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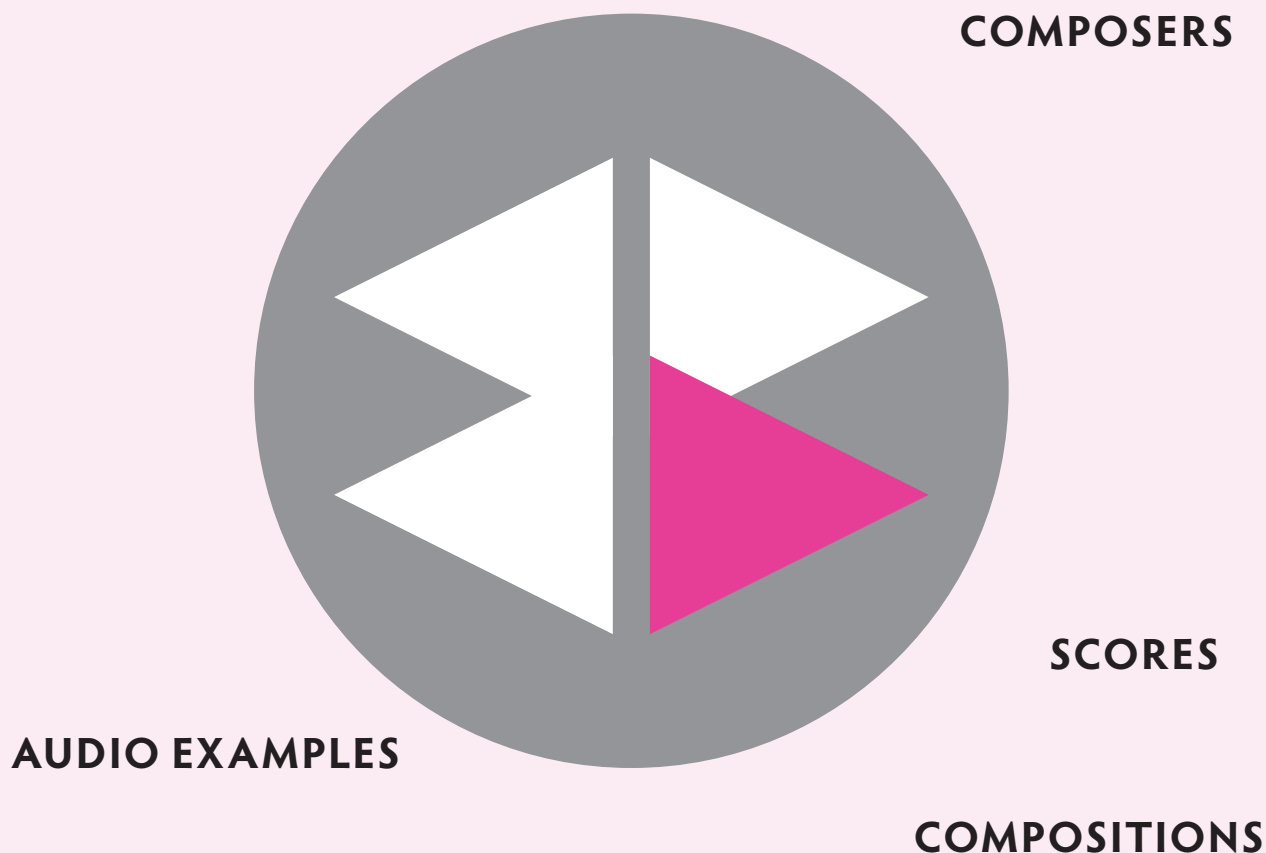
Sára Medková

Ostrava Days 2017

The Golden Prague Festival

Jan Václav Stamic

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Czech Music Information Centre

Dear readers,

as you must have noticed, the present autumn issue of our magazine includes an attached Czech-English brochure titled "Contemporary composed music in the Czech Republic - ensembles, festivals, concert series". Its mission and aim are, we hope, elucidated in the editorial on its first page, so there is no need for me to repeat it here. Just like this quarterly, the brochure is one of the outputs of the Czech Music Information Centre, and it is also available free in electronic form. You can find it on our portal musica.cz (tell your friends!), which I would like to invite you to visit. Among other things, it provides access to the MusicBase (see the teaser on the opposite page), which contains records on contemporary and slightly historical pieces by Czech composers and, in many cases, views of scores and recordings. We are constantly updating the MusicBase, and are planning to further extend it in 2018. We will welcome your feedback, suggestions and comments. If you read our magazine, the Czech Music Information Centre has more to offer you!

Have a nice autumn & see you at musica.cz
Petr Bakla

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cover: Participants in the Ostrava Days Institute (photo by Martin Popelář)



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SÁRA MEDKOVÁ: SOME PERFORMERS NEED TO CREATE STORIES I RATHER STRIVE TO FILTER THEM

Following the acclaim garnered by her debut solo album, *De profundis*, Sára Medková has become a rising star among young Czech pianists.

The CD is centred around pieces by Johann Sebastian Bach and Frederic Rzewski, after whose *De profundis* it was named. We talked with Sára Medková about her singular interpretation style and repertoire during the summer holidays at the deserted Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno.

This June, your first solo album was launched at the Prague Music Performance festival. How did you feel?

I gave one of the best concerts I have ever given. After several months over which I could not perform owing to my maternal duties, I really looked forward to it. What's more, the audience was truly amazing. And I was happy to have three godparents – David Mareček, the director of the Czech Philharmonic; the harpsichordist Barbara Maria Willi; and the festival's director, Jan Bartoš. Each of them said something personal, and so I got on stage with the feeling of being at home, as though at a family gathering. The actual CD launch was then just the icing on the cake.

The CD combines Johann Sebastian Bach's music with Vít Zouhar's minimalism, a joint audio performance with Ivo Medek and Frederic Rzewski's De profundis. How did you arrive at such a repertoire?

Bach is my greatest love, and I have performed plenty of his works. For instance, I will soon play his *English Suites* and *Partitas*. Bach's is the music I have actually



PHOTO: MAREK OLBRYZEK

pursued more than any other. On the other hand, I am keen on contemporary music too. I am also a composer, and ever since I was a student I have never ceased to performed pieces written by my friends and myself. While I was attending the primary arts school, the conservatory and, finally, the Janáček Academy, I was naturally absorbing contemporary music thanks to the people around me, as well as to having studied composition. All in all, to date I have given more than a hundred premieres of contemporary works, some of which were written directly for me. Hence, by combining Bach and contemporary pieces I have put together the music that is closest to my heart.

The album contains the composition Inside, which you have created jointly with your husband, Ivo Medek. The piano chimes from without and within in all possible manners, with the whole rather coming across as a captured improvisation...

The composition was actually engendering as improvisation. After all, my husband and I have also been engaged in improvisation as members of the Ensemble Marijan, who since 1999 have consistently focused on improvisation and multimedia projects. When played repeatedly, some passages began establishing, stabilising

themselves, which is how the piece's final form resulted. The album's producer, Vítězslav Janda, even arrived at the idea that the title, *Inside*, was related to my pregnancy. That, however, was simply out of the question, as the composition had come into being 10 years before we were recording it.

And I thought of it as being an insinuation to the inside of the piano...

Well, that seems to be a more prosaic explanation. Another semantic level relates to that which is between me and Ivo. But I like the fact that everyone can think up his/her own story for our music.

The Bach and Rzewski pieces dominate the album, with the former being a wonderfully heron monolith, towering even within the Baroque context, while the latter rather evokes a burning bush. What is it that makes you feel that the works are akin to each other?

Rzewski is greatly fond of Bach's music. He told me that no one will ever be able to surpass Bach, and he himself would not even consider attempting to do so. Nevertheless, his *De profundis* contains a through-composed fugue, which may be deemed to refer to the past or represent an attitude towards Baroque music. The two composers are allied in respect of the sheer profundity of their music. I have been exploring Rzewski's *De profundis* for six years now, and I have the feeling that I will be learning it until the end of my life. I keep discovering and finding something in the work, just as I do in Bach's creations. When it comes to Bach, I am fascinated by the splendid polyphony and voice leading, whereas in the case of Rzewski I am amazed by his incredible compositional techniques, which seem to absorb everything that has ever emerged in music. Nonetheless, it is not a collage or a spiritless exercise, merely demonstrating all that Rzewski knows. The compositional techniques are so ingeniously covert that they never protrude, and the whole is a synthesis of the most striking facets – for instance, an almost unplayable Ligetian etude, which I have had to rehearse for a few days prior to every concert performance.

The necessity to read a piece repeatedly has now and then even been used as an argument against playing by heart...

I prefer performing by heart to playing from the score, since it allows me to immerse myself deeper into the work. Yet as regards contemporary music, I have mainly played it from the sheet, as it is more complicated and, regrettably, is sometimes only performed on a single occasion. But when I study and rehearse, I explore the notation in minute detail.

Frederic Rzewski's De profundis also includes a recitation and something resembling Sprechgesang, so it would seem that the piece requires to be presented more by a comprehensive performer than a mere pianist. Do you intend to continue to pursue this direction?

Performing *De profundis* is highly demanding in mental terms, yet I really enjoy doing so. It is the coming true of a dream that had seemed unfeasible to me. When as a child I was asked what I would like to become, I used to say that I wanted to be an actress or singer. Although it has not turned out to be the case, I really like cultivating myself in this respect. When, at a composition-theory lesson, the composer Jaroslav Štátný – alias Peter Graham – played a recording of Lisa Moore, I was enthralled and sensed that I simply had to play the music. By the way, Jaroslav Štátný wrote for me a piece in which I also sing and dance. And there

followed other composers, when they realised that they could make use of these skills of mine – somewhat unusual for a pianist – and thus bring their own ideas into effect.

The work is based on a well-known text written by Oscar Wilde, which underlines the musical message with deliberations on the fate of an exceptional, socially outcast individual. What is your opinion of the artist's lot?

People gifted with artistic propensities are far more prone to depression and seeing the world more acutely than those who are not. And a number of things affect us more than they do those devoting to rational activities. On the other hand, we possess the advantage – and disadvantage – of being capable of constantly creating. Yet when having a day off, we don't know how to enjoy it. We don't only feel the obligation, motivation or ambition to do something, we are outright impelled. Consequently, we can never relax. If I had to say what the artist's lot is, I would perhaps point out their presenting to people that which they ordinarily fail to perceive. Which brings me to the other, beautiful aspect: our feeling of immense euphoria. It is important for us to filter such experiences through our art and communicate them to the people who have not been granted this susceptibility or do not sense it so intensely.

If you submerge into the things around you, as well as your inner self more deeply than others – whether for good or ill – you reach the substance of art. Otherwise it would be just show business...

As the tumultuous fates of Oscar Wilde and many other artists have shown, we quite often pay a heavy price for having reached into our inner selves, which is not fair (*laughs*).



ISHA Trio

Wilde said that he put all his genius into his life and put only his talent into his work. What do you yourself put into life and what into work?

I put all my energy into life. When it comes to work, it is inseparable from my life, the two are linked together. Life is work, and work is life. I don't want to sound like a workaholic, yet the interconnection is too strong. One is encouraged and driven 24 hours a day, each and every day, all year round.

The album De profundis also includes a DVD with a visual representation of the title piece, furnished with Lukáš Medek's animations. What specific role did you play in creating them?

It was actually my idea, initially an utterly prosaic one. When I first performed *De profundis* in public, I ascertained that Oscar Wilde's parlance is so specific and complex that even people who are in regular contact with English could not fully understand it. The music is very forcible in itself, yet the lyrics do play a significant role, and I wanted the audience to grasp the message. So we decided to visualise the text. Originally, we only intended to add subtitles, as the written caption makes the perception of the sung or spoken words easier. I turned to Lukáš Medek, who came up with a true work of art. His fascinating video is now an integral part of all the concerts at which *De profundis* is performed. And Frederic Rzewski liked it too, so I am glad to have received his blessing.

When you embark upon exploring a piece, do you solely focus on the music, or do you also have visual and extra-musical notions?

I would be quite pleased if at least sometimes I would be able to concentrate on the music alone. But I usually see something in addition, and, now and then – which is really annoying – I can even hear another music, which may result from the fact that I myself am creating something, so I am overloaded with perceptions. Nonetheless, when I start studying a piece, first I go through the score, without my instrument, so as to make out what the composer aimed to say and thus refrain from projecting my own things into it. Some performers need to create stories, I rather strive to filter them.

Your repertoire seems to me quite wide-ranging. How do you actually compile it – does it result from goal-directed seeking, a haphazard testing or something totally different?

My repertoire does not reflect any long-term goal seeking, I have been putting it together spontaneously. Whenever something grips my heart, I learn it, play it for some time, and later on I may include it in my core repertoire. That is perhaps why it comes across as incongruous – it contains something from someone, nothing pivotal. Although I have been generally referred to as having a penchant for contemporary music, I love Romanticism and Eclecticism – throughout my studies at the conservatory and academy I was fond of Rachmaninov and Chopin, created my own things and also liked jazz. Well, it is funny indeed that all that has been left over from it for the album is Bach and contemporary music! But whenever something overwhelms me I begin playing it all the time. I think that one day I will return to Chopin's music, which I would love to record at some point down the road. Yet at the moment I am probably going through a phase when Romanticism does not appeal to me, as I feel the need for purity and brutality.

What are you above all interested in as regards the piano and piano playing – the sound quality, brilliant technique...?

The technique fascinates me, yet I don't consider it the main thing – it is still and all just a means of expression. First and foremost, I am enthralled by the incredible multitude of timbres and sounds the piano can generate. Contemporary music has brought about new techniques and potentialities, and the instrument has begun to virtually speak. Back at the primary arts school, I had a fantastic teacher, who used to leave me alone in the classroom and ask me to play silence or a storm, for instance. She taught me how to improvise, I was allowed to do anything, even reaching inside the piano, anything I desired to do. And I am yet to find the limit, the point at which I could say that I have tried everything.

You are also a member of the ISHA Trio...

Yes, and I love being part of it. As the name indicates, it is a female ensemble, made up of a soprano, flautist and pianist. To date, we have recorded two albums featuring Czech music, ranging from Dvořák all the way through to the 21st century. We are about to make our third CD, which this time will contain international contemporary music.

One of the ISHA Trio albums contains your Songs of the Daughter of Zion for piano, flute and soprano. Have you ever considered transcribing the piece in such a manner that you could play and sing it yourself?

I am not a good enough singer to venture to do so. I would like to study voice one day, yet I would also like to play jazz, sing opera, sing huskily – I should divide myself into four, or rather fifteen. There are so many things I am fond of, and it's really difficult to choose. That which I am doing at the moment is in itself difficult enough to choose from, when I have to decide whether I should rehearse Dvořák's piano concerto for a festival in Texas, Lachenmann for a performance in Brno, or whether I should rather work on a new composition or tidy up the kitchen.

You are a composer and your husband, Ivo Medek, is a composer too. Does he not stifle you, as Mahler stifled his wife Alma?

Fortunately, he no longer does, but he did use to stifle me as my teacher throughout the time of my studies. He was perhaps the first person in the world whom I really disliked, and only after a long struggle did this feeling change. Now I have my own poetics, he has his own poetics, and even though they differ significantly, they have points of concurrence at which we come together – for instance, in joint improvisations and team compositions.

Sára Medková (born 1983 in Přerov) is one of the most gifted young Czech pianists. She studied composition at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno, with Ivo Medek, and the piano at the Faculty of Music of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, with Peter Tópercz and Ivo Kahánek. She has garnered accolades at international piano contests, including the Yamaha Competition, Concorso Argento, Concorso pianistico internazionale in Salerno and the Josef Suk International Competition in Prague. She has performed at concerts and made recordings with orchestras, chamber ensembles, and also as a soloist. In 2009 and 2010, in collaboration with the Brno Philharmonic and AKS Prague, she initiated a unique project featuring concertos for three pianos by J. S. Bach, W.A. Mozart and her own triple concerto, Di ritorno. In the 2017/18 season, Sára Medková is scheduled to give performances at the festivals in The Hague, Berlin, Bratislava, Krakow, Brno, Prague and Kroměříž, to make a tour of China, to undertake projects with the Ensemble Marijan and the ISHA Trio, to work with the Brno Contemporary Orchestra, and to pursue other activities.

THE GOLDEN PRAGUE FESTIVAL

Over the last 54 years, the Golden Prague Festival has crystallised into a unique annual competition and showcase for TV production in the areas of music, dance and theatre. Emphasis is placed on classical and contemporary music and jazz. The festival started in 1964, when it was founded by Czechoslovak Television, which makes it one of the oldest television festivals in Europe.

The festival looked for inspiration for its current form in historical developments – in the breath of freedom with the Prague Spring in 1968, quickly tied down by the purges of normalization, and in the transformation of the communist-controlled Czechoslovak Television into a self-confident, independent public service. The Golden Prague ITF has been through various incarnations, from a festival of television programming in general; as a showcase for television culture in the Soviet block, through a competition in the drama and music categories, up to today's focus on music and dance. The festival categories underwent tempestuous developments which saw diverse combinations and a changeable number of categories, such as entertainment, journalistic programmes, original dramatic work, or even adventure films. In addition to the competition section, Golden Prague also has a non-competitive “videothèque” which is not restricted by the date at which the programme was created.

The dates changed too: at times, the festival ran parallel to the Prague Spring international music festival, at other times, it was held in late September. The festival used to last up to a week;

today's four days are packed with events. It also changed location: the Slavic House on Na Příkopě street, the historical environs of the Wallenstein Palace in the Lesser Town, the Žofín Palace on one of the Vltava islands opposite the National Theatre, the Kaiserstein Palace on Malostranské náměstí, the modern Palace of Culture and the alternative spaces of the Archa Theatre. In recent years, it has found a home on the New Stage of the National Theatre, including outdoor events on the adjacent piazzeta.

The prizes changed too, as well as the methods by which they were allocated – there were juries of journalists, Czechoslovak television viewers, the Union of Film and Television Artists, the Union of Dramatic Artists, students, or representatives from developing countries. Socialist ideology permeated the festival, including the audience jury and visits to United Agricultural Cooperatives and factories. There are 54 years of television production between *Půjčovna talentů* (*Talent Rental Shop*), a musical theatre revue with a humorous story about a device that grants people extraordinary artistic powers, and *Červená* (a documentary on the legendary soprano Soňa



The Little Mermaid (The National Theatre in Prague)

PHOTO: HANA SNEJKALOVÁ

Červená), the latest programme to receive an award at this year's Golden Prague.

In recent years, the number of competition entries has been between seventy and a hundred, arriving from twenty different countries. Throughout its history, the festival received entries from around the world, not just from the TV “superpowers”, which, within the festival categories, are mostly Germany, the UK, France and other European countries. The festival has also presented programmes from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, South Africa, Middle Eastern countries, Egypt or the USA. The festival once offered a unique opportunity to see programmes from places as exotic to Europeans as Sri Lanka, Ghana or Nigeria.

Today, the programmes are judged by a jury of five, which consisted of the following for the 54th edition in 2017: Bernard Hellthaler from Germany, member of the Euroarts board and chairman of the Idéale Audience Group, John Bridcut from the United Kingdom, a producer at Crux Productions, Danica Dolinar from Slovenia, head of music and dance at Televizija Slovenia, Silvia Hroncová from the Czech Republic, director of the Theatre of the National

Opera and the State Opera in Prague, and Miikka Maunula, executive producer for classical music at the Finnish YLE.

The jury assesses the entries in two rounds. The first takes place before the festival, and focuses on the overall artistic quality and the technical and craft aspects. Through a “grading” process, the twenty programmes with the highest number of points advance to the second round. This takes place during the festival: the jury watches the entries together and decides on the awards; one programme can receive multiple awards. The main award is the Grand Prix Golden Prague, which includes a €10 000 cash prize. There are also two Czech Crystal awards for the best programmes in the individual categories, and an Honourable Mention for extraordinary artistic achievement. A special prize can also be awarded by Czech Television, the festival's organiser.

The competitive aspect of the ITF Golden Prague also includes the possibility of awarding prizes by important foundations, cultural institutions or sponsors. Since 2003, it has cooperated with the Dagmar and Václav Havel Foundation – Vize 97, who in 2011 gave a special award to a programme



PHOTO: HANA SMEJKALOVÁ

Bohuslav Martinů's *Juliette*

capturing a historical reconstruction of Giuseppe Scarlatti's *Dove è amore è gelosia*. This comic intermezzo was premiered in 1768 at the same venue at which it was now recorded: the theatre at the Český Krumlov château, one of the few preserved Baroque theatres in the Czech Republic. The Foundation also awarded a prize to a recording of Leoš Janáček's *The Makropulos Affair*, premiered at the Janáček Brno biennale, organised by the National Theatre Brno. In this case, the jury concurred, as it awarded this program with the Czech Crystal for 2014.

The programmes that were awarded the Grand Prix reflect the variety, variability and creativity of fifty years of development in television production in the fields of music, dance, and theatre. Recent winners have included *The Life I Love*, a German documentary portrait of pianist and pedagogue Menahem Pressler, who restarted his solo career at age eighty five. Another winning programme was the Danish documentary *Danse le danse*, which explores the moments of disillusionment, doubt and social isolation of choreographer Nacho Duato, who after his departure from the Madrid ballet had the task of modernising the conservative Russian ballet in St. Petersburg.

In 2013, the jury was impressed by *Journey of a Lifetime*, which marked Sir Georg Solti's hundredth birthday by presenting various takes on his extraordinary

conducting career, while *Lang Lang – The Art of Being a Virtuoso* allowed the audience a peak into the life of a contemporary pianist who has the ability to enthuse millions of people for classical music.

2011 saw the success of *Carnival of the Animals*, a BBC production which makes the music of Camille Saint-Saëns come alive with the help of actors, documentary footage and animations of both the orchestra and animals. The BBC also scored highly with their portrayal of a radically new interpretation of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. This was prepared by the Balletboyz dance group and featured dancers in styles as varied as tango and street dance.

There is also great variety as to the range of opera, ballet, concert and other performances that are recorded. Producers choose traditional productions in large established theatres as well as alternative and often controversial approaches. Winners have included a Dutch broadcast of a performance combining ballet and dance in CERN, the largest particle accelerator in the world. A popular genre is made up of portraits of eminent figures in the world of music and dance. In recent years, these have included Seiji Ozawa, Leonard Bernstein, Zubin Mehta, Nikolaus Harnoncourt or Nicolai Gedda. A documentary on Yuja Wang also managed to portray the dark side of this extravagant virtuoso's rise to stardom, while Alice Nellis' portrait of Czech countertenor Jan Mikušek captures him in a struggle with the musical material and his own talent, as he prepares for the premiere of *Stabat Mater* by the contemporary Czech composer Tomáš Hanzlík.

Festival programmes often reflect the lives of artists in zones affected by conflict. Last year's main prize went to the German documentary *Ayham Ahmad: The Pianist of Yarmouk*, about a Syrian pianist who continued playing in the ruins of Damascus until his piano was destroyed and he was forced to join thousands of other people and flee. The jury highlighted the use of music as a means of communicating a crucial message of hope and optimism in tragic circumstances. There are also documentaries on amateur musicians, such as one of last year's laureates *The Miracle of Gozo*, which maps life on a small island near Malta whose 30,000 inhabitants manage to keep two opera houses running.

The Golden Prague ITF, however, is not just a withdrawn competition for an international

jury, nor is it a conference with panel discussions, round tables and seminars for a small community of experts; creatives, producers, broadcasters and distributors. It is a meeting place, a crossroads that mediates encounters between people and institutions that can help assess developments in the television genres of music and dance, and also suggest further progress. It also has a noticeable social dimension in its gala evenings and award ceremonies.

According to the Petr Dvořák, director general at Czech Television, the festival wants not only to present the newest productions, both Czech and international, in the given genre, but also to initiate and reflect on events on the cultural scene. Over the last few years, Golden Prague has been progressively more open to a wide audience, adding further accompanying events for the public. The Video Library is always very popular. It offers the possibility of freely viewing the competition entries and other programmes during the festival. At any point during the festival, one can enter one of the forty video boxes and watch the entries at one's leisure, or even get a password at the New Stage café and watch on one's own laptop or tablet.

The festival programme also includes encounters with interesting figures. Recent guests have

included the world-renowned dancers Jiří and Otto Bubeníček, who inaugurated the ITF 2016 with *Orfeus*, their original performance, and also presented a documentary that maps their extraordinary careers. Pianist Jiří Kahánek introduced his television cycle on classical music. Daria Klimentová, for many years the *prima ballerina* of the English National Ballet, presented not only *Dance Stories*, a documentary on her life and work, but also introduced her work as a photographer in an exhibition. Golden Prague also paid tribute to Soňa Červená, who managed to return from exile when she was already past seventy and follow up her international singing career with extraordinary work in theatre and opera, as well as melodrama, of which she is a prime exponent. Martin Kubala introduced his documentary about Jiří Kylián's departure from the position of director and chief choreographer of the Nederlands Dans Theater – the evening of the screening was full of Kylián's modesty and internal elegance. The tenor Štefan Margita presented a documentary in which the film crew, led by director Martin Kubala, followed him between his birth town of Košice and the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

The accompanying programme also includes a display by all the operatic theatres in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This year, this included



PHOTO: MIROSLAV KUČERA

Opening of the Golden Prague Festival in 2016

a memorial programme dedicated to the television and film work of one of the great innovators and magicians in the use of new technologies in the arts – director and composer Václav Kašík.

This year, we are introducing an award for lifetime achievements, bestowed by the European Broadcast Union and the International Music + Media Centre. It is symbolic that of the many nominations, Brian Large was chosen as the first laureate. He worked for many years at the BBC, and in addition

to hundreds of operatic performances, he also directed the legendary Three Tenors concert during the football world championships in 1990 or the New Year's concerts of the Vienna Philharmonic. It was Brian Large who in over seven hundred broadcasts set new standards for the recording of performances of opera, ballet and symphonic concerts. And the Golden Prague festival is the place where his contemporaries and followers point in the direction of new developments.

For the last few decades, the ITF Golden Prague has been organised by Czech Television in association with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which unites public radio and television broadcasters, and the International Music + Media Centre (IMZ), an international business network dedicated to the promotion of the performing arts through audiovisual media.

The competition entries, which can also be individual parts of a series or cycle, are divided into two categories: documentary works about music, dance and theatre, and Performing Arts, which includes broadcasts of operas, operettas, musical theatre, dance, ballet, concerts or theatrical performances. By accepting only programmes made at most sixteen months before the festival, Golden Prague earned its name as a unique competition and showcase for this kind of work. The number of submissions for one registration is unlimited, as is their maximum length. The entries must be at least 5 minutes long.

The statute of the festival states that the aim of the Golden Prague ITF is to mediate a wider knowledge of television programmes and films in the areas of music, dance and theatre from around the world and support their international exchange. The statutes also define artistic quality as a condition for participation. The management reserves the option of rejecting a programme if it were in conflict with the mission of public broadcasting television on an ethical or aesthetic level.

02 — 15 / 10 2017

9. mezinárodní festival soudobé hudby

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TRISTAN MURAIL: KOMPLETNÍ KLAVÍRNÍ DÍLO	PHACE ENSEMBLE
2 / 10 / 2017 — 19.00	9 / 10 / 2017 — 19.00
ALEPH GITARENQUARTETT	SKLADATELSKÝ PORTRÉT: ONDŘEJ ADÁMEK „AIRMACHINE 2 & PRAGUE MODERN“
2 / 10 / 2017 — 21.30	15 / 10 / 2017 — 19.00
AUDITIVVOKAL DRESDEN	WORKSHOPY
3 / 10 / 2017 — 20.30	Cello map
LICHTZWANG & NÓRA FÜZI	9 / 10 / 2017 — 13.15
8 / 10 / 2017 — 17.00	Airmachine
TWO NEW DUO	15 / 10 / 2017 — 16.30
8 / 10 / 2017 — 20.00	KDE: Umělecké centrum Univerzity Palackého



OSTRAVA DAYS 2017



ONO (Ostrava New Orchestra) conducted by Bruno Ferrandis

During its sixteen years on the scene, the Ostrava Days biennial has carved out a position as an exclusive space for the presentation of contemporary music which far surpasses the borders of the Czech Republic. This year, the festival presented twenty two concerts in ten days and more than a hundred compositions in total – from classics of the 20th century to pieces by participants in the festival institute, from chamber miniatures through pieces for large orchestra to operas. With its ninth instalment, the festival has not abandoned its ideological foundations or its basic conception of a series of musical events, but it was also transformed by two strong impulses.

The first of these was the foundation of the festival symphony orchestra, which replaced the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava. The artistic and personal tension between the festival and the JPO had grown over the last few instalments – it was often discussed behind the scenes and also transpired into criticism in the media. Journalists reprimanded certain members of the orchestra for their unfocused behaviour, often bordering on sabotaging music that was clearly foreign to them, which they did not enjoy performing, and for which they could not even find enough professionalism to keep this to themselves during the performance. The orchestra, on the other hand, complained about the conducting of Petr Kotík, artistic director of Ostrava Days, and the mutual animosity finally resulted in the decision to create a resident orchestra for the festival.

This is ONO – the Ostrava New Orchestra. There were no auditions: recommendations from the members of Ostravská banda (resident ensemble of the festival), and associated soloists were of primary importance. The organisers conducted

a targeted search for members: they focused on music schools where contemporary music has a strong standing. However, many also came with the idea that they would learn something about contemporary music performance and encounter it through intensive practice. The musicians of this hundred-headed orchestra met for the first time only nine days before the start of the festival. Intense rehearsals led them to a very good result after their first performance.

The second impulse was a change in the concert space – most of the concerts moved from the Ostrava House of Culture to the Karolina Triple Hall. This complex, reconstructed in 2014, used to serve as a power plant for the mine and coking plant which used to stand on the premises of today's New Karolina shopping and administration centre. The Triple Hall provided Ostrava Days with facilities and a variable concert space, which worked for large symphonic concerts, chamber orchestra pieces and a string quartet as well as an opera production. The shabby house of culture was replaced by fresh industrial poetry. In addition to the Triple Hall, concerts were held in the Antonín Dvořák Theatre, St. Wenceslas' Church, the adapted utility rooms of the Provoz Hlubina mine complex, the Cooltour centre and the Ostrava Gallery of Fine Art.

Ostrava Days did not move into the Triple Hall without any guarantees – in 2015, Karolina was the venue for the triple orchestra concert, culminating in a performance of Stockhausen's *Gruppen*. With continuous use, however, the acoustic disadvantages of the venue became apparent – the halls are not isolated and one can hear car noise from outside. Orchestras and chamber groups had to be supported with light amplification, and though the sound engineers did a very respectable job, they could not mask the outside noises. In all other respects, however, the Triple Hall worked perfectly.

The premiere of the Ostrava New Orchestra on Sunday the 27th of August in the Karolina Triple Hall attracted unusual attention. At the very start of the concert, ONO had to come to terms with **Phill Niblock's** #9.7, which was performed in its world premiere. Niblock uses his tried and tested methods, letting the strings sound in long chords which slowly transform and shift in micro-intervals. His composition held no surprises – except perhaps the fact that this seemingly monotonous and repetitive compositional method works again and again. Interpreting Niblock's music places large demands on concentration and coordination

in the string section. The orchestra seemed to be searching for teamwork rather than finding it.

However, it quickly consolidated during the following numbers on the programme, and this was certainly also thanks to conductor **Bruno Ferrandis**. This was his first appearance at Ostrava Days and his lively, encouraging and yet technically precise leadership was one of the beautiful constants and certainties of the festival. **Petr Kotík**, the convincing musical guru who alternated with Ferrandis on the conducting podium, found himself an ideal supplementary counterpart. *Six Short Pieces* by American resident **Devin Maxwell** got an excellent performance. **Salvatore Sciarrino's** violin concerto *Giorno velato presso il lago nero* provided a charming ending to the first part of the programme. The expressiveness of the fragile sonic magic was due



in large part to the artistry of violinist **Hana Kotková**, who interprets Sciarrino's music like it's her mother tongue. This was perhaps even clearer in the solo *Capriccio no. 6* by the same composer, which she played as an encore.

The climax of the second part of the concert was *Aīs* for baritone, percussion and orchestra by **Iannis Xenakis**. OD has begun to create a dramaturgical line out of Xenakis' large orchestral works: at the last edition, it was *Troorkh*, before that *Dox-Orkh*, and last year, the affiliated New Opera Days Ostrava festival presented *Oresteia*. Ostrava offers unique opportunities to hear these extraordinary works live, and in at least convincing interpretations. Let us add that before the grand opening evening, the festival had already presented Thursday's

"Open Space" concert in Provoz Hlubina and **Boris Guckelsberger's** *Requiem for Viola* in St. Wenceslas' Church, Friday's *Cage Chess Show* with the **Opening Performance Orchestra**, a concert by the String Noise duo with **Michal Rataj**, a recital by pianist **Joseph Kubera** and a performance of part of **Kate Soper's** opera *Here Be Sirens*. On Saturday, the programme continued with the traditional "Minimarathon of Electronic Music", String Noise returned with a performance of *Love Song* by **Alvin Lucier** and the programme concluded with a performance by **Jennifer Walshe** and guests. Ostrava Days were intense as usual, and if all the festival events had to be named, this text would simply turn into an exhausting list.

Out of what we have to look forward to every two years, we'd certainly miss Ostravská banda among the festival





ONO (Ostrava New Orchestra)

certainties. This year, it introduced itself with a portrait concert, “The World of OB”. In keeping with the name of the concert, **Ostravská banda** showed off all of its characteristic features: masterful performance, excellent individual technique and ensemble work, concentration, a great interest in the music, and finally, stamina: with two breaks, the concert lasted over five hours.

The first third of the evening was crowned by **Klaus Lang**'s *weiße farben* – a refined and elaborated composition which set up sonic layers and colours to communicate amongst each other. **Petr Bakla**'s *Summer Work*, a world premiere, was also built in several layers. In opposition to Lang's static colour, it presented constant motion of mutually stimulating voices. The second third of the concert lost its drive due to **Marc Sabat**'s *Lying in the Grass, River and Clouds*, which seems to have been composed more as a sound installation than a concert piece, and it made remaining focused very difficult. **Roscoe Mitchell**'s world premiere, *Distant Radio Transmission*, was excellent, and featured a soprano saxophone solo by the composer. An entertaining mix of noises and fragments of music from the airwaves held together perfectly – it was a patchwork created with compositional diligence and a detached view. The solo part in the exceptionally entertaining No. 36 *NONcerto for Horn* by **Richard Ayres** was performed

by the Ostravská banda horn player **Daniel Costello**, movement component included.

The “Voices in St. Wenceslas” concert brought a wide sweep through contemporary and recent chamber works. *Quartet – Unisono no. 2* was dedicated by **Pavel Zemek Novák** to the memory of student Jan Zajíc, who on the 25th of February 1969 became the second person, after Jan Palach, to self-immolate in protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact. His compositional work, which is limited only to one voice, works in a refined manner not only with the voice-leading, but also with colour and rhythm, reverberations, resonances and perhaps even a mechanic deduction of harmonic relationships in the mind of the listener. **Petr Kotík**'s *Ouverture* seemed to reflect the different and complementary temperaments of **Conrad Harris** and **Pauline Kim Harris** (that is, the String Noise duo) in the two violin parts. **György Ligeti**'s *10 Pieces for Wind Quintet* were performed virtuosically by members of Ostravská banda. The programme concluded with **Galina Ustowska**'s *Composition No. 1 “Dona nobis pacem”*. Her extreme approach to music managed to make even an audience as open as that of Ostrava Days quarrel. Tuesday evening continued into the night with solo compositions in the Cooltour space.

Wednesday's concert, "The Radical Past", was an unusual undertaking even in the context of Ostrava Days, particularly in its dramaturgy, focused on progressive pieces from the 20th century. It began with *Central Park in the Dark* by American composer Charles Ives from 1906 – this made it the oldest piece in this year's edition of the festival. The concert was accompanied by short recollections and observations by festival founder and initiator Petr Kotík and broadcast live from the Antonín Dvořák Theatre by Czech Radio. *Structures* by Morton Feldman also received an excellent performance.

A block of smaller pieces followed – Kotík's *Music for Three*, whose scraping and creaking string sounds once irritated the audience as well as Czech musical officials, *Olympia*, a beautiful miniature by **Rudolf Komorous**, and **Philip Glass**' minimalist *Two Pages*, in which violinists Conrad Harris and Pauline Kim Harris and keyboard player **Miroslav Beinhauer** played like

a well-oiled machine. The extract from **Jan Rychlík**'s *African Cycle* seemed to refer to past neo-classicism and future minimalism at once. The concert reached a monumental apex in a parallel performance of three pieces by **John Cage**: the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, *Atlas Eclipticalis* and *Winter Music*.

The Radical Past was preceded by a chamber concert in the Triple Hall, featuring the New York-based **Momenta Quartet**, who were joined by pianist **Joseph Kubera** for the Czech premiere of **Petr Bakla**'s *Major Thirds*. The Momenta Quartet also participated in the "Legacy of Rudolf Komorous" programme the next day. Thursday was closed off by **Daan Vandewalle**'s excellent rendition of **Frederic Rzewski**'s *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*.

On Friday the 1st of September, Ostrava Days became the first in the Czech Republic to present an opera by **Miroslav Srnka**, whose success with *South Pole* at the Bavarian State Opera has made him the most closely followed Czech composer today. The festival put on his previous operatic work, *Make No Noise*, which was presented at the chamber studio of the Bavarian State Opera and the Bregenz festival. *Make No Noise* is an excellently written work, starting with **Tom Holloway**'s libretto, which uses well-chosen non-poetic language to construct convincing situations. Expression is left to the music, and, most importantly, the singing. Srnka wrote a practically exclusively vocal work, in which he deals only with psychology – there is



Miroslav Srnka's *Make No Noise*



Loadbang Quartet

no story and the events serve only as points of departure for the main characters, Hanna and Joseph, who try to come to terms with their own past and traumas and build a relationship. Joseph and Hanna do finally come together happily, and the music erases any possibility of a banal, excessively sweet happy ending. The staging, by **Jiří Nekvasil** and **David Bazika**, tailored specifically to the Triple Hall, was excellent, as was **Joseph Trafton**'s conducting and **Ostravská banda**'s playing.

Make No Noise was preceded by a fantastic show by the **Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart**. The seven-piece vocal ensemble presented a cycle of madrigals by **Salvatore Sciarrino** in St. Wenceslas' Church, followed by pieces by **Enno Poppe**, **Konstantin Heuer** and **Friedrich Cerha**. The concert was topped off with a stunning rendition of *Menschen, hört* by **Karlheinz Stockhausen**. While singing in perfect synchrony, the members

*Holger Falk and Tamas Schlanger taking bow
after the performance of Iannis Xenakis's Aïs*





of the ensemble walked around the church until they finally walked outside, where they performed the last part of the piece. This vocal Friday was an extraordinary festival event from beginning to end.

The ninth instalment of Ostrava Days was, as is tradition, closed off with a chamber concert of student-resident pieces at the Janáček Conservatory, which is the festival's base of operation, and a last symphonic concert in the Karolina Triple Hall with ONO and Ostravská banda. It began with a somewhat restrained rendition of Varèse's *Ionisation*, Daniel Lo's bravura *YouHuang* was an excellent presentation of the artistry of violinist Pauline Kim Harris. The climax of the programme was **Bernhard Lang's** world premiere, *Monadologie XXXVII Loops for Leoš*, in which he cleverly and ably works with references to the work of Leoš Janáček. There was an unwanted quote of the gunshot from *The Cunning Little Vixen*, provided by one of the lights exploding – not only was nobody harmed, but the orchestra remained unfazed. The last piece of the festival was **Olga Neuwirth's** opulent *Trurljade – Zone Zero*, with **Victor Hanna** taking the solo percussion part. As with ONO's first concert, Petr Kotík and Bruno Ferrandis alternated on the podium.

The ninth instalment of the festival was supplemented by official recognition and a film. The founder of Ostrava Days, composer, conductor, flautist and *spiritus agens* Petr Kotík received the prize of the Czech Musical Council, and Ostrava's Cineport also saw the pre-premiere of the Czech Television documentary *Nezkrotitelný Kotík (The Untameable Kotík)*.

CZECH MUSIC EVERY DAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

IN THE SUMMER OF 2017

The summer – that is, prior to the start of the Ostrava Days, the largest contemporary music festival in the country – is a time when new works tend to be presented rather randomly, so as to somewhat enrich the programmes of the festivals that have prevalently been very traditionally oriented. Following the world premiere at Prague Spring of *The Rest Is Song* by the eclectic Petr Wajsar, a work that (literally) tells the history of 20th-century music, one world premiere apiece was featured by three smaller-scale festivals: the Treasures of the Broumov Region (by Jaroslav Pelikán), the Podkrkonoší Music Summer (by Kateřina Horká) and the Kuks Music Summer (by Juraj Filas).

Since Ostrava Days, the internationally renowned 10-day marathon of new and experimental music, is dealt with at length in the present issue in a special article, I would like to draw your attention to a few events abroad. In June, German audiences saw two new productions of *Brundibár*, the best-known Czech children's opera, which its creator, Hans Krása, used to perform during World War II with the children from the Theresienstadt camp-ghetto. Noteworthy too was the premiere of a production of Antonín Dvořák's scarcely staged opera *Dimitrij* at the Bard SummerScape festival in New York, and that of Bohuslav Martinů's *Ariane* in Konstanz, Germany. At the end of August, Martin Smolka's new choral piece, commissioned from the Baltic Sea Festival, was first performed in Stockholm.

More information about these and other events – in Czech and English – can be found on www.blog.musica.cz.

1 June, Trade Fair Palace, Prague. Prague Spring. **Petr Wajsar: The Rest Is Song for singing actor, soprano and chamber orchestra (world premiere).** Veronika Vítová, Petr Wajsar, BERG orchestra, conductor: Jan Kučera.

1 June, St. Augustine Church, Brno. **František Gregor Emmert: Symphony No. 25 for viola, organ, mezzosoprano and strings (world premiere).** Milan Paľa, Marek Paľa, Jarmila Balážová, Ensemble Opera Diversa, conductor: Ondrej Olos.

7 and 8 June, Smetana Hall, Municipal House, Prague. **Karel Růžička, Sr., arranged by Tomáš Sýkora: Celebration Jazz Mass (world premiere of an orchestral version).** Michaela Šrůmová – soprano, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Kühn Choir of Prague, Litomyšl Teacher Training School Mixed Choir KOS, Karel Růžička's Chamber Soloists, conductor: Jan Kučera.

15 June, St Lawrence Church, Prague. **Tomáš Pálka: Landscapes: AlpenQuelle (world premiere).** Simon Nagl – cello, Felix Nagl – piano. **Michaela Pálka Plachká: Grasps, Touches (world premiere of a scenic project).** Michaela Doláková – choreography, Jiří Mráz – clarinet

17 June, Staatstheater Kassel, Kassel, Germany. **Hans Krása: Brundibár (premiere of a new production).** Directed by: Franziska Schumacher, music director: Maria Radzikhovskiy. Following performances: 24, 25, 26, 29 and 30 June, Großes Haus, Theater Trier, Trier, Germany. **Hans Krása: Brundibár (premiere of a new**



Petr Wajsar (The Rest Is Song, Prague Spring Festival)

production). Directed by: Heidi Sommer, music director: Malte Kühn.

30 June, Smetana House, Litomyšl. Smetana's Litomyšl. **Jiřina Marková-Krystlíková: Rusalenka (world premiere of a children's opera)**. Directed by: Jiřina Marková-Krystlíková, music director: Jan Chalupecký.

Soloists, choir and orchestra of Prague Children's Opera.

8 July, Church of St Michael, Vernéřovice. Treasures of the Broumov Region. **Jaroslav Pelikán: Confessione cantata, to a text by St. Augustine, for solo quartet and chamber ensemble (world premiere)**.

Musica Brauensensis, conductor: Zdeněk Klauda.

21 July, Lázně Bělohrad. Podkrkonoší Music Summer. **Kateřina Horká: Mosaics (world premiere)**.

Mucha Trio: Anna Paulová – clarinet, Ludmila Pavlová – violin, Johanna Haníková – piano.

28 July, Sosnoff Theater, The Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson.

Antonín Dvořák: Dimitrij (premiere of a new production). Directed by: Anne Bogart, music director: Leon Botstein. Following performances: 30 July, 2, 4 and 6 August.

16 August, Rathaushof Konstanz, Konstanz, Germany. **Bohuslav Martinů: Ariane (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Alexander Imer, music director: Peter Bauer. Following performances: 18, 19, 21 and 23 August.

19 August, Trinity Church, Kuks. Kuks Music Summer. **Juraj Filas: Sonata for trumpet and organ "Kuks – Hexen – Aria" (world premiere)**. Marek Zvolánek – trumpet, Pavel Svoboda – organ.

24 August 2017, Hlubina Coal Mine, Ostrava. Ostrava Days Festival. **Ian Mikyska: passing; moving; still; passing. 17 still-lives (world premiere)**. Jennifer Baker, William Lang – trombone, Jan Kulka – analogue projection.

25 August 2017, Hlubina Coal Mine, Ostrava. Ostrava Days Festival. **Petr Bakla: September (Czech premiere), Petr Cígler: Nothing is Free (Czech premiere), Michal Rataj: The Long Sentence II (Czech premiere)**. String Noise (Conrad Harris, Pauline Kim Harris – violin), Michal Rataj – electronics.

27 August 2017, Berwaldhallen, Stockholm. Baltic Sea Festival. **Martin Smolka: The Name Emmanuel (world premiere)**. Swedish Radio Choir, conductor: Peter Dijkstra.

28 August 2017, Triple Hall Karolina, Ostrava. Ostrava Days Festival. **Petr Bakla: Summer Work (world premiere)**. Ostravská banda, conductor: Bruno Ferrandis.

30 August 2017, Triple Hall Karolina, Ostrava. Ostrava Days Festival. **Petr Bakla: Major Thirds (Czech premiere)**. Joseph Kubera – piano, Momenta Quartet.

1 September 2017, Triple Hall Karolina, Ostrava. Ostrava Days Festival. **Miroslav Srnka: Make No Noise (Czech premiere)**. Directed by: Jiří Nekvasil, music director: Joseph Trafton.

2 September 2017, Janáček Conservatory in Ostrava, Ostrava Days Festival. **Jakub Rataj: Second Breath (world premiere)**. Uta-Maria Lempert, Eszter Krulik – violin, Lih-Wen Ting – viola, Matthias Lorenz – cello.

JUNE-AUGUST

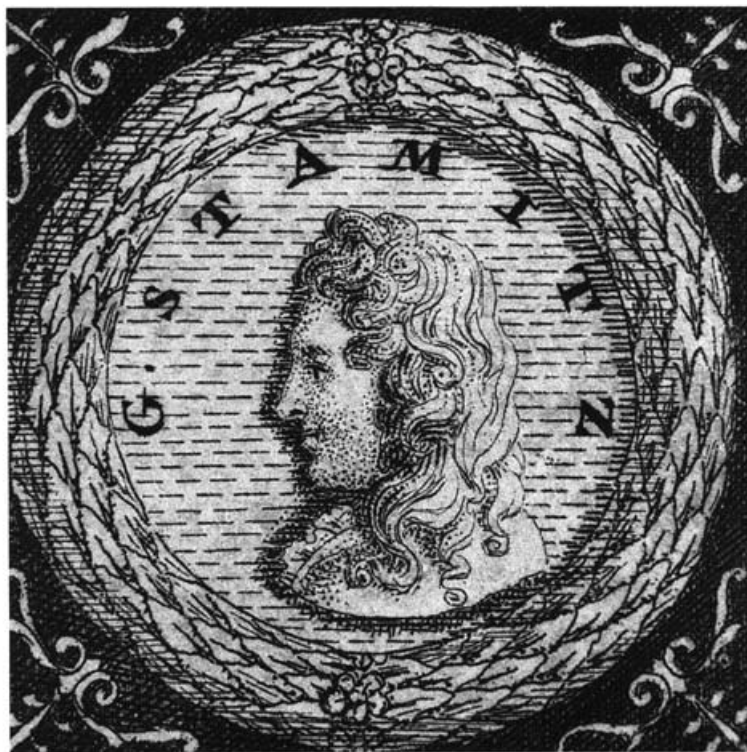
JAN VÁCLAV STAMIC

1717 • 1757 • 2017

A TENTATIVE STOCK-TAKING

Writing an article to mark the 300th anniversary of the birth of the composer and violinist, who, just as his ancestors had, crossed so many borders and transcended so many customs, conventions and standards, is no easy task. If written in one country, such an article would have a content and form different from that written in a neighbouring country, bearing witness to which are the contemporary entries pertaining to Jan Václav Stamic (Johann Wenzel Anton Stamitz) in the Wikipedias in different countries and languages. After having given the matter a great deal of thought, I have opted to outline the more than two-century history of writing about Stamic, which has fragmented into ample, mutually uncoordinated incomplete assertions, observations, commendations and a smaller amount of genuine research findings. Such research has been carried out in Germany and the Czech Republic, to a smaller extent in Austria and the UK, as well as, following World War II, in the USA and Israel. The approach I have chosen to bring to bear has also made it possible to expose the inappropriate practices that have been pursued in musicology – among the international and Czech scholars alike – which may stand in the way of attaining profound knowledge.

The first to have written about Stamic – and with the utmost respect – was Charles Burney (1726–1814), a highly competent English music historian, who was capable of gauging the standards of music in Europe better than any other of his contemporaries and who has never actually been eclipsed in this respect. During his travels across Western Europe, in 1772 Burney visited Mannheim, where he heard the local orchestra, “so deservedly celebrated throughout Europe”, and subsequently summed up his impressions in his account of his tour of the continent in *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands and United Provinces* (1773): “I found it to be indeed all that its fame made me to expect: power will naturally arise from a great number of hands; but the judicious use of this power, on all occasions, must be the consequence of good discipline, indeed there are more solo players, and good composers, in this, than perhaps any other orchestra in Europe; it is an army of generals [...]”. As a music historian, Burney added: “... it was here that Stamitz, stimulated by the productions of Jommelli, first surpassed the bounds of common opera overtures [...] Since



An engraving of J. V. Stamitz in profile by F. Dobret (Paris, 1789)

the discovery which the genius of Stamitz first made [...] it was here that the *Crescendo* and *Diminuendo* had birth; and the *Piano* [...], as well as the *Forte*, were found to be musical *colours* which had their *shades* [...].”

Burney’s references to J. V. Stamitz date from the time when the artist had been dead for 15 years. This indicates that he was told about Stamitz’s virtues by the members of the Mannheim orchestra and those who had known the composer in person, which was quite extraordinary. Burney himself again highlighted Stamitz’s significance in the second volume of his music travelogue, in whose section about music education in rural Bohemia he wrote: “In these common country schools now and then a great genius appears, as was the case at Teuchembrod, the birth-place of the famous Stamitz. His father was a *cantor* of the church in that town; and Stamitz, who was afterwards so eminent, both as a composer and performer, was brought up in the common school [...] but he, like another Shakespeare, broke through all difficulties and discouragements; as the eye of one pervaded all nature, the other, without quitting nature, pushed art further than any one had done before him; his genius was truly original, bold, and nervous; invention, fire, and contrast, in the quick movements; a tender, graceful, and insinuating melody, in the flow; together with the ingenuity and richness of the accompaniments, characterise his productions; all replete with great effects, produced by an enthusiasm of genius, refined, but not repressed by cultivation.”

When it comes to the Mannheim orchestra, some 33 years after Burney its high quality was lauded by the German composer and (rather scatter-brained) music journalist Christian Friedrich Schubart (1739–1791), who had met and worked with Burney during his stay in Ludwigsburg. Based on his own experience, in his



*The main square in Mannheim, with the streets designed on a rectangular grid and not bearing names, only given numbers and letters.
(Colour engraving, 1779)*

Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst (1806, 131f.) Schubart pointed out that “No other orchestra in the world has ever surpassed that of Mannheim” (“Kein Orchester der Welt hat es je in der Ausführung der Mannheimer zuvorgetan”), adding that “its forte is thunder, its crescendo a cataract (“sein crescendo ein Katarakt”), its diminuendo a crystal stream murmuring as it evanesces in the distance, its piano a vernal breath”.

Another worthwhile piece of knowledge came from Stamic’s native land. The lexicon compiled by a major Czech historian and librarian, the Premonstratensian priest Jan Bohumír Dlabáč (1758–1820), contains several entries on the gifted members of the Stamic family from Německý Brod (Deutschbrod), with the most extensive one relating to Tadeáš Stamic, Jan Václav’s brother, a cellist and priest, whom Dlabáč had met in person. With evident pleasure, Dlabáč included in the entry Tadeáš’s epitaph, penned by himself in Latin and Czech. Dlabáč was not familiar with the details of the life of Jan Václav Stamic, only mentioning him as “Johann Karl”, yet he was aware that in 1756 he was the head of the Mannheim instrumental ensemble. Moreover, as a seasoned musician himself, Dlabáč knew and correctly wrote in his lexicon that J. V. Stamic “reformed the style of the symphony” and following the assessment that “his spirit was highly original, bold

and powerful” (“sein Genie war sehr originell, kühn und kraftvoll”), he added other apt generalisations: “his music in the fast movements was abounding in ideas, fire and contrasts, while the melodies of his slow movements were delicate, poignant and unctuous”. During the course of the 19th century, the fledgling European musicological research almost solely focused on “geniuses” (“Genius-Historiographie”), that is, on Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Even though the numerous encyclopaedias and “Konversationslexikons” published over this thriving era of bourgeois culture did contain entries on such composers as Stamic, their oeuvres were not subject to exploration at the time (who would have been able to occupy themselves with it anyway?). A turning point only came at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, when Austrian music historians, led by Guido Adler, soon followed by their German colleagues, began publishing the volumes of their seminal Denkmälers. Stamic’s works were duly included in these music-history editions owing to Hugo Riemann (1849–1919), one of the most influential German music theorists of the time. An extraordinarily prolific author, his more than 50 monographs, hundreds of studies and a comprehensive dictionary of music and musicians covered virtually all the contemporary branches of mu-

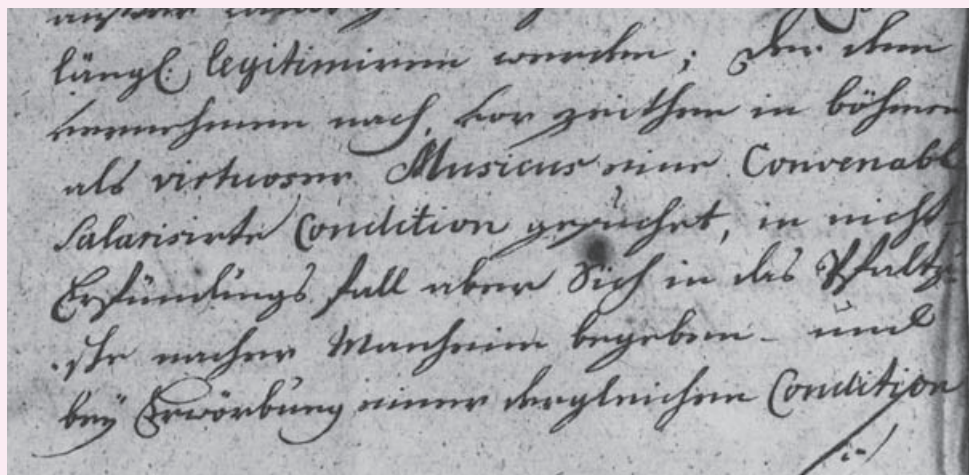
The final page of the claim filed by Stamic's three surviving children for inheritance after their Deutchbrod grandfather Antonín Ignác, co-signed by their Czech stepfather Jan Matuska, a violinist with the Mannheim orchestra.

Handwritten text in German, likely a legal claim or inheritance statement. The text is written in a cursive script. At the bottom, there are several signatures and names, including "Carl Kämpf" and "Antonius Kämpf". A circular stamp is visible in the bottom right corner.

sicology. Unfortunately, besides being a great dogmatist, Riemann was also a staunch protagonist in the aggressive German nationalism of his time. In this connection, I personally still vividly recall the shock I, as a young music historian, experienced – a mere decade in the wake of WWII – when reading Riemann's *Geschichte der Musik seit Beethoven* (Berlin, 1901) and his assertion that Gluck, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven had “driven French and Italian music from the field” (“aus dem Felde geschlagen”), and thus Germany had gained “musical hegemony” (!?) in Europe. In line with such a distorted view of the history of European music, Riemann dealt with all non-German 19th-century composers within large chapters about German composers. Accordingly, Verdi was treated in the chapter *Epoche Schumann – Mendelssohn*, Berlioz degraded in the *Epoche Wagner – Liszt*, and the like. When it comes to the brief sections dedicated to Czech musicians, Riemann contemptuously debased them, a case in point being his snooty appraisal of Antonín Dvořák as a “semi-cultivated being” (“halbkultiviertes Wesen”), etc. While promoting German superiority in music¹, shortly after the *Geschichte der Musik seit Beethoven* – in 1902, 1906 and 1907 – Riemann published within the *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Bayern* series three revelatory volumes of truly epochal significance, titled *Sinfonien der pfälzbayerischen Schule* (*Mannheimer Symphoniker*). Issued approximately 130 years after Burney's lauding of Stamic, these volumes still represent the most substantial contribution to the Stamic research by a single scholar. Ever since this breakthrough edition, the Mannheim school, headed by J. V. Stamic, has been rightly deemed to have made a major contribution to the inception of Classicism

in music and elevating the symphony in four movements to become major category of the modern concert life. Until that time, the “sinfonia” had predominantly existed as a mere opera overture. Furthermore, in the introductory study of the edition, comparing the style of the Mannheim musicians with that of their predecessors and contemporaries, Riemann seems to have put aside all his previous biases, coming across as a historian in due course: “The inspired idea of incorporating into the symphony a minuet in the form of a typical folksy medley of coarse revelry, the philistine affability and naïve grace was also undoubtedly in compliance with the new spirit, which had been brought into orchestral music in the city on the Rhine and Neckar by the settled Bohemian

1) It should be mentioned that this approach of Riemann's had been embraced by a large number of German musicologists, bearing witness to which are, for instance, the assertions of Friedrich Blume, the editor-in-chief of the post-war encyclopaedia *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, in the article “Klassik” (column 1039): “Das italienische Zeitalter des Barock wurde durch das deutsche Zeitalter der Klassik und Romantik abgelöst.” Not even in the wake of WWII did Blume – a former member of the Nazi party – relinquish the notion of the “hegemony of German culture”, at least when it came to instrumental music.



In the matter of Stamic's children in Mannheim claiming the inheritance in Deutschbrod, the Bohemian governorate authorities asked the local council to explain the reasons why Stamic had gone abroad. The presented document truthfully stated that Stamic, a virtuoso musician, could not find a fairly paid job in Bohemia ("eine convenable salarisierte Condition"), so he left for the Rhenish Palatinate, where he did indeed find such conditions.

[böhmisch], and Moravian, musicians Stamitz, Filtz and Richter." In a footnote, with reference to a work by Adolf Sandberg, Riemann added yet another name – that of Jan Zach (whereas Filtz would be omitted from the group in the future). A list of the members of the Mannheim orchestra, first published in 1756, included a number of other Czech musicians; four horn players were Czechs, three of them from the Živný family and one named Johann Matuška, who, following J. V. Stamic's death, became the stepfather of his children. In the conclusion to his study, Riemann outlined the biographies of the respective musicians, starting with that of Stamic himself. He first pointed to the complications caused by his name having been stated as "Johann Karl" in Dlabáč's lexicon, from which it was also taken over by F. J. Fétis (*Biographie universelle des musiciens*), whose high assessment of Stamic's originality was quoted by Riemann. Moreover, he appreciatively acknowledged that the Deutschbrod (Německý Brod) town council had sent him the requested copy of the registry record of Stamic's baptism, and he also faithfully spelled the names in their Czech form. Yet the next biographical data Riemann was familiar with was Stamic's performance at a concert marking the coronation of Charles VII in Frankfurt in 1742. And the most recent record of the composer he had available

dated from 1757, as Riemann had not found any document confirming his death (!).

The introductory study is followed by Riemann's highly valued summary of all the prints of symphonies he knew had been written by the Mannheim composers, as well as a thematic catalogue of Stamic's 45 symphonies and 10 orchestral trios, a catalogue of hundreds of symphonies created by other members of the Mannheim orchestra, from F. X. Richter to Stamic's two sons, and, finally, an edition of the selected pieces.

In the years that followed, virtually all the articles on Stamic published in magazines would draw upon the statements with which Riemann rounded off his generalising conclusions: "There is no doubt: Johann Stamitz is the long-sought forerunner of Haydn!", and "Let us not grieve over the fact that it is a Bohemian [Böhme], not a German, upon whom we must bestow this laurel". Indignant responses ensued on the part of Austrian musicologists, starting with Prof. Guido Adler himself and his assistant, Wilhelm Fischer.² Their line of argument reached its nadir when Adler (a native of Ivančice in Moravia!) and his pupils declared that Stamic and other Mannheim-based musicians from Bohemia and Moravia were in fact Austrians, who had only left to "make culture" in the Elector Palatine's residence ... And this viewpoint went on to be held

2) In this respect, I would like to refer to my article *Vývoj bádání o Janu Václavu Stamicovi. K dvoustému výročí skladatelské smrti – 27. 3. 1757* [Development in the Jan Václav Stamic research. On the 200th anniversary of the composer's death], in: *Hudební rozhledy*, Vol. 10, 1957, pp. 235-237.

by the next generation of Viennese scholars (markedly in the case of the music historian Erich Schenk, as manifested in his *950 Jahre Musik in Österreich*, Vienna, 1946).

In the wake of Riemann's epochal edition, no significant contribution to the Stamic research would appear for decades. Only in 1936 did the Institute of Musicology of the German University in Prague publish within the Vienna-based (formerly Brno-based) Verlag Rudolf M. Rohrer Peter Gradenwitz's 56-page book *Johann Stamitz I. Das Leben*. Reputedly, it was the text of the Berlin native's thesis, which he had initially intended to write on the subject of *Musiksoziologie der Mannheimer Sinfoniker*, yet, for some obscure reason, he went to Prague to attend a seminar given by Gustav Becking (1894-1945), who would evidently make a radical impact on the wording of the text. Influenced by Becking, an ardent Nazi, in his volume Gradenwitz totally disregards the qualities of Riemann's colossal body of work, coarsely misinterprets the definition of the phenomenon of the Czech musical emigration penned by Vladimír Helfert (1886-1945), by means of concealing certain details distorts the description of the milieu in Deutschbrod, etc. A strange feeling that the research has been deformed arises in everyone who searches out at the National Library in Prague Gradenwitz's thesis on Stamic. As I myself found out in January 1957, the 189-page typed copy, under the mark Diss D 67, bearing the date 1 February 1935, begins with a brief recapitulation of Riemann's discoveries and the subsequent discussions about certain stylistic elements, which had emerged before Stamic in Vienna, Naples, Stuttgart and elsewhere. Merely small sections are identical with Gradenwitz's book, for instance, the characterisations of Mannheim that, however, only begin on page 75 in the typed thesis, while they appear on page 26 in the published work, which in itself bears witness to the much reduced scope dedicated in the printed version to the genesis and nature of Stamic's descent and the time he spent in Bohemia. Many more details signal tampering, for instance, in the later published memorial volume to honour Becking's legacy, while the summary "von Becking approbierten Dissertationen" does not mention Gradenwitz's work at all.³

When, owing to his Jewish origin, the Nazi regime began to threaten Gradenwitz (1910-2001), he escaped to Palestine, where later on he founded a music publishing house and returned to musicology, including to Stamic research. Years later, he even re-established written contact with our country (the present author included), and accomplished decent work. His second Stamic monograph - *Johann Stamitz. Leben, Umwelt, Werk* (2 volumes, 455 pages, Wilhelmshaven, 1984) - differs starkly from the first one, dealing in quite thorough detail with the light shed on the subject by the previous research and still serving as the major publication providing a general survey of the Stamic research. Among other things, Gradenwitz's monograph strikingly differs from the other foreign literature over the past few decades by its highlighting, from the very first page of the preface, the significance of the Czech sources, acknowledging the author's collaboration with his Czech colleagues, and not concealing any historical findings.

Regrettably, a new practice has come to prevail within international musicology - among the German scholars in particular, but also among some of their American colleagues, who have derived their approach from them. In line with this attitude, Stamic has been presented as a clear fruit and a noted agent of German culture, while the descent of his family, the two generations of Stamic's ancestors who lived and worked in Bohemia, the family documents written in Czech, and the like, have been simply ignored. . Conceived in this unexplained, simplified manner is Ludwig Finscher's Stamic article in the new edition of the encyclopaedia *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, as well as the Stamic article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*, written by the American musicologist Eugene K. Wolf (1939-2002), the author of the book *The Symphonies of Johann Stamitz*, published in 1982. In his case too, I can personally attest that he had been informed of the Německý Brod sources (whose copies he even received from me in 1975 in Prague), yet his resolve to eliminate nearly everything that was "non-German in the historical Stamic case" was so staunch that he was not even willing to discuss the topic in the slightest. For me, a Czech musicologist, it was a truly painful experience: at the end of the 20th

3) *Gustav Becking zum Gedächtnis*, herausgegeben von Walter Kramolisch, Tutzing, 1975.



Tomislav Volek, opening the Stamic exhibition in Havlíčkův Brod on 18 June 1967. Second from the left: the archivist Jiří Sochr.

century, an American scholar with German roots being so nationalistically inclined that he pursued de facto the same method of research and interpretation as did those here during the time of the Nazi and Communist dictatorships – everything that does not fit within the author’s a priori intention must be simply omitted and remain unsaid. As though it never was, did not exist. How substantial a change for the worse this is becomes immediately clear when we compare it with the interpretation approach taken by the first great American conception, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York, 1941, 1963, 1969, 1971, since 1998 available as an e-book). It was devised by Paul Henry Lang (1901–1991), a highly cultivated European, a Hungary-born musicologist, devoid of any national prejudice, educated in Budapest, Heidelberg and Paris. An erudite scholar, possessing exceptional language skills, he arrived in America in 1928, and in 1934 he was appointed professor of musicology at Columbia University in New York and thereby become the very first to hold such a post in the US. With the second half of the 18th century having remained his favourite field of research, when Lang came to deal with the Mannheim school he paid due attention to the “importations from Bohemia”. In the main, extensive, passage devoted to Stamic (pp. 609–610), he, among other things, aptly stated: “He approached his task with a vehemence that was well-nigh unparalleled in his times, frightening the timid knights of the style galant. [...] Where others experimented gently with

a motivic subsidiary group he placed a full-fledged theme, even at the expense of the principal idea, which may have been much simpler. Stamitz established, then, the clear disposition of the sections of the sonata, but their logical-causal connection remained to be perfected, for his ideas were too bold and his technique not fine-grained enough [...]”.

And even more saddening for the author of the present article is the fact that, something similar to L. Finscher and E. K. Wolf can be observed – *mutatis mutandis* – among contemporary Czech musicologists. Let us start this part of the recapitulation by going back to 1957, the year that marked the 200th anniversary of Stamic’s death. On this occasion, an exhibition was installed at the Melantrich publisher’s premises by Prof. Dr. Mirko Očadlík (1904–1964), who invited me to aid him in this matter, since he had previously asked me, as his assistant at the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, to prepare a two-semester lecture series about Classicism in music and had been told that I had discovered some previously unknown documents in the State Archives. In addition, when putting together the lectures, I spent a lot of time reading Riemann’s editions, in which I was intrigued by the fact that in several cases the editor – evidently convinced that the composer had erred in the metre – had added another beat or two. I myself found Stamic’s method utterly logical, deeming the accent – if needed – on the weak beat to be a natural



trait of his style. So as to eke out my paltry salary as an assistant, I asked the Czech Music Fund to grant me an allowance for work on the *Stamic Chapters* (typed copy, 1963), and duly continued in my research. When I paid a visit to Havlíčkův Brod (Deutschbrod), the district archivist, Jiří Sochr, an ambitious young university graduate, who according to the registry records had Stamic blood running through his veins, suggested that we jointly prepare a large Stamic exhibition that would mark his next anniversary, in 1967. Sochr was primarily enthused by the documents I had found in the archives: the extensive Czech-language last will and testament of the composer's grandfather, an analysis of which is contained in my *Stamic Chapters*, as well as documents pertaining to the claim filed by J. V. Stamic's Mannheim descendants for their inheritance in Deutschbrod, which include the town council's remarkable statement in this matter,⁴ and a copy of which Sochr and I would display as exhibit No 42 at our exhibition.

As the inheritance claim had arrived from abroad, before issuing their approval the Bohemian governorate authorities were obliged to probe into the reasons why Stamic had actually left the Kingdom of Bohemia. The reply to the question that came from the Deutschbrod town council was similar to the one provided by the contemporary research: a virtuoso musician, Stamic could not find a reasonably paid job in Bohemia, and so he moved to Mannheim ("[...] in Böhmen als virtuoser Musicus eine convenable

salarisierte Condition gesucht, in nicht Erfündungsfall aber sich in das Pfaltzische nacher Mannheim begeben"). Since the King of Bohemia – a Habsburg – did not reside in Bohemia, there was no court orchestra present and, consequently, there was no appropriate employment available for the "virtuoso musician". As a document of the exhibition in Havlíčkův Brod in 1967, a project of major significance for the Stamic research, I have hereby the honour to publish a photograph of the exhibition's opening by myself and its initiator, Jiří Sochr (1933–1987, the first man on my right).

Bearing witness to the pitiable ethics on the part of some of our contemporary musicologists is Jitka Bastlová's 2010 thesis *Antonín Ignác Stamic, působení hudebního rodu Stamiců a děkana Seidla v Německém Brodě* [Antonín Ignác Stamic, work of the Stamic family of musicians and Dean Seidl in Deutschbrod], written at the Brno University under the tutelage of assistant professor Vladimír Maňas, which does mention my two articles about Stamic in the list of literature, yet fails to reveal their content. Hence, the author herself comes across as having been the one to have discovered the seminal documents. What is more, she also overlooked my later finding that, before arriving in Německý Brod, the composer's father Antonín Ignác Stamic had studied with the Piarists in Slaný, which undoubtedly had a significant impact on his further development.

Besides exploring the archival sources, for several years I analysed Stamic's works with the aim to ascertain the principles of his personal style. At the time, it was evident that they do not primarily rest in the famed developed dynamic scale, which – coupled with his instrumental virtuosity – is one of the effects, but, first and foremost, in a peculiar metro-rhythmic structure. The fundamental structural principle applied in the majority of his instrumental compositions was the technique of chaining two-bar units with stressed downbeats, based on Czech folk dance music. Starting from this elementary foundation, Stamic went on to arrive at a refined application of asymmetrical accents of all types (dynamic accents, melodic accents – also

4) With regard to the two documents, see my essay *K sporům o Stamicovu národnost* [Disputes about Stamic's nationality], in: *Hudební rozhledy*, Volume 15, 1962, pp. 1000–1001.

through embellishments – durational accents, through instrumentation, harmonic delays, etc.). His original metro-rhythmic manipulations had thus gradually transformed from mere witty sensual effects into a major element of the musical syntax and structure of the entire movement. By these innovatory methods, Stamic afforded the instrumental movement additional – unprecedented at the time – options for its construction, without being supported by the word, solely utilising its own sources, that is, the individual instrumental parts and the technique of the thematic work, which would be fully brought to bear in the climax of the Classicism epoch, especially in the sonatas, quartets and symphonic pieces of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. My most recent work in this field was the article *Das Verhältnis von Rhythmus und Metrum bei J. W. Stamitz*, published in the report on a musicological congress in Bonn in 1970, which, however, I was not able to attend in the wake of my country's invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies.⁵

Worthy of mention is the fact that there have been precious few performers who have been able to

render to the full the singular style of Stamic's instrumental pieces. In this respect, I myself consider the best the recordings of several trios made in 1961 by the ensemble *Ars rediviva*, conducted by Milan Munclinger (Supraphon DV 5729), which would have been even more cogent had it not employed the harpsichord. It would be wonderful if someone were to follow this example, yet I am afraid that, at the time when the number of stylistically faithful interpretations has been decreasing, Jan Václav Stamic's music being presented in this manner may be mere wishful thinking...

*With the kind permission of Harmonie magazine,
edited by the author for CMQ.*

5) *Das Verhältnis von Rhythmus und Metrum bei J. W. Stamitz*, in: Bericht über den internationalen musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress Bonn 1970, hrsg. C. Dahlhaus, H. J. Marx, M. Marx-Weber, G. Massenskeil, Kassel 1972, pp. 53-55.

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Sára Medková

De Profundis

**Sára Medková - piano,
Ivo Medek - inside piano,
Lukáš Medek - animation.**

Text: English, Czech. Recorded:
Sep., Dec. 2016, Brno. Released: 2017.
TT: 76:52 / 30:00.
1CD/1DVD. Arta F102232

The piano – a sonic and visual symbol of western art music and our entire “high culture”. It is also therefore a marker of conservative positions on music. Piano students are led to a deification of the canon, from Bach to the late romantics. Performances are compared at competitions as if they were racing dogs. There are not many who venture past the borders of romantic beauty into contemporary repertoire, especially in the Czech Republic. But there are exceptions, and this year, this interpretive courage materialised into *De profundis*, a CD by pianist Sára Medková. In addition to three pieces by J. S. Bach, it contains three contemporary pieces which make some departure from standard piano performance. Vít Zouhar (1966) often uses minimalist principles in his work, and *Six Pianos* for pianist and tape from 1992 is a good example, moving on a trajectory from minimalism to ambient, to a music of non-dramatic and fluently transforming sections. The combination of pre-recorded and live piano creates a delicate web of loops, emerging and then receding into the background again. Music of this kind works well in larger proportions, allowing the listener to really immerse herself. Six minutes, therefore, seems a little disappointing. I could have enjoyed the sound for longer. For the second contemporary number, Sára Medková is also listed as co-author. *Inside* began as an improvisation, in which she plays the piano in the traditional manner, while her husband, composer Ivo Medek (1956)

operates the inside of the piano. Over time, the improvisation settled into a more or less stable structure, though it still retains a kind of semi-openness. The discipline of four-hand piano gets a form here. We hear standard playing on the keyboard, but in some cases, this activates prepared strings. In addition, we also notice another pair of hands scratching, drumming, strumming and performing other actions which you can barely imagine. Just like with Zouhar, I could imagine a slightly longer duration, as the contrasts between soft sections with dramatic booming, between melodic lines and interwoven drumming, has no time to get boring over the time of eight minutes. At the end, the folk song *Ej lásko, lásko* (*Hey Love, Love*) emerges, softly plucked, and it's gone. Frederic Rzewski's (1938) *De Profundis*, composed in 1992, takes up the most space. It asks the pianist to become a narrator and actress, as this is in effect a melodrama. The text is Oscar Wilde's eponymous letter to his lover, lord Alfred Douglas. Their relationship got the poet imprisoned for two years, which is also where the text was written. The half-hour composition is divided into sixteen sections, eight with text and eight as interludes. In addition to narrating, the performer sighs, whistles, laughs and makes a number of other noises. A certain socially engaged character is typical of Rzewski's music – we can interpret this as a reflection on the criminalisation of homosexuality, but it's no bare agitprop. (Incidentally, *De Profundis* is his second composition written on the basis of a letter from jail. The first was *Coming Together*, on letters by Sam Melville from the 1970s.) Another hallmark of Rzewski's style is the use of existing music, in the form of quotations, collage, variations. Here, these include the chant *London Bridge is falling down* or a Baroque interlude. Of the three contemporary pieces on the CD, *De Profundis* gives the most space to virtuosity in the classical, technical manner. Add to that the use of unusual playing techniques and, of course, vocal performance. In Medková's interpretation, it is very pleasant, not over-acted, but also

emotional. In comparison to Rzewski's own performance, it is much more pleasant, informal, but still dramatic. What is the role of the three Bach numbers, namely the *Toccata in E minor* BWV 914, *Ricercar á 3 voci in C minor* BWV 1079 and the *French Suite G major* BWV 816? We can see them as a dramaturgical diversification, an obliging gesture to those listeners who are not as interested in contemporary music, or proof of the performer's versatility. These interpretations might be correct, but I also see a deeper connection. The Baroque quotation in *De Profundis*, as well as the minimalist machine-like movement in *Six Pianos* are various forms in which history is reflected in the present. Just like *Inside*, many of Bach's compositions began as improvisations. In programming the Bach, these connections can come out into the open. A DVD accompanies the CD. It contains a recording of Rzewski's *De Profundis* with a visual – predominantly typographical – accompaniment by Lukáš Medek. It is an interesting bonus, but it adds no crucial information to the disc, which is an elegant demonstration of the kinds of virtuosity one can find around the piano.

Matěj Kratochvíl

Belfiato Quintet

**Belfiato Quintet
(Oto Reiprich - flute, Jan Souček -
oboe, Jiří Javůrek - clarinet,
Ondřej Šindelář - bassoon,
Kateřina Javůrková - horn),
Jindřich Pavliš - bass clarinet.**

Text: English, German, French,
Czech. Recorded: Feb. 2017, Chapel
of the Evangelical Church of Czech
Brethren in Vinohrady, Prague.
Released: 2017. TT: 50:56. DDD. 1 CD,
Supraphon SU 4230-2.



Having closely observed its output for a quarter of a century, the major Czech label, Supraphon, can still now and then take me by surprise. A recent case in point is the release of the new album made by the **Belfiato Quintet**, clearly revealing the young instrumentalists' enthusiasm and featuring a highly intriguing repertoire. At the age of 50, J. B. Foerster succeeded in writing youthfully impassioned music, containing dainty melodies and characterised by commensurately complex harmonics. Pavel Haas is a composer in whose case it occurs to me how unjust Fate can be, and I always think of how far such a genius could have gone had it not been for his cruelly untimely death ... His quintet is of an extraordinarily high quality indeed and, notwithstanding the "Janáčekisms", truly singular too – I know of precious few similarly engrossing pieces of this ilk dating from the first half of the 20th century. And Janáček? Well, he was a case unto himself, with the sheer quality of his *Youth* having been recognised for a long time now. So, what do the Belfiato Quintet sound like? The individual fortes of its members are indisputable. Although not all of them may assert themselves as soloists, they form a homogeneous, well-coordinated team, chiming through a shared approach to music, as well as the zest and ebullience of youth, which duly reflect in, for instance, their amazing account of detail in Haas's *Ballo eccentrico* and Janáček's *Vivace*. When it comes to the minor solos, I was particularly captivated by the performances of **Kateřina Javůrková** and **Oto Reiprich**, while **Jindřich Pavliš** (a fortunate choice indeed) boldly enhanced the impression from Janáček's piece. **Jan Souček**, **Jiří Javůrek** and **Ondřej Šindelář** too have proved themselves to be chamber players possessing extraordinary qualities. I praise the album's novel, non-kowtowing repertoire, the excellent performance of all the musicians involved, as well as the work of the reliable recording tandem of **Jiří**

Gemrot and **Jan Lžičar**. The only problem, as I see it, is the album's being too short. The question thus arises of whether it really was beyond the bounds of possibility to add to it another, thematically fitting, 20-minute Czech piece... Regardless of this minor aspect, the Belfiato Quintet's CD has emerged at the right time and it may well also intrigue listeners worldwide.

Luboš Stehlík

Antonín Dvořák

Stabat Mater

Eri Nakamura – soprano, Elizabeth Kulman – mezzo-soprano, Michael Spyres – tenor, Jongmin Park – bass, Czech Philharmonic, Prague Philharmonic Choir, Jiří Bělohlávek – conductor.
Text: English, German, French.
Recorded: Mar. 2016, Rudolfinum, Prague. Released: 2017. TT: 83:06.
DDD. 2 CDs, Decca 483 1510.

Writing about the history of the *Stabat Mater* sequence is not necessary, as all the fundamental information can be found on the internet. The image of the grief of a mother who has lost her child and faces up to her sorrow with a bold faith in God has been used as part of the liturgy at Lent and intensely perceived for centuries. The original Latin text has been set to music by numerous composers, including Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Gioachino Rossini, Karol Szymanowski, Giuseppe Verdi, Ferenc Liszt, Krzysztof Penderecki and others. Yet, without being patriotic, I must say that the most extensive, and the best, is the setting by Antonín Dvořák. And while his *Symphony No. 9* has been captured on dozens of albums, there are only 11

recordings of his no less inspired *Stabat Mater*. The best-known Czech recording to date has been the one made in 1987 at the Rudolfinum hall in Prague by the Czech Philharmonic, the Prague Philharmonic Choir and four superlative soloists (Beňáková-Čápková, Wenkel, Dvorský, Rootering), conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch. The title still ranks among the most valuable Supraphon releases. **Jiří Bělohlávek** made three recordings of *Stabat Mater*: in 1997, for Chandos, (along with Dvořák's *Psalms 149*); in 1997, for Supraphon; and in 2016, for Decca, all of them with the **Czech Philharmonic** and the **Prague Philharmonic Choir**, who have recorded (and most likely performed) the piece on more occasions than any other Czech orchestra and chorus has done. In the 1990s, Bělohlávek opted for the Bambini di Praga, while for the most recent of his recordings, made in 2016, he wisely chose the females singers of the Prague Philharmonic Choir to perform the heavenly voices. Let us view the Decca album through the prism of three other creations: those of Rafael Kubelík (conducting the Bavarian Symphony Orchestra and Choir, with the soloists Mathis, Reynolds, Ochran and Shirley-Quirk), Giuseppe Sinopoli (conducting the Staatskapelle Dresden, with Zvetkova, Donose, Botha and Scanduzzi), and Wolfgang Sawallisch. During his second tenure as the chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, which this year was unexpectedly and cruelly put to an end by his untimely death, Bělohlávek in part gravitated towards a repertoire featuring inner lyricism, contemplation, non-impassioned emotionality. Compared to his accounts of the same music in the 1980s, he often favoured slower tempos. A case in point in this respect in his take on *Stabat Mater*, with the introductory, philosophical part *Stabat Mater dolorosa, Fac, ut ardeat cor meum*, and the sanguine final *Quando corpus morietur* sounding majestically grand, forming a seemingly unceasing torrent of music. Initially, you may perceive it as slow, sluggish even, yet that impression is illusory – upon attentive listening to the recording, you will probably arrive at the same conclusion as I have: that what we hear is an infinite lyrical poem, harbouring vivid detail, refined internal structure, now and then coming across as a harrowingly poignant prayer, silent grief, the mother's pure love for her child, as well as faith: "*By the Cross with thee to stay, there with thee to weep and pray, is all I ask of thee to give*". Following Jiří Bělohlávek's passing away, I asked myself whether the unctuousity, humility and burning entreaty his recording emanates may have resulted from his being seriously ill. As though he had identified himself

with the "Son on the Cross"... After all, in my opinion, Bělohlávek tempos should not be viewed as extraordinarily slow and contemplative. The figures are clear. To give but a few examples as regards the duration of the *Stabat Mater dolorosa* section: Bělohlávek – 19:48, Kubelík – 18:30, Sawallisch – 20:58, Sinopoli – 20:36, with the longest account being that of Václav Smetáček, 23 minutes. Bělohlávek has displayed his sense of proportion and the work's tectonics throughout the more than 83-minute recording. In his case, the performance of the second part, Quartetto, is faster (10:09) than that of Kubelík (11:18) and Sinopoli (11:27!). And I could go on in this direction, yet mere numbers do not say anything about the content and philosophy of the interpretation. While Sinopoli comprehends the piece as a grand oratorio, delivering it in a sweeping manner, exaggerating both the tempos and the expression, and the intimacy that meanders through Bělohlávek's third, and most outstanding, recording is present in his account as wild strawberries in the winter forest. The climax of Bělohlávek's creation is the highly forcible finale, *Quando corpus morietur*. When I try to recall whether I have ever heard it performed as enthrallingly as that, I find Bělohlávek's account to eclipse even the performances of Sawallisch and Kubelík. Owing largely to the Prague Philharmonic Choir, the *Paradisi gloria* gives me the impression of the heavens having opened. I can only concur with the words: "*The catharsis in the Quando corpus morietur serves as proof of Dvořák's prowess and equanimity resulting from his deep faith and trust in God's will. It may explain why his Stabat Mater does not only bring sorrowful intonations, and if it does, they never remain hopelessly open, yet lead into the answer of conciliation and humility*". After having listened to all the recordings of *Stabat Mater* featuring the Prague Philharmonic Choir, I have arrived at the conclusion that they have attained their best outcome to date in Bělohlávek's three accounts. And the same applies to the orchestra, which plays precisely, intensely, vigorously, occasionally reaching for a colour I had not heard previously (*Eja Mater, Quando corpus*). Unfortunately, I have never encountered a recording of *Stabat Mater* that could be deemed faultless in all regards. The performances of the four soloists on Bělohlávek's third album are not ideally balanced in vocal terms. While the tenor **Michael Spyres** sings vibrantly and freshly, and the bass **Jongmin Park** excels not only with his pleasant voice but also understanding of the music's specifics, I do find the female singers rather disappointing (although, owing to



the audio engineers, the recording has worked out better than the concerts did). The voice of **Eri Nakamura** is shrill in a few phrases and her vibrato has a rich amplitude. The mezzo-soprano **Elizabeth Kulman** sounds far better, even though now and then she somewhat whoops. By and large, Bělohlávek's conceptually crystallised *Stabat Mater* ranks among the very best recordings of the peerless work. Regrettably, it would seem that in the case of grand Romantic sacred pieces it is simply not possible to attain utter perfection. On the other hand, the eternal wait for the ideal may be beneficial...

Luboš Stehlík

Mozart – Brahms

Clarinet Quintets

Igor Františák (clarinet), Zemlinsky Quartet (Petr Souček, František Strážek – violins, Petr Holman – viola, Vladimír Fortin – cello).

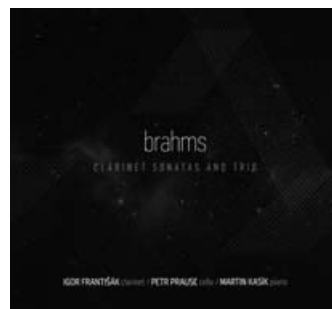
Text: Czech, English. Recorded: live Oct. 2014, Saint Nicholas Church, Ostrava-Poruba (KV 581), Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, Pržno (Op. 115). Released: 2017. TT: 68.47. 1 CD, FMG Artists 002.

Brahms

Clarinet Sonatas and Trio

Igor Františák (clarinet), Petr Prause (cello), Martin Kašík (piano).

Text: Czech, English. Recorded: Mar. 2015 (Op. 120), Nov. 2016 (Op. 114), Saint Lawrence Church, Prague. Released: 2017. TT: 67.03. 1 CD, FMG Artists 003.



The Ostrava-based clarinetist **Igor Františák** (b. 1974) is what can be termed a versatile artist. A graduate of the Ostrava Conservatory and University, where he studied with Valter Vítek, he has attended master classes led by the renowned champions of informed clarinet performance Hoepfich, Neidich and Leitherer, and appeared as a soloist with numerous Czech and international orchestras. A founder of the Stadler Clarinet Quartet (1994), he is a sought-after and respected chamber player. Furthermore, Igor Františák is today a distinguished clarinet teacher at the Faculty of Arts of Ostrava University, and he has served as the director of the Saint Wenceslas Music Festival in Ostrava (since 2004), the largest early and sacred music event in the city and region, having the worst social and artistic conditions for continuous presentation of the genre. Even though having been extremely busy as an educator and manager, Františák has continued to evolve as an artist, having been invited by Czech early music ensembles more frequently than any other to play Baroque chalumeau and classicist clarinet parts. Remarkable indeed. Yet Františák is an artist possessing a truly robust will, a man who has directed the most popular music festival in the Moravia-Silesia Region; he is a relentless teacher, soloist and chamber player, and also an artist making recordings, among them the two reviewed CDs, featuring Mozart's and Brahms's works for clarinet and piano or string instruments, in all likelihood the most exquisite repertoire of chamber music with clarinet.

The recording microphones are merciless, and many an artist with managerial ambitions has failed vis-à-vis the equipment, especially when the recording has been made live. Yet Františák has risen to the challenge with honour. One of the main reasons may well have been his fortunate selection of all the partners: the pianist **Martin Kašík**, the cellist **Petr Prause** (a member of the Talich Quartet), and the **Zemlinsky Quartet**. Amidst the fierce competition,



the album of Mozart's and Brahms's clarinet quintets Igor Františák has made with the Zemlinsky Quartet came to me as a great surprise, a revelation even, owing to the choice of spontaneous tempos, highly expressive dialogues between the cello or the first violin and the clarinet, as well as the well-coordinated ensemble playing (one cannot get tired of the introductory beats of Brahms's quintet as performed by them). Given that they are live accounts devoid of the audiences' applause, they are of a truly remarkable technical quality, as are the audio recordings made by Jiří Gemrot (sonatas, trio) and František Mixa (quintets). With regard to the plethora of recordings that have come before, some of them the stuff of legend, I was rather sceptical before I had immersed myself into listening to the quintets. Yet the artistic partnership between Igor Františák and the Zemlinsky Quartet, who have once again proved their extraordinary qualities, is evidently based on the solid foundations of respect for the score and profound love for chamber music. In the Mozart quintet, Františák has opted for a rather introvert interpretation and an even tone, which have predestined him for a forcible mode of performance of Brahms's clarinet sonatas, of which I most recently wrote for Harmonie magazine in my review of the Lorenzo Coppola album released by Harmonia Mundi (Harmonie 2/2016). Unlike Coppola, Františák has chosen to play a modern instrument, yet his esteem of the principles of historically informed performance does occasionally reflect in his approach to Brahms's late chamber pieces. Together with the Zemlinsky Quartet, Františák accentuates to an even greater degree the introvert nature of the summarising composition, whose complex architecture never fails to fascinate and whose profound content never fails to chill me to the marrow. Perhaps every renowned clarinetist must square up to Brahms's *Clarinet Sonatas*, Op. 120, and the *Trio for Clarinet, Piano and Cello*, Op. 114. The reviewed studio CD featuring the works was completed a year following the recording of the quintets,

at the Saint Lawrence Church in Prague. The pianist Martin Kasík has always been known as a highly intelligent chamber partner. The CD, with the piano somewhat acoustically prevailing over the other instruments, has confirmed the qualities of his long-term artistic partnership with Igor Františák. The texture of Brahms's *Clarinet Sonatas* itself and Františák's introvert take on the clarinet parts seem to make them come across as piano sonatas with an obligate clarinet, which, however, nowise changes the fact that the performance of the second of the four movements of *Sonata No. 1 in F minor* is genuinely enthralling (a decade ago, Františák recorded the work with Eliška Novotná for Presto Records). I may perhaps round off my review by praising Františák's performance virtues and his intimate approach to Brahms's chamber scores. Yet I do feel obliged to pay particular attention to the *Trio in A minor*, Op. 114, featured as the last track on the second CD. Emotions flow between the instruments, with the musicians conducting a rhetorical battle for predominance over the piece, abounding in effects. It is a splendid conclusion to the album, which would deserve to be distributed professionally and perhaps be furnished with a more graphically attractive sleeve. And at least the CD with the two quintets definitely deserves to be paid attention to by the foreign critics.

Martin Jemelka

KATT

Bach, Messiaen, Pärt, Katt

Kateřina Chroboková – organ.
Text: English, German, French, Czech.
Recorded: Aug. 2015, St. Willibrod's Basilica, Echternach, Luxembourg.
Published: 2016. TT: 56:44. 1 CD
Supraphon SU 4189-2.

The harpsichordist and organist **Kateřina Chroboková**, who goes by the pseudonym **KATT**, or **Katta** on her website, has matured into a performer whose great talent and strong intuition are beyond doubt. All the impulses she received during her studies – at the Janáček Conservatory Ostrava, JAMU Brno, the Utrecht School of the Arts, Lammeninstitut Leuven and the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis – have been transformed into a unique artistic programme. In addition to performances, this also includes a sustained effort to bring classical music and the sound of the royal instrument to audiences outside the standard concert circles. It seems that KATT's productions are also a welcome refreshment for promoters of classical music concert series and festivals, as they too would like to welcome new subscribers among their audience. For many listeners, then, her performances become the proverbial bridge between genres. Katta performs both on traditional instruments and her mobile white organ, which includes samples of organs from various regions and historical periods. In 2008, she released her first album – still as Kateřina Chroboková – with the Belgian label Passacaille (Passacaille 949). On this disc, she introduced pieces by 18th century composers on a historical instrument by Van Peteghem at st. Martin's in Haringe. For her Supraphon debut, the artist – now billed as KATT – performed on a four-manual instrument by the German company Klais (1953) at st. Willibrod's Basilica in Echternach, Luxembourg. What binds this recording together is the spiritual dimension, which is opened and concluded by J. S. Bach (*Toccata and Fugue in D minor BWV 565*, *Toccata in D minor "Dorian" BWV 538*). The other pieces were composed in the 20th century or later. Katta selected three pieces by the organ magician Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992): *Prière après la Communion* from the cycle *Livre du Saint Sacrement* (*The Book of the Blessed Sacrament*), *Communion a Sortie from the Pentecost Mass* (*Messe de la Pentecôte*), which includes Messiaen's signature imitations of birdsong in combination with inward contemplation. Beauty in simplicity is represented by two works by Arvo Pärt (b. 1935), *Trivium* and *Pari intervallo*. Katta added three pieces of her own to those by these masters of colour and harmony, as her wish is also to create space for her own compositions. These are represented by *Slavkov*, *Bogorodice Djevo* and *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. The former is also Katta's first composition – as a composer, she is self-taught, and this particular piece grew out of an improvisation in the church in Slavkov. The other two pieces, which

enter into dialogue with the tradition of both eastern and western Christianity, also introduce Kateřina Chroboková as a singer. As far as performance is concerned, there is nothing to criticise. Katta knows how to work with her instrument, with its colour, sound and reverberation. Bach is sensitively articulated and constructed, Messiaen coloured in with the appropriate shades and Pärt is softly "belled". In Katta's own work, she is courageous and convincing in trying to find a path for self-expression. It is clear that in a live situation, performed on a mobile instrument with added visualisations, the result can be very suggestive. I'll admit to being least taken by the use of the Orthodox prayer to the Virgin Mary, *Bogorodice Djevo*. The contrast between the text, the sound and the voice ends up coming across as too raw. I'd like to conclude by mentioning the – mostly analytical – introduction by Jiří Gemrot. Those with a knowledge of music theory and its terminology will doubtless enjoy this text, but if Katta wants to approach an audience of which this knowledge cannot be expected, it could be worth conceiving the text as a bridge too. We'll have to wait and see what Katta will put together next.

Dina Šnejdarová

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mozart Piano Concertos

Jan Bartoš – piano, Doležal Quartet (Václav Dvořák, Ondřej Puštyčejovský – violins, Martin Stupka – viola, Vojtěch Urban – violoncello), Czech Philharmonic, Jiří Bělohlávek – conductor.

Text: English, German, French, Czech.

Recorded: May 2013, Dvořák Hall, Prague (K 466), 5/2016, Martinů Hall, Prague (K 414). Published: 2017.

TT: 57:16. DDD.

1 CD Supraphon SU 4234-2.

Jan Bartoš is one of our most interesting and characterful pianists today. This was already clear after his first CD, published last year, which consisted of a live recording of pieces by Schumann, Smetana and Tálch, and it is now confirmed by his second, on which he presents two of Mozart's most performed piano concerti. Even though this information is not divulged in the booklet, these are also live recordings: the *Piano Concerto in D minor* was recorded on May 1st 2013 at the Rudolfinum, during a subscribers' concert of the Czech Philharmonic, and the *Piano Concerto in A major* at Bartoš's



recital at the Martinů Hall on May 21st 2016. It is clear that when recording the D minor concerto, all involved – Bartoš, the **Czech Philharmonic** and **Jiří Bělohlávek** – were in excellent shape; no edits were made to the recording. The orchestral introduction to the first movement has a fittingly magical atmosphere. Beginning with the first measures, we can appreciate the rich and plastic modelling of the dynamics and inspired work with instrumental timbre (winds, timpani). Bartoš's piano sounds both manly and emotive. The pianist builds his interpretation on a strict pulse, his technique is brilliant and precise, the copious and particularly effective passages in octaves evoke storms or torrents, especially in the left hand. It is one of the most dramatic interpretations of this movement I know. In the graceful slow movement, which Bartoš presents with a charming singing tone, the pianist's subtle poetics connect with a strange purity and modesty of expression. The most sonically impressive moment in this movement is the gentle return of the main subject after the dramatic middle section. The final movement reaches an almost demonic sound in several places and the rhythm is as stable as at the opening. The firmly structured architecture of the movement allows no doubts about the pianist and conductor's knowledge of the direction of Mozart's music. Special attention should be given to the cadence in this concerto. Bartoš chose Beethoven's, and he performs them excellently. Each of them seems an individual story, attempting to finish what Mozart left unsaid. The playful and careless A major concerto is a complete polar opposite – as concerns the compositional texture and overall effect – to the dramatic D minor, all the more since Bartoš is accompanied by a string quartet rather than an orchestra. In this intimate instrumentation, the work comes much closer to a piano quintet. Bartoš has found an excellent artistic partner in the **Doležal Quartet**. Its members gave the "accompaniment" a huge amount of work, working it out to the smallest detail. The solo part is much clearer and more lucid



than the D minor. Bartoš relates it with clear joy and a congenial honesty. The cadences, written by Mozart himself for this concerto, became refined bouquets of flowers in the most glorious colours in the hands of the pianist. The same interest I felt when listening to both the concerti was sustained as I read through Bartoš's booklet text. It is stylistically lively and contains many interesting personal observations, many of which are quite unusual and offer the listener unexpectedly beguiling food for thought.

Věroslav Němec

Slavic Soul: Antonín Dvořák & Leoš Janáček

Antonín Dvořák:
Dumka and Furiant op. 12,
B 136, 137
Poetic Tone Pictures op. 85,
nos. 3, 7, 6, 9, 13, B 161
Humoresques op. 101,
nos. 1, 8, B 187

Leoš Janáček:
On an Overgrown Path JW
VIII/17,
Sonata 1. X. 1905 JW VIII/19,
In the Mists JW VIII/22

Jan Michiels – piano.
Text: English, German, French, Dutch
(by Jan Michiels). Recorded:
Feb. 2016, Royal Conservatoire,
Brussels, Belgium. Published: 2017.
TT: 77:57. 1 CD Outhere Music / Fuga
Libera FUG 743

I waited for a recording like this for many years: one combining Dvořák's *Poetic Tone Pictures* and Janáček's *On an Overgrown Path*, the grandest piano works by these two composers, allied both spiritually and compositionally. And here it is. Not thanks to the work

of Czech pianists, who practically ignore Dvořák's two-hand piano work. Just like they were taught by generations of their Czech pedagogues, who shared an arrogantly disdainful view of Dvořák as a piano composer. Janáček's piano oeuvre is in a much better state, and not only thanks to the work of Firkušný, Páleníčková, Moravcová, Klánský, Kahánek or Kasík, but also thanks to many pianists from abroad, of whom we might mention at least Andrés Schiff and Leif Ove Andsnes. In the compositionally allied company of Dvořák's piano pieces, with which they share their roots in Schumann and a relation to Grieg's piano miniatures, Janáček's fragile compositions from *On an Overgrown Path* sound fresh, if not outright new. While we hear only a sophisticated selection from Dvořák's *Humoresques* and *Poetic Tone Pictures* (and the same with Janáček's *Overgrown Path*), Dvořák's forgotten jewel *Dumka*

and *Furiant* op. 12 was recorded in its entirety, just like Janáček's two-movement piano sonata and the four-part cycle *In the Mists*, which concludes the disc, following Janáček's *The Madonna of Frýdek* and Dvořák's *Holy Mountain*. The 51-year-old Belgian Jan Michiels is a gripping storyteller who stretches both the capacity of the CD medium (77:57) and the listener's attention, which gets no respite from the Janáček-Dvořák ping pong: *At the Old Castle – Vivo, Furiant – The Barn Owl Has Not Flown Away, Remembering – Sonata I. X. 1905, Dumka and Furiant – Allegro and Good Night!, Serenade*, perhaps only with the first and seventh of Dvořák's *Humoresques* op. 101. However, Michiels is also a supremely enlightened narrator, as the current CD – a studio recording of his public concert at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire in February 2016 – follows on from two older projects; one with Dvořák, one with Janáček. In 2009, together with the Prometheus Ensemble, he made studio recordings of *Capriccio, Concertino, Pohádka* for 'cello and piano and three pieces from *On an Overgrown Path* (Eufoda 1374). As early as 2003, he dedicated another Eufoda disc to Dvořák's piano music. This included *Dumka and Furiant*, a selection from *Poetic Tone Pictures* (nos. 3, 5–9, 11 and 13) and the entirety of the *Humoresques* and the *A major Suite*, recorded on a period Bösendorfer piano from 1884. For this new release, Michiels opted for a modern Steinway D, and once again wrote his own accompanying text. His playing is similar to his relationship to

the composers: it is free of any (technical and interpretive) superficiality, permeated in admiration for the compositional invention of both composers and an interest for their particular pianistic style. Both Dvořák and Janáček worked with piano textures in a rather unusual way, whether the influence came from the bowing of the strings (Dvořák) or from the cimbalom and harmonium (Janáček). An intimate knowledge of both of these pianistic tessituras is Michiels' starting point for his interpretation, in which the use of tempo and rhythm is, after all, more refined than the Dvořák of Firkušný or Kvapil, the use of rubato still freer than the Janáček of Firkušný, Páleníček or Kvapil, or their younger contemporaries Kahánek and Kasík. The only thing missing from a truly ingenious dramaturgical project would be the use of the harmonium, to which Janáček assigned several of the oldest parts of the first book of *On an Overgrown Path*. Jan Michiels sent out a precisely sculpted sonic postcard. We can only hope it will reach the ears of Czech concert promoters, who might then respond by inviting him onto our stages – so far, he has only performed at Janáčkovy Hukvaldy in July 2013, in the Frýdek-Místek château with a view of Janáček's Virgin Mary.

Martin Jemelka

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