



4
17

Igor Františák

Feedbacks and Ties

Josef Suk's A Summer's Tale

Marek Keprt

**25th ANNIVERSARY SEASON
2018–2019**

A Orchestral Series
Rudolfinum

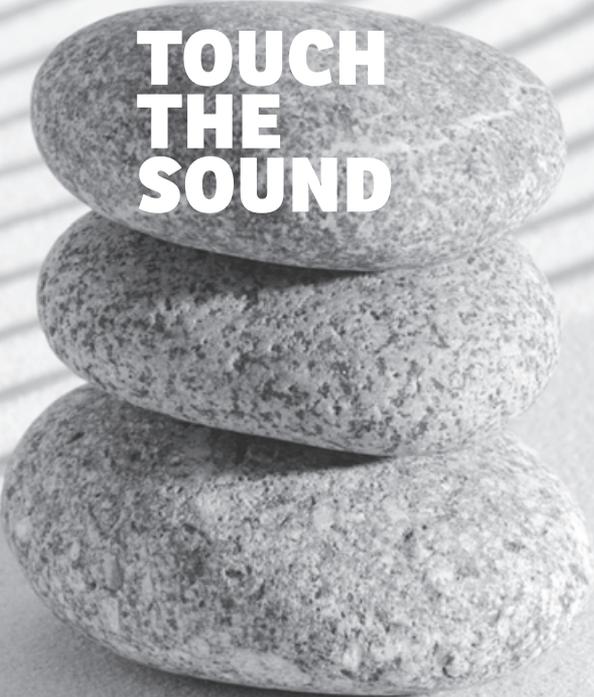
L PKF – LOBKOWICZ Series
Lobkowitz Palace

K Chamber Music Series
Czech Museum of Music

S The Beauty of Today
Experimental Space NoD

D Children's Concerts
Rudolfinum

**TOUCH
THE
SOUND**



www.pkf.cz

Start of subscription sales 2018–2019: Mon 16 April 2018 at 10 am
Start of individual concert tickets sales: Fri 1 June 2018 at 10 am

Dear readers,

The current issue again – after some time – contains an attached CD. This time, it is not another instalment within the monograph series of Composer Portraits discs, but a compilation of historical recordings of pieces that could be branded Czech (or, actually, Czechoslovak) ambient music. The “Feedbacks and Ties” CD is a probe into one of the offshoots of the alternative rock scene, which yielded remarkable fruit during the time of the Neo-Stalinist dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, and which within the global context often may be deemed to represent the most original Czech music created over the past few centuries. More information is provided in the extensive notes written by Petr Ferenc, who has compiled the CD. Should you raise the question of why such material can be found in a magazine that has been dedicated to composed (notated) music, both classical and contemporary, the answer is that it was the very interconnection between the alternative rock scene and the then ascending generation of unconventional composers, disloyal to the official regime, that to a great extent defined one of the facets of the Czech composed music of the 1990s, an interconnection that is still palpable today.

All the very best in the new year
Petr Bakla

Contents:

The St. Wenceslas Music Festival Was Born in My Dreams An interview with Igor Františák

by *Dina Šnejdarová*
page 2

Josef Suk's A Summer's Tale: Six decades of recordings

by *Martin Jemelka*
page 9

Feedbacks and Ties What Can You Hear on the Enclosed CD

by *Petr Ferenc*
page 16

Marek Kepřt: When Dragonfly Wakefulness Outflows the Glow

by *Matěj Kratochvíl*
page 24

Czech music Every day Events at home and abroad in the autumn of 2017

by *Barbora Vacková*
page 28

Wenzel Johann Tomaschek and his Autobiography

by *Tom Moore*
page 31

Reviews page 33



MINISTRY OF CULTURE
CZECH REPUBLIC



ISSN 1211-0264 (Print), ISSN 1804-0586 (Online)
MK ČR E 7099

Price and subscription (shipping included):
Czech Republic: one issue Kč 60
subscription (4 issues) Kč 320
Europe: one issue € 7, subscription (4 issues) € 40
Overseas countries: one issue \$ 10, subscription
(4 issues) \$ 50, or respective equivalents.
Electronic subscription: \$ 18 (see www.czech-music.net)

cover: *Luboš Fidler and Pavel Richter (1980)*

Czech music information centre

Czech Music Information Centre
Besední 3, 118 00 Praha 1, Czech Republic
fax: +420 257 317 424, phone: +420 257 312 422
e-mail: info@czech-music.net
www.czech-music.net

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

Editor: Petr Bakla, Producer: Monika Havlová
Translation: Hilda Hearne (pp. 9-15, 28-30,
reviews), Ian Mikyska (pp. 2-8, 16-27)
Graphic design: Ditta Jiříčková
DTP: HD EDIT. Print: Durabo



IGOR FRANTIŠÁK: THE ST. WENCESLAS MUSIC FESTIVAL WAS BORN IN MY DREAMS

Clarinetist Igor Františák is a man of quick judgement and grand visions, both a musician and a manager. Fourteen years ago, his resilience, perseverance – and doubtless also his luck – allowed him to create the St. Wenceslas Music Festival. This takes place exclusively in churches in the old mining town of Ostrava and the adjacent region. Over its history, this festival became one of the best-known for classical music in the country and Ostrava has long since stopped being the “steel heart of the republic” – it is now a space pulsating with culture of all genres, and it seems as though a new, vitalising freshness is permeating into its surroundings. Igor Františák’s festival is one of its unmistakable flavours.

When did you come up with the idea of establishing the St. Wenceslas Music Festival in Ostrava, of having it in the autumn and only in sacred spaces?

I first had the idea about fifteen years ago. In meetings with friends and colleagues from the musical world, we’d recount our experiences of giving concerts in churches. We all agreed that sacred spaces provide us with extraordinary artistic experiences and give these concerts a deeper dimension. For this reason, me and several others decided to establish a non-profit organisation with the aim of realising an autumn festival in our region, and locating it exclusively in sacred spaces. The autumn was a bit thin for cultural life in our region, so this season was a good fit for the festival. Furthermore, on the 28th of September, when we inaugurated the festival, we celebrate the Day of Czech Statehood and commemorate the death of St. Wenceslas, patron of the Czechs.

Your festival is spread across sacred spaces in Ostrava, but also the surrounding cities and towns. Was this always the case?

Yes, that was one of the founding ideas. My aim was to get artistic productions of a high standard to the smaller cities and towns in the Moravian-Silesian Region, to places that aren't natural cultural centres, but where one can find gorgeous historical buildings, churches with wonderful acoustics and, last but not least, an enthusiastic audience. I think this is something that's appreciated both by our stable audiences and the artists themselves, who are warmly received. I'm also glad people are now prepared to travel out of town to see concerts, so the church hosts local audiences as well as listeners from Ostrava, Olomouc or Prague.

You focus on sacred and early music, but your concerts don't only feature music written for sacred purposes. What do you understand when we say sacred music?

That's quite a complex issue. For me, sacred music is indelibly connected to sacred spaces, the spaces it was originally composed for. On the other hand, I see no reason for avoiding performances of purely instrumental music in churches. Rather, I would ask after the meaning of presenting sacred music in concert halls, which naturally lack the space of the nave with its distinctive reverberation and spiritual atmosphere. Many times, I was deprived of the fusion of the majestic acoustic and architectural beauty of a church with the character of the sacred music and religious texts. This is why we like to say that "a concert in a church is an experience". It is of course a matter of taste – or rather dramaturgical feeling – what kinds of music should be performed in sacred spaces.

That is an even more complex question. We often encounter extreme approaches: on one side, we find those who claim that churches are not intended for music that is not directly sacred, like Gustav Mahler; on the other, there are often projects presented in churches that have depressive, dark or even perverse topics. Even though the idea of "taste" is subjective, do you yourself have a line you would not cross?

You are right to say that both these positions exist, and it is often difficult to find a balance in this respect. I am not only a dramaturg, but also a musician, which is why I can trust that my natural musical intuition (and more than fifteen years of experience in putting on almost 700 concerts in the most varied of churches) draws an imaginary line which I have no reason to cross. To be honest, I consider the dogmatically obstinate following of historical sediment in the form of allowing or banning certain music, as in the case of Gustav Mahler, to be utterly irrelevant. For me, his music is so deep and real that it does not even cross my mind to think about whether it is suitable for a place of worship. Incidentally, we performed his 2nd symphony at our festival a few years ago, in one of Ostrava's largest churches. It was an extraordinary success.

The first instalment of the festival featured 31 concerts in total. Do you stick with this number, or does the number of concerts change?

To be honest, the 31 concerts that first year became the minimum. At most, we did 36 concerts. We also run a year-long series, called The Four Seasons, which is now in its tenth year. Combining both, we are putting on 75 concerts altogether this year.

To which concert space do you feel closest?

I love all the venues of our festival – each has something unique about it. But if I were forced to mention some by name, it would be the oldest church in Ostrava,





St. Wenceslas, the “deconsecrated” church of St. Wenceslas in Opava or the “crooked” church of St. Peter from Alcantara near Karviná, nicknamed “the Czech Pisa”.

How do you secure funding for projects of this magnitude?

I am happy to say that since we started, we have built up respect and recognition and established ourselves as one of the most important music festivals in the Czech Republic. This way, we became true partners for the cities in which we present our concerts. Funding for projects like this one is never ideal, but I must admit that - especially in the last two years - the situation has improved considerably. A substantial part of the support comes from public funds. Among the most important, I'd like to name the City of Ostrava, the Moravian-Silesian Region and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. On the other hand, private support is very complicated, especially in our region, and I earnestly hope this situation will soon improve to the benefit of culture. We also mustn't fail to mention income from ticket sales, which rises each year thanks to the beautiful attendance at our concerts.

I noticed that you approach your work very personally; that you're not only an éminence gris in the background. Do you direct the programming, the selection of artists and spaces entirely on your own, or in collaboration with other musicians, musicologists...?

I consider the St. Wenceslas Music Festival another one of my “children”. It’s a project I dreamt up, and that’s how I approach it and care for it. The preparation of the dramaturgy is a process of substantial duration that continually transforms. In the long term, I try to present little-performed repertoire and also progressively introduce the key works in this tradition. Due to the size of the festival, I also make use of recommendations from my friends; performers and musicologists. Sadly, I can’t attend all of the concerts, as sometimes, we might have three concerts at the same time. When it’s possible, however, I try to attend all of the festival concerts. Not only is this an enriching experience that fills me with energy, but it’s also feedback and a certain satisfaction for my work. I also like to make use of the opportunity to meet the artists during their stay here. We regularly meet for dinner after the concert to converse on a variety of topics, which is always pleasant and interesting for both parties. Perhaps this is part of the reason why so many performers like to come back.

Did there ever come a time when you thought you'd have to stop the festival for whatever reason, or was there no such low moment?

There were of course a number of “moments” like that, but I am truly happy I always managed to overcome the various problems and continue in the work I began. Today, I am very fulfilled and enriched by this work.

You mentioned that the festival gradually presents the works of specific composers, introducing them to your listeners year after year. Which composers and works are they?

We have presented the complete sacred works of Antonín Dvořák, for example, as well as key works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg Friedrich Händel or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Also Jan Dismas Zelenka, whose star has gone up in the last fifteen years, and whose music we can now compare with the oeuvre of J. S. Bach without any qualms. We are the only festival in the Czech Republic to present Zelenka’s complete *Psalmi Vespertini*, performed by Ensemble Inégal and their artistic director Adam Viktora.

You want to present unknown sacred music from the Czech tradition, from all periods. What about contemporary music? Are you planning to commission a work or invite a composer to work as artist in residence?

We have presented pieces by contemporary composers several times, but to be honest, I think they are more suited to specialised festivals of contemporary music, and in our case, it was more about bringing greater diversity to the programming. Next year, we will present Martin Kumžák’s oratorio *St. Wenceslas*, which was premiered in 2015, and Arvo Pärt’s *St. John Passion*.

The qualities of the St. Wenceslas Music Festival include discovering new performers and the regular return of some artists. Which international performers did you discover, not just for Ostrava, but for the Czech Republic? And with which artists did you enter into closer collaboration?

I think “new faces” are absolutely essential. Every year, I try to bring new artists to the festival and I’m glad this has been the case thus far. Our festival was the first in the Moravian-Silesian Region to start introducing artists and ensembles specialising

in historically informed performances of early music. If we stay in the Czech Republic, the most significant were – and in fact, still are – Collegium Marianum with Jana Semerádová and Collegium 1704 with Václav Luks. They are both resident ensembles at our festival. Among the soloists, I'd like to mention singers Martina Janková, Hana Blažíková, Markéta Cukrová and Tomáš Král. The Pavel Haas Quartet is a chamber group that is among the world's very best, and they performed at our festival at least seven times. Conductor Jakub Hruša is another strong artistic personality – he conducted Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* at the very first instalment of the festival. We have become friends since then, and I'm glad that he visits us quite often, as commitments allow. In 2018, he will conduct the opening concert, which will include Leoš Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*. As for international artists, I'll mention violinist Esther Yoo, harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani, flautist and conductor Philippe Bernold or Israeli cellist Gavriel Lipkind, who is currently employed as visiting lecturer at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ostrava.

Another new name is the Ostrava Youth Orchestra, which first performed at the festival this autumn.

Yes. It is formed of students at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ostrava and Janáček's Conservatory in Ostrava, and was conducted by Paolo Gatto at the festival. Frankly, I was surprised by the artistic quality and the level of concentration in rehearsals and the concert itself, but also by their youthful energy and enthusiasm. Naturally, we are planning to develop this young orchestra's activities in the future, and I am sure it won't be long before we see them at another stage or festival in Ostrava.

You teach at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava. How do you combine the festival, where you also regularly perform, with your pedagogical activities?

That is of course a very complex matter. I consider myself more of a musician than a manager. Over the years, I had to teach myself to distinguish my priorities and also work on a system for my projects. Without organising myself well, it would be impossible to do this. And my performances at the St. Wenceslas Music Festival always arise from the individual projects. Not only do I admire and love chamber music, which is why I often perform in various chamber ensembles, I am also one of the few players in the Czech Republic to perform on historical clarinets, and the only one to play the chalumeau.

How did you start playing on historical instruments?

It was thanks to our festival, actually. I always admired musicians who performed on them – I was always captivated by the unusual sound of period instruments, as well as the entirely different approach to interpretation of music that is utterly exciting. Then, it was only a matter of time and luck, which I had right from my first meeting with instrument builder Rudolf Tutz in Innsbruck.

The flutist Barthold Kuijken's recital at this year's festival was dedicated to Rudolf Tutz, who passed away recently. How do you remember him?

Rudy – as those close to him called him – was an incredible person, with a capital “P”. Not only was he one of the best makers of copies of historical wind instruments, he was also immensely smart and creative. Contact with the musicians for whom he was building the instruments was completely central to him. I am truly delighted that in the last ten years or so, I had the opportunity to visit Rudy in Innsbruck regularly

and spend up to a few days on the instruments he made for me. I am the only player in the country who owns and performs on various kinds of chalumeau, baroque and classical-period clarinets made by Rudy. Every time I play his instruments, I realise what a great person he was. I'm very grateful to him for that, and I hope I can return it in my concerts.

What are you planning for the next edition?

At least 35 concerts. We will commemorate the anniversary of the death of Leoš Janáček with his underperformed cantata *Amarus* followed by the *Glagolitic Mass*. Collegium 1704 are planning a big project with singer Magdalená Kožená, we're planning a performance by the legendary Belgian ensemble Flanders Recorder Quartet that will conclude their 35-year-long career. There will also be concerts by the Lviv-based vocal octet Orpheus, a screening of *Saint Wenceslas*, a silent film from 1929, accompanied by live music, a song recital by soprano Martina Janková and harpsichordist Barbara Maria Willi and also my favourite, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*.

Igor Františák

studied at the conservatory in Ostrava in Valtr Vitek's clarinet class. He continued his studies with Vitek at the Faculty of Arts and Education at the University of Ostrava. In 2001, he received a government grant to study at the Norwegian Academy of Music, where he worked with Hans Christian Bræin. He also attended international performance courses and seminars led by important pedagogues such as Michel Arrignon, Eric Hoepfich, Charles Neidich, Christian Leitherer, Milan Etlík or Andrzej Janicki. He participated in a number of national and international competitions, receiving the 3rd prize in the Interpretation Competition in Chomutov and the Marco Fiorinda International Music Competition in Turin, where he also won the 1st prize for chamber music with Ensemble Moravia. As a soloist, he has performed with many Czech symphonic and chamber orchestras, such as the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic or Czech Virtuosi, and internationally with Bohdan Warchal's Slovak Chamber Orchestra or the Kurpfälzisches Kammerorchester Mannheim. He also collaborates with leading Czech chamber groups such as the Pavel Haas, Bennewitz, Wihan and Škamp quartets. He is a founding member of the Stadler Clarinet Quartet, which has been performing for over twenty years. In recent years, he has also performed historical repertoire on chalumeau, baroque and classical clarinets. As a performer on these instruments, he has collaborated with the ensembles Collegium 1704, Collegium Marianum, Musica Florea, Ensemble Tourbillon or Ensemble Inégal. Since 2002, he is a co-organiser and teacher at the international performance courses in Ostrava. In addition to his concert activities, he is also a lecturer in clarinet at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava. Igor Františák is an official player of the French company Buffet Crampon and US-based D'Addario Woodwinds.



Josef Suk's *A Summer's Tale*: *Six decades of recordings*

*In one of his very last letters, written in February 1911 from New York to Vienna, Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) referred to his plan to hold a symphonic Czech Evening in the Austro-Hungarian metropolis. The centrepiece of the programme, compiled of orchestral works by Czech composers, was to be a recently completed piece by Josef Suk (1874-1935), *A Summer's Tale*, Op. 29 (1907-1909). Following the world premiere of Antonín Dvořák's final orchestral work, the symphonic poem *A Hero's Song*, Op. 111 (4 December 1898, Vienna), and after the first staging of Bedřich Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride* at the Metropolitan Opera (19 February 1909), Mahler intended to present music by another Czech composer, and thus bring it global renown.*

On 21 February 1911, Mahler conducted a concert in New York for the last time, and three months later, on 18 May 1911, he died. Hence, the Viennese music-lovers did not get to hear his account of *A Summer's Tale*. The Vienna premiere of the piece was conducted in 1910 by Oskar Nedbal (1874-1930), Suk's fellow student in Dvořák's composition class at the Prague Conservatory. *A Summer's Tale* had first been performed in Prague a year previously, on 26 January 1909, by the Czech Philharmonic, under the baton of Karel Kovařovic (1862-1920), to whom the work was dedicated.

Although *A Summer's Tale* - unlike the older, five-movement Symphony in C minor, *Asrael*, Op. 27 (1905-1906) - seems to be virtually devoid of any auto-biographical traits, its genesis and musical content have most frequently been interpreted through the lens of the composer's life. *A Summer's Tale* does not feature any motifs from Suk's earlier (1902) *Summer Impressions* for piano, Op. 22 (the composer employed the theme of the *At Noon* section in his 1904 symphonic poem *Praga*), yet the same gloomy tones present in *Asrael* do open its first movement (*Andante sostenuto* - *Allegro appassionato* - *Andante* - *Allegro moderato* - *Allegro energico* - *Allegro con brio* - *Andante sostenuto*). *A Summer's Tale* begins where *Asrael* ends: while by writing *Asrael* Suk had sought to get over the deaths of Antonín and Otýlie Dvořák, *A Summer's Tale* reflects his trying to find solace amidst nature. It was not for the first time that Suk, a member of the Czech Quartet, had drawn inspiration from nature and the summer. Yet *A Summer's Tale* marks his definitive farewell to the Czech Romantic tradition of musical rendition of nature, as we know it from Smetana's and Dvořák's works. Accordingly, the piece is more akin to Dvořák's 1896 tone poems based on K. J. Erben's

folk ballads than to his father-in-law's *Symphony No. 8* or the programme concert overture *In Nature's Realm*. What *A Summer's Tale* does have in common with *Asrael*, however, is the five-movement structure. Yet even though in terms of its proportions, treatment of motifs, structure, sequence of the movements and thematic cohesion *A Summer's Tale* does reveal Suk's symphonic inspirations and ambitions, the piece rather comes across as a suite of five symphonic poems: *Voices of Life and Consolation*, *Midday*, *Blind Musicians*, *In the Power of Phantoms* and *Night*.

In *A Summer's Tale*, the conventional summer pastorale gives way to a human being, either a seeking person (the introductory theme possessing a considerable variation potential in the high strings at the beginning of the opening movement) or a woman, whose shadow – according to Suk himself – emerges in the consolatory tones of the trio in the fourth movement, *In the Power of Phantoms* (*Adagio - Vivacissimo - Andante - Vivacissimo - Animato - Andante con moto - Tempo I*), whose patrons might as well be Berlioz, Dvořák or Mahler. The theme of nature enters the piece in the cor anglais, accompanied by the flute, imitating bird song. The second movement (*Moderato*) is a rhythmically heavy hymn to the glowing summer sun, while the third (*Adagio*) is the only movement to carry a certain autobiographical message and refer to an actual event – the composer's childhood memory of encountering blind musicians whom he, bewildered, followed from his native Křečovice to the neighbouring village, where he would later on be found in tears. Attesting to Suk's high opinion of this engrossing five-minute composition is his recycling of it in the revised incidental music for Julius Zeyer's drama *Radúz and Mahulena* (1914). His instrumental mastery and harmonic boldness are perhaps best manifested in the fourth movement, which is succeeded by the final section (*Adagio - Più mosso - Tempo I - Andante sostenuto e maestoso - Poco meno mosso*), which, besides the archaic hymn, utilises all the motifs of the preceding movements. *A Summer's Tale* is written for a gigantic orchestra, including two flutes, oboes, cors anglais, clarinets and bassoons, a piccolo, bass-clarinet and double bassoon, six horns, three trombones and trumpets, a tuba, timpani and a percussion set, two harps, an organ, piano, celesta and full string section.

The first commercial studio album of Suk's *A Summer's Tale* was made six decades ago, in late August 1957 at the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague, at the very end of the monophonic era. Just a few months later, the **Czech Philharmonic**, conducted by **Karel Šejna**, would have recorded it in stereo. Sixty years down the road, it is



Czech Philharmonic, Karel Šejna

still hard to believe just how many fine details of Suk's filigree score the sound director **Miloslav Kulhan** and the sound engineer **Miloslav Kuba** managed to squeeze on to the brittle disc. The first movement is characterised by a striking sonic and motivic transparency, significant traits of the entire recording, imbued by **Šejna** – humbly serving Czech music in the studio and on the stage, conducting works by Dvořák, Fibich, Martinů, Smetana and Suk – with a true Sukian exacerbated timbre. Particularly remarkable are the second and third movements, *Midday* and *Blind Musicians*. The Czech Philharmonic under **Šejna** breathes heavily, wearied by the sheer humidity of the July fields, while the sordined trumpets in *Midday* are still unsurpassed as regards the blurred sound, whose forcibility is even intensified by the seemingly imperfect period recording. In *Blind Musicians*, the cors anglais stumble over each other, cross each other's paths, instead of slavishly blending their parts precisely in line with the score. Regrettably, **Šejna's** affection for Mahler has only been captured by the Supraphon label on a recording of the conductor's performance of *Symphony No. 4* in G major, since in **Šejna's** account the scherzo of *In the Power of Phantoms* acquires almost Mahlerian dimensions and ambitions – in his hands, the feverish movement, texturally akin to Suk's *Fantastic Scherzo* and *Asrael*, does not let the listener take a breath, does not lose its nerve throughout, rolling like a deliriously hot dream, an emotional hallucination. After



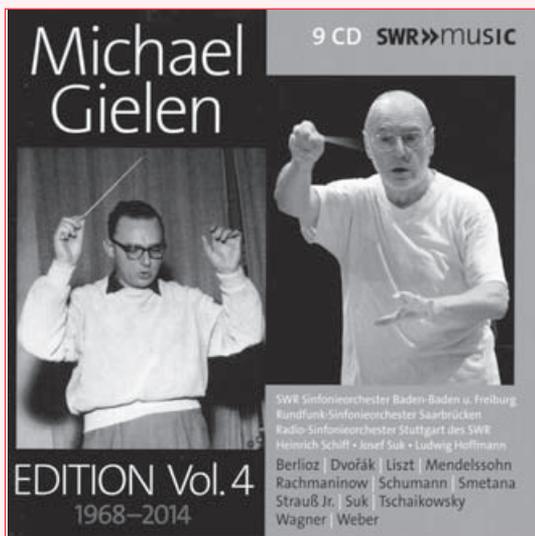
Czech Philharmonic, Libor Pešek

the scherzo ultimately collapses under a stroke on the bass drum, it passes through arpeggio chords in the harp to *Night*. The final movement's conclusion, combining the sounds of the piano, celesta, high strings and flute, may well be deemed the very apex of the Czech Philharmonic's period performance excellence. The trumpets, not always intonationally self-confident in the high register, come across as authentic, imparting the recording with the atmosphere of rural brass music. Šejna's discography encompasses plenty of similarly remarkable albums - featuring Zdeněk Fibich's symphonies and melodramas, Vítězslav Novák's tone poems, Antonín Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances* and *Legends*, Bedřich Smetana's *My Country* and other works - yet his account of Suk's *A Summer's Tale* (51.56: 14.37 - 5.51 - 4.54 - 11.07 - 15.08) remains an underestimated gem in the Supraphon archives. All the later recordings of Suk's opus have thus been compared with this monument to Šejna's mastery, an exquisite successor to Václav Talich's benchmark recordings of Suk's pieces (the suite *Fairy Tale*, 1949; *Serenade in E flat major*, 1951; *Asrael*, 1952; *Ripening*, 1956).

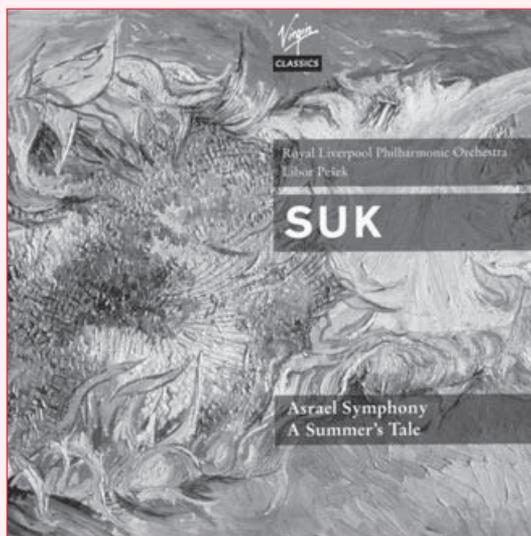
The next recording of Suk's *A Summer's Tale* was made some 27 years later, in February 1984, when Supraphon produced the first digital disc, featuring the **Czech Philharmonic**, conducted by **Libor Pešek**. At the time when the studio album was made, Pešek had served as a permanent guest conductor of the prime Czech orchestra since 1981, a post he

would remain in until 1990, when its chief conductor, Václav Neumann, was replaced by Jiří Bělohlávek. Whereas Neumann's Suk project included recordings of the *Fairy Tale*, *Symphony in E major*, *Fantasy in G minor*, *Asrael*, *Ripening* and *Epilogue* (1982-1986), the task to make the first digital recording of *A Summer's Tale* was undertaken by Pešek, who regarded Josef Suk's music as part of his core repertoire and a heartfelt matter as well. Unfortunately, Pešek's recording suffers from the shortcomings characteristic of the majority of the albums produced by Supraphon and the Czech Philharmonic in the infancy of the digital era, with the unpleasant sound of the high strings and trumpets making one regret that the recording had not come into existence at the end of the 1970s in analogue stereo format, as had, for instance, the sonically markedly better Neumann album of Dvořák's symphonic poems. In terms of tempo, Pešek's account is very similar to that of Šejna's (52:19 = 14.29 - 5.50 - 4.56 - 11.23 - 15.26), yet I still cannot shake off the impression that the music drags along, in the first movement in particular. On the other hand, Pešek did succeed in somewhat reviving the Suk symphonic style that had been pursued by the conductors of the Talich generation, especially as regards the emotionally charged performance of the *Blind Musicians*. The finale, far more masterfully built and gradated than the opening movement, is the satisfactory culmination of Pešek's creation (on the majority of the releases, combined with Suk's tone poem *Praga*). Nevertheless, the recording was not the last that Pešek would make of *A Summer's Tale* - a decade later, he would return to the composition as the music director of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Before Pešek had made his recording in the UK, in 1993 *A Summer's Tale* was recorded in a studio by the legendary German conductor and champion of contemporary music **Michael Gielen**, who this year celebrated his goth birthday. The very first non-Czech recording of Suk's piece, which was soon broadcast on the radio and released on disc, actually came into being by sheer chance. A friend of Gielen's presented to the conductor the score of *A Summer's Tale* and asked him to guess the composer. He immediately ruled out Bartók, Schönberg, as well as Scriabin, Zemlinsky... Gielen, who was not familiar with Suk at the time, was engrossed by the work, primarily owing to the modern, novel orchestration, and exclaimed: "*A masterpiece that no one knows. Come on! I thought so. It must be performed right away!*" And he duly did so - if the sources can be believed - within a single recording session. Even though I would expect an even more transparent sound, the German



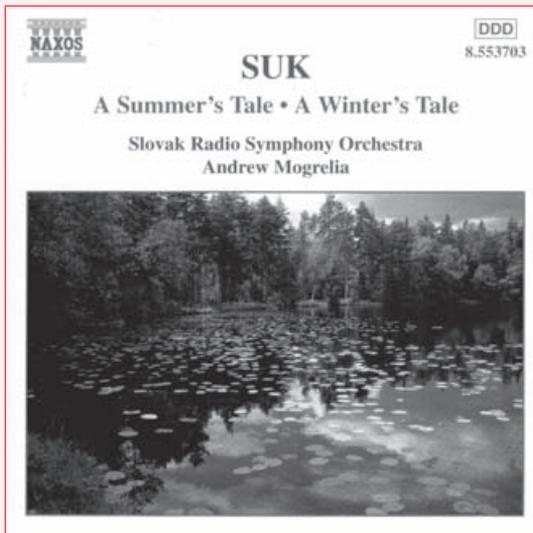
SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg, Michael Gielen



Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Libor Pešek

radio recording is masterfully balanced in acoustic terms, and those who happen to hear Suk's piece for the first time as approached by Gielen would be struck by it as a revelation. Although Gielen, a connoisseur of Mahler's music, does not put Suk up on a pedestal next to Mahler, he clearly believed in Suk's work. His studio recording presents *A Summer's Tale* to the listener within the context of the strings' objective German sound and the straight tone of the woodwind instruments. The specific tang of the Suk orchestra may have been cast aside, yet the elastic rhythmicity, faster tempos (50:46 = 14.03 - 5.26 - 4.38 - 10.53 - 15.23), and the precise intonation of the high strings and woodwinds make the piece comprehensible and attractive to the audience. The vivid tempos besem the first movement, as well as the intermezzos, with the *Midday* section captivating the listener by the legible, crystal-clear tremolo in the strings, while the sound of *Blind Musicians* is impressionistically intoxicating. As approached by Gielen, the *Night* movement does not come across as sonorously eerie as it does in the Czech recordings, yet his Mahlerian scherzo seems to be unrivalled, be it in terms of its dramatic gradation or the inventive dealing with the clarinet part. The soft tutti of the **SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg**, combined with a transparent sound, hold out the mirror to the Czech interpretation tradition. Gielen's recording was a true milestone in the performance of Suk's music.

In May 1994, *A Summer's Tale* was again taken up by **Libor Pešek**, the one and only conductor who can pride himself on having made two recordings of the extraordinary piece. The series of albums of Suk's works Pešek made in Liverpool also contains recordings of *Asrael* (1990/12), *Ripening* (1991) and *Epilogue* (1997). In line with his placid, amicable attitude to orchestras, by no means did Pešek force the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic** to imitate the Czech timbre. Consequently, under his baton, straight off in the first movement the brass instruments generate tones markedly more dramatic than those we are accustomed to hearing in the case of other Czech-helmed recordings. This resulted in particular in the sonically more objective scherzo, which, however, is not as agogically refined as that of Gielen's creation, recorded a few months earlier. Pešek's studio recording, with its duration being exactly the same as *Šejna's* (51:56 = 14.50 - 6.15 - 5.11 - 10.45 - 14.52), may serve as a prime example of a pleasing performance of the work, the sonic appeal of whose score, dating from the time of late Romanticism and impending Modernism, is increased by both the pedal-tones in *Midday* and the foggy sound in *Blind Musicians*. The solid quality of *A Summer's Tale* especially stands out in comparison with the other recordings Pešek made in Liverpool. I personally would even venture to place it above the later recording of the piece created in the UK by Jiří Bělohlávek and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.



*Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra,
Andrew Mogrelia*

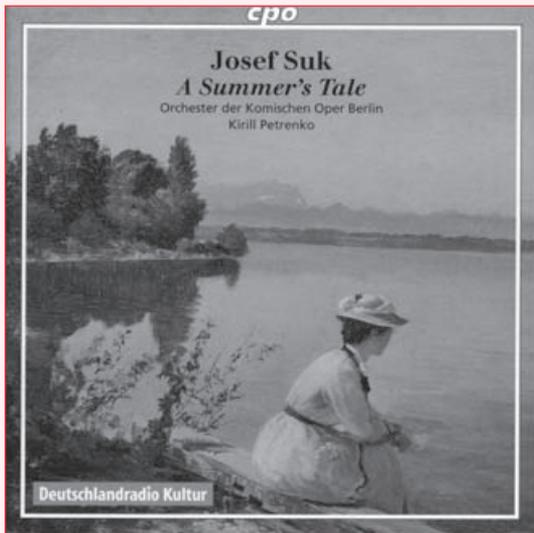


Czech Philharmonic, Charles Mackerras

In January 1996, the **Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra** made in a Bratislava studio the third radio recording of Suk's *A Summer's Tale* (if we are also to count the one made in Prague by **Josef Hrnčíř**, conducting the **Czechoslovak Symphony Orchestra**, which has long since been unavailable on the market and hence the present article does not reflect upon it). A British artist participated in the Bratislava project too – the conductor **Andrew Mogrelia**, whose recordings of symphonic and orchestral works by Fibich, Novák and Suk had filled the gaps in the discography of the Naxos label. Although one may expect it to be the “weakest” of the performances, the recording is far from being an “outsider”, owing in no small part to its being in accordance with the good tradition of the recordings made by Central European radio orchestras, objective in terms of sound and tempo (rewarding to the audience). Performed relatively nimbly (50:41 = 13.26 – 6.05 – 5.32 – 10.56 – 14.43), the recording may be deemed to be an ideal guide for those previously unfamiliar with Suk's music (especially given its low price). In precious few recordings are the development passages of the first movement as sonically transparent as on this recording, which, however, in places lacks sufficient rhythmic and agogic elasticity, for instance, in the barcarolle sections of the introductory movement. The rather average performance of the two intermezzos and the relatively poor execution of the scherzo are compensated for by

the finale, in which Mogrelia particularly succeeded in making all the motifs from the previous movements immediately recognisable. Similarly to Pešek's earlier Liverpool creation, the recording too may be defined as slightly above average. Nevertheless, the value of Mogrelia's album is greatly enhanced due to its containing the overture *Tale of a Winter's Evening*, Op. 9, perhaps the most overlooked of all Suk's works.

The next studio recording of *A Summer's Tale* was made in December 1997 by yet another UK-based artist, the Australian **Sir Charles Mackerras**, conducting the **Czech Philharmonic**. Along with his accounts of *Rusalka* (Decca 460 568) and Dvořák's *Violin Concerto* and Suk's *Fantasy*, featuring the violinist Pamela Frank (Decca 460 316), the album, released by Decca – ideally combining *A Summer's Tale* with another Suk piece, *Fantastic Scherzo*, Op. 25 – ranks among the Czech Philharmonic's greatest accomplishments at the end of the first millennium. When it comes to the audio quality, I would rank Mackerras's *A Summer's Tale* for Decca higher than the recordings he made at the time at the Rudolfinum hall for Supraphon (featuring music by Janáček, Dvořák and Martinů), as well as his 2007 recording of Suk's symphony *Asrael* (SU 4043-2). The Decca sound engineers duly made use of both the Rudolfinum's acoustic fortes (with an occasionally guileful longer reverberation) and the dark sound of the strings, which so becomes Suk's work. Mackerras managed to coerce the orchestra into being rhythmically flexible



*Orchester der Komischen Oper Berlin,
Kirill Petrenko*

(a property it lacks in the case of numerous Czech Philharmonic recordings dating from the time) and also made them attain soft dynamic sublimities, including stark dynamic contrasts in the fourth and fifth movements, which always land on the velvety pillow of the Rudolfinum's acoustics. Yet, unsurprisingly, Mackerras, at the time a permanent guest conductor with the Czech Philharmonic, failed to remove all of the orchestra's ingrained bad habits, which are above all palpable in the string section's insufficient interplay, mainly evincing itself in the scherzo in the *In the Power of Phantoms* movement. Nevertheless, owing to the thorough knowledge of Suk's musical idiom, gained during the time of his studies with Talich, Mackerras conceived a remarkable recording, one that, from among the later recordings, is definitely most akin to the *Sejna* model. The introduction to the first movement flows like honey, without the tiny motifs in the development blending together. Mackerras had a sensibility for the sonic surprises that are often present in Suk's scores, a quality that he brought to bear, for instance, at the end of the first movement, with the orchestra literally exhaling, and in *Midday*, whose motif struts like the stork. I consider *Midday* to be the true adornment of the recording – it pulsates and is exemplarily gradated. Similarly defined can be the third movement, in a slower tempo, yet with a truly intoxicating sound. When assessing the recordings of Czech provenience, the scherzo in the *In the Power of Phantoms* movement

as approached by Mackerras is perhaps the closest to Mahler's herzos, owing in part to the reliable performance of the woodwind section. A genuine treat for the listener is the finale of the work, as regards the setting of the chords in the piano and celesta alone, which are followed by the splendidly recorded chord in the low strings. The Czech Philharmonic of the 1990s are not recalled with enthusiasm in all respects. Nonetheless, Mackerras's recording, featuring lively tempos (50:12 = 13.36 - 5.36 - 5.10 - 10.41 - 15.09), floats timelessly as a perfect interpretation of Suk's piece. An exceptional accomplishment indeed, it towers like a landmark in the Czech Philharmonic's discography dating from the 1990s.

Had it not been for **Kirill Petrenko**, all the currently existing recordings of Suk's *A Summer's Tale* would have been made in radio studios (Gielen, Mogrelia, Bělohávek), or in collaboration with standard symphony orchestras. Yet in 2002, 2004 and 2006, Petrenko, who will soon become the next chief conductor of the Berliner Philharmoniker, brought to fruition a three-part Suk project (not including the *Epilogue*) with the **Orchester der Komischen Oper Berlin**, who in addition to executing their theatre-related duties have given regular performances within their own subscription concert series, in accordance with the praiseworthy practice in the German-speaking countries. Even though Petrenko's live (!) recording does not possess a trace of the singular Czech style, it does possess by a number of virtues, starting with a very specific sonic conception and ending with the intriguing coupling of Suk's piece with Anatoly Lyadov's symphonic poem *The Enchanted Lake* (1909). Josef Suk Jr. himself lauded Petrenko's recording of *Asrael*. Deserving equally high esteem is Petrenko's account of *A Summer's Tale*, which on his recording made in January 2004 in Berlin features becomingly vivid tempos (49:44 = 13.30 - 5.39 - 5.26 - 10.12 - 14.57), particularly in the middle movements. On the lucid recording (on precious few recordings are the introductory bars in the low strings as clearly audible as in the one made by Petrenko on the Komische Oper stage), the first movement vehemently rushes forward, while the ceaseless dynamic gradation (*Midday*) and agogic vivification are the key standout qualities of the album, which you will undoubtedly want to listen to again. As performed by Petrenko, the wild scherzo of *In the Power of Phantoms* will give you the willies, while the final movement, *Night*, attests to the (perhaps surprising) qualities of the recording. Regrettably, one would be hard pressed indeed to imagine that the leading Czech opera orchestras



BBC Symphony Orchestra, Jiří Bělohlávek

(in Brno, Ostrava and Prague) could have implemented a similar album. Well, we shall eagerly await the Czech projects Kirill Petrenko may pursue in the future as the chief conductor of the Berliner Philharmoniker. Let us hope he will undertake Suk's scores too.

The most recent recording of *A Summer's Tale* was – again – the result of Czech-British collaboration. It was made in January 2012 in the UK by **Jiří Bělohlávek** and the **BBC Symphony Orchestra**. The CD significantly extended the conductor's Suk discography. Whereas he and the Czech Philharmonic had made a recording of the *String Serenade*, *Fantastic Scherzo* and *Asrael* for Chandos back in the 1990s, Bělohlávek only got around to making recordings of *A Summer's Tale*, *Ripening*, *Praga* and *Symphony in E major* while based in London (if we do not take into account Bělohlávek's recording of *Asrael* at the Prague Spring festival 2008, the CD containing the *Fantasy*, made with the Czech Philharmonic and the violinist Josef Špaček, and the older recording of the *String Serenade* with the Prague Philharmonia, the latter two released on Supraphon). In his 2012 London recording, Jiří Bělohlávek opted for very slow (54:25 = 15.04 – 6.50 – 5.34 – 10.54 – 15.40), relatively monolithic tempos, which, however, do not always benefit the impression, especially when compared with the agogically more vigorous performances captured on the recordings made by Gielen and Mackerras, let alone Petrenko.

The Andante sostenuto in the first movement drags on. The conductor's extremely precise tempo reading in the first two movements even comes across as monotonous. The scherzo of *In the Power of Phantoms* sounds cumbersome too. The absence of considerable differences in tempo and rhythm seems to be the most pertinent in the movements *Midday* and *Blind Musicians*, with the latter making Bělohlávek's recording definitely worth listening to – the sonic transparency and serene tempo let the section blossom into a small orchestral gem. The finale markedly raises the standard of the recording, which as a whole would certainly have benefited from a greater tempo and rhythmic flexibility. By and large, Bělohlávek's London recording has confirmed my conviction that the technical faculties and sonic qualities of the BBC Symphony Orchestra are eclipsed by those of the German radio orchestras in Hamburg and Munich. Moreover, I would like to point out that the five-channel SACD format has done the Chandos recording a world of good, serving as it does to highlight the fortes of Suk's colourful score. Bělohlávek's album, coupling *A Summer's Tale* and *Praga*, met with great acclaim on the part of the British critics, and even won the 2017 Gramophone Classical Music Award in the Orchestral category. Owing to Bělohlávek's endeavours, Suk's *A Summer's Tale* has finally earned the international critical acclaim it so richly deserves. Let us hope now that the piece will be performed regularly on concert stages. At least in the Czech Republic.

-
- Czech Philharmonic, Karel Šejna: 1957, Supraphon SU 1923-2
 - Czechoslovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Josef Hrnčíř: Radioservis
 - Czech Philharmonic, Libor Pešek: 1984, Supraphon SU 3864-2
 - SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg, Michael Gielen: 1993, SWR Music, Edition Michael Gielen Vol. 4, SWR19028CD
 - Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Libor Pešek: 1994 Virgin Classics 50999 6 28530 2 6
 - Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Andrew Mogrelia: 1996, Naxos 8.553703
 - Czech Philharmonic, Charles Mackerras: 1997, Decca 466 443-2
 - Orchester der Komischen Oper Berlin, Kirill Petrenko: 2004, CPO 777 174-2
 - BBC Symphony Orchestra, Jiří Bělohlávek: 2012, Chandos CHSA 5109

FEEDBACKS AND TIES

What Can You Hear on the Enclosed CD

The CD which accompanies this issue of the Czech Music Quarterly is a probe – by necessity brief and not all-encompassing – of one of the scenes in Czech musical life in the 1980s and 90s. Reading the back cover reveals that it is a kind of “micro-scene”: the constant figures come together within it and outside of it in various constellations. I chose the five names for the Feedbacks and Ties compilation, that is Oldřich Janota, Pavel Richter, Luboš Fidler and brothers Jaroslav and Michal Kořán, as representatives with the widest musical scope and as artists whose creative journey still continues – in some cases for five decades – and still follows the principles of searching for new possibilities of expression.

Despite years on the scene, none of them is a star in the true sense of the word, but they all sustain a deep and meaningful bottom current in within Czech music, which has become an integral part of local considerations of alternative and experimental music. In their work, they have confronted rock, folk, improvisation, electronic and ambient music.

Behind the Curtain

The path to the music you will hear on the CD began in the 1960s within the fields of rock and folk. Like other countries, Czechoslovakia was struck by the rock wave and became a seedbed for many “beat” groups – the official name for rock music. Folk music came in through the door, becoming embedded in the young audience. It was inspired by western singer-songwriters (Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Donovan), French *chansonniers*, Russian singing poets (Bulat Okudzhava, later Vladimir Vysotsky) and the local pre-war tradition of the so-called tramp song (Czech tramping is a movement deriving from the scouts, emphasising living

in harmony with nature. Its music is similar to American hill-billy music, but with a major influence of interwar pop music; tangos and polkas.)

After a period of cultural and political thaw, which culminated in the Prague Spring of 1968 and ended with the entry of the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August, free musical – and other artistic – expression once again became a thorn in the eye of the powers that be, and thus the subject of centralised control and censorship. To put the issue in simple terms, a Czechoslovak musician could not perform and receive a fee if he wasn't designated as "allowed" by the state apparatus. State-run agencies were in charge of organising performances, state



companies would publish records. There were always at most three of these labels in socialist Czechoslovakia. Attempts at independent operations, self-published recordings (i.e. musical *samizdat*) and self-organised concerts could end in persecution for the conduct of illegal business – the entire economy of the state was nationalised and private entrepreneurship did not exist – and for distributing unapproved content. The result was the abolition of a number of groups and the end of many scenes. Scores of records in production were suspended.

This process of normalisation, that is, of a return to a state-approved "track", was at its peak in 1972. Different musicians dealt with it differently, from continuing their career at the cost of adapting their image, name and repertoire, to departing

OLDŘICH JANOTA, PAVEL RICHTER, LUBOŠ FIDLER (1984)





**LUBOŠ FIDLER,
PAVEL RICHTER,
OLDŘICH JANOTA (1995)**

for “calm waters”, for example the accompanying bands of “unobjectionable” pop stars. Others searched for ways of functioning within the cultural politics of the state at an amateur level, i.e. having the opportunity to perform officially with a more or less uncensored repertoire, but without the possibility of professionalisation. Many emigrated, many others decided to have nothing to do with the official cultural politics and go underground, where every artistic decision broke the law. Let us add that this desolate situation transformed at least partially at the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s with the arrival of many young groups. The intensity of this wave resembled that of the 60s. Again, this was a reaction to an impulse from the West, now through punk and new wave music.

Even in the second half of the 1960s, when socialist Czechoslovakia was most open to the western world, it was still separated by an only slightly permeable information barrier. The acquisition of new recordings – what in democratic society of the western kind



OLDŘICH JANOTA



PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER 5x

JAROSLAV KOŘÁN
MICHAL KOŘÁN

PAVEL RICHTER
LUBOŠ FIDLER

amounted to going to the store and purchasing the desired record - was an activity which most resembled smuggling luxury goods. Those supplied with records by family in emigration abroad were considered lucky. The better-off could occasionally visit an illegal market, which would often end with an intervention by the police. The prices there were often in the realm of tenths of a month's wages. The state company, Supraphon, would occasionally publish a licensed album by a western artist, but it was a drop in the sea. Rock music was recorded from western radios, often jammed. The most important was Radio Luxembourg. Records were copied and lent out endlessly.

Even in this situation, the recordings that reached Czechoslovak also came to include some which we could call marginal. Thanks to the undesired "forbidden fruit effect" of censorship, they also often provoked much interest. Frank Zappa, for example, was a notable influence on the local alternative rock scene. His "freak out" style was used with enough marketing dexterity as to attract popularity and allow his music to spread through mainstream paths and large print runs in the West, and thus reach behind the iron curtain.

The consequences of the information barrier were twofold. It would often happen that it would serve as an unknown creative partner for musicians and music critics. That's why Zappa's music was considered heavy, existential and dark within the Czech underground community, even though it often operates on the fields of satire, straightforward virtuosity or scatological humour. Others, when they later encountered British groups from the Rock in Opposition movement, they considered this to be a generally popular, more or less superstar scene without any material concerns.



Less is the Most

The artists presented on *Feedbacks and Ties* dealt, in their own ways, with inspirations from minimal and ambient music. These genres migrated from the context of contemporary composition (which, in its official form in Czechoslovakia, was not at all inclined to excesses and fads like minimalism) and luxury studios to “bedroom conditions”, and thus a *do-it-yourself* aesthetic, enriching the music with a distinctive spontaneity with elements of improvisation and inventiveness in home recording and DIY instrument building. The working title of the disc was Czech Reduction. It suggested a feeling hard to capture in words; something our editorial team felt from the music presented. Approximately, we could describe it as a search for a full-blooded musical expression whose resultant complexity does not exclude being enchanted by simplicity and airiness. The keywords could be repetitiveness; moving at the edge of silence; seeming simplicity which stems from lengthy sanding and polishing; an investigation into how little is necessary to achieve an effective result; an abandonment of sectional forms in favour of singular; gradually developing sonic-musical blocks; and finally, the use of unusual sounds and musical instruments, often self-made, in a position surpassing that of a mere “exotic” sound effect.

Five Names

As we suggested above, *Feedbacks and Ties* presents the tip of the iceberg, represented by five distinctive personalities.

Oldřich Janota (1949) has a reputation in the Czech Republic as the most ruminative singer-songwriter, as a man who subtly, but all the more strenuously and remarkably out-steps the boundaries of folk music. In addition to his solo work, he performed live as the leader of the generally rock-oriented group Mozart K in the early 1980s. Its line-up included harmonium, saxophone, electric guitar and drums. Not long after, Janota moved to a smaller ensemble: a trio with Pavel Richter and Luboš Fidler. They brought not only their interweaving guitar strumming, but also record players, tape recorders, radios, and Fidler’s percussion instrument, the roletophone (amplified window-blind wands). In the grip of minimalist moods – listening to the American minimalists showed him that the circles of arpeggiated chords which he used to practice could often be quite enough – Janota liked to omit the voice. Perhaps it was here that he acquired his fondness for expression with an almost koan-like brevity. After 1989, he became immersed in “tea-room culture”, as he calls it. He created a remarkable trio with Irena and Vojtěch Havel, a married couple of viola da gamba players whose music often fuses the old with the Eastern. In addition to a vast array of *ad hoc* improvisation ensembles and his current ensembles (the [non]choir /

[non]band Ora pro nobis), Oldřich Janota continues performing solo as a singer-songwriter with a guitar. He is among the best lyricists to be born in the Czech lands. In recent years, he has also published two volumes of *feuilletons*, written in the same imaginative language, lightly seasoned with subtle humour.

Guitarist **Pavel Richter** (1956) and bass guitarist Luboš Fidler (1951) began meeting on the fringes of the official - in the early 1970s. Together with drummer Petr Křečan and guitarist Lesík Hajovský, they were part - together or individually - of the core of many interlinked groups, including the rock group Stehlík, the folk F.O.K. and, particularly later, Švehlík (temporarily renamed Marno Union), whose leading figure was Pavel Richter. In addition to his virtuosic guitar artistry, Richter was also a tireless sonic handyman and a master of amateur studio recording. He worked with electromagnetic

tape both as a means of recording and as a musical instrument. His recordings, despite having been made in bedroom, amateur conditions, are comparable in their sound and the precision of their performances with much output from professional studios. From the 1980s onwards, he led his own Richter Band, whose music was more or less ambient and which also included Michal Kořán. He currently performs in a duo with his son Jonáš under the name Richter & syn (Richter & Son). He records in his home studio and often publishes on his own label, Richtig Music. I think it is no offence for either of the two if I compare Pavel Richter to Robert Fripp.

In addition to playing a home-made bass guitar and the amplified window-blind wands mentioned above, Luboš Fidler also sculpted sound in his own home studios. After Pavel Richter's departure, he performed in a duo with Oldřich Janota for a while,

**HOROCLOGY OF DREAMERS
(MAREK ŠEBELKA, JAROSLAV AND MICHAL KOŘÁN)**

JAROSLAV AND MICHAL (SITTING) KOŘÁN



MICHAL KOŘÁN

**RICHTER BAND
(BHARATA RAJNOŠEK, PAVEL RICHTER)**



spending some time in the seclusion of the countryside, later in emigration. He considers Vyšší populár (The Higher Popular) a refreshing impulse at the beginning of the 1980s, when he encountered young musicians – including Jaroslav Kořán – and experienced the joy of spontaneous music making and naturally emerging non-songs. He currently performs in a duo with drummer Zdeněk Konopásek under the name Noční pták (Night Bird). Their anticipated first album has been about to drop for several years now.

We should also add that in addition to their collaboration with Oldřich Janota, Richter and Fidler also passed through groups around another key figure in Czech experimental rock: composer, singer, saxophonist and guitarist Mikoláš Chadima, including, at the end of the seventh decade, also the wild, short-lived and yet legendary improvisation supergroup Kilhets (Stehlík backwards).

Approximately a generation younger, Jaroslav (1962) and Michal (1969) Kořán began their musical and artistic explorations together. One of their first bands was Modrá (Blue), Jaroslav later played with Luboš Fidler in Vyšší populár, Michal in the Richter Band. Orloj snivců (Horology of Dreamers) is considered their largest collaborative work – an instrument and a variable ensemble created around it.

Since 1991, the Horology of Dreamers is a continually reincarnating and transforming variety of gamelan from metal poles (and sheets, screws and bolts) built on polystyrene boxes; a material which does not dampen the sound of the metal and lets it reverberate beautifully after it is struck. The concerts are also a bold scenic experience and an art installation – and one that is dictated solely by the sonic demands – and it is certainly no exaggeration to consider this changeable instrument one of the most distinctive manifestations of local sound art. *Nebeské varhany* (Heavenly Organ), an album by the Horology of Dreamers, was published in its second edition this year, finally on CD. I cite here an extract from the Proclamation of the Dreamers, written up by Jaroslav Kořán and reprinted in the CD booklet, because it is true to a certain extent for all the artists presented on *Feedbacks and Ties*, and can work as a supplement to the above attempt at summarising the artistic characters of those involved. The idea of a dreamer has its forebear in a novel by the Austrian expressionist, artist and writer Alfred Kubin, *The Other Side* (*Die andere Seite*, 1909; *Země snivců – The Land of the Dreamers* – in Czech). Jaroslav's text was written in 1994.

It is quite easy to recognise a dreamer. He walks past you, saying nothing, examining everything with peace of mind, you included, subtly of course, and best if he softly, imperceptibly smiles, all the while clearly fully engaged by himself, by something hidden to you, living through what is inside him, enjoying it in addition to everything around him... A true dreamer is silently

happy in himself. In the depth of their souls, dreamers are often quiet people. Mass experiences are not their field, and they perform blind obligations with a dreamer's will. Everything singularly defined or narrowly strict disturbs them and remains inadequate. Their core is bound far from the noisy streets, smoke, advertising space, receding to the spheres of the rhythm of existence itself, if possible. They try to make fun of work and reshape their space to their own happiness, as a dreamer needs to be himself. (...) Curiously, dreamers do not sleep, but, paradoxically, they are awake. They are here. They try to avoid the nonsense we make up for ourselves, they honour life in various forms and rejoice at it. They know they possess the gift of seeing connections and an astounding and – it seems – invaluable power to act. They esteem the ability to create and consider it one of their elementary values and needs. (...) Dreamers are serious, dreamers laugh.

The Horology of Dreamers gradually expanded into a formation called Zapomenutý orchestr Země snivců (Forgotten Orchestra of the Land of the Dreamers), which brought the most various of instrumental combinations to the forefront. Jaroslav Kořán, who led the ensemble, continues performing in various improvising groups, most recently with singer-songwriter and pianist Jan Burian. In his duo Kora et le Mechanix, Michal became a leading exponent of Czech electronic ambient music in the vein of Brian Eno.

Of Loops and People

Oldřich Janota is somewhat under-represented on the current disc considering his position on the Czech musical scene. Despite of all the genre detours mentioned above, he is still primarily a songwriter and a remarkable lyricist, which makes his work less accessible for non-Czech speakers. However, the context in which he is presented in the song on *Feedbacks and Ties* is very significant: in a trio with Luboš Fidler and Pavel Richter from a period in which guitars were complemented by noisy ready-mades from radios, tape and vinyl records. Janota recites a text, but he also destroys it and supplements it with gramophone manipulations.

At the time, he was in a creative mode that forced him to abbreviate his texts (which most attracted the folk audience), to shroud them to incomprehensibility, sometimes to abandon them altogether and make his songs repetitive instrumental numbers. This culminated in a performance at a folk festival, during which the trio – to the displeasure of the audience – made do with record players. In addition to the story of Little Red Riding-Hood, these also played language-learning records, repeating the questions “You do not understand, do you? It is very difficult for you, isn't it?”

I think it is not without interest to reprint Janota's short lyrics for the song *Asi si to pleteš (You Might Have It Mixed Up)*: "You might have it mixed up / with something which long ago / it must've been that same night / and the same colour // Perhaps the same flash of lights / perhaps so // You might have it mixed up / with something which long ago // Perhaps the same flash of lights / a scream and a blow // You might have it mixed up / with something that will be."

In order to give the reader an idea of the DIY strategies used in producing these recordings, let us consider the circumstances in which the only solo piece on *Feedbacks and Ties* was made. Luboš Fidler recorded *Absolute Realism* in 1984, alone in his DIY studio in the Prague district of Strašnice:

Two tape recorders wound two loops of varying lengths around several appropriately placed glasses across the "studio" – [one of them sounded an alarm-bell spring] the sound of which I manipulated using all the functional buttons on the Tesla tape player. Simultaneously, I played a prepared piano (e.g. with a hair brush), and, if it's even possible, recorded all of this live with a stereo microphone onto a third tape recorder (I'd borrowed all of them). But I can't guarantee that is actually how the recording happened. The quality corresponds to the overcomplicated technology, but I think that that "sound" is part of it, actually.

Magnetic tape with a recording that is glued into a loop and plays over and over is one of the foundations of Czech attempts at widening the field of sonic possibilities beyond the world of musical instruments. In addition to Fidler and Richter, it is also worth mentioning the considerably louder work of Chadima's MCH Band: in a certain period during the 1980s, repetitive playback replaced the drum kit, becoming the backbone of semi-improvised songs. It was an advantage to have such a compact setup, which could be transported in passenger cars and allowed one to make a quick escape from the police if an illegal performance were in risk of police intervention. You can pack a tape player faster than a drum kit...

To Further Journeys...

Feedbacks and Ties makes no attempt at completeness, and also does not try to double previously published compilations. It is composed mostly of previously unpublished recordings. The only exception is a song by the group Modrá, which was featured on Jaroslav Kořán's *Zahrada* (Garden), published in 2009 by Polí 5 and *Pagoda* in a limited edition of 222 CD-Rs. Pieces by the Horology of Dreamers and *Dějà vu ve vlaku (Dějà vu on the Train)* by the Kořán brothers are presented here in different versions from those published previously, which is also the case of *You Might Have It Mixed Up* by the Janota-Fidler-Richter trio.

There have been several releases of Oldřich Janota's archival recordings – the double album *Žako měšíc (Like the Moon, Spojené náhody, 2003)* recapitulates his work with Mozart K, *High-Fidelity* (Indies, 2001), also a double CD, brings a selection of recordings by the Janota-Fidler-Richter trio, the *Ultimate Nothing* box set (Indies Scope, 2016) offers approximately nine hours of material presenting Janota as – among others – a songwriter, improviser and author and performer in an opera dedicated to "dyslexics, dysgraphics, dyscalculics, dysotographs, dysprosodiacs," and others who collide with the occasionally impenetrable walls of language. We can follow Pavel Richter's creative journey on the 2CD *Richtig Music* (Indies, 2003), and it is worth mentioning that this contains a recording by the short-lived group Sanctus Musics, which included Jaroslav Kořán and Bharata Rajnošek. The transformation of the rock-directed Švehlík into a studio-based group above genres, Marno Union, can be traced on the double-disc *Studio 1982 / Studio Marno* (Black Point, 2002).

What seems to be all of the surviving output of Vyšší populár, which in 1982–1983 brought together Luboš Fidler, Jaroslav Kořán, Štěpán Pečírka and Igor Gimmich – with Pavel Richter appearing as a guest whilst also recording and producing – was published on the CD *Hafhaf (Bark Bark, Polí 5, 2014)*, which reflects the period ideal of what an album that it was impossible to make could look like.

The Kořán brothers are still waiting for a similar compilation, though Jaroslav's work was featured on the above-mentioned CD-R *Zahrada*.

Take this account as inspiration for further discoveries. In addition to these compilations, all of our protagonists have also released a respectable amount of "regular" albums. And know that there are many names that would deserve a place in this article and on the CD which is its subject, such as instrument builder Martin Janíček or various figures from the sonic-visual international symposia which were organised at the Plasy monastery in the 90s – a compilation CD was published in 2013 as an attachment to *HIS Voice* magazine, published by the Czech Music Information Center like CMQ – and others.

Finally, a few words on the title of the compilation. It is derived from the longest track on the record, *Vazby*. The Czech word, "vazba" in the singular, can mean both "feedback" and "tie". Using both translations (the third – "detention" – did not seem appropriate), I want to point towards a certain place beyond genre which these artists strive for, to their musical experiments and the bilateral ties connecting them.

Marek Keprt

When Dragonfly Wakefulness Outflows the Glow

Olomouc, a university town in the north east of the Czech Republic, is home to one of the three musicology departments in the country. As to musical life, it was always somewhat in the shadow of Brno and Ostrava, with their orchestras and established festivals of contemporary music. Marek Keprt is part of a movement to change this situation - a composer, pianist, and since 2014 also director of the MusicOlomouc festival, focused on contemporary art music. A concentrated, almost meditative atmosphere is typical for his own music, with attention directed at subtle sonic details. The colourfulness of his oeuvre is all the more interesting in that it is comprised mostly of chamber music. Even with limited instrumental means, the listener is often confronted with immersive and hypnotic sound worlds.

The titles Keprt gives his pieces are often composed of neologisms and wordplay: *Když vážkobdění vychmyřuje svit* (*When Dragonfly Wakefulness Outflows the Glow*), *Čtyřlho chořních dob* (*The Fkhour Skheasons*), *Či vzprůsvitní oblak nevědění?* (*Will the Cloud of Unknowing Translucerase?*). Though these titles seem untranslatable, the author usually creates equally playful German equivalents: *Libellenwach entflaumt ein blauer Schein*, *Die vier AhnWehzeiten*, *Ob die wolke des unwissens sich in durchsichtigkeit auflöst?*

This is certainly due in part to his relationship with Austria, where he studied composition with Iván Eröd and Dieter Kaufmann. After he started as director of MusicOlomouc, the dramaturgy came to include a higher number of German and Austrian ensembles focused on contemporary composition. Keprt also established a new ensemble, Lichtzwang, with the unusual instrumentation of piano, cello, trumpet and theremin, and he is also active as a performer and musicologist. His repertoire includes Frederic Chopin, Ferenz Liszt, Tristan Murail, but the most space is reserved for Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin, who was also the subject of his studies at the musicology department in Olomouc.

You are at once a composer and a performer with a repertoire ranging from Bach to contemporary music. How do these two spheres influence each other?

You can't hide the performer in the composer - especially since I compose mostly piano pieces which I perform myself. As a performer, I try to find novel points of view. In the pieces I play, I focus on what is new, non-traditional; how the composer was ahead of his time. In performance - for at least half a century - objective tendencies have predominated, but I aim more towards the freer and more creative interpretive approaches of the 19th century. I am close to the approaches of pianists like Ignaz Friedman, Moritz Rosenthal or Vladimir Horowitz, who also

composed themselves, or made their own versions and transcriptions of the compositions they performed. Both in composition and performance, sound and colour are the most important for me. When playing, I also focus on multi-layeredness, on a certain “floating” time perception, on finding and highlighting hidden voices, and on nuanced pedal work. And though it’s true I play music from the Baroque to today, my approach is very selective. It’s mostly Chopin, Scriabin, my own compositions and authors of a spectral bent. On the other hand, I don’t perform Beethoven, Smetana, Dvořák or Martinů at all.

In your process, what is the journey from the original idea to the final score? Has it changed as your career has progressed?

The term “final score” is a little misleading in my case. I consider my compositions works in progress. Even when the score is finished, it is usually a partial version. Most of my pieces have been through several versions and it’s hard to say if a version will be final some day. I usually compose at the piano if it’s a piano piece. The initial idea usually comes spontaneously, through improvisation: I note down a few interesting harmonies, principles, models, and then I develop, combine, reorganise and so on.

With the approach to performance you mentioned, the following question comes to mind: what role does improvisation play for you? In addition to its initial role in composition, is it also interesting to you as part of a piece, whether it’s yours (i.e. intentionally allowing the performers certain freedoms) or someone else’s?

There is always a certain component of improvisation or indeterminacy in my compositions. Sometimes more, sometimes less. There are very few pieces that are written entirely in standard notation; in bars. I usually work with models and leave the number of repetitions on the performers. So, in the field of time, there is freedom. If I’m composing chamber music - i.e. not solo or orchestral, where the time is determined by one person; the soloist or conductor - it is usually about communication. A certain event in an instrumental part serves as a point of orientation, we could say a “password”, which triggers a chain reaction. The instruments often play in different uncoordinated tempi. Or, which is more common, the composition includes both coordinated and non-coordinated sections - sections written in models and various tempi and sections with synchronous tempi. Technically, it is best to play from the score rather than individual parts with this type of composing.



PHOTO: GABRIELA STAŠOVÁ



Ensemble Lichtzwang

In some pieces, I apply an even greater measure of freedom, for example having one instrumental part notated exactly and the others without notation - only verbal instructions, manuals for certain actions. I used this method in *úMžik sypkých vyšek* (*Underdrizzle of Powdery Highs*), for example. With some pieces, it’s the other way round: there is no score, only parts. It varies.

Finding unusual harmonies and sonic colours plays an important role in your music. However, most of your compositions are chamber pieces. Is it more interesting to you to experiment with sounds within the limits of chamber music?

Yes, this is true. I don’t like grand gestures, I’m more interested in working with detail, weaving softly flickering fabrics. And the chamber context is more amenable to this - even in the fact that

Když vážkoddění vychmyřuje svit

Score Marek Keprt

Very fast, each instrument in its tempo (no tempo coordination)

© Marek Keprt

*When Dragonfly
Wakefulness Outflows
the Glow (2016)*

it takes place in a smaller hall. If I am writing for orchestra, which I have done three times, I still understand the orchestra as a chamber ensemble. In *Čtverřho chořních dob*, I mostly used five solo strings, and the whole string section is only heard sporadically. Furthermore, I removed some wind instruments (oboe, bassoon, horn) and added two pianos (one of them prepared), a soprano and a harpsichord.

You studied composition in Vienna. What was the most important thing you learned during your stay?

The main reason I went to study to Vienna was because contemporary music in this country was somewhat frozen and boring in the 90s - today, the situation is thankfully much better. Vienna had a cosmopolitan environment, there were performances of current and interesting music, and I personally had the pleasure of meeting a number of interesting people.

You wrote a chamber opera in 2003. Are you interested in returning to the crossroads of music and theatre in further works?

Yes, I'm very interested in this area, but not the field of classical operas - stylised classical opera always seemed somewhat repulsive to me; the grand operatic gestures, the pretence. My chamber opera was also *de facto* a non-opera - it was more an attempt at complex musical theatre, a chamber Gesamtkunstwerk. The libretto played an important part - I spent longer composing it than I did the music. Except for a few moments, there is no singing, only whispering, gesturing and reacting to events in the orchestra. I've used certain theatrical elements in my music on other occasions, including audience participation and spatialisation - and I consider spatialisation a theatrical element. I often use instruments which play subtly and subliminally from other parts of the room, instruments that are "hushed" and aren't even listed in the programme.

If I was tempted by something directly theatrical, it would certainly not be a traditional story – more a story of a specific place and audience in real time. A musical theatre of the present moment. Usually, music colours in, “comments” on and “amplifies” the story. I like the opposite approach: words comment on what occurs in the instrumental part, in the audience. The audience is the stage and the listener the core. That is, not a listener of something out-bodied from them, but a core into which the tones, the words and the space enter.

Many of your pieces have titles which include word play and neologisms. Is the name an important component of the work for you, something which should direct the listener in some way?

The name usually comes about after the composing is done. I simply try to express what is in the notes in an onomatopoeic way – the atmosphere, mood. It is certainly no programme music.

Your academic work focused on Scriabin, whose music you also perform. Where does this interest stem from?

I consider Scriabin one of the pillars of 20th century music. He is extremely undervalued. There is still this dominant opinion that the development of music in the 20th century was influenced mostly by Arnold Schönberg and Igor Stravinsky. But today's contemporary music is much closer to principles used by Scriabin – I mean particularly the spectral composers and those working with micro-intervals. You can follow a clear continuity: Scriabin–Obukhov, Wyschnegradsky–Messiaen–the spectralists, and to some extent also Scriabin–Scelsi. His presence in contemporary music is well proven by the fact that two important composers of today, independently of each other, worked through the material of Scriabin's Sonata no. 9 Op. 68, “Black Mass”: Gérard Pesson (*Messe Noire – d'après la 9ème Sonate Scriabine* from 2005) and Georg Friedrich Haas (*Opus 68* from 2003).

I am fascinated, among other things, by his enormous stylistic development (not too different from Schönberg's) – from the first “post-Chopin” Romantic compositions, through the works of the middle period, which use late Romantic harmonies on the basis of altered chords and more complex chords of five or six notes, all the way to the late period, which is based on so-called synthetic chords. Despite this, Scriabin is very easy to recognise, very original, and there are some principles he uses throughout. Especially in the fields of rhythm and texture, he is very innovative, and since he was a pianist himself, his pieces are written very idiomatically, “pianistically”. I am also fascinated by his conceptual world, synaesthetic projects and visions. It was also in this “multimedia” position that he anticipated future tendencies.

In 2014, you took over as director of the MusicOlomouc contemporary music festival. How does an event as dramaturgically distinctive as this one work in a city like Olomouc? How do you take into consideration the local audience and its specificities? Do you feel there are any advantages or disadvantages in comparison to Prague or Brno?

The most distinct thing about MusicOlomouc, I think, is the connection with Palacký University. The audience is generally composed of students and young people generally. I don't attempt compromises in programming to attract a larger audience, for example from amongst the subscribers of Moravian Philharmonic concerts. That's a different world. It's not about quantity. We want the festival to have a clear dramaturgy, to be comprehensive. We emphasise contemporary work of a high quality, world premieres and top ensembles, mostly from abroad. And I'd say that the MusicOlomouc audience is closer to alternative music, to non-art, than a classical concert audience.

In 2016, you founded the Lichtzwang ensemble, which has quite an unusual instrumentation: piano, trumpet, 'cello and theremin. What is the ensemble's repertoire?

We are creating the repertoire as we go, from pieces written directly for Lichtzwang. Since we've only been doing this for two years, there aren't that many pieces yet – in addition to two of my pieces, we also premiered works by Jan Vičar and Daniel Skála; we have two premieres planned for next year. At concerts, we put together pieces that involve the whole ensemble with solo pieces and works for 'cello and piano.

Marek Kepřt (*1974, Olomouc)

In 1988–1992, he attended the Economic High School in Olomouc and studied music privately with Pavel Čotek and Eduard Fišer. He then continued his studies at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna. Since 2002, he is a research fellow at the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Philosophy at Palacký University in Olomouc. As a pianist, his repertoire includes mostly Romantic music and music from the end of the 19th century until the present day. In his research and performance, he focuses on the work of Alexander Scriabin, who is also an important compositional influence. His chamber opera Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor was performed at the Estates Theatre in 2003, together with Michael Kepřt's opera The Shores of the Ganges as part of a project by the National Theatre, “Beating on the Iron Curtain”.

CZECH MUSIC EVERY DAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

IN THE AUTUMN OF 2017

The most significant events in the autumn of 2017 included the premieres of four new Czech opera productions. The first of them was *Rules for Good Manners in the Modern World*, composed by Michal Nežtek to Jiří Adámek's libretto, which was staged at the National Theatre in Brno. Based on Jean-Luc Lagarce's play, the opera focuses on the, many a time absurd, standards of behaviour in society at the end of the 19th century, which people were expected to adhere to from the cradle to the grave.

To great acclaim, the J. K. Tyl Theatre in Plzeň hosted the world premiere of Miroslav Kubička's debut opera *Jakub Jan Ryba*. Written largely in the neo-Classicist style, it depicts the difficult life journey of a composer and teacher, who today is virtually only known as the creator of the legendary *Czech Christmas Mass*. A piece of a more experimental ilk was presented in Brno, Prague and Olomouc by the opera povera society. The project *Echo – Metamorphoses II* for electronics and soprano, created by the stage director Rocc and the composer and musicologist Vít Zouhar, explores the limits of the opera genre, inviting the audience to concentrated listening with blindfolds.

The fourth opera to have received its premiere was Lenka Nota's *I Am the Princess of Fools*, which was staged by the Brno-based Ensemble Opera Diversa as the first work within the "Woman in the Main Role" cycle. The heroine is Božena Němcová, probably the best-known Czech female author, whose story has been penned in the libretto by the leading Czech documentary maker Olga Sommerová. More information about these and other events – in Czech and English – can be found on blog.musica.cz.

4 September 2017, Domovina – Grand Hall, Prague. **Tomáš Reindl: *Yoga for Guru, Orchestra and Yogis* (world premiere)**. Soňa Červená, BERG orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábek.

9 September 2017, Theater Magdeburg, Magdeburg, Germany. **Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by Stephen Lawless, music director: Pawel Poplawski.

Following performances: 16 Sept, 1, 7 and 30 Oct, 30 Nov, 21 and 29 Dec 2017.

10 September 2017, Birmingham Canals, Birmingham, UK. Canal Serenade on Narrow Boats.

Ondřej Adámek: *Share the Space* (world premiere). BCMG.

13 September 2017, Metropol, České Budějovice. **Jiří Lukeš: *Bukolika* (world premiere)**.

South Bohemia Philharmonic, conductor: Jan Talich.

15 September 2017, Reduta, Brno. **Michal Nežtek: *Rules for Good Manners in the Modern World* (world premiere)**. Directed by Jiří Adámek, music director: Pavel Šnajdr.

Following performances: 17 and 22 Sep, 26 and 28 Oct 2017, 20, 28 and 30 Jan 2018.

SEPTEMBER



Roméo Monteiro performing on Ondřej Adámek's Airmachine

PHOTO: PETRA KOZUŠNIKOVA

- 16 September 2017, ASB Theatre, Aotea Centre, Auckland, New Zealand. **Leoš Janáček: *Katya Kabanova***. New Zealand Opera, directed by Patrick Nolan, music conductor: Wyn Davies. Following performances: 19, 21 and 23 Sept (Auckland), 7, 10, 12 and 14 Oct (St James Theatre, Wellington).
- 25 September 2017, Masaryk Dormitory, Prague. **Jan Ryant Dřízal: *Lekce Váchal* (world premiere)**. Jan Mikušek – countertenor, BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.
- 2 October 2017, Theatre K3, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **František Chaloupka: *Guitar Quartet No. 1 "The Aleph"* (world premiere)**. Aleph Gittarenquartett.
- 3 October 2017, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **Marek Keprt: *Hláskopelní a špitocudní* (world premiere)**. AuditivVokal Dresden, cond. Olaf Katzer
- 8 November 2017, Corpus Christi Chapel, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **Daniel Skála: *Tickling* (world premiere)**. Lichtzwang.
- 9 October 2017, Corpus Christi Chapel, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **Petr Bakla: *Last Piece (Mostly stepwise)* (world premiere)**. Phace Ensemble.
- 12 October 2017, The Royal Theatre, Victoria, Canada. **Leoš Janáček: *Jenůfa* (premiere of a new production)**. Pacific Opera Victoria, directed by Atom Egoyan, music director: Timothy Vernon. Following performances: 14, 18, 20 and 22 Oct 2017.
- 14 October 2017, J. K. Tyl Theatre, Plzeň. **Miroslav Kubička: *Jakub Jan Ryba* (world premiere)**. Directed by Tomáš Pilař, music director: Jakub Štrunc, choirmaster: Zdeněk Vimr. Following performances: 15 and 31 Oct, 11 Nov and 25 Dec 2017.
- 14 October 2017, Aalto-Musiktheater, Essen, Germany. **Bedřich Smetana: *The Bartered Bride* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by SKUTR, music director: Tomáš Netopil. Following performances: 19, 22 and 28 Oct, 1, 8 and 18 Nov, 16 and 22 Dec 2017, 14 and 18 Jan 2018.
- 15 October 2017, Atrium, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **Ondřej Adámek: *Conséquences particulièrement blanches ou noires* (Czech premiere)**. Roméo Monteiro – Airmachine, Prague Modern, conductor: Ondřej Adámek.
- 16 October 2017, Besední dům, Brno. Moravian Autumn. **Marek Kopelent: *Amor vincit* (world premiere)**. Soprano – Irena Troupová, oboe – Vilém Veverka, cor anglais – Dominik Wollenweber.
- 16 October 2017, Továrna, Prague. **Matouš Hejl: *Kaleidoscope* (world premiere)**. BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.
- 22 October 2017, Palace, Nové Město nad Metují. **David Rejchrt: *Psalms Songs* (world premiere)**. Richard Novák – bass, Jaroslav Šaroun – piano.

BER-NOVEMBER



Lenka Nota: I Am the Princess of Fools

22 October, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Archaion Kallos. **Martin Klusák: Pnoi, Jan Trojan: Refractions – sound interventions (world premieres)**. Karel Dohnal – clarinet, Andrea Mottlová – piano.

31 October, Church of St Lawrence, Prague. **Tomáš Pálka: Landscape: HypnoticPulsation (world premiere)**. Kalabis Quintet, Konvergence.

2 November, Atrium of the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University, Brno. 3 November, Czech Museum of Music, Prague. 5 November, Atrium of the Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. **Rocc & Vít Zouhar: Echo – Metamorphoses II (world premiere)**. Natalia Ushakova – soprano, Rocc – concept / music / sound / live performance, Vít Zouhar – concept / scenario / live performance.

7 and 8 November, Theater Bremen, Bremen, Germany. **Jiří Kadeřábek: No Man (German premiere)**.

Directed by Katharina Schmitt, music director: Jiří Kadeřábek.

9 November 2017, Chamber Hall, Faculty of Music of the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Brno.

Meetings of New Music Plus. **Jiří Lukeš: "... o rezonanci..."**, **Kamil Doležal: Lento Kopelento**,

Hanuš Bartoň: a zdálky zněl menuet..., **Miroslav Pudlák: Intuitiva II (world premieres)**.

MoEns, conductor: Miroslav Pudlák.

11 November 2017, Theater Bremen, Bremen, Germany. **Antonín Dvořák: Rusalka (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by Anna-Sophie Mahler, conductors: Winston Dan Vogel, Hartmut Keil. Following performances: 17 and 25 Nov, 13, 21, 25 and 29 Dec 2017, 7, 20 and 30 Jan, 16 Feb and 18 Mar 2018.

12 November 2017, Theater Aachen, Aachen, Germany. **Leoš Janáček: Katya Kabanova (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by Tibor Torell, music director: Justus Thorau. Following performances:

19 and 26 Nov, 2, 14 and 29 Dec 2017, 10 and 13 Jan, 15 and 23 Feb 2018.

16 November 2017, Metropol, České Budějovice. **Aleš Pavlorek: Lachian Pictures (world premiere)**.

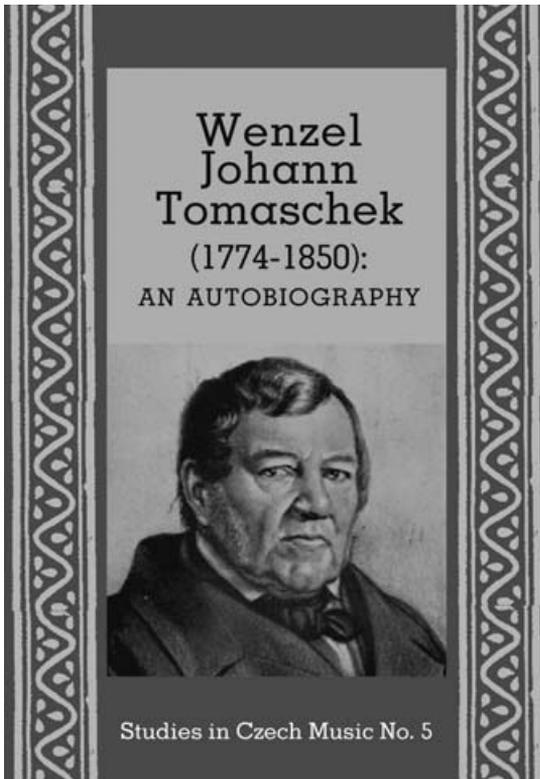
South Bohemia Philharmonic, conductor: Zoe Zeniodi.

17 and 18 November 2017, Reduta, Brno. **Lenka Nota: I Am the Princess of Fools (world premiere)**.

Libretto: Olga Sommerová, directed by Kristiana Belcredi, music director: Gabriela Tardonová.

23 November 2017, Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia, Prague. **Martin Kumžák: Sherlock Holmes (world premiere)**. Bohemia Saxophone Quartet.

Wenzel Johann Tomaschek and his Autobiography



Wenzel Johann Tomaschek (1774–1850): an autobiography.

Translated by Stephen Thomson
Moore; introduction by Michael
Beckerman. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon
Press, 2017. ISBN 9781576472477.

Wenzel Johann Tomaschek (1774–1850) was born into a provincial merchant family in Bohemia, and through his musical skill and determination became one of the leading figures in Czech music in the first half of the 19th century. As a member of the bourgeoisie, he spent the first two decades of his life expecting to enter a profession after university study, and throughout his life had a particular interest in literature and drama, developing a close personal relationship with Goethe, for whose poems he composed dozens of settings for solo voice with piano. He met and heard many contemporary musicians both in Prague and during visits to Vienna, and had a keen critical eye and ear, reflected in his sometimes cutting opinions of such figures as Steibelt and Wölfl. He also reported in detail on his conversations with Beethoven, painting a vivid picture of the master. His *Autobiography* was published in the German-Bohemian periodical *Libussa* in installments between 1845 and 1850. It has never been republished since then in German, though there was an edition in Czech in 1941. This is the first complete translation of this interesting and highly informative work, giving a view of the life and times of a leading cultural figure of the musical Romantic.

Full-fledged biographies of musical figures are relatively few in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, although briefer biographical notes do exist. Likewise, large-scale autobiographies by musicians are scarce, and thus the ones that do exist shed important light on the social origins, training, experiences, and opinions of professional musicians. There are important memoirs by André Grétry, a leading opera composer who goes on to occupy himself almost entirely with philosophical reflections; by Lorenzo da Ponte, Mozart's most important librettist; by G. G. Ferrari, student of Paisiello; by A. B. Marx, theorist, composer, and personal friend of Felix Mendelssohn; by Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, poet, composer and journalist; by Johann Friedrich Reichardt, composer and journalist; by Giovanni Pacini, leading opera

composer. Very few of these have been available in any translations from their original languages, and among all these important primary sources only the da Ponte memoirs have been available in English.

Tomaschek's autobiography, unlike most of these, was not published originally in book form, and the creative activities of Czech composers and writers occupied a problematic position within an Europe in which Slavic nationalities had to present themselves in languages that were not their own, usually either French or German, if they were to be understood more internationally. Thus Tomaschek, although he was a native speaker of Czech (his difficulties in learning German appear in the autobiography), published his memoirs in German, not Czech, in a period when many educated Czechs would have known both languages. However, the fact of his Czech nationality clearly meant that he was not accepted within the broader world of Germanic culture, despite his important song settings of Goethe poems in German, lauded by the poet himself. Tomaschek was finally reclaimed as an important Czech cultural figure with the translation of his autobiography into Czech by Zdeněk Němec during the time of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in the Second World War.

Like so many literate musicians who cared to commit their thoughts and feelings about music and musical society to paper, Tomaschek's origins lie in the petty bourgeoisie, coming from a family with enough money to be concerned with education, but not enough to have pretensions to social position. In this regard, for example, he could be compared to Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari, both offspring of fathers with some success in manufacturing. Tomaschek is born in the provinces in Skuteč (current population 5,000), about 150 km east of Prague, went to study in Jihlava (p Op. 50,000), and finally arrives for more advanced study in Prague in 1790. For the next thirty years Tomaschek is an informative and critical eye and ear for a cultural capital visited by most of the important musical figures of central Europe, including Beethoven, Haydn, Steibelt, Wölfl, Abbé Vogler, Clementi, Dussek, Polledro, Druand, Weber, Spohr, Gelinek, Hummel, and more. Towards the end of the memoirs he shares some travel writing about Carlsbad, Marienbad, and caves at Slaupp and Macocha.

It is especially valuable to have such an acute, analytic, and unsparing view of the music of Beethoven, the effect it made on him, and his reports of his visits to Beethoven. He writes: *I certainly was amazed by his powerful and brilliant playing, but also the bold leaps from one motive to another, which offset the organic connection and gradual development of ideas, did not escape me. Such problematic passages often weaken his marvelous compositions, which he created in his jubilant conception. Not infrequently the unprejudiced listener is powerfully cast out of his blissful reverie.*

On his visiting Beethoven in Vienna, we get a sense of just how unusual (or to be less kind, eccentric) individual the great composer was. Tomaschek notes: *The salon, in which he amiably greeted me, was not less than brilliantly decorated, although at the same time it was just as disordered as was his hair. on the keyboard lay a pencil, with which he wrote down the sketches of his works; and next to it I found on a well-used notepad the various ideas thrown together without any connection to each other, the heterogeneous individual items sitting next to each other, just as they might have occurred to him. These were the materials for the new cantata. Just as interwoven as these musical bits was his conversation as well, which he, as is usually the case for the hard of hearing, carried on with a very loud voice, always with a hand around his ear, as if he wanted to seek out the diminished power of hearing.*

Having related his impression of Beethoven's manner of jotting down ideas for later use, he later relates the critical views of Abbé Joseph Gelinek (Czech composer living in Vienna, particularly noted for his sets of variations for piano solo) about the musical results of this practice:

After mutual greetings, it did not take long before he asked me if I had been at the rehearsal, and what I thought of Beethoven's composition. That I gave the composer the credit that he is due will be doubted by no one who is unprejudiced; but the Abbé did not seem to be content with my judgment, so that he told me more about Beethoven, wherefrom I concluded that he was not very amicably inclined toward Beethoven, that he had thus no thought of mixing up Beethoven the artist with the man, so that he also was unable to arrive at a clear opinion regarding Beethoven's artistic production. He stated in a very aphoristic way that all of his compositions lacked inner coherence, and that they often also were overelaborated. This he called the serious defect of a composition, and sought to base its existence in Beethoven's style and art of composition, in the course of which he alleged that Beethoven had always been accustomed to note down every musical idea that occurred to him on a little piece of paper, and to toss the bit of paper into a corner of his room, so that over time the bits of papers with motives notated on them grew to be a heap, that the maid was not permitted to touch in the course of her sweeping up and cleaning. When Beethoven then felt like composing, then he looked for some motives from this treasury of ideas, which he thought to use for the main and middle sections of the work in question, but whereby he seldom made a happy choice.

Evidently, Gelinek found Beethoven's music as disorderly as the impression made by his residence and his personal appearance.

A closer meeting of souls seems have been possible between Tomaschek and Goethe. Tomaschek has much to say about the latter, and gives a long description of his playing many of his Goethe settings for the master, for which he was rewarded with an autograph poem for his souvenir book.

For better or worse, Tomaschek's recollections end with his marriage, although he wrote them twenty years later, in the 1840s.



Jan Dismas Zelenka
Sonatas ZWV 181

Xenia Löffler, Michael Bosch – oboe,
Jane Gower – bassoon,
Helena Zemanová – violin,
Luděk Braný – double-bass,
Shizuko Noiri – lute,
Václav Luks – harpsichord.

Text: English, French, German, Czech.
Recorded: Mar., Jul. 2016, Church of Saints Simon and Jude, Prague.
Released: 2017. TT: 107:21.
DDD. 2 CDs, Accent ACC 24319.

The title featuring J. D. Zelenka's instrumental works, recorded under the heading of Collegium 1704 (even though its main protagonists are not permanent members of the ensemble), is a masterful accomplishment on the part of **Václav Luks**, who besides preparing the music also played the harpsichord. And of no lesser quality is the truly exemplary accompanying text, written by **Václav Kapsa**. Moreover, I also feel obliged to highlight the high technical standards of the recording, owing to the recording director, **Jiří Gemrot**, and the sound engineer, **Aleš Dvořák**. The trio sonatas are among the most engrossing Zelenka opuses to have survived. Listening to them is just as delicious as the pomegranate on the album's cover, yet for many a musician they are just too challenging to play. When, however, instrumentalists as superb as those **Václav Luks** had chosen to work with get together, the performance may well be compared to savouring the most flavourful of fruits. At this juncture, I feel it appropriate to refer to the sleeve notes, in which **Václav Kapsa** writes that "the sonatas rank among the most remarkable chamber pieces of their time, the most demanding items of the Baroque oboe and bassoon repertoire, and the key works of Zelenka's creative legacy." I would like to add that to my ears they sound just

as good as Johann Sebastian Bach's music. Meeting the sonatas' technical requirements is a truly gigantic task, yet it is indeed feasible. Although the wind parts are virtuosic, Zelenka wrote them bearing in mind the qualities of both the instruments and the performers. Here is yet another quote from **Václav Kapsa's** text: "The very long chains of virtuosic passages are not meant for the players' ostentatiously showing off, they serve to thoughtfully accumulate the tension, which results in the desired expressive effect at the moment when all the conceivable expectations on the part of the listener are fully satisfied and the end is still far from being near." There is no need to further highlight Zelenka's compositional mastery. Nonetheless, when hearing the abrupt standstills, the alternation between tension and release, the multi-layered linkage between the sonatas, their arrangement within a cycle, which simply cannot be random, we find ourselves in another world. (By the way, in the conclusion to his "study", **Václav Kapsa** pertinently refers to **Emilián Troida**, who put Zelenka's music in parallel with the unique Baroque Gothic style of the architect **Jan Blažej Santini-Aichel**, who too grew up in the atmosphere of the Czech Baroque historicism). It does not matter whether Zelenka's trio sonatas came into being in 1715/16 or, as **Wolfgang Reich** suggested, six years later – in my opinion, they represent top-notch chamber works of the Baroque epoch. Yet, in order to be perceived as such they must be performed by truly excellent musicians. And that is precisely the case of the players who feature on the present album. The brilliant German oboist **Xenia Löffler** is well known to the Czech audience. (Last year, she participated as a guest of Collegium Marianum on the Supraphon recording of **František Jiránek's** concertos.) Her interplay with **Michael Bosch**, who, just like her, is a member of the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, is impeccable. A revelation to me was the outstanding Australian bassoonist **Jane Gower**, a member

of the renowned Concerto Copenhagen ensemble. (I cannot recall within the realm of Baroque music a bassoon part more difficult than that written by Zelenka.) The two ensembles are familiar to **Václav Luks**, who also involved in the Zelenka CDs **Helena Zemanová**, a violinist of Collegium 1704, the double-bassist **Luděk Braný** and the lutenist **Shizuko Noiri**, who provide a reliable sonic background. Judging by **Václav Luks's** previous recordings of vocal-instrumental music, I expected that the new album would be of a high quality, yet the result took me by surprise. It is a truly exceptional title, one that even surpasses **Heinz Holliger's** project within the ECM New Series. The graphic design is impressive too. I am also pleased to see that the Belgian label has included a Czech text in the booklet (which is not at all common in the case of CDs released by non-Czech companies). Foolish indeed would be the Czech concert or festival promoters who would not take the opportunity to incorporate in their programmes Zelenka's sonatas, as performed live by this superlative team!

Luboš Stehlík

Josef Suk
Asrael

Essener Philharmoniker,
Tomáš Netopil – conductor.
Text: English, German. Recorded:
17–18 Nov. 2016, Alfred Krupp Saal,
Philharmonic Essen. Released: 2017.
TT: 59:55. DDD. 1 CD,
OEHMS Classics OC1865.

Josef Suk's *Asrael*, a grand-scale, five-movement symphony, in which the composer treated his harrowing experience of having encountered death, has so far been fortunate indeed as regards recordings. The piece is so

engrossing that many a Czech, as well as international, conductor has assumed to it an intimate relationship. And they have again and again witnessed what a revelation *Asrael* has been to orchestras and audiences alike all over the world. As I have mentioned above, the recordings of the piece have been of a high quality. The one made by Václav Talich in 1952 may even be deemed the most impressive of all the albums he made. And then there is the splendid account of Libor Pešek, conducting the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as the recordings made by Václav Neumann and Rafael Kubelik. *Asrael* has even been recorded by Kirill Petrenko, who will soon assume the post of chief conductor of the Berliner Philharmoniker, albeit "only" with the Orchester der Komischen Oper Berlin. Another remarkable recording, released on Supraphon, is that of Jiří Bělohlávek's live performance at the Prague Spring festival, conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The Bělohlávek discography also contains an earlier recording of *Asrael*, with the Czech Philharmonic, released on Chandos. Jakub Hrůša too has grasped the first opportunity to make a recording of one of his beloved pieces, conducting the Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra. The most recent recording of Suk's *Asrael*, made by **Tomáš Netopil** and the **Essener Philharmoniker**, stands its ground amidst the fierce competition. At first listen, it immediately drew me in with its grand-scale, Mahlerian conception, as well as the intimacy in a number of details. The orchestra's sound is – in line with the German tradition – dark and compact, yet devoid of any heaviness. The grand violin solos come across as unctuously lyrical, and are played in a full round tone, as though the concert master had caught the proper timbre from the violinist Josef Suk himself. The orchestra's ample experience with late-Romantic symphonies, as well as opera, evinces itself in the fresh dramatic sentiment. Not for a moment does the performance give the impression

of being static, with the grand, full-coloured Wagnerian sound being tamed into a less impassioned, far more personal work. Admittedly, the booklet cover somewhat resembles what one would expect with a single made by a punk rock band, yet the sleeve notes provide comprehensive information. Written by Jonáš Hájek, who has also prepared the critical edition for Bärenreiter, the accompanying text contains the basic data, as well as numerous details pertaining to the score's first editions (even though the "new" version does not actually have any material impact on the piece's performance, since *Asrael* de facto does not have any Urtext version). In his text, Hájek also point out the excellent acoustics of the Philharmonie Essen hall, where Tomáš Netopil invited Jan Lžičář, Supraphon's main sound engineer. By and large, the wonderful CD serves to prove that the orchestra is in very good shape, and shows that the conductor has undertaken the highly challenging composition in a brave manner. The instrumental sections' sonic balance is superb and, what is more, the recording demonstrates the musicians' bold and natural romantic feeling. Granted, I would not be angry with a young conductor for deciding to delay recording Suk's opus for a while – the subject of death needs a long time to be comprehended. (When undertaken by young conductors, some of the passages in *Asrael* sound like Suk's *Fairy Tale*.) On the other hand: we have got used to hearing *Asrael* performed by seasoned, older conductors, and this recording seems to call attention to the fact that the composer was a mere 32 years of age when he completed the piece. The fascination with *Asrael*, which may be deemed Suk's greatest work, on the part of younger conductors is sincere, and certainly deserving of recognition.

Jindřich Bálek



Zdeněk Fibich

Spring, Op. 1
Album Leaves, Op. 2
Scherzo in E minor, Op. 4
Scherzo in E flat major, sine op.
From the Mountains, Op. 29
Painting Studies, Op. 56

Tomáš Vášek - piano.

Producer: Vít Roubíček. Text: Czech, English. Recorded: Mar. 2001, June 2005, Sept. 2010, Czech Radio studios, Prague. Released: 2017. TT: 66:47. DDD. 1 CD, Radioservis CR0938-2.

We often hear complaints of how scarcely Czech pianists play Smetana and, even less frequently, Dvořák. Yet when it comes to Zdeněk Fibich (1850–1900), another of the three major Czech Romantic composers, the situation is even worse: his piano pieces are hardly ever performed. The new CD, made by **Tomáš Vášek**, affords us the rare opportunity to listen to Fibich's early works, as well as two of his mature piano cycles. The composer wrote *Spring, Op. 1*, in January 1865, shortly after he had reached the age of 14. In terms of its diction, the gracious, melodically inventive piece resembles Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*. Fibich's *Album Leaves, Op. 2*, is made up of five miniatures of a Schumannesque ilk, dating from 1865 and 1866. Tomáš Vášek plays the two early works with the utmost sensitivity, "romantically" – with ample extensive rubatos, which, however, I must admit, in places I found somewhat exorbitant. Nevertheless, the next two tracks, *Scherzo in E minor, Op. 4* (1866), and *Scherzo in E flat major, sine op.* (1871), come across as absolutely convincing: witty, airy and extraordinarily fresh in expression. The two weighty piano cycles, following the juvenilia, present Fibich as a mature composer. The seven-



part *From the Mountains*, Op. 29 (1887), reflects the artist's admiration for mountains and affection for nature in general. All the movements of the cycle refer to J. Vrchlický's poems, largely selected from *The Road in the Alps*. As engrossingly performed by Višek, the cycle sounds like sheer tone poetry. The CD ends with the cycle *Painting Studies*, Op. 56, which Fibich completed in 1899, the penultimate year of his life. The five pieces, inspired by paintings of globally renowned artists, are characterised by a novel texture, and they also place extremely high technical requirements on the players. Yet Tomáš Višek seems to be in his element – under his magical fingers, each movement transforms into a suggestible musical picture. *Forest Solitude*, based on Ruysdael's painting, radiates peace, which is vociferously interrupted by the hunters chasing their quarry. Utterly enchanting in Višek's account is the following humorous, bizarrely rustic Brueghel-inspired *The Strife Between Shrovetide and Lent*. In the polyphonic composition *The Dance of the Blissful*, rendering Fra Angelico's painting, the pianist literarily conjures with timbres, with his piano many a time sounding like heavenly tender organ registers. And more sonic magic is heard in the movement based on Corregio's *Io and Jupiter*, whose refined harmonies have, owing to Višek's nuanced touch, attained an almost Impressionistic colouring. The final of the musical pictures is *Garden Festivity*, inspired by Watteau. Fibich stylised the movement as a reminiscence of the Baroque dance suite, and Tomáš Višek plays it lucidly like Rameau's or Couperin's music. The attractiveness of the CD is further enhanced by an exemplary booklet, including Vít Roubíček's comprehensive text, Vrchlický's verse pertaining to the cycle *From the Mountains*, and Tomáš Višek's witty, stylised personal confession.

Věroslav Němec

Josef Seger

Complete Organ Works 2

Pavel Kohout - organ.

Text: English, French, German, Czech. Recorded: Sept. 2015, Church of Our Lady Before Týn, Prague.

Released: 2016.

TT: 78:18. 1 CD, Vixen V2 - 0001.

The organist Pavel Kohout has devoted to the music of Josef Seger (baptised 1716–1782) over the long term, systematically and thoroughly, in practice and theory alike. Thanks to his endeavours, we have thus available not only the present album, containing a number of pieces performed in modern premiere, but also editions of Seger's organ pieces (published by Czech Radio). Nevertheless, I would venture to say that not even this would be sufficient had Kohout not vitalised, resurrected the music. The recording captures Pavel Kohout playing the unique organ at the Church of Our Lady Before Týn in Prague. The two-manual instrument, built by Hans Heinrich Mundt in 1673, has been preserved in virtually its original form, with the only modification to it having been carried out in the 19th century, by the organ maker Josef Gartner, who transposed the case to the back and tuned it an entire pitch lower, which was retained when the instrument was restored. The organ at the Church of Our Lady Before Týn has a rather stiff mechanics, the short octave in both the manuals and pedal, as well as delicately sounding registers, including the *Zimbelstern* (a "cymbal star", on which several small bells are mounted, which produce a continuous tinkling sound), which was mainly common in northern Germany throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Yet this particular instrument was not chosen for the recording only

due its technical properties. Like a lofty, centuries-old oak tree, it stands as a witness and source alike – Seger himself played the organ for 47 years. In addition to serving at Our Lady Before Týn, he was also an organist at the Church of St Francis Seraph of the Order of the Knights of the Cross with a Red Star in Prague. The CD features the *Eight Toccatas and Fugues*, performed according to the first printed edition, by Daniel Gottlob Türk in 1793, and a wide selection of organ pieces from Kohout's edition (17 works, eight of which in modern-time premieres). The toccatas are rather preludes than virtuoso solo compositions (they were originally named as such, the title was only changed by the publisher), with the exception of the more demanding *Tocatta V in C major*, T 5. Especially noteworthy are the fugues, a type of music in which, in line with the period testimonies, Seger excelled (his pupil Václav Pichl mentioned his ability to improvise without preparation any fugue during church services). The renowned English music historian Charles Burney himself branded Seger as the best organist in Prague. That comes as no surprise, as his compositions reveal great inventiveness, ingenious incorporation of Italian music trends, imaginative use of chromaticism, as well as masterful knowledge of the organ itself. Pavel Kohout is a mature, seasoned performer, combining enthusiasm with proficiency and musical intelligence. After having been trained by excellent teachers, including Jacques van Oortmersen, Harald Vogel and Peter van Dijck, he has continued to educate himself. His performances of Seger's works are sensitively registered (the *Zimbelstern* is applied in the pastoral *Tocatta VIII*, whose fugue treats the melody of *Jesus Christ Was Born*), meticulously articulated and dramaturgically built, with the result being that the album possesses the correct gradation line, inner tempo and calm breath. The task was not easy, though, since at first listen the music is not impressive as regards virtuosity



and performance equilibrium. Kohout's interpretation is deserving of praise, as he has indeed succeeded in bringing Seger's music to light in a highly attractive manner and splendid form. I would recommend that you listen to the CD with great concentration, so as not to miss all the details and nuances with which Seger imbued his music, and which Kohout duly highlights. The present recording has linked up to the CD *The Baroque Golden Age* (Editions Hortus), largely made up of Seger pieces. Kohout has thus paid tribute to a composer whose music has over the course of time tended to be somewhat overlooked, yet certainly deserves our attention. We should bear in mind that Seger taught many 18th-century musicians of note, including Josef Mysliveček, Jan Evangelista Koželuh and Jiří Ignác Linka. In conclusion, I should add that the brilliant sleeve notes have been written by **Jan Hora**, a true connoisseur of Seger's organ music.

Dina Šnejdarová

Vlach Quartet

Beethoven:
String Quartets,
Op. 18, Nos. 1 – 6
String Quartet, Op. 59, No. 1
String Quartet No. 14, Op. 131

Mozart:
String Quartet No. 15
in D minor, K. 421

Josef Vlach – 1st violin, Václav Snítíl
– 2nd violin, Josef Kodoušek – viola,
Viktor Moučka – cello.

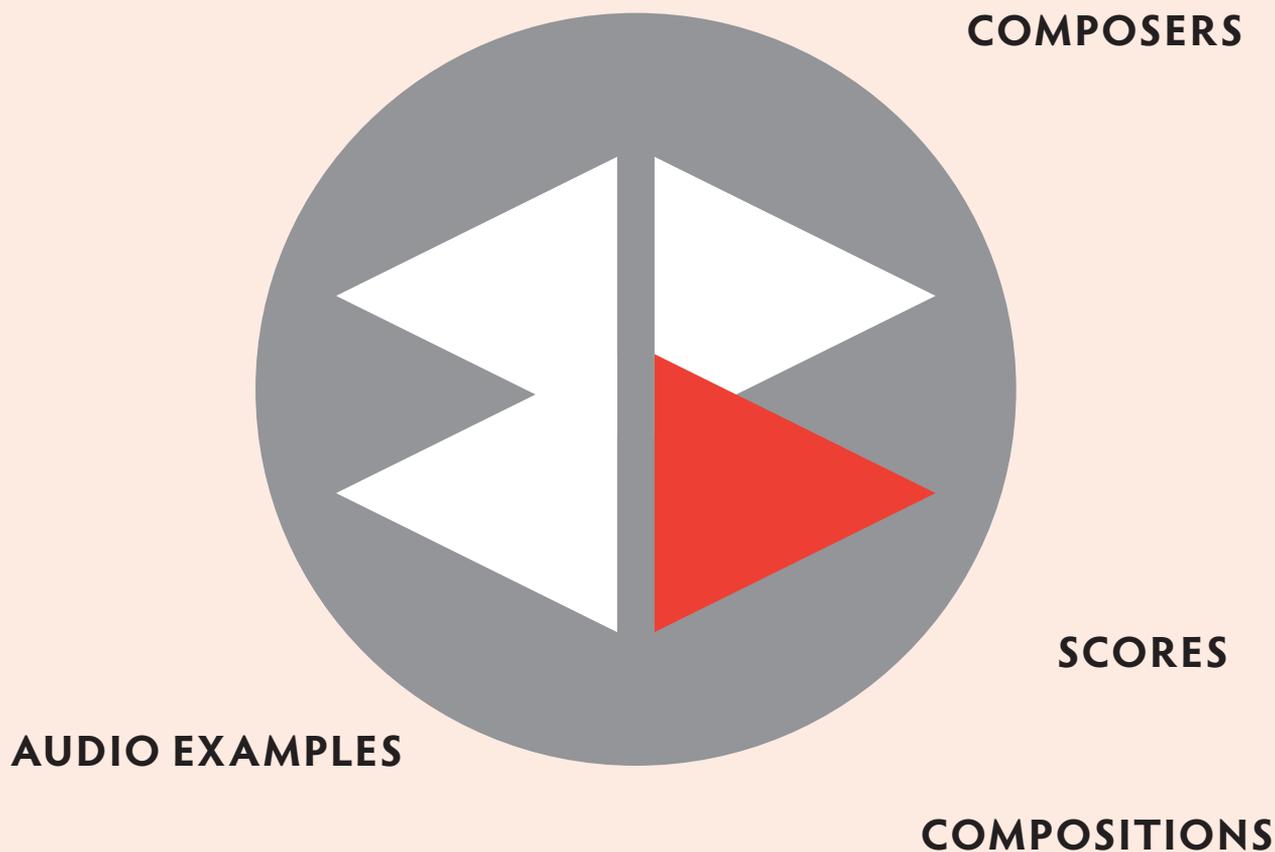
Re-edition producer: Matouš Vlčinský.
 Text: English, German, French Czech.
 Recorded: 1960-1970. Released: 2017
 re-edition. TT: 4:26:10. AAD stereo.
 4 CDs, Supraphon SU 4221-2.

Owing to albums like this one, the Supraphon archives are cherished by discophiles worldwide. Granted, Beethoven's and Mozart's pieces are today often played differently (I have avoided saying "better", as it may be quite subjective) to the way they are interpreted on the present recording. And some may dislike the Vlach Quartet's ample vibratos, while others would object to the phrasing, the dynamics or the tempos. Yet I do think everyone would agree that they performed their beloved Beethoven fervently, boldly and clearly. I myself regard the legendary Czech quartet as having played convincingly, with great ease, modesty, devoid of obstinacy, generating tonal beauty, even though the category of "beauty" too can be subjective. When at the age of 15 I came to Prague to study, I was fascinated by three quartets in particular – the Pražák, the Smetana and the Vlach – while in the case of the third one I could not understand why a musician of extraordinary soloist qualities would be content with being "just" a second violinist. Later on, I would analyse every performance given by the Vlach Quartet, marvelling at the details of their interplay and inspiring emotionality. I was lucky indeed to have heard them in the 1960s and in the early 1970s, when they were in the best form... As performed by them on the CDs, the Beethoven quartets flow naturally, without sharp contrasts, which have often been heard in the case of some other ensembles of the past and present. As the *Classics Today* review aptly put it, theirs is an affectionate performance. The Vlach Quartet furnished Beethoven's pieces with a grace that I have scarcely heard. And the balance between the instruments too is a quality I have seldom encountered with today's quartets! The album's apex may be deemed to be Beethoven's Opus 131, teeming with invention and, in line with Josef Vlach's

words ("We rather suggest than state. We rather steer than push."), harbouring great humility, yet just as affectionate is the performance of all the other works, including the one and only Mozart quartet, with the wonderful *Andante*. The re-released recordings may bring to mind the sentence the *Westdeutsche Rundschau* magazine published back in 1976, when the ensemble disbanded: "One would be hard pressed indeed to conceive of a chamber ensemble who would eclipse the Vlach Quartet's mastery". Although that may be considered somewhat hyperbolic, there are precious few chamber ensembles of their calibre... It is commendable that Supraphon has paid constant attention to its archive. In many respects, the title serves to document its time, but its qualities render it timeless.

Luboš Stehlik

A DATABASE YOU CAN LISTEN TO



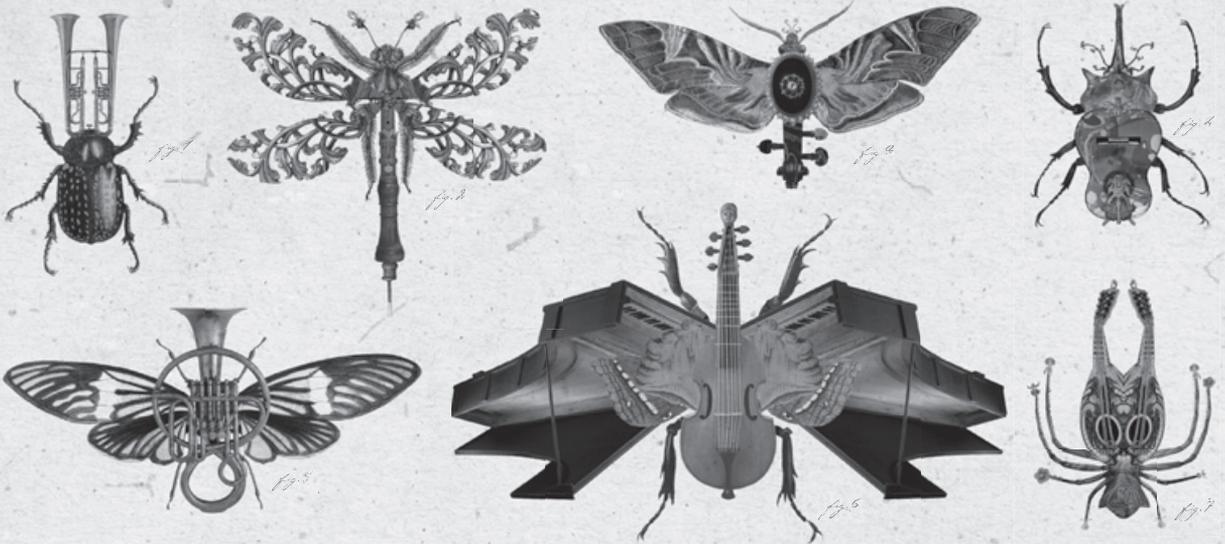
www.musicbase.cz

A database of compositions and composers of contemporary classical music from the Czech lands, ranging from the mid-20th century till recent times

Czech Music Information Centre

12. 5. –
3. 6. 2018

f



PRAGUE SPRING

73rd International Music Festival

CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF STATEHOOD WITH MUSIC!
1918–2018

15. 5. Music of Terezin authors 18. 5. Michal Nejtěk Ultramarine 19. 5. Pavel Haas String Quartet No. 3
19. 5. Tribute to Leoš Janáček 19. 5. Marko Ivanović Five Little Words Miloslav Kabeláč Symphony No. 6
20. 5. Iša Krejčí Nonet–Divertimento Michal Müller Passacaglia 1918 20. 5. Alexander Moyzes Jazz
Sonata 20. 5. Jiří Gemrot world premiere of a vocal work 21. 5. Luboš Mrkvička For Large Ensemble,
Part D 26. 5. Indi Stivín Concerto “Bohemia” 26. 5. Lukáš Sommer Harp Concerto 27. 5. Concert in
honour of the Czechoslovak legionnaires 28. 5. Luboš Fišer, Luboš Sluka, Jan Kučera, Alexey Aslamas
29. 5. Jan Novák Dido, cantata after Virgil 30. 5. Karel Husa Music for Prague 1968 Pavel Bořkovec
Piano Concerto No. 2 30.–31. 5. Musicological conference to mark the anniversary of statehood
31. 5. Ondřej Adámek Karakuri 1. 6. Bohuslav Martinů Symphony No. 4 2. 6. Pavel Trojan Astoriana
2. 6. Bohuslav Martinů Estampes Klement Slavický Sinfonietta No. 4 “Pax hominibus in universo urbi”
2. 6. Eugen Suchoň Psalm of the Carpathian Land Leoš Janáček Taras Bulba

Full programme & tickets: www.festival.cz

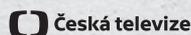
Financial Support



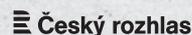
Festival Partner



General Media Partner



Main Media Partner



Media Partner

