czech music *quarterly*

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Emmanuel Villaume

Charles IV and Music

Contempuls / Space & Sound

Music in the Stalinist Era

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Dear readers,

Dear readers,
As is customary, the final issue of the year maintains a fine balance between current events and excursions into history. Martin Horyna's article about the music in the Czech lands during the reign of Charles IV reveals that even at a relatively cursory glance, which the scope of a magazine study only allows, the matters seem to be far more complex than they are depicted within school history lessons. This actually holds true in the case of all high-quality texts about history, as evidenced by the final part of Viktor Pantůček's series dedicated to socialist realism in the era of Stalinism and the article by Tom Moore, who points out that the simplification we apply to telling the history of music may be inevitable, yet we should always bear in mind that it is still a simplification. And it applies as much to the turbulent periods of the 20th century whose ugliness has been generally agreed upon, as it does with regard to, for instance, the eras of Romanticism and Baroque, which music magazines in particular tend to depict in harmlessly kitschy colours. As for the texts pertaining to the contemporary Czech music scene (the new conductor of the Prague Philharmonia, the Contempuls festival, the Space & Sound concert for three orchestras), I am glad that, notwithstanding the name of our magazine, we find ourselves on ground whose content and outreach alike are more international than local.

All the very best in 2017
Petr Bakla

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cover: Marián Lejava and Jan Trojan, Contempuls festival 2016 (photo by Karel Šuster)

by Dita Hradecká

"THERE WAS A SPARK" EMMANUEL VILLAUME

In September 2015, the PKF – Prague Philharmonia launched its 22nd season with a new music director and a new motto: "New Style". The French conductor Emmanuel Villaume, who has mainly been living in the USA, has brought new impulses to the orchestra. Despite its relatively small basic configuration, he is not afraid to perform large-scale symphonic pieces, and he has duly enriched the repertoire with more French music. And he has also engaged a number of exciting soloists.

Villaume assessed his first season as the chief conductor of the PKF – Prague Philharmonia as highly positive: *"I feel great with the orchestra, as it has a great sense for detail and co-ordination, with the players listening to each other and interplaying. A love of music dominates in the orchestra."* The 23rd season is based on the W. A. Mozart and Johannes Brahms anniversaries. Under Villaume, the PKF – Prague Philharmonia is now getting ready for an extensive tour of the USA and also preparing interesting new recording projects.

You assumed the post of chief conductor of the PKF – Prague Philharmonia after Jakub Hrůša, who has been a darling of the Prague audience. Were you not worried about how you would be received in the city?

My joining the PKF – Prague Philharmonia was actually a logical step following several years of on and off collaboration. The orchestra and I had worked together on recordings with Anna Netrebko and Bryan Hymel, so when the management came up with the offer for me to take up the post of music director, I wasn't actually too surprised. My assuming of the function was preceded by a long "wooing" with the orchestra's leaders and a "sounding out" of each other with the players. The crucial

PHOTO: PAVEL HEJNÝ

thing for me, though, was that there was a spark between me and the musicians. I am very familiar with the orchestra's history. Jakub Hrůša and I had some long discussions, which is one of the reasons why I think there is the feeling of continuity. My intention is to link up to that which Messrs Bělohlávek and Hrůša have created. By the way, I have been continuing to co-operate with them. And when it comes to the audience – they have made the best of impressions on me. That may sound like a cliché and flattery, yet I do feel that I have been received in Prague positively. After all, bearing witness to it is the rising number of our subscribers.

How would you assess your first season at the helm of the PKF – Prague Philharmonia?

In the end, the success surpassed our expectations. I would like to extend my thanks to all my colleagues – musicians, as well as the wonderful audience, for their support and favour. We have being doing our best to pay them back for all their encouragement. We also gave performances outside Prague, and abroad. We promoted the extraordinary Czech spirit – at least in the artistic sense – around the world, either by means of recordings, or at Europe's most prominent concert halls. We have also performed in the Middle East, most frequently at the Royal Opera in Oman.

In the current season's programme, in which you, as music director and chief conductor, have had the main word, a few names stand out, that of Johannes Brahms in particular.

The Brahms anniversary has given us the excuse to present the artist as a composer of more chamber-like works. First and foremost, these include two serenades that have scarcely been performed. And we have also included Symphony No. 2, which, I would say, is the most chamber-like of Brahms's four.

And what about his German Requiem, a monumental choral piece?

I would like to carry out such projects with the PKF – Prague Philharmonia once a season. During the previous season, we performed Mendelssohn's Lobgesang to great acclaim. I don't think that the orchestra's chamber nature means that it cannot play such pieces. I for myself comprehend the word "chamber" in the interpretational sense – it entails listening to each other, phrasing, working together when creating music. The PKF – Prague Philharmonia has a great sense for detail and co-ordination, the players listen to each other and interplay, none of them strives to override the others, with the very opposite being the case – all of them are concerned about the whole. The musicians are very specifically bound together, which holds true both when all of them are on the stage playing a symphony by Beethoven and when a smaller group is performing a chamber piece… Some symphonies, Mendelssohn's, for instance, can be executed in a significantly reduced formation, after all, that is the way they were definitely played in his time. But I am also of the opinion that the orchestra should now and then transcend that which they usually do.

On the other hand, Mozart fits well into the orchestra's profile. His music is in its DNA.

The PKF – Prague Philharmonia has been closely connected with Mozart for a long time. In 2016, we are commemorating the 260th anniversary of Mozart's birth. Even though such anniversaries are somewhat artificial, we like savouring Mozart's music every day, and this is a good opportunity to play it even more often.

What does your work with the PKF – Prague Philharmonia actually bring to you in terms of your career?

PHOTO © MORRIS MEDIA 2015

The orchestra is made up of soloists, virtuosos, which is precisely that which I was seeking in this very phase of my career. I have succeeded in finding an ensemble who, in addition to giving concerts on home soil, would like to make recordings and tours abroad. This facet of the PKF – Prague Philharmonia has vivified my approach as music director and chief conductor. In my opinion, orchestras should regularly change their artistic directors, while the management should remain stable. This would prevent them getting set in their ways and would provide new impulses instead, which is of crucial importance. This is what we are experiencing now, living through a beautiful creative period, pursuing plenty of new projects. I have been growing as an artist and I think that my tenure at the PKF – Prague Philharmonia represents a splendid synergy, beneficial for both of the parties at the present stage of our artistic development.

You have often performed in opera houses, from your home stage in Dallas, through Covent Garden, to the Royal Opera in Muscat. Does conducting operas and symphonies differ in any respect?

I strive to maintain a balance between conducting opera productions and concerts. Opera conductors must be flexible and prompt in response to specific situations. They

must captivate the audience and guide them through the story to the very end. You simply cannot acquire such faculties when merely conducting symphonic works, or at least not to such extent. Symphonic conductors have to take absolute control of the tempo and the interplay of the orchestra. They must comprehend the emotional subtext, as well as the abstract and intellectual structure of a music piece. Knowledge of the specificities of the concert performance enriches the opera performance, and vice versa. A sense of drama, narrative flexibility and soloists' accompaniment are vitally beneficial for the symphonic performance.

You were born in Strasbourg. You use to sing with the choir of its famous cathedral. What are your memories of that time?

I was a member of the local boys' choir between the age of eight and twelve. My most intense musical impressions pertain to that time. The period was so crucial for me that I have related to it ever since. I have been returning to singing as the basic musical utterance. I remember when I, as a chorister, first stood on an opera stage and saw all those people sharing a passion for music. I was enthralled. That is when and where I discovered music's magical attraction. I realised just how heart-felt and overwhelming music can be.

What about your relation to 20th-century music?

I have conducted numerous works, including the entire oeuvre of Stravinsky's, many pieces by Bartók, Messiaen, Carter. And also compositions by representatives of a variety of modern movements and trends – dodecaphonic music, art rock, neo-Romanticism, everyday music… I am very open to contemporary music.

Your presence on the stage is highly emotional. What do you feel when conducting, and how would you characterise yourself?

To a certain degree, I always strive to adapt myself to the musicians I work with. And, of course, I have to be led by a clear musical conception, of that which I want to attain. My attitude to the rehearsal process is very open-minded, I am prepared to be taken by surprise, and I let myself be enraptured by that which is happening on the stage, that which approaches me. A conductor has to be a psychologist, as well as a politician and diplomat. We work with people who surrender to us part of their freedom. When I am on the stage, I actually play a certain role, as the musicians and the audience alike expect me to. When you play the role faithfully and properly, the orchestra go with you and give the best of themselves. I do not trust conductors who behave like dictators. Authority, decisiveness – all very well. But bearing in mind that it is a matter of mutual agreement.

In addition to helming the PKF – Prague Philharmonia, you are currently also the music director of the Dallas Opera. How do you manage to balance heading institutions on two distant continents?

I stay in permanent contact with Dallas, and I have to deal with a host of things on a daily basis. I have regular video conference talks with the management, the team. I have a New York-based manager, who organises my cultural events and artistic calendar. And I also have several local managers, in Italy and elsewhere. Yet I arrange many a thing on my own, including plane tickets and booking hotel accommodation.

You are constantly on the go. How often do you have a holiday and how do you unwind?

Well, I do not get enough rest. I conduct a lot, but I also devise the programme strategy and business for Dallas and the PKF – Prague Philharmonia alike. And I am invited to perform as a guest on other stages worldwide, which is crucial for my career. What is more, Dallas and Prague are in different time zones. Therefore, I not only have no time to relax, I don't actually have time to sleep either, since I am getting telephone calls and emails day and night. Sometimes, however, I can have a rest by delaying one job and embarking on another instead. Thus, when I am weary of exploring a Beethoven symphony, I put it aside and take, let us say, a Puccini opera, which is a totally different type of activity. Real relaxation for me is reading a book, having dinner with friends or taking a stroll, though, regrettably, I don't have much time left over to do so. But I am not complaining. My mentor once told me: "You wanted a bike, so now don't moan of having to ride it." I bear that in mind, and so far have succeeded quite well in acting accordingly. If the day should ever come that I find myself going on stage with a sense of reluctance, then I will know that's the end of it, that the time has come to start devoting to something else. At the moment, however, I still feel an enormous desire to work with great orchestras on wonderful music.

*The French conductor **Emmanuel Villaume** was born in Strasbourg, where he studied at the Conservatoire. Subsequently, he attended the École normale supérieure in Paris, and completed his education at the Sorbonne, where he studied literature, philosophy and musicology. Throughout his illustrious career, he has worked with the world's most prominent opera companies and symphony orchestras, performing at the Metropolitan Opera, the Washington Opera, the opera houses in Hamburg, Montreal, Marseille and San Francisco, and other renowned venues. Villaume has served as chief conductor of the Slovak and Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestras, and since 2013 has been music director of the Dallas Opera. In 2015, he assumed the post of music director and chief conductor of the PKF – Prague Philharmonia.*

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by Martin Horyna

CHARLES IV
and music

Less than a year since the 600th anniversary of the execution of the Czech Christian reformer Jan Hus, we are now commemorating the 700th anniversary of the birth of Charles IV (14 May 1316 – 29 November 1378), King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor. To a certain degree, the two dates correspond to the beginning and the end of the "Luxembourg century", which is generally deemed to have been one of the most significant phases in Czech history.

Centuries later, we can still marvel at Saint Vitus Cathedral, Karlštejn Castle, Charles Bridge, as well as the Bohemian Crown Jewels, to name but the best-known material artefacts linked with Charles IV. Yet there are also the institutions of a spiritual nature, such as Charles University or the Archbishoprics in Prague. In many respects, we thus tend to perceive Charles IV as a founder of a number of things we consider matter-of-course constituents of the life in the Czech Republic. It would seem that we view the monarch more through the perspective of institutions, as well as majestic architectural and artistic monuments, than through the written testimonies and the work of historians.
Is it possible to complete the picture of Charles IV through the music of his era? Can we, however, come to know this music at all, and can we get an insight into his musical preferences and tastes? These are the questions we will strive to answer in the present article.

Dreams of Czech music during the reign of Charles IV

Such questions have been raised for a very long time. Not surprisingly, the noted sovereign has attracted attention since the very start of modern music historiography. Serving the national revival, the Czech music historiographers placed great store by two facts in particular: Charles spent his youth at the French court, and the longstanding secretary of his father, John of Luxembourg, or John of Bohemia, nicknamed the "foreign king" (1296–1346), was the poet and composer Guillaume de Machaut. At the time when the Central European peoples were stacking up their glorious pasts, this would perhaps have been a home run even greater than the "medieval" Manuscripts of Zelená Hora and of Dvůr Králové (eventually proved to be forgeries, "discovered" in the early 19th century)! Thus,

The Jan of Roudnice Breviary, King David plays a psaltery, after 1360

Karlštejn Castle, a window niche at the Chapel of the Holy Cross, the old men of the Apocalypse (from the left: a Latin gittern without strings, ala bohemica and psaltery), Mikuláš Wurmser, circa 1359

all the greater must have been the disappointment (one that has been regularly repeated) about the fact that nothing from the French musical culture of the Ars Nova epoch has been confirmed within Charles IV's court. We will attempt to view the past more soberly and from a different angle.
Somewhat surprisingly, the music of the era of Charles IV concerned the Baroque historiographers back in the 17th and 18th centuries. It would not be just to deny that the ecclesiastics of the re-Catholicisation period were sincere patriots. The prefaces to the Baroque hymn-books bear witness to their seeking ways of legalising and preserving the wealth of the Czech church song, which they had inherited from the Reformation era of the 15th and 16th centuries, setting its origin in the time of Charles IV. To a certain extent, they were right, but we will return to it later.

The personality of Charles IV

After his mother Eliška (Elizabeth), daughter of Václav (Wenceslas) II, Charles was the heir of the Přemyslid dynasty. After his father, he hailed from the House of Luxembourg. His grandfather, Henry VII, King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor, had strengthened the relations with the French royal family by means of diplomacy and marriages. In 1323, he took the seven-year-old Charles to the French court, where the prince would spend seven years, until 1330. He had the opportunity to closely observe the manner in which a centre of a large kingdom worked, familiarise himself with the roles assigned to courtly ceremonies, decorum and the symbolical parlance, resulting from the sacralisation of royal government. There is no doubt that the prince adopted the rules – originally named Václav (Wenceslas), he chose the name Charles at his confirmation in Paris in honour of his uncle, Charles IV of France. Later on, as the Holy Roman Emperor, he would regard himself as a distant successor to Charlemagne.
Charles was at the French court at the time when it possessed a permanent music ensemble. In all likelihood, he met the influential composer and poet Philippe de Vitry, a prominent creator of the isorhythmic motet of the early phase of the Ars Nova period. Machaut came up with his chansons later on, yet sung courtly poetry abounded in the milieu in different forms. It would seem that Charles did not feel the necessity to employ lyrical love poetry performers at his own court in Prague, as the one and only representative of the German Minnesang there, Heinrich von Mügeln, left for Vienna in 1360 and none of the few Czech secular songs dating from the pre-Hussite era deal with courtly love. Well, Charles certainly did not show an interest in this type of music comparable with that of Wenceslas II. To all appearances, instead of courtly love, Charles IV embraced the Marian cult, which he boldly promoted and supported. Devotion to the Mother of Christ, however, was quite common in the 14th century and it does not attest to his being the "Priests' King", as he was derisively referred to. After all, paintings and statues of beautiful Madonnas too come across as expressing sublimated love, with their equivalent in sacred lyrics at the time having been the numerous Marian songs. And as their predominant language was Latin, their composers and performers should be sought among the clergy. There are speculations that, together with Archbishop Arnošt (Ernest) of Pardubice, Charles IV initiated the collection *Laudes Mariae,* put together prior to the middle of the 14th century at the Carthusian Monastery in Prague's Smíchov quarter by the poet Konrad von Hainburg.

The Krumlov Miscellanea, King David plays a psaltery, early 15th century

Let us, however, return to Charles's youth. In 1331, his father sent him to northern Italy, where until 1333 he served as viceroy. The luxury and the high standard of living at the local courts were in stark contrast to their political irrelevance. Charles would continue to maintain contacts with Italy in the years to come.

Upon returning to Bohemia in 1333, he must have experienced a culture shock, yet he decided not to follow in his father's footsteps and duly plunged into the systematic building up of Prague and the Kingdom of Bohemia, converting them into a dignified centre of his future realm, with some of his plans having been implemented during his father's lifetime, as Margrave of Moravia. In 1344, the Prague Episcopate was upgraded to Archbishopric and the reconstruction of Saint Vitus Cathedral commenced. In 1346, Charles was elected the King of the Romans. Following his father's death (on 26 August 1346 in the Battle of Grécy), on 2 September 1347 he was crowned King of Bohemia. In 1348, he founded Prague's New Town and University. In 1349, he was crowned Roman (German) King in Aachen and, finally, in 1355, he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome.

The Czech historian František Kavka has summed up Charles's personality as follows: "The majority of the contemporary observers were impressed by the sharp intellect and an even chilly realism, which made it possible for Charles to duly recognise the limits of his potentialities. Noticeable too was his faculty for comprehending human nature, which also manifested itself in his almost unerring selection of advisers and assistants." Unlike many of the aristocrats of the time, he was literate and capable of expressing himself in writing, while his diplomatic skills were further advanced by his being fluent in five languages.

Charles IV and music – the facts

Specific documents of his relationship to music are scarce, with just three of them particularly worthy of mention. The incorporation of the ancient hymn *Hospodine, pomiluj ny* (Lord Have Mercy Upon Us), in addition to the commonplace *Te Deum,* into Charles's coronation order, might have reflected some older local customs. One of his literary works – *Morality* – contains an interpretation of the passage from the First Book of Moses on Tubal-cain, who as "the first smith forging iron, invented and perceived joy at music; just as a pious man in the state of mercy arrives through mortification of the body at an understanding of eternal melodies and at delight of the celestials perfect in nature." The passage was comprehended by everyone who studied the speculative music theory at the faculty of free arts. Music was discovered (besides Biblical characters, by Orpheus and Pythagoras, for instance) and the tonal system was created on the basis of numerical ratios equal to those of the microcosm of the human body and soul, as well as the microcosm of the entire universe, whose eternal melody or music of the spheres could not, however, be heard by the mortals. Charles would take an active part in the evening services (matins) on Christmas Day, presenting the Seventh Lesson himself, with the crown on his head and holding an unsheathed sword. We do not know whether he was singing or reading, yet we do know that the Christmas matins ranked among the most solemn divine services and that the first three Lessons were sung at the Prague Cathedral by selected vocalists in three voices. Buglers and pipers too were employed at the court, with their main task being to deliver signal and utility music, of which we have no particular knowledge, yet they might have performed other types of productions (that, however, has not been proven to have taken place at Charles's court). One (dubious) testimony in this respect may be given in connection with Guillaume de Machaut. Now and then, the artist would visit Prague, accompanying John of Luxembourg, to whom he dedicated a multitude of celebratory poems but never actually indicated that the monarch had an

The Velislav Bible, women playing an ala bohemica, zither, vielle and psaltery, before the middle of the 14th century

affinity to music. In 1364, Machaut came to Prague again, this time as a member of the suite of Peter I of Cyprus (Pierre I de Lusignan). The king maintained in Nicosia a French court, at which, as the preserved repertoire reveals, music performances were given in the Ars Nova style. At the time, Peter I of Cyprus was travelling around Europe, seeking among its rulers allies who would support his plan for a Crusade in the Holy Land. Machaut described the welcoming of Peter in Prague in the poem *Prise d'Alexandrie,* in which he wrote, probably with hyperbole, that more than 20,000 people had cheered him outside the city gates, and that the music performance held in his honour at the Castle encompassed some 35 instruments, all of which he named and even divided, as was the custom at the time, into the loud and the soft. When deciphering their names, they also include instruments we know from period images – we can then only hope that Machaut did not make it all up and his account is based on truth. To date, the researchers have tended not to take the description seriously, yet, on the other hand, there are preserved contemporary paintings featuring the welcoming of royal visitors, on which good-sized, and motley, according to today's standards, groups of musicians are part of the procession. Amidst the tumult of the crowd, the range of their productions might have been minimal, with nobody objecting to the blending of all kinds of sounds. The composer Charles IVes, who a century ago experimented with the dissonance of concurrently passing brass bands, would certainly have been pleased by his medieval predecessors.

Naturally, Charles IV had ample opportunities to hear music in the advanced French and Italian environments. That which he may have encountered when he was young has been pondered above. At the end of 1377, he decided to pay a visit with his son Wenceslas IV to King Charles V and other relatives in France, as well as in Luxembourg. The journey is quite well documented in the chronicle records. The texts and the pictures show that the feasts and banquets were always accompanied by music. Every course was launched by a performance on "loud" instruments, i.e. trumpets, and, possibly, shawms and bagpipes. After one of the dinners, those present listened to music played on "soft" instruments, perhaps lutes, harps and strings. The nobility were transferred between the palaces in Paris on a special recreational ship on the Seine, with the cruise being sweetened (according to a late account) by court singers and musicians performing *virelais, chansons et autres bergerettes*.

Music in Bohemia before and after Charles IV

The situation pertaining to music in the Kingdom of Bohemia prior to Charles's accession to the throne is rather difficult to describe. Notwithstanding its rises and declines during the reign of the last members of the Přemyslid dynasty, it would seem that liturgical music performances were well secured at Saint Vitus Cathedral and at the Convent of Saint George at Prague Castle, which, according to the preserved documents, also pursued a remarkable tradition of staging Easter Passions. The Zbraslav Chronicle states that under John of Luxembourg Prague experienced a change in the universal demeanour, including the fashion of dress, as well as an increase in the popularity of singing in the manner of Neidhart von Reuental, with the name of the famed German minnesinger having become synonymous with satire (even Master Jan Hus still used the verb "to neidhart", in the sense of "spoofing"). "Singing in broken voices in fourths and fifths, which was once only done by proficient musicians, is today applied by laymen and Pharisees, in dances and everywhere on town squares." Translated into the present-day language, the sentence means: Artful rhythmic singing in long and short notes,

The Krumlov Miscellanea, King Artaxerxes's banquet, shawm and trumpet players by the royal table, early 15th century

and polyphony in fourths and fifths, was at one time (circa 1300) only mastered by trained vocalists (clerics, without exception), whereas nowadays every layman and hypocrite is able to do so.

The existence of some forms of polyphony within the self-contained monastic milieu circa 1300 has been confirmed – it concerned the earliest types of organum, as well as its later type, which in the 13th century spread from Notre Dame school in Paris, and perhaps even the very first multi-text motets. The "broken voices" could already have referred to the motet, yet they might also have related to the conductus, vocal compositions for one or more voices, which, however, have only been documented in records dating from the late-14th and the early-15th centuries. And this very style of music is perhaps the easiest to imagine as having been performed on "town squares". After all, even melodies of some popular late-14th-century sacred songs were employed in pamphlets and the popular Hussite-era hymns (*Imber nunc celitus – Ó svolánie konstanské – Ó svolánie pikhartské /* O synod of Constance – O synod of Pikhart).

The era following Charles IV's accession to the throne was characterised by a number of innovations that resulted in the transformation of society. The clergy, whose numbers were considerably growing, went on to create their own musical-poetic forms, not all of which were of a purely liturgical nature, frequently straddling non-liturgical church singing and a kind of sacred entertainment beyond the church grounds. When building up a centralised state, Charles IV could merely rely on the ecclesiastics and the clerical administration, since no one else was able to provide him with executive staff and a written agenda.

The degree of sacralisation of life in the more populous cities was probably commensurate to the size and social position of the local clerical communities, with a bold Marian cult having been part of the contemporary trend. Approximately at that time, the custom of serving the daily morning Marian mass – matura – expanded. Even in the 16th century, it was a divine service at which literary brotherhoods would gather to sing together, with the famous Rorate Masses having been nothing but the matura during Advent. By an irony of fate, an emphasis on outward manifestations of piety began to be placed at the time of the onset of the profound crisis of the Catholic Church, which, however, only culminated in Bohemia under the reign of Wenceslas IV and ultimately ended in the Hussite movement.

Immediately upon his having been appointed Archbishop of Prague, Arnošt of Pardubice (1297–1364) embarked upon reorganising the clergy linked with Saint Vitus Cathedral. A relatively high number of persons (the estimates exceed 100!) were assigned with singing, participating in the prayers marking the hours of each day and the regular masses. Depending on their position and tasks, they were divided into several independent groups: the cathedral's canons or their deputies (vicars), choristers, psalm readers, or boni infantes (boys who helped during the divine services, singing, reading and reciting psalms). New liturgical hymn-books, some of which have been preserved, were drawn up for their needs. With their repertoire being traditional, based on the customs practised at Saint Vitus Cathedral back in the Přemyslid era, they were to serve as the model of choral singing for the whole diocese of Prague. Indirectly connected with the cathedral was a Christmas matins repertoire of polyphonic songs, characterised by a unique updating of the old-fashioned organum technique.

Another sanctuary at Prague Castle was the All Saints Church, whose canonry only hired masters of Charles University for the post of canon. Its Book of Graduals contains arrangements of chants of the mass for two voices, and affords one of the possible insights into the musical world of the Prague University, at which the speculative music theory was primarily studied. The fact that music intervals can be expressed by numerical ratios turned music into a mathematic discipline, which was taught at the faculty of free arts. Somewhat overshadowed by it were the lessons on practical theory – the majority of the students were preparing themselves for careers as priests, perhaps all of them sang at the university chapel, and masters, as mentioned above, at the All Saints Church. The instructional texts preserved pertain to plainchant and the most modern polyphony alike. The oldest testimony to the French notation of the Ars Nova epoch in Central Europe is a tractate written for Charles University students circa 1369, followed up by several other texts, which even provide examples of specific compositions. Some of them are of French or Italian provenance, while others are more likely local imitations, with approximately half of the pieces being identifiable and traceable.

The prevailing forms among them are isorhythmic motets and chansons. That which whole generations of researchers were seeking, and failed to find, at the court of Charles IV has been discovered at the university.

The Velislav Bible, tuning of a psaltery harp, glockenspiel and psaltery, before the middle of the 14th century

Musical creation

The losses of 14th-century music scores are simply colossal. Some of the works, particularly the majority of those for multiple voices, are only known from later sources, and hence we are now merely reconstructing them, trying to figure out the time of their origin and what they originally looked like. It is completely impossible to distinguish between the music hailing from the era of Charles IV and that which was written during the reign of his son, Wenceslas IV, up to the Hussite period. Nonetheless, we can approximately define the genres that were characteristic of the Kingdom of Bohemia.

Numerous new pieces were composed for the plainsong repertoire. They differed from the traditional chant by rhymed texts, by giving preference to certain keys, as well as by placing relatively high requirements on the singers, and they were interspersed with rhythmically recited vocal insertions.

A true treasure dating from the era is the Latin sacred lyrical music, encompassing two types of compositions – the *cantio* (a strophic song) and the *leich,* or *lai* (a more elaborate form of song) – which were cultivated among the clerics, initially perhaps serving for spiritual intellectual entertainment, yet subsequently being part of the masses. Hundreds of the songs are yet to be published. In the pre-Hussite era, they were translated into Czech, and in the Reformation period they became the major source of melodies for Czech, as well as, in part, German, Protestant hymns. A number of these melodies have been sung in churches for 600 or more years.

At the time, sacred lyrical music – including that to Czech texts – was earmarked for the ecclesiastic elite, and if it did become popular on a mass scale, it only occurred in the 15th and 16th centuries. We should single out the music intended to be sung beyond actual divine services. The old hymn *Hospodine, pomiluj ny* (Lord Have Mercy Upon Us) has been mentioned above, with a similar function having been pursued by the chorale *Svatý Václave* (Saint Wenceslas) in the 12th and 13th centuries. More songs of this ilk appeared during the 14th century, to which the Church responded by issuing repeated decrees, reducing the number of approved hymns to four – in addition to the two specified above, they included *Buóh všemohúcí* (God Almighty) and *Jezu Kriste, štědrý kněže* (Jesus Christ, Bountiful Prince), both of them related to the expansion of the reformist evangelistic movement, which had reacted to the crisis of the Catholic Church. The former occurred in connection with the preaching of Konrad Waldhauser, whom Charles IV summoned to Prague in 1363. Following his sermons, the congregation would sing the song *Christ ist erstanden,* the German equivalent of *Buóh všemohúcí*, hence in the linguistically mixed milieu people could sing in their own tongue. The latter was highly popular during Master Jan Hus's tenure at the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague.

When it comes to polyphony, in addition to the aforementioned genres, greatly developed was the form of multi-text motet. Also preserved has been a smaller amount of lovely "rondels", variations on the French chansons. When we once more return to Machaut, these rondels, or "rondelets", were far from attaining the refinement of his compositions, but we should bear in mind that they are simply incomparable. The further from Paris, the more different were Machaut's chansons (and markedly more similar to the small rondels) to the form in which we today know them from the editions based on manuscripts, whose making the composer himself supervised.

The article has been written in collaboration with the Musica Rudolphina research centre, www.bibemus.org/musicarudolphina. First published in Harmonie magazine, edited for CMQ.

by Matěj Kratochvíl

CONTEMPULS RESTARTED

Kevin Volans

Between 11 and 25 November, after a year's break, the Contempuls contemporary music festival returned to Prague, with a new programme director, Josef Třeštík. The main venue was again La Fabrika, the concerts were divided into two or three blocks an evening and, most significantly, the organisers retained high-quality performances combined with well-considered programme planning.

Several thematic lines could be observed within the festival concerts. The first was a special focus on contemporary Danish music, which was represented by Bent Sørensen, Hans Abrahamsen and Jexper Holmen, while the latter two even visited Prague in person. Even though Sørensen and Abrahamsen have a totally different style of work, their music is in a way kindred owing to its being somewhat nostalgic, as well as referring to historical music. Sørensen's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2, "La Mattina"* (2009), harbours linkages to Mozart and Bach, with its sound and technical virtuosity now and then being reminiscent of the late-Romantic repertoire, albeit employing boldly modern elements, including a surprise in the form of the orchestral players' vocal entry. The piece was excellently rendered by the pianist Jonathan Powell, who at the last minute stood in for Jan Bartoš, who had fallen ill. Another work by Sørensen, *Sirenengesang* (1994), was performed by Prague's Ensemble Terrible, who brought out a different facet of the composer's music, one more sonically thickened, including microtones.

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER 5x

Pascal Gallois conducting Prague Modern

Abrahamsen's cycle *Schnee* (2008) utilises specific pieces by J. S. Bach, which are duly transformed into a meditative, almost minimalist sound, mainly on very soft dynamic levels. The performance by ensemble recherche had a ritual-like atmosphere, which was further enhanced by the musicians being symmetrically distributed around the percussionist, who was sitting in front of a large gong amidst several tables and was in a number of passages shuffling in a concentrated manner pieces of paper placed on them, thus producing gentle noises. Written in a less meditative and less mosaic-like style is Abrahamsen's *Wald*, which was delivered by Prague Modern within the festival's final concert. A totally different universe was presented within Jexper Holmen's hour-long *Oort Cloud*, for the unusual combination of two accordions and soprano saxophone, continually playing multiphonics. Inspired by a cluster of celestial bodies circulating around the solar system, the piece flew by as an uninterrupted mass of sound, rising from silence into waves and again reverberating into silence, without any footings in the form of rhythms and melodies. Although the performance at La Fabrika was acoustically much "drier" than that featured on the existing recording, on which the instruments are veiled by a long reverb, the instruments' timbres perfectly merged into a sonic cloud, with the result being perhaps the most singular and, at the same time, most impressive experience within the entire festival.

All three mentioned composers somewhat stand apart from the contemporary music trends, yet over the past few years they have been attracting ever increasing attention worldwide. A respected phenomenon too, one who cannot be anyhow pigeonholed, is Kevin Volans, an Irishman born in South Africa, whose music formed another axis of the festival programme. The opening evening featured his orchestral *Symphony: Daar kom die Alibama* (2010). Volans predominantly works with tonal material, he revels in bold rhythms, yet it would be all too easy to class him as a minimalist. *Daar kom die Alibama* is built as a succession of brief, distinctively acoustically differentiated episodes, now and then delicate, at other times quite dramatic. Based on a similar juxtaposition between soft and loud was the second Volans block, within which he himself played the piano, appearing alongside the percussionist Jonny Axelsson.

Pascal Gallois

Whereas *Asanga* (1997) and *Akrodha 2* (1998), for solo percussion, were energetic virtuoso pieces, *Akrodha 3* (2015) and *perc:piano [Reflets dans l'eau]* (2016), for piano and percussion, were imbued with finer nuances. When it comes to the latter two works, Contempuls was hosting their world premieres. In the first case, the piano's gentle chords merely tinged the performance of the percussionist, who unfolded complex rhythms on an arsenal of mainly metal objects; in the second, the two instruments played more equal roles, with the sound of the piano blending with the marimba, vibraphone and glockenspiel. Volans's earlier creative phase was recalled by *Etude No. 8* (1988), for solo piano, which the composer rendered with the utmost concentration and confidence.

One of the main strengths of Contempuls has always been the meticulous selection of the performers, owing to which the Prague audiences have been afforded the opportunity to hear contemporary music in top-notch quality. In this connection, each of the festival's editions has featured solo recitals. The two given this year can serve as yet more proof of the progress the players' technical potentialities made during the 20th century.

The pianist Ian Pace opened his block with two linked-up pieces by the Czech composer Luboš Mrkvička, *For Piano – Part G* (2014) and *Part L* (2016), which received its world premiere at Contempuls. Mrkvička's music encompasses challenging rhythmic structures, which in the case of the former occasionally engender an almost Chopinesque romantic arc. The axis of the second work was a virtually continuous ostinato on a single note, projecting out of which were melodic phrases, now and then reminiscent of Moravian folk melodies. Organically linked up owing to this association was the next item, *Sonata for Piano No. 6* (2007), by Romania's Horatiu Radulescu. Although of late the composer has furnished his works with subtitles taken from the classic Chinese text Tao Te Ching, he has also often drawn inspiration from traditional eastern European music. The third composer whose works were included in the block was Britain's Michael Finnissy, to whose music Ian Pace has devoted over the long term. *Five Yvaroperas* (1995) and *all.fall.down* (1977) presented two different facets of Finnissy's style, with their common trait being the high requirements placed on both the performer and the audience.

Another solo block was dedicated to the French bassoonist Pascal Gallois. His performance, during which he moved on the dark stage among several spot-lit music stands, showed the bassoon – scarcely exposed as a solo instrument – in an extraordinary light.

The two opening, laconic compositions by György Kurtág worked with more or less traditional acoustic material. The focal point of the programme, Luciano Berio's *Sequenza XII* (1995), a piece written directly for Gallois, demonstrated just how far it is possible to go. The long passages, making use of the circular breathing technique, gave the impression that the player possessed at least one standby set

of lungs, with the extensive glissandos seemingly denying the instrument's very nature. In Olga Neuwirth's *Torsion* (2005), the bassoon was joined by a sound track of city bustle and historical music recordings. Pascal Gallois performed the piece in two versions at Contempuls. In tandem with the Czech Republic's Ensemble Terrible, conducted by Marek Šedivý, he had previously played it in the version for bassoon and chamber ensemble, *Torsion: transparent variation*. Besides having performed as a bassoonist, Pascal Gallois also appeared at the festival in the role of conductor – at the final evening, he led Prague Modern, with whom he has collaborated for several years now. Under his baton, the ensemble performed Hans Abrahamsen's *Wald*, Jiří Kadeřábek's *Nostalgia II* (written to commission for the festival), and Benedict Mason's *Drawing Tunes and Fuguing Photos* (2012).

Jexper Holmen's Oort Cloud

Marián Lejava conducting the PKF – Prague Philharmonia

Ever since its establishment, Contempuls has afforded ample scope to Czech composers and striven to put the domestic music into the global context. In this year's edition, Czech music occupied a very strong position indeed. It hosted four world premieres of works by Czech composers, two of which were created to commission. The festival has confirmed the assumption that at the present time there is a group of Czech composers who can definitely stand their ground amid the international competition. Perhaps the most intriguing piece presented this year was Jan Trojan's *3017 Miles of Proximity* (2016), which was performed at the opening concert by the Prague Philharmonia, conducted by Marián Lejava. The succession of contrastive episodes, ranging from the quiet noise of strings, through standard tones, to harsher sonic tinges, had a good drift. A sudden quotation of the Czech medieval chorale Saint Wenceslas, delivered by the oboe and strings before the end, may have come across as a somewhat of a shock within the music, yet, in the final analysis, such a minor derailment actually served to benefit the composition. Two Czech premieres were also given by Ensemble Terrible, a recently formed group of young musicians, who were introduced at the festival within Contempuls Lab, a new section that is intended to include in the future fledgling projects or projects that in some way or other will not "fit" into the main programme line. All in all, it would very much seem that Contempuls, under a new programme director, has gathered energy, and while the festival has embraced new trends, it has retained its placing emphasis on a well-considered programme and high quality requirements. Let us hope that the next editions will follow without enforced break.

Three orchestras at the Forum Karlín, Prague

PHOTO: ZDENĚK CHRAPEK 4x

SPACE & SOUND, OSTRAVA IN PRAGUE

Petr Kotík

The Ostrava Centre for New Music is not a venue that would plan "commensurate" or "modest" events. The bulk of that which the team, centred around Petr Kotík, has forged is in this or that respect beyond the local standard, be it the Ostrava Days festival or the more recent New Opera Days Ostrava (NODO). Extraordinary indeed too was the concert Space & Sound, subtitled Music for Three Orchestras, which the Ostrava Centre held on 19 November at the Forum Karlín in Prague. The joined forces of the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava and the Ostravská Banda ensemble presented the same programme with which they opened last year's Ostrava Days. The main attraction was Karlheinz Stockhausen's Gruppen, written between 1955 and 1957.

The first minor positive factor of the evening was seeing that the programme brochure stated the durations of the individual compositions. Particularly in the case of not yet well known contemporary works it is somewhat comforting to know for how long one is going to listen to a piece. Less pleasant, however, was the ascertainment that at the oblong hall it was not possible to place three stages around the audience. The orchestras on the sides were only slightly distanced from the central one, which, naturally, reduced the spatial effect, even though, fortunately, it appeared that the limitation was not as great as I had initially apprehended it would be.

The concert opened with *Three Petals* (2014) by Phil Niblock, who has been a permanent guest at the Ostrava Days. Although the composer has actually been creating all his music in the same manner, merely modifying the sonic material, it does not come across as boring or self-cribbing, but is always capable of bewitching the listener. From the very first seconds, the long notes, gradually retuning, encased us with a compact glazing which let the enthralled audience go after less than half an hour. Similarly to Yves Klein's canvases, with the observer not perceiving the shapes and tinges, Niblock's piece does not urge the listener to focus on melodies or rhythms (there are none in it), yet leaves one absorbing the very essence of the orchestral sound.

The next item on the programme was *beautiful to me. ah* (2014) by Jacek Sotomski, one of the young composers who have passed through the institute of the Ostrava Days. A solo accordion (Milan Osadský) at the head, two small groups of strings on remote verges, electronics flying across the entire hall. And the title borrowed from a porn film. The listener could speculate as to whether the accordion part's gasping drama does reflect in the slightest that

Petr Kotík and Hana Kotková with the members of Ostravská Banda

which is going on in the respective movie, but, notwithstanding its technically challenging nature (the performers mastered it with aplomb), just a few passages, based on an aggressive electronic sound, were actually intriguing.
The first third of the evening concluded with Petr Kotík's *Variations for 3 Orchestras* (2003–2005), in which the composer plays with a varying degree of the instrumental sections' co-ordination and independence. In places – by means of a variation on his own *Many Many Women* – Kotík returned to his earlier creative phase, with the passages referring to the time when he worked with a radically simple material being the most forcible in the 30-minute piece.
After the first intermission, the concert continued with a lesson in one of the key chapters of music history. Stockhausen's orchestral *Gruppen* and electronic *Gesang der Jünglinge* are mentioned in every anthology of 20th-century music, yet only seldom are they heard as the composer intended them to be performed, that is, moving in space. Notwithstanding its age, *Gesang der Jünglinge* sounded monumental, forming a sonic picture of a fiery furnace from the Biblical story that served Stockhausen as inspiration. Electronically generated sounds and a variously modified boy's voice circled around the audience's heads, thoroughly utilising the space. The ensuing *Gruppen*, composed at the same time, made use of a smaller space, yet the impression of three separate orchestras remained. From the listener's perspective, the Stockhausen work is not easy to penetrate. The principles guiding the structure are so complex that they cannot be revealed without elaborate analysis, but after some time the variable rhythms and clusters of tones begin to fit together and form a continuous sound. In some places, this even leads to ecstatic climaxes, for instance, when shortly before the end the brass sections of all the three orchestras start "exchanging" majestic material.
Following the second intermission, the three orchestras were joined by the pianist Daan Vandewalle and the Hornická kapela, a miners' band from Stonava, who together performed John Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961) and *Winter Music* (1957). As Petr Kotík pointed out, seeming anarchy allowed Cage to put sounds, tones and silence together in an unpredictable and, at the same time, natural way. Seeking emotions we usually project into music does not make sense here. It is rather similar to looking at the stars, which too do not care whether we romantically get lost in dreams below them. The impersonal acoustic happening was twice entered by the miners' band with its typical repertoire,

easily drowning out Cage's music with vigorous rhythms and melodies. Yet that which may have seemed to be a purposeless deliberateness produced fascinating effects. On the one hand, it was bizarre to watch the orchestral players focusing on their parts, without their performance being heard. On the other hand, despite being drowned out, their tones kept floating in the space, and after the brass band had stopped playing they simply continued to exist. If we are to stick to the comparison with the sky: it was as though a jet plane had flown across a starry firmament. From the viewpoint of the observer, two worlds intersected, yet the stars would not blink an eye.

The evening featuring music for three orchestras revealed the unthought-of possibilities opening up for orchestras in contemporary music. It does not only concern distribution of sound in space, but also the potencies of synchronisation and the relation between the conductor and the orchestra players. While in the pieces by Niblock and Cage Petr Kotík operated like a simple timekeeper, on other occasions he, Johannes Kalitzke and Rolf Gupta conducted their own orchestras, concurrently responding to one another. The audience, who spent almost four hours at the Forum Karlín, was rewarded with a truly extraordinary experience.

The next day, the Ostravská Banda gave a concert at the Archa Theatre in Prague, performing in their standard stage constellation, conducted by Petr Kotík and Johannes Kalitzke. The programme included Christian Wolff's *Trust*, Alban Berg's *Kammerkonzert*, Petr Kotík's *Nine+1* and Salvatore Sciarrino's *Allegoria della notte*. The violinist Hana Kotková and the pianist Daan Vandewalle appeared as soloists.

Rolf Gupta conducting one of the orchestras

CZECH MUSIC EVERY DAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD IN THE AUTUMN OF 2016

When it comes to music events, autumn has traditionally been the most interesting season. This especially holds true with regard to contemporary music. With a slight exaggeration, it can be said that November is the one and only month in which Prague fans of 20th- and 21st-century music do not have a chance to attend all the events on offer. This year, in addition to the Contempuls festival and two concerts held by the Ostrava Centre for New Music, both of which ranked among the indisputable apices (see the separate reviews in this issue), there was also the Days of Contemporary Music in Prague, a festival that within nine concerts presented works by members of the Society of Czech Composers. Pieces by composers spanning the generations were performed by brilliant musicians, including those ranking among the very finest Czech instrumentalists (Petr Nouzovský, Vilém Veverka, Jitka Hosprová, Kateřina Englichová, and others). Intriguing programmes were also featured at concerts given by the MoEns ensemble and the BERG Orchestra.

And there were other attractive events elsewhere. The eighth edition of the MusicOlomouc contemporary music festival encompassed premieres of works by Jan Vičar, Marek Keprt, Lucie Vítková, Ondřej Štochl and František Chaloupka. The Exposition of New Music in Brno afforded space to both Czech and foreign composers and performers (especially worthy of mention is the unique orchestral concert given by Frederic Rzewski, Richard Teitelbaum and Alvin Curran, the founders of Musica Elettronica Viva). Moreover, this year's Musical Present festival of contemporary art in Ostrava featured a variegated programme, which included composition and performance seminars, creative workshops for children, as well as musicology conferences.

With regard to performances of contemporary Czech music abroad, a noteworthy event this autumn was the world premiere of Šimon Voseček's feature-length chamber opera *Hybris,* premiered and performed in November by Austria's sirene Operntheater company at the Theater an der Wien, as a part of the *Hospital-Trilogy*.

More information about the respective events can be found on the blog.musica.cz/en. I hope that the following brief summary may inspire you to visit some of the Czech festivals next year…

12 September, The Prague Market, Prague. **Jan Šikl: *On Trees and People* (world premiere).** Lenka Dusilová, BERG Orchestra, conducted by Peter Vrábel.

24 September, Tiroler Landestheater und Symphonieorchester Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria. **Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by Thilo Reinhardt, music director: Francesco Angelico.

3 October, Corpus Christi Chapel, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **Jan Vičar: *3 +1,* Marek Keprt: *úMžik sypkých výšek zVnitřní* (world premieres)**. Marek Keprt, Jan Přibil, Jiří Fajkus, Eva Balcárková, Lichtzwang.

3 October, K3 Theatre, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **Lucie Vítková: *To Whom Do the Horses in the Yard Belong?* (world premiere).** Cello: Niklas Seidl, guitar: Steffen Ahrens.

4 October, Corpus Christi Chapel, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **Ondřej Štochl: *A Fountain from the Cave of Helplessness for string quartet* (world premiere)**. Ensemble Lux.

6 October, Grandhotel Ambassador, Karlovy Vary. **Karel Šimandl: *Voices* (world premiere)**. Karlovy Vary Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Miriam Němcová.

9 October, Tonhalle, Zurich, Switzerland. **Jan Fila:** ***Three Images for Violin and Piano*** **(world premiere)**. New Kubelík Duo.

9 and 10 October, Spanish Synagogue, Prague. Cinegogue – The Second Sex. Experimental silent films with live music. **Tomáš Reindl:** ***Hands: The Life and Loves of the Gentler Sex,*** **Michaela Pálka Plachká:** ***Dance of Hands,*** **Jiří Lukeš:** ***Meshes of the Afternoon,*** **Matouš Hejl:** ***At Land,*** **Miroslav Tóth:** ***Ritual in Transfigured Time*** **(world premieres)**. BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.

10 October, Atrium, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **František Chaloupka:** ***A Chalet in the Lake Basin*** **(world premiere)**. Dunami Ensemble.

18 October, Gallery of the Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Archaion Kallos, "Hesychasm – Music From/ Of the Silence". **Slavomír Hořínka:** ***Prayer Inside,*** **Jan Ryant Dřízal:** ***Organic Study No. 1 for solo piano*** **(world premieres).** Piano: Andrea Vavrušová.

21 October, Besední dům, Brno. Exposition of New Music. **Pavel Zlámal:** ***Horizon of the Seventh*** **(world premiere).** Saxophone: Pavel Zlámal.

23 October, Besední dům, Brno. Exposition of New Music. **Petr Bakla:** ***First Movement and Variations*** **(world premiere)**. Piano: Emanuele Torquati.

23 October, Teatro Massimo, Palermo, Italy. **Leoš Janáček:** ***Jenůfa*** **(premiere of a new production by Anverse Vlaamse Opera)**. Directed by Robert Carsen, music director: Gabriele Ferro. Further performances: October 25, 27 and 30, November 2.

29 October, Staatsoper Hannover, Hanover, Germany. **Bedřich Smetana:** ***The Bartered Bride*** **(premiere of a new production)**. Directed by Martin G. Berger, music director: Benjamin Reiners. Further performances: November 3, 12 and 19, December 3, 15, 27, January 6, 11, 15, February 15.

31 October, St. Agnes Convent, Prague. **Martin Klusák:** ***Early Spring*** **(world premiere)**. BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.

2 November, Church of the Virgin Mary under the Chain, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Stanislav Jelínek:** ***Seven Casings,*** **Pavel Trojan:** ***Four Essays,*** **Milan Křížek:** ***Diaphonia,*** **Vilém Zelenka:** ***Ubi Caritas / Where God Is, Love Is*** **(world premieres).** Dana Dubová, Drahoslav Gric, Vilém Hofbauer, Petr Čech, František Jaroš, Marek Babka, Lukáš Vencovský, Bubureza female choir, Miloslava Vítková.

3 November, Church of the Virgin Mary under the Chain, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Radek Rejšek:** ***Missa Campanarum,*** **Olga Ježková:** ***Diptych Christus factus est et Magnificat,*** **Jan Bernátek:** ***Praise the Lord, All Nations,*** **Petr Chaloupský:** ***Dignus est Agnus,*** **Michael Korbička:** ***Ave Maria,*** **Jan Vrkoč:** ***Motet (Psalm 44)*** **(world premieres).** Walter Hofbauer, Prague Singers, Stanislav Mistr, Prague Cathedral Choir, Josef Kšica, Miloslava Vítková.

3, 4, 5 and 28 November, Theater an der Wien, Vienna, Austria. **Šimon Voseček:** ***Hybris (world premiere)***. Production by sirene Operntheater. Directed by Kristine Tornquist, music director: Jury Everhartz.

5 November, St. Antonin Church, Prague. **Eliška Cílková:** ***Great Wayfaring*** **(world premiere)**. Stamic Quartet, RADOST-Praha choir.

7 November, Gallery of the Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **David Lukáš:** ***Obsession*** **(world premiere)**. Flute: Kristina Vaculová, piano: Stanislav Slavíček.

8 November, Gallery of the Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. **Marek Kopelent:** ***Dole žal, hore ráj,*** **Hanuš Bartoň:** ***32 Variations on a Tone D*** **(world premiere)**, **Michal Nejtek:** ***Trois morceaux délicieux,*** **Kamil Doležal:** ***A Swing*** **(world premieres)**. MoEns, conductor: Miroslav Pudlák.

9 November, Martinů Hall, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Pavel Kopecký:** ***Ricercar for Organ Solo,*** **Karel Janovický:** ***Sonata for Cello and Piano,*** **Jan Kasal:** ***Schooling, A Door*** **(world premieres)**. Dorothea Fleischmannová, Jitka Vlašánková, Karel Košárek, Alfréd Strejček, Jiří Boušek, Karel Řehák, Pavel Chovanec, Marie Bartošová.

9 November, Janáček Conservatory, Ostrava. Musical Present. **Aleš Pavlorek:** ***Panta Rei*** **(world premiere)**. Piano: Lukáš Michel, bass-clarinet: Jiří Porubiak, viola: Hana Tomanová.

11 November, La fabrika, Prague. Contempuls. **Jan Trojan:** ***3107 Miles of Proximity*** **(world premiere)**. PKF – Prague Philharmonia, conducted by Marián Lejava.

11, 12 and 13 November, Arizona Opera, Phoenix, USA. **Antonín Dvořák:** ***Rusalka*** **(premiere of a new production)**. Directed by Joshua Borths, music director: Steven White.

BER-NOVEMBER

SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER

PHOTO: VOJTĚCH BRTNICKÝ

Michal Nejtek: Constellations I – Before I Say Yes

14 November, Martinů Hall, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Karel Pexidr: *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra,* Zdeněk Zahradník: *Oh, Mother Earth* (world premieres)**. Petr Nouzovský, Kristina Kubová, Petr Kolař, Dagmar Kolařová, Academic Chamber Singers and František Fiala, Quattro Orchestra, conductor: Marek Štilec.

15 November, La fabrika, Prague. Contempuls. **Luboš Mrkvička: *For Piano – Part G, Part L* (world premiere).** Piano: Ian Pace.

21 November, La fabrika, Prague. Contempuls. **Jakub Rataj: *Culmination,* Jan Ryant Dřízal: *Broken Flowers* (world premieres)**. Ensemble Terrible, conductor: Marek Šedivý.

21 November, Gallery of the Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Jiří Bezděk: *Pallets and Shading,* Romana Schuldová: *Piano Trio for Anežka,* Luboš Sluka: *Primavera,* Josef Marek: *Dialogues on W. Shakespeare's Sonnets,* Jiří Teml: *String Quartet no. 5* (world premieres)**. Jitka Hosprová, Ladislav Horák, Martin Kos, Hana Vítková, Štěpán Kos, Vilém Veverka, Kateřina Englichová, Petr Stach, Markéta Cukrová, Daniel Wiesner, Sedláček Quartet.

23 November, Martinů Hall, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Jaromír Dadák: *Homage to the Creators*, Milan Jíra: *Concerto grosso,* Ondřej Kukal: *Prague Tubopiccolarium,* Pavel Hrabánek: *Picnic,* Michal Müller: *Curved Mirrors* (world premieres).** Lumír Vaněk, Kateřina Macourková Hlaváčová, Božena Englerová, Dana Hegerová, Luděk Hrabec, Markéta Mazourová, Hana Müllerová, Jana Kopicová, Archioni Plus, conductor: Michal Macourek / Ondřej Kukal.

24 November, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Jan Vičar: *Konopa for female choir a capella,* Martin Kučera: *Small Pieces,* Vojtěch Mojžíš: *Seeking,* Milada Červenková: *Three Characteristic Etudes,* Vít Micka: *Pastorale* (world premieres)**. Bubureza female choir and Miloslava Vítková, Markéta Mazourová, Monika Čeřovská, Jaroslav Šaroun, Markéta Janáčková, Dorothea Chudá, Vít Micka.

25 November, La fabrika, Prague. Contempuls. **Jiří Kadeřábek: *Nostalgia II* (world premiere)**. Prague Modern, conductor: Pascal Gallois.

26 November, Theater Freiburg, Germany. **Leoš Janáček: *The Makropulos Affair* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by Vera Nemirova, music director: Gerhard Markson. Further performances: December 1, 3, 9, 18 and 23, January 6 and 18, February 4, March 19 and 26.

27 and 29 November, Opéra Grand Avignon, Avignon, France. **Leoš Janáček: *Katia Kabanova* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by Nadine Duffaut, music director: Jean-Yves Ossonce.

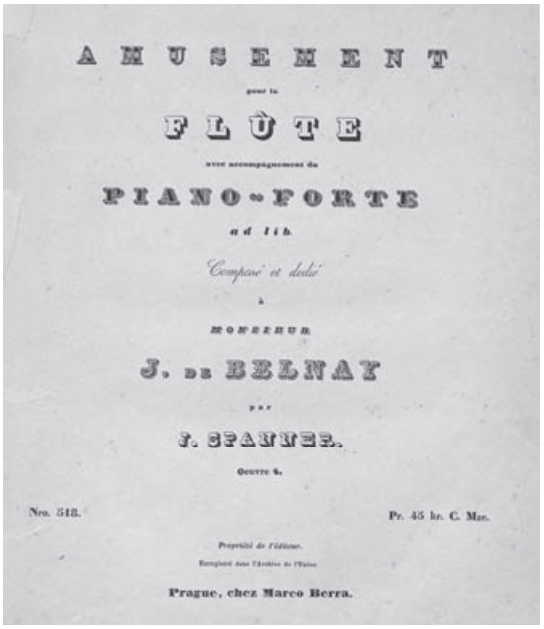
29 and 30 November, 2 December, Ponec Theatre, Prague. **Michal Nejtek: *Constellations I – Before I Say Yes* (world premiere of a staged project)**. Directed by Petr Boháč. BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.

30 November, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Edvard Schiffauer: *The Importunate G flat,* Jiří Laburda: *Sonata per violoncello e pianoforte,* Jindra Nečasová Nardelli: *Crystals,* Ivan Zelenka: *Prelude, Fugue and Toccata,* Miroslav Kubička: *Two Allegrettos* (world premieres)**. Alexandr Starý, Petr Nouzovský, Yukie Ichimura, Tomáš Víšek, Ladislav Horák, Petr Budín, Daniel Wiesner.

by Tom Moore

JOSEPH SPANNER, FLUTIST IN PRAGUE

Even at a distance of only two hundred years in time, and even looking at major world cities, so much of our historical detail is lost that we can scarcely construct a realistic idea of what cultural activities were like, or more than the scraps of the biographies of less-than-prominent musicians. The Prague of the early nineteenth century was beginning to move toward the influential and independent Czech metropolis it is today. As part of the rebirth of the Czech nation at this time, Czech musicians who had once need to emigrate in search of work could now remain in Prague, where their compositions were issued by music publisher Marco Berra.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Prague, chez Marco Berra.

The case of Joseph Spanner is typical. Spanner seems to have spent his entire musical career in Prague. We know nothing about his birth or youth, nor the year of his death; he appears in the historical record as a student performing in concerts with other students from the Conservatory. The reporter for the column on the "state of music on the continent" for the Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review writes:

The scholars of the conservatory of music had two concerts, entirely supported by scholars of only three years standing in the academy. M. SLAWICK, the violin player, was the only exception. They performed MOZART's grand symphony in C, and the last fugue was played in such a masterly style as 'to excite the astonishment of the audience at the boys' attainments'. A concertante for two flutes by CRAMER[1]*, and executed by Joseph SPAIMER [recte Spanner] and ANTONY KLEPSCH*[2]*.*

A report (including the date, Feb. 21, 1823) on the very same concert appeared in two other contemporary publications, the *Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst* (Vienna), and *Der Kranz, oder Erholungen für Geist und Herz. Eine Unterhaltungs-Schrift für gebildete Leser* (Prague). The anonymous critic writes:

1) The composition is certainly the work by this title by Franz Seraph Cramer (1783–1835), which had been published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1815. A copy survives in the Badisches Landesbibliothek.
2) Klepsch went on to be a brass-instrument maker and appraiser in Vienna.

The first of the two academies opened with the immortal Mozart's glorious majestic grand Symphony in C major; the solid and powerful performance of the orchestra was worthy of the masterpiece. In particular, the fugato conclusion, followed by the loud and general applause of the public, was given with unusual precision. The Concertant for two flutes by Cramer performed by the students Joseph Spanner and Anton Klepsch as the first item after the symphony, spoke, lifted by its worthy performance, quite pleasantly.

In the following year a similar concert took place to benefit the "Hausarmen" [literally house-poor]. The *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* reports:

On April 2, at 5 PM, the first vocal-instrumental academy took place in the Imperial-Royal private meeting rooms [Redoutensälen], to benefit the Fund for the Support of the House-Poor. The orchestra and the soloists as well as the singers were almost entirely current and graduated students of the Conservatory.

The concert opened with the overture to *Pflegekindern* by Lindpaintner; this was succeeded by an aria from Mozart's *Figaro* sung by Miss Emilie Rössler ("sung purely and correctly, but with little power and feeling"). Spanner appeared next, in Krommer's Adagio and Polonoise for Flute[3], "played quite beautifully". Five more numbers followed, concluding with the grand overture in D by Stunz.

By 1833 Spanner is listed among the performers in another benefit in Prague, but now as "Member of the [Royal] official Theater-Orchestra", interpreting variations for the flute by Tulou. The last note regarding his performances that I have been able to find is in a mention of the 1841 benefit for the "House-Poor":

"The annual musical academy for the benefit of the private society for the support of the house-poor awoke no great interest. The students from the Conservatory played an overture (unknown here, as the ticket said) by August Krommer, son of the late Imperial/Royal Chamber Kapellmeister Franz Krommer, and a second one by Winter. The most important concert piece was a quintet (first and last movement) by Louis Spohr, for piano, flute, clarinet, horn and bassoon, performed by Miss Marie Potel, with Messrs. Spanner, Pisarzowitz, Hail and Poschmaurny."

This program had been announced in advance (for March 30) in the column "Art and Life in Bohemia" in *Bohemia: Ein Unterhaltungsblatt*.

By 1844 Spanner was listed among the teaching faculty at the *K.-u-K. Konvikt* (a school founded 1831), responsible for wind instruments, along with other teachers responsible for piano, strings, and voice, and continued to hold the position until at least 1851. As a composer, Spanner produced at least four works with opus numbers, as well as ten "*Unterhaltungen*" (entertainment, diversion, amusement). The earliest piece to be mentioned in the press is a *Rondo alla Polacca* for flute with piano accompaniment, issued in Prague by Marco Berra. The first review appeared in the *AMZ* in 1832:

"The piano, which also sometimes receives its own little solo sections, leads, with a small Andante into the chief movement, with which a good flutist without excessive efforts will make friends. This is a fine piece of entertainment, which well combines bravura with melody. The pianoforte is easy."

The critic for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* was less complimentary in 1835:

"*I see nothing of the form of a rondo; but it remains a Polonaise in the manner in which one uses it for concerts, with pretty cantabile moments and brilliant passagework. Everything is very proper for the fingers, here and there, not easy; the accompanying piano part is poor and conventional, particularly in the introductory Andante. The writing is not pure. The piece would be better scored for unaccompanied flute."*

Spanner's op. 4, the *Amusement pour la Flûte avec accomp. du Pfte ad lib.* received the following notice in the *AMZ* in 1836:

"*An entertaining piece, not difficult to perform for a moderately skilled flutist, but still rewarding, consisting of an easily comprehensible introductory Andante and a sonorously written Allegro moderato, the bravura moments of which lie very easily on the finger. The whole things can serve just as well as exercise for study without any accompaniment, as it can bused with the very easy piano accompaniment to enliven a company. It only claims to be pleasing."*

In the same year *Caecilia*[4] (a contemporary music magazine, issued by the publisher Schott in Mainz) wrote:

"A very successful solo, brilliant and yet not at all too difficult to perform, since it is conceived and written with a complete knowledge of the instrument."

At about the same time the *Leitmeritzer*[5] *Amtsblatt* noted the publication of number ten in the series of *Unterhaltungen für eine Flöte von J. Spanner*, or "Fantasy on favorite motives from the Operas: the Sonnambula, and the Fiancée, by Auber". In the same issue they

3) Not likely to be from either of the composer's concertos for the flute. Perhaps the two concluding movements of the Krommer flute quartet in D, op. 75, published in 1808?

4) Caecilia, Vol. 18 (1836), p. 277.

5) Now known as Litoměřice, north of Prague on the Labe river.

also mentioned the previously published ninth volume in the series, which included material from the operas *Das Nachtlager in Granada* [C. Kreutzer], *L'ultimo giorno di Pompeii* [Pacini], *die Weiße Frau* [Boieldieu], *und Jessonda* [Spohr]. No surviving copies, and no bibliographical references, identify for us the contents of nos. 1-8 of the *Unterhaltungen*, nor what Spanner's opp. 1-3 were. As of this writing I have only located his op. 4, which is in the collection of the Royal Library in Copenhagen, and has now joined the digitized music for flute on the Library's website[6].

6) http://img.kb.dk/ma/spanner_j/spanner_amusement_oeuvre_4.pdf

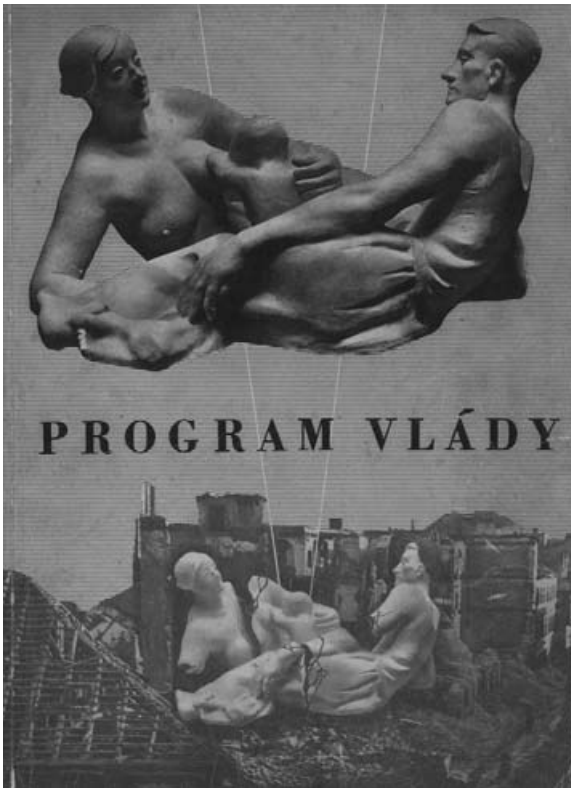
MUSIC IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE STALINIST ERA

PART 3

"TODAY,
THE STATE IS YOU
AND ALL YOUR
FELLOW WORKERS"

"It is not
the consciousness
of men
that determines
their existence
but their social
existence
that determines
their consciousness."
Karl Marx

The previous two parts of our mini series have dealt with the ideology of socialist realism. We have striven to define socialist realism as a strategy pursued by those wielding power, focusing on its organisational structure and distribution, then viewing it as an actual ideology and, finally, as a compositional method. In the present text, we will attempt to lay bare the characteristics of the music of the time – that which was created and that which was performed. The main attention will be paid to vocal-instrumental forms, which played the major role in the shaping of the nature of the socialist-realist creations. The questions pertaining to instrumental music are yet to be dealt with.



The cover of the so-called Košice Government Programme, which in 1945 virtually ushered in the accession of Communist totalitarian rule and the country's subordination to the Soviet Union.

Socialist realism was supposed to become, and did indeed become, the one and only creative method, the one and only possible way of making art conducive to the building up of socialism, and for many it was also the one and only way of survival, the one and only manner that made it possible for their music to be published and, most significantly, performed. A societal form of consciousness was formulated. Composers were expected to be aware of who paid them and whom they should serve. The leading role in Czechoslovak society was assumed by the working man, and music was to play no small a part in his re-education, in the fight for his transformation into socialist man. The postulate for re-education, however, was understood in the sense of straightforward populism and the urgency of waging an ideological battle. Art was aimed at expanding people's horizons, enabling an orientation amidst the intricate social situation and relations; it was to satisfy the needs of the people. Music was required to intermingle with the working process, production, itself, hence the "centre of gravity of the music scene should be relocated", from the concert hall and the opera house to the factory, the popular festival, the street, that is, among the people. Another objective was to do away with the distinction between "pure" and "utility" music – all music was to be of the utility variety, to become an everyday requisite of the working people. "Serious music composers must write utility music, not exclusively serious", since then it would widen the gap "between their creation and the people, between their creation and the social needs." "Music works must depict reality, yet the picture must not be general and non-specific. Depicting the execution of a plan does not suffice, it is necessary to render the process of executing a specific plan, by a specific collective and, what is more, in a variety of forms – plans are differently executed by miners and seamstresses, in towns and villages." National specificities were of vital importance. New melodies and new types of musical expression (Asafiev's "intonations") would then arise from these specific pictures, which, however, also had to be rather universal and typical. Consequently, in line with the contemporary opinion, analysis of a particular social situation would make it possible to plan an artistic work on scientific foundations, and the basic artistic forms would spare artists of unnecessary fumbling. The path of new music was, and had to be, the path of socialist realism, which was not a fad introduced by Lenin, Stalin and Zhdanov in the Soviet Union but the sole possibility resulting from the objective societal patterns. The essential trait of socialist realism was that it did not focus on the work itself, but the creation – that is, not dealing with the questions of why, how and when a composition *was* written, being instead concerned about how it *should be*

written, "not instinctive expression, but conscious application." This appertained to the history of music itself – not presenting something as it was but as we want it to have been – and this spurious reasoning was also applied to the contemporary creation and performance. Illuminative in this respect are some quotations from the brilliantly formulated text by the future celebrated author Milan Kundera, titled *Co je realismus v hudební reprodukci* (What is realism in music interpretation?), published in the first issue of the Hudební rozhledy magazine: *"By reflecting the objective reality, a work of art harbours within itself the ideology of its time; when this reflected reality occurs in a new epoch, it becomes in part consistent, in part inconsistent, with the tendencies of this new epoch, with a part of the work of art's erstwhile values turning into non-values. This typical discrepancy between the values and non-values in a work of art has been easily and regularly dealt with in the arts that entail the process of interpretation. By means of interpretation, a work of art has been constantly re-valued day by day, epoch by epoch." […] "Perhaps it is now evident that the requirement for the interpretation to be faithful, the requirement for a work of art to be approached with the so-called rigorous reverence, the whole perception of a work as an inalterable thing unto itself, which is recognised, felt and apprehended by the interpretation, means that the work of art is rid of its variability in time, its progressiveness, viability, its ability to satisfy the new societal needs. Meeting such a requirement is tantamount to killing a living work of art and enclosing it in a museum showcase. Meeting such a requirement means barring a work of art from performing the new functions, tasked by the new class. Such a requirement, albeit not intended to lead to such results, functions as reactionary." […] "What, then, will be the mission […] of socialist realism in music interpretation? Let us define it as specifically and as generally as possible: To preserve the musical values of individual works by accommodating them, as far as the possibilities of the performer allow, to the needs of today's progressive class, to the needs of the proletariat." […] "It is only possible to re-value that which retains some, or an essential part, of its value; whereas in the cases of works that are, in their entirety, useless for the needs of today's leading class, for instance – chosen at random – Valéry's charms, or Schönberg's Piano Pieces, any re-valuation is out of the question, as nothing can be redeemed either by recitation or performance, for simply nothing is there to be re-valued. The socialist-realist interpretation of such works is: no interpretation at all."* How alluring, how monstrous?

Following the end of World War II, Czechoslovak society, as well as its music scene, featured a number of attributes that were, to a greater or lesser degree, similar to those of the entire Euro-American culture sphere. When turning our glance to the summary of the music production in particular and not merely confining ourselves to the few transcendent works and creators, we can trace a continuing deviation from the early-20th-century avant-garde trends, which had already begun evincing itself at the beginning of the 1930s. What is more, many artists felt a bold and sincere urgency to help with the recovery of the nation, culture and society in the wake of a devastating armed conflict. The reconstruction optimism and the endeavour for being widely acceptable, demonstrating that they had embraced the legacy of heroic and revolutionary Romanticism, markedly influenced the message delivered by music throughout Europe. On the other hand, society gradually started to perceive the more progressive, avant-garde tendencies in art as a manifestation of freedom. Logically, that which during the Nazi dictatorship was branded as "entartete Kunst" acquired a new ethical charge, which many a time went beyond the framework of "mere" art. Yet the main accession of the "second avant-garde" would only occur at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, when it was no longer feasible in the post-war Czechoslovakia. Consequently, the greatest scope at concerts was afforded to music reassuring of the national identity, that is, works hailing from the time of the national liberation (the second half of the 19th century), primarily pieces by Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák, but also by their successors, Josef Suk and Vítězslav Novák. Significant too was the performance of compositions that in terms of programme endorsed the fight against fascism, among them Miloslav Kabeláč's cantata *Neustupujte!* (Do Not Retreat!), for male choir, woodwinds and percussion, to folk texts that contained anti-German passages, as well as, almost naturally, quoting the Hussite chorale *Ktož sú boží bojovníci* (Ye Who Are Warriors of God). Positively assessed too were Ervin Schulhoff's anti-war pieces, primarily *The Symphony of Freedom* (1940), the *Red Army Symphony* (1942) by Josef Stanislav, and Jaroslav Doubrava's *Symphony No. 2*, the "Stalingrad" (1944). The first prize of the Hudební matice's May Competition in 1945 went to Vítězslav Novák's 1943 *May Symphony,* Op 73, for solo voices, mixed choir and large orchestra, to verse by Karel Hynek Mácha, Vítězslav Hálek and František Branislav, and dedicated to "Generalissimus Jos. V. Stalin,

HISTORICAL BI

the liberator of the Slavs". Special attention was aroused by Vít Nejedlý's music, particularly his symphonic march *Vítězství bude naše* (Victory Will Be Ours) and the cantatas *Přísaha Ukrajinky* (A Vow of a Ukrainian Woman) and *Tóbě, Rudá armádo* (To You, Red Army). Numerous compositions were based on the subject of the Czechoslovak Legions, for instance, the cantata *Lví stopou* (The Lions' Tread) by the chorus master Jaroslav Kvapil, a pupil of Leoš Janáček. A number of composers who before WWII had inclined to the European avant-garde or even co-formed it, returned to popular and mass culture, both in terms of the subjects and music, seeing an extraordinary opportunity and challenge in the mass song in particular, and, taking an example from the Soviet Union, more boldly employing mixed choirs, which were supported with the aim of cultivating the people's creativity. Alois Hába and his pupils Karel Hába, Karel Reiner, Rudolf Kubín, Štěpán Lucký, Václav Kašlík and Václav Dobiáš composed numerous songs to the themes of liberation and building up socialism. Similar tendencies were also in evidence on the part of Otakar Ostrčil and Ladislav Vycpálek, representatives of the first Czechoslovak Republic's official musical culture. Vycpálek's 1946 chorus *Boje nynější* (The Fights of this Day), for instance, was set as a model for young composer as late as in 1949.

In the wake of the parliamentary election in May 1946, clearly won by the Communist Party, and, especially, after the Communist coup in 1948, there was thus something to link up to. The rising and ever more evident discrepancy between popular and high-brow culture, the omnipresent adverting to the crisis of contemporary music, as well as the ever increasing disregard of music and music events by the media, the professional and non-professional public alike, all these factors contributed to the extreme willingness of music creators to involve themselves in the building of socialism. Accordingly, the resolution and proclamation adopted at the Second International Congress of Composers and Musicologists (20–25 May 1948, Prague), a year prior to the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (25–29 May 1949), which announced the so-called austere direction and approved socialist realism as the sole creative method that would serve the ideological struggle, already bore all the signs of socialist-realist

art's uncompromising directives. Sadly enough, although musicians acted relatively independently and stood beyond the framework of the structure of the cultural policy (no one was much interested in music), they were highly active as regards manifestation of allegiance (definitely more active than in the sense of actual creation). Yet even though both the Second International Congress of Composers and Musicologists and the First Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers could have been made use of by the Communist Party bodies as opportunities to declare the artists' readiness to collaborate with them, it was virtually unheeded by the leading culture functionaries, let alone the public. Nonetheless, the two events were adjudged as having played a major role in the domain of music. The Zhdanov Doctrine, pronounced on 10 February 1948, and Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's ever-repeated phrase "A nation creates music – the composer only arranges it", fell on very fertile soil. Let us quote from the editorial in the second issue of Hudební rozhledy magazine, published on 30 November 1948: *"Composers and musicologists were the first artists in our country to have clearly and unanimously declared that they would like to draw conclusions from the new reality in their work. The first among artists to begin seeing in a new way; not intellectualistically understanding, but feeling and experiencing. The first artists to avow collectively to serve the people."* Or as Andrei Alexandrovich Zhdanov once put it: *"Not everything that is accessible is great, but everything that is authentically great is accessible, and the greater it is, the more accessible to the masses."*

Numerous folk-creativity ensembles started to spring up under the administration of the mass organisation "The People's Arts": youth and workers' choirs, cultural brigades, military choruses. Operas were performed directly in factory halls (in 1949, Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* was staged in the Zbrojovka Brno ammunition works, for instance), while philharmonic orchestras went to meet and play for the working people. Composers assumed music patronages in the regions with the aim to intermingle with the "common people", and the party's cultural and propagandist departments agitated among amateurs. Monstrous Parks of Culture and Relaxation were built, opulent folk festivals were held. Opera theatres were set up in the border regions (in Liberec and Ústí nad Labem), the record industry was nationalised, new music academies were established in Brno and Bratislava. Music was needed everywhere – people's music, comprehensible, optimistic and beautiful, utility music, music in the service of the building up of a new society. Yet, according to the official doctrine, artists could not, erroneously, seek the "new reality in new techniques, they must seek it in a new vital content". And where people's culture was no longer alive, it was necessary to "engraft such a people's culture that is needed in the particular region, thus unleashing a mighty wave of new people's creativity, of a kind that was unprecedented in the past." On the one hand, it was necessary to revive all the abundance of the regional creation, on the other, its content had to be merely for the masses, democratic and socialist. "Composers must render the mood that should be uttered by music."

Forward, left

The flagship, and most promoted, genre in the years following the assumption of power by the Communists in February 1948 was the mass song. In the Czech milieu in particular, it linked up to the tradition of the 1930s proletarian song, the Soviet mass song, which began to be performed in Czechoslovakia in the middle of the 1930s, as well as the workers' song and the Czech tramping song. The country-building epoch of the first two-year plan, announced in 1946, is characteristic of, among others, Václav Dobiáš's song *Budujeme* (We Are Building), to lyrics by the renowned poet František Halas, with the symptomatic refrain "let us roll up our sleeves", which won the publishing company Melantrich's competition in 1946 and relatively soon became generally popular. After 1948, the mass song differentiated itself into an array of specific subgenres (march, military, socialism-building, socialist youth's, young pioneers', political, love, and other types of song). The explosion of creative activity was not only encouraged by the Syndicate and the subsequent Union of Czechoslovak Composers, it was also enhanced by a large network of mass culture organisations. The song *Kupředu, levá! Kupředu, zpátky ni krok* (Forward, Left! Forward, Not a Step Backwards), composed by Jan Seidl for the Congress of National Culture in April 1948, would be approved as the jingle of the first five-year plan for economic development, which was announced at the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1949. Highly acclaimed and popular at the time were compositions by Václav Dobiáš (*Pojďte s námi na brigádu* / Join Us in Voluntary Work or *Příchod Rudé armády* / The Arrival of the Red Army), Josef Stanislav (*Se zpěvem a smíchem* / With Song and Laughter), Jan Kapr, Rudolf Kubín, Antonín Palouček, Jiří Pauer, Ludvík Podéšť, Jaromír Podešva, Zdeněk Přecechtěl, Karel Reiner, Jan Seidl, Vladimír Sommer, and others. With a slight exaggeration, we can brand Radim Drejsl as a prime example of a promising young composer of mass songs. An extraordinarily gifted pupil of Pavel Bořkovec at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, in 1947 Drejsl joined the Communist Party and, while still a student, was appointed the head of the Vít Nejedlý Military Ensemble. He did his utmost to make his music comprehensible and melodious, voluntarily having forsaken an individual, singular expression in favour of the collective. In 1953, Drejsl took up a working

WITH SONG AN

1) Julius Fučík (1903–1943) was a Czech Communist journalist, executed by the Nazis. He occupies an almost mythical position in the pantheon of Communist "martyrs".

2) The recording of the piece has been re-released on CD on Supraphon's Karel Ančerl Gold Edition, Vol. 43, titled *Build Up Your Country to Reinforce the Peace* (SU 3944-2)

"The Victorious February,
a wide perspective of the joyful building of socialism."

residency in the Soviet Union, and two days after returning to Prague, on 20 April 1953, he died under mysterious circumstances. His best-known pieces included the popular song *Rozkvetlý den* (A Day in Bloom), and also acclaimed were his songs *Armádě zdar* (Hail to the Army), *Píseň o Fučíkovi*[1] (Song of Fučík), *Písnička na vojně* (Song of Military Service) and *Sláva tankům* (Hail to the Tanks).

Build your country, strengthen peace

Given all the requirements the music at the time was supposed to meet, it comes as no surprise that one of the most amply applied genres was the cantata, ranging from short to feature-length. *"A pathfinder in our new creation, and not only as regards the cantata, is Build Your Country, Strengthen Peace by Václav Dobiáš,"* wrote Jaroslav Jiránek in 1961 in his article *Patnáct let nové cesty Československé hudby* (Fifteen years of the new path pursued by Czechoslovak music). Dobiáš had written the cantata back in 1947, under the title *Československá polka* (Czechoslovak Polka), and its main theme was the idea of restored Czechoslovakism. Based on two texts penned by František Halas, it fully complied with the enthusiasm accompanying the reconstruction of the liberated country. Yet the cantata's premiere had met with a lukewarm response, and the piece would only gain general recognition following its receiving the gold medal at the World Congress of Defenders of Peace in Warsaw in November 1950. The composition was duly renamed after the battle cry of the first Communist Czechoslovak President, Klement Gottwald: "Build Your Country, Strengthen Peace", and went on to serve as the model of socialist realism in Czech music. The work's highly derivative traditionalism drew upon the legacy of Bedřich Smetana.[2] A prominent position was also occupied by the cantata *V sovětské zemi* (In the Soviet Country) by Jan Kapr, the only Czechoslovak holder of the Stalin Prize, to a poem by Vítězslav Nezval. The emptiness of the music and the overlaying of Romantic clichés in both the music and text represent one of the nadirs of socialist-realist vulgarity. Dobiáš's and Kapr's cantatas were premiered at the first music festival of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers in April 1950 by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Karel Ančerl, whose programme also featured Jan Seidl's cantata *Odkaz Julia Fučíka* (The Legacy of Julius Fučík). One of the first cantatas written by a young composer was Miroslav Barvík's *Poděkování Sovětskému svazu* (Thanks to the Soviet Union), to Stanislav Kostka Neumann's lyrics, which received its premiere on 6 November 1948 in Brno. Although praised as an accomplished attempt at monumentalising an agitprop song, the cantata was reprehended for being overly challenging in technical terms. After it had been broadcast on the radio for the second time, on 8 November 1948, Barvík's piece fell into oblivion and would never be performed again. Bearing witness to the sheer bizarreness of the era is the fate of Vladimír Sommer's *Cantata of Klement Gottwald,* premiered on 20 November 1949 at a concert given by the Czech Philharmonic to mark President Gottwald's birthday. The piece met with a relatively positive response, yet it gave rise to heated debate within the Union of Czechoslovak Composers, with some questioning whether its

ND LAUGHTER

"musical content" was purely subjective, at variance with its dedication. Sommer's cantata was then cited as an example serving to disprove this thesis and highlighted, vice versa, as proof of the possibility of rendering content in music objectively ("since the musical picture often captures a variety of emotional nuances, characterises, represents different aspects of a certain life situation") by Antonín Sychra in his doctrine-forming text *Stranická hudební kritika – spolutvůrce nové hudby* (The party's music critics – co-creators of new music), written at the beginning of 1950. In the autumn of 1950, however, Vladimír Sommer's *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in G minor,* his graduation work in Pavel Bořkovec's class, was castigated for being formalist, and subsequently his music was banned from concert stages in Czechoslovakia. In 1954, in the *Musicology* anthology Ivan Vojtěch attempted to defend Sommer, mainly with reference to the success enjoyed by the cantata dedicated to Gottwald, yet at the time the composer was already working on the *Vocal Symphony,* set to, among other texts, Franz Kafka's prose, which was absolutely unacceptable at the time. Neither the *Cantata of Klement Gottwald* nor his rather popular mass songs *Hej Stalinovci* (Hey, Stalinists) and *Stráž nového žití* (On Guard of New Life) were sung any longer, and they have eventually even disappeared from the list of Sommer's works.

Build Your Country, Strengthen Peace
"Mothers of the world, fight for peace, against the new war mongers."

New, truly realistic operas

Pursuant to the 1948 Theatre Act, in April of that year the Theatre and Dramaturgy Council was instituted, with the agile Miroslav Kouřil named as its director. Soon after its establishment, it set out the "operative dramaturgy plan" for the period between 1 July 1949 and 30 June 1950, which defined five major tasks: the systematic promotion of Czech and Slovak creation; the joint thematic planning of all opera and operetta companies; the encouragement of the production of new works based on new subjects; the reassessment of the legacy of the past (at least two historical operas to modified librettos should be performed within a theatre season); the support of Soviet and people's democratic art.

As opera was considered to be a genre popular among the working people, it was assigned with playing a significant role in the education of the new human. "Owing to its being closely related to specific life situations, implied by the libretto, the form of opera has always been an indicator of the realistic nature of music, and hence also the degree of progressiveness of the composer's world-view." The demand for a new, socialist-realist type of opera was extremely high indeed. From 1948 on, the period press, as well as inter-professional and public debates, stressed the necessity of generating new, contemporary opera, of the kind that, in line with the spirit of Bedřich Smetana's legacy, would foreground the joyous building up of socialism – yet this goal

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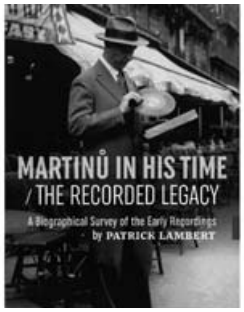
was not overly successfully achieved. Accordingly, in 1951, in a speech titled *Naše hudba bojuje za mír* (Our music fights for peace), Miroslav Barvík could say that: "… *the best cantatas of Dobiáš, Seidl, Kapr, Stanislav, Očenáš, Jurkovský, Kardoš, Podešť and others – fighting for peace and singing about peace, whereby peace is often personified in the figure of the great Stalin – serve to prove another truth: that the great themes and high degree of ideology aids artistic creation, that ideology raises the artistic value of works…",* just as he could appeal for encouraging the making of new operas: *"Opera is undoubtedly the most accessible and the most acceptable grand musical form, capable of having a large-scale and wide impact. The total of more than 30 operas that have been composed, and to a lesser part, staged in our country since 1945, certainly impresses everyone as regards the quantity. Yet their qualities altogether cannot be claimed as being high enough as to leave any major traces in our awareness or in the development of Czech opera at large (with the exception of Krútňava [The Whirlpool] by E[ugen] Suchoň).*" And similarly, in his 1954 proclamation *Vytvoření nové opery – přední úkol našich skladatelů* (Creation of New Opera – the Key Task of Our Composers), Jan Seidel could opine: *"Regrettably, the results in the domain of opera are not such that we could unambiguously talk about a definitive consolidation of the realistic style in opera, which must also manifest itself in the wide masses' enduring love for and appreciation of the individual new operas",* adding that "*in opera, it is necessary to more boldly fight for a new realistic style, for a profoundly true and concurrently romantically uplifted portrayal of today's life."* As late as in 1959, under somewhat changed conditions, we can thus read in the *Letter to Opera Companies*, as it was formulated by the participants in a conference on contemporary opera, that they "*with disconcertment, conclude that opera is the one and only artistic form in which so far not a single work has been created on a subject from the socialist present of our days."* When we make use of the quotations for further contemplations, it is evident that the intention to conceive a truly socialist-realist opera failed to materialise in Czechoslovakia during the course of the 1950s. To all appearances, however, the main reason was not the absence of ideology but the intricacy and complexity of staging operas.

The almost 30 new operas which were premiered from the end of WWII to the end of the 1953/54 season did not include any pieces of extraordinary quality. Their composers gave preference to ideologically neutral librettos, mainly reaching for literature of the Czech classics (Alois Jirásek, Ladislav Stroupežnický, František Kožík, Božena Němcová, Alois Mrštík, Vilém Mrštík, etc.). The overwhelming majority of the operas hailing from the period did not astonish anyone, did not offend anyone, did not provoke anyone, they merely pragmatically met the requirements of the theatre companies' dramaturgy. The endeavour of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers, its invitation for creating socialist-realist opera, was thus not fulfilled, not even within the intentions of the new opera that may be branded as national, people's (after the fashion of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*), with the only exception being *Krútňava* (The Whirlpool) by Slovakia's Eugen Suchoň. In this respect, the most discussed in Bohemia were two operas: Jaroslav Kvapil's *Pohádka máje* (A May Tale) and Zdeněk Blažek's *Verchovina* (The Highlands). As regards the former, in the wake of its premiere in March 1950 at the National Theatre in Prague, the reviews and the debates within the Union of Czechoslovak Composers rebuked the piece for its arias being overly complex and lacking in melody. Jaroslav Kvapil duly responded to the critique by revising the opera, yet the modified version was only staged in 1955, by which time the very conception of socialist realism, and national opera had changed somewhat. The greatest hopes were invested in Zdeněk Blažek's *Verchovina* (1950–51), set to Jaroslav Zatloukal's libretto, fragments of which were performed at concerts in Brno in 1953 and in Prague in 1954, and which was first staged in Brno on 3 March 1956. The music-drama committee, established in March 1954 within the headquarters of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers in Prague, went on to deal with the work after the premiere. The pursuit for creating a "model" socialist-realist opera was evident up until the early 1960s, with Blažek's piece having been the hot candidate, yet – perhaps fortunately – it was not identified as such either.

NG FOR PEACE

reviews



Patrick Lambert

Martinů in His Time / The Recorded Legacy

Bohuslav Martinů Institute, 2015, 83 pp., ISBN 978-80-906098-2-2.

Patrick Lambert is one of those British music lovers and specialists who seem to have the greatest penchant for the music of the Czech masters. The most recent work pertaining to this attachment of his is the modestly appearing publication *Martinů in His Time / The Recorded Legacy*. Its secondary title, *A Biographical Survey of the Early Recordings*, sums up the content. The study is primarily intended for readers beyond the Czech Republic, thus focusing on the details of the making of the recordings and the existing recordings, especially those released during Martinů's lifetime, as well as the basic general information. It is a survey that may serve as the first acquaintance with the composer, just as it may be used for acquiring a deeper view of the matter by someone who, when it comes to Martinů, is already in the picture. That is precisely what the Bohuslav Martinů Institute must have had in mind – to obtain a new printed source providing the fundamental information about the artist whose legacy it attends to, while, at the same time, to afford scope to an enthusiast, researcher and record collector so as to present long-term documentation work, and also to furnish his own evidence as to what has appealed to him in Martinů's music and why. The publication has just 83 pages, yet owing to its format, font size and use of the printed area, it is more voluminous than would seem to be the case. It also features photographs and images of some of the recordings' sleeves. Lambert's explication may seem to be divided unevenly, yet, with regard to the subject, the layout is logical. The first chapter is dedicated to a long phase of Martinů's life, ending with his leaving Europe during World War II, a period that, in terms of the development of his own specific musical idiom, could be split into many more parts, but if we take into account the reasoning based on the recordings themselves, there are not so many that actually date from that time. The title of second chapter refers to Martinů's success in the USA at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s. It also pays attention to the period of the composer's returns to Europe, his wanderings across Western Europe, and, finally, the last two years of his life. Unlike Czech authors, Patrick Lambert presents a view unburdened by personal experience of the Communist era, a view based on his having lived in the free world. At the same time, he is profoundly informed, familiar with all the sources, including the Czech, having the advantage of being able to understand the Czech language through his wife. In many cases, Lambert has added his own notion of connections and his own assessments. He provides information about the recordings that have long since not been generally available, and about recordings that may have yet to be digitised, demonstrating on them the well-known fact that Martinů often created music to commission from particular artists. From a distance, Lambert thoroughly explains the development of the reception of Martinů's music in Czechoslovakia – from the time when it was biased owing to the ideology of the rulers, then being corrected and, ultimately, perhaps correct. A coherent reading, one backed up by the author's profound knowledge of the matter; a necessary and beneficial publication.

Petr Veber

Jan Klusák

Soliloquies of Philoctetes

Marie Fajtová – soprano, Roman Janál – baritone, Jiří Mráz – clarinet, Sebastian Toth – cello, Amy Lynn Barber – marimba, Jan Riedlbauch – flute, Miloslav Klaus – guitar, Lucie Kautská – piano, Wihan Quartet, Fama Quartet, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Tomáš Brauner – conductor.
Text: English, Czech. Recorded: 1992–2015. Released: 2016. TT: 66:38. 1 CD Radioservis 51034817.

Soliloquies of Philoctetes is the title of a recently released Radioservis album featuring chamber works by Jan Klusák, an 82-year-old Czech composer, who keeps seeking new colours in music. Even though it is difficult to come up with something novel in terms of form and expression, emotions and ideas can still be conveyed in singular, fresh ways. And in doing so, Klusák does not have to employ ample configurations, nor does he need an extraordinary manner of playing this or that instrument, or anyhow strive to change natural acoustics. The very first piece, *La Jolie Rousse*, written in 2001 to Guillaume Apollinaire's poem, makes do with a soprano (the superlative **Marie Fajtová**) and string quartet (the Wihan Quartet). Its music teeters between tradition and innovation, with the timbres and the wide scale of emotions implying an enormous inner tension, which outwardly takes effect in a similar manner to that of Henryk Górecki's music, coming across as possessing a spiritual, even meditative, power. The subsequent 1973 duo for clarinet and cello, *Jupiter,* reveals the compositional asceticism Klusák adhered to in the 1970s (perhaps

in defence against the surrounding bombastic vulgarity?), yet it naturally fits on the album, for the abandonment of expressive depths has given greater scope to bringing out purity and boundless sincerity, as well as Klusák's upright, unbent spine. The cycle of songs for baritone and orchestra *Bitter Sorrows*, set to Josef Václav Sládek's poems, was completed in 2014 for the brilliant **Roman Janál,** who on the live recording is accompanied by the **Prague Symphony Orchestra,** conducted by **Tomáš Brauner.** The seven songs sound compact, as they serve to render the composer's reminiscences of his wife, and chime with his state of mind following her death. Admirably, Klusák has eschewed superficially expressing his grief and sentiment, hence his songs do not act on the listener as emotional blackmail, with the very opposite being the case – we can even hear defiance, determination, an honest immersion in the ocean of feelings, passion. All that has taken the form of a highly terse dramatic arc of Mahlerian force, mainly harbouring fatefulness and hope, a faith in the immortality of love. The next piece, *Trigon*, a trio for marimba, flute and guitar, written in 1983, brings to the fore another of Klusák's creative facets. Its eminently experimental structure, drawing in part upon minimalism and employing an extraordinarily refined counterpoint, incorporates three traditional forms: chant, song (canto) and toccata. All three performers – **Amy Lynn Barber** (marimba), **Jan Riedlbauch** (flute) and **Miloslav Klaus** (guitar) – are superb. Minimalist elements are also present in the eight-minute-long *Three Pieces for Two Pianos* (1990), performed by **Lucie Kautská;** amidst the ostinato current, however, there is the section, titled *Hidden Melodies*, in which the minimalist form is subordinated to deep immersion in the most inner of feelings.

Jan Klusák's profile album culminates (in the right sense of the word) in the titular *Soliloquies of Philoctetes*, i.e. *String Quartet No. 7*, written in 2015. It was inspired by the story of the mythical Greek archer, which was also dramatically treated by Sophocles, to whose text Klusák has even composed an opera. The String Quartet renders the hero's meditation in a cave on the island of Lemnos, where he lived for nine years in the utmost agony. How did Philoctetes get there? The legend has it that during the Trojan War, he was bitten by a venomous snake and, upon Odysseus's command, he was marooned on the desolate island, because his co-warriors simply could not look at his festering and terribly foetid wound. Ultimately, the desperate besiegers of Troy returned to pick him up, since, according to a prophecy, Philoctetes's his archery skills, given to him by the gods, were supposed to decide about the victory in the Trojan War. Which, as is known, did indeed come to pass. The *Soliloquies of Philoctetes*, given on the CD a full-blooded account by the **Fama Quartet,** fully express meditative absorption in existential pain, with sustained notes, almost of a drone nature, having a harrowing effect. The compendious, full timbres form ever more thickening clouds of fatefulness, with the flow now and then broken by an intense pizzicato or cluster. In the booklet notes, Klusák himself refers to the piece as follows: "*Every Central European composer worth his salt should bid farewell to the world with a string quartet. Not everyone, though, can manage to create a quartet up there with Beethoven's final and Smetana's second. Should something so extraordinary and original be conceived, it is necessary that a composer goes somewhat insane. May the kind listener judge whether I have sufficiently succeeded in this regard in my swansong.*"

Jan Hocek

Richard Novák

Portrait

Richard Novák – bass, Gerhard Zeller – piano, Brno Janáček Opera Orchestra and Choir, Brno Philharmonic, PKF – Prague Philharmonia, František Jílek, Miroslav Hoňka, Jaroslav Kyzlink, Tomáš Hanus – conductors.
Text: English, Czech. Recorded: 1978, Stadion studio in Brno; 1977, Czech Radio Brno; 9 Oct. 2003, live, Janáček Theatre in Brno; Aug. 1975 and Dec. 1975, Domovina studio in Prague; 13 Oct. 2001, live, Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2016. TT: 2:32:13. AAD/DDD stereo. 2 CDs Supraphon SU 4206-2.

The portrait of **Richard Novák,** who celebrated his 85th birthday this year, presents the superlative bass in the roles in which he has enthralled thousands of listeners and opera lovers throughout his long and illustrious career. A resonant voice, flavoured with a great emotional charge, fabulously clear pronunciation, so characteristic of the singers of older generations, and, most notably, a genuine artistically faithful approach to each and every role are all synonymous with Richard Novák. The album, containing two discs, first shows him as an opera soloist in Brno, in studio recordings made between 1977 and 1983, as well as performing in a production of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* at the Janáček Theatre in 2003, while the second, "Prague", CD consists of studio recordings of his accounts of song cycles and is crowned by a live recording of his singing of Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* at a concert at the Rufolfinum. The album offers an exquisite selection

of Novák's flagship opera roles, with the first one, Leporello in *Don Giovanni,* literally drawing you into the universe of the artist, evidently enjoying the natural, unceasing joy of singing, portraying the immortal Mozart role with an admirable vocal equilibrium and impressive dynamism.
Not surprisingly, Richard Novák has his favourite music and characters, one of them being the Water Sprite in Dvořák's *Rusalka*, the performance of which is so enthralling that it makes us listen to it breathlessly and compels a comparison with Eduard Haken's unforgettable rendition of the role – yet Novák's Water Sprite is vocally brighter, more lyrical, less menacing, fatherly, highly credible and human. As portrayed by Novák, Tchaikovsky's Gremin is a confession with all, including the lowest, tones both vigorous and deep-felt in the softest pianissimo.
Verdi complies with Richard Novák's nature similarly to Dvořák and Janáček, and it is good that the album features music from four of his operas: *Don Carlos*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Macbeth* and *Luisa Miller,* with all the respective parts delivered in a highly cantabile way, with an immense sense for expression, drama and the slightest nuances. The CD dedicated to opera is rounded off with the Forester's aria from *The Cunning Little Vixen,* with Novák paying tribute to Janáček; the love of life, its beginning and end, appear to be that which the composer and the singer have in common.
The second CD, made up of songs, includes Hugo Wolf's *Mörike Lieder*, Franz Schubert's *Schwanengesang*, and Jaroslav Křička's *Northern Nights.* Richard Novák splendidly combines the pensive lyrics with the dreamy music. The final track is of Dvořák's *Biblical Songs,* beloved by Novák, who performs them naturally and free of any pathos, entirely chiming with all the songs in terms of the music and content.
The accompaniment, provided by the **PKF – Prague Philharmonia,** is precise, extremely sensitive, and even more authentic than that many a time supplied by the customary organ. The live recording of the *Biblical Songs*, made in 2001, exposes Novák as a mature performer, the deserved holder of the Thalia Prize for lifelong mastery. Yet – as Petr Kadlec points out in the booklet notes – since that time Richard Novák has gone on to give over 300 performances in opera productions and appeared at more than 300 concerts. The superlative singer is celebrating his 85th birthday in full strength, both as an artist and human, with dedication and humility to his mission in life.

Marta Tužilová

Bohuslav Martinů

Ariane

Simona Šaturová – soprano, Zoltán Nagy – baritone, Baurzhan Anderzhanov – bass, Abdellah Lasri – tenor, Tijl Faveyts – bass, Theater Essen Choir Soloists, Ivo Kahánek – piano, Essener Philharmoniker, Tomáš Netopil – conductor.
Text: English, German, French, Czech. Recorded: 2014, 2015, Alfred Krupp Saal, Essen. Released: 2016. TT: 66:00. 1 CD, Supraphon SU 4205-2.

"You are the image of my happiness and that happiness will kill you." Just as these words in George Neveux's play *Le Voyage de Thésée* may unveil several levels – a love drama, a mythological premonition, a surrealistic shortcut – so does Bohuslav Martinů's *Ariane,* in its non-complexity and playfulness, during less than three-quarters of an hour, graciously serve up to listeners everything they could expect from an opera. A mystical touch of death and a struggle for life, as well as against oneself; a mystery shredding the beginning of a love affair and the inevitability of its end; the lament of the abandoned heroine – and all that wrapped in a Neo-Classical package, at every turn clearly revealing Martinů at the peak of his invention.
While working on the challenging opera *The Greek Passion,* in the summer of 1958, Martinů, as he himself put it, took a break by composing the one-act *Ariane*, to which he wrote the libretto, based on Georges Neveux's play. The composer had previously, in the 1930s, made use of a subject of the French author in his surrealistic opera *Juliette.* This time, Martinů reached for a play in which Neveux approached the myth of Ariadne on Naxos in a singular manner. In Neveux's drama, while fighting the Minotaur, Theseus realises that he is facing his alter ego, which has yielded to love for a woman (this approach to the ancient Greek myth intrigued Martinů and his play with the human psyche).
Amidst the competition on the part of the greater and more significant operas, Martinů's *Ariane* has to date been rather overlooked. In 1987, Supraphon released a recording (which was re-released in 2000), featuring an account by Václav Neumann, conducting the Czech Philharmonic, and the soloists Celine Lindsey, Richard Novák and Miroslav Kopp. The performance is fabulous, romantic, the singers are splendid (with the only caveat being the bad French of some of them, which simply wouldn't be tolerated today). Almost 30 years down the road, a new album has come out – a live recording of a performance of *Ariane* made by the **Essener Philharmoniker**, headed by **Tomáš Netopil,** who also conducted the most recent presentation of the opera at the National Theatre in Prague, in 2010 (owing to the lack of finance, only in a concert version).
As conceived by Netopil, Martinů's inspired score possesses drive and lightness,

the vigour of sharp transitions, while the expression is more restrained than that of Neumann's, thus being closer to the composer's aesthetics. The music does not hover so much in Romantic arcs, with Netopil respecting the structure of the self-contained numbers, accentuating the dividing lines of the individual passages and savouring the contrasts, which permeate all the score's components. Serving as a prime example in this respect is that which follows Ariane's lament, the opera's one and only aria, which forms one quarter of the piece and in which the mythological heroine gracefully bids farewell to her life: "And if I have to die, I will die happy, as the one I loved was King Theseus." Afterwards, Martinů returns to the playful motif of the introductory Sinfonia, now played on glockenspiel (!). It comes across as though a dance of two porcelain elephants were fading away, not the life of the lead female character. In Tomáš Netopil's hands, however, it does not sound like a mockery, it just represents Martinů's typical aloofness, which, what is more, adds to the opera an alluring flavour. With a similar aloofness, as well as drama and elegance, is the role of Ariane sung by **Simona Šaturová.** The part requires both a coloratura and a character soprano, and although it is not primarily written to impress (although it does contain a few typically coloratura passages), it places great challenges in terms of phrasing and thus can mercilessly expose any of the singer's technical insufficiencies. In this respect, I must say that I simply cannot imagine that any other Czech or Slovak singer could have performed the role of Ariane better than Mrs. Šaturová, who delivers it effortlessly and with great technical bravado. Outstanding too are the other singers, particularly the Romanian bass-baritone **Zoltán Nagy,** a pliant and sonically delicious Thésée. A minor, humorous, exception in the performance is several phrases of the male ensemble, exposing a total rhythmic and melodic variance (evidently the result of the live recording…).
It would seem outrageous to refer to Martinů's *Double Concerto for Two String Orchestras, Piano and Timpani*, H 271, as a supplement of any sort, yet in this case the word is apposite. Both Supraphon and Tomáš Netopil, who initiated the album's making, emphasise that the main intention was to record *Ariane*, which is at the centre of attention. Nonetheless, the Double Concerto, recorded by the Essener Philharmoniker and **Ivo Kahánek,** is definitely worthy of attentive listening. It may, however, happen that you simply won't get round to it – you may well find yourself playing *Ariane* over and over again, abandoning it with an even heavier heart than Thésée did Ariane.

Michaela Vostřelová

Jan Mráček

Antonín Dvořák

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 53, B 108; Romance for Violin and Orchestra in F minor, Op. 11, B 38; Mazurek for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 49, B 90; Romantic Pieces for Violin and Piano, Op. 75, B 150

Jan Mráček (housle), Czech National Symphony Orchestra, James Judd (conductor), Lukáš Klánský (piano). Text: English, German, French. Recorded: Czech National Symphony Orchestra recording studio, Prague, Nov. 2015. Released: 2016. TT: 67. 34. 1 CD, Onyx, ONYX 4160

The Czech violinist **Jan Mráček,** winner of the 2014 Fritz Kreisler Competition in Vienna, gave himself an exquisite present for his 25th birthday. His debut solo album, released by the UK's Onyx, features the most representative 19th-century Czech violin works: Dvořák's *Violin Concerto*, *Romance*, *Mazurek* and *Romantic Pieces*. Had he also opted for the *Nocturne in B major* or *Ballade in D minor*, the CD's capacity would be bursting at the seams. But, on the other hand, we have a good reason to look forward to Mráček's next recordings – not only as regards music by Dvořák, for whom the artist has an affinity owing to his family (both of his parents are violinists), but also with respect to his teachers and mentors, Marie Micková, Jiří Fišer, Václav Hudeček and Jan Pospíchal. The CD clearly reveals Mráček's reverence for the Czech performance tradition, particularly Josef Suk's "model" presentment of Czech violin pieces (Mráček played with Suk back when he was 11 years of age).
To all appearances, the two would only disagree when it comes to their opinion of Dvořák's *Mazurek*, of which Suk was highly critical. On the reviewed CD, the *Mazurek,* even with orchestral accompaniment, actually comes across as the most forcible of all the works, followed by the *Romantic Pieces,* in which Mráček was accompanied by the pianist **Lukáš Klánský.** The two artists have been working together for years, and it is evident in the latter opus's splendid, rhythmically pregnant and finely nuanced performance. Mráček's age and natural talent, as well as the objectivising Czech tradition, have prevented him from turning the masterpiece into an impassioned or, vice versa, superficial, potpourri. The first three parts sound sensitively differentiated, yet still like a one-movement composition. The final *Larghetto* (*Elegia*) has not fallen

into languid sorrow; it sounds credible, indicating a slightly objective distance. The only thing that diminishes my enthusiasm about the account of the tender *Romance* is Mráček's tendency towards broad legato and the agogically not overly variable orchestral accompaniment. In this connection, I am surprised that the British label did not invite along for the making of the album the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, a soloist of which Mráček has been since 2011, but the **Czech National Symphony Orchestra,** helmed by its spiritus agens, Jan Hasenhörl, without whose support the CD would have not been materialised, as Onyx duly points out on the album's sleeve.

The tricky task of accompanying Mráček, an incarnation of the Czech violin tradition, and a Czech orchestra, performing a purely Czech programme, was undertaken by the British conductor **James Judd,** who did manage to negotiate the rhythmically delicate passages of the *Mazurek* and the first and final movements of the *Concerto* yet failed to set the *Romance* swinging in the barcarole way, while in the *Concerto* he staked his bets on rustically loaded rhythms (the opening bars of the first movement), which are not even audible in older recordings of the piece. Forming a stark contrast to the rustic rhythms of the *Violin Concerto* is the rather rigid agogic development of the *Romance*, which Mráček did not conceive as a pious lullaby, but a romantic vocal scene. This is an entirely legitimate manner of reading Dvořák's score, although far more intriguing interpretations have appeared in recent years, primarily on the part of Mráček's foreign colleagues. Yet Mráček's more dynamically than rhythmically and agogicallly varied playing should be gauged in terms of the Czech tradition, and mainly compared with that of his contemporary Josef Špaček, who for his 2014 recording had available a more renowned orchestra and presented a more resourceful interpretation of Dvořák's *Violin Concerto* (Supraphon, SU 4182-2). Alien to Mráček are the speculative postmodernist renditions of Messrs Tetzlaff (2015) and Zimmermann (2013), let alone of Anne-Sophie Mutter (2013) – unlike them, he does not wallow in the pointing of phrases, giving preference to more straightforward interpretation, above all bringing his strengths to bear in the second movement of the *Violin Concerto*, in which, by means of a long-breath legato, he embraces the older performance tradition. Mráček's approach reveals his sticking to the certainties of the Czech violin "school", as well as an unsentimental veneration and respect for the previous generation of Slavonic violinists. And this stance is indeed worthy of admiration. As are Mráček's current predispositions, which will undoubtedly mature in the course of time and transform into a more singular expression. Given the violinist's young age, the present album is a truly valuable achievement.

Martin Jemelka

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