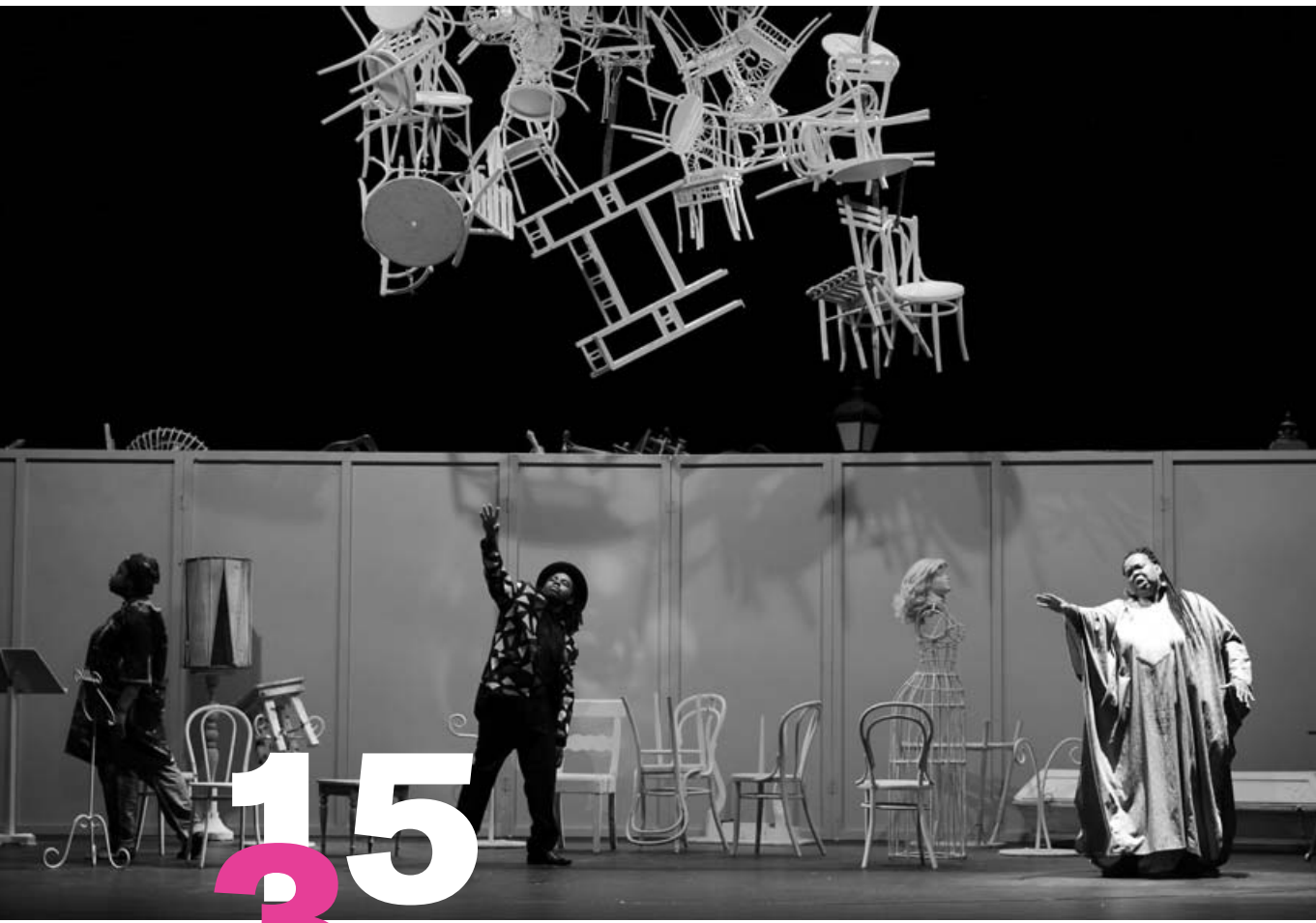
czech music *quarterly*



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Edita Keglerová

Berg Orchestra

Ostrava Days 2015

Music of the Rudolphine Era

Mezinárodní festival Brno International Music Festival

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Dear readers

welcome to the Czech Music Quarterly autumn 2015 issue. I would like to introduce to you a new series that, starting with the current issue, will continue to dominate our regular history section over the next few magazines. We have in store approximately a dozen texts mapping one of the most exciting eras of Czech history – the period of the reign of Emperor Rudolf II – in terms of the musical life in Renaissance Prague. The set of the texts you can find in this issue has been prepared by the musicologist Petr Daněk (familiar to regular CMQ readers) and his collaborators. On the other hand, the present is dedicated to through Frank Kuznik's article marking the 15th anniversary of the Prague-based Berg Orchestra and Ian Mikyska's report from this year's edition of Ostrava Days, the largest contemporary music festival in the Czech Republic, an event with a truly international outreach and impact.

Pleasant reading
Petr Bakla

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Czech Music Quarterly is issued by the Czech Music Information Centre with support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Czech Music Fund.

Editor: Petr Bakla, Producer: Lenka Hradilková
Translation: Hilda Hearne
Graphic design: Ditta Jiřičková
DTP: HD EDIT. Print: Nová tiskárna Pelhřimov.
ISSN 1211-0264 (Print), ISSN 1804-0586 (Online)

MK ČR E 7099
Price and subscription (shipping included):
Czech Republic: one issue Kč 60,
subscription (4 issues) Kč 200
Europe: one issue € 6.25, subscription (4 issues) € 25.
Overseas countries: one issue $ 9, subscription (4 issues) $ 36 or respective equivalents.
Electronic subscription: $ 18 (see www.czech-music.net)

cover: George Lewis's opera Afterword at the Ostrava Days 2015 festival (photo: Martin Popelář)

PHOTO: VÁCLAV JIRÁSEK 5x

by Dina Šnejdarová

EDITA KEGLEROVÁ
THE HARPSICHORD OPENED THE DOOR TO A NEW MUSICAL UNIVERSE

Edita Keglerová is an artist whose high degree of intuition has always fascinated me. She seems to be able to get to the very core of the score, beyond the limits of the staves and compositional instructions, and in an extremely natural manner to boot. More than two decades ago, she first bound her great musical talent to the harpsichord, thus joining the generation who in the Czech Republic have to a large extent paved the way to historically informed performance. Nowadays, Edita Keglerová is an esteemed musician and sought-after teacher, with her fortes including rigorousness, sensible distance and a sense of humour.

It would seem that over the past few years the number of harpsichordists and copies of historical instruments in the Czech Republic has considerably increased. Do you think that the Czech harpsichord school is enjoying a renaissance?

I would not term it an outright renaissance, which I would rather use in connection with the 1990s. In my opinion, through slow development over the past two decades we have attained certain changes, primarily as regards the institutional area. But you are right in saying that the number of trained harpsichordists has increased, as has the interest in high-quality copies of historical instruments. When it comes to concerts, harpsichord recitals in our country continue to be a matter for more informed audiences, as they are mainly included in the concert series focused on early music, and there aren't that many of them. On the other hand, there are plenty of renowned Czech early-music ensembles in which harpsichordists are employed.

Could the frequency of harpsichord recitals grow in the course of time?

That's difficult to foretell. Perhaps one day a musician so bold and distinguished will appear as to make an impact on the concert programmes. But I can't really forecast in this respect…

You have mentioned institutional changes. Could you specify them?

I have in mind, for instance, primary art schools, where music is taught at the amateur level and whose pupils and teachers of other subjects, particularly recorder, have begun ever more often to require harpsichord accompaniment for a certain type of repertoire. It motivates pianists, raising their interest in the harpsichord, and this in turn has over the past few years compelled music schools to order high-quality instruments. And that has given rise to scope for independent harpsichord training. If we shift to the professional domain, many conservatories today provide harpsichord studies not only as a secondary, but also the main discipline. At the Prague Conservatory, for instance, there has been an increased interest in Baroque music. Amazingly, the school's management supports this trend, so during recent years the recorder and the harpsichord have been taught as one of the major subjects. Another subject is performing in the Baroque orchestra, and students can also attend Baroque cello classes. That is a significant advance. This year, we at the eight-year music grammar school in Prague had two first-year students applying for harpsichord studies. That was the very first time in the school's more than 20-year history!

It is said that the harpsichord is mainly studied by organists and pianists who cannot cope with the technical requirements of their instrument. Is that really the case?

Not quite. Well, it does happen that some students face physical problems when playing the piano or organ, and the harpsichord serves as a certain solution for them. But it is not really possible without a certain inner resonance and without being keen on early music. Admittedly, the harpsichord has often above all been chosen by older students from the ranks of pianists and organists, who have taken an interest in Baroque music and intend to devote to it, but, as I have said, it has started to change and younger applicants have been appearing too.

What are contemporary students like when compared to your day?

They are very prompt, smart and sharp, versatile. This is particularly visible at the aforementioned music grammar school, whose students have to master the demanding grammar-school tuition and playing the instrument, both at a high level. Although they have fewer lessons earmarked for playing instruments than conservatory students, who on top of that have to attend chamber music, orchestra and figured bass lessons, they have other subjects, such as mathematics, physics and chemistry. In comparison with my generation, now in their 40s, contemporary students are more skilful in languages. Today, it is far easier to study abroad, attend classes given by foreign tutors, which in the 1980s and 90s, owing to the political situation, was only possible to a limited extent. At the present time, music academies may be enrolled at by performers who have studied the harpsichord

at a conservatory or have even dedicated to it since primary art school.
My generation mostly began studying the instrument at the academy, following piano or organ training, possessing only a limited knowledge of the harpsichord.

And in what respect do today's students have it more difficult?

In seeking jobs. Nowadays, earning one's living by music is not easy. Those who have studied abroad logically establish a network of contacts and friends there, thanks to which they can find better job opportunities than here, in the Czech Republic.

Professor Zuzana Růžičková (b. 1927) built up harpsichord studies in the Czech Republic from scratch and has succeeded in bringing the instrument into the wider awareness of audiences. As for the copies of historical instruments, a major role was played by Professor Giedré Lukšaité-Mrázková (b. 1944), whose first students included you. What can you say about your encounter with her?

My encounter with Professor Mrázková was perhaps fateful… I still perceive it as an intervention of some force majeure phenomenon. We are on the same wavelength, not only in terms of music but also in comprehending the philosophy of life. But I cannot say anything else, as it is very difficult to find the appropriate words.

When disregarding this aspect, what benefits have your studies at the Academy of Music in Prague brought you in artistic and technical terms?

The harpsichord opened to me the door to a new musical universe. All of a sudden, I had to learn how to perceive everything in a totally different manner and mull over individual details far more than I was used to with the piano. Owing to this, I think, I have got deeper into music. What is more, harpsichordists are expected to be adept in playing other keyboard instruments too, such as, for instance, the organ and the hammerklavier, which I had to study as well. Historically informed performance also entails research work in archives, questing for unknown compositions, seeking connections. All of these activities afford me great inner satisfaction.
When it comes to education, all of us actually started with historically informed performance on the harpsichord. Professor Mrázková received her training from harpsichordists of such stellar status as Bob van Asperen, Jacques Ogg and Gustav Leonhardt, and subsequently initiated master classes with foreign tutors in Prague. She always attended to us with immense fervour and energy. We had lessons twice a week as absolute beginners. In point of fact, in a way she studied alongside us, meticulously writing down everything, gauging her knowledge, her intuition. At the time, it was more difficult than today to get to the sources and literature in which we could read everything. The treasure-house was above all the Dutch teachers, who had everything digested and verified.

Later on, you had the great fortune to study with Jacques Ogg. How did it enrich you?

The Netherlands has a long tradition of performing early music, and I went there so as to reassure myself in that which I was doing. I had met Jacques Ogg at master

classes in Prague in the 1990s. I admired him at first glance. He is a person whose nature is very close to my heart, he is generous, good-humoured and, above all, a true master in his discipline. Studying with him has enriched me both as an artist and a human. Owing to Jacques, I have become more self-confident in playing and gained inner certainty. Into the bargain, the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague is a huge school, so I met there plenty of young musicians from all over the world, some of whom have become my friends. I still meet many of them at joint music projects.

You have yourself become an acclaimed pedagogue. All the students you have prepared for entrance exams have been accepted. Have you been lucky in having extraordinarily gifted students or have you refined a special method?

In my opinion, being a successful teacher first and foremost rests in technically mastering the instrument, in understanding, in the ability to explain everything and pass on your knowledge. At the same time, a good pedagogue must also be a little bit of a psychologist, know the students and comprehend them. A teacher should estimate the students' potential and qualities, and also be able to plan properly. I work with students in the form of a rather friendly relationship, yet they should never forget who's the boss. We laugh a lot in our lessons, but there always has to appear the unpleasant phase, whereby the entire process must lead to some outcome. At that juncture I can be really harsh, yet the students largely respect it and, perhaps, will eventually understand and appreciate. I am a champion of open communication, so when the atmosphere thickens, I strive, if possible, to somewhat lighten the situation and clear things up composedly and without emotions. For the most part, it helps and the teacher-pupil relationship deepens. I don't like to yell at and stress out my students, as that wouldn't do anyone any good. I have remained in contact with the majority of my students; they keep coming back, asking me for advice, which makes me happy.

What instrument do you play?

I possess a copy of a 1756 harpsichord from the workshop of the French builder Pascal Taskin. It is the largest type of concert instrument possible, with five octaves, furnished with two manuals, and its corpus is made from basswood. It has

Edita Keglerová's harpsichord made by František Vyhnálek

splendidly colourful basses and a great sound-carrying capacity. Another of its splendid features is that only one register has plastic plectra, the others have bird quills, which greatly affects the quality of tone and stroke, as plastic is emotionally blunt. Unlike plastic, quills do not break, only wear down and thin, which, naturally, impacts the sound. Consequently, the quills are far more practical than delrin, even though they do not seem to be at first glance. When it comes to the sound, French harpsichords, compared to, for instance, the Flemish instruments, which, owing to their rich overtones, come across as more "hairy", are very cultivated, precisely in the spirit of the pieces composed for them.

Your copy was made by the renowned Czech builder František Vyhnálek, whose instruments, as far as I know, are among the best in the world.

Yes, that's right. The Academy of Music in Prague, for instance, has in its possession an instrument by Bruce Kennedy, ranking among the world's top builders, and I think that Vyhnálek's harpsichords are just as good. I believe that this is due to his approach, as he loves his work immensely, lives for it. Vyhnálek's instruments are elaborated to the tiniest details, which are further refined by other specialists, such as smiths and painters. Such harpsichords are gorgeous not only to listen but also to behold. I would also like to add that Vyhnálek's instruments are voiced by the harpsichordist Filip Dvořák, an absolute master in his job. This tandem is unique indeed.

Given the meticulous work involved, I'd expect one has to wait a long time for a harpsichord from this workshop…

Yes, it can take four or five years to build an instrument, but it's definitely worth the wait. As regards my harpsichord, I often lend it to someone for a concert, and I receive enthusiastic responses from musicians, some of whom even ask whether I would consider selling it…

To date, you have recorded on your copy of Taskin's instrument three CDs featuring pieces by the Czech composer Jiří Antonín Benda (1722–1795). Why? Do you strive to revive lesser-known Czech music?

Yes, to a certain extent. I still feel grateful to Professor Mrázková and her astonishing intuition, for her having inspired me to focus on this composer. Jiří Antonín Benda worked in northern Germany, where he arrived owing to his elder brother František, an acclaimed violin virtuoso. Jiří first went to the Prussian court in Berlin, where he joined his brother and where he met and befriended the harpsichordist Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Subsequently, he served for 30 years as the court Kapellmeister in Gotha. In his time, Jiří was a highly recognised composer, best known today for his melodramas. Yet he also created instrumental music, including 10 preserved harpsichord concertos. He published an anthology of keyboard and vocal pieces "for trained and untrained players" (für geübte und ungeübte Spieler), which enjoyed great popularity in the 18th century. The first of its six volumes was subscribed to by more than 2,000 persons, clearly outstripping the number of those who ordered C. P. E. Bach's collection of sonatas, intended "for connoisseurs and lovers" (für Kenner und Liebhaber)! By the way, Benda's anthology was also subscribed to by Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart, great admirers of his. That is why I am pleased that of late Benda's music has been performed more frequently in the Czech Republic.

How would you characterise Benda's pieces?

His music for keyboards has always been deemed early Classicist, and has been played accordingly. But then it sounds neither imaginative nor intriguing. Yet when we classify it properly, that is within the context of the sensitive style (Empfindsamkeit), it presently comes into blossom. Jiří Antonín Benda's pieces must be approached with the awareness that they should express the "true and natural" emotions, abrupt changes of moods and that, together with the Sturm und Drang period music, they represent pre-Romanticism. We cannot play them like, for instance, early Haydn sonatas; we should rather abide by the directions of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who claimed that when a musician aims to move the listeners, he must first experience the emotions himself.

In your thesis, you have given a thorough account of Benda's harpsichord concertos. You are the first to have drawn up an urtext edition for four of them and the first in the world to have recorded two of them. What precisely is it about Benda and his music that so enthrals you?

He was a man with a great sense of humour, sensitive and having a profound relation to nature. We have documents bearing witness to his being moved to tears during some of his home concerts. I think that these very aspects are reflected in his music, which fully resonates with me.

To what extent do you let yourself be governed by emotions when selecting particular compositions?

Why does one select two out of 30 sonatas? Because they touch the heart. The initial impression plays the key role in my selection. First of all, I play a piece as I feel it, only then do I start to dissect the details, which, however, just underline that which I had perceived at the very beginning.

This year, you and the flautist Julie Braná held summer classes for the first time. How did you arrive at the decision to do so?

I have known Julie Braná since my conservatory studies. She is a close friend of mine and a musician with whom I have an affinity. We'd dallied with the idea of giving independent master classes for ages, yet the time never seemed right. Until the moment, that is, when the master classes at which we had served as tutors for several years were scrapped owing to financial reasons. Coincidentally, at the time, Radek Hanuš, an organist and the director of the primary art school in the beautiful mountain town of Vrchlabí, became one of my students at the conservatory. And he offered to assume the auspices of our master classes. Radek is a great enthusiast, an incredibly efficient and self-sacrificing person, and he didn't say "no" to any of our requirements. He saw to all the organisational matters, provided us with his school's premises, arranged the opportunity to give numerous concerts at the local church. It was actually the "zero" edition", which, I think, turned out very well. And we're already looking forward to its continuation next year…

After graduating from the Plzeň Conservatory, where she studied the piano with Věra Müllerová and the harpsichord with Jitka Navrátilová, **Edita Keglerová** *went on to hone her harpsichord skills at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, under the tutelage of Giedré-Lukšaité Mrázková. She subsequently attended master classes given by Jacques Ogg at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague and at the Royal Academy of Music in London. In 2007 she received a doctorate from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. She has won several international music competitions, and as a soloist and member of chamber ensembles has appeared on numerous renowned stages in Europe and beyond (Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, USA). Edita Keglerová has worked with the Prague Baroque Ensemble, Capella Regia, Hipocondria, Barocco sempre giovanne and other ensembles. In 2004 she and the flautist Julie Braná established the Accento ensemble. Edita Keglerová has collaborated with the Supraphon and ARTA labels, for the latter of which she and Hipocondria recorded a unique CD featuring the complete harpsichord concertos of J. A. Benda. From 2003 to 2005 she taught at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno, between 2006 and 2013 she served as a tutor at the Summer School of Early Music in Prachatice. Since 1996 she has taught the harpsichord at the Prague Grammar and Music School and since September 2011 at the Prague Conservatory.*

by Frank Kuznik

MUSIC IMPOSSIBLE

HOW THE BERG ORCHESTRA PERSUADED PRAGUE TO JOIN THE 21ST CENTURY

What was the modern music scene like in Prague at the turn of the 21st century? No need to answer, it's a trick question. There was no modern music scene in Prague 15 years ago. Yes, there were schools training young composers and professors writing new pieces, mostly for each other. And occasional heroic efforts by groups like the Agon Orchestra. But in a city that considers itself one of the major music centers of Europe, there was no place to regularly hear works by composers like Messiaen, Ligeti and Xenakis, and share the experience with listeners and musicians of similar interests and taste.

PHOTO: PAVEL HEJNÝ

If anything, the city was anti-modern music. An accomplished composer like Marek Kopelent was more likely to have his work performed abroad that in his homeland. Orchestra members literally sat on their hands rather than play contemporary pieces. At the premiere of a new opera at the National Theater in 2004, several players in the orchestra disliked the music so much, they deliberately played some wrong notes.

Into this minefield stepped an ensemble whose love for the music outweighed all other considerations. The Berg Orchestra had its roots in the Prague Academy of Performing Arts, where in the mid-1990s a group was formed to play student works and concerts organized by professor and composer Václav Riedlbauch. Peter Vrábel (conducting), Petr

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

Eva Kesslová

above:
Petr Vrábel and Heiner Goebbels

Budín (bassoon) and Igor Paleta (piano) recruited fellow students from the Academy and the Prague Conservatory, and after playing together for a few years, felt they had created something worth continuing.
When Berg launched its first season as an independent chamber orchestra in January 2001, the organizers knew very well what they were facing. "The music scene could be described as post-socialist," says Vrábel, who became Berg's conductor and artistic director. "Audiences rejected anything that was a bit more avant-garde, and many musicians looked at contemporary music with total disrespect. We had to learn how to live in freedom."

All of which makes the orchestra's accomplishments even more impressive. Berg is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year, having pioneered not just new repertoire, but innovations like performing in unorthodox spaces, implementing educational components to the concerts, and regularly collaborating with other performing artists. Berg has also led the way in commissioning new works from Czech composers, far outpacing any mainstream orchestra or institution in the country.
From the beginning, the motivation was a combination of practicality and idealism. "There was a strong feeling about the value of the music and a curiosity to explore it," says Eva Kesslová, who started as a violinist and became the group's managing director. "Also, we felt that performing the stuff that's always on Prague stages did not make sense. This brought something new to the music scene. We knew it was risky, but there was an eagerness to prove to the rest of the music world here that it was possible."
Most of the concerts in the first few seasons were held in the Academy's Martinů Hall, and the programming was relatively conservative. Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert were in the mix with familiar 20th-century voices like Stravinsky, Shostakovich and Hindemith. Martinů was a staple, Terezín

PHOTO: BERG ORCHESTRA

composers like Pavel Haas and Hans Krása appeared regularly, and the modern Czech voices were well-established composers like Viktor Kalabis, Peter Eben and Jan Hanuš.

"We knew audiences weren't ready for an entire evening of avant-garde music, so we created concerts that had a mix of nice pieces and more difficult pieces," says Kesslová. "We always wanted people to leave the hall with a feeling of, I didn't like that particular piece, but on the whole it was a great experience."
"Experience" became the key word and central theme for the orchestra as it outgrew Martinů Hall and began staging concerts in other venues. At first, they were relatively tame – churches, museums, theaters, the latter often in conjunction with a film screening or stage production. But as audiences grew and the programming became bolder, so did the excursions to places like the old sewage treatment plant in Prague 6, reopened as the "Ekotechnické Museum;" Bubenská 1, a vintage hulk of functionalist architecture in Prague 7, nearly abandoned when the orchestra performed there in 2011 and now a thriving office building; Trafačka, a transformer station-turned-gallery in Prague 9; the spooky National Monument atop Vitkov Hill; the Spanish Synagogue; the Roxy nightclub.
It was in response to the Berg Orchestra's request that National Gallery officials opened up a forgotten theater space in the basement of Veletržni palác which has since become a popular setting for avant-garde productions. And last year the orchestra outdid itself with an underground performance at a metro station still under construction at Petřiny in Prague 6. Despite the fact that listeners had to negotiate 200 steps to get in and out of a raw, cold site, the concert drew 500 people and more had to be turned away.
"Our original idea was to perform at Blanka [a series of traffic tunnels through city center], but when we met with the people at the construction company, they suggested the station and we really loved the space," Kesslová says. "It took two years to arrange and we had to buy insurance that cost us quite a lot of money, but it was worth it."

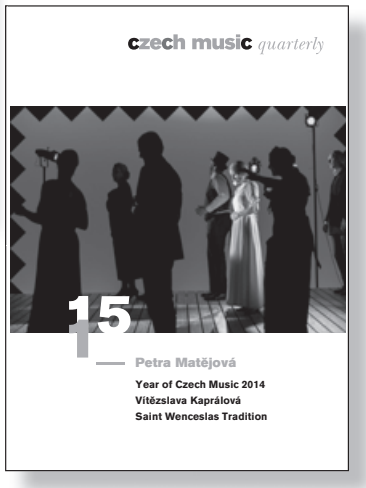
The unusual performance spaces were never intended as a gimmick to draw crowds. "As the programming evolved, we just needed different spaces that would better complement the music we were performing," says Kesslová, who acknowledges that finding innovative sites has become increasingly difficult. "We have discovered most of what was out there to be discovered, including spaces that are not suitable for concerts because of acoustics and other considerations. So we're revisiting a lot of places now."
Along with the new sites came other ideas to make the concerts more interesting and accessible: pre-concert talks about the pieces, demonstrations of unusual instruments, tours of the facilities, and perhaps most significantly, joint performances that added another dimension to the music. It is a rare Berg concert now that does not include a multimedia component like film or videos, dancers, or an accompanying performance piece. Along with being a natural outgrowth of the ensemble's desire to provide an unforgettable experience, this reflects a decidedly different approach to programming.
"We are really fond of themed evenings – programs built around a particular space, experiments of all

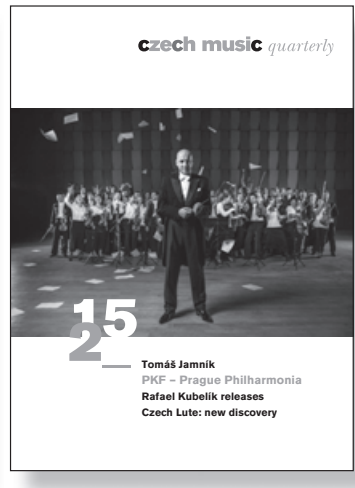
sorts, collaborations with artists from outside the field of music," Vrábel says. "One idea often inspires another. And as we've developed our collaboration with young composers, we have been able to commission larger and larger works, and our audiences have embraced all that."

The orchestra reached an apex in collaboration and a watershed moment in its history in May, when it appeared in the Prague Spring festival performing Heiner Goebbels' *Songs of Wars I Have Seen*. Playing at Prague Spring, one of Europe's premier classical music festivals, confers an aura of legitimacy and accomplishment. But of greater import, at least in contemporary music circles, is the relationship the ensemble now has with Goebbels, one of the foremost practitioners of modern music theater.

It began in 2009, when Berg staged Goebbels' daunting *Schwarz auf Weiss* at the Veletržni palác site as part of the Strings of Autumn festival. The piece was written for Ensemble Modern in Frankfurt, which gave the world premiere in 1996. No one else had done it when Kesslová first talked to Goebbels in 2007 because, he told her, it was simply too difficult to stage. In classic Berg fashion, she thought, Well, why not us?
The performance was a great success, reprised six times. So when the ensemble proposed doing Songs of Wars, Goebbels not only gave his blessing, but collaborated closely on the production, coming to Prague for the final days of rehearsals and sitting at the sound board for the performance. An overflow crowd filled every seat and the aisles at Archa Theatre, and at a press conference Goebbels described working with the orchestra as "pure pleasure."

Berg Orchestra performing Heiner Goebbels' music theatre Schwarz auf Weiss





Czech music information centre

czech music *quarterly*

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focused on Czech classical music. Czech Music Quarterly provides a wide spectrum of information for music professionals and the general music public.
Czech Music Quarterly offers an interviews and portraits of Czech composers and performers, often with a special focus on contemporary classical music, information about current events, reviews and longer articles from leading Czech musicologists.

Czech Music Quarterly is published every 3 months.
Since 1995
Please send orders to:
Czech Music Information Centre
Besední 3, 118 00 Prague 1,
Czech Republic
Email: info@czech-music.net
Web: www.czech-music.net
Published by Czech Music Information Centre
www.musica.cz

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For all that, Vrábel and Kesslová consider their most significant accomplishment to be the commissions Berg has given to Czech composers – more than 100 over the life of the orchestra, including original film scores. The focus has been on young composers, who soon replaced the older generation of Czech names on the programs. Michal Nejtek and Kryštof Mařatka were early contributors; more recently the roster has included Jan Trojan, Petr Cígler, Ondřej Štochl, Petr Wajsar, Jakub Rataj, Slavomir Hořínka and many of their contemporaries.

"When we first started, many of them didn't have any other outlets," Kesslová says. "Nobody knew them or had any interest in what they did. We've tried to commission as many pieces from them as we can, and in many cases, more than once."

To foster audience interest in their work, a competition was introduced in 2008 called NUBERG. Listeners are given an opportunity to vote for the best new work premiered during the previous season. The top three are performed in the first concert of the new season, with the composers getting prizes. Anyone can listen to the music, which is posted online, and vote.

The orchestra also enlists a professional jury – six composers from outside the Czech Republic – to help decide the winners. Past juries have included prestigious names like Kaaija Saariaho, Michel van der Aa, Dai Fujikura and Lera Auerbauch.

In its best years NUBERG has attracted more than 1,000 voters, which is the real purpose of the exercise. "It's not meant as a serious competition," Kesslová explains. "The point is to get people to listen to contemporary music. As with any language, the more you listen to it, the more you understand it and enjoy it. We've also gotten some really good reactions from our jurors, who very often write us saying things like, This is amazing, we didn't know that Czech composers are so interesting."

To celebrate its 15th anniversary, the orchestra has commissioned 15 new works for the NUBERG competition, which Kesslová happily acknowledges is pushing the limits. "We're trying to think of some way to set them up as an interactive game, because we know that nobody is going to listen to all 15 works," she says. "If a voter listens to three pieces, we will be totally happy."

Nothing in contemporary music is a sure bet, but if the past is prologue, the Berg Orchestra has a bright future. With a base of 90 subscribers, the ensemble now sells out almost all its concerts. And its subscription series of eight concerts comprises only part of its performance schedule, with more invitations every year to festivals and other events. Along with Prague Spring, the ensemble played this year at Moravian Autumn, the Lipa Musica International Music Festival, St. Wenceslas Music Festival and Pablo Casals International Music Festival in Spain. It also makes regular appearances on Czech radio and television.

Asked to assess the impact of his once-impossible dream on the Czech music scene, Vrábel says, "I am really happy that we were instrumental in helping create an adventurous listener base. I think our positive example inspired many others – when they saw that contemporary music can fill sold-out halls, they wanted to try it too. And all those works we commissioned will be there forever."

Kesslová puts it even more succinctly: "If you say contemporary music in the Czech Republic, you have to think of the Berg Orchestra."

by Ian Mikyska

OSTRAVA DAYS 2015

PHOTO: MARTIN POPELÁŘ 10x

Kamala Sankaram in Petr Kotík's Master-Pieces
above: Opening concert featuring pieces for 3 orchestras

This August, the 8th instalment of the Ostrava Days of New and Experimental Music took place in Ostrava, a mining town which marks the border between Silesia and Moravia, in the Eastern corner of the Czech Republic. The town has a rich history of coal mining and ironworks, most of which is defunct today, but its aesthetic and atmosphere, its sights, sounds and smells still permeate the town today.

With industry now limited to a few functioning ironworks that provide a charmingly irregular night soundscape, much of the city's attention – and public funding – has turned to culture. The exceptionally diverse Colours of Ostrava festival draws huge crowds each year, while on a more stable basis, the city boasts two major drama/opera/ballet theatres, as well as large scale art spaces (PLATO) and initiatives that started as grassroots but quickly gained institutional support (Provoz Hlubina).

The audience for the Ostrava Days festival, which presents exclusively contemporary music, has been growing steadily since 2001. Today, it feels as though one is at an event that makes sense not only as an 'imported' meeting of an international rostrum of composers, performers, critics and aficionados, but also as a local-scale event.

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Institute

Apart from these intense nine days of music (or, in other figures, forty hours this year), Ostrava Days also organizes a three-week residency for aspiring composers from around the world, who spend three weeks attending lectures, workshops and individual lessons with a selected group of established composers. Each resident also has at least one piece performed within the main festival programme.
Under the direction of Petr Kotík and Renáta Spisarová, the festival is unique in presenting a wide variety of musical worlds: from the American experimental tradition (Christian Wolff, Alvin Lucier, Phill Niblock, John Cage) and its younger, more diversely-oriented offspring (Alex Mincek), through Austro-German new music (Rolf Riehm, Bernhard Lang, Johannes Kalitzke) to more conceptually oriented composers (Peter Ablinger, Jennifer Walshe) and some who fit into no categories (Richard Ayres, George Lewis, Christopher Butterfield).
This mix bubbles particularly well when faced with thirty five eager and critical composers who have three weeks back-to-back absorbing the approaches – in teaching, in composing, in communicating – and inevitably discussing them in every free moment.

Musicians and Venues

Then, of course, there are the musicians. Another unique aspect of the festival is its emphasis on compositions for orchestra, performed by a combination of the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra, based in Ostrava, and Ostravská banda, an international ensemble of musicians that morphs a little every two years whilst retaining a single core.

Furthermore, there were performances by the Canticum Choir Ostrava led by Yuriy Galatenko, the Elole Trio from Dresden, the New York violin duo String Noise and the Prague-based string quartet FAMA Quartet, as well as a long list of soloists. The featured conductors were Rolf Gupta, Petr Kotík, Johannes Kalitzke, Ondřej Vrabec, Roland Kluttig and Carl Bettendorf, a resident composer who handled his constantly amassing conducting duties with poise and professionalism.

Most of the concerts take place at the Philharmonic Hall, whose aged curtains and tablecloths begin to feel like home after the third or fourth intermission. The Ostrava tradition of four, five or six hour concerts (some ending as late as an hour and a half after midnight) makes one adapt very deeply to the surroundings, and for those concerts that are expected to stretch into the wee hours, long mats are spread out at the side of the hall for those who want to continue enjoying the music in a horizontal position. All this contributes to a relaxed atmosphere that makes the festival inviting despite the forbidding nature of some of the music.

There were also several concerts at Provoz Hlubina, a brand new multi-purpose art space in the Lower Vítkovice area, in what use to be the Hlubina Mine. Two years ago, the festival saw an ad hoc evening programme at Hlubina organised by a few resident composers in truly DIY conditions. This May, the space opened after receiving institutional support and an enormous make-over, and presented a well-built space capable of accommodating installations, multimedia performances and opera, without losing any of its charm and friendliness (and excellent selection of vegan food).

The last of these concerts was preceded by an opera each in the two theatres that comprise the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre, the Antonín Dvořák Theatre hosting Petr Kotík's *Masterpieces* in late 19th century pomp, while the Jiří Myron Theatre placed George Lewis' *Afterword* in a setting built at about the same time, but reconstructed into a more modest setting after a fire in the 1980s. There was also the traditional Minimarathon of Electronic Music at the Gallery of Fine Arts, a well-chosen programme at St. Wenceslas Church, and the opening concert in the impressive environs of the Karolina Triple Hall. Since the venues are all almost within comfortable walking distance of each other, this allows the visitor to sample from Ostrava's wide venue of culture and architecture, whilst still remaining in the familiar environs of the city centre.

Daniel Havel and Jan Souček performig György Ligeti's Double Concerto above: Participants of the Ostrava Days Institute

above: Reinhold Friedrich and the Janáček Philharmonic
middle: from Jennifer Walshe's The Total Mountain
below: Ostravská Banda and Ondřej Vrabec, conductor
right: from George Lewis' Afterword

A Few Ostrava Days

A typical composer-resident's day at the festival begins with a red-eyed breakfast at the Hotel Maria, typically a struggle to wolf down enough food and conversation to not be embarrassingly late at the day's first lecture, which begins at 9:30. This might be Jennifer Walshe's exhausting, information-packed expositions of her many alter-egos' works, or Peter Ablinger discussing his environmental opera.

A quick break for lunch at the Mercure Hotel, where residents, 'lectors' (the trademark Ostrava-word for lecturing composers) and musicians mingle freely, followed by an improvisation workshop with Tom Buckner and George Lewis, or a talk with George, Petr Kotík and Richard Ayres titled *What is Opera?* But of course, you have to leave halfway through, as you have a lesson with Christian Wolff immediately followed by a rehearsal for your piece.

Then it's off to dinner, before seeing an opera, running to another theatre,

seeing another opera, and then taking the tram to Provoz Hlubina for a concert scheduled to start at 10:30 pm ('scheduled' being the key word here). Of course, the programme never ends with the end of the concert, and the festival can quickly become a balancing game – just how much exhaustion are you willing to take, and how many fabulous talks, concerts or installations are you willing to miss.

But of course, what matters at the end of those long Ostrava days is the music. Not only has the festival stuck to its marathon-length formats, but it has gone along the path of adding more concerts, more pieces within each concert, and more premieres (other than those by the resident composers). However, the number of staff and musicians remains pretty much constant, as does their hard work and dedication.

It is the musicians who should be taking the first bow here, with most members of Ostravská banda playing between twelve and fifteen – generally very demanding – pieces, and never letting this heavy overload show in performances, displaying only utter professionalism.

Professionalism was, as is tradition, sometimes the falling point of the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra: particularly in pieces in which they have not so much to do, or in which they are given more freedom than usual. The case in point is the trombonist who tore up his part during a simultaneous performance of John Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis* and *Winter Music*, before demonstratively walking off stage – all this during the festival's opening concert.

At other times, the orchestra played wonderfully, as in Iannis Xenakis' trombone concerto, *Troorkh,* under the baton of Petr Kotík. The soloist, Will Lang, chose a friendly and collegial approach, which, together with his modest manner, won the orchestra over. Their support – even from the feisty trombone section – was with him through the piece, and they played with warmth and liveliness that overshadowed the (minor) technical difficulties.

At other times, the problem lay elsewhere, as with Morton Feldman's *Oboe and Orchestra*, with Vilém Veverka on oboe and Petr Kotík conducting, which featured an inexplicably loud solo part over an orchestra that was almost restrained enough: with a quieter soloist and a conductor who could get Feldman's work with structure across better, they might have done the piece justice.

Then, there are the soloists. Pianist Daan Wandewalle brought his particular brand of post-romantic precision to every piece he played. Wolfgang Rihm's *4 Späte Gedichte von Friedrich Rückert* – sung with fantastic attention to detail by Annette Schönmüller – was a tour de force in what we can salvage from romanticism today, as was his solo part in Alban Berg's Chamber Concert (together with Hana Kotková on violin). However, the real highlight was his solo recital, comprised only of two pieces by Christian Wolff. While *Suite II*, with Daniel Costello on horn, lacked poise and concentration, and the changes in instrumental technique for the horn were far too distracting, the sixty minutes of *Long Piano* were Wolff at his best.

His very detailed use of the sustain pedal and dynamic shadings truly allowed all of Wolff's suggestions and half-finished sentences to resonate. His intense attention to the many silences also

Ostravská banda

Petr Kotík, Johannes Kalitzke and Rolf Gupta taking bow following the performance of Karlheinz Stockhausen's Gruppen

gave the piece a clear sense of shape outside of the materials themselves; leaving much to the imagination. And this intensity was sustained throughout the entire hour.

Now based in Switzerland, Czech violinist Hana Kotková is a regular guest of the festival, and her playing in Salvatore Sciarrino's violin concerto *Allegoria della notte* was as intense and sensitive as always. In the composer's words, the piece presents 'the dark side of Planet Mendelssohn'. It begins and ends with short quotations from Mendelssohn's violin concerto, but the world in between exists entirely on its own, only occasionally tethering on the brink of a slight reference to the original music. As usual, Kotková knew exactly when to blend with the orchestra, when to come out front and when to stay there.

New York duo String Noise, comprised of violinists Conrad Harris and Pauline Kim Harris, also stuck to their traditional level of stunning performances, from their recital at Provoz Hlubina, through Conrad Harris' stunning interpretation of Horatiu Radulescu's *Das Andere,* to their role as soloists in resident composer Rita Ueda's double concerto *Hummingbird Lovers*. The concept of the piece – the two violins as two hummingbird lovers – was so simple it inspired no confidence, and indeed, the soloist's parts were not the strongest point, compositionally: the possibilities of a relationship between two identical instruments and their materials was left largely unexplored. However, once the piece moved into an unconducted section with a more improvisatory feel, and the world of the piece came to include the audience, as the musicians stood up and moved around, it created a remarkable space for the two soloists. The Banda exhibited repeatedly (notably in this and Helmut Oehring's *Goya III*) that unlike many ensembles dedicated to contemporary music, they are well at home with theatricality or other means that force the situation to expand beyond the purely concert-hall context.

One of the advertised highlights of the festival was the opening concert, which featured Karlheinz Stockhausen's seminal *Gruppen* and other works for three orchestras. However, it was unfairly disadvantaged by the choice of venue. The Karolina Triple Hall is an impressive post-industrial space, perfectly suited for the film and sound installations placed in the smaller rooms on the ground floor (by Virginia Dwan and Alvin Lucier, respectively), but not so much to strings and woodwinds. *Gruppen*, conducted by Rolf Gupta, Petr Kotík and Johannes Kalitzke, was an imbalanced experience. The tension between the three conductors and their styles was palpable, making the music, already rough around

the edges, even more on edge. The percussion section, which appeared to be led by the energy and precision of Chris Nappi peering over his spectacles, was more robust and energetic than in most performances. Together with the brass parts, it worked better in the large, dry-sounding hall, while the strings tended to get drowned out – which was not aided by the fact that most of the strings were directed away from the audience.
Phill Niblock's *Three Petals*, gently moving a chordal mass through twenty four minutes – featuring Petr Kotík miming a stopwatch's second-hand twenty four times – was also somewhat lost in the acoustic, and just like *beautiful to me. ah* by resident composer Jacek Sotomski, it suffered from a lack of balance between the orchestras. Sotomski's piece presented an interesting approach to material, both instrumental/soloistic (undifferentiated whole- and half-step rising progressions in the solo accordion and masses of strings played with plectrums) and particularly electronic. His approach to synthesised sound could be described as post-electronic music: no longer so closely aligned with the ethic of newness and craftsmanship, utilising well-known and simple sounds in a strangely tilted world; particularly as regards rhythm, density and form.

While the buzz – and there really was buzz – of the general public on the opening night seemed somewhat stifled, the last day was as oddly grand as the festival deserved. It began in the afternoon with the traditional Last Call concert, featuring only works by the resident composers. Adrian Demoč's piece, like most of his recent music, spoke with the same quiet intensity that restlessly tries to settle into contemplation. The gradually unweaving texture of the music, filled with reiterated disturbances, suddenly fell into a pizzicato pulse near the end. This seemed like a fairly straightforward structural division, until the piece ended a few seconds later. Suddenly, one felt as though he had been plunged into a new world of music which had been immediately taken away, and the strangeness and newness of both this new world and the previous music was suddenly made apparent.
Both Gilberto Agostinho's and Bálint Laczkó's pieces made excellent use of very simple techniques. Agostinho's piece for four cellos continues his work in entirely algorithmic composition, wherein the entire score is generated and rendered by a computer program. However, the conceptual clarity of this piece made it flow more seamlessly than some of his other music, and the interpretation was remarkable mostly for its rhythmic precision. A really remarkably dynamic and 'human' computer-generated piece, also aided by the musicians swaying in order to stay in time.
The festive evening concert only continued the excitement. While both the premieres, lector Alex Mincek's *Harmonielehre* and resident composer Ben Richter's *Rivulose*, seemed to stretch out a little past their due, and could certainly have been a little tighter constructed, the rest of the program was a joy. Kotková and Vandewalle performed the solo parts in Berg's *Kammerkonzert* – one of the oldest pieces ever performed at the festival – with just the right amount of historically informed feeling. After nine days of contemporary material, it was amazing to hear just how Romantic Berg's language really was, and how easy it was to follow its flow in this twenty five minute piece.
György Ligeti's *Double Concerto* was seamlessly performed by flautist Daniel Havel and oboist Jan Souček, and turned out to be a real crowd-pleaser. But Rheinhold Friedrich's interpretation of another 'old' piece, Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Nobody Knows de Trouble I See*, ended up stealing the show – at the end, thankfully. The jazz-influenced piece was played without pathos by the orchestra, and with large swaths of charm and charisma from the soloist. The piece seems to have aged well, and its use of jazz is less derogatory than much concert music. It is hard to tell whether the audience was cheering this, or rather Friedrich's irresistible smile as he took a bow – it was certainly a combination of both, and it was a fantastic end to the festival.

Though not unusual, it would be unfair not to mention the organisational team. About halfway through the festival, I asked pianist Keiko Shichijo whether the amount of music she was playing was manageable. "You know, I deleted the word 'manageable' a long time ago" was her typically upbeat response. This seems to be the general feeling at the festival, and the overall – sometimes seeming – seamlessness would certainly not be possible without the superhuman efforts of Renáta Spisarová and office manager Kristýna Konczyna. They managed to keep 35 resident composers, 12 lectors, over 20 soloists and all the members of Ostravská banda more than happy, but also, and more importantly, to once again run a festival that is entirely exceptional, not only in the context of Czech musical life, but in all of Europe.

Ian Mikyska was a resident composer at Ostrava Days 2015.

by Barbora Vacková

CZECH MUSIC EVERY DAY EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

JULY AND AUGUST ARE VERY SPECIFIC MONTHS FOR MUSIC-LOVING AUDIENCES. DURING THE SUMMER, THE VAST MAJORITY OF ORCHESTRAS AND OPERA COMPANIES ARE ON HOLIDAY, WITH THE MUSIC EVENTS BEING TRANSFERRED FROM BRICKS-AND-MORTAR INSTITUTIONS TO VARIOUS FESTIVALS, OPEN-AIR STAGES AND COURSES. IN SPITE OF, OR PERHAPS OWING TO, THIS, THE SUMMER OF 2015 AFFORDED ALL CZECH MUSIC FANS COPIOUS OPPORTUNITIES TO HEAR BOTH BRAND-NEW AND OLDER WORKS, LESSER-KNOWN AND, LAST BUT NOT LEAST, CLASSICAL PIECES IN ALL KINDS OF CONTEXTS AND PRODUCTIONS.

JULY-SEPTEMBER

The major summer contemporary music event was August's Ostrava Days festival of new and experimental music, which this year over nine days again presented works by renowned 20th-century avant-gardists, as well as numerous pieces by contemporary creators of all generations, including young participants in composition courses run by the Ostrava Days Institute, preceding the festival itself. When it comes to Czech artists, this year's festival audiences heard world premieres of works by Petr Cígler, Petr Bakla, Michal Rataj, Ian Mikyska and Ján Podracký, and the European premiere of a chamber opera by Rudolf Komorous (see the separate article in this issue dedicated to Ostrava Days). Several other pieces were given world premieres within festivals of a wider focus: for instance, new opuses by Lukáš Hurník, at the Znojmo Music Festival, and Otomar Kvěch, at the Kuks Music Summer. The following summary also includes the world premiere in September of a composition by František Chaloupka at the Gaudeamus Muziekweek in the Netherlands.

As regards somewhat older music, works by Czech creators continue to enjoy great interest on the part of foreign institutions and festivals. During the summer, new productions of operas by Leoš Janáček, Bedřich Smetana and Bohuslav Martinů were presented abroad. High demand for Czech music was, not surprisingly, shown by neighbouring Germany, yet a new production of Janáček's *Jenufa* was also staged at the Des Moines Metro Opera festival in Iowa. Beyond the sphere of opera, most noteworthy was the concert in homage to Jakub Jan Ryba, whose anniversary we celebrate this year, which took place in July in Bavaria. The following summary of music events corresponds to the focus of the blog run by the Czech Music Information Centre, the publisher of this magazine, newly, and simply, called "HIS Blog", whose aim it is to inform readers of the most significant events pertaining to Czech music in the Czech Republic and abroad. The criterion of "significance" was more thoroughly described by Bohumil Klepal in this year's first issue of CMQ. In a nutshell, this listing should include premieres of pieces by Czech composers, on the one hand, and, on the other, performances of Czech works abroad which are deemed important primarily owing to their unusual format, scope and challenging rendition, as well as the prestige of the institutions and/or artists who have presented the particular piece. In conclusion, I would like to cordially invite our readers to send us tips for events that should not escape our attention, or any other comments and remarks, to the email address his.musicblog@gmail.com. We would appreciate your observations and will do our utmost so that the HIS Blog serves as a useful information source and reliable guide to the universe of Czech music.

JULY-SEPTEMBER-

July 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16 and 17, Frankfurt, Germany. Three Bohuslav Martinů one-act operas. Stage director: Beate Baron, conductor: Nikolai Petersen.

Oper Frankfurt premiered a production made up of three not overly frequently performed one-act operas by Bohuslav Martinů: *Les larmes du couteau* (1928), *Alexandre bis* (1937), and *Comedy on the Bridge* (1935). All three works, each lasting about half an hour, were written at the time the composer was living in Paris and show his evidently being influenced by the music of Les Six, Neo-Classicism and jazz. Martinů did not live to see two of them performed. The comic opera *Alexandre bis,* on the subject of a test of loyalty, was only premiered in 1964, while *Les larmes du couteau*, to an eccentric libretto penned by the Dada poet Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, was first staged in 1969. *Comedy on the Bridge,* one of the first-ever radio operas, was premiered in 1937 and 11 years later was given a stage performance. The production, directed by Beate Baron, was performed in German at the Bockenheimer Depot in Frankfurt.

July 5, 7, 10, 16 and 18, Indianola, Iowa, USA. Des Moines Metro Opera festival. Leoš Janáček: *Jenufa*. Stage director: Kristine McIntyre, conductor: David Neely.

Leoš Janáček's *Jenufa* was one of the three operas performed within the 43rd edition of the Des Moines Metro Opera summer music festival. The production was staged by the seasoned director Kristine McIntyre and conducted by David Neely. The lead roles were portrayed by Sara Gartland (Jenufa), Brenda Harris (Kostelnička), Richard Cox (Laca) and Joseph Dennis (Števa). It was the first-ever staging of *Jenufa* in the history of the festival, as well as the first performance sung in Czech (with English surtitles).

July 11, Znojmo, Czech Republic. Znojmo Music Festival. Lukáš Hurník: *Sturm und Drang* for Classicist clarinet and period instruments orchestra (premiere).

The Znojmo Music Festival saw the world premiere of a Lukáš Hurník piece, created to commission for the festival. The concert, held at the Louka Monastery, was titled "Tribute to the Czech Symphony Orchestra" and also featured works by Jiří Antonín Benda, František Kramář and Pavel Vranický. The name of Hurník's composition, *Sturm und Drang,* directly refers to the pre-Romantic literary movement of the second half of the 18th

PHOTO: WOLFGANG VON HÖRSTEN

Bedřich Smetana's Two Widows at the Opernbühne Bad Aibling, Germany

century. According to Jiří Ludvík, the director of the Znojmo Music Festival, the piece is a novel attempt at combining historically informed performance and the sentiment of a modern-time composer. The solo clarinet part was delivered by Ludmila Peterková, who was accompanied by the Czech Baroque Ensemble, conducted by Roman Válek.

July 11, Arzburg, Germany. Festival Mitte Europa. Hommage an Jakub Jan Ryba.
"Music knits together minds and friendships, tames animosity and drives away maladies resulting from animosity." These words, uttered by Jakub Jan Ryba (1765–1815), served as the motto of the 24th edition of the Czech-Saxon-Bavarian Festival Mitte Europa. A special concert, titled "Hommage an Jakub Jan Ryba", which marked the 250th anniversary of the birth and 200th of the death of the Czech composer, was held at the Röthenbach chateau. The M. Nostitz Quartet played, among other pieces, Ryba's *String Quartet in A minor* (1801) and, together with the flautist Jan Ostrý, the *Flute Concerto in C major* (1811). The concert was co-organised by the Czech Centre in Munich.

July 11 / October 9, 17, 23 and 29 / November 11, Hanover, Germany. Leoš Janáček: Jenufa. Stage director: Floris Vissner, conductor: Karen Kamensek.
A new production of Leoš Janáček's opera *Jenufa* was presented at the Staatsoper Hannover. The final premiere of the theatre's 2014/15 season, it was broadcast live by the radio station NDR Kultur. The opera was staged by the Dutch director Floris Vissner, whose work on *Jenufa* was his first-ever collaboration with the Staatsoper Hannover. The music was explored by the institution's chief conductor, Karen Kamensek. Cast in the lead roles were the Dutch soprano Kelly God (Jenufa), Hedwig Fassbender (Kostelnička), Austria's Robert Künzli (Laca) and Martin Homrich (Števa). The production is performed in Czech, with German surtitles.

July 17, Munich, Germany. Martin Smolka: *Psalmus 114*.
The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus presented in Munich *Psalmus 114* by Martin Smolka. The concert rounded off the cycle Paradisi gloria, during which they performed at the unique venue of the modern Herz-Jesu-Kirche mainly recent and contemporary works on spiritual themes. In his almost 30-minute, five-part 2009 piece for 16-voice mixed chorus and small symphony orchestra, Smolka set to music the Latin text of Psalm 114, which in an extraordinarily playful language describes the miracles that accompanied the Israelites' escape from captivity in Egypt. The concert also featured compositions by Olivier Messiaen and Einojuhani Rautavaara.

July 18, 19, 22, 24 and 25, Bad Aibling, Germany. Bedřich Smetana: *The Two Widows*. Stage director: Stefan Kastner, conductor: Richard van Schoor.
A new production of Bedřich Smetana's opera *The Two Widows* was premiered at the Maxlrain chateau, near Bad Aibling, in Bavaria. Over the past few years, the organiser, Operbühne Bad Aibling, has every summer given a premiere of a production of a not frequently staged opera, with the roles being entrusted to fledgling singers, thus affording the audience the opportunity to familiarise themselves with a repertoire slightly different from that of large opera houses and the artists to gain valuable professional experience. *The Two Widows* is the first Smetana opera to have been presented by Operbühne Bad Aibling. The orchestra was led by the South African pianist, composer and conductor Richard van Schoor, while the staging was undertaken by the German singer, director and composer Stefan Kastner. The lead roles were portrayed by Doris S. Langara, Lisa Koroleva, Virgil Hartinger, Philipp Gaiser, Andreas Stauber and Kristina Scherer. James Barner was in charge of the opera's conception. The production was performed in German.

July 25, Kuks, Czech Republic. Kuks Music Summer. Otomar Kvěch: *Fantasy Variations on the "Hare Aria"* (premiere). Jaroslav Halíř – trumpet, Pavel Černý – organ.
The Kuks Music Summer festival saw the world premiere of a new piece by Otomar Kvěch, *Fantasy Variations on the "Hare Aria",* for trumpet and orchestra*,* written to commission for the festival. Over the six years of its existence, it was the third time that the festival had included in its programme a contemporary composer's work inspired by the music connected with the exquisite historical milieu of the Baroque Kuks Hospital complex. Such works performed during the festival's previous editions were Emil Viklický's and Ivan Kurz's *Fantasy Variations* on the theme of one of the so-called Sporck arias.

August 22, Lucerne, Switzerland. Bohuslav Martinů: *La Revue de cuisine*. Soloists of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.
The suite from Bohuslav Martinů's 1927 one-act ballet *La Revue de cuisine* was performed in Lucerne, Switzerland. The concert was given within the summer section of the Lucerne Festival, whose theme this year was humour and removal of the prejudices pertaining to the "seriousness" of classical music. Martinů's work, inspired by jazz and civilisation themes, was included in the programme between William Walton's setting of Edith Sitwell's poem from the cycle *Façade* and Arnold Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. The Late Night concert, which aimed to evoke the atmosphere of cabarets at the beginning of the 20th century, took place at the KKl Luzern hall.

August 24, Prague, Czech Republic. Prague Shakuhachi Festival. Matouš Hejl: *Recasting* (premiere).
The ninth edition of the Prague Shakuhachi Festival of Japanese and experimental music premiered the piece *Recasting* by the young Czech composer and pianist Matouš Hejl, for four cellos, double bass, electronics and – with respect to the festival's focus – the Japanese flute shakuhachi. A brief description in the programme read: "Global history enters nature; global nature enters history: this is something utterly new in philosophy." The festival also featured compositions by Marty Regan, Charles Ives and Peter Eötvös.

August 21 – 29, Ostrava. Ostrava Days.
August 21. Rudolf Komorous: *Lady Blancarosa* (European premiere)
The first night of the festival's programme included a performance at the Old Baths of the Hlubina mine of a chamber opera by the Czech composer and bassoonist Rudolf Komorous, who has lived in Canada since 1969. It was the very first time his *Lady Blancarosa*, premiered in 1970 in Buffalo, New York, had been heard in Europe. Komorous worked on the opera back in the 1960s in Czechoslovakia, where, as he himself said, "all my friends and colleagues were of the opinion that the operatic form was obsolete and out of date. I agreed, when it comes to grand opera at least. But my idea of the opera of the future was different. Small theatres, small companies, rather smaller, Renaissance, voices." The text to *Lady Blancarosa* is based on the "strange sentences indeed" penned by the Czech poet and prose-writer Jan of Vojkovice (1880–1944), which the composer compiled as a collage into the libretto. The lead roles in the staging in Ostrava were performed by the Hungarian singers Sára Dezsö and Katalin Károlyi. The production was created by the Prague-based artistic laboratory Handa Gote, headed by Tomáš Procházka. The opera was presented in English.

August 23. Petr Kotík: *Variations for Three Orchestras*. Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra Ostrava, Ostravská banda, Petr Kotík, Johannes Kalitzke, Rolf Gupta.
The major Sunday evening event at Ostrava Days was the Concert for Three Orchestras. So as to give performances of pieces for this unconventional configuration, which were held at the industrial premises of the Triple Hall Karolina, the Janáček Philharmonic, extended by numerous other musicians, divided into three groups. Besides Karlheinz Stockhausen's feted *Gruppen* (1955–57) and a simultaneous performance of John Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961) and *Winter Music* (1957), they also delivered the *Variations for Three Orchestras* by Petr Kotík, the festival's founder and artistic director. The over 30-minute-long piece, written between 2003 and 2005, was premiered in its current version at Ostrava Days 10 years ago. In his *Variations*, Kotík primarily engages with the question of interplay and the possibilities of various tempos of the three orchestras within a single composition.

August 25. Ian Mikyska: *Settings; Stillness (On Romantic Style)* (premiere).
The young composer Ian Mikyska was one of this year's residents of the Ostrava Days Institute. During the festival's fifth evening and the Night Solos block, the audience at the Philharmonic Hall of the Ostrava House of Culture heard the premiere of his work *Settings; Stillness (On Romantic Style),* a series of settings of the "Wanderer's Night Song", in which the composer makes use of historical material – J. W. Goethe's poems and their musical settings. The work was performed by the mezzo-soprano Annette Schönmüller and the pianist Keiko Shichijo. *Settings* was followed by a composition created by Martyna Kosecka, another of the Ostrava Days Institute's residents, which rounded off a concert made up of pieces by a number of renowned contemporary music composers (Kaija Saariaho, Wolfgang Rihm, Christian Wolff, Iannis Xenakis, and others).

August 26. Petr Cígler: *Jagdtrio* (premiere). Elole Trio.
The composer and scientist Petr Cígler's new work *Jagdtrio* is a classical piano trio (violin, cello, piano), yet, according to its creator, it "does not steer towards the classical form or home music-making, as it deals with," – as the title indicates – "hunting". In the piece, Cígler explores the universe of animal sounds – "the hare's braying, the boar's grunting, the deer's shrieking and the duck's quacking". The *Jagdtrio* was performed by Dresden's Elole Trio (Uta-Maria Lempert – violin, Matthias Lorenz – cello, Stefan Eder – piano). That evening's concert also featured works by Petr Bakla, Makiko Nishikaze, Salvatore Sciarrino and others.

August 26. Petr Bakla: *Classical Blend / Weihnachtsoratorium*, Michal Rataj: *Temporis* (premieres). Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra Ostrava, conductor: Rolf Gupta.
On the sixth day of the festival, the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra Ostrava premiered two Czech compositions: Petr Bakla's *Classical Blend / Weihnachtsoratorium* and Michal Rataj's

Temporis. The former, written in 2014 and 2015, consists of two parts, with the first examining the major third, while the second, titled after Ivan Pinkava's photograph, is, as Bakla himself put it, "akin to the atmosphere of the windy weeks around last year's Christmas". Rataj defined *Temporis*, a concerto for dulcimer and large orchestra, as a "sort of 'bowing' to cosmological time and the events that accelerate with the universe's development". The Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by Norway's Rolf Gupta, while the solo dulcimer part in Rataj's piece was delivered by Jan Mikušek.

August 27. Peter Graham: *Death Has a Smile on Its Face…*, Ján Podracký: *Pre / Pro / For / Für Anet I* (premiere).
The programme of the evening at the Saint Wenceslas Church, titled Voices & Instruments, featured Peter Graham's work *Death Has a Smile on Its Face…* (*Church Concerto in Memoriam Reinhard Oehlschlägel,* for bass-clarinet, two trumpets, strings, organ and mixed chorus). As the title indicates, the extremely expressive, almost half-an-hour-long, 2014 piece pays tribute to the late German music journalist, whom the composer knew in person and highly respected. It is dedicated to Oehlschlägel's widow. Graham wrote the solo clarinet part directly for Pavel Zlámal, who performed the work in Ostrava together with the Ostravská banda ensemble. The second half of the concert featured the premiere of a piece by Ján Podracký, a fledgling composer and resident of the Ostrava Days Institute 2015. A student of musicology and a private pupil of the composer Pavel Zemek Novák, Podracký presented at the festival his 2014 minimalist work *Pre / Pro / For / Für Anet I,* for soprano and recorder, in which he probes into the relationship between beauty and simplicity in music. The composition was premiered by the soprano Aneta Bendová and the bassoonist and flautist Stefanie Liedtke. The concert's programme also included the premiere of Rolf Riehm's *Adieu, Sirens* and performances of other works.

August 28. Petr Kotík: *Master-Pieces* (2014–15). Staged by Jiří Nekvasil and David Bazika.
The penultimate evening at Ostrava Days featured the staging of Petr Kotík's opera *Master-Pieces*. The work, premiered within the festival's previous edition, returned to Ostrava in a revised version and a new production. The libretto to *Master-Pieces* is based on texts by Gertrude Stein, particularly the lecture she gave in 1936 on the topic "What are masterpieces, and why are there so few of them?", in which the celebrated writer pondered the nature and process of the creation of works of art that would later on be labelled as masterpieces, as well as the diary Stein wrote during World War II, which was published under the title *The Wars I Have Seen*. This year, the lead role in the opera was again portrayed by the American soprano Kamala Sankaram, accompanied by Pauline Kim Harris's solo violin, three male voices, three narrators and the Ostravská banda, conducted by Petr Kotík himself. The performance was held at the Antonín Dvořák Theatre in Ostrava.
(In this issue, you will find a review of the Ostrava Days festival and more information in a separate article.)

September 10, Utrecht, the Netherlands. Gaudeamus Muziekweek. František Chaloupka: *Stockhausen on Sirius* (premiere).
The world premiere of the Czech composer František Chaloupka's *Stockhausen on Sirius* was given within the New Masters of Contemporary Music evening at the Gaudeamus Muziekweek, which took place between 9 and 13 September in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The piece was created for the International Ensemble Modern Academy (IEMA), in which Chaloupka is currently a composer in residence. The title refers to the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen's fascination with the star Sirius. The concert's programme also included works by other young composers: Stylianos Dimou (Greece), Christiaan Richter (the Netherlands) and Sergej Maingardt (Germany).

by Petr Daněk,
Michaela Žáčková Rossi,
Jan Baťa, Petra Jakoubková

Music and musical culture in the Czech lands during the reign of Emperor RUDOLF II

Last year's second issue of Czech Music Quarterly provided information about the establishment and work of Musica Rudolphina, a musicological centre associating a number of distinguished Czech and foreign scholars, who from various angles have researched into, edited and performed the music that came into being in the Czech lands during the rule of the remarkable monarch Rudolf II of the House of Habsburg (Musica Rudolphina. A project of international co-operation in musicological research, Czech Music Quarterly, 2014/2, pp. 23-29). The centre has pursued publication, exploratory and pedagogical activities, which have met with a positive response among musicologists, musicians and all those interested in matters historical. In collaboration with Czech Music Quarterly, it has thus prepared a series of specialist articles which aim to familiarise the readers with various intriguing aspects and specificities of the musical culture during the Rudolfine era. The introductory study in this issue provides an account of the position occupied by musicians within the imperial court's structure, the next article focuses on the musical culture of the Emperor's residence city of Prague, while the other studies shed light on the music score printing that served as a crucial means for the notation and propagation of music. *(Petr Daněk)*

At the court of Emperor Rudolf II

Michaela Žáčková Rossi

Rudolfine art, culture and scholarship have been paid attention to both by Czech and foreign historians over the past few decades. Numerous extensive and exquisite monographs about art at Rudolf II's court have been published, as have been volumes devoted to individual aspects and personages of the Rudolfine epoch. Since the late 1980s, the Bohemian late-Renaissance music too has been explored ever more systematically and on a greater international scale. And rightly so, since in the late-16th and early-17th centuries Prague and the Czech lands enjoyed a marked bloom in the arts and beyond. Rudolfine Prague was linked with the lives of Johannes Kepler and Tycho Brahe; it was regularly visited by foreign delegations; it was the residence of Spanish, Jesuit and other envoys; and the city also experienced an architectural flowering. The moving of the Habsburg court's permanent seat from Vienna to Prague was preceded by vital circumstances that paved the way for the Emperor's relocation. Rudolf II's uncle, Ferdinand of Tirolia, who served as vice-regent in Bohemia for a full 20 years, up until 1567, built a sumptuous residence in Prague (one of the buildings he has bequeathed is the Hvězda villa), and during this time Bohemia experienced a boom of humanism and Renaissance culture. The other preparatory factor was the long-term stay of Rudolf himself in Prague, from 1578 to 1581, which must have affirmed his idea of definitively transferring the imperial court from Vienna, both by reason of a more healthy climate and because Prague was more distant from the Turks, who represented a permanent threat on the eastern border of the Habsburg Empire.

Lucas van Valckenborch, Emperor Rudolf II in his 30s or 40s right: Franz Hoogenberghe, after Joris Hoefnagel, Prague Castle and view of Prague, Civitates orbis terrarum, Volume V

The structure of Rudolf II's court

The imperial court itself was a sophisticated formation of a rather complex structure. The preserved account ledgers, currently conserved at the Austrian State Archives in Vienna, reveal a great deal of information pertaining to its administrative division and, naturally, also contain essential records of Rudolf's music expenses: the servants' fixed wages and contributions to their clothing, travel costs, fees for the dedications of madrigals, motets or other compositions, as well as allowances for court musicians' weddings, christenings of their children and short-term payments for their widows. All these data are recorded in giant annual account books, originally bound in white leather and diligently arrayed by Habsburg scribes into service sections, called *Parthey*. The musicians at Rudolf's court were classified as working either at the court chapel (*Capellnparthey*) or stables (*Stallparthey*). The chapel section encompassed all those who attended to the liturgical services, that is, including musical liturgy: chaplains, singers, organists, copyists, tuners, and, later on, chamber musicians too. Trumpeters and drummers were assigned to the stables. Therefore many imperial trumpeters died in the battles against the Turks, which lasted from 1593 to 1606, as is documented in the requests for being accorded coats-of-arms (nobility), with the applicants thoroughly describing how they and their relatives had loyally served the House of Habsburg as trumpeters in the Hungarian field. In fact, in the respective years there is a palpable rise in the number of trumpeters and trumpeter apprentices. Even though at first glance these servants' inclusion in the stables section does not predicate of their quality and versatility, we know that plenty of the buglers and cornett (zink) players were universal musicians and excellent composers, who not only procured instruments, sheet music and new musicians for their ruler but were also in contact with other Bohemian and Moravian aristocrats, and their services often surpassed the solely musical framework.

National provenance

The imperial court in Prague was variegated, a place absorbing the boldest artistic trends of late-Renaissance Europe, which were in turn reflected in the entire Rudolfine artistic production. Today, we can compare compositions that were created in the Prague milieu with the music of other major centres in the Europe of the time – the courts in Italy, Munich, Innsbruck, Dresden, Copenhagen, Madrid, etc. Over their lifetime, some of the composers passed through several Habsburg and other courts, served in numerous places in Europe, and brought the experience they had gained to bear in Prague. The most significant Rudolfine Prague figure was the long-time Kapellmeister Philippe de Monte. In 1568, the noted Flemish composer was called to Vienna by Rudolf's father, Maximilian II, and he would remain in the imperial services up until his death in 1603. He bequeathed us copious printed collections of sacred and secular music (masses, motets, madrigals, etc.). The leading composers of the time who worked in Prague during Rudolf II's era included Jacob Regnart, Carl Luython, Franz Sale,

Jacobus Regnart, Sacrae aliqvot cantiones, quas moteta vulgo appelant, Munich, Adam Berg, 1575 right: Aegidius Sadeler, Jacobus Chimarrhaeus, ca 1601s

Alessandro Orologio, Gregorio Turini and Philipp Schoendorff, while others – Hans Leo Hassler, Nicolaus Zangius – were registered as imperial servants, though they often lived outside the court. Whole families even were employed at Rudolf II's court, evidently for practical reasons too. Its national structure also reveals a few more general tendencies: the trumpeters had right from the beginning of Rudolf II's reign been traditionally Italians, predominantly hailing from the north – the regions around Venice and Udine (members of the Mosto family), Verona (the Rizzo family) and Brescia (father and son Turinis); the violinists were from Cremona (the Ardesi family); the sopranos (descantists) mostly hailed from Spain; whereas the vast majority of other singers – altos, tenors and basses – were from the Netherlands (the extended de Sayve and Cupers families); the drummers, more precisely, timpanists, were recruited from the ranks of German musicians (the Wolf family). Circa 1600, however, the national provenance of the court musicians began to change, with the old servants being replaced by local – German and, occasionally, Czech – musicians. And if a few Italians or Dutch remained, most of them were Prague-born, members of the second or third generations.

From Imperial servants to permanent residents

These people lived in the Castle district itself or nearby, with many of the musicians dwelling in the Lesser Town (in the vicinity of Jánský vršek, near the Church of Saint Thomas, Lázeňská street and environs). Some of them had even the opportunity to buy houses, to become citizens of some of the Prague boroughs, and duly settled in the city for good, even remaining there after 1612, when Rudolf's brother and successor, Matthias, moved the imperial residence back to Vienna. A fascinating insight into the lives of these people is provided by numerous archival sources: citizenship books, registries and testaments, religious orders' documents and other papers contain fragments of information illuminating the non-musical activities of Rudolf II's servants, their lodgings and way of life, their later means of subsistence. An interesting example is the fate of the Zigotta family, which had been settled in Bohemia since at least the beginning of the 16th century. They were active members of a Jesuit sodality in Prague and after leaving the imperial services they bought a lime kiln, became aldermen (Georg Zigotta was even elected to the post of primate), their children studied at the university in Prague as well as in Germany, and in the 1630s they entered the services of the Knights of the Cross and the Archbishop of Prague, Ernst Adalbert von Harrach.

All this paints a vivid picture of how musicians lived in Rudolfine Prague. Some of them dedicated their compositions to the Emperor and other aristocrats as the fruits of their endeavours, as well as proof of their being loyal and "humble" servants, others did so with the aim to be accepted by the imperial court. A large portion of this music has been lost and today is merely documented in the account books and inventory collections. Nevertheless, musicologists have continued to find valuable, previously unknown sources and music prints which

serve to complete the mosaic of Rudolfine Prague and Bohemia.

Music in Rudolfine Prague

Jan Baťa

The Imperial Court was definitively relocated to Prague in 1583. This brought about a significant change for the Prague boroughs, as within a short time they had to house behind their ramparts a large number of courtiers who needed permanent dwelling. The better-off among them could afford to buy their own houses, whereas the majority – including the musicians– had to lease rooms in one of the burgesses' buildings. The ranks of such sub-tenants, or "roomers", as they were dubbed at the time, did not only comprise members of the Imperial Court. The "courtly" roomers mainly lived in the Castle district itself, in the Lesser Town and Old Town, from where they had to commute to the Castle every day. In 1608, the Imperial Court had a list of accommodation capacities in the respective localities drawn up, with the aim to ascertain how many vacancies it could count with should the need arise. And arise it did relatively often, when Prague was visited by foreign legations, which mostly included large entourages. Owing to this unique document, we know, at least as regards the year 1608, where the Rudolfine


MISSARVM SEX
VOCVM, NVPER A STEPHANO
FELIS BARENSI, METROPOLITANAE
ECCLESIAE EIVSDEM CIVITATIS CANONICO, & Chori Magistro editarum.
Liber primus.
AD ILLVSTRISSIMVM ET EXCELLENTISSIMVM DD. PHILIPPVM, DOMINVM DE CROY, ET DVCEM ARSCHOTANVM, &c.
Serenissimiq; Catholici Regis ad Sacrae Caes. Maiest: Legatum.
ALTVS.
IMPRESSA PRAGAE, PER GEORGIVM NIGRINVM.
Anno: M. D. LXXXVIII.

Stefano Felis Barensi, Missarum sex vocum, Prague, Jiří Nigrin, 1588

musicians resided. Were it not for the list, we would have to dredge up the relevant data from other period sources, which, however, largely only mention the roomers in cases when public order was breached or disputes between neighbours occurred.

Rudolfine musicians in the streets of Prague

The relationship between the Imperial Court and the city thus also had this practical aspect. And no wonder – the courtiers too were people of flesh and blood, with their common everyday needs. Yet it would be inappropriate to reduce this co-existence to the purely practical facets of life. The city provided the musicians with a spiritual background in Catholic parishes, which attended to their families' needs from the cradle to the grave. One of the places at which these people gathered was the Church of Saint Thomas in the Lesser Town. Those who were not content with the positions of rank-and-file parishioner could join the brotherhoods, which made the religious life of their members more profound and enhanced their spirituality in specific directions. The aforementioned Church of Saint Thomas hosted the Brotherhood of Corpus Christi, whose activities centred on revering the Eucharist; the Church of the Holy Saviour within the Jesuit College at the Klementinum in the Old Town housed the Brotherhood of Our Blessed Lady, devoted to the Virgin Mary. The members of the latter included Rudolf's Vice-Kapellmeisters Jacob Regnart (1540/45–1599) and Mathias de Sayve (1540/50–1619), the organist Paul de Winde (†1596), the chaplain Jan Sixt of Lerchenfels (†1629), and many others.

Pious motets in the town-hall towers

Just as Prague provided a material and spiritual background to the Imperial Court, so could the city pride itself in an advanced musical culture. But what did this musical culture look like? If we begin with Prague Castle, it must be pointed out that the arrival of the court orchestra meant an essential turning point and enrichment for Saint Vitus Cathedral. Until that time, merely two music ensembles had operated at the Castle – 12 choristers, who attended to liturgical (exclusively monophonic) music, and a group of trumpeters playing in the cathedral's tower.
The music performed in the other parts of Prague was far more lively and variegated. When we bear in mind just how complex an organism a city is, we can imagine various milieux in which music could be played. A clearer image can be gleaned from the well-known 1606 graphical view of Prague, created by the court embroiderer Philippe van den Bossche (active c. 1604–1615) and the Nuremberg-born engraver Johannes Wechter

Nicolas de L'Armessin, Philippe de Monte, 1682

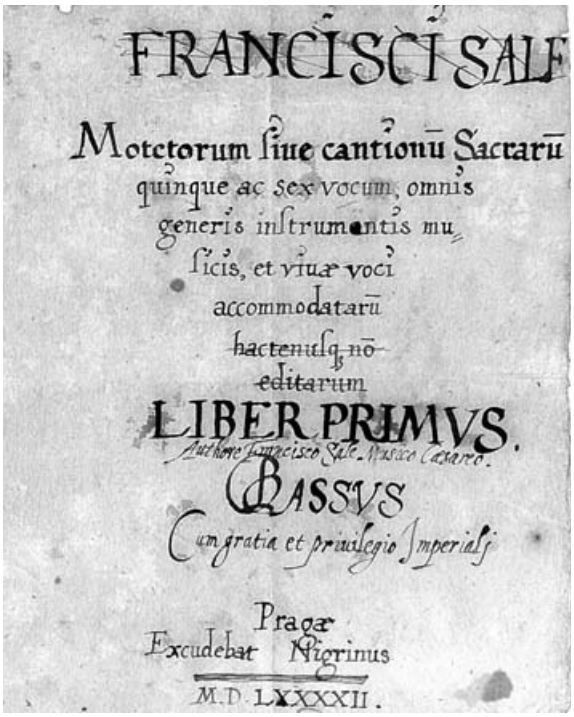
(active c. 1550–1606), yet named after its publisher, the Rudolfine copper engraver Jiljí Sadeler (c. 1570–1629). The veduta shows the city in its full splendour. Numerous towers and spires overhang the burgesses' houses and Renaissance palaces. Some of them, however, are not parts of churches but town halls. And in these towers played city trumpeters, who were employed by the councils (the Old Town Council, for instance, kept trumpeters from 1440). Besides serving as guards and announcing the hours, these men were also assigned with the task of representing, welcoming guests at the city gates. The design of the instruments at the time afforded the musicians limited possibilities, hence their performances were merely made up of simple signal music or fanfares. From 1551, the Old Town Council employed a group of instrumentalists capable of delivering more sophisticated music. The duties of the players – referred to as "trombonists" at the time – were stipulated in a set of instructions dating from 1585. This manual reveals that in the spring and summer the ensemble performed from Sunday to Thursday and on feast days twice a day – in the morning, starting at about half past seven, and in the afternoon, at approximately half past three. In the autumn and in winter, the trombonists played music just once a day – at noon, and only on Sundays and feast days. According to the instructions, they no longer executed simple fanfares, but "pious motets", which indicates that it must have concerned a group of four to five skilled musicians, capable of performing the more exacting polyphony. In all likelihood, it concerned not only motets, but also madrigals and other pieces, which at the determined time resounded through the neighbouring urban space.

Singing in churches

Nevertheless, most of the towers in Sadeler's picture belong to the Prague churches. Their network was already rather dense back during the reign of Charles IV, and not all of them had parish priests in the Rudolfine era. Larger parishes – for instance, those within the Church of Our Lady Before Týn in the Old Town, Saint Nicholas' in the Lesser Town and Saint Stephen's in the New Town – held regular daily liturgies, whereas in smaller churches (the majority of which are today merely attested to by the names of streets, for instance, Linhartská, Valentinská, Benediktská, etc.) divine services only took place occasionally. The music in the regular liturgies was mainly provided by pupils of the adjacent parish schools, who were assigned with the greatest burden of duties – singing at matins and vespers. The religious services were most frequently accompanied by plainchant, yet even the youngest boys were taught how to sing polyphony. On Sundays and feast days, the pupils were joined by members of literary brotherhoods: societies of music-loving town folk whose mission was to sing at divine services. Human voices were supported by the sound of organs, which emanated from many a church in Prague. During the major feast days, the trombonists came in too, so as to add the appropriate glamour to the church festivities. Highly popular in Prague during the reign of Rudolf II was Italian multi-choir music, which influenced the style of both the court and local Czech composers (Pavel Spongopaeus of Jistebnice, for instance), as well as the musicians settled in Bohemia (Jacob Handl Gallus). This fashion also spread and engrossed other towns in the Kingdom of Bohemia and the wider Central European region.

Besides the parish churches of the Utraquists, there were in Prague Catholic churches with adjacent monasteries, belonging to various religious orders. The most active of these in musical terms were the Jesuits, who since their arrival in the city in 1556 had deemed music to be one of the most effective tools in their Counter-Reformation endeavours. They found a powerful ally in the Rudolfine musicians, some of whom – as mentioned above – were members of the Jesuit sodality and, together with other court musicians, were frequent guests of the Church of the Holy Saviour, where too, in addition to Rudolfine composers' pieces, contemporary Italian music was performed.

Towards the end of Rudolf II's rule, the Lutherans began building their churches in Prague as well. Within a short period of time, they had opened on


FRANCISCI SALE
Motetorum siue cantionū Sacrarū
quinque ac sex vocum, omnis
generis instrumentis mu
sicis, et viuæ voci
accommodatarū
hactenusq; nō
editarum
LIBER PRIMVS.
Authore Francisco Sale Musico Cæsareo.
BASSVS
Cum gratia et priuilegio Imperiali
Pragæ
Excudebat Nigrinus
M.D. LXXXXII.

Franz Sale, Motetorum sive cantionum sacrarum, Prague, Jiří Nigrin, 1592, draft design of the print's front page

both banks of the river Vltava two Protestant shrines, designed in the Italian architectonic style. As was the case of other churches, they pursued multi-choir music of the Venetian type, either pieces by Italian composers or the transalpine creators influenced by them. Accordingly, when it comes to the performed polyphonic repertoire, universally sung in Latin, all the Christian denominations were very close to each other, with the music smoothly transcending the religious boundaries.

Music-making in citizens' homes

The inhabitants of Prague did not only come into contact with music in public spaces, as it was an integral part of their private lives. Whereas the aristocrats and burghers possessing coats-of-arms settled in the city could afford to keep musicians (or rather one musician, for instance, a lutenist or organist), others had to make do with their own abilities. Said "others" constituted a large number. During the Rudolfine era, plenty of Prague burghers possessed either instruments or sheet music, or both even. Although in some cases these were mere collectors' items, we can assume that a fair proportion of the household music equipment was actually used for making music.

The preserved personal inventory books reveal that the most frequently owned instrument was a lute or a keyboard (clavichord, virginal, regal), that is, an instrument allowing the performance of polyphonic music. As regards sheet music, the most common were hymn-books, but also to be found in the possession of Prague citizens were collections of polyphonic pieces, referred to as "partes", primarily sacred music. Furthermore, the burghers liked to play and sing madrigals together, as documented by the statutes of the society called *collegium musicum*, which date from a later time, 1616, yet we can presume that similar citizens' associations existed much earlier, even though we lack written records about them.

The music business

The demand for sheet music and musical instruments was duly responded to by merchants, music printers, booksellers and makers of musical instruments. The needs of the Prague market were satisfied in two manners. The first was the import of music goods (most frequently from Nuremberg), involved in which was, among others, the composer Jacob Handl Gallus. Yet the demand was also met in Prague by skilful local instrument-builders. When it comes to the typographers, the best-known among them was Jiří Černý of Černý Most, alias Jiří Nigrin or Georgius Nigrinus of Nigropont (†1606), who printed numerous vocal polyphonic works written by Rudolfine composers.

Music printing in the Rudolfine era

Petr Daněk

Similarly to the majority of European cities, Rudolfine Prague gradually created the scope and the conditions for the development of all the contemporary trades and crafts. These included printing and everything related to it. The printing craft had been cultivated in Prague and Bohemia at large for decades preceding the relocation of the Imperial Court from Vienna, yet only in the Rudofine era did typography develop and attain the European standard. A specific category was music printing.

The Petrucci revolution

Music printing had first appeared in Europe back in the second half of the 15th century. It gradually superseded the costly, yet peerless, medieval manuscript, which only resulted in single copies. An inter-phase in the development of music printing involved the combination of prints of texts and manually inscribed staves and notes, which was applied in various regions of Europe. The next phase entailed the printing of separate staves, into which the music was written by hand. In the late 15th

century, this process, enabling more rapid dissemination of works, was further enhanced by the invention of full-page wood blocks and double-impression printing (first the stave and then the notes). A watershed was the anthology of polyphonic secular music (containing 96 popular songs, mostly French chansons) *Harmonice musices Odhecaton A,* published in 1501 in Venice by Ottaviano Petrucci. By applying the triple-impression technique (first printing the stave, then the text, and then the notes), allowing for relatively fast and, most significantly, high-quality printing of polyphonic music, he launched a revolution in the distribution of music throughout Europe. Petrucci's method was soon improved upon by Parisian printers (Pierre Attaignan, Pierre Haultin), who invented the double-impression technique (first printing the text and red staves, then printing the black text and black notes), which made the printing of polyphonic music even faster, simpler and more accurate. Consequently, music printing began to take hold throughout Europe, revolutionising the dissemination of music and making compositions more widely available than in the previous centuries. During the course of the 16th century, music was printed by a number of typographers, some of them being famed for the high quality of their craft (Valerio Dorico, Pietro Phalesio, Adam Berg, Katharina Gerlach, Antonio Gardano, etc.), and in all major cities (Venice, Paris, Antwerp, Nuremburg, Frankfurt). In the Rudolfine era, their ranks were joined by Prague.

Sacrae cantiones, liber missarum, madrigali italiani, canzoni francese, canzonette, cantio, graduale, sonetti, strambotti, frottole, etc.

What type of music was printed in the 16th century? In actual fact, all the contemporary varieties and genres, as the title of this section indicates. The largest proportion of preserved prints is formed by hymns-books and collections of monophonic sacred songs. In addition, mainly polyphonic sacred vocal pieces were printed: particularly motets (sacrae cantiones, motetae), but also masses and other liturgical works (liber missarum, Magnificat, litanies, passions settings). Extremely popular too were prints of secular music, primarily Italian madrigals, French chansons and German polyphonic songs intended as entertainment, often possessing lyrics with double-entendre (teutsche Lieder). Gradually, instrumental music, including, naturally, dance music, was printed as well, as were compositions for keyboard and other solo instruments. Also published were monophonic chants, which required special supervision and editing, so as to be suitable for specific liturgies. In considerable demand too were publications of musicological works (Musica) and practical manuals for students of composition and quadrivium. The majority of prints were in the form of volumes, which only provided the respective vocal parts (bass, tenor, cantus, etc.), or independent large-format, folio-sized books (Chorbuch), designed to be placed on the musicians' shared stand. The individual parts were printed on an


TERTIVS TOMVS.

MVSICI OPERIS, HARMONIARVM QVATVOR, QVINQVE, SEX, OCTO ET PLVRIVM VOCVM, QVAE EX SANCTO CATHOLICAE ECCLESIAE VSV ITA SVNT DISPOSITAE, VT omni tempore inseruire queant.

Ad Dei Opt: Max: laudem, & Ecclesiæ sanctæ decus.

AVTHORE

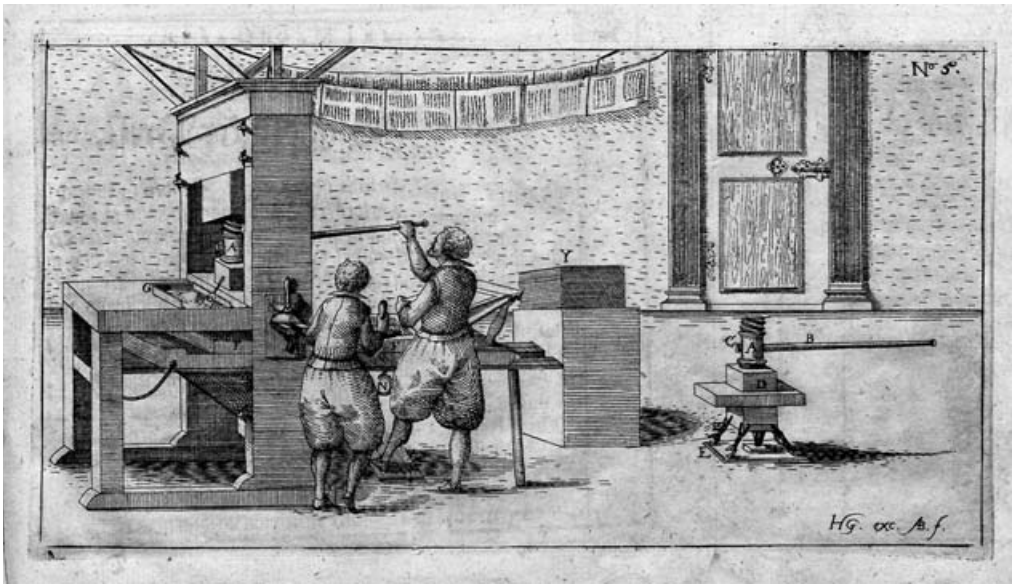
Iacobo Händl.

TENOR.

PRAGAE, TYPIS NIGRINIANIS. Anno M. D. LXXXVII.

CVM GRATIA ET PRIVILEGIO SAC. CAES. MAIEST:

Jacobus Handl Gallus, Tertius tomus musici operis, Prague, Jiří Nigrin, 1587, title page printed from typeset Franz Sale, Motetorum sive cantionum sacrarum, Prague, Jiří Nigrin, 1592, draft design of the print's front page



Abraham Bartolus, Musica mathematica, Leipzig, Hennig Gross, 1614, a picture of a printing shop

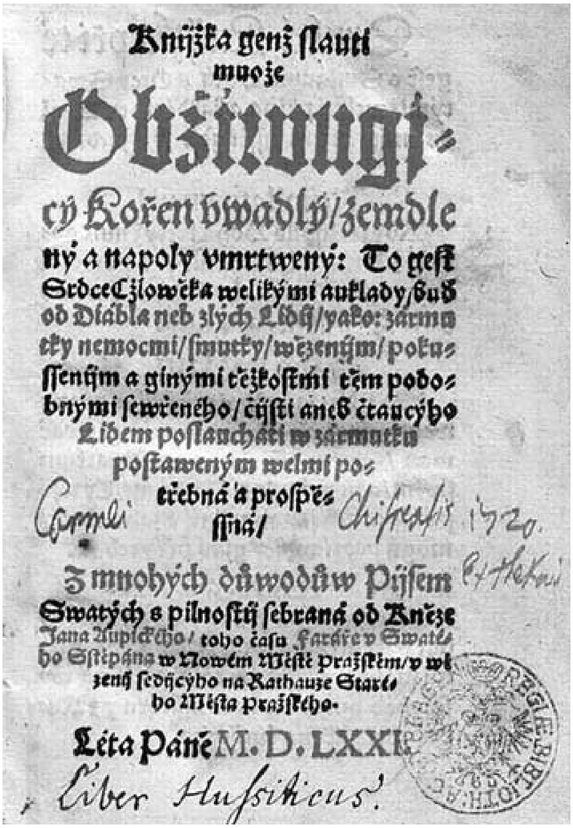
open two-page sheet, so the singers could see their parts from their position, but placed on the sheet separately, as Renaissance music did not have scores. The first-ever music scores only appeared in 1613, in Carlo Gesualdo's book of madrigals.

Partes bought for the "musica"

Music prints were distributed in the same manner as ordinary books. They were sold, often without being furnished with a binding, by the printers themselves, as well as by composers, who frequently financed and co-created the final appearance of the prints. Moreover, music prints were on sale at marketplaces and fairs. At the time, the first book fairs occurred, some of which have been functioning to the present day (for example, those in Frankfurt and Leipzig). The preserved period lists reveal that music prints formed a substantial part of the items on offer. Music prints were also distributed around Bohemia by bookbinders, professional librarians and booksellers. The Rožmberk (Rosenberg) aristocratic family accounts dating from the end of the 16th century include the information that the court office had paid for the "partes bought for the musica" (consort / the instrumental ensemble) to the Prague bookbinder Dobiáš more than eight "kopa" (approximately 480 Groschen). In 1608, Petr Vok of Rožmberk purchased for his library 14 volumes of modern Italian music prints, which he chose from the list sent by the "court bookseller and librarian", Claudio Marnio. The purchasers and users usually had the procured music prints bound together into more extensive convolutes. Yet not all music prints served for actual performances. At the time, music was deemed a discipline that every contemporary intellectual was expected to know, at least superficially. Consequently, numerous music prints ended up in the libraries of book collectors next to publications dedicated to other disciplines (astronomy, theology, mathematics, occult sciences, geography).

Datum Pragae ipso nostrae sanctissimae patronae D. Ceciliae die. Anno 1580

Music printing took hold in Bohemia gradually. Liturgical music books, intended for individual Bohemian and Moravian dioceses, were printed abroad until at least the middle of the 16th century. Polyphonic sacred and secular music was first printed by a Czech typographer in the 1570s, while instrumental pieces were not published in Bohemia until the 1640s. On the other hand, hymn-book printing had already experienced an extraordinary boom – characterised by quantitative and qualitative increase – back in the first half of the 16th century. The development and form of music printing in the Czech lands was impacted by the nature of the domestic market. Over the major part of the century, the prevailingly Utraquist society above all required prints of music that could be sung by the "common people", that is, monophonic songs, whereas the more difficult-to-perform polyphony, supposed to be delivered by skilful singers, for a long time to come continued to be copied or, exceptionally, bought abroad (selected pieces by Europe-renowned composers). Only the relocation


Knijžka genž slauti
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Z mnohých důwodůw Pijsem
Swatých s pilnostij sebraná od Kněze
Jana Aupického/ toho času Faráře v Swaté-
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zenij sedijcýho na Rathauze Staré-
ho Města Pražského.
Léta Páně M.D.LXXI.
Liber Hussiticus

Jan Okurka Oupický, Knížka, jenž může slouti obživující kořen uvadlý, Prague, Jiří Nigrin, 1571, print of songs

of Rudolf II's court to Prague served to begin changing the domestic market and give rise to demand for printing and distribution of polyphonic music, written by professionals.

Ex Officina Typographica…
Throughout the period preceding the relocation of Rudolf II's court to Prague, music prints were produced in a number of "officinas". The majority of them were in Prague, yet many significant printing shops were established in other towns too. The first edition of the musicological work *Musica*, penned by Jan Blahoslav, was published in 1558 in Olomouc and subsequently, 10 years later, in Ivančice. The capital of the Kingdom of Bohemia, Prague was the residence of typographer families. One such, the Severýns, who ran the most prominent and busiest printing workshop up until the middle of the 16th century, published in 1541 probably the most extensive hymnbook in Europe at the time, Roh's *Písně chval božských (Songs of Divine Praise)*. Around the middle of the century, the typographer Jiří Melantrich moved his printing business from Prostějov to Prague, linking up to the work of Bartoloměj Netolický and gradually forming a successful and versatile European-style printing office, yet he only occasionally made music prints, and on a small scale. Another independent printer in Prague was Jiří Nigrin, who launched his trade in 1571 and, owing to the high-quality of his craft, soon attained a prominent position among his competitors and printed a large amount of music.

… **Georgii Nigrini**
With brief intervals, in addition to numerous other prints, Nigrin published polyphonic pieces throughout the time of his activity, spanning more than 30 years. He issued about four dozen prints of vocal polyphony, as well as numerous hymn-books and single sheets with musical notation. Besides typographically simpler and altogether slender prints, Nigrin also published extensive collections; for instance, Jacob Handl Gallus's motets for the whole ecclesiastical year. In the music printing domain, he became an imperial typographer in Prague, as the bulk of the works he published were written by Rudolf II's musicians and composers, including those who only stayed at the court temporarily. One of the first publications of vocal polyphony that Nigrin issued was Mateo Flecha the Younger's *Las Ensaladas* (1581), comprising a collection of various secular pieces by Spanish composers. Furthermore, Nigrin published virtually the entire vocal oeuvre of the imperial organist Charles Luython, who spent all his productive life in Prague. Other Rudolfine composers too commissioned Nigrin to print their works, as did some of the Silesian musicians.

Altera pars selectissimarum cantionum… and the others?
Besides Nigrin, several other typographers published music in Rudolfine Prague, yet for the most part it concerned individual opuses. An exception among them was Mikuláš Strauss (Pštros), who issued (in two editions, in 1609 and 1611) a vast collection of masses by the imperial organist and composer Charles Luython, *Liber I. Missarum,* in the large folio format, dedicated to Rudolf II himself. In 1609, Strauss published in Prague Nicolaus Zangio's *Magnificat* in the same format. In 1585, Michael Peterle, a former associate of Nigrin's, printed an intriguing book of chants, *Obsequiale sive Benedictionale*, and in 1586, on the occasion of Jan Václav Popel of Lobkovice's wedding, he issued a music publication containing a five-part vocal piece by Jiří Molitor. During Nigrin's lifetime, in 1595 the printer Jan Othmar published *Liber primus motectorum,* a collection of works by the imperial musician Mathias de Sayve.

Jacob Typotius, Anselm Boetius de Boodt, Symbola Divina & Humana, Prague, Jiří Nigrin, 1601, print, title sheet, printed by means of the copperplate-engraving technique

De musica practica liber primus

During the Rudolfine era, Prague and other Bohemian cities and cultural centres did not, however, make use for performance of music published by domestic printers alone. Prague was linked up to European trade networks of all kinds. Accordingly, it was not difficult to procure music published in Frankfurt, Venice or Antwerp. Bearing witness to this is the large quantity of music prints, various in content and provenance, which have been preserved in Bohemian and Moravian book collections. Rudolfine composers also often had their works printed beyond Prague and, depending on their contacts, interests, preferences, origin and language, turned to typographers in other European countries. Those whose music was never printed in Bohemia included the imperial Kapellmeister, Philippe de Monte, and his deputy, Jacob Regnart. They gave preference to more renowned Italian and Dutch printing offices, which were most probably better connected to the European distribution network than their Czech counterparts. None the less, and largely owing to Jiří Nigrin, the music printing industry in Bohemia attained an excellent standard during the Rudolfine era, representing a remarkable stage in the discipline's development.

Jiří Nigrin of Nigropont – a master of Rudolfine music printing

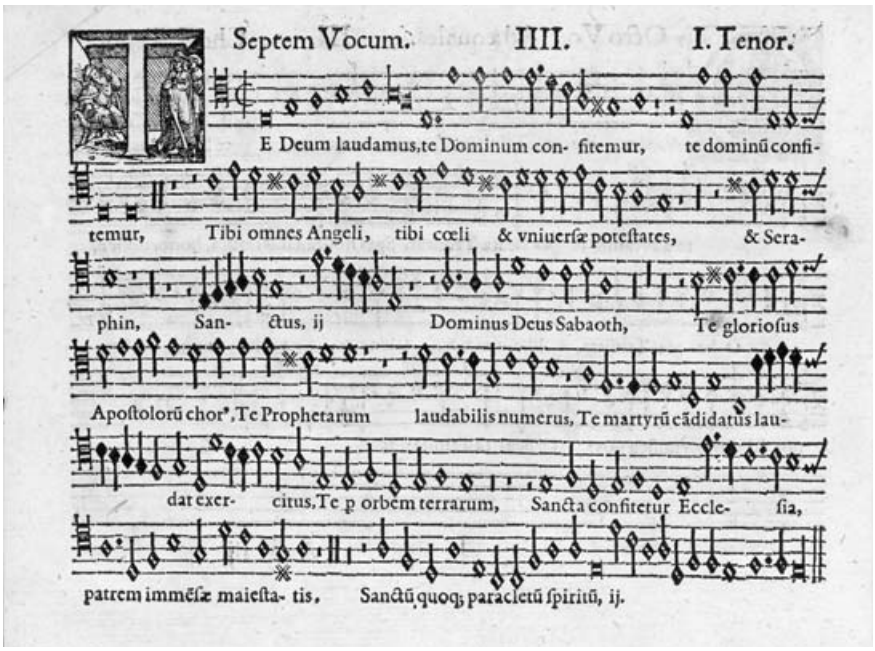
Petra Jakoubková

It all begins with a marriage

The beginning of Nigrin's "career" did not differ in any way from the standard model of printers at the time. When reading the profiles of many a 16th-century typographer, they often begin with the words: "He acquired the printing office upon marrying the widow of the printer…" The downsides of this profession included the sheer dirtiness of the everyday work with printing ink and lead, which had a negative impact on the typographers' health. Consequently, after the death of their husbands, the typographers' widows faced the problem of ensuring the continued operation of the printing offices, which they wanted to retain as a family business for children who had yet to reach adulthood. Hence, the easiest solution was to remarry: either the factor of their own workshop or another typographer, who would take over the operation of the plant. In 1572, following the death of one Jan Jičínský, Nigrin married his widow, Magdalena, thus gaining possession of the deceased's printing office, including the very expensive equipment. Yet Nigrin differed from most of his colleagues in many respects. Most notably, unlike other printers, he did not die prematurely: although we do not know the age he lived to (there are no preserved records of his date of birth), we do know that he ran his independent printing shop for some 35 years. During his unusually long career, Nigrin produced about 600 prints.

Printing works by imperial musicians

Another aspect in which Nigrin's life and professional work differed from that of his competitors is of major significance to us. Nigrin possessed great dexterity and business acumen, whereby he was promptly able to fill the gap in the plethora of trades in Prague which lacked a typographer printing polyphonic music. Nigrin devoted to printing music right at the very beginning of his career, with his first publications of polyphony collections dating from the 1570s. Upon the relocation of the Imperial Court to Prague, the city saw the arrival of numerous musicians and composers to serve in Rudolf II's orchestra, who in their new domicile soon sought someone who could print their works. And they found him in Jiří Nigrin, who would virtually become the exclusive printer of vocal polyphony in Rudolfine Prague. The composers who had their pieces printed by



Example of music typesetting in Jiří Nigrin's polyphonic music prints (Jacob Handl Gallus, Musici operis, 1587)

Nigrin included Jacob Handl Gallus, Charles Luython, Franz Sale, Tiburtio Massaino, Jacobus de Kerle, Giovanni Battista Pinello and others. The quality of the music prints from his office was superb, and in this respect Nigrin was actually unrivalled in Prague. Yet he was not the only typographer in the city possessing equipment for music printing. At the time, there were others in Prague capable of supplying music prints using simple typesetting (Jiří Melantrich of Aventino, Burian Valda, Jiří Jakubův Dačický and Jiří Othmar Dačický, Michael Peterle, Anna Schumannová etc.), yet none of them devoted to music printing as systematically and to such an extent as Nigrin did. If some of Nigrin's contemporaries did embark upon music printing, they mainly produced prints with dominant text typesetting supplemented with shorter music notation typesetting of a monophonic song, whereas Nigrin mastered the production of extensive vocal polyphony prints, which required greater professional skills, as well as a larger stock of music notation types. The few polyphonic music prints that were made outside Nigrin's office may be deemed exceptions. When we compare the 73 preserved music prints produced by Nigrin – including prints of polyphonic works, songs and single sheets – with those made in all the other Prague workshops (which taken together totalled approximately half of those published by Nigrin alone), there is no doubt that Nigrin absolutely dominated the music printing business in Rudolfine Prague.

Foreign contacts

Yet by no means can Nigrin be considered just a local printer who surpassed those around him owing solely to a lack of serious competitors. The quality of his music prints was very high even when compared to those produced abroad, where the music printing was far more advanced. Nigrin closely observed the development in other countries and knew very well what types of prints were made there. The preserved catalogues of the Frankfurt book fairs reveal that Nigrin was often in attendance. At this juncture, however, it should be pointed out that he was not the only Prague printer who appeared at the trade fair – as documented, it was also visited on several occasions by Michael Peterle, Jiří Melantrich of Aventino, Daniel Adam of Veleslavín and Jan Othmar Dačický. Although the catalogues do not contain any mention of Nigrin offering any of his polyphonic music prints, it is evident that they were demanded by and sold to foreign customers, as illustrated by the numerous prints produced at Nigrin's workshop which have been preserved in Polish and German archives. Accordingly, there is no doubt that Nigrin was well familiar with the book-printing craft beyond the Czech lands, as were his Prague-based colleagues. And not surprisingly, as in the 16th century a printer could not afford to live in isolation from his foreign counterparts. Owing to the fact that no professional type foundry existed in Bohemia until the 17th century, the local printers had to import equipment for the printing of not only music

notation, but also of texts and book ornamentation. Most frequently, they purchased it in neighbouring Germany, particularly Nuremberg. Admittedly, Nigrin had inherited his workshop equipment, including the music notation types, from his predecessor, Jan Jičínský, yet he too continued to extend the inventory of the printing office. We know for certain that, in 1586 at least, he enlarged his stock of music notation types. Today, we can only conjecture as to the reason why Nigrin bought new equipment: the original notation types may have been damaged or otherwise unsatisfactory, or, more likely, he needed a greater number of them for his thriving business so as to be able to set more extensive musical works (in that very year, 1586, he started to print Jacob Handl Gallus's collection, for which he needed a large supply of notation types). Nigrin purchased the new equipment in Nuremberg, as can be deduced when comparing his prints with those produced in some of the Nuremberg-based printing offices.

What did Nigrin's music prints look like?

In line with the European standard, the vocal polyphony books from Nigrin's workshop have the customary cross quarto format. One music page contained 5–6 staves, and the prints were usually furnished with an introduction and list of compositions. With a few exceptions, the front pages of polyphonic music prints looked identical throughout Nigrin's career: the visibly distinguished title of the collection, with the name of the creator written below and the entire page being markedly dominated by the name of the part pressed into a woodcut decorative frame, placed in the bottom half of the page, which ended with the printer's imprint and the year of printing. On the other hand, the front sheets of prints comprising monophonic songs were far less uniform. Naturally, they too featured the title of the book and its creator (unless his name had to be kept secret, so as to sidetrack censorship and publish a work by a banned artist), yet at first glance they come across as far more variegated. Nigrin would often highlight the type by using red ink, alternating black and red lines. Within a single page, the height of lines varied too, depending on the particular information that it was necessary to highlight. Some of the title pages already contained illustrations or tiny typographical ornaments, or the entire page was framed with decorative woodcut band. The printer's imprint did not appear on all the title pages; in some cases it was placed at the very end of the book. Generally, the title pages were at the time most frequently printed from typesetting, meaning that both the individual letters and the ornamentation were put together from tiny segments. Even though the title pages were originally included in the books rather with the aim of protecting the printed text itself (as the front page was the most susceptible to being damaged or torn off), over time they gradually began to be understood as that which identified the print, mediating the reader's first contact with the book. As a consequence, the title pages were paid ever-increasing attention. Copperplate title pages, whose lines were more delicate and drawings more detailed, started to occur as well. In the case of this printing technique, in addition to an illustration, the entire text was engraved in the copperplate. It would very much appear that the first Bohemian printer to have included a copperplate title page in his print was Nigrin himself, who first applied it in *Empresas morales* (1581) and later on in Jacobus Typotius's books *Symbola divina* (1601) and *Symbola varia* (1602), as well as in the music collection *Odae suavissimae*.

Unlike prints of monofonic songs featuring more complex illustrations, the one and only decorative element of polyphonic music prints, besides tiny trimmings (serving to fill in the void space under the stave), was initial letters. Nigrin had available 21 initial letter alphabets, ranging from those amply adorned with floral or figurative motifs to totally plain letters. We should not imagine that every set of initial letters was a unique original copy owned by a single printer alone. The very opposite was the case. At the time, initial letters, typefaces and ornamentations were already produced in series, and thus several printing offices had identical typesetting elements. When we compare the prints from several Prague workshops, we can see that some of the initial letters were identical. Yet when it comes to music notation, the situation was rather different, as they were a much more specific element of the typography. At first glance, the notation types from individual Prague printers generally differ, and they can even serve to determine the office that produced typographically anonymous works.

Nigrin's illustrious career ended under circumstances similar to those under which it started. He died in 1606, and his widow, Alžběta, remarried – who else but a printer: Jonata Bohutský of Hranice. Yet although Nigrin's shop continued to operate under the name of another typographer, after his death its printing of music began to wane (after 1606, it only published two prints of songs, and no prints of polyphonic music). Bohutský did not make use of the ample stock of Nigrin's music notation types, and in the wake of the Battle of the White Mountain (1620) he sold the whole printing office. The question remains of where Nigrin's extensive equipment – thanks to which so many remarkable music prints came into the world – may have ended up. Could it be that it became the property of the Prague Jesuits?

Josef Špaček
Dvořák, Suk, Janáček: Violin Concertos

Josef Špaček – violin,
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra,
Jiří Bělohlávek – conductor.
Text: English, German, French, Czech.
Recorded: Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague, 2014. Released: 2015.
TT: 66:12. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 4182-2.

At the age of 28, **Josef Špaček** has been afforded the opportunity to record three seminal Czech violin concertos – a truly exciting, challenging task. (To complete the mission, he should now focus on Bohuslav Martinů's concertos…) He has thus finally stepped out from the shadow of his role as concert master of the Czech Philharmonic, the orchestra who accompanied him when he recorded the album. How did he fare? How does he stand in comparison with the top violinists he would perhaps like to be ranked among? I tried to find the answers to my questions by listening to five different albums, mainly containing recordings of Dvořák's violin concerto, made by the following artists: Josef Suk (1960), Anne-Sophie Mutter (2013), Julia Fischer (2013), Pamela Frank (1998) and Frank Peter Zimmermann (2014). Although several solid reasons can be given for not granting Špaček the highest evaluation, I will now try to explain why I insist upon it.

First, the facts *against*. Josef Špaček does not possess a tone as magically colourful as that of Mutter and Fischer. Although his technique is flawless, negotiating with grace the pitfalls of Dvořák's and Suk's works alike, it does not come across as fantastically transparent, as in the case of Zimmermann and the two ladies. *Problematic against*: the sound produced technically by Deutsche Grammophon (Mutter) and, even more so, Decca (Zimmermann) is softer, more rounded than the "functionalist" sound generated by Supraphon (Špaček). Naturally, this statement is subjective, as the Czech label's audio aesthetics and tradition are simply different, and this singularity has after all been praised by numerous specialists worldwide.

First, I will put aside the recordings that do not chime with me personally or, notwithstanding their positives, primarily serve to document the particular period. Under the baton of Sir Charles Mackerras and supported by the Czech Philharmonic, Pamela Frank strove to play Dvořák and Suk in an informed manner, yet her performance pales when compared to that of Mutter and Fischer (it was more forcible in the hall during a live concert), with Špaček being one class higher. The recording made by Suk with the conductor Karel Ančerl and the well-prepared Czech Philharmonic was benchmark for several decades (some violinists even deemed it untouchable), but Špaček has succeeded in stepping out of its shadow and, though respecting some of the attributes of the "Czech tradition", he has elegantly formulated his opinion of all the three pieces. (Serving as an example in this, rather more general, respect, is the flow of the second movement: Špaček's 9:55 as against Suk's 11:30, which naturally had to vent itself in all the aspects of interpretation.)

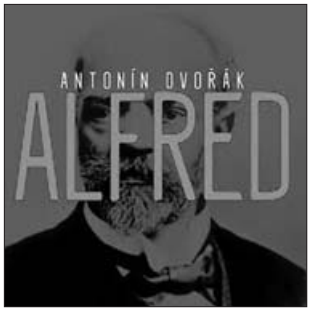
The performances of Dvořák's concerto by Zimmermann and Mutter are exceptional indeed in terms of tone. Zimmermann's approach reflects the contemporary world – its restlessness, volatility, disrespect of the autograph and the music's spiritual essence with the aim to capture attention. When listening to his recording, I feel admiration for the violinist's technical perfection, but also discomposure and even a reluctance to return to such a view of Dvořák's work. Yet the frantic (probably record-breaking) pace of the first and final movements (9:28, 9:46), offset by the inorganically ostentatious meditativeness of the Adagio (10:18, as against Špaček's 9:55), is merely a framework. What is more significant is the strange leading of the melodic line, phrasing, modified dynamics and agogics, and the like. Mutter is simply Mutter, and she would not change her stubbornness in putting across her conception. As regards the first movement, the most content-packed, she attained the opposite record (12:26), and she handled the autograph score with an even greater arbitrariness than Zimmermann. Of course, it sounds amazing, but sometimes her non-vibrato and glissandos are simply too much to bear (the Adagio). The Berliner Philharmoniker and Manfred Honeck gladly backed her up. Nonetheless, I look forward to April 2016, when Prague is scheduled to hear Mutter's take on Dvořák live, and I wonder how the Czech Philharmonic will cope with it professionally. I admit that I might be wrong and that it is possible that the virtuoso glamour, absolute perfectionism, heavenly supple suspension of time and cheerfully free rendition of the music score is the right approach and is precisely how Dvořák should sound in the 21st century…

For? Fortunately, Špaček will never be either a Zimmermann or a Mutter (even though I would like him to have their instruments). His account reveres Dvořák's autograph score the most. (By the way, I laud the flexibility of Jiří Bělohlávek and the Czech Philharmonic for their brilliantly mastering both Špaček and Zimmermann within a relatively short time!) He has an amazingly light right hand, a great sense for leading of the melody, dance rhythm, and is able to accurately gauge emotions. The only recording anywhere close to that of Špaček's is Fischer's. In my opinion, however, the Czech violinist's rendition of the third movement of Dvořák's concerto is the best I have ever heard. What is more, and with all due respect to the Tonhalle Orchester, the Czech Philhamonic's wind section is better.

As performed by Špaček, Suk's Fantasy is a rhapsodic, amply patterned, yet monolithic work. Even though it is not easy, Špaček has managed to afford a compactness to the compositionally original structure. Coming across even more forcibly is Janáček's coherent musical soliloquy, poignancy within the borders of a solid interpretational structure. Špaček's accounts of the Dvořák, Suk and Janáček pieces are extremely convincing; his reading of Janáček's work impressed me most in all the attributes.

Jiří Bělohlávek allegedly thoroughly explored and prepared the scores with Josef Špaček. I do not know whether it is true

reviews



or not, yet the fruit of their collaboration is a transparency of all their details, with the Czech Philharmonic's well-known fortes irradiating throughout. I even had the feeling (also on the basis of my visual experience) that the orchestra played with love and bold empathy for the soloist. In this context, the Supraphon sound is closer to my heart than that of Decca and Deutsche Grammophon. In every way, the Czech Philharmonic did a great job accompanying Špaček in all three masterpieces.

Luboš Stehlík

Antonín Dvořák: Alfred

Petra Froese – soprano, Ferdinand von Bothmer – tenor, Felix Rumpf – baritone, Jörg Sabrowski – baritone, Peter Mikuláš – bass, Tilmann Unger – tenor, Jarmila Baxová – soprano, Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno, Petr Fiala – chorus master, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Marek Štilec – assistant conductor, Heiko Mathias Förster – conductor.
Text: English, Czech. Recorded live: 16–17 September 2014, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2015. TT: 117:54.
2 CDs Arco Diva UP 0140-2611.

Antonín Dvořák: Armida

Dana Burešová – soprano, Tomáš Černý – tenor, Ulf Paulsen – baritone, Martin Gurbaľ – bass, Martin Bárta – baritone, David Szendiuch – bass-baritone, Martin Šrejma – tenor, Matěj Chadima – baritone, Peter Svetlík – tenor, Roman Vlkovi – bass, Ondřej Koplík – tenor, Martin Štolba – baritone, Marianna Pillárová – soprano, Chorus and Orchestra of the Opera of the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre in Ostrava, Jurij Galatenko – chorus master, Robert Jindra – conductor.
Text: Czech, English. Recorded live: 8 November 2012, Antonín Dvořák Theatre, Moravian-Silesian Theatre, Ostrava. Released: 2015. TT: 161.46.
DDD. 3 CDs Moravian-Silesian Theatre / Czech Radio

The late fruits of the Year of Czech Music 2014, which saw the light in parallel in January 2015, include two live recordings of Antonín Dvořák's totally, or rather, unknown operas, *Alfred* and *Armida*, framing the composer's music-drama creations between 1870 and 1903. Dvořák's first, three-act, opera, to K. T. Körner's German libretto, *Alfred*, B. 16 (1870), and his final, four-act, opera, to Jaroslav Vrchlický's text, *Armida*, Op. 115 B. 206 (1903), have more in common than readers of superficial encyclopaedia entries may guess. The heroic *Alfred* and the fantasy *Armida* are set in the historical period of the early and late Middle Ages, respectively. Both works depict the struggle between nations and their religions, with Christianity prevailing and baptism serving to symbolise their reconciliation. Among Czech operas, both *Alfred* and *Armida* are specific owing to their masculinity, as, with the exception of a lead and one minor role, all the solos are assigned to male singers. Yet first and foremost, the two works are the outcome of Dvořák's lifelong being in touch and wrestling with Wagner's music-dramatic legacy, which in *Alfred*, as a young composer, he obediently followed, and in *Armida* masterfully developed in the sonic garb of late Romanticism and nascent Impressionism. Both works, neither of them trouble-free in terms of dramaturgy and interpretation, had to wait a long time for being (re)discovered: *Alfred* for its revitalisation, *Armida* for being rehabilitated. Whereas *Alfred* saw its world premiere on a recording, the latest disc of *Armida* was preceded by three older albums, released in 1956 (Václav Jiráček, Multisonic), 1961 (Albrecht George Alexander, most recently Cantus Classics), and 1995 (Gerd Albrecht, Orfeo d'Or).

The older of the two live recordings, of *Armida,* was made in November 2012 during a radio broadcast of a performance on the stage of the Antonín Dvořák Theatre of the Moravian-Silesian Theatre in Ostrava, conducted by **Robert Jindra**. Owing to the CD, his account of Dvořák's *Armida* will serve as a monument to Jindra's tenure in Ostrava, a monument of a strikingly high quality, when we take into account that it is a live recording of a rerun of a dramaturgically bold yet, nonetheless, still regional opera stage's production. The technical parameters of the live recording, with occasional clatters on the stage, the final applause of the, otherwise disciplined, audience, the resonating rendition of the singers may disqualify it in comparison with the current multi-channel standard of opera productions' broadcasts, yet none of the previous recordings of performances of *Armida*, including the mono recording of the one conducted by Jiráček, the technically and interpretationally problematic live recording of Alexander's conception, and the not entirely balanced Albrecht creation, are devoid of deficiencies and imperfections. The main fortes of Jindra's creation (if I am not mistaken, the very first recording of an opera production he has conducted) are its indisputable artistic qualities and the singers cast in all the solo roles (**Marianna Pillárová** as the Siren, **Martin Štolba** as the Muezzin), as well as the chorus of Crusader Knights – **Martin Šrejma**, **Matěj Chadima**, **Peter Svetlík**, **Roman Vlkovič** and **Ondřej Koplík**.

The lead roles in the production were entrusted to leading Czech soloists and two foreign guests – Slovakia's **Martin Gurbaľ** (settled in Ostrava), who performed King Hydraot as a careworn father yet still noble character, and Germany's **Ulf Paulsen**, who forcibly portrayed Ismen. Whereas Paulsen as Ismen cannot be compared to the demonically cogent Ladislav Mráz in Jiráček's production (although, on the other hand, Paulsen was far better prepared than the superficial George Fortune on Albrecht's recording), at a few junctures, Gurbaľ as Hydraot is almost as good as Zdeněk Otava in Jiráček's creation. Coping with the perfunctory, yet religiously exalted, role of the Crusade commander

Gottfried of Bouillon is no easy task, but the determined young singer **Martin Bárta** managed it better than Albrecht's soloist, Vratislav Kříž. Although until its rehabilitation in Ostrava (let us hope, for good) *Armida* did not establish itself on stages for a long time, the cast of the two lead roles was already superlative on previous recordings: Jiráček's (M. Šubrtová – I. Žídek), Alexander's (M. Caballé – Kurt Ruesche), and Albrecht's (J. Borowska – W. Ochman). While Šubrtová and Žídek were absolutely peerless in terms of declamation, timbre and expression, **Dana Burešová** as Armida in Jindra's creation was nearly as good as Borowska, who was perhaps merely better as regards the timbre. I would, however, like to add that since the cautious premiere performance, Burešová has succeeded in masterfully rendering the role, balancing between dramatic and young-dramatic soprano, and I cannot imagine any other Czech singer being able to portray it better. **Tomáš Černý** was comparable to his predecessors in many respects (exemplary declamation), but in the final analysis he sang over-cautiously and did not attain Žídek's sovereignty or Ochman's intoxicating Slavonic presence. Nevertheless, Jindra got together a team of top-class Czech opera singers, all of them striving for flawless declamation and showing a commitment to Dvořák's work, one fraught with plenty of stumbling blocks the performers have to overcome.

A sturdy buttress to Jindra's creation was provided by the **National Moravian-Silesian Theatre Opera Chorus** (chorus master: **Jurij Galatenko**) and, most notably, the **National Moravian-Silesian Theatre Opera Orchestra,** who may not possess the technical qualities of the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra that fleshed out Förster's account of *Alfred*, yet they outshone the latter with the ability, by means of sharper accents, articulation and phrasing, to comment on and underline the action on stage, to create the desired atmosphere and exude operatic pathos. In this respect, I would clearly rank the orchestral constituent of Jindra's recording better than that of the older creations, including that of Jiráček's, especially given the fact that the attentive listener, for whom Jindra's recording also serves as an important study material, is aided by the specific acoustics of the Ostrava theatre, making the middle parts more transparent. The National Moravian-Silesian Theatre Opera Orchestra have simply succeeded in reviving Dvořák's score. Accordingly, the orchestra, alongside the solo singers, have played a key role in *Armida*'s resuscitation. Another quality of the reviewed album, made up of three discs, is its opulent graphic layout, including photographs of the performance (**Martin Popelář**), and the brief yet sufficiently informative booklet text. The main deficiency of the recording, though, is its being non-commercially released by the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre, in collaboration with Czech Radio, which compels those interested in the album to contact the theatre's management and does not allow for the possibility of purchase through the regular distribution network (I simply cannot believe that it was not possible to motivate Naxos or Arco Diva for co-operation in this respect). Although a non-commercial release is a canny way of avoiding further distribution costs (the artists' copyrights), it is also a grave strategic error, as those interested in Dvořák's opera are disadvantaged, with the possible result being that Jindra and his team's admirable revival of *Armida* is easily forgotten in the media matrix.

In stark contrast, the first complete recording of Dvořák's debut opera, *Alfred*, was right from the beginning targeted at a pan-European audience. One of the dramaturgically most intriguing projects of the Year of Czech Music 2014, it came into being during the Dvořák Prague festival, in a co-production of Arco Diva and Czech Radio. When comparing the albums of *Armida* and *Alfred*, the latter should be at a considerable advantage. Although it was also recorded live, in the case of *Alfred* it concerned a concert performance, during which all the singers could focus on their vocal performance, without having to act on the stage. The qualities of the orchestras in Prague and Ostrava cannot be compared either (for the time being), even though it is impossible not to hear a lack of experience with opera on the part of the Prague Radio Symphony, even if the occasional insufficient drama cannot be attributed to the orchestra but rather the conductor. Neither can we compare the acoustic qualities of the Rudolfinum and the resulting recording with the Ostrava project, as they are far higher. On the other hand, one would expect a renowned music label to have taken far greater care with the album' graphic design than a regional opera house (within a short time, the recording of *Alfred* was released with a different design, owing to the miserable original version, featuring a commercially repulsive red sleeve).

Great attention was paid to the cast, which was selected by the late **Gerd Albrecht**, who was succeeded by the German conductor **Heiko Mathias Förste**r. Dazzling in the minor male roles were **Tilmann Unger** (Dorset / Herald) and **Peter Mikuláš** (Sieward), who had thus included another, albeit quaint, Dvořák character in his repertoire. Rowena was reliably performed by **Jarmila Baxová**. **Ferdinand von Bothmer** as Harald and **Jörg Sabrowski** as Gothron have proved to be examples of the unquestionable qualities of the German voice school, at least when it came to declamation and vocal technique. Befitting the roles both in terms of character and timbre, they did the maximum for their resurrection. Assigning the role of Alfred to the young baritone **Felix Rumpf** was an inspired idea indeed. Within a single week, I heard him singing in Dvořák and Zelenka pieces, and it is evident that he adroitly combines performing early and Romantic music, and he even sang with the Collegium Vocale Gent on Herreweghe's recent recording of Dvořák's *Requiem*. Rumpf possesses an ideal young voice of a significant range and, most markedly, superb expressive qualities. Regrettably, his performance overshadowed that of Petra Froese, a Czech soprano based in Germany, who portrayed the lead female role of Alvina; she either had an off-day or the character was simply beyond her current abilities. Her timbre was akin to that of the young singer Livia Ágh, Albrecht's court Dvořák soprano, yet notwithstanding her faultless declamation, she was incapable of overcoming the technical pitfalls and the sound of the orchestra and choir and, if she did, it was at the expense of pushing her voice too far.

The **Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno**, led by the chorus master **Petr Fiala**, delivered their usual high-quality performance, acquitting themselves well of the German text and the dense texture. Occasionally, Dvořák's score proved to be difficult for the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, though. They already displayed limitations and insufficient drama, or perhaps a deliberate oratorio-like frescoid nature, in the overture, the opera's best-known part, which on older commercial recordings made by Pešek (Naxos, 1986) and Kukal (TIM, 1997) came across as definitely more ebullient. Fortunately, the sluggish tempo was only applied by Förster in the overture, not the subsequent instrumental numbers. Bearing witness to the opera's compositional potential is at least the ballet music at the end of Act I (will we ever live to see a series of CDs comprising the ballet scenes in Dvořák's operas?). Förster should be praised for his evident interest in the work itself (he will conduct the suite during the concert season of the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra in Ostrava), yet he did not take any risks and his conception lacked the operatic melos. He can, however, be excused by having to cope with Dvořák's challenging, rather experimental score.

In conclusion, I cannot help but voice my surprise at the absence in the booklets of printed librettos: while the Ostrava release directly refers to Ondřej Šupka's Antonín Dvořák website, the Prague team placed the libretto in digital form on the second of the two CDs. This somewhat diminishes the listener's comfort, particularly given the fact that neither of the operas is a regular repertoire work. Well, it would very much seem that the era of lavish CD packs containing opera recordings and voluminous booklets has gone for good. Yet publishing the libretto would tackle another, in my opinion, vital problem; that is, familiarising the listeners with the editing of the scores. *Alfred* was played from the material in the possession of the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, prepared for

the production in collaboration with musicologists of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, whereas the music of *Armida* was bar-by-bar edited from the problematic performance material, distributed in its entirety. As neither of the operas is presented on the reviewed recordings complete and without deletions, the listeners surely deserve to be informed of the respective revisions. By the way, today such data are routinely included in the booklets for albums of many a second-rate Baroque opera. So we can only hope that the two albums will find their way to Czech and foreign listeners and opera fans, for whom they could be an interesting diversification (*Alfred*) or discovery (*Armida*). The recordings can surely help to pave the way for *Armida* to be performed on opera stages, and for *Alfred* at least to be heard at concert venues in the German-speaking countries.

Martin Jemelka

Robert Schumann: Piano Concerto in A major, Op. 54 Clara Schumann: Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 7

Jitka Čechová – piano, Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra Olomouc, Petr Vronský – conductor.
Text: Czech, English. Recorded live: Nov. 2009, Nov. 2010, Moravian Philharmonic Olomouc Hall. Released: 2015. TT: 52:00. DDD. 1 CD Triart Recording TR009.

For her new album, **Jitka Čechová** has chosen an attractive combination of works: Robert Schumann's celebrated *Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54*, one of the most popular Romantic piano concertos there is, and the rarely performed *Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 7,* by his wife Clara. In 1845, when Robert Schumann completed his piece, he was 35 years of age. Clara began writing her piano concerto in 1833, at the tender age of 13(!), finished it when she was 14 and premiered it – still as Clara Wieck – at the age of 16, at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn. Even though her concerto is more in line with the contemporary conventions and more aimed at external effect than the concerto written by her future husband, it cannot be disputed as regards the originality of ideas and the singular stylisation of the piano part. With respect to the fact that Clara was allegedly assisted with the instrumentation by Robert, it comes as no surprise that many a thing in her piece is reminiscent of his style. In addition, it contains a number of striking details referring to Mendelssohn and, most notably, Chopin.

Jitka Čechová plays Robert Schumann's piano concerto with remarkable humility, in enchanting pastel colours, with wonderful and ample rubatos and finely nuanced dynamic oscillations, hence – her indisputable brilliance notwithstanding – it would almost seem that she rather perceives the work as chamber music. And her extraordinary, yet very impressive, conception is endorsed by the Moravian Philharmonic Olomouc, whose conductor, Petr Vronský, gives preference to highlighting the tone qualities of the individual instruments than the compact "mass" of the orchestral sound (excellent woodwinds and surprisingly subdued brass instruments). Jitka Čechová and the orchestra pay no less attention to the performance of Clara Schumann's concerto, approaching it equally seriously as Robert's piece. The outcome is adorable indeed – in comparison with Robert's far more famous piece, Clara's work stands its ground very well. There is no doubt that Clara Schumann was an extremely bold personality, possessing an outstanding creative potential. Hence, after hearing this album, the question arises of how she might have progressed as an artist had fate allowed her to devote solely to composing…

Věroslav Němec

Antonín Dvořák: String Quintet No. 2 in G major, Op. (18) 77, B. 49, Nocturne for Spring Orchestra in B major, Op. 40, B. 47, String Quintet No. 3 in E flat major, Op. 97, B. 180 (2nd movement)

Berlin Philharmonic String Quintet: Thomas Timm, Romano Tommasini (violin), Wolfgang Talirz (viola), Tatjana Vassilieva (cello), Nabil Shehata (double-bass).
Text: English, German, French. Recorded: June 2011, Muziekgebouw Frits Philips, Eindhoven. Released: 2011. TT: 46:02. 1 SACD PentaTone Classics PTC 5186 458

Antonín Dvořák: Bagatelles, Op. 47, B. 79, Terzetto in C major, Op. 74, B. 148, String Quintet No. 2 in G-major, Op. (18) 77, B. 49

Scharoun Ensemble Berlin: Wolfram Brandl, Rachel Schmidt (violin), Micha Afkham (viola), Richard Duven (cello), Peter Riegelbauer (double-bass), Wolfgang Kühnl (harmonium).
Text: English, German, French. Recorded: May/June 2013, Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg, Saal 3 (Opp. 47, 77), Kammermusiksaal der Berliner Philharmonie (Op. 74), Berlin. Released: 2015. TT: 69:54. 1 CD Tudor Recording TUDOR 7187

Within the space of a mere two years, two recordings of Antonín Dvořák's music, both of them containing his 1875 *String Quartet No. 2,* Op. 77 (formerly 18), B. 49, were made by two chamber ensembles of the Berliner Philharmoniker, its **String Quintet** and the **Scharoun Ensemble Berlin**: in June 2011 (PentaTone Classics) and May/June 2013 (Tudor). Both of them are centred around Dvořák's quintet for two violins, viola, cello and double-bass, which on the CD

by the Swiss label Tudor Recording is preceded by the 1878 piece *Bagatelles,* Op. 47, B. 79, for two violins, cello and harmonium, and the 1877 work *Terzetto in C major,* Op. 74, B. 148, for two violins and viola. Whereas Tudor staked on combining compositions for unusual configurations (the string quintet, with the second viola replaced by the double-bass; the "piano" quartet, with the harmonium instead of the piano and without the viola; the "string trio", employing the second violin instead of the viola), the Dutch label PentaTone Classics did not hesitate to focus in the short recording (46:02) on just a single work, supplemented by the genetically kindred *Nocturne in B major,* Op. 40, B. 47, and the second movement of *String Quintet No. 3 in E flat major*, Op. 97, B. 180, as arranged for the double-bass instead of the second viola. When leaving aside the fact that the number of recordings of Dvořák's attractive double-bass quintet, dating from his fruitful spring of 1875 (within a short period of time, he created *Piano Trio No. 1,* Op. 21, the *Serenade for Strings*, Op. 22, *Piano Quartet No. 1*, Op. 23, and *Symphony No. 5,* Op. [24] 78), has been growing (Leipzig String Quartet & Alois Posch / Dabringhaus und Grimm, Silesian String Quintet / Acte Préalable) – I have to laud the performance qualities of the two albums, even though they (fortunately) differ in many a conceptual and interpretational aspect. What they do have in common is an excellent sound (PentaTone Classics's release on a SACD, with Tudor's not anywise lagging behind) and a splendid graphic design (PentaTone Classic's applying subdued colours and furnished with a portrait of Dvořák dating from 1895, Tudor in a luxury typography featuring Antonín Slavíček's picture *Stromovka Park* (1907) – not his *Walking in the Park*, as stated in the booklet.

Although most of the members of the two ensembles have encountered one other, or previously used to meet in the ranks of the Berliner Philharmoniker, the ensembles differ not only as regards the time of their foundation but also, and most significantly, their specific approach to performing chamber music and its Dvořák metamorphosis. The Scharoun Ensemble Berlin, made up of string and wind instrumentalists, was formed back in 1983, while the Philharmonic String Quintet gave their first concert in 2007 (in Belgium). The Philharmonic String Quintet give preference to the compact sound of a chamber ensemble and observance of the macrostructure, while the Scharoun Ensemble thoroughly pursue the compositions' microstructure, differentiate the dynamics, apply sharper accentuation and savour details in articulation and phrasing. So much as the Quintet sounds like a small string orchestra, they do not drown out the middle parts in the compact sound, clearly gradating the individual instrumental lines. And whereas the Scharoun Ensemble have a penchant for soft dynamics (the first movement of the *Bagatelles* and the *Terzetto* express the lyrical tenderness of a love scene), the Philharmonic String Quintet in the finale of *String Quintet No. 2 in G-major* robustly reach for the strings, put their foot down in a dance manner in the deep strings and fill the listener's room with the spontaneity of Central European folk bands. Yet they do not eschew the dialogical nature of the opening bars of the first movement, while the glissandos in the finale may bring a smile to the listener's face. As a purist, I was less intrigued by the adapted second movement of Dvořák's *String Quintet No. 3 in E flat major,* arranged for the double-bass instead of the second viola, than by the *Nocturne in B major,* except for the division of the violins interpreted according to the orchestral version. In the darker sound, it sinks in silence, and in the middle section it splendidly accelerates, so as to chime with the poignancy of the Baroquely wistful piety. In this work, the Philharmonic String Quintet have raised the performance standard aloft, having been solidly aided by the state-of-the-art recording technology and the splendid acoustic properties of Eindhoven's Muziekgebouw Frits Philips concert hall.

The Scharoun Ensemble differentiate themselves from the Philharmonic String Quintet's homogenous sound by means of a refined sense for subtle dynamics and the technical potentialities of the individual instruments. Their placing emphasis on the pieces' inner structure does not allow the listener to rest, impelling him/her to follow the development of the compositions bar by bar, detail by detail, yet without fragmenting them. And whereas the Philharmonic String Quintet propel *String Quintet No. 3 in E flat major* forwards within the compact sound of their homogeneous performance, the Scharoun Ensemble move on through paying attention to all the motifs and themes, as though five Harnoncourts had met at a Berlin studio and toyed with each and every bar, exuding contagious joy. In the *Quintet in G major,* the *Bagatelles* and the *Terzetto* alike, the Scharoun Ensemble lay the emphasis on delicate dynamics, cantability and a bold lyrical charge, which sets their interpretation apart from the rather more robust Czech creations (of the Panocha Quartet and the Stamic Quartet). While in the *Bagatelles* the Schauron Ensemble take into account the tender sonic background of the harmonium, which only bestirs in the third and fourth movements, when it comes to the *Terzetto*, the first two, hyper-lyrical movements just prepare the ground for the jovial scherzo and the impetuous variation-filled finale. On a rainy day, listening to this album will undoubtedly warm Dvořák fans up and save from spleen everyone, especially a random audience. Both of the ensembles have shown their zest for chamber music playing, one of them ensemble-like robustly, the other solo-delicately, as well as their great affection for the treasures of Dvořák's chamber oeuvre. Whichever you happen to choose, you will not have got it wrong. By the way, the reviewed albums are not the only Dvořák recordings released by the two labels: Tudor's catalogue includes a very good disc comprising the *New World Symphony* and the *Suite in A major*, as performed by the Bamberg Symphony – Bavarian State Philharmonic, conducted by Robin Ticciati (Tudor 7194, 2013), while PentaTone Classics has to date released Dvořák's four late symphonies and four symphonic poems inspired by K. J. Erben's ballads, recorded by the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra Amsterdam under the baton of Yakov Kreizberg, which will soon be joined by a Dvořák trilogy by Jakub Hrůša, conducting the PKF – Prague Philharmonia. We have something to look forward to.

Martin Jemelka

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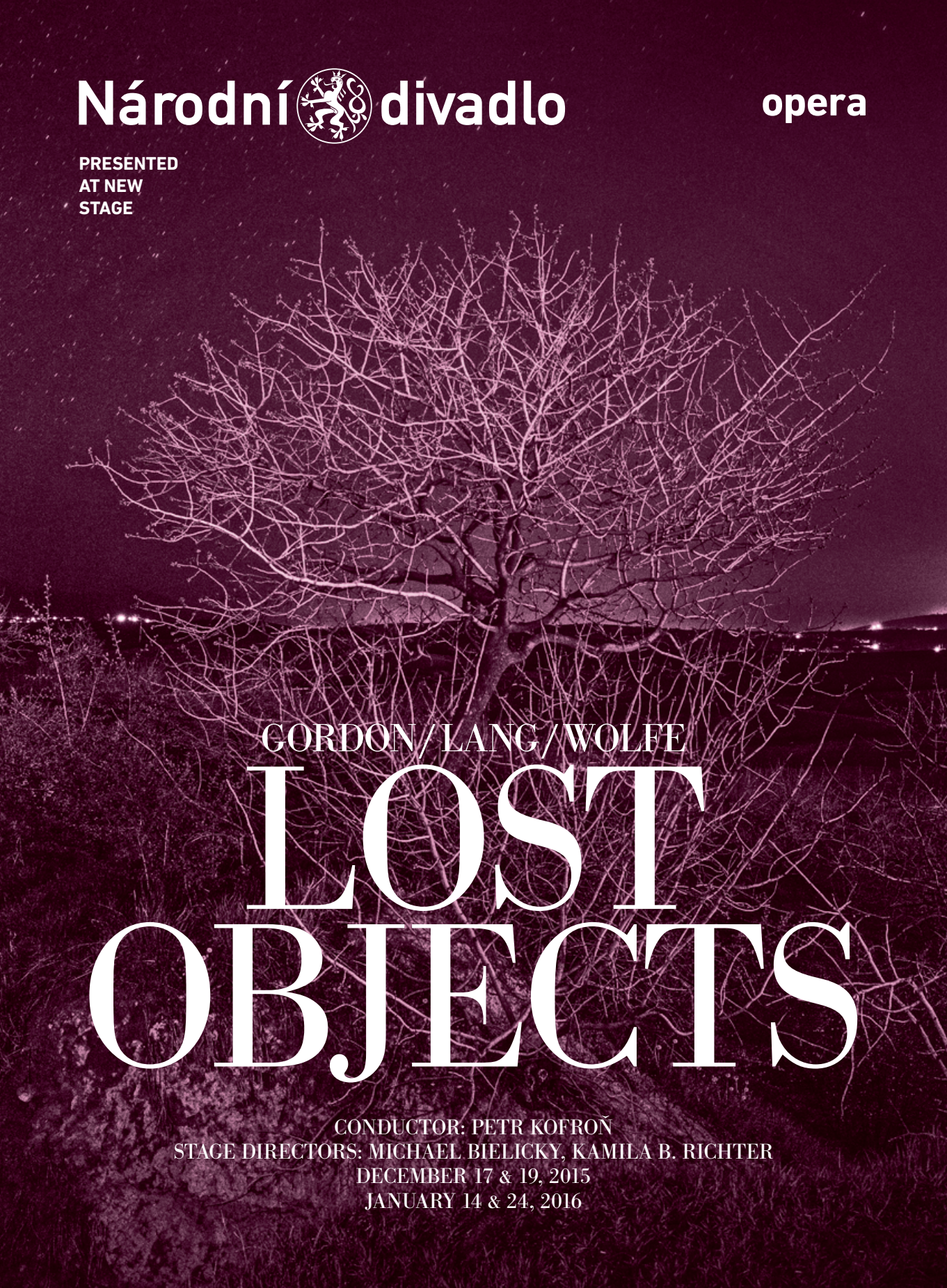

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