first glance, the two honourees could not differ more, and the dissimilarity persists even when we discount the fact that it is not really possible to compare phenomena as diverse as a person and an institution. On the one hand, the Music Information Centre (the publisher of *Czech Music Quarterly*), an institution controlled for many years by a totalitarian state to promote "approved music"; on the other, a visual artist, performer and musician who at the time when this institution was founded (and for a long time afterwards) was difficult to accept, even for fellow artists who cannot be suspected of being loyal to the communist regime, and who was a true enemy of the regime itself. But half a century is a long time and, owing to the unfathomable twists of history, some fates are simply fascinating. Whereas in the wake of the fall of communism in 1989 Milan Knížák assumed a high position in the cultural establishment (in my opinion, deserved and universally successfully; others, however, would take a completely different view), after several years of post-revolution fumbling the Music Information Centre became a stable promoter of often very marginal, occasionally downright underground, musical genres and now stands in silent yet permanent opposition to many a state-aided cultural institution. In 2013, Milan Knížák and the Music Information Centre definitely have something in common.

Enjoy the magazine!
Petr Bakla

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cover: Milan Knížák in Venice, 1990 (photo by Marie Knížáková)



THE PAVEL HAAS QUARTET'S BREATHTAKING NEW SCHUBERT DISC IN LINE FOR ANOTHER GRAMOPHONE AWARD

Over the past few years, the Czech-Slovak Pavel Haas Quartet have established themselves as one of the world's finest chamber ensembles. The list of their awards is truly impressive: Rising Stars 2007/08, Gramophone Award 2007, BBC Music Magazine Award 2007, MIDEM Classical Award 2009, Diapason d'Or de l'Année 2010, Gramophone Award 2011 (Recording of the Year in the chamber category). Since 2006, the quartet have exclusively recorded for Supraphon and in the autumn of 2013 the Czech label released a new CD, featuring Schubert pieces, which in my opinion would be worthy of another Gramophone Award. At the present time, the Pavel Haas Quartet's line-up is Veronika Jarůšková, Marek Zwiebel, Pavel Nikl and Peter Jarůšek. I spoke with Peter shortly before his daughter Anna was born.

In the 1990s, I discussed the Smetana Quartet with Antonín Kohout. I asked him how it was possible to work and live within a group of four people for such a long time. And now I am asking you the same question.

In a nutshell: It's all about tolerance, respect and love of music.

The sound of your quartet is highly emotional, yet you also demonstrate technical virtuosity...





PHOTO © SUPRAPHON 2x

Yes, we are real pedants, everything must fit together – the technique, intonation, vibrato, character... Our current performance style could be defined as youthful and impassioned. No doubt there are listeners who may desire more lyricism and suspense. But it's about where we are right now. When I listened to our Schubert master tapes, for instance, I thought that it could perhaps be more lyrical in some places, less so in others. But that's how we have recorded it, in 2013, and it's possible that our take on the pieces would be different in 15 years' time. It may have lost the charge and drive but possess other qualities. I have the feeling that it is the way it should be.

Your workload has been enormous. How many concerts did you give in 2005, after you had won the Premio Paolo Borciani and launched your international career? And how many concerts have you given in 2013?

You know, the difference is minimal. Part of the Premio Paolo Borciani was 48 concerts around the world in the next season. What's more, at the time we signed a contract with a London-based agency which resulted in our giving more concerts. So we gave 60 to 70 concerts, and the number was similar in the years that followed. On the other hand, before 2005 we hardly performed at all.

A quartet has a really hard life – concerts, travel, preparing new pieces and maintaining the old repertoire, getting on while on tour. Can you imagine it going on like this for another three decades?

I can't even imagine what will be in 10 years' time. When eight years ago we were inundated with concert invitations, not all of the venues were top-notch. I don't want to sound superior, but these days we can pick and choose. Playing before a large, educated audience is often more inspiring than performing at, say, a church in the USA, with the listeners having no idea what's it all about. Owing to our having a new family member, Veronika and I will have to change the rhythm of our lives, which will also have an impact on the ensemble's activity. For the 2014/15 season, we are preparing a project focused on Czech music, ranging from Romanticism to contemporary, with the basis being Smetana, Janáček and Haas quartets. But we don't avoid new things. Jiří Gemrot, for instance, has composed for us a piece for quartet and marimba, which will be performed within a mini-festival made up of three to five concerts, with the guests including Bernarda Fink and Nikolas Anhelich. Since our current position is good, we are offering the work to large venues in Europe and are pretty certain that audiences will come to see us. We will thus eschew the traditional nomadic recital framework and be able to stay in one place for a longer time.

Your latest project is a Schubert album. It would seem that you have been going further back into the past. Anyway, why didn't you choose, say, late Beethoven and why did you juxtapose the String Quintet with two cellos with Death and the Maiden, instead of, for instance, Schubert's string quartets dating from the same time, in G major or A minor; Op. 29?

The process took place in the opposite direction. In 2007, within the BBC New Generation Artists programme, we were put together with the German cellist Danjulo Ishizaka. We played Schubert's quintet, which we subsequently performed together on several other occasions. So the idea of recording the piece crossed our mind. For me personally, it is definitely one of the most beautiful works I have ever played. When I recall its recording I still get goose bumps. And the quartet goes hand in hand with the quintet, of course. Coincidentally, Death and the Maiden is the very first work the Pavel Haas Quartet began exploring following their formation in 2002, when I wasn't yet with them. We considered the two pieces a good combination. Accordingly, the main work for us was the quintet, not Death and the Maiden. We didn't want to combine it with anything else, trying to find bonus tracks, and I must thank Supraphon for understanding our philosophy and making it possible for us to put these gems on two CDs. I'm not sure that any other label would have allowed us to do so.

Your conception of Schubert is pretty much contrastive, dramatic, occasionally even harsh, when you sacrifice the tenderness of the tone in order to pursue the feeling that you aim to

express. How do you apprehend this music, how do you perceive the great drama within the small area of Death and the Maiden?

You have actually said it yourself. Compared to the quintet, the quartet possesses many more dramatic passages, and we deliberately took things to the very limit. The first movement is the main drama, the Scherzo is dramatic too, while the final Presto hurtles along uninterruptedly, there is nowhere to seek beauty in it, it is a dash to hell. And we tried to render this dash, it is “fully charged”. But the Andante is a different world, so it is lyrical. Music always bears some emotion and our task is to mediate it to the listener in the most convincing manner possible. Academic perception of music is alien to me...

The quartet Death and the Maiden is defined by some as an allegory of seduction and a perfect sexual act. Did something like that occur to you?

Not in the slightest... I rather feel tremendous despair in it, gloom, a struggle against fate you can never win. We may have conceived it in a very Beethovenian way, yet that's how we perceive it. The Andante is clearly about death. It's more about the void than sexuality.

In his treatise “Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst”, Daniel Schubart characterises D minor as the key of “heavy-hearted womanliness, spleen and foreboding”. Do you agree with this?

Some foreboding may be there, but unfortunately I don't have such an imagination or relationship to the keys. It didn't even cross my mind.

How long do the preparations for a recording last?

In the case of the quintet, intensive preparation began before the recording sessions, although we were putting flesh on the bones since Danjulo and we had played it about five times. Even though over the years we have had a close familiarity with Death and the Maiden, the work on the quartet was more intensive. We usually work on a piece for approximately 10 days, three hours a day. We try to take a break between the individual sections. Having a clear head is really important, and mixing several compositions isn't good. Maximum short-term concentration is essential.

How does the structure of the two Schubert pieces differ?

As I have already mentioned, Death and the Maiden is a truly great drama, love and death go hand in hand, and the dramatic trajectory spans the entire composition. The quintet's structure is considerably more variable, with many more lyrical passages and standstills.

And the first violin has more fun with it too.

Yes, Veronika really relishes the second section in particular, which I cannot say about the medium parts, which are extremely difficult. Attaining a balance and the feeling of “eternal” flux by means of perfect switching of bows is sometimes



almost suffocating. So the three of us don't really enjoy it much. But the first violin "speaks" above it...

Which recording of the quintet do you like most?

The one made by the Emerson Quartet and Rostropovich for Deutsche Grammophon. Quite old but nice.

Will you be returning to Schubert again?

His late works in particular are amazing. I am sure we will play Rosamunde and the Quartet in G major, a true gem. We aren't likely to record more Schubert any time soon, but we'll definitely get back to him.

Beethoven may be another challenge...

I personally deem Beethoven a genius of geniuses who essentially transformed the view of music, and this resonates in the quartet too. On the subject of the quartets - one day we will definitely record them, but I have no idea when... One of the variants is to record the Razumovsky Quartets, Op. 59, from his middle period, plus the Serioso, Op. 95. The late ones... it will possibly occur.

And do you play late Beethoven pieces in public?

We sure do. Our strategy is to explore a new Beethoven piece every year or two. Over the past two years, we have performed the Great Fugue for instance. It's music from another world, ungraspable! Words fail you... Another astonishing experience

is to play it and observe the structure, the way he works with the themes, with even the last, fourth, part being truly fascinating.

You will be recording Bedřich Smetana's quartets for Supraphon. Will this be a logical follow-up to your Dvořák and Janáček discs, will you be doing it because of the Year of Czech Music, or is there another reason?

At the time we planned it we didn't overly reflect upon it. The reason is pretty prosaic actually. The two quartets have been in our repertoire for a long time and we have the feeling that the time has come to record them.

Do you think the time to supplement Janáček, Dvořák and Smetana with Martinů will come?

Martinů's quartets are definitely somewhere on our list but, frankly speaking, I don't know where... But there are plenty of compositions we would like to play before we get around to him. We know the music, I played Martinů's fifth string quartet when I was with the Škampa Quartet, yet our ensemble hasn't yet studied any.

Which composers are ahead of Martinů?

Shostakovich, for example, and we still have debts to pay when it comes to Dvořák, Beethoven...

And contemporary music?

For the time being, we have poor knowledge as regards contemporary Czech and international music, and I don't think we gravitate towards it. This may be due to the fact that there are still plenty of compositions from older periods we would like to perform. We simply cannot play music, and no one should for that matter, that we don't understand or don't feel ripe for, since it can never be authentic. That's one of the reasons why we have so far bypassed, for instance, the second Viennese School.

One more blast from the past - what about Mozart and Haydn?

You're giving me a right grilling (*laughs*)... To be honest, which after all an interviewee should be, I prefer Beethoven. But next season we will play Haydn's Lark Quartet.

Your wife will have great fun with that.

The music is great when it comes to melody, but it drives you up the wall. Really tough, difficult parts! What's more, everyone seems to have a clear-cut opinion of Haydn, how it should sound. The critics will undoubtedly write about style and say we take liberties.

The first violin is the one who has to lead in a quartet. The cello mostly forms the solid basis of the musical structure. The leader in the Pavel Haas Quartet is your wife. Is this also the case at home?

She is the face of our quartet, a real leader – she is superb! But you asked about how it is at home. We have the advantage of being equal, no one is the leader at home.

I don't know whether it can be attributed to your Slovak origin, but you seem to be an ebullient person. What is your wife like?

She is even more ebullient! But we fit splendidly together. We don't argue at all. It's not an Italian marriage. We don't enjoy arguing; it gets in the way of loving each other.

You are planning to renew concert activities abroad soon after your child was born. What model of family functioning have you devised so that your little girl can be with her parents?

If everything is all right and little Anna is in good health, she will travel with us, and someone will baby-sit her on our tours. The question is whether it will be Grandma or a nurse. But only time will tell how it all will proceed and how many concerts we will give. If Veronika is strong enough, we'll be playing at the end of November and in December. Yet the priority is clear – and it is not concerts.

If your plans do come to fruition, which of your concerts are you most relishing?

We have planned a tour of North America, a fifth, I think, all concerts in nice places– San Francisco, Cleveland, Atlanta, Montreal... quite prestigious venues. Always exciting are concerts at the Wigmore Hall. Moreover, we will perform at the Herkulesaal in Munich, the Philharmonic Hall in Cologne, in Hamburg, at the Louvre in Paris, at the Prague Spring festival, which we are really happy about, since we have played at home much less frequently than abroad. We are delighted to be this season's Czech Chamber Music Society ensemble-in-residence, playing at the Rudolfinum is always a great experience – the Dvořák Hall is simply beautiful! Then Salzburg, Edinburgh, the Schubertiade in Austria... But as I have said, everything will evolve in dependence on current circumstances.

To date, Supraphon has released five titles of yours. You are well known, at least among chamber music lovers in Europe, and it would certainly be no problem for you to find an economically strong publisher abroad. None the less, you remain faithful to a Czech label. Why? Because of your patriotism, or qualities the ordinary listener is not aware of?

We've had excellent experience with Supraphon. They have always behaved correctly and we can rely on them. Good personal relationships are vital for us. In addition, it is a Czech company, we live in Prague and see no reason to move, we play a lot of Czech music, and Supraphon provides us with great freedom. So this union is ideal for us.

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HALF A CENTURY OF **MILAN KNÍŽÁK'S** BROKEN MUSIC



Fifty years ago, within his research into everydayness through the eyes of art, Milan Knížák (*1940), one of the most distinct and controversial 20th-century Czech artists, former chancellor of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (1990–1997) and director of the National Gallery (1999–2011), put on the turntable an LP he himself had previously damaged. The echo of his broken music still resonates in classical, pop, alternative music and sound art.

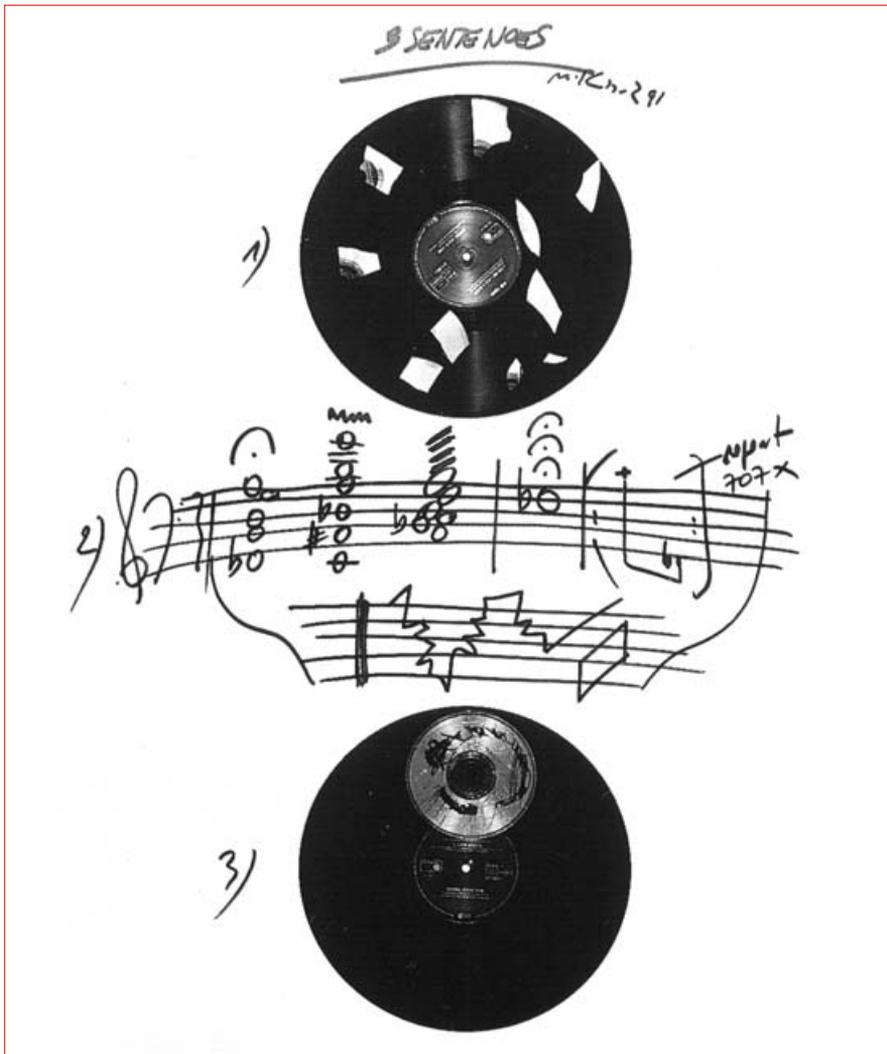
Over the course of time, the brief, apposite text titled *Broken Music*, has become canonical and is quoted every time Milan Knížák's *broken music* is mentioned – in exhibition catalogues, concert programmes, CD booklets: “In 1963-64 I used to play records both too slowly and too fast, changing the quality of the music and thereby creating new compositions. In 1965 I started to destroy records: scratch them, punch holes in them, break them. By playing them over and over again (which destroyed the needle and often the record player too) an entirely new music was created - unexpected, nerve-racking and aggressive. Compositions lasting one second or almost infinitely long (as when the needle got stuck in a deep groove and played the same phrase over and over). I developed this system further. I began sticking tape on top of records, painting over them, burning them, cutting them up and gluing different parts of records back together, etc. to achieve the widest possible variety of sounds.”

Breaking discs is still considered by many a barbaric act; vinyl buffs don't even touch their records and only play them on festive occasions, after having made sure that their deck and stylus are in tip-top shape. Records have a wonderful sound, yet easily wear down, becoming thinner upon every play. And Milan Knížák wantonly makes from them semi-products/raw material: in the world of his *broken music*, a record is a mass-scale-distributed industrial artefact to be finished by the creator, who by means of destructive acts affords it a new, singular quality.

In my opinion, Knížák's fundamental technique is the cutting up of LPs and the subsequent gluing together of different segments, which are not supposed to adjoin each other – a piece of a classical music disc next to a bit of pop music, an oompah piece next to a symphony and cabaret... The glued joints of such records form an uneven surface (often sealed

up by tape), on which the stylus must decide where to jump, yet at the same time they are the one and only rhythmic constant of the hybrid carrier whose segments can play at various speeds. Playing such a glued-together record is an adventure in the case of which neither the listener nor the player knows in advance how it will turn out: which path will the needle take?





Will it survive? Will it leave the disc altogether, or will it settle down in its middle? The art of *broken music* is the art of struggling against the record player's factory presetting and the uniform production of audio discs. Even though Knížák was not the first to use a gramophone as a musical instrument – in some of his compositions, John Cage requires playing test pressings with pre-recorded frequencies; Pierre Schaeffer, in the initial phases of discovering *musique concrète*, instead of recording sounds on magnetic tapes etched closed grooves on to gramophone records – he can be deemed the father of *turntablism*, a “different” way of phonograph playing. A playing that works with the turntable and disc as fortes, not limitations, a playing during which a disc's surface furrowed with scars is equally, if not more, important than the musical content pressed into its grooves. A playing whose rhythmic constant is skipping, often in the basic rotational speeds of 33 and 45 rpm.

A playing during which the disc's grooves and the needle can be touched, the disc speeded up or slowed down by hand and – *scratched*.

Yet when it comes to pioneering, it frequently occurs that the credit for being the first is taken by the person who grabs on to that which is hanging in the air. I am convinced that the idea of making use of the phonograph as a musical instrument was one of those hanging in the air. In his book *Scarred Hearts*, the Romanian Existentialist artist Max Blecher (1909-1938), who was bedridden for most of his short life, describes the following pastime of the summer inmates of a sanatorium: "They place gramophones next to each other and then, upon a signal, turn them all on concurrently (...), 10 gramophones (...) with 10 different records (...) And indeed, an unimaginable cacophony of various sounds and roars suddenly bursts out from the 10 gramophones. It was a wild torrent of tones, an amorphous mixture of music, as though a long-prepared air disaster had occurred, in which the atmosphere worked for a long time and now brought it forth accompanied by all the roar, clamour and crackle."

Knížák's *broken music* sounds exactly the way Blecher describes, yet its inception is not based on reading a book but the inability to do things otherwise, combined with the desire not to delay them and pursue the most direct paths between an idea and bringing it into effect.

"Teaching one how to live"

Milan Knížák was born in 1940 in Plzeň, then lived in Mariánské Lázně and at the beginning of the 1960s moved to Nový Svět in the Prague Castle District, where he has devoted to various arts: painting, sculpting assemblages, as well as, and most notably, creating "happenings" (he is ranked among the discipline's pioneers), designs, costume designs and literature. *Does art mean teaching one how to live*, he wrote on one of his posters – the word order indicates a question, yet the sentence does not end with a question mark and therefore can also be perceived as an answer or declaration. Knížák strives for a close connection between art and the fundamental questions of life, he lets art enter his intimate privacy. It is a strategy, conviction and necessity alike.

"I managed to get hold of a record player, but I only had four discs, which I played over and over again. After some time, it started to get quite boring, so I amused myself by playing them too fast or too slow. This soon didn't suffice either, so I accelerated the speed with a finger, or, vice versa, held them back by hand to a very slow speed. As a result, the discs gave off whooping sounds totally different to those on the original recording, or a clutter of squeaky shrieks. And from there it was just a small step to scratching the discs... and further acts of destruction. In the main, everything I have done in my life has ensued from a certain situation. I hadn't enough room in my study in Nový Svět, so I did things in the street, which resulted in other people entering the process... and so on," Knížák said in an interview with Petr and Jaromír Studený for HIS Voice, from which I quote in this text. The first public performance of *broken music* took place in 1965 within the 2nd Manifestation of Actual Art in Prague's Nový Svět. "No one was ever interested in this



Milan Knížák working on the installation "Lenin" at the Venice Biennale in 1990

PHOTO: MARIE KNÍŽÁKOVÁ

allegretto (-2) repeat 3x

24

(-3)

48

(4)

lento

72

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108

Quartet + piano (excerpt)

music in our country, so I went to perform it in West Berlin, where I'd received a grant from the DAAD. I took part in several exhibitions at which, among other things, I displayed a gramophone playing ruined records. At the renowned Für Augen und Ohren exhibition at the Arts Academy in Berlin, for instance. I remember a concert for a radio station in Amsterdam. Perhaps the most significant was the performance at Berlin's Ballhaus in 1992, where for the first time I used several instruments, not only vinyl discs but also tape recorders and keyboards.'

Knížák's turntablism is not virtuoso but, first and foremost, conceptual. We can brand it generative music: the discs are prepared, put on the deck and the outcome unfolds. Knížák never cultivated the finesses of gramophone playing – he was content with being the architect of the idea and, what's more, didn't even possess the necessary gear. He made the recordings featured on the album *Broken Music*, first released by Italy's Multiphla Records in 1979, in Prague, "since I couldn't go anywhere. It was very simple. I played records on the deck and held a microphone."

At this juncture, it should be pointed out that *broken music* is not the one and only musical activity Knížák has devoted to. He has composed approximately 100 songs and, as someone who wears his hair long to this day, in the late 1960s he also plunged into the Czech "big beat" scene. Owing to its Czech lyrics, combining musical and non-musical instruments, and melding rock with folk and new music elements, his Mariánské Lázně-based band Aktual served as a model for the most distinct Czech underground groups (Plastic People, DG 307 and Umělá hmota), and predated by at least half a decade the industrial music that emerged in Britain and Berlin (without the likes of Throbbing Gristle or Einstürzende Neubauten having noticed).

Although sounding totally different, Knížák's "classical" music is markedly affected by his experience with *broken music*. Destruction of records was followed by his destroying scores too, gluing together scores of various compositions, adding and deleting flats and

sharps, individual notes or entire bars. In the 1980s, he began composing "so-called classical music" pieces, such as string quartets, sonatas and other instrumental works, mostly for chamber configurations with prevailing strings. In the course of time, I created about 15 string quartets, a few piano and a number of other, unspecified, compositions for various formations. I wrote and still write compositions in the classical manner, like a score, but I also bring to bear my experience with minimal music, broken music productions, as well as memories of romantic pieces or popular melodies. The compositions are actually a certain type of collage, yet this collage no longer originates by means of the gluing method, like with ruined scores, they are composed in the conventional manner. I don't eschew melodies, quite the contrary. It seems to me that modern music is oversaturated with non-melodies, and my minor pieces aim to demonstrate that lovely yet absolutely contemporary music can exist. But I may no longer be contemporary, even though I am still alive."

In the 1970s, *broken music* acquired a visual dimension too. "For a long time, I thought of ruined discs as musical instruments only. That's the way they were created. I wasn't interested in their aesthetic aspect. Until, that is, Giancarlo Politi (Flesh Art) took some of the records and sold them to Gino di Maggio, who began hanging them on the wall like visual objects. Afterwards, I created a series of broken discs that count with visuality as another element, thus becoming conceptual works that also take into account the image of music. For instance, a record to which a simple musical instrument is attached gives rise to a combination of recorded and live music, yet everything often only remains in the imagination." Knížák applied a similar method to scores as well, gluing into staves shards of broken vinyl and, later on, compact discs.

Since the 1990s, Knížák has sporadically performed *broken music* again. Some of his concerts have been captured on the CD *Broken Tracks*, released in 2008 by Guerilla Records. The sound quality of the recording of his aforementioned performance at the Ballhaus

isn't great yet it serves as a representative example of Czech "post-revolution" *broken music*, which in addition to gramophones and dense keyboard drones includes Knížák and other compositions played from cassettes and CDs.

From Knížák to the disco ball

In the world of 2013, *turntablism* has its apostles, stars and upstarts. As regards the domain of rock and non-academic alternative music, the primacy is held by the German duo NEU!, who primarily gained fame for their *motorik* percussion-driven style. When during the recording of their second album they ran out of money (according to other versions, time or ideas), they took out their new single, put it on a turntable in the studio and played it faster and slower than the prescribed

45 rpm, letting the disc skip and occasionally kicking the gramophone for good measure. "In 1973, plenty of critics and fans were upset, having the feeling that we were making a joke at their expense, which wasn't our intention at all," recalls NEU! guitarist Michael Rother. The critic Michael Dee, however, deems it a pop-art solution to a pop problem: the single was made use of in a manner similar to that in which Andy Warhol reproduced and manipulated with newspaper photographs.

At the turn of the 1980s, attraction was drawn to the Swiss-American visual artist and composer Christian Marclay, branded in many publications the "father of turntablism" (although he himself accepts being influenced by Knížák). "Records are... dead," he claimed and took it upon himself to breathe new life into them by using them as a medium for works seeking the substance and patterns of commercial releasing of recordings, as well as by expressive playing on gramophones within the context of the New York underground No Wave scene, from which Swans, Sonic Youth, Lydia Lunch and Glenn Branca accured, as well as the contemporary reductionist improvisations.

Whereas Knížák was a generation peer (and later on a member) of the 1960s Fluxus movement, by the beginning of the 1980s Marclay endeavoured to unite the worlds of Marcel Duchamp and performance



art with the savagery of punk. He hung a gramophone "on a strap like an electric guitar and, producing a harsh scratching, looked like a possessed Hendrixian anti-DJ," is how the Czech music writer Pavel Klusák described Marclay's approach. In 1985, Marclay

released *Record Without A Cover*, with the music recorded on it continuously changing and evolving in accordance with the ambient impacts. "The surface noise, the pops and crackles, all those unwanted sounds, occur with time.

I don't reject them, I use them to my benefit, value them and enjoy them. This sound patina has a great expressive quality. It's an aural expression of the passing of time. The record is supposed to be a stable reproduction of time, but it's not. Time and sound become elusive again through the mechanical failure. Technology captures sound and stamps it on these discs. Then they begin lives of their own. Within those lives, technological cracks - defects - occur. That's when it gets interesting for me, when technology fails. That's when I feel the possibility for expression."

Many artists are treading in Marclay's footsteps. Some accentuate in their approach the conceptual, social aspect of using the ready-made vinyl. For the most part, they sail close to the wind as regards copyright restrictions, which has resulted in several lawsuits against these artists (Canada's John Oswald for his "undesirable" Michael Jackson remix). Others, among them Philip Jeck from Liverpool and Germany's Claus Van Bebber, love the gramophone and vinyl for the specific warm sound, the appeasing cracking and tactility of playing. There are possibilities galore. Some even make do without discs. Switzerland's Strotter Inst. have made self-contained hurdy-gurdies from three gramophones and rubber bands, Berlin's Ignaz Schick uses a record player as a microphone-monitored rotating surface, which he touches with dozens of items (cymbals, cocktail umbrellas, plastic utensils, etc.), whereas others, for instance, the US's DJ Spooky and France's ErikM, instead of contemplation and playing with sound art undercut, but not entirely, the consumer-dance usage of DJing, the most widespread application of turntable artistry.

"Two manual decks and a rhythm box is all you need," so reads the call to arms on the sleeve of the 1982 single "Buffalo Gals" by Malcolm McLaren, the legendary manager and inventor of the Sex Pistols. "Get a bunch of good rhythm records, choose your favourite part and groove along with the rhythm machine. Using your hands, scratch the records

repeating the grooves you dig so much. Fade one record into the other and keep that rhythm box going. Now start talking and singing over the record with your own microphone. Now you're making your own music out of other people's records. That's what scratching is." And this is precisely what gave rise to one of the major revolutions in the history of pop music: the birth of hip hop and electronic dance music, whose DJs employ two turntables in order to create an uninterrupted torrent of rhythms for dancing. Today, software suffices for this purpose, but as recently as the 1990s club DJs had to be virtuosos on their instruments. An experimenting turntablist does not have to be one (Knížák being a case in point), yet the sheer chance and materialness of his/her music cannot be replaced computer wizardry.

Milan Knížák considers the approaches outlined in this chapter (including those applied by Marclay, as he has said on many an occasion) plain pop and continues to give preference to destruction and a variegated, albeit sometimes unbearable, clamour. "I don't know whether in 2050 broken music will still make sense," he said to HIS Voice. "Destruction can become, and I am convinced that it already has become, one of the methods of creating music. But, in my opinion, in 2050 people will again be closer to some kind of 'natural' sound. Contemporary youth are turning deaf beneath the onslaught of decibels. Maybe direct participation in creating music without tedious twiddling with stage monitors and all that palaver – this all musicians know – will be the order of the day."

In conclusion, we should add that Knížák is not the only Czech turntablist. Since the 1980s, the potential of the gramophone as a musical instrument has also been worked with by the visual artist Blahoslav Rozbořil, who builds record players from sewing machines and plays on them, among other things, linocuts, and the trio Birds Build Nests Underground, devoting to turntable improvisation and improvised film projection, of which the present author is a member and, since 2012, Knížák's stage assistant within their joint programme of his *broken music* and the derived *re-broken music* by the Prague-based Opening Performance Orchestra, noisesters further destroying Knížák's music by digital means.

FIFTY YEARS OF CZECH MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE

The Music Information Centre, the publisher of the journal you are reading, will soon be celebrating 50 years of its operation. The following text briefly describes the foundation of the institution, deals with its role and possibilities in a totalitarian regime and, finally, gives an account of its transformation into the current form.

“Music Information Centre” is a general title that designates an institution gathering, storing and providing information on the musical culture of the territory to which it appertains, as well as receiving and disseminating information on foreign musical culture, with the aim to encourage, in particular, performance of contemporary works of music both on the national and international scale. This mission has been common to all music information centres, including the Czech one, since the very beginning of their existence. Back at the first meeting of “national music centres” (according to the official protocol: the “Meeting of National Music Centre representatives organised by the International Music Council in co-operation with the Donemus Foundation and the Dutch National Music Committee”) from six European countries, in 1958 in Amsterdam, the then Czechoslovakia was represented by Pavel Eckstein, a delegate of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers, who delivered a report of the territory he stood for. Although at the time Czechoslovakia was part of the bloc of states controlled by Moscow through local communist parties, owing to its having condemned the most blatant errors and the greatest atrocities of the Stalin era and on the basis of its economic and cultural upswing, often attained despite the obstacles continuously placed by the communist regime, the domestic situation appeared to be so stabilised and promising that in 1960 the “establishment of socialism in Czechoslovakia” was declared. Furthermore, the ruling structure’s confidence in the existing state system’s permanence allowed for moderate loosening of the totalitarian grip.



The Czech Music Fund building, in which, in the left part of the ground floor, the Music Information Centre has resided since 1967 (photo circa 2000)

In 1961 the Minister of Education and Culture set up the **Committee for Promotion of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic Through Czech and Slovak Music**, made up of representatives of 16 central authorities, institutions and organisations, with its secretariat being the **Music Information Centre**, whose one and only employee worked from February 1962 until the end of 1963 within the State Music Publisher in Prague. Owing to the ineffectiveness of this system, upon the proposal of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers, with effect from 1 January 1964 the Ministry of Education and Culture replaced it with the **Music Information Centre within the Czech Music Fund** in Prague, headed by Milena Galušková, and within the Slovak Music Fund in Bratislava, headed by Ernest Zavorský, while at significant international meetings the two centres were deemed a single organisation represented by the workplace in Prague, up until Czechoslovakia's split into the independent Czech and Slovak states at the beginning of 1993. Secured by permanent, state-determined income, the Czech and Slovak Music Funds were from the very outset of their existence able - even compared to similar institutions abroad - to sustain generously in material terms the development of music-information activities that were in compliance with their mission.

In 1964 the periodical **Music News from Prague** (initially comprising four pages and edited by Pavel Eckstein) began to be published in English, German, French, Spanish and Russian versions. The same year saw the launch of separate English, German and Russian six-page **pamphlets dedicated to contemporary Czech and Slovak composers**, the first one dealing with Ján Cikker, followed over the next few years by titles devoted to Alois Hába, Pavel Bořkovec, Jan Kapr, Vladimír Sommer, Eugen Suchoň, Petr Eben, Jan Hanuš, Miloslav Kabeláč, with more pamphlets, some of them updated, with the total print run of 5-10 thousand copies, ensuing annually.

From 1966 on, LP discs were released, on the initiative of the Music Information Centre, featuring recordings of Czech compositions performed at the annual **New Music Week** festival, which were available in shops within two or three days after the concert. This practice continued up until 1989, while the Music Information Centre subscribed to at least 50 copies of each release and subsequently sent them, either in complete editions or separately, to foreign radio companies, which, including the BBC, played them on their broadcasts. In 1967 and 1968 the Music Information Centre itself released a total of 28 **LPs with the diameter of 17 cm** containing representative pieces by Czech composers.

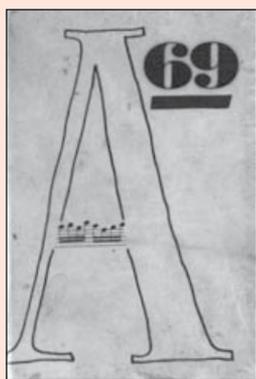


Cover of the RCA Victor LP featuring recordings of selected representative late-50s/early-60s Czech compositions (1969-70)

Above: two titles from the 2nd series of EPs featuring selected contemporary Czech compositions, released by the Music Information Centre in 1968. A technically better follow-up are the CD samplers featuring the latest Czech and foreign works released by the Music Information Centre since 2002. (1968)



Left: cover of an LP from the edition of reportage recordings from the annual "New Music Week" festival of new Czech compositions, with the logo of the Music Information Centre (HIS), which initiated the edition (1967)



The Czech Music Directory prepared and edited by the Music Information Centre and published by Panton in 1969. The 1972 volume couldn't be issued, for political reasons; the next directory wasn't published until 1990, following the fall of the communist regime.

Part of the gallery of the prominent and few tolerated composers on the Music Information Centre's leaflets dating from the turn of the 1980s, during the era of post-Soviet invasion "normalisation".



The Music Information Centre almost single-handedly initiated the publication of, and in some cases actually issued, **foreign-language books** providing compendious information pertaining to contemporary Czech musical culture, as well as, to a certain extent, music dating from older periods. Gradually built up were a **library** and a **sound recordings library**, as well as a **stock** of multiplicative selected titles intended for promotion. Magnetic tapes were copied and, later on, some of them made at the centre's own sound studio. >From the beginning of 1964 to the end of September 1966, **complimentary promotional materials** were sent to 1,500 addressees in some 42 countries. They contained 7,360 scores by living and 1,136 by deceased Czech composers, 1,133 books, 310 works of music on magnetic tape, etc. In 1967 the periodical Music News from Prague was distributed abroad in a print run of 12,000.

Over the period in question, the Music Information Centre was visited by **463 foreign guests**, many of whom were invited at its own expense by the Czech Music Fund and the Union of Czechoslovak Composers, and an unregistered number of domestic guests. The Music Information Centre employees and collaborators made numerous trips throughout Czechoslovakia and abroad. In 1966 and 1967 the centre organised a cycle of 15 programmes featuring recorded music titled "**Music Travels**", each of them dedicated to a European country.

Following the opening in 1967 of the Janáček Hall in the Czech Music Fund building in Besední street, which primarily hosted concerts held by the Union of Czechoslovak Composers, the Music Information Centre began organising at the venue **several live performances every year**. The fundamental objective was to familiarise the Czech public with new foreign works, while in turn contemporary Czech music was presented abroad. Dozens of both domestic and foreign compositions were premiered at these concerts.

Owing to sheet music being sent abroad, Czech chamber pieces were performed in the USA, East and West Germany, Austria, France, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Britain, Canada and elsewhere, and symphonic compositions in Germany, Ireland, the Soviet Union and Australia. Czech composers began receiving commissions from foreign artists, including the American Wind Symphony Orchestra, the Rostocker Nonett (inspired by the Czech Nonet) and the American saxophone player Sigurd

M. Rascher, who instigated Otmar Mácha's extremely popular *Pláč saxofonu* (The Wailing of Saxophone).

Following consultations with the Music Information Centre, in 1969 the American conductor Igor Buketoff and the London Symphony Orchestra recorded a **gramophone disc (RCA Victor)** featuring Vladimír Sommer's *Vocal Symphony*, Luboš Fišer's *15 Prints after Dürer's Apocalypse* and Ivan Klusák's *Invention No. 1*, which were among the most acclaimed pieces at the time. Great popularity was also enjoyed by compositions written by Otmar Mácha, Petr Eben, Jiří Jaroš, Svatopluk Havelka, Viktor Kalabis and Miloslav Kabeláč, the latter of whom, along with Zbyněk Vostrák and Marek Kopelent, was also an extremely successful creator of the stylistically most progressive music. The Music Information Centre's menu included Alos Hába's microinterval music, as well as Alois Piňos's and Miroslav Hlaváč's electroacoustic works.

The relaxing of the communist restrictions in the 1960s, which went hand in hand with greater artistic freedom, was brought to an abrupt end on **21 August 1968** by the Warsaw Pact invasion and subsequent occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Army. One of the results of the "normalisation" process in society was the de facto exclusion from concert life of music composed using novel techniques, themes incompatible with the communist ideology, music by emigrants, particularly Jan Novák, and dissidents, including Kabeláč, Kopelent, Kapr, Klusák, Klement Slavický and others. Musica viva Pragensis, an ensemble specialising in new music, was banned from pursuing further activity. Also forbidden was the use of publications written by politically unfitting authors or those containing the names of undesirable persons, which applied to all summary books, with the exception of those focused on older eras. Owing to their objecting to such a policy, many artists and cultural workers had to leave their jobs, among them the Music Information Centre's Milena Galušková and Pavel Eckstein.

To a certain degree, the various restrictions were compensated by the **improving material provision of work** at the Music Information Centre, which at the end of the 1980s employed 10 persons. The periodical Music News from Prague, which was extended to 8 pages and also contained larger articles dedicated not only to contemporary

music but also performance art and other aspects of the Czech musical culture, including historical discursions, was distributed in a print run of almost 15,000 copies. New promotional materials appeared, such as, for instance, a 10-LP anthology of Czech music conforming to the aesthetic and ideological requirements of the regime, titled *In the Name of Life, Joy and Beauty*, released in 1985 by Panton.

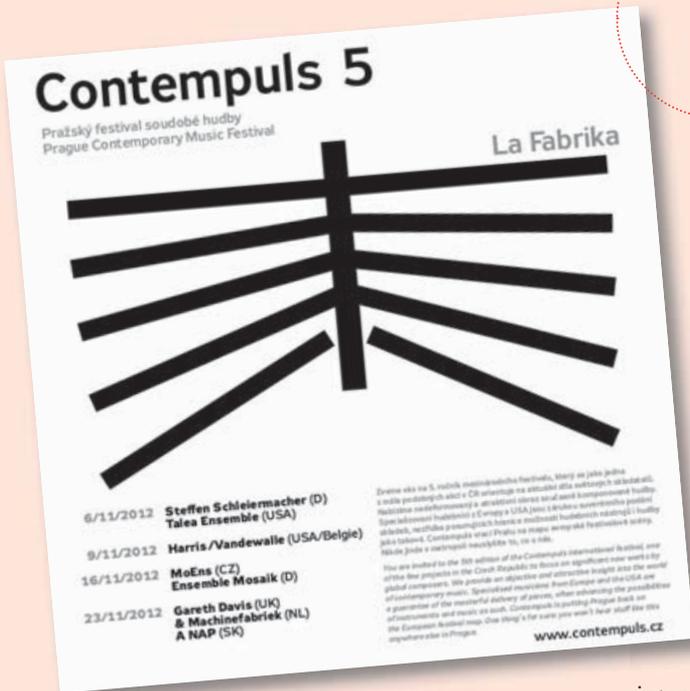
The culmination of the period during which informational and promotional work above all rested in handing out and distributing a large volume of substantial promotional materials started under Jan Ledeč (the head of the Music Information Centre from 1972 to 1986) with the preparation of the Year of Czech Music 1984. The project was motivated by momentous anniversaries of renowned Czech composers (see Lenka Dohnalová's article in this issue) and was promoted in Music News from Prague in a number of informative articles and by means of contributions to the event from celebrated foreign artists (including Sir Charles Mackerras). The Music Information Centre participated in the organisation of numerous programmes, such as chamber concerts, in collaboration with the Czechoslovak Culture Centres abroad and foreign promoters. Notable outcomes were, for instance, two performances of the complete Bohuslav Martinů symphonies (in 1984 in London, conducted by Christopher Adey, and in 1985 in Moscow under the baton of Gennady Rozhdestvensky), the Days of Czechoslovak Music festival in Kiev in April 1987, concerts of Czech and Siberian music in Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk in 1988, and other similar events.

A paradoxical situation occurred in Czechoslovakia, whereby owing to the inflexibility of official negotiations in the countries of the "socialist bloc" performances scheduled to be given by artists from these states could not materialise, and hence, starting from 1986 until September 1989, the concerts held by the Music Information Centre only featured, apart from domestic musicians, artists from the Western democracies.

Interest in new Czech compositions on the part of foreign performers continued. In 1989, the Music Information Centre, headed by Oleg Podgorný, recorded 2,543 reference numbers for both domestic and foreign correspondence, received 240 visitors from abroad and distributed more than a thousand sets of promotional materials. Mass-scale handing over and sending of free sheet music, sound recordings and publications supplemented in part the poorly functioning foreign distribution system.

The democratisation of Czechoslovakia **in the wake of the November 1989 revolution** removed the previous political barriers to promotional work, yet the abolishing of the state-determined support for the Czech Music Fund, which financed the operation of the Music Information Centre, one of its departments, soon resulted in a lack of money. Music News from Prague published a series of articles by hitherto banned Czech musicians, bearing the summary title Prohibited Czech Music; after a 21-year interval, a new volume of the Czech Music Directory could be published; several festivals at home and abroad, and other projects with the participation of the Music Information Centre, took place. From 1992 on, however, the centre's independent concert activity ceased altogether and Music News from Prague began only to be published in English and distributed for a subscription fee, which resulted in the number of subscribers dwindling to a few hundred. Discs, sheet music and publications started to be provided against payment, which might have been one of the reasons for the considerable decrease in the number of visitors to the Music Information Centre. Promotional trips and inviting guests at the Music Information Centre's expense stopped too. By 1994, the number of the centre's permanent employees had dropped to three.

After several changes of head of the Music Information Centre, in 1995 Miroslav Pudlák, the current director, assumed the post on the basis of a contest. The organisation's status changed into that of a public-benefit company, thus no longer being a department of the Czech Music Fund, which itself became a foundation and since 1995 has functioned as a grantor, as well as major sponsor, in relation to the Music Information Centre. The difficult period the Music Information Centre went through in the 1990s was overcome by means of obtaining financial support from the state and various foundations in order to implement projects and gradually convert documentary, information and promotional materials into electronic form. The periodical Music News from Prague, which from 1995 was issued under the title Czech Music, was in 2007 renamed **Czech Music Quarterly**. Since 2001, the Czech-language bi-monthly **HIS Voice**, primarily focused on minority musical genres both in the Czech Republic and abroad, has been published. Since 2002, HIS Voice has included covermount **CDs featuring selected Czech and foreign compositions**, and since 2007 similar CDs



Examples of current projects of the Czech Music Information Centre

(CD-sampler covers, cover of the HIS Voice bimonthly magazine, Contempuls festival flyer)

have been released as supplements of Czech Music Quarterly. At the turn of 2004 the Music Information Centre provided editing of the **Anthology of Czech Music**, spanning the period from the 9th to the end of the 20th centuries.

Since the early 1990s, basic sources of information have been gradually, and with increasing intensity, transferred to the website www.musica.cz. The www.musicbase.cz website includes an extensive database of records on pieces by Czech composers, mainly from the second half of the 20th century to the present day, as well as a digital archive of scores and recordings. Furthermore, the Music Information Centre's website provides a Czech music directory (Muzikontakt), archives of the two journals, an anthology of Czech music, a calendar of concerts held in the Czech Republic and other useful

information. Digitisation of the music scores, sound and photo archive is ongoing. At the present time, the Music Information Centre functions owing to receiving one-year grants from various sources, intended for individual projects. It has expanded to encompass other non-commercial musical genres. In 2005, the centre renewed its concert-related activities as a co-organiser of the series of alternative foreign music performances **STIMUL**, and since 2008 it has held **Contempuls**, its own annual international festival of contemporary music. The Music Information Centre is a member of the International Association of Music Information Centres (IAMIC), within which it participates in joint projects pertaining to sharing information databases and mobility of artists and works. Together with the other 10 IAMIC organisations, it has taken part in the multiyear **MINSTREL** project, supported by a grant from the European Commission.

The author worked at the Music Information Centre from 1964 to 2007.

2014: YEAR OF CZECH MUSIC - *Creativity and Co-operation*

Within another **Year of Czech Music**, we will again focus on the anniversaries of a number of Czech composers, musicians and ensembles, both in the Czech Republic and abroad. The patrons of the project, are the world-renowned mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kožená and her husband Sir Simon Rattle, chief conductor of the Berliner Philharmoniker. What will the Year of Czech Music be like? What should its outcome be? What can we expect over the next 12 months?



The Year of Czech Music concept has a long tradition in the Czech lands, dating right back to the magnificent festivities marking a Bedřich Smetana anniversary in 1924. Under the auspices of Leoš Janáček, Brno too held events reflecting contemporary music. The year 1954 included commemoration of the anniversary of Antonín Dvořák's death (1904). The 1974 edition was a typical product of the "Normalisation" cultural policy in the wake of the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968, promoting traditional Czech music and boosting its export, yet as regards contemporary music only offering space to members of the official composers unions. The 1984 project further continued in this direction. Amid the dynamic post-revolution political situation, in 1994 there was no endeavour on the part of the government to provide incentives and co-ordinate the transforming institutions; what's more, there was an evident distancing from any previous practice, albeit rooted in an older era and the general cultural custom of the European region. The centenary of Antonín Dvořák's death, on 1 May 2004, the very day of the Czech Republic's accession to the EU, and the 50th anniversary of Leoš Janáček's death served as an impulse for revival of the "Year". Spontaneous preparations

for the celebrations of anniversaries, of these two composers in particular, were accompanied by the "*Czech Music 2004 - An Integral Part of European Culture*" programme as a tool of state financial support and promotion, as well as an instrument of motivation for implementing projects and reflecting on Czech musical culture as such.

This year's vision is based on approximately 90 momentous anniversaries of composers, performers and organisations, this time not only those relating to classical music but also folk, jazz and alternative, encompassing professionals and non-professionals alike. Its purpose is to reflect and support the natural synergies of the Czech Republic's musical culture, as well as robustly promoting Czech music abroad, leaning on the names that are a reputable Czech cultural "trademark".

In addition to Dvořák and Smetana, we are celebrating an anniversary of Leoš Janáček (b. 1854), who alongside Dvořák is the most popular composer abroad. Furthermore, we will recall the late-Romantic and Art Nouveau inspired work of Josef Suk (b. 1874), Antonín Dvořák's son-in-law and a member of the celebrated Czech Quartet, whose



symphonic *Asrael* (1906) and orchestral *Radúz and Mahulena* (1898) are sought-after works worldwide, primarily owing to the conductor Libor Pešek and his younger colleague Jakub Hruša, who will present *Asrael* on 15 April 2014 in London together with Antonín Dvořák's celebrated *Cello Concerto in B minor* within a remarkable Czech music cycle he has organised in tandem with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Another artist whose anniversary we will be celebrating in 2014 is the Baroque master Jan Dismas Zelenka, whose works are mainly championed by the brilliant ensemble Collegium 1704, who on 31 July are scheduled to perform his *Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetae* at the international music festival in Český Krumlov. (Supraphon is preparing a recording of the composition.) Programmes made up entirely of Zelenka works will be presented on 8 April in the Czech capital by the Prague Symphony Orchestra and on 3 May in Munich by the Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunk.

Significant anniversaries relate not only to composers but performing artists too, including those of the Czech soprano Tereza Stolzová (b. 1834),

a friend of Giuseppe Verdi's who took care of the ailing composer until the very end of his life, and the soprano and actress Jarmila Novotná (d. 1994), a Metropolitan Opera soloist whose stunning performances inspired an English translation of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, thus playing a considerable role in the opera's being staged globally. May 2014 will see the 90th anniversary of the birth of the soprano Milada Šubrtová, one of the most authentic Czech performers of Dvořák's *Rusalka*. The opera, which has been part of the core repertoire in Europe and the USA (on 23 January, a production of *Rusalka* starring Renée Fleming will be staged at the Metropolitan Opera), will be presented in several countries for the very first time (for instance, in Oman, whose Royal Opera House in Muscat will on 7 and 8 May stage a National Theatre in Brno production). In 2014, we will also celebrate the centenary of the birth of the renowned Czech conductor and composer Rafael Kubelík, the son of the world-famous violinist Jan Kubelík. In addition to his illustrious international engagements, his career was repeatedly, and symbolically, linked with the Czech Philharmonic, who after 1990 named him their conductor emeritus. On 12 May, in honour of Rafael Kubelík,

the orchestra will open the 2014 Prague Spring international music festival with Smetana's *My Country* under the baton of Jiří Bělohlávek, its chief conductor and honorary president of the current Year of Czech Music.

Anniversaries will be celebrated by arts institutions too, including the Prague Symphony Orchestra (founded in 1934), the National Theatre in Brno (established in 1884), as well as the much younger yet prestigious PKF - Prague Philharmonia, co-founded in 1994 by Jiří Bělohlávek.

It is natural that the Year of Czech Music also reflects folk traditions. A great role in their preservation was played by František Sušil (b. 1804), a collector of Moravian folk songs who inspired other collectors, as well as celebrated Czech composers, including Leoš Janáček, Vítězslav Novák (d. 1949) and Bohuslav Martinů (d. 1959). Other leading figures whose anniversaries we are celebrating are the versatile avant-garde musician and dramatist Emil František Burian (b. 1904), who in 1928 wrote the very first book on jazz in Czechoslovakia (a new publication on his operas is being prepared by the Koniasch Latin Press), and the multi-instrumentalist Karel Velebný (d. 1989), who closely collaborated with the untimely deceased jazz singer Eva Olmerová (b. 1934). In 2014, we will also commemorate the work of two extremely popular Czech singer-songwriters: the co-founder of the SEMAFOR theatre of minor forms Jiří Šlitr (b. 1924), and Karel Kryl, who would have been celebrating his seventieth birthday in 2014.

Bearing witness to the fact that Czech music, whether its "Czechness" is viewed in terms of territory, language, culture, value or intention, is interesting not only for us Czechs is that the auspices of this Year of Czech Music have been assumed by Sir Simon Rattle, chief conductor of the Berliner Philharmoniker, and his wife, the mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kožená. It is for the very first time that artists of such great renown are synonymous with a programme promoting a Czech trademark. This can give rise to a number of positive responses.

So what will this Year of Czech Music be like? What should its outcome be? What can we expect over the next 12 months? It has become a cultural custom that anniversaries are widely reflected, and the easiest

to market are the anniversaries of musical giants, as we have seen of late in the case of Mozart, Verdi, and Chopin. In addition, we have grown accustomed to the moniker "Year of...", applied, for instance, by the European Union (Years of Intercultural Dialogue, Volunteerism, Active Ageing, etc.), which aims to stimulate us to rethink and adopt a more sensitive attitude to a certain topic. In this respect, the Year of Czech Music actually has a particularly long tradition, one spontaneously combining the two approaches. At the same time, it is not only confined to reflecting the respective anniversaries in programmes of events but also strives to initiate the mentioned rethinking of our current plentiful practice in all aspects: dramaturgy, format, marketing and politics. This approach is also motivated by the project's secondary title: "*Creativity and Co-operation*".

Although the Czech government is planning to support the programme to the tune of approximately CZK 50 million, a greater part of the finance will come from other sources: regions and municipalities, as well as private sponsors. As is customary, organisers fully covering all expenses have spontaneously appeared, above all abroad and within the folk and jazz genres. In their case, the Co-ordination Centre can provide support as regards promotion, barter and, well, co-ordination. Accordingly, it is not just yet another "festival of festivals", which would cost established organisers a lot of money, but a project involving as great a number of organisers in the project as possible, inspiring and interconnecting them, making use of regional specificities, funds, capacities and mutual synergies. In addition to festivals and concerts, the scheduled projects include exhibitions (e.g. *Politics and Music*, prepared by the National Museum, and the National Gallery in Prague's iconographic exhibition *Musica viva*) and publications. At the present time, about 700 events have been registered and mapped. Even though we expect this already substantial figure to grow even further, changes will undoubtedly occur in dependence on the finance acquired. The number of partners will increase too; these already include media outlets, the Ministry of Education and Sports, Czech Centres, Czech Tourism, the Prague Information Service, and the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS), which also provides methodological support to non-professional activities.

Let us now highlight a few of the most noteworthy events. The Year of Czech Music will be officially opened by the Czech Philharmonic under its chief conductor, Jiří Bělohávek, and Magdalena Kožená, who will give the world premiere of the orchestral version (arranged by the contemporary composer Jiří Teml) of Antonín Dvořák's *Love Songs*. On 7 January, the Estates Theatre in Prague will host the Moravian-Silesian National Theatre's production of Bohuslav Martinů's opera *Mirandolina* (to be recorded by the European Broadcasting Union).

Other intriguing events include remarkable cycles and thematic shows; for instance, a recital to be given by the pianist Jitka Čechová, a Bedřich Smetana specialist, on 10 March in Prague, and the *Weekend of Czech Chamber Music*, which within the Prague Spring festival will encompass 12 performances (from 30 May to 1 June) by first-class Czech ensembles of music by Czech composers, from Smetana and Dvořák to contemporary creators, such as Vladimír Sommer and Luboš Fišer. Another mouth-watering prospect is the *Marathon of Antonín Dvořák's Songs*, prepared in collaboration with Czech Radio, scheduled to take place in Ostrava on 1 May, the anniversary of the artist's death, at which about 90 Dvořák songs will be presented within six hours.

We can also look forward new releases, of complete works or compositions not previously recorded. Live performances of the complete Dvořák symphonies by the Czech Philharmonic conducted by Jiří Bělohávek are currently being recorded for the resulting documentary directed by Barbara Willis Sweete. A recording of global significance is a set of discs comprising the complete symphonies of Miloslav Kabeláč (b. 1979), to be released by Czech Radio. Another eagerly-awaited disc is the first-ever CD recording of Dvořák's opera *Alfréd* (Arco Diva).

In December 2014, the National Theatre in Prague will premiere Alois Hába's opera *New Land*, the first-ever complete performance of the work depicting collectivisation in a Soviet village (based on Fyodor Gladkov's novella). Hába created the libretto in tandem with the Czech writer Ferdinand Pujman. The dramatic opera contains shockingly realistic scenes of violence, yet since it is not pro-Soviet it was not performed in its entirety during the ideologically driven inter- and post-war periods.

On 26 June, Ostrava will play host to the premiere of a production of the opera *Labyrinth of Lists* by the acclaimed contemporary Czech composer Martin Smolka, inspired by Umberto Eco's monograph *La Vertigine della Lista*, within the New Opera Days Ostrava festival, which will also present other contemporary Czech operas.

Another fascinating component of the Year of Czech Music is novel artistic treatment of well-known works. Such productions include Eva Blažičková's choreography *The Bouquet of Flowers* to Martinů's music, which engages three generations of dancers. Moreover, 2014 will include interactive projects with school children, thus affording the project an encompassing social dimension. As we have mentioned, an integral part of the project will be formed by international events. *Czech Dreams*, scheduled for the second half of the year, will link up to the renowned Concentus Moraviae festival and take place in collaboration with some 23 countries. The Janáček May international music festival will open on 22 May with a performance of *Sinfonietta* at the GONG multifunctional hall, the former gasholder of the Vítkovice Ironworks, and present outstanding young Czech artists (e.g. the violinist Josef Špaček, laureate of the 2012 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, and the horn player Kateřina Javůrková, winner of the Prague Spring international competition).

The patron of the Year of Czech Music, as well as *Czech Dreams*, will appear within the *Magdalena Kožená and Friends* cycle on 1 July in Biel, Switzerland.

Even though the Year of Czech Music will officially conclude in December 2014, its ripples should have a long-term benefit. One such is the concept of professional "Friends of Czech Music", i.e. those intrigued by and devoting to it continuously, both in the Czech Republic and abroad. If you are one of these artists, producers, writers or musicologists, feel free to contact our Information/Co-ordination Centre. We are interested in your experience and opinions.

www.yearofczechmusic.cz

Contact:

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DON'T RIDE A DEAD HORSE...

Musica Nova 2013

Some 75 composers from 27 countries took part in Musica Nova 2013, the 22nd edition of the electroacoustic music international competition. A number somewhat lower in comparison with the previous year, yet the overall impression was good, perhaps owing in part to the fact that over the past two years we have made it clear, both in the media and on the internet, that the jury places emphasis on aesthetically integrated compositions. And just like every year, we also carefully considered the competition's focus and formal terms and conditions.

The competition's genre has been changed to the simpler *sonic art* denomination, which may not be in total semantic alignment with the previous one yet basically designates the two fundamental attributes expected. What's more, we have also united the terminology with that of our colleagues in Slovakia.

Our interest continues to focus on free sonic art, without explicitly preferring a style, in two categories - studio (purely electroacoustic) creations and compositions encompassing a live element. Accordingly, styles representing a crossover to other types of creation - the more functionally profiled radioart or sound installation, for instance - remain peripheral. The multimedia domain is

excluded, unless the creator himself/herself deems that the musical component is sufficiently autonomous and registers it separately. For the time being, multimedia works are omitted for both capacity and conceptual reasons, since we are interested in the semantic possibilities and communicability of sound itself.

Technological development somewhat blurs the division of categories into "purely electroacoustic", i.e. de facto studio music, and electroacoustic music "in combination with an instrument/instruments played live or vocals". In this respect, during the course of the competition Pavel Kopecký (Faculty of Music of the Academy of Performing Arts) several times opened a heated discussion concerning a composition registered in the "live" category, in which the creator, live without cutting, manipulates modular cubes on a board with an attached contact microphone. The majority of the committee members arrived at the opinion (which I myself support) that the categories are still distinguishable, intuitively well comprehensible and, above all, essentially different in terms of ontology. Although the practice and the possibilities of what can be used as a live "instrument", including the human body with sensors, have been expanding, decisive in this category is the fact that the "line" of a composition is maintained by a human gesture (voice, a body movement, breath) without cutting - by that which a human body can manage in real time. This, of course, does not mean that it does not contain components prepared in advance or modified in real time. The compositions within this category are also more variegated and livelier for the listener, they suffer less from "dead parts". In this connection, a proverb of the Dakota Indians crosses my mind: "*When you discover that you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount...*", which could, and perhaps



The competition's jury

even should, be compulsory reading at sound studios and elsewhere. Many composers “start off riding a live horse”, but they fail to notice that it has died during the composition. My colleague, the juror Juraj Ďuriš, a seasoned composer, sound engineer and pedagogue, affronts this danger at his lessons by submitting a format he calls “bonsai”. I find the symbol really apposite: It evokes the association that a composition should not be a fast-grown offshoot but, with regard to the required duration, possess a profound implicit semantic density and recast aesthetic value. We do not dare trammel the composers by limiting the duration to 20 minutes, yet our experience is that better mastered pieces do not usually exceed 10 minutes.

We are pleased that the composers approach the competition as one of the international platforms available making it possible for them to present their creations, not only as a competition *sensu stricto*. Neither is it meant to be that way. The competition represents, at least in my eyes, the necessary reflective phase of selection prior to a piece’s concert and radio performance, which is, owing to the members of the international jury, more impartial than the programme chosen for a regular festival. The competition also gives rise to an active interest on the part of composers, as well as providing the opportunity for established creators to mingle with new ones. There is always someone alluring in the youngest generation.

This year’s Musica Nova was generally of a high quality, more poetic than sonically “documentary”. In this respect, our programme indicia were adequately understood. The winner in the studio music category was Felipe Otondo, born in Chile and currently living in Britain, with his *Night Study No. 1*; first prize

in the “live” category went to Robert Normandeu from Quebec with the composition *Baobabs* for 6 percussionists, 4 voices and electronics. The voices in this piece serve to express gestures, emotions and movement. The anthropologically-based music possesses a great expressive range and vitality without any dead passages, and is reminiscent of the Maori style.

Honorary mentions in this category were awarded to the Russian-Swiss composer Elvira Garifzyanova for the piece *Aurora Borealis* for flute and electronics, and the American David Ikard for his *Ventus et Unda* (Wind and Wave) for bass clarinet and electronics. By means of technology, the artists expand the possibilities of the instruments, while the basic “spirit” of the works retains a human dimension.

Felipe Otondo’s *Night Study No. 1* is a colourful whimsical piece, as are the other prize-winning poetic contractions by the Belgian Stijn Govaere (*Far bolire piano per 8 minuti*) and the Italian Antonio Scarcia’s *Ordinary Rehearsals* in the studio category.

The competition also has a Czech-only round, whose winner was Michal Rataj with the orchestral composition *Spatialis*. The title indicates that electronically treated is the sound’s spatial dimension, especially in the percussion section. This work too gave rise to a discussion among the jury members as to what extent a more sophisticated spatial projection of a certain component of an instrumental ensemble’s sound is a sufficient feature for including it in the electroacoustic category. The choice was ultimately justified by, above all, the sheer musical quality of the piece. The other prize-winning Czech composition was Jan Fila’s sonic plaything *Slzy bran* (Tears of Gates), one of the few humorous, thus all the more welcome, pieces.



From top left, clockwise:
Stijn Govaere, Robert Normandeu, Antonio Scarcia, Felipe Otondo

What are the competition's future intentions? First and foremost, to extend the audience and to nurture the youngest listeners. Bearing this in mind, before the usual **Laureates Concert, on 17 December** at the Hungarian Culture Institute in Prague, we held a **concert at the Futurum Music Bar on 12 December**, which the audience were able to listen to lying down. We are seeking a content and format that would captivate (also in collaboration with dancers). 2014 is the Year of Czech Music. One of the planned events is the project for children "Czech Ear", whose aim it is to teach the youngest how to listen attentively to the typical sounds around them, to process them by means of available freeware to a "sound trademark", which could be offered as an acoustic logo to a municipal authority, school, etc. Accordingly, it concerns interconnecting perception, imagination, creation and technologies, co-operation between primary and art schools, artists and schools. These miniatures will be assigned a special round in the Musica Nova competition. The winner will be provided with the opportunity to consult a professional sound engineer or composer about his/her experience. Some time ago, I came across to a bon mot by the Czech philosopher Václav Bělohradský: *Under Socialism we were afraid of someone always somewhere listening; today we are afraid that no one listens to anyone.* We need attentive listening not only for our project but also, as is said today, for "the audience's evolvement", and life itself.

MUSICA NOVA 2013

In Category A (purely electroacoustic), 50 compositions were registered.

The victor was the Chile-born **Felipe Otondo** with *Night Study No. 1*, honorary mentions were awarded to the Belgian **Stijn Govaere** with the piece *Far bollire piano per 8 minuti* and the Italian **Antonio Scarcia** with *Ordinary Rehearsals*.

The finalists in category A were **Linda Antas** from the USA with the work *Iridescence*, **Andrew Lewis** (UK) with *Dark Glass*, another British creator **Pete Stollery** with the soundscape composition *Three Cities* and Taiwan's **Yu Chung-Tseng** with *As Butterflies Flying under the Curtain*.

In Category B (combination of live and electroacoustic components), 25 composers participated. First prize went to the Canadian **Robert Normandeu** with the piece for vocals and electroacoustic media *Baobabs*, honorary mentions were awarded to the American **David Ikard** with *Ventus et Unda* for clarinet and electronics and the Russian **Elvira Garifzyanova** with *Aurora Borealis* for flute and electronics.

The other finalists in Category B were the Greek composer **Konstantinos Karathanasis** with *Hekate* for shaman drum and electronics, Portugal's **Joao Pedro Oliveira** with *IMH* for percussion and electroacoustic media and the American **Robert Thompson** with *Passage* for clarinet and electronics

In the special Czech round, whose aim it is to motivate domestic creators, two composers received awards: **Michal Rataj** with *Spatialis* for orchestra, percussion and live electronics, and **Jan Fila** with the witty *Slzy bran* (Tears of Gates).

The prize-winning compositions were performed at the Laureates Concert on 17 December 2013 at the Hungarian Culture Institute in Prague, and selected pieces were presented on 12 December 2013 at the Futurum Music Bar in Prague. They will also be played on Czech Radio and sent to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). Following the concert performances, the compositions will be available online on www.musicanova.seah.cz

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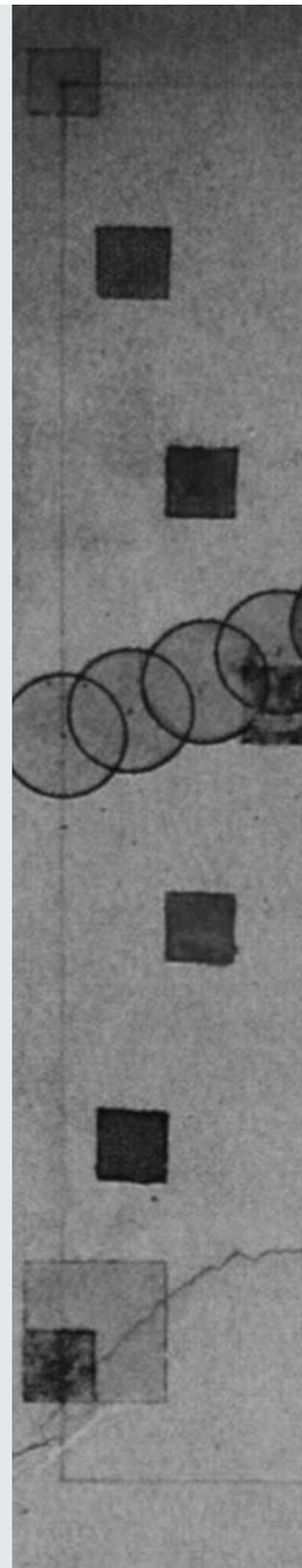
musica.cz

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MIROSLAV PONC'S COLOUR MUSIC AND MUSIC FOR THE EYES

The composer, conductor and pianist Miroslav Ponc is a little explored and thus overlooked figure of the Czech interwar avant-garde. He, however, deserves to be paid attention not only as a creator of music comparable with that of the currently better-known composers of the period, but also as a versatile artist with a marked penchant for overlap into the visual arts in particular. And Ponc was perhaps the very first Czech composer to have noted down musical ideas by means of graphic media. One of the fruits of his interest in various types of art is the conception of “colour music”; although on a global scale not the first of its kind, it has a telling value and remains a singular response to period tendencies pursuing synthesis of selected artistic disciplines. Alongside numerous musical/visual artefacts, Ponc’s “colour music” can also be understood as evidence of a bold creative talent, as well as a testimony to the intoxicating avant-garde milieu in interwar Berlin.

Design for the cover of Ponc’s piece “Three Technical Exercises for Quartertone Piano”, watercolour, 1925. (detail)





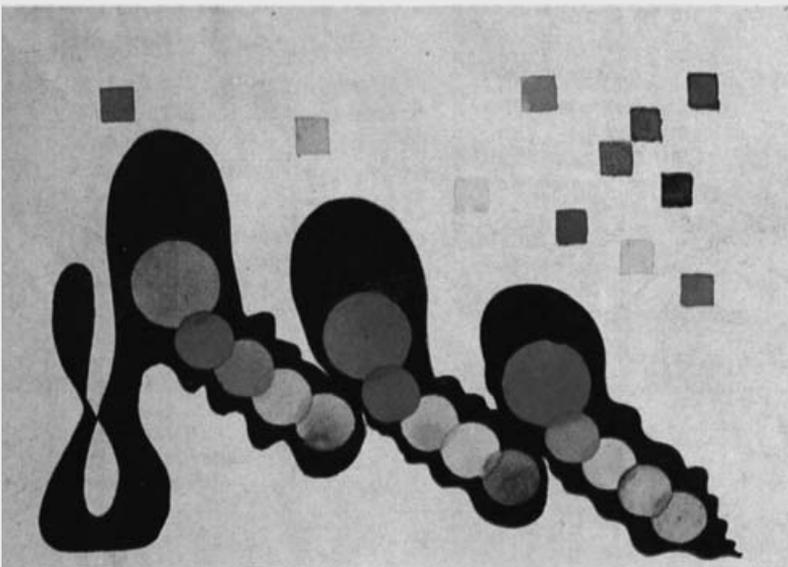
From left Miroslav Ponec; Vítězslav Nezval, noted Czech poet and founder of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group; Bedřich Feuerstein, architect, set designer and painter; Jiří Frejka, famous Czech stage director; 1932

Miroslav Ponc (1902–1976) studied at the Prague Conservatory in the class of the post-Romantic composer Josef Suk, branded by music specialists the founder of the “first generation of Czech Modernism”. Five years later, in 1935, he completed his studies at the department of quarter-tone music with the composer and theoretician Alois Hába, the creator of the concept of the microtonal and “athematic” music style, who also gave Ponc private lessons and was his mentor at the time preceding his studies at the Prague Conservatory.

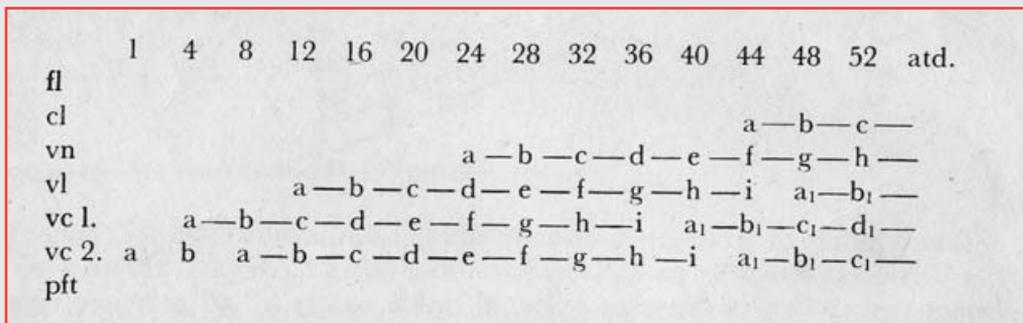
Miroslav Ponc did not only study in Prague. In 1927 and 1932, he attended lectures given by Arnold Schoenberg in Berlin, where in 1927 he completed his training at the Stern Conservatory – piano with Rudolf Breithaupt and conducting with Hermann Scherchen. During his sojourns in Berlin in the second half of the 1920s, Ponc acquainted himself with most avant-garde trends, especially in the visual arts, architecture and poetry, the majority of which he himself devoted to in various periods. Furthermore, he embraced the endeavours for fusion of individual artistic disciplines, mainly presented by the Bauhaus movement. As evidenced by Ponc’s personal effects, he was also actively interested in the works of the Futurists, Dadaists, as well as everything relating to Constructivism. The key role in his evolution was played by his getting to know the Berlin-based Expressionist art group *Der Sturm*. In 1925, as a “painter and composer”, Ponc joined it and was afforded the opportunity to showcase both his music and paintings at their numerous exhibitions and soirées.

In interwar Czechoslovakia he was a member of the avant-garde and leftist *Devětsil* group, primarily focused on literature, theatre and poetry. As a composer of incidental music and musical drama productions, Ponc collaborated with the famous Liberated Theatre, an avant-garde stage that played a crucial role in the development of modern Czech drama, and later on with the National Theatre in Prague. After World War II, writing incidental music (a total of almost 650 works) for theatre, film, radio and television became his main activity. Ponc’s independent musical oeuvre is much more modest, numbering fewer than 60 opuses, with the bulk of them being chamber pieces.

As regards his style, it drew upon Neo-Classicism, which in linkage to Paris’s *Les Six* represented in interwar Czechoslovakia the most influential avant-garde trend, more often defined as “Constructivism” or “asentimental Constructivism”. At that time, he also devoted to microtonal composition. His pieces for theatre productions were based on the notion of incidental music as an independent dramatic figure, thus serving not only as an emotional explication of an action or other events taking place on stage. Accordingly, he perceived the creator of such incidental music, including himself, as a “director of everything that is heard”, meaning “not only a director of music” but also a “director of all noises, clatters and rustles originating in the process of staging a production”. To materialise his conceptions, he made use of live music, background noise and mixing gramophone discs. In 1945, he



Colour Music, watercolour, 1925



Ponc's scheme illustrating the principle of the structure of his Great Canonical Prelude. The letters represent themes, the figures the numbers of bars. The colour relations are: a-dark-blue, b-red, c-green, d-green, e-bright-blue, f-orange, g-pink, h- terracotta, i-dark-blue

succeeded in initiating a separate orchestra merely for the needs of the Drama section of the National Theatre in Prague.

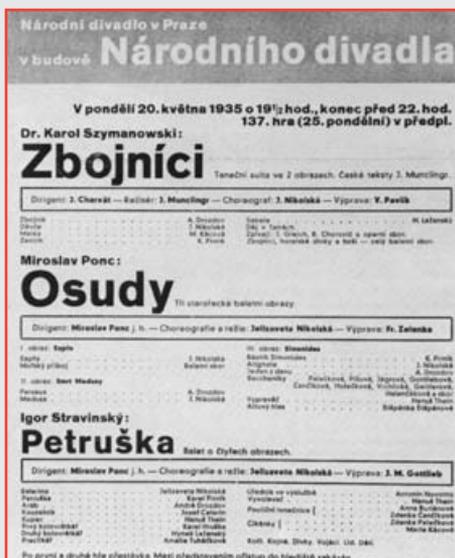
Ponc's independent works were rarely performed. In terms of social prestige, the most significant performances were those of the suite *The Wedding Party on the Eiffel Tower* (1923) at the Prague Spring international music festival in 1946 and the ballet *Fates - Three Ancient Greek Ballet Scenes for Orchestra* at the National Theatre in Prague in 1935. During the Communist era, in 1966 he was awarded the title "Merited Artist", which is

still viewed with derision by the public, although receiving it was not actually conditioned on collaboration with the totalitarian regime.

Great Canonical Prelude

The frequent notes on the colours of particular scales and tones in his papers may compel us to assume that Ponc had developed the ability of synesthesia, owing to which colours were a totally natural part of the music heard. In all likelihood, this is one of the reasons for his serious interest in "music" for visual reception, which, together with an interest in the fine arts, he began demonstrating during the 1920s. This period corresponds with the start of his studies in Berlin, as well as the time from which his first visual art works date. Their common denominator is the evident presence of the parameter of time. Ponc treated his abstract painting motifs in such a manner as though he were striving to capture their transformation and development on the area of paper or canvas from left to right. The majority of his artefacts come across as visual records of a sound track, often appearing as graphic scores making use of melographic and proportional notation. Laconic titles like "Colour Music" explicitly refer to music.

The oldest evidence of Ponc's deliberations on the colour-tone relation dates from the time when he was working on his *Great Canonical Prelude* (1922-23). The piece employs a simple method: the total of 500 bars represents a linearly thickening polyphonic structure in the middle of which precise inversion of the previous



A Prague National Theatre poster, on the programme: Igor Stravinsky's Petrushka and Miroslav Ponc's "Fates - Three Ancient Greek Ballet Scenes"

part occurs. In a graphic contraction, the composition is represented as two mirror-image identical right-angled triangles, or as one triangle with its apex being above half the base's length. The musical material is nine themes, often sharply contrastive in terms of motif and metro-rhythmical structure, used by the composer in an original or transposed form. Each of them is assigned a colour. Yet the succession of colours, which come after each other as individual themes, does not have any elementarily apparent regularity, based upon, for instance, the laws of optics, colorimetry, etc. Neither do Ponc's papers contain any notes explaining the mechanism of the allocation of the colour and theme. In all likelihood, the relations thus arose "randomly" or spontaneously, without adhering to any objectivised system created in advance. With regard to the fact that at the time Ponc was engaged with visual works probably conceived as "music for the eyes", it is also possible that the piece first came into being as a composition of colours to which the particular themes were only additionally assigned, but there is nothing to prove this theory. It is only possible to claim that the scheme of the musical structure refers to the then topical neo-Baroque tendencies representing an avant-garde trend, which is (not only in Czech musicology) incorporated under the not quite apposite term "Neo-Classicism" with reference to the activities of Les Six, Igor Stravinsky and the composers of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) movement.

Objective relations and "absolute poetry"

Ponc's personal effects bear witness to his having occupied himself with the issue of the objective

relation between colour and tone, and that he did not deem synesthesia the one and only decisive tool for allocating a specific note to a specific colour. The creations of some of the artists from the Berlin-based group Der Sturm gave rise to similarly motivated doubts in him. This above all applies to Otto Nebel, the inventor of "absolute poetry", whose conceptual works did not arouse Ponc's interest owing to the poetry itself but the working method employed. Nebel reduced the letters of the alphabet to nine speech sounds, to which he then, in a manner not specified, assigned various graphemes. Nebel wrote his "absolute" texts using this limited number of letters. In parallel or conversely, he thus also created visual artefacts whose structure, determined by the distribution of individual graphemes on the paper, was subordinated to the structure of the text. What was vital for Ponc was his ascertaining that neither in this case did the letter-grapheme relation lean on any objectively existing relation, although the result was inspiring in graphic terms. He encountered a problem that was identical with that occurring with the building up of the colour-tone relation within the considered concept of "colour music".

Colours of chromatic and bichromatic scale

His endeavour to detect the objective relation between colour and tone compelled Ponc to reflect upon the essence of sense reception and, later on, study specifically oriented psychology. During his time in Berlin, he attended public university lectures given by Prof. E. M. Hornbostel ("Musikpsychologie in Grundzügen"), focused on the psychology of auditory perceptions. He conducted various

Sturm-Abende		Sturm - Abend	
IN DER KUNSTAUSSTELLUNG DER STURM Potsdamer Straße 134a I 7 ¹ / ₄ Uhr		im Blüthnersaal / Lützowstr. 76	
März		Sonnabend / 28. März 7 ¹ / ₄ Uhr	
4.	Rudolf Blümner Rezitation	Chor-Konzert der Gesangsgemeinschaft	
11.	Herwarth Walden Aus eigenen Schriften	Rosebery d'Arguto	
18.	Lothar Schreyer Vortrag: Die neue Kunst	Gesellschaft der Sturmfreunde Sonnabend, den 28. März 9 Uhr	
25.	Tschechische Musik Gesang: Kammersängerin ANA KRATKY / PRAG Klavier: Miroslav Ponc	Sturmball im Zoo	
		6. März: Klavierabend Imre Weisshaus / Budapest Neue ungarische Komponisten	

A Der Sturm poster announcing a series of evenings within the group's 139th exhibition in March 1925. Miroslav Ponc played the piano at the 25 March evening dedicated to Czech music.



Design for the joint cover of Ponc's own piece "Chamber Music" and Alois Hába's "Score", watercolour, 1923



Design for the cover of Ponc's "Seven Small Pieces for Quartertone Piano", watercolour, 1926

acoustic experiments and private research in the extensive Oriental music recordings library at the Institute of Psychology of Berlin University. By 1924, however, Ponc had discovered the tool he had sought, as well as the pillar for his work, after reading the German chemist Wilhelm Ostwald's *Die Farbenlehre* (Theory of Colours). Ponc's fundamental aid became Ostwald's colour wheel equipped with a simple mechanism, a movable pointer that, when the wheel was turned, displayed individual colours or their combinations. The key element was that the system reckoned with 24 hues comprising 8 main colours, "pure colours", and 16 cross-hues. This partition of the colour wheel naturally gave rise to deliberations about the analogy with the tonal system, comprising 12 tempered semitones or 24 quartertones. Accordingly, it would suffice to allocate each of the 24 hues one degree from the quartertone (bichromatic) scale in the manner Ponc knew from Alois Hába, which resulted in 24 pairs forming one relation system. Subsequently, Ponc decided to form another relation system of pairs in combination with 12 notes of the chromatic scale, which required reducing the 24 hues by half. Ponc

made use of the additive nature of Ostwald's system and selected colours and the consecutive cross-hues in the logic expressible by the sequence of their ordinal numbers itself: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, etc. up to 23 (see the Chart). Ponc's notes reveal that he also dealt with the pertinence of colours within the framework of octave equivalencies with respect to the progressing "brightness" of individual colours corresponding to the changing "brightness" of tone in octaves. Nevertheless, the final form of the two relation systems and, consequently, the final semblance of the "colour music" system are unknown to us. A more advanced version has not been found in Ponc's personal effects, while available sources do not mention that he ever completed the concept. Be that as it may, Ponc intended the final presentation to take the form of a stage project within which music is both heard and "seen". But he did not conceive visual reception as mere watching of colour combinations that during the performance, as a result of the existence of the colour-tone relation, are projected on to a film screen. This is the manner in which the Hungarian pianist and composer Alexander László presented his "colour music" for a special



Design for the cover of Ponc's piece "Three Technical Exercises for Quartertone Piano", watercolour, 1925.

piano, "sonchronomatoscope", back in 1925. Ponc was familiar with László's work and we can presume that he was also familiar with the simple colour-tone relation system devised by Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin in the early 20th century and considered for a projection accompanying the performance of his vocal-instrumental piece *Prométheus, the Poem of Fire*. Unlike other experimental artists before him, Ponc imagined his "colour music" as an installation of various, above all moving, luminous sources distributed in space. This also reflects his fascination with László Moholy-Nagy's *Die mechanische Exzentrik*, a score of optic-acoustic phenomena designed for a theatre stage. A distinguished theoretician, painter, photographer and artist associated with the Bauhaus, Moholy-Nagy appears to have had a significant impact on Ponc's visual aesthetics, as well as his passion for attempts at a new synthesis of artistic disciplines. Ponc himself tried to put across his own stage-set design, yet he ultimately only completed simple sketches. And his "colour music" met with the same fate: his concept was never implemented and verified in practice, and after the end of World War II Ponc ceased to deal with it. His major activity became incidental music, which more than composing was many a time "theatre-making" and "film-making" whose creator had to possess skills as regards

understanding how theatre and film work. In this way, Ponc was at least able to apply his talent beyond the domain of music itself.

Chart:

Ponc's colour-tone relations, applying F. W. Ostwald's colour theory and working with the chromatic scale.

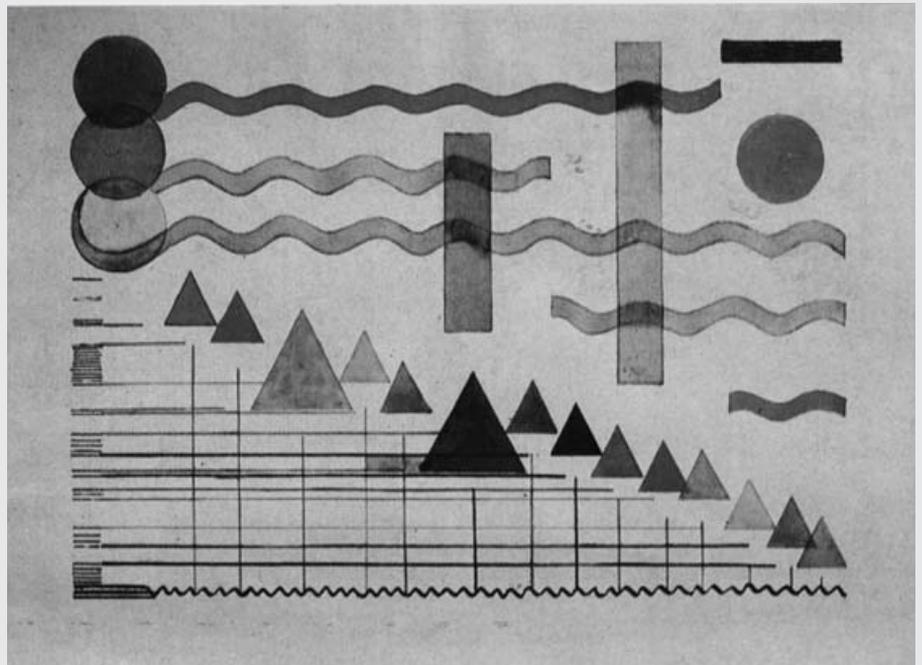
- No.1 Yellow - C
- No. 3 Hue from 1 segment of yellow and 2 segments of orange - C sharp
- No. 5 Hue from 2 segments of orange and 1 segment of red - D
- No. 7 Red - D sharp
- No. 9 Hue from 1 segment of red and 2 segment of violet - E
- No. 11 Hue from 2 segments of violet and 1 segment of blue - F
- No. 13 Blue - F sharp
- No. 15 Hue from 1 segment of blue and 2 segments of blue-green - G
- No. 17 Hue from 2 segments of blue-green and 1 segment of green-blue - G sharp
- No. 19 Green-blue - A
- No. 21 Hue from 1 segment of green-blue and 2 segments of green - A sharp
- No. 23 Hue from 2 segments of green and 1 segment of yellow - B

Music for visual reception

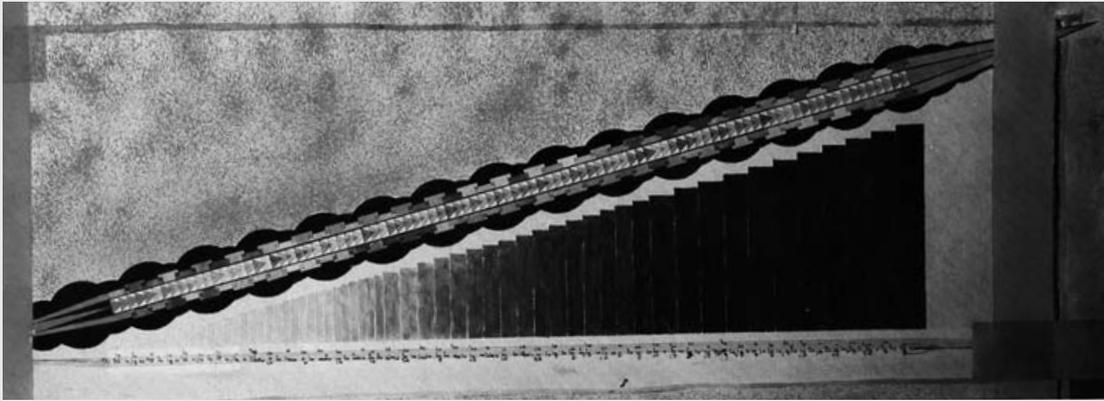
In addition to composing and theorising about “colour music” and synthesis of optic-acoustic phenomena, in the interwar period Ponc also devoted to the visual arts. All his paintings, basically using the watercolour technique, are music-related: either designs of covers for his own compositions or compositions presented together with Alois Hába pieces, or artefacts representing a specific “music” for visual reception. Ponc may have perceived some of them as graphic scores fixing a musical idea by means of painting.

In terms of the fine arts, Ponc based his works on the aesthetics of Constructivism and the related geometrical abstractions. There is no doubt that he was acquainted with the creations of the Bauhaus artists, especially those by Paul Klee, Vasily Kandinsky and László Moholy-Nagy. At the same time, he was very familiar with the production of the De Stijl group and the abstract canvases of the Czech painter František Kupka. By no means, however, are Ponc’s graphic and musico-graphic works sheer plagiarism when it comes to the visual aesthetics applied. Although amounting to just a few works, his oeuvre is singular and, most notably, demonstrates his ability to find, process

and further cultivate the stimuli inspired by key representatives of the interwar avant-gardes. And this was at the time when the future authorities of the László Moholy-Nagy type were far from being celebrities of 20th-century avant-garde art. The best-known Ponc works include watercolours presented at Der Sturm exhibitions under the title *Colour Music* and the watercolour *Sketch for Colour Film Music*. All of them date from 1925 and have to date mainly been perceived as artefacts for purely visual reception, albeit perhaps activating the musical imagination. We do not know, however, whether Ponc really had this aim in mind or whether he created them as graphic scores fixing a musical-auditory idea, since he did not mention his specific acoustic ideas in any available sources. What’s more, the majority of the artefacts do not contain information sufficiently determining possible musical interpretation, yet it does not mean that they were not intended for inspiring music performance. Intriguing in this respect is the aforementioned *Sketch for Colour Film Music*. The watercolour’s exceptionality rests in its possibly being construed as an approximate music score making use of that which the traditional terminology defines as proportional and melographic notation, in this case a notation evidently combined with presentation of a visual-art opinion.



Sketch for Colour Film Music, watercolour, 1925



Graphically supplemented notation of part of the 1924 piece “Chromatic Turbine in Eighth-tones”, watercolour, 1924

The fact that the watercolour dates from the period when, impressed by silent abstract experimental films and, later on, by the texts of Karel Teige, the renowned Czech art theoretician and a leading figure of the European interwar avant-garde, Ponce began dealing with the issue of the “optophonetic” film conception may indicate that the *Sketch* is, on the one hand, a graphically treated model of a visual composition for a future film and, on the other, a graphically treated notation of its sound track, i.e. a graphic score of film music. This is how the distinguished Czech ensemble Agon, focused on contemporary and 20th-century music, attempted to interpret the watercolour. Under the title *Colour Music*, the *Sketch for Colour Film Music* was featured on a CD and the accompanying publication released under the collective title *Graphic Scores and Concepts* (1996). In all likelihood, it is the one and only materialisation of Ponce’s music-visual concept, that is, if Ponce perceived the *Sketch* in this manner at all.

One way or other, within the milieu of the Czech interwar avant-garde Ponce’s music-visual works are a unique phenomenon. This holds true all the more owing to the fact that Ponce did not pay attention to the tendencies that with the distance of time appear as ephemeral but wittingly, as well as for study purposes, embraced the artistic trends that would in the future turn out to be a fruitful basis for the subsequent 20th-century progressive creation. Accordingly, he manifested the corresponding ability of selection and a critical view of that which was happening around him. Nevertheless, he might not have possessed the ability or perseverance necessary for further cultivation of his music-graphic activity. As Ponce himself put it, after WWII he became a “music small trader”, with “small trader” evidently

alluding to his composing incidental music and the frequent obligation to write one score a week.

An unknown chapter in the history of the interwar avant-garde

Miroslav Ponce’s works are referred to in connection with all the areas in which he was active. At the same time, it is a minor reflection as regards the volume. One of the reasons is the fact that there is not a sufficient amount of information and sources. Although disciplines dealing purely with the Czech visual arts do not refer to Miroslav Ponce, his name is usually mentioned in passing in relation to the development of Czech artists’ endeavours to create graphic artefacts influenced by the structure or notation of a music composition. Within the domain of incidental music, theatre studies takes note of his aspirations to revise the use of music in drama productions. Musicology deems Ponce primarily a creator of incidental music and a composer who did not stand out and in the interwar period joined the predominant trend of Neo-Classical music. Unfortunately, a significant part of his compositions, papers, paintings and other works has been lost. The title of the monograph by the Czech musicologist and theatrologist Jaromír Paclt, *Miroslav Ponce – neznámá kapitola z dějin meziválečné umělecké avantgardy* (Miroslav Ponce – An Unknown Chapter in the History of the Interwar Avant-garde) is thus eloquent in a certain sense. Miroslav Ponce is not an underestimated artist, but an *unknown* artist in the real sense of the word.

All photos from the book: Paclt, Jaromír: Miroslav Ponce, neznámá kapitola z dějin meziválečné umělecké avantgardy, Supraphon, Praha 1990



Pavel Haas Quartet

Schubert

Pavel Haas Quartet
(Veronika Jarůšková, Marek Zwiebel,
Pavel Nikl, Peter Jarůšek),
Danjulo Ishizaka - cello.

Text: English, German, French,
Czech. Recorded: Mar., Aug. 2013,
Domovina studio, Prague. Released:
2013. TT: 37:51, 53:51. DDD. 2 CDs
Supraphon SU 4110-2.

It would seem that the **Pavel Haas Quartet** have been going further back in time in their recording activity. In the wake of Prokofiev, Haas, Janáček and Dvořák, they have now chosen Franz Schubert (in my opinion, after Beethoven the greatest master of chamber music, at least when it comes to the first half of the 19th century). And the choice was definitely the right one, although perhaps influenced by the ensemble's friendship with the cellist **Danjulo Ishizaka** and the fact that they have performed the *String Quintet in C major* together on several occasions worldwide. This amazingly splendid work is, it seems, the centrepiece of the album, even though the *String Quartet in D minor* is more famous and has been featured on more recordings (26 as against the quintet's 24). What is the Pavel Haas Quartet's take on Schubert? The creative poetics are similar to those of the previous projects: a lush spectrum of contrasts of various type, degree and poignancy, plenty of dramatic moments, eruptive dynamism, but also an enigmatic mellowing, technical perfection and interplay, massive "Czech" (or today, one could say, "Haasean") full-blooded fortes. Whereas a number of their competitors appear to seek Schubertian Vienna and serve as mere interpreters, the Czech-Slovak quartet are an exponent of Schubert for the first decades of the 21st century. As regards the first group, I would include the Hagen Quartet, Leipziger Streichquar-

tett, Wiener (Philharmoniker) Streichquartett, Takács Quartet, Amati Quartett Zürich and, to a certain degree, the legendary Alban Berg Quartet, with the Emerson String Quartet and, partially, the Julliard String Quartet being classified as members of the markedly creative group.

Let us now have a closer look at Schubert's quintet, which was recorded some time ago by the Smetana Quartet with Miloš Sádlo. A number of albums have prided themselves on bearing the names of celebrated cellists – Mstislav Rostropovich, Yo-Yo Ma, Heinrich Schiff, etc. – which, however, have not considerably increased their quality. "Run-of-the-mill" cellists have often been more beneficial for the outcome, which is also the case of the recording reviewed. In addition to the thoroughly elaborate, transparent structure of the inner parts, of major importance for the quintet is a superb performance of the first violin and a solid foundation provided by the cellos. Some time ago, I lauded a recording made by an ensemble lead by Janine Jansen. **Veronika Jarůšková** may not be as dazzling a violinist as Jansen, she most likely does not even possess an instrument of the same quality, yet as first violin she comes across equally well in the quintet. In the case of the recording made by the ensemble headed by Jansen, the resulting sonic image is based on her (see the incredibly cantabile Adagio), whereas when it comes to the Pavel Haas Quartet, everything rests in the homogeneity and, to a certain extent, novelty of the overall conception. Illustrative in this respect is the quintet's tempo plan. The running times are not greatly different to those of other ensembles, yet I had never previously heard anything similar to the way in which the Pavel Haas Quartet work with the tempo-rhythm during the introductory Allegro or the Scherzo, with its splendid push-off. This album will have you on the edge of your seat! If I am to generalise my impressions of the recording, I would rank it up there with the discs cut by the Alban Berg Quartet (D 810) and Artemis Quartet – Truls Mørk and Janine Jansen & Company

(D 956). Noteworthy too is the luxury Supraphon has afforded to the Pavel Haas Quartet: each piece has been allocated a separate disc. This makes the listening experience all the more intense.

Luboš Stehlík

Johann Sebastian Bach

Mass in B minor

Collegium 1704
& **Collegium Vocale 1704,**
Václav Luks - conductor.

Text: English, German, French,
Czech. Recorded: 2013. Released:
2013. TT: 101:26. DDD. 2 CDs
Accent ACC 24283.

The first Czech recording of Bach's monumental *Mass in B minor*, BWV 232, has finally been released. In taking on the hallowed opus, the renowned **Collegium 1704** and **Collegium Vocale 1704** were faced with a fiendishly difficult task – to purge their delivery of the celebrated work of all the performance deposits that have accumulated over two centuries, especially in the German-speaking countries. To begin with, I would like to say that their courage to oppose the still lingering "romanticising" conceptions of interpreting Bach's grandiose and popular composition has paid off. **Václav Luks**, the conductor of Europe's most prestigious ensemble specialised in early music, has mediated to the listener a brand-new, unburdened view of the *Mass in B minor*, which besides large and spectacular sections also includes sensitive, no less impressive details. We have yet to find out whether Bach conceived the setting of the Latin Ordinary of the Mass as a whole intended to be performed during Catholic worship, since the individual parts can also be perceived as four independent compositions written over a relatively long period of time - from 1724 until the final



years of his life. Even though in 1733 Bach dedicated the Mass's first version, made up of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, to Friedrich August II, Elector of Saxony, there is still no evidence pertaining to what place and what ensemble it was composed for, neither do we know whether it was performed during the artist's lifetime. The *Mass in B minor* abounds in variegated compositional means and reminiscences of Bach's previous pieces. For example, the *Et expecto resurrectionem* is actually a remake of the second movement (*Jauchzet, ihr erfreuten Stimmen*) of his Cantata, BWV 120. The listener is above all expected to be impressed by the contrast between the extensive passages, written in the modern concertante style (*Kyrie II*), and the sections inspired by Palestrinan polyphony, *stile antico* (*Gratias agimus tibi*). The work's overall forcibility is further enhanced by frequent alternation of the chorus configuration (from four voices to double choir) and varied combination of solo singers and musical instruments (the suave sound of the transverse flutes in the *Domine Deus* duet for the first soprano and tenor). The melancholic nature of some sections (*Agnus Dei*) reminds us of music by Jan Dismas Zelenka, whose harmonic techniques may be unexpected, bizarre even, for non-erudite listeners. Bach's oft-discussed musical symbolism is primarily represented by the *Crucifixus*, with the chromatically descending bass expressing Christ's unavoidable suffering and pain. This mournful pathos is followed by the hopeful *Et resurrexit*.

Václav Luks has demonstrated that a one-hundred-member choir is not needed to perform a monumental piece, quite the opposite: owing to top-class singers, a much smaller formation is capable of attaining not only a spectacular sound but also lightened yet technically accurate runs, as well as the expected inwardness in the emotionally charged passages. Luks's conception of Bach's work is replete with soaring energy and a sense of expressing the text's content (masterfully carried out in the *Sanctus*, for instance). In addition to the Collegium 1704 orchestra (with

the outstanding performance of the horn player Erwin Wiering), members of Collegium Vocale 1704 and the solo vocal ensemble (Barbora Sojková, Kamila Mazalová, Václav Čížek and Jan Mikušek), the recording features splendid soloists possessing strikingly colourful voices – Hana Blažíková, Sophie Harnsen, Terry Wey, Eric Stoklossa, Tomáš Král and Marián Krejčík. The CD booklet contains accompanying texts in four language versions, including an interesting comment written by the conductor himself. The eagerly awaited recording is the fruit of long study which opens new interpretational possibilities to "early music". The listener can thus look forward to more wonderfully performed works.

Veronika M. Mráčková

Benjamin Britten

War Requiem

Naděžda Kniplová - soprano,
 Milada Šubrtová - soprano,
 Věra Soukupová - alto,
 Beno Blachut - tenor,
 Gerald English - tenor,
 Czech Philharmonic Choir,
 Kühn Children's Choir,
 Czech Philharmonic Orchestra,
 Karel Ančerl - conductor.

Text: English, German, French,
 Czech. Recorded live, 1958-1966.
 Released: 2013. TT: 141:25. 2 CDs
 Supraphon SU 4135-2.

Supraphon hasn't neglected to commemorate the centenary of Benjamin Britten's birth and has duly released three live recordings made by **Karel Ančerl** and the **Czech Philharmonic** between 1958 and 1966, in part from the label's own archives (*A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*), in part from the archives of Czech Radio (*War Requiem, Spring Symphony*). Whereas the *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell, Op. 34*, was

released years ago, most recently in 2008 as the 43rd part of the Karel Ančerl Gold Edition (SU 3944-2004), in a version with spoken commentary (**Eric Shilling**), the live radio recordings of the *War Requiem* and the *Spring Symphony* are now issued for the very first time, as are the *Variations* in the orchestral version without spoken commentary. The sheer documentary value of the recordings is enhanced by the fact that the live *War Requiem* recording was made in January 1966 just a few years after the work's premiere (30 May 1962), thus ranking alongside Britten's live recording of the premiere (Testament SBT1490), the composer's more recent studio disc, including recordings from rehearsals in 1963 (Decca), and Giulini's recording dating from 1969 (BBC) among the oldest recordings of this remarkable and impressive composition, written to the words of the Mass for the Dead and Wilfred Owen's poems for consecration of the new cathedral in Coventry next to the site of the original Gothic one destroyed during World War II.

The oratorio for solo soprano, tenor and baritone, mixed chorus and boys' choir, full and chamber orchestras and organ blends the gravity of war atrocities with the absurdity of their everydayness, piety with grotesqueness. Owing to his turbulent and tragic fate, Karel Ančerl may have been pre-determined for a forcible performance of the poly-stylistic composition, which the CD presents in a staunch, sonically compact recording (apart from the problematic opening of the Requiem). The surprisingly good quality of the children's choir, the robust voice of **Naděžda Kniplová**, the pleasant timbre of the baritone **John Cameron** and the excellent delivery of **Gerald English**, one of the many superlative 20th-century English tenors, serve to highlight the artistic virtues of the recorded performance, followed by the well-deserved ovations. The instructional *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell* (premiered on 15 October 1946 in Liverpool), based on the composer's incidental music to the tragedy *Abdelazer*, or *The Moor's Revenge*, aligns with the qualities of the *Requiem*, yet the (brilliantly verified) Czech version of Britten's *Spring Symphony*,



Op. 44, is somewhat eclipsed by the previous recordings in both technical and artistic terms (with all due respect to **Beno Blachut**, casting him in the tenor role was an error, immediately apparent when comparing his with English's sublime and youthful voice). As a result, the Czech version of the *Spring Symphony*, and the entire CD for that matter, is of very limited appeal to foreign listeners. The booklet text is written by **Jaromír Havlík** (Britten's compositions) and **Petr Kadlec** (Karel Ančerl), the latter of whom could have immersed himself in the Czech Radio or Czech Philharmonic archives and supplemented his essay with period reviews in the press and other mass media. These minor objections notwithstanding, I consider the present CD one of the most distinctive recent releases of the Czech label Supraphon, which has previously missed many an opportunity. I would like to point out that the Czech Radio archives contain other valuable Ančerl albums, for instance, the one of his concert marking the 60th anniversary of the Czech Philharmonic (1956), not with the aim to set things in order but on behalf of eager discophiles, who would undoubtedly be grateful for their release, with the most recent one being the conductor's live recording of Dvořák's oratorio *Stabat Mater* (Montreux 1962, Tahra 755-756).

Martin Jemelka

Dvořák Trio

**Dvořák: Dumky, Op. 90;
Slavonic Dances No. 2
in E minor, Op. 46/2, No. 8
in A minor, Op. 46/8, No. 3
in G major, Op. 46/3; Smetana:
Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 15**

**Ivo Kahánek - piano, Jan Fišer -
violin, Tomáš Janník - cello.**

Producer: Matouš Vlčinský. Text:
English, German, French, Czech.
Recorded: July 2013, HAMU Studio,
Prague. Released: 2013. TT: 72:51.
DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 4144-2.

After listening to the Supraphon debut of the **Dvořák Trio** (formerly Trio Concertino), I arrived at the conclusion that this is a truly momentous recording, one of major significance for both the label and Czech music in general. The young ensemble made up of three distinct instrumentalists, who this spring assumed the name of the most celebrated of Czech composers, proudly indicate that they are ready to launch another decade of their career, that they intend to be an integral part of the Czech music scene, as well as expand abroad. There is no doubt they will be represent fierce but salutary competitors to all similar domestic ensembles, above all, the Guarneri Trio Prague and the Smetana Trio. The CD features music by the two composers whose piano trios have been most frequently performed.

The benchmark recording of Dvořák's amply structured *Dumky* is that made by the Guarneri Trio in 2009 (Praga Digitals). When compared with the Dvořák Trio's conception, immediately evident are the differences in phrasing, the fundamental philosophy of perceiving the music, articulation, accentuation, tempo, vibrato, homogeneity and presentation of melodic lines. Then you realise that the Dvořák Trio have placed great emphasis on the accuracy of the rhythm, stick strictly to the autograph and are careful in respect of detail. The Guarneri Trio play the *Dumky* in an extremely cantabile manner, munificently (for instance, the eminently vibrant sound of the opening movement, the third movement), which, however, inevitably results in a singular conception of the fine nuances in rhythm and articulation. The melodiousness particularly manifests itself in the "pastel colours" of Čeněk Pavlík's violin (the fifth movement, the beautiful theme on the G string), Ivan Klánský's effulgently poignant piano (the third movement, the Allegretto scherzando of the fourth movement, the Lento maestoso of the sixth movement) and Marek Jerie's heroic cello (the second movement - Poco adagio, the Cadenza, the main theme of the fourth movement, the introduction of the

fifth movement)... The Dvořák Trio's highly poetic account impresses with its deliberate lack of ostentation, initially inconspicuously, but it also ultimately wins over the listener. Possessing a peculiar melancholia, meditateness (the final movement, for instance), it is a perfect and equal dialogue. This recording has even served to make me understand the genius of the leading of the seemingly secondary part in several places. **Ivo Kahánek** and **Tomáš Janník** are excellent instrumentalists, while **Jan Fišer**, although maturing like a good wine, is somewhat in the background, which is regrettable. While, the slight melancholia notwithstanding, the Dvořák Trio play the *Dumky* positively, joyously, the Smetana piece is for them a (sophisticated) drama. And they duly accord the tragic moments a carefully administered dose of the tragic (*Moderato assai*), and again they do not exaggerate the tempos. Thus, for instance, the Allegro really is "ma non agitato". I feel obliged to laud above all the pianist's bravura performance (*Finale. Presto*). The Smetana piece on this CD is enthralling indeed and the Dvořák Trio certainly hold their own against their celebrated peers.

Wedged between the extensive *Dumky* and Smetana's *Piano Trio* are three of Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*. In *No. 2 in E minor*, Jan Fišer shows in his demanding part that he ranks among the finest young Czech violinists of today, even though I myself was more impressed by the tone of Pavel Šporcl's or Bohuslav Matoušek's delivery. Tomáš Janník truly excels in the following two dances. I am of the opinion that in the case of *No. 3 in A major* the ensemble was right to have chosen Jiří Gemrot's transcription completed from Dvořák's fragment, which is better than that Jarmil Burghauser's version.

The Dvořák Trio have made a remarkable recording. The Czech musical community will certainly be eagerly awaiting the CDs that will follow (the complete Dvořák trios, which, given the ensemble's name, should be an obligation, Schubert, etc.).

Luboš Stehlík



Ludmila Dvořáková

Wagner, Smetana

**Ludmila Dvořáková - soprano,
Prague National Theatre Orchestra,
Rudolf Vašata - conductor.**

Text: English, Czech. Recorded:
1966, 1972 and 1976, Domovina studio,
Czech Radio. Released: 2013.

TT: 75:03. AAD.

1 CD Supraphon SU 4137-2.

At the peak of her illustrious career, **Ludmila Dvořáková** was talked about as one of the most distinguished representatives of Czech operatic art. Audiences in her homeland did not have many opportunities to admire her artistry, but when they did during opera performances she always confirmed the qualities that were lauded by critics worldwide. Ludmila Dvořáková started her professional career at the end of the 1940s as a soloist at the Ostrava opera company, which was headed by her future husband Rudolf Vašata, a well-known conductor and pupil of Václav Talich's, who went on to accompany her at opera performances and concerts both at home and abroad. The National Theatre in Prague engaged her in 1954 as a promising young dramatic soprano. A year later, she appeared as Elisabeth in Verdi's *Don Carlos* at the Wiener Staatsoper. By the time, she had portrayed numerous roles, with a prominent position occupied by Czech operatic characters. In 1957, Ludmila Dvořáková joined the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava, where she remained for three seasons. Her international career started in earnest in the early 1960s, when she was engaged at the Staatsoper in Berlin. In 1965 she was invited to Bayreuth, and her first performance was followed by seven years of successful collaboration with the festival. In addition to Berlin, she regularly appeared in Vienna, Hamburg, Munich, as well as overseas, including, for three years, at the Metropolitan Opera. Her main domain was Wagner roles, yet she also created splendid characters in Richard Strauss's operas, dazzled as Leonora in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Katerina

in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, Kostelnička in Janáček's *Jenufa*. The array of roles she sang and the list of venues at which she performed are impressive indeed. Although Ludmila Dvořáková did not make a vast amount of recordings, every one of them is artistically exceptional. On the still available album (Philips) of the complete performance of Wagner's *Ring* in Bayreuth in 1967, conducted by Karl Böhm, she is captured in the role of Gutrune (*Götterdämmerung*). The oldest discs she made include the radio recording of Anežka's grand scene in Act 2 of *The Two Widows*, made in 1953 under Václav Talich, who at the time was working at the radio as artistic adviser to music ensembles, and Supraphon's recording of scenes from Beethoven's *Fidelio*. The same monologue and Anežka's aria are contained on this CD (in a newer stereo recording) – similarly to all the presented recordings, made at various times with the **National Theatre Orchestra** under the baton of **Rudolf Vašata**.

In 1966, the time when her glory was at its peak, Ludmila Dvořáková was invited by Supraphon (then the one and only label in our country) to the Domovina studio to record scenes from Wagner's operas. The fruit was a double album for the Gramophone Club, titled *Scenes from Richard Wagner's Operas*. One disc appertained to Ludmila Dvořáková, the other to Theo Adam (also accompanied by the National Theatre Orchestra, but conducted by Bohumil Gregor). At the time, the project was of major importance, since with the exception of a few older mono recordings Wagner opera scenes were practically unavailable in Czechoslovakia. Especially significant were the excerpts from *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. This Wagner recital of Ludmila Dvořáková in practically its entirety has been transferred to CD, which affords us the opportunity to compare our impressions today with the past experience. And the basic finding is that Ludmila Dvořáková was a Wagnerian heroine who could easily stand her ground among the singers who have come since, including the global stars of the present. Compared to, for instance, the still peerless Birgit Nilsson, her *Isolde* possesses a full-blooded dynamism, completely devoid of the traditional static nature. Elisabeth's prayer as delivered by Dvořáková expresses

ardent piety, Kundry (a newer radio recording on this CD) enralls with forcible drama, Brünhilde at the end of *Siegfried* with amorous sentiment and the weightiness of a great catharsis in the conclusion of the tetralogy. We can only regret that at the time the National Theatre Orchestra was not up to so great a task. Vašata's musical account is stylish and informed, as was the case of all his accomplishments (let us recall his projects in the humble premises of the Liberec theatre opera company, which he headed in the 1960s), yet in comparison with the currently common recordings the ensemble lacked the desired greater sense of sonic and expressive compactness of large areas. When faced with more complicated scores, the orchestra had its insuperable limits. The intonation of individual instruments (the clarinet in *Siegfried*) and the homogeneity of instrumental sections, the winds in particular, do not always match the now regular standard (the accompaniment to the prayer in *Tannhäuser*, the brass entrances in *Die Walküre*). Nevertheless, the recordings reveal the orchestra's earnest endeavour for the best and most stylish interpretation (the cogent and faultless performance in *Tristan und Isolde*). Another question is whether it would not have been better to make the recording at the Rudolfinum, whose hall is definitely more suitable for a grand sound than the Domovina studio. The orchestra was much better when performing Smetana – excellent even in accompanying Krása in Act 2 of *Libuše!* Besides this scene, Ludmila Dvořáková also sings Milada's and the aforementioned Anežka's arias, perhaps somewhat more dramatically and seriously compared to her then colleagues. The radio recordings, however, are different too – for instance, Krása comes across more sonically distinct than Milada. In general terms, the newer, here "supplementary", radio recordings have a more ample and dynamic sound than the older Supraphon ones. Be that as it may, it was high time to commemorate this Czech diva with this representative recital in the hope that she can in many respects serve as an inspiration for young Czech singers today. This is another reason why this CD is worthy of high praise.

Bohuslav Vitek

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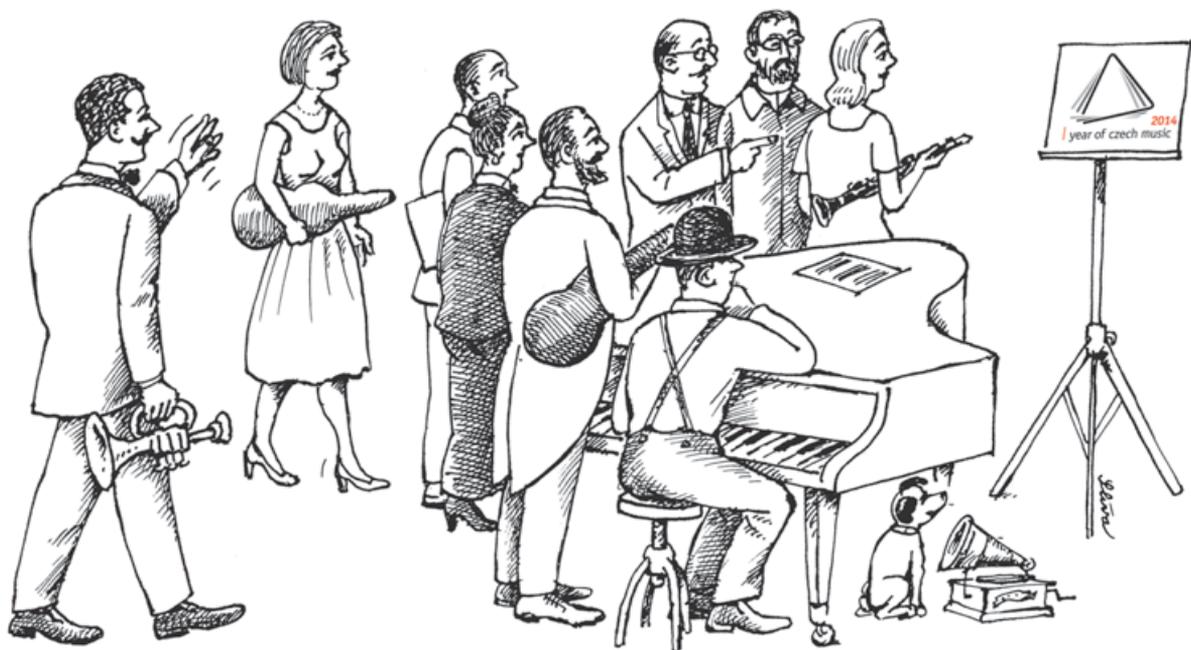
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