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Ivan Acher

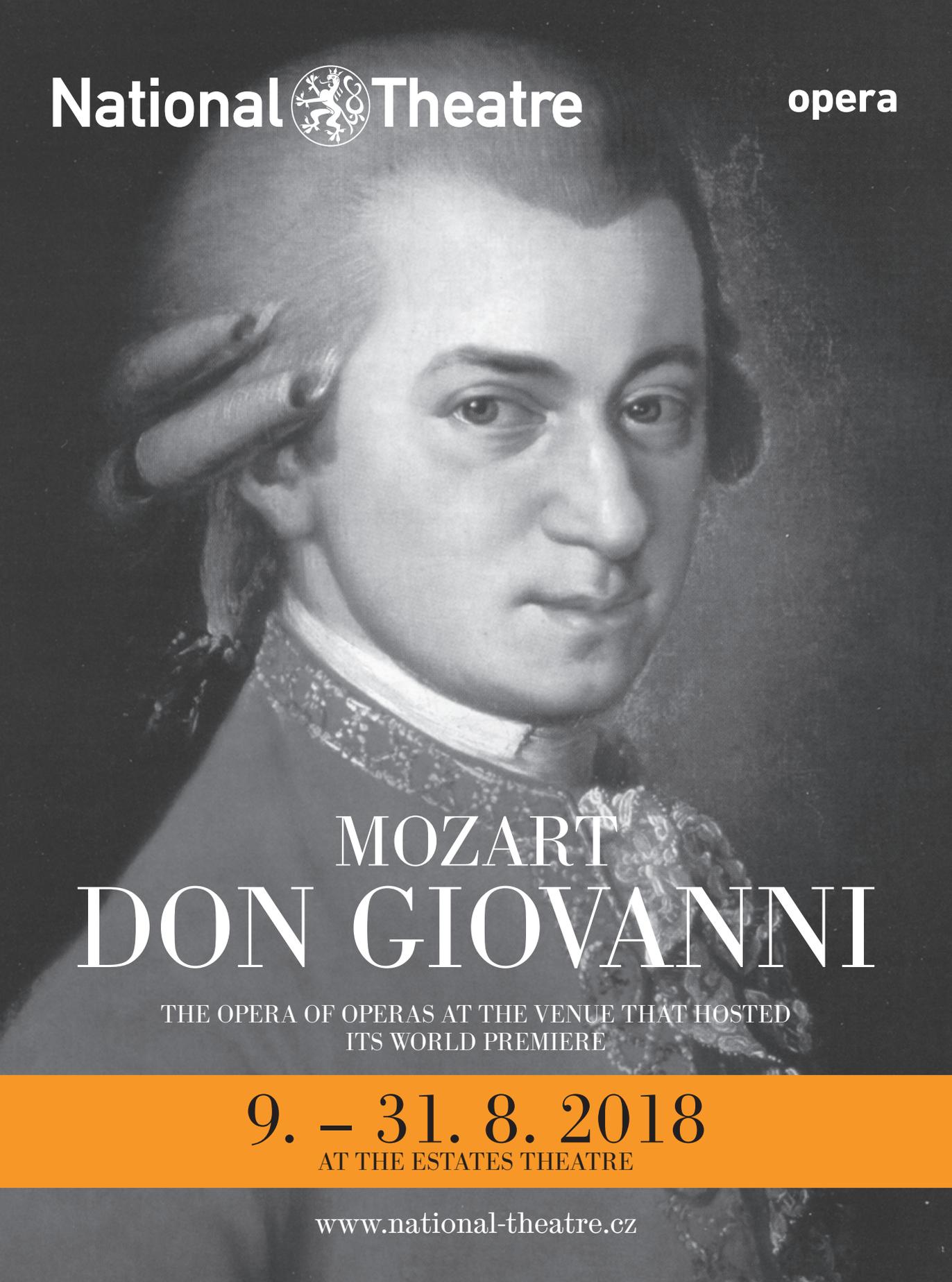
Alois Hába *Thy Kingdom Come*

Zdeněk Liška

Reformation in the Czech Lands

National  Theatre

opera



MOZART
DON GIOVANNI

THE OPERA OF OPERAS AT THE VENUE THAT HOSTED
ITS WORLD PREMIERE

9. – 31. 8. 2018
AT THE ESTATES THEATRE

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DEAR READERS,

It is mostly the work of chance that this edition of Czech Music Quarterly centres on opera. Our interview with Ivan Acher comes hot on the heels of the recent premiere of his chamber opera *Sternenhoch*, created on foundations laid by Ladislav Klíma (1878–1928), *enfant terrible* of Czech philosophy.

This unique Nietzschean apparition left a significant mark on Czech culture, in large part due to those who continued his legacy – apart from poets such as Jiří Kolář and Ivan Diviš, this also included the underground rock scene. Acher's *Sternenhoch*, well received by critics and audiences alike, is the newest fruit of Klíma's permanent presence in Czech culture.

While we were preparing this issue for print, the world premiere (several decades late) of Alois Hába's sixth-tone opera *Thy Kingdom Come* took place at the NODO festival in Ostrava. Vlasta Reittererová's article focuses on the genesis of the work and its position within Hába's oeuvre. We appended an interview with Bruno Ferrandis, who conducted the premiere, as well as some photos from the rehearsals. In the last moments before this issue is sent to the printers', I can confirm that the premiere was a grand success and the heroic work of all those who took part in putting the production together was repaid beyond all expectations.

You will also find a review of Ondřej Adámek's newest music-theatre work – speaking of opera would be misleading, but music is still central – and also a portrait of Czech film music legend Zdeněk Liška, one of the composers who doubtless elevated film music to an art form unto itself.

With wishes of a beautiful and musical summer,
Petr Bakla

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cover: *Sergj Kostov in Ivan Acher's Sternenhoch* (photo: *Patrik Borecký*)

IVAN ACHER WHAT REALLY KEEPS ME GOING IS THE **JOY** **OF THE WORK ITSELF**

Ivan Acher (* 1973 in Liberec) is a Czech composer, musician, carpenter, and forest worker. His name is tied to the legendary Prague Chamber Theatre (Pražské komorní divadlo) led by director Dušan Pařízek, which was active at Prague's Komedie Theatre between 2002 and 2012. He has also worked at the National Theatres in Prague, Brno, and Bratislava, as well as having composed the music for several dozen documentaries and feature films. He has composed over twenty orchestral pieces for the Agon Orchestra, with whom he has collaborated since 2002. His opera **Sternenhoch** was recently successfully premiered at the National Theatre in Prague. Acher often works with electronics, as well as singers of popular music, positing himself as one of the most flexible musicians and composers working in both concert and theatre music in the Czech Republic today.

At the beginning of your creative career, technologies were of paramount importance, specifically software from IRCAM in Paris, which could synthesise sound from visual input. This was when you were studying textile design at the Technical University in Liberec?

This is mostly true, but it was another crucial situation that was really an awakening and an infection. For me, a Neanderthal from the borders, this was a miracle! My high school friend Karel Korous used his clever head to switch the heads on a Tesla reel-to-reel so we could record double stereo - adding a second layer to a track! So this IRCAM-led entry into the organisation of sound - which we can now call



PHOTO: TOMÁŠ VODNÁNSKÝ

composing - was not as simple as it might seem at first. Of course, I was also playing instruments, I experienced traditional band-on-tour life with Venca Václavek and the progressive bigband NUO (the most beautiful of boys), but that wasn't really my flowerpot. I stopped growing even though there was no lack of water. I took the entrance exams to study design, and there was the possibility there of generating sound through visual means thanks to the powerful Silicon Graphics computers the school had at its disposal. That was a great adventure. So great I even slept in the studio, spending weeks on end composing and drawing like a maniac. I didn't finish art school, paradoxically, because of all the time I spent in the studio.

To what extent are instruments - including electronic instruments - and responsive, live sound the centre of composing for you? Or do you often think things through, go on walks, work on paper?

Hearing what you're writing right away performed by mock-ups of real instruments might seem tempting, but it's not my path. The resultant sound (with minimal

exceptions) always was - and probably always will be - repugnant. Hearing it three hundred times a day, then, is mildly deadening. The basic idea, an instant construction without decoration - if it is not too sonic - is still linked in my mind to composing at the piano and writing on paper - PDF paper, that is. Some time before that, I sing while I walk, which creates truly dangerously seductive starting modules.

As concerns inspiration from non-musical sounds, created both on classical instruments and on home appliances produced especially to emit interesting sounds, that's a different story. At least half the time, sampling these sonicities is the starting motor for composing. If responsive sound means what I think it means, this compositional method is prevalent in my work, and the ensuing shaping and cutting down leaves its marks on the resultant piece. Some remain only roughly outlined like the unfinished totem on the coast near Seattle, if they are strong enough even in this state. With some, I file away with so much detail I might be carving a cameo. Deciding when to stop is in fact the most difficult part.

What has not coming from a traditionally musical environment given you?

The question, I suppose, is what you can achieve despite this initial handicap. First and foremost, if you expect nothing and work purposefully, you can go for a long time simply for the joy the work brings you. It took ten years before someone happened to notice that I was doing something. In ten years, you can make a lot of music without the ambition of showing someone something or achieving any kind of success. Complete freedom and the necessity of setting one's own rules.

If such a thing as the development of quality in private without arbiters exists, it consists mostly of giving oneself tasks in the sense of surprising oneself, avoiding repetition, setting traps for one's weaknesses both in terms of craft and emotion. That visual trajectory I had lined out, heading for the beautifully continual career of a regional graphic designer and Sunday painter, was not all in vain, however. The form of talent I use today to materialise music is not entirely of musicianly origin. At least half the ideas are visual at first.

What do you work for today, then? For sheer joy? To make a living? Ambition? Have your motivations transformed over time? And does this influence the kind of commission you're likely to accept or reject?

That's a painful question. I certainly do not act with maximal prudence as concerns remuneration. I have four children and this is really an aspect I should be rigorous about; including financial considerations when deciding whether or not to take on a job. But usually, I don't think about it. I often only ask "How much?" during the finishing stages.

What really keeps me going is the joy of the work itself. When I wake up and listen to something I recorded at night, and it works on me as if it had been done by someone else, that's IT, and there's enough euphoria guaranteed to keep me going up to the next slump.





Ivan Acher's Sternenhoch at the National Theatre in Prague

Sometimes, the challenges – a piece for the Prague Spring, an opera for the National – have the character of a path of courage; a battle at Thermopylae. So there's also a bit of a bloke-ish challenge or provocation. I have had the good fortune to receive beautiful and dignified offers and adventurous challenges. The fact that no other offers come my way is probably thanks to the fact that I continually reject projects that stink of any kind of small-mindedness. Though of course I stepped into cow-dung a few times. But never in sandals!

What does your working environment look like today? Do you work in one place, or are you forced to work on the road?

The important things are born at our mill under Oybin Castle: I can see Töpfer mountain over the treetops of a three-hundred-year-old oak alley – it just pours out there. My brain works like a Christmas candy machine. Recently, though, I am forced to travel due to my work for theatre.

Given my obsession with being present and finishing off details on the show (because seeing images while you work is of course a triumph), I haven't been home for almost a month now. So I have a "hotel set-up": a small keyboard, a small guitar without a body, one condenser microphone for singing – even now I'm also writing this interview on a laptop with all these decorations plugged in and set up for my work on *War and Peace* at the Slovak National Theatre. They're all around me. I woke up at 5 in the morning, while my voice was still deep, I recorded the basis of an Orthodox chorale in the darkest timbres, then I'll go to the rehearsal. In the afternoon, when the trains quiet down in Klíny, I'll record the tenor voices, and then mix it all after

dinner. I've been taking pictures of my hotel sets around the world, which I think would make for a great complement to this interview.

How much time do you spend in theatres? What is your relationship to that environment?

I've more or less answered that responsibly, let me just add that the possibility of creating an artificial world on the stage, of being able to experience the feeling that I have an influence on something in the movement of things on Earth; that I can fortify these and leave an imprint of the kind only music can leave – all this is enormously precious and I am thankful for this gift of fate.

Which of the projects you worked on do you value the most in retrospect?

You can't really make a list. I am thankful for my stint with the Prague Chamber Theatre: this gave me a feeling that even a group of adults can meaningfully spend entire nights rehearsing purely thanks to their desire to make the show perfect; the feeling that we're part of something extraordinary and that it makes sense. I'm thankful to Dušan Pařízek, David Jařab, and Jan Nebeský for trusting me enough to let me work freely.

I'm thankful to various bands for allowing me to travel around Europe for free. Where I once struggled to hitch a ride, we now enjoyed the luxuries of hotels and multivans. Those tours might have made us just about enough money to get an ice cream at the Rozvadov border crossing, because audiences for progressive approaches to music were washed down by the 2002 flood, but it was beautiful.

My theatrical travels also range across Europe, so the trips continue. The good thing is that as a composer, I hand over a more or less fixed work, which I can influence until the very last moment, so I don't get so stressed about accommodation, sound engineers, fees... in the wild years of band tours, it would sometimes happen that we performed a concert for five hundred people in the middle of a vineyard in Tuscany, but the owner was nowhere to be found. We did our own sound, there was no fee, and we had to sleep in an outhouse on carpets from the bar. But even that was glorious – the morning! The villa-farm stood on a hill in the middle of the wavy vineyard ocean... so we loaded the crate of beer we got as a fee and on we went to Civitavecchia. So far, I've been lucky. And I now realise how often I mention gratitude in this interview. Yes, I am grateful.

How do you see your position in relation to various cultural scenes? Drama and experimental theatre, contemporary art or popular music?

Given the reactions my work has garnered, I am more certain now after twenty years of composing and researching that I have found where I belong. I can vouch for my work, and so if the creative teams' favour lasts, I will gladly and eagerly continue composing for the theatre. I avoid terms like incidental or scenic music, because my aim is to make this genre more autonomous and rid it of the musical public's unfair label of a second-rate genre with a stigma of complementarity.

Every month, the theatre gets me to a new world: not just thanks to travelling, but also in discovering the micro-climate of every theatre. This way, the journey never ceases to amuse me; thanks to the flight through the literary preparations, it's always



Vanda Šípová (as Helga) and Sergej Kostov (as prince Sternenhoch)

new. The orchestral and jazzband projects are currently in the fridge given how hard it is to keep large ensembles afloat in recent years. So NUO and the Agon Orchestra are hibernating for now.

Thanks to the - very surprising - success of *Sternenhoch* at the National Theatre with both the critical and general public, I have received a number of new offers for operatic and orchestral commissions. First, however, I have to carefully consider the energy which *Sternenhoch* needed. I have to breathe for a little longer. So far, though, a sense of relief predominates and everything looks bright. My diary looks like Pavarotti's (humour) and hopefully I'll continue getting work. But I have to be at 110% all the time. There are no indulgences reserved for a visual immigrant in the musical world, and "self-taught" sounds worse than a diploma tube slammed against the table. There is a short euphoria at every premiere: now I am finally certain I can do anything. It is immediately replaced by a feeling that I still know nothing.

What are your plans for the future?

The most immediate plan is to survive this hectic end of the season. In the autumn, a break in productions at the National will allow us to tour the opera abroad and avoid losing continuity. I'm getting ready to experience the adventure of travelling around theatres with the same excitement I've had up to this point. The premiere-weeks have so far been merciful in how they layer themselves onto my Google calendar, so hopefully it won't be too stressful. Hopefully. And then I need to layer this roast with the music to two greasy films. It's hard to bite off more than three layers of this lasagne... but when you intersperse them with aubergines...

ALOIS HÁBA THE VISIONARY

Notes on the premiere of *Thy Kingdom Come*

WE BRING THIS TEXT ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD PREMIERE OF THY KINGDOM COME, AN OPERA BY CZECH COMPOSER ALOIS HÁBA (1893–1973), COMPOSED USING MICROTONES (I.E. INTERVALS SMALLER THAN THOSE FOUND ON A PIANO), SPECIFICALLY SIXTH-TONES. THE OPERA WAS STAGED BY THE NEW OPERA DAYS OSTRAVA FESTIVAL (NODO), DIRECTED BY JIŘÍ NEKVASIL AND CONDUCTED BY BRUNO FERRANDIS, WITH THE CHOIR CANTICUM OSTRAVA, THE ENSEMBLE OSTRAVSKÁ BANDA AND THE OSTRAVA NEW ORCHESTRA. THE PREMIERE TOOK PLACE ON THE 24TH OF JUNE IN THE JIŘÍ MYRON THEATRE IN OSTRAVA.

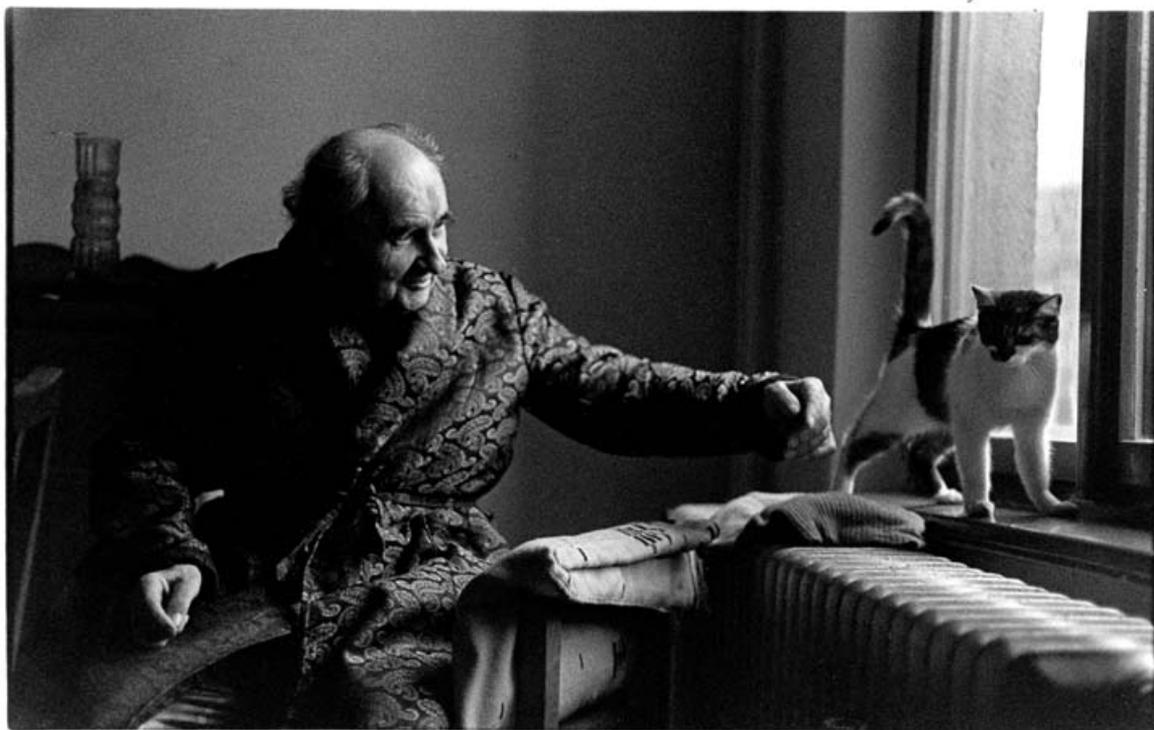
In the 19th century, music was ruled by drama. As literary programme, it made its way into symphonic music, and drama became an important element in so-called absolute music. Opera became a prestigious form, offering an opportunity for composers to connect various artistic disciplines.

Operas were used to express national and political positions, ethical ideals. And, most importantly, audiences called for opera.

Few composers could resist the ambition to compose for the stage.

Alois Hába studied with Vítězslav Novák at the Prague Conservatory and Franz Schreker at both the Music Academy in Vienna and the Musikhochschule in Berlin. Both of Hába's teachers composed operas. Novák drew on dramatic adaptations of comedic material on historical topics, and was received with uncertainty as a musical dramatist. With the exception of his first attempt, Schreker wrote his own libretti. At the time, he was one of the most performed operatic composers on the German stage.

Searching for a basis for his opera, Hába felt closer to Schreker's path between post-romanticism and expressionism. He also shared a propensity for symbolism and abstraction with his teacher. He was impressed



by the conflict among the characters, as well as by the psychological, erotic, and ethical background of Schreker's plots.

Håba aspired to a contemporary opera: he had no need for historical characters, the dramatic conflict was to arise from divergences in moral positions, social circumstances, education, and interests. From the beginning of the 1890s, when he began continuously applying his energy to the study of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophic teachings, philosophy and esotericism also entered the arena.

A large number of Håba's text sketches have been preserved; sometimes entire scenes, worked out in some detail. More than thirty fragments dated after 1919 attest to the importance he personally attached to opera. The sketches show repeated failures in structuring the plot, but they are also permeated by repeated or similar narrative motifs.

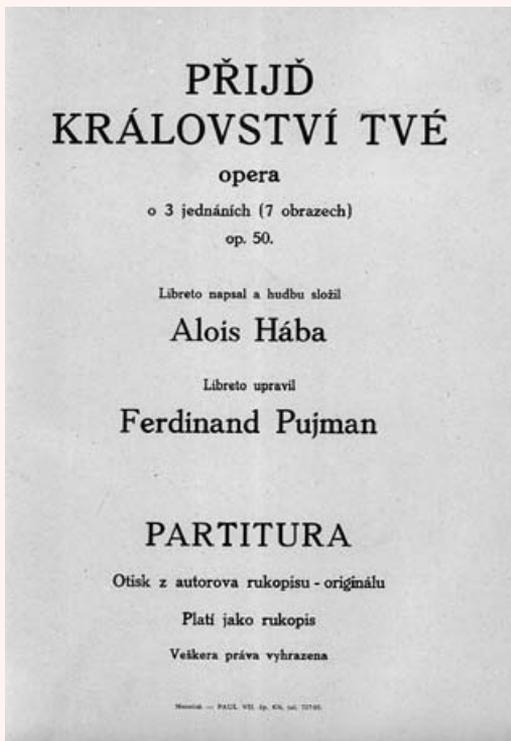
When Håba put down an idea, the music was secondary - there are no identifiable sketches of the music. Håba was first and foremost

after a functional groundwork and a manner of scenic production. In the first years of these contemplations, he even considered including medium that was brand new at the time: film.

Operatic Realism I

It took a full decade before he found a topic he would stick to. The musical material came as if it were obvious. Håba's first opera, *Mother (Matka)* was created at a time when several important moments for the composer came all at once. In 1922, his String Quartet op. 7 was performed, the first written in the quarter-tone system. 1924 saw the first public presentation of the quarter-tone grand piano, constructed by the August Förster company following Håba's instructions. By this time, he was fully invested in micro-intervals.

The reactions to his lectures and promotional concerts ranged from respect to doubts, scepticism, and derision. An often rehearsed argument was that on the small scale of a phantasia or a suite, composing in quarter-tones might be possible and



*Title page of the score of Thy Kingdom Come
Explanatory notes to the score (opposite)*

consumable, but it was certainly inadequate for any larger works. The insistent Hába was set on proving these naysayers wrong.

Two moments were crucial in instigating Hába to compose this opera. Privately, it was his separation from his wife, whom Hába met during his studies in Berlin - his family never approved of her. Hába set this opera - which contains autobiographical elements, a species of return of the prodigal son - in Valašsko, where he himself had grown up. He justified the use of quarter-tones through this source, which he also referred to in his theoretical writings: the folk music where he was from used micro-intervals quite naturally.

Matka - under its German title, *Die Mutter* - was premiered on the 17th of May 1931 at the Week of New Music in Munich. It was only produced in Czech on the 24th of May 1947 at the Theatre of the 5th of May (now the Prague State Opera; part of the National Theatre), where Hába was managing director at the time. The last production was by the National Theatre in Prague in 1964 for performances at the Prague Spring and Maggio musicale Fiorentino festivals - a recording was made of the latter performance. To this day, *Matka* remains the only evening-length opera composed in quarter-tones.



Sixth-tone harmonium, custom-built by August Förster

Sěštinotónová stupnice



Tvar opery:



Orchestr

Harfa laděna normálně

Harfa laděna o šestinotón výš

Harfa laděna o 2/6tón výš

Harmonium šestinotónové s fagotovým, klarinetovým a flétnovým rejstříkem

1. altový pozoun (a žahová trompeta)

2. a 3. altový pozoun

1. 2. 3. tenorový pozoun (3. s basovou klapkou)

4 kotly (timpani)

Bicí nástroje: tamtam, vel. bub., hlub. tomtom, činely, víř. buben,

vojen. bub., trianql., bashic. bub., tykev, castaněty,
(systém bicích nástrojů)

Violino 1.

Violino 2.

Viola

Violoncello

Kontrabas

S. = soprán } žen. sbor }
A. = alt } smíš. sbor }
T. = tenor } muž. sbor }
B. = bas }

H] = hlavní melodie;

č.p. = tvrdou paličkou; 1. 2. 3. = pozoun

H₁, H₂ a t. d. = vedlejší melodie;

m.p. = měk. paličkou;

Λ, ∇, / \ * Kolenní rejstříky (levý pro zvukové rejstříky, pravý pro dynamiku).

Posuvky: 1/6tón, 1/3tón, 1/2tón, 2/3tón, 5/6tón výš; platí jen pro jednu notu.

Operatic Realism II

We find notes for another opera almost concurrently with the creation of *Matka*. At the time of its premiere, the world began waking up from the economic crisis of 1929. This brought political tension within which Czechoslovakia found itself between the dangerous developments in Germany and the no-less strange progress in the Soviet Union, in which many saw hope, and others a threat of the same kind as that posed by national socialism.

Hába had a strong social feeling, and he felt a need to contribute to the current debate: “Expressing the conflict of capitalism as death threatening to throttle the life of theatre, education, freedom of the press (...) widening the budget for death – war – from this conflict then construct a resistance and a victory of the proletariat – weave in an entry of the unemployed after a discussion with the author – show a way out.”

These were the words he put down at the time, which contain the foundation of his next opera. Once again, he considered quarter-tones, now not as an icon of a folkloric setting, but a means of expressing the conflict within the social order and the fickle changeability of human character. He then abandoned the topic for some time.

If Hába’s claims in a radio interview broadcast in 1970 are true, it was chance that put Ferdinand Pujman’s libretto into his hands. Pujman had directed the Munich production of *Mother*, and this new text was based on a short story by the Soviet writer Fyodor Gladkov. Pujman was writing a libretto for Hába’s brother Karel, also a composer, but the libretto came at an extraordinarily opportune time for Alois.

He composed his second opera, *Nová země* (*New Country*) in 1935 and ‘36, working in the (standard) half-tone system and the athematic style; his own term for a compositional method in which no musical idea is repeated or varied and the stream of music never stops moving forward. The proclaimed athematicism was not thorough, however: the introduction to the opera includes a quotation of the *Internationale*, which was enough for many to label the opera Bolshevik propaganda.

The story is set in a Ukrainian village at the time of forced collectivisation and famine. It has an optimistic conclusion, but it also includes stories about drastic events such as cannibalism, sabotage,

and the breakdown of marital relationships. For the followers of communism, this was a denigration of the noble ideals of the Soviet state.

The opera was accepted by the National Theatre in Prague, rehearsals were under way, but fear of political provocation led superior authorities to stop the production. It was only produced – in a concert version and for a single evening – on the 12th of December 2014 at the National Theatre in Prague, conducted by Petr Kofroň.

Opera of Symbolically Expressed Reality

After the production of *New Country* was cancelled, Hába returned to the abandoned idea. It shared a social focus with *New Country*, but in addition to the original intention of expressing the conflict of capitalism in connection with the threat of war and cultural decadence, anthroposophy and its symbolism entered the opera under the influence of the events and general atmosphere of the times.

In 1934, Brno saw the premiere of the anti-war opera *Honzovo království* (*Honza’s Kingdom*) by Otakar Ostrčil, which was then produced in Prague the following year. *Bloud*, Josef Bohuslav Foerster’s opera based on a story by Leo Tolstoy, was produced that same year, wherein the mission of mankind is expressed through Christian love. Hába had certainly seen both these pieces.

He also knew from manuscript the work of his student and friend Viktor Ullmann, who in 1935 finished his opera *Der Sturz des Antichrist* (*The Fall of the Antichrist*), based on a drama by the anthroposophist poet Albert Steffen. With its story, in which the trio of Priest, Technician, and Artist are to decide whether they will be exclusive servants of the Regent and only the Artist is capable of standing up to the dictator, Ullmann stated clearly his opinion on the artist’s position in society. In each of these works, Hába found something that was also occupying his own mind: the pan-human idea of Christian love, opposition to war, mysticism, an expression of the artist’s position.

Operatic Allegories

In 1934, when Hába was asked by the International Music Office in Moscow to formulate his thoughts on the culture of the West and the Soviet Union,





*Rehearsing Thy Kingdom Come
Jiří Mahen Theatre, Ostrava, June 2018*

his answer included the following: “The Soviet Union was the first to begin creating a new social order, (...) but one cannot claim that Soviet culture created a new synthetic world-view, containing within it total knowledge of the basis of man, his development and his earthly and cosmic function”.

Hába was convinced that against this gap and against the “decomposition and decay of Western culture stands Steiner’s anthroposophy as a new foundation of knowledge, from which able young workers

gain fruitful impulses in all areas of scientific study, art, and education”. Steiner’s conception of the tripartite social organism, composed of the political, economic, and spiritual spheres, which refers to the ideals of the French revolution, is “after Marx’s teachings a more comprehensive and scientifically differentiated instigation to build a new social order. (...) Steiner’s ideas can be used to objectively measure what has and has not been achieved in the USSR, as well as that which cannot be achieved in the West for now”.

Hába's attempt to combine Steiner's anthroposophy with Marxist teachings was naive, but he never abandoned this conviction. Two sides of his personality came through: the idealist and visionary on the one hand, and the pragmatic "rustic youth", as Hermann Scherchen, conductor of the world premiere of *Matka*, once referred to Hába. We find both these aspects in *Thy Kingdom Come*.

While *New Country* was mainly concerned with the material aspect of life, it is mostly an idealist non-specificity which fills the pages of the "Christian-socially-anthroposophic" *Thy Kingdom Come*. The socialist - or rather socialisational - idea is expressed in the sense of Rudolf Steiner's teaching as noted by Hába: "Socialism as it presents itself today - as a demand - will always lead to conflict, unless it is linked with two other things. First: free spiritual life. Second: an insight into the spiritual background of nature. Socialism without spiritual science and without freedom of thought is non-rationality."

That, after all, became apparent later, following the communist take-over of 1948 and the acceptance of the so-called Zhdanov Doctrine: the socialist regime put Hába among the "formalists", whose music was distant from the needs of the contemporary people.

The content of *Thy Kingdom Come* is in constant conflict: on the one hand, it is schematic and could be put on a poster, on the other hand it is full of complicated symbols, which could not - and perhaps were not meant to - be generally understood. The central idea, however, is simple: one-sided service to the development of technology and capital has brought about social destitution; people can easily become inconsiderate, which leads to wars.

In simplistic terms, we could label the opera a "mysterium" of class struggle: the three competing elements are the capitalists, bureaucracy and the proletariat. The first act shows a group of factory workers discussing their situation while on their break. They complain that pressure on their effectiveness turns them into soulless machines: "RATIONALISATION IS THE PEAK OF EVERY CIVILISATION. PURPOSEFULLY SIMPLIFY WORK. - Do you feel? Do you think? Are you happy or

unhappy in this world? Who will ask you! What do they care, they who build the pyramids of capital. They pressed one fingering out of us", says one worker about the slogans that adorn the factory walls.

The factory informants relay the director's decision: the decline in sales necessitates a restriction of production, which will lead to redundancies. In case of rebellion, violence will be used. The second scene is a symbolic portrayal of the three parties outlined above (capitalists, bureaucrats, the proletariat) through the characters used in anthroposophic teaching: Lucifer, Ariman, and Christ, two forces of evil and one force of good.

Lucifer (Bearer of Light; biblical snake) represents sensuousness, Ariman (a destructive spirit derived from Zoroastrianism; ruler of darkness) the temptations of the material world. Christ's activity balances the powers. Interspersed among scenes taking place in the realistic environs of the factory, the director's office, and the periphery of a city is an allegorical scene - a dialogue of those three characters, the central idea of which is: Man must first know his own essence, only then can he free himself, set out on the path of Christ, thus dispensing with the need for both Lucifer and Ariman.

The next scene begins with a meeting of the Intellectual, the workers, and the unemployed on the periphery. Standing in front of accommodation for the unemployed, they comment on the shop windows, full of goods. The policeman tells them to move along. Meanwhile, the factory director consults with the workers' confidant on how to avoid a workers' revolt. The confidant suggests: "Uniforms with colourful shirts, flags and banners, marches and songs, meetings, soaring speeches, promises of new orders, curses of old evils, celebrations and oaths. That will increase the crowd's self-confidence. But all this only on weekends and holidays, like the Word of God. On weekdays, work. Food in a common kitchen, inexpensive. Instead of a roof, a tent above their heads, like a young romantic hiker." The agitative method is successful: there is no revolt.

The last scene is titled "Theatrum mundi" (Theatre of the World), which is a metaphor used

in Baroque theatre to express the insignificance and vanity of all worldly action; a conception of the world in which people are “actors” and God the “director”. In this scene, the Author himself enters the narrative, asking the Scribe, a character who possesses historical memory, what he can change as an artist. The wise Scribe suggests he turn to Christ, and the chorus concludes: “Christ in us and his Kingdom on Earth!”

The opera’s finale is unconvincing: the Author puts the solution in the hands of God, the “director”. Hába wanted to avoid awakening much hope with his opera in the middle of the war, but he also wasn’t pathetically calling for struggle and resistance. If an individual cannot change fate, there is nothing left to do but to accept it.

We find the ideas that appear in the libretto scattered throughout Hába’s notes and sketches from the preceding ten years, but we cannot reconstruct how the final version of the libretto was put together. We can assume Ferdinand Pujman, whom Hába chose to collaborate with, played a significant part. The opera, which was originally to be called *The Unemployed (Nezaměstnaní)* changed not only its name, but also probably its message.

With this work, Hába the musician gave himself over to a vision other than a manual for a reparation of the world. That was a further extension of the tonal system, never yet used for such an extensive work. First, he had quarter-tones in mind, but in 1937, the August Förster company built an improved sixth-tone harmonium with bassoon, clarinet, and flute registers. Hába had already composed an opera each in the half-tone and quarter-tone system, so he opted for sixth-tones, which he could recognise safely thanks to his perfect pitch. He could also sing them; he had a detailed conception of the resultant sound.

Even though Hába’s third opera is in sixth-tones, he simplified the performance requirements. The orchestration, which in addition to the sixth-tone harmonium (kept today in the collection of the National Museum – Czech Museum of Music, which graciously loaned it for the premiere production in Ostrava) includes common instruments capable of playing microtones: three harps (each tuned differently), six trombones and a slide trumpet, a full string section and a rich arsenal of percussion.

Sixth-tones are used throughout in all the instrumental and vocal parts. The declamative vocal parts are not too distant from Leoš Janáček’s speech melodies, with gentler, more detailed shades of intonation. The opera has twenty five solo parts, the mass scenes feature quick exchanges of short statements, as in common conversation.

We might ask how Hába imagined this might be rehearsed and produced. In the case of the quarter-tone *Matka*, he could rely fully on his student Karel Ančerl, who studied the vocal parts with the soloists as an assistant to conductor Hermann Scherchen. He did so at a normal, half-tone piano at first, but then he acquired an August Förster quarter-tone instrument. There was no piano reduction of *Thy Kingdom Come*; only the sixth-tone harmonium could serve as an aid for the répétiteur. Most of the rehearsal material had to be prepared for the world premiere in Ostrava.

Only the score was published in print: by Hába himself, printed at the Paul printers Holešovice in Prague. The print is not dated, but Viktor Ullmann’s last works were printed at the same printers before his transport to Terezín, so we can expect that Hába’s score was printed immediately after he finished the instrumentation: March 1942.

At a time when there was not a sliver of hope that an opera such as *Thy Kingdom Come* could be produced, Hába immersed himself in a dream of an “opera of the future”. His sixth-tone vision had to wait until 2018 before it was realised.



Q&A with Bruno Ferrandis conductor of *Thy Kingdom Come*

Boris Klepal



When did you hear microtonal music for the first time and how did you like it?

I do not remember exactly. Early on in my career, I had an ensemble in New York called Music Mobile, which performed a bit of that sort of music (especially the French spectralist composers like Tristan Murail). At the Juilliard School (where I studied), a lot of young composers were trying out microtones, but very limited compared to Hába, who has literally developed a “sixth-tone” language in this opera. It’s hard to say whether I liked it... Let’s say that it’s already a great achievement if we can play as close as it is written on the page!

Did you know Hába’s music – and especially his opera *Matka (Mother)* – before you began preparing *Thy Kingdom Come*?

Absolutely not! I know a lot of composers, but there was so much music coming in from all over the world that I was not well acquainted with the Czech composers of the 20th century, except for Janáček through his operas and Bohuslav Martinů because of a few symphonic pieces. For me, discovering Hába came as a complete surprise.

How many orchestral rehearsals will you have for *Thy Kingdom Come*?

Not enough, of course! I think it’s six rehearsals – including the dress rehearsal.

Did you look at the parts with the singers before you came to Ostrava?

The most important job was to distribute the very many roles the piece asks for. Some singers will have to sing two different characters depending on their vocal range. But I have a good contact in chorus master Jurij Galatenko, who will take care of the intonation of the chorus.

The typical operatic singer is not trained in the intonation of quarter- or sixth-tone music. How can a conductor support them in finding their way of handling this material?

It is a big challenge for them, not only to actually do it but to know how close they are in intonation. I think Hába realised that most of what he was asking for was either very difficult or outright impossible. And there is a big question for the singers: how to memorise all these micro-intervallic notes!

“When times were better, there was something left for art”, says the Second Female Worker in *Thy Kingdom Come*. What are the times for art at the moment? Are they better or worse?

That is a prophetic phrase in this opera showing how far ahead of his time Hába was. No money for the arts is the phrase of the era. Governments everywhere are saying: no money for the arts. But money for everything else! In the minds of our presidents, prime ministers, and so on, arts are not the priority. This is catastrophic for me, not only because my personal work is affected, but because the arts are the biggest link between people on this planet, and if they disappear the planet will disappear too (especially in the richest countries).

WENN ALLES KLAPPT



Alles klappt, a new musical theatre piece by Ondřej Adámek and Katharina Schmitt, was premiered at the prestigious Munich Biennale this June. It is a confident and solid work by a generation of Czech and German artists well accustomed to working internationally in a variety of contexts, pointing to both the encouraging recent developments in new opera in the Czech Republic, and the huge differences in institutional grounding and production possibilities between the Czech lands and Western Europe.

Ondřej Adámek is currently among the most successful Czech composers, and it is telling that he has done most of his professional work abroad, particularly in Germany and France (where he also studied at the Conservatoire National Supérieur). The career trajectory of Katharina Schmitt, on the other hand, is quite unusual: born and raised in Bremen, she came to Prague in 2000 searching for a different context, inspired by an interest for the ongoing cultural and social change in Central and Eastern Europe. She has since become one of the leading directors with an experimental bent in the Czech Republic, tying her name to the innovative Studio Hrdinů theatre in Prague.

Schmitt has only recently recently branched out as an opera director: in 2016, she directed the opening performance at the New Opera Days Ostrava festival (NODO), a double bill of Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures*. In 2017, she wrote the libretto - with Lukáš Jiříčka - to Jiří Kadeřábek's opera *No Man*, which she also directed in its premiere at the National Theatre in Prague. This is the first collaboration between Schmitt and Adámek, who both live currently live in Berlin.

The Not-so-Silent Archive

Alles klappt plays out as a mapping of making audible and visible the invisible dynamics of an archive. What is written is not necessarily what is said, and not in the least what is meant by the carefully selected, dissected, and reassembled phrases which once attempted to describe something as indescribable: as people having their lives broken apart, bodies and objects separated, catalogued and shipped off to different fates - some to be preserved and others destroyed.

The piece was developed based on archive material directly connected to composer Ondřej Adámek's own family history. The libretto - written by director Katharina Schmitt - is built on bureaucratic language, the enabler of a systematic and violent process, which is then posited alongside postcards full of well-wishing and assurances of health sent home to family in Prague from the camps at Birkenau and Terezín, as well as catalogue of apartments left behind by Jews who had "moved away", which Adámek's grandfather was forced to put together for the Nazis. As a compliment to the programme, we receive a facsimile of the original

postcards, themselves a complex map of signs, symbols and secretly coded messages which the artists have attempted to decode - or at least interpret - through this performance.

The performance begins with Adámek scanning the stage with a metal detector. He searches for something buried, hidden; listening for sounds that would indicate that something is in fact there, waiting for him. He retreats and other figures become audible. Breath - words not yet born - develop into syllables and eventually phrases begin to be passed around the stage by six singers. They manoeuvre crates into place; downstage, two percussionists wheel in their array of instruments one by one. Adámek himself conducts from a booth to the right of the stage connected by a video feed to





monitor screens to the left and behind the audience. This way, the performers can follow his guiding hands whichever direction they might be facing, in a kind of reverse panopticon.

In this makeshift office the workers begin to unwrap objects wrapped up in carpet fragments. Working as a team, they dust them off to the tune of syllables building up and transforming into slogans and phrases indicating how the objects should be considered and handled. The objects are re-catalogued, re-wrapped in the more contemporary material of plastic wrap. In a sense, the discovery and repacking of the objects reflects the digging in the archive, re-working and re-interpreting the language for a contemporary format in the medium of music theatre.

Everything is Running Smoothly

These uses of language is the strength of the performance, as well as of the collaboration between Adámek and Schmitt. The English working title of the piece was “False Good News”, which is

a clearer suggestion that these words should not be taken at face value: one is required to read between the lines, and the circular affirmation that *Alles klappt* (everything is running smoothly) is simply not the truth.

This well oiled machine takes some time to assemble itself, not only in finding its language through the recitation of slogans, but by arriving at points of contact - sometimes through physical movement, varying distance between performers on the stage, or coming together vocally at certain moments - “April!” and “Mail!” are expressed in unison as if the progression of time was one of the few things experienced that can be expressed together, while other aspects of their archiving, counting and inventory work are individual tasks that are “consulted” with others through fragmented vocal exchanges and affirmations.

The personal stories taken from the postcards are eventually found in a similar crate, and likewise embodied in objects, but to a completely different effect. Since we have already been introduced to

the structured and systematic world of the philosophies of quantity and progress, the uncovering of feelings that have also been waiting to be revived comes as a sharp contrast to the cold bureaucratic approach of labelling and wrapping.

The singer who first touches this sensitive material is emotionally affected. To begin with, the others reject her, finding comfort in each other instead. However, one by one, they are also drawn to the sensitive material, and each character takes up an object and appears to channel the stories hidden in heirlooms and letters, trying to give form to the emotions behind the misleading shapes of the words themselves; trying to give the writer a voice again, if only for a few moments.

Once these objects have told their stories, they are not returned to their crates, but finally buried, or at least laid to rest until they are dug up again some day. At the end of the piece, these words and voices, which have temporarily borrowed the bodies

of the performers, intensify until the exhausted singers collapse and return to a wordless, voiced rhythm of breath.

Alongside and underneath this vocal mosaic, the tuned percussion build layers of rhythms and textures, building up terrain for the voices to work on without competing with them. The piece is almost entirely built from rhythms and beats of different kinds, waxing and waning in complexity.

There are very few melodies and the opera singers rarely sing fully, but as is explicitly outlined in the score, the performers are required to have trained operatic voices although they are seldom used as such. This made the casting process challenging, as it was not easy to find performers who could both perform Adámek's score and attain the scenic presence that Schmitt was looking for. Fortunately, the frame of the Münchener Biennale provided resources to find artists with the specific skills needed for these roles.



I spoke with Adámek and Schmitt about their process, and they described how a deep trust in their collaborating partner, extensive discussions, and listening all helped provide a solid basis for the working process. The result is an innovative new music theatre piece of a high standard, which is thought provoking in addition to having attained aesthetic and conceptual maturity.

In contrast to other pieces at the festival, *Alles klappt* is not particularly context- or site-specific to the festival and will tour after its run there. The Münchener Biennale is a festival specifically focused on producing premieres, an incubator for this genre which falls somewhere between devised theatre, opera, experimental music, and performance art, flanked by a curious and supportive community and atmosphere which allows artists to develop new methods, strategies, and solutions for staging musical compositions in the laboratory of the theatre space.

Apart from the nuts and bolts required for staging a show, it also offers theoretical frameworks, workshops, platforms, and discussions to challenge what new music theatre can be, encourage it to stay relevant to un-theatrical issues, and trust artists to experiment and provoke through the medium of new music theatre.

This year's festival theme, "Private Matter", was chosen out of curiosity for how the younger generation (the target age group for the invited artists is around 35) might address the personal, as these "digital natives" have grown up in a world where privacy has a different meaning and is often closely shaped and controlled by technological devices and systems which have also, in a sense, been "composed".

Of course, not every project needs to be deeply personal for an artist, and ultimately, such projects are few and far between. Sometimes it might take half a lifetime to find the right context and language to bring an idea or source material to light, and a lot of patience to wait for that moment. We can be thankful that Ondřej Adámek found his opportunity to open that archive box, and not only that, but also the right company to give it a voice again. Given the show's success at the Munich Biennale, we might even hope for a production in the Czech Republic.



PHOTO: ARMIN SMALOVIC 7x

Alles klappt

composer and conductor: Ondřej Adámek
libretto and director: Katharina Schmitt

Münchener Biennale Festival of New Music Theatre
Residenztheater/Marstall, München

premiered on the 6th of June 2018

Further performances:
starting 18th of October 2019 - Basel, Gare du Nord

Zdeněk Liška

Revolution Behind the Silver Screen

There is probably nothing we could call underground film music, but there is certainly an innovative scene for film soundtracks. The composer Zdeněk Liška (1922–1983) was an innovator of revolutionary parameters, but he lived at a time when Czechoslovak film music was not published separately. Today, the world is gradually discovering his name outside the frame of cinematography, on releases by British label Finders Keepers or the Polish brand Bolt Records.

And there is certainly a lot to discover. Liška pioneered film music in Central Europe, he composed the music to the Oscar-winning *The Shop on Main Street* (*Obchod na korze*, 1965), and also managed to convince film-maker and artist Jan Švankmajer that music can mix well with a surrealist imagination. He bound his life to cinematography and scored several hundred films – the crucial aspect, however, is quality, not quantity.

We are currently in a period of re-evaluation in regards to the 20th century. Forgotten stories re-emerge. Points of view change, and what was once marginal can meet what a later conception sees as valuable. For too long, film music was considered an “applied art” in Czechoslovakia, and the publishing politics of state-operated labels Supraphon and Panton (between 1948 and 1989) made no claims to it for neither documentary nor commercial purposes. The Soviet bloc states had centrally planned cinematography, freedom of speech was partial at best, and artists often had to cloud their opinions in metaphor. Concurrently, however, there was a functional system of film production groups, and centralised production included not only high quality sound studios, but also the possibility of using Fisyó – the Film Symphony Orchestra. Artists walked a narrow path: they had to try and find ways of using these excellent resources in their works without expressing too much loyalty to the powers that be and their ideology. Film music, graphic design for books, translations from foreign languages or work for children: all these fields became the home of artists that would at other times have expressed themselves through original work. The freest time for Czechoslovak cinema was the 1960s. Films by authors connected to the new wave (and others) have timeless value. Zdeněk Liška made his strongest works in the 60s and 70s. His story, however, begins in the 1940s. Liška finished the Prague Conservatory and in 1944, he started as a composer in the film studios in Zlín. This city was crucially determined by the Baťa shoe



factory. In the first half of the 20th century, Tomáš Baťa took great care of the complex social status of his employees; their involvement in culture and sport and their abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. The city includes an entire district of Baťa-houses to accommodate the workers. The film studios produced advertisements: Liška cut his teeth on these and on animated films.

Here, he encountered his first important collaborators: puppet film maker Hermína Týrlová, and a Meliés-style magician who created dreams between animated and live action films – Karel Zeman. With Zeman, the young Liška soon entered the realm of experiments. When glass, the pride of Czech export, needed advertising, Zeman made an imaginative short film titled *Inspiration* (*Inspirace*, 1949). The sounds Liška is able to merge with the glass material show how far he was able to think through the process of glass-making – from liquid material to solid, and from there on to specific forms – here still in the traditional orchestral instrumentation, with only the addition of the realistic sound of water.

Private Man

It is difficult to identify the influences that were crucial for Liška. Over the course of his entire career, he gave only one interview that was published in print – his entire story is only being reconstructed after his death. Until this day, it includes not only his extensive oeuvre, but also a number of uncertain periods and a general lack of information. What is certain is that Liška decided to make film music his exclusive occupation. “I only write under

moving pictures,” he would say. In this, he differed from remarkable composers like Luboš Fišer, Svato-pluk Havelka, Jan Novák, Jan Klusák, or Ilja Zeljenka, who also left their distinctive imprint on film music, but were more active as authors of concert music. Liška, it seems, did not miss this. By the end of the 1950s, he had acquired a reputation as a distinctive, fast-working composer who possessed both professionalism and a remarkable invention. The beginning of his artistic maturity is marked by his first feature-length collaboration with film-maker and animator Karel Zeman: *The Invention of Doom* (*Vynález zkázy*, 1958). For this Jules Verne adaptation, Liška combined acoustic instruments and early electronics: the orchestra’s dramatic narration is complemented by ‘walkie-talkies’ made by early oscillators and the industrial rhythms of motorised valves. Just like Verne, then, Liška anachronistically combined technologies from different time periods. That was his strong point: he belonged to the era of symphony orchestras, but he greatly enjoyed experimenting. He also suggested edits to the director, increasing the pacing of the entire film. It is of course extremely rare that a composer acts as a parallel dramaturg (editor?) for the film, but that was exactly the position Liška began assuming. He conceived of music as one of the dramaturgical methods film has at its disposal. For him, it was much more than an illustration or expression of atmosphere. *The Invention of Doom* became the most successful Czechoslovak export film altogether. To this day, it retains cult status in Japan. With features like the subtle drama *At the Terminus* (*Tam na konečné*, 1957) or *The White Dove* (*Holubice*, 1960), lyrical impressions from the life of a sculptor, he became the most in-demand Czech film composer. Throughout the 1960s, he stuck to an almost unbelievable rhythm: he scored eight feature films a year, and a number of shorts on top. This decade also saw the creation of his most fantastic works.

A Man from the Twentieth Century

“You have to understand there are things robots aren’t fit for,” says the astronaut in the first large-scale Czech sci-fi. Liška knew no one could say what space sounded like. That is why he wed his experiments in electronic music to the cosmos. He was one of the pioneers of electronic music not only in Czech film, but in Central Europe. The opening credits to *The Man from the First Century* (*Muž z prvního století*, 1961) list Zdeněk Liška under “electronic music”, but also Jaroslav Svoboda as the “author of the electronic instrument” – Svoboda prepared the composer’s technical setup. Liška’s search for sounds made use of oscillators and filters: he carefully selected



LP cover

the sounds he would use. Suddenly, sci-fi was an amply supported genre even in Czechoslovakia: during the cold war, both parties were openly competing in the space race.

For the satirical comedy *The Man from the First Century*, Liška created distinctive sounds (rather than music), but he had larger expanses and more complex means at his disposal when scoring the existential sci-fi *Ikarie XB-1* (1963; the remastered version was screened at the Cannes Festival in 2016). Several layers of pulsations and tones complete the scenes both inside the Ikarie space ship and in outer space. Liška evokes warning sirens; communication signals both strong and weak; the trembling of material; nervous responses to sudden impulses; and most of all, something uncertain and unknown.

There is even a dance party scene in the futuristic spaceship: the astronauts do not make contact while moving; the important thing is the repeated flowing rhythmic figure. The harmony is more impressionist, but generally, Liška quite precisely captured rhythm as the timeless axis of dance. He never used electronic sounds for melodies: they were used exclusively for their own world of rhythm, drones, and abstraction. *Ikarie XB-1* is an adaptation of a novel by the Polish writer Stanisław Lem, which is why the music – arranged into a suite – was first published by the Polish public broadcaster's label Bolt Records, as part of their *Polak melduje z kosmosu* compilation (2016). Another significant chapter is Zdeněk Liška's involvement with Jan Švankmajer. Švankmajer, born in 1934, studied puppetry, and his aesthetic was formed by the very influential Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, to which he remains loyal to this day. His films always critique a passive approach

to life, throwing doubt on the ordinary, celebrating imagination, proposing a latent revolution, and declaring "animation as a magical act". Together, they made ten short films that belong with the classics of non-conformist art of the late 20th century: the Kafkaesque *The Flat* (*Byt*, 1968), in which animated objects grind down their owner; *Jaberwocky* (*Žvahlav aneb šatičky slaměného Huberta*, 1971), a tribute to Lewis Carroll; *Don Šajn* (1969), an homage to old puppet shows; or *Leonardo's Diary* (1972), a study in societal decay through the medium of archive footage. The music for *Leonardo's Diary* is one of only few exceptions: it was published in Czechoslovakia as the *Suite for Brass Quintet*. Jan Švankmajer gives us valuable insights into Liška's life. "Mr. Liška had an editing table at home – that was exceptional. He took the film home and then examined and measured it at his table for so long he discovered rhythms I didn't even know about. The fact that he made rhythm such a central component of his music was very convenient for me. I think he knew how to capture a rhythm other than the obvious one: he discovered in the material the rhythm of its soul."

The depiction of the beginnings of the Holocaust *The Shop on Main Street* (*Obchod na korze*, 1965) was the first Czechoslovak film to receive an Academy Award. Not even this brought the Czechoslovak labels to publish Liška's music – Jewish and Slovak motifs in an original transformation. An LP was made in the United States – in Czechoslovakia, it was only a vinyl single (today a coveted collectors' item).

Screenwriter and director František Vlácil was one of the most important figures of Czechoslovak cinematography. Liška worked with Vlácil for almost twenty years: they made nine features

together. In *The Valley of the Bees* (*Údolí včel*, 1968) and the famous *Markéta Lazarová* (1967), they made great creative use of the tension between pagan music, the first notes of Christianity and the sounds of the real world. Apart from a few stage projects, Liška wrote no music other than film music: all the more, then, he let cinematography inspire him to create the best music he could. His film scores included his response to modernist composers: we can hear this in the music to the pagan love scene in *Markéta Lazarová*.

Interest from Abroad

This film, like a number of others, was published on DVD in Great Britain by Second Run, reminding the cultural world about the somewhat hidden heights of the Eastern European sixties. The English musician, producer, and Czechoslovak-new-wave-cinema enthusiast Andy Votel is instrumental in these developments. With Finders Keepers Records, he began publishing extraordinary old soundtracks: not a single one of them were re-editions, they were all published for the first time. He faced several obstacles: overcoming copyright hell and finding a quality source, as the original magnetic tapes were predominantly lost.

That was also the case of Zdeněk Liška's films: only the music for *The Cremator* (*Spalovač mrtvol*, 1968) and the imaginative fairy-tale *Malá mořská víla* (*The Little Mermaid*, 1976) was published in Czechoslovakia. Both of these films have a very attractive sound-world. For the most brutal scenes in *The Cremator*, a horror with comedic elements, Liška intentionally composed music of illusive beauty; a waltz whirling as if one were entering a grand ball. The music for *The Little Mermaid*, on the other hand, takes its cues from the underwater world: acoustic effects, electronics, echoes. The discs published by Finders Keepers in 2011 and 2013 inaugurated a new wave of international interest in Liška. But this wasn't the first time someone abroad had discovered Liška. Identical twins Stephen and Timothy Quay have been fixtures on the world art and cinema scene since the 1980s. They discovered Zdeněk Liška and Jan Švankmajer's oeuvre while preparing a film about Czech surrealism in Prague. There is something romantic about their discoveries of film music: "We always went to the cinema with a tape recorder," they say. They are among Liška's most fervent admirers: their private archives include the soundtracks to a number



Movie stills:
Ikarie XB-1 (1963)
Markéta Lazarová (1967)
The Invention of Doom (1958)
The Cremator (1969)



of films. They legally recycled Liška's music and used it in films such as *The Cabinet of Jan Svankmajer* (1984) or *The Phantom Museum* (2003). With the Quay brothers, Liška entered the context of international contemporary art; new generations and societies of audiences. At their group exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2012, for example.

Music from Inside Films

The new portraiture of Zdeněk Liška in the Czech Republic has gone as far as the documentary film *Music: Zdeněk Liška* (2017), directed by the author of this text. It brings samples from dozens of feature films and valuable personal testimonies from a number of artists: Jan Švankmajer, Juraj Herz, the Quay brothers - but also Jára Tarnovski, for example, a contemporary electronic musician who remixes Liška's music into mixtapes for internet radio stations.

If I may be allowed to append a personal remark, the making of the film included several highlights. One of these were my conversations with Jan Švankmajer and Juraj Herz, the latter of whom -

author of the legendary new wave jewel *The Cremator* - died in 2018. The documentary is thus the last record of the famous director before his death. They both remember Zdeněk Liška as a masterful artist, who in a friendly and helpful manner listened to the director's conception, only to then bring an entirely unique and different result - a film score as his own analysis of the work.

The second highlight was mastering the sound track for *Volání rodu*, an adventure film made in 1977: Liška took this prehistoric tale and wed to it electronic sounds including bass pulsations and drones. And then there was the collaboration between myself and the main co-author of the film, Jan Daňhel - editor and member of the Czech surrealist group. It is thanks to him that this tribute to Zdeněk Liška, at times displaying an inclination towards experimental methods, could see the light of day.

Liška expected his music to sound from inside films: thanks to its unique characteristics, however, it has separated itself from the image, now often presented as an autonomous work.



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Compared to previous editions, the Prague Spring gave a lot of space to contemporary music. The work of contemporary composers both Czech and international was presented both at purely “new music” concerts by specialised ensembles (*For Large Ensemble, Part D* by Luboš Mrkvička performed by Klangforum Wien or Ondřej Adámek’s gripping *Karakuri* performed by Prague Modern), as well as on the grand stages in the company of canonical works from centuries past (e.g. Michal Nežtek’s *Ultramarine* at the Warsaw Philharmonic concert).

New music fans certainly came into their own, though other listeners – as is often the case – seemed to have arrived expecting a different concert, and so exited prematurely. It will certainly be interesting to observe how the festival will continue down this path of “modernising” the repertoire. As concerns new compositions premiered on other occasions, I personally was deeply struck by Miroslav Pudlák’s concerto for Luigi Russolo’s century-old *intonarumori* and by *Narcissus* for cello and orchestra by Jan Ryant Dřizal.

As for contemporary opera, Ivan Acher’s *Sternenhoch* garnered generally positive reactions. It is a setting of the expressionist-grotesque romanetto *The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch (Utrpení knížete Sternenhocha)* by the solitary Czech philosopher Ladislav Klíma, who worked mostly in the first half of the 20th century (see our interview with composer Ivan Acher on pages 2–7). Another successful production was *Alles klappt* by Ondřej Adámek, premiered at the Munich Biennale (see the text by Susanne Kass on pages 17–21).

24 March 2018, Theater Hagen, Hagen, Germany. **Leoš Janáček: *The Cunning Little Vixen* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Mascha Pörzgen, music director: Joseph Trafton. Following performances: 29 Mar, 8, 13, 18 and 27 Apr, 12, 16 and 26 May, 24 Jun 2018.

28 and 29 March 2018, St Anna’s Church, České Budějovice. **Lukáš Sommer: *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* (world premiere)**. Vilém Veverka – oboe, South Czech philharmonic, conductor: Jan Talich.

31 March 2018, Landestheater Linz, Linz, Austria. **Hans Krása: *Brundibár* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Hermann Schneider, music director: Martin Braun. Following performances: 2, 8, 12, 15, 17, 19, 24 and 29 Apr, 3, 7, 18, 27 and 28 May 2018.

1 April 2018, Oper Frankfurt, Frankfurt. **Leoš Janáček: *From the House of the Dead* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: David Hermann, music director: Tito Ceccherini. Following performances: 6, 8, 12, 15, 21, 27 and 29 Apr 2018.

7 April 2018, New Stage of the National Theatre in Prague, Prague. **Ivan Acher: *Sternenhoch* (world premiere)**. Directed by: Michal Dočekal, music director: Petr Kofroň. Following performances: 12 Apr, 13 May and 24 Jun 2018.

9 April 2018, Studio Hrdinů, Prague. **Miroslav Pudlák: *Intonarumori Concerto for Howler, Scraper, Crackler and Orchestra* (world premiere)**. Opening Performance Orchestra, BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.

16 April 2018, Salle Cortot, Paris. **Kryštof Mařatka: *Báchorky – fables pastorales* (world premiere)**. Michel Lethiec – clarinet, Karine Lethiec – viola, Kryštof Mařatka – piano and folk instruments.

19 April 2018, State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre in Ekaterinburg, Russia. **Bohuslav Martinů: *The Greek Passion* (Russian premiere)**. Directed by: Thaddeus Strassberger, music director: Oliver von Dohnányi. Following performances: 20, 21 and 22 Apr 2018.

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25 April 2018, Smetana Hall, Municipal House, Prague. Violin Gala. Special concert for the 60th anniversary of the Kocian Violin Competition. **Lukáš Sommer: *Gala Violin* (world premiere)**. Pavel Šporcl, Stefan Milenkovič, Josef Špaček, Bohuslav Matoušek, Pavel Hůla, Pavel Eret, Leoš Čepický, Petr Matěják – violin, Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK, conductor: Jessica Cottis.

25 April 2018, St Anna's Church, České Budějovice. **Roman Pallas: *Spring Hymn*, Petr Hanzlík: *Anima mea* (world premieres)**. Karolína Berková – mezzosoprano (2), South Czech Philharmonic, conductor: Jan Talich.

28 April 2018, Music Department, University of California, Santa Cruz, USA. **Michal Rataj: *Long Sentence I* (US premiere)**. Del Sol String Quartet, Ben Carson – piano.

28 April 2018, Bohemian National Hall, New York, USA. Czech American Inspiration. **Petr Kotík: *Master-Pieces* (American premiere of the final version)**. Directed by: Jiří Nekvasil, David Bazika, music director: Petr Kotík. S.E.M. Ensemble.

29 April 2018, Landestheater Coburg, Coburg, Germany (following the cancelled performances on April 22 and 25). **Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Tobias Heyder, music director: Roland Kluttig. Following performances: 4, 15, 18, 24, 26 and 31 May, 10 and 27 Jun 2018.

1 May 2018, Martinů Hall, Lichtenstein Palace, Prague. **Slavomír Hořinka: *Pocket Guide to Bird Flight* (world premiere)**. BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.

4 – 7 May 2018, Royal Pump Rooms, The Parade, Leamington Spa, UK. Leamington Music Festival Weekend. **Seven concerts of music by Antonín Rejcha, Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák, Leoš Janáček, Josef Suk, Bohuslav Martinů, Ervín Schulhoff, Klement Slavický and Luboš Fišer**. Ensemble 360, Pražák String Quartet, Guarneri Trio, Ivan Klánský, Jana Vonášková-Nováková, Martin Kasík, Nicholas Wearne.

5, 6 and 7 May 2018, Weill Hall, Green Music Center, Rohnert Park, California. **Michal Rataj: *Temporis for cimbalom and large orchestra* (US premiere)**. Jan Mikušek – cimbalom, Santa Rosa Symphony, conductor: Bruno Ferrandis.

7 May 2018, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. **Jan Ryant Dřízal: *Narcissus for cello and orchestra* (world premiere)**. Tomáš Jamník – cello, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Marek Šedivý.

18 May 2018, Smetana Hall, Municipal House, Prague. Prague Spring. **Michal Nejtěk: *Ultramarine* (world premiere)**. Warsaw Philharmonic, conductor: Jacek Kaspszyk.

19 May 2018, Smetana Hall, Municipal House, Prague. Prague Spring. **Marko Ivanović: *Little Words* (world premiere of the orchestral version)**. Katarina Kornéus – mezzosoprano, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Marko Ivanović.

19 May 2018, Stadttheater, Konzert Theater Bern, Bern, Switzerland. **Leoš Janáček: *Katja Kabanova* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Florentine Klepper, music director: Kevin John Edusei. Following performances: 23 and 27 May, 1, 9, 14, 16, 19 and 27 Jun 2018.

20 May 2018, ČNB Hall, Prague. Prague Spring. **Michal Müller: *Passacaglia 1918* (world premiere)**. Czech Nonet.

20 May 2018, Spanish synagogue, Prague. Prague Spring. **Jiří Gemrot: *A Lament for Military Secretaries* (world premiere)**. Martinů Voices, choirmaster– Lukáš Vasilek.

21 May 2018, Studio Hrdinů, Fair Trade Palace, Prague. Prague Spring. **Luboš Mrkvička: *For Large Ensemble, Part D* (world premiere)**. Klangforum Wien, conductor: Bas Wiegers.

21 May 2018, Beijing Concert Hall, Beijing, China. Beijing Modern Music Festival. **Jiří Kadeřábek: *Remote Heart II for traditional Chinese instruments' orchestra* (world premiere)**. Suzhou Chinese Orchestra, conductor: Pang Kapang.

21 May 2018, Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich. **Leoš Janáček: *From the House of the Dead* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Frank Castorf, music director: Simone Young. Following performances: 26 and 30 May, 3, 5 and 8 Jun 2018.

26 May 2018, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. Prague Spring. **Lukáš Sommer: *Harp Concerto* (Czech premiere)**. Jana Boušková – harp, PKF – Prague Philharmonia, conductor: Zbyněk Müller.

27 May 2018, Großes Haus, Altenburg, Germany. **Bedřich Smetana: *The Bartered Bride* (premiere of a new production)**. Theater und Philharmonie Thüringen. Directed by: Kay Kuntze, music director: Takahiro Nagasaki. Following performances: 31 May and 17 June 2018.

28 May 2018, National Technical Museum, Prague. Prague Spring. **Jan Kučera: *Sundial* (world premiere)**. Epoque Quartet.

31 May 2018, Studio Hrdinů, Fair Trade Palace, Prague. Prague Spring. **Ondřej Adámek: *Karakuri* (Czech premiere)**. Shigeko Hata – soprano, Prague Modern, conductor: Baldur Brönnimann.

4 June 2018, Továrna, Prague. **Petr Bakla: *Statements?* (Czech premiere)**. Bronislava Smržová Tomanová – soprano, BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.

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Miroslav Pudlák: *Intonarumori Concerto for Howler, Srapec, Crackler and Orchestra*

5 June 2018, Knights Hall, Chateau, Moravský Krumlov. Concentus Moraviae. **Iva Bittová: *My Midnight Pillow for voice/violin, strings and three wind instruments (world premiere)***. Iva Bittová, Ensemble Opera Diversa, cond. Gabriela Tardonová. Following performances: 20 Jun 2018, Reduta, Brno.

6 June 2018, Library, Chateau, Náměšť nad Oslavou. Concentus Moraviae. **Miloš Štědroň: *Affetti Banalissimi for oboe, clarinet and bassoon (world premiere)***. Trio Aperto (Barbora Šteflová – oboe, Jan Charfreitag – clarinet, Pavel Horák – bassoon).

6 June 2018, Residenz Theater, Munich, Germany. Munich Biennale. **Ondřej Adámek: *Alles klappt (world premiere)***. Direction and libretto: Katharina Schmitt, music director: Ondřej Adámek Following performances: 7, 8, 9 and 10 Jun 2018.

15 June 2018, Castle Courtyard, Litomyšl. Smetana's Litomyšl. **Jan Kučera, Jan Ryant Dřízal, Jiří Gemrot, Sylvie Bodorová: *A Bohemian Pilgrim, Cantata for narrator, baritone, children's choir, mixed choir and orchestra to a libretto by Vojtěch Střítecký and poems by František Hrubín, Jiří Orten, Josef Václav Sládek, Josef Kainar, Karel Hlaváček, Josef Hora and Jaroslav Seifert (world premiere on the centenary of the declaration of the republic)***. Jan Šťastný – narrator, Adam Plachetka – baritone, JITRO Czech Children's Choir (choirmaster Jiří Skopal), Prague Philharmonic Choir (choirmaster Lukáš Vasilek), Czech Philharmonic, conductor: Tomáš Netopil.

18 June 2018, Archa Theatre, Prague. **Jan Ryant Dřízal: *Shadows of the Forgotten Ancestors (world premiere)***. Hidejiro Honjō – shamisen, Akihito Obama – shakuhachi.

19 June 2018, NoD, Prague. **Petr Wajsar: *Ping-pong for Two Soloists and a Referee (world premiere)***. Jindřich Pavliš, Vojtěch Nýdl – clarinet, Ivan Hoznedr – percussion.

19 June 2018, Assembly Hall, Chateau, Kroměříž. Forfest. **Vojtěch Dlask: *Querelle for oboe, violoncello and piano, Lenka Nota: *Trio for oboe, violoncello and piano (world premieres)****. Trio Opera (Barbora Šteflová – oboe, Štěpán Filípek – violoncello, Ondrej Olos – piano).

20 June 2018, Assembly Hall, Chateau, Kroměříž. Forfest. **Pavel Mario Slezák: "Mercedes" from *The Songs of Autumn (world premiere)***. Nao Higano – soprano, Mária Vaitová – piano.

21 June 2018, Picture Gallery, Chateau, Kroměříž. Forfest. **Pavel Kopecký: *Ritorni for wind trio and electroacoustics, Vojtěch Dlask: *Krapp trio for wind trio and electronics (world premieres)****. Trio Aperto (Barbora Šteflová – oboe, Jan Charfreitag – clarinet, Pavel Horák – bassoon).

21 June, Villa Tugendhat, Brno. **Daniel Forró: *100 Shapes of the Czech National Anthem (world premiere)***. Brno Contemporary Orchestra, conductor: Pavel Šnajdr.

The First Century OF THE REFORMATION IN THE CZECH LANDS

The year 2017 was full of important anniversaries, and with two of these – both crucial for the history of music – it was precisely 500 years. The first date is tied to the death of one of the most important and inventive composers of the high renaissance, Heinrich Isaac (around 1480, † 25th of March, 1517). The second had a much greater impact on European culture over the course of the next five centuries. The 31st of October 1517 is the day on which – according to tradition – the Augustinian priest and doctor of theology Martin Luther presented his 95 Theses at the university in Wittenberg. This critique of the injustices taking place within the Roman Catholic Church were the impulse for a renewal of the church generally referred to as the Lutheran or Protestant Reformation. This strong impulse made its mark not only on questions theological, pastoral, and societal, but also in art – including music.*

The Reformer Martin Luther and Music

Luther was born on the 10th of November 1483 in Eisleben as one of four children in a poor miner's family. Later, however, his father became a man of business, allowing his son to study at the university in Erfurt, where Luther studied between 1501 and 1505, becoming first a bachelor and then a master of the liberal arts. Then, following his father's wishes, he began studying law, but soon after he entered the Augustinian Order, within which he was ordained a priest in 1507. The following year, he left for the recently established university in Wittenberg, where he became a student of theology. At the turn of the years 1510 and 1511, he travelled to Rome with a mission by order. The journey to the Holy City allowed him to see the hedonistic court of the renaissance popes, leaving a deep impression on the young Luther. In 1512, he became a doctor of theol-

ogy, also receiving a professorship in biblical studies; a year later, he began working as a preacher.

As soon as he had entered seminary, he considered intensely the question of salvation. Through careful study of Scripture, he reached the conclusion that any deeds – though they necessarily belong with the life of a Christian – cannot establish a real claim to salvation, as this can only be given by God's grace. Within the confines of the university, he also often encountered medieval scholasticism, with which he engaged through the use of Scripture. Soon, he became one of the leading professors of theology at Wittenberg University.

What ignited a major conflict was ultimately not scholasticism, but the increasing frequency with which indulgences were sold: with these, one could buy forgiveness for one's sins directly from the church. In 1515, Pope Leo X announced their sale with the aim of raising enough resources to build the church of Sts.



Peter and Paul in the Vatican. In some of the German lands, their sale was administered by archbishop Albert of Brandenburg, who planned to use part of the proceeds to pay back his loan with the Fugger banking family. He had used this loan to bypass church regulations and attain the office of Archbishop of Mainz.

Luther had no inkling of these goings on, but he took a stance against indulgences as a theologian after some of his parishioners purchased them. In a letter to the archbishop himself from the 31st of October 1517, he claimed that these indulgences are of no consequence, as only lifelong repentance can lead to forgiveness. He appended to this letter a list of 95 theses, which have since become an iconic work. While Luther gained a number of followers within the Augustinian Order, the Roman Curia considered his critique an attack on the essence of the papal office. In 1519, Luther became acquainted with the work of Master Jan Hus¹, and espoused his teachings. After several attempts by the church to stifle these new teachings, 1521 saw a second hearing with emperor Charles V, during which Luther claimed to be a prisoner of God's word, unable to take back his teachings without confirmation from Scripture. Pope Leo X – more a warrior than a cleric – then excommunicated him from the church and issued an interdict for his followers. This authoritarian approach, however, was doomed to failure. Luther's opinions resonated across a wide section of society and gained powerful followers. In the face of this dangerous situation, his protector, Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, had him secretly kidnapped and taken to safety at Wartburg Castle, where Luther produced



Martin Luther the reformer with his German translation of the New Testament

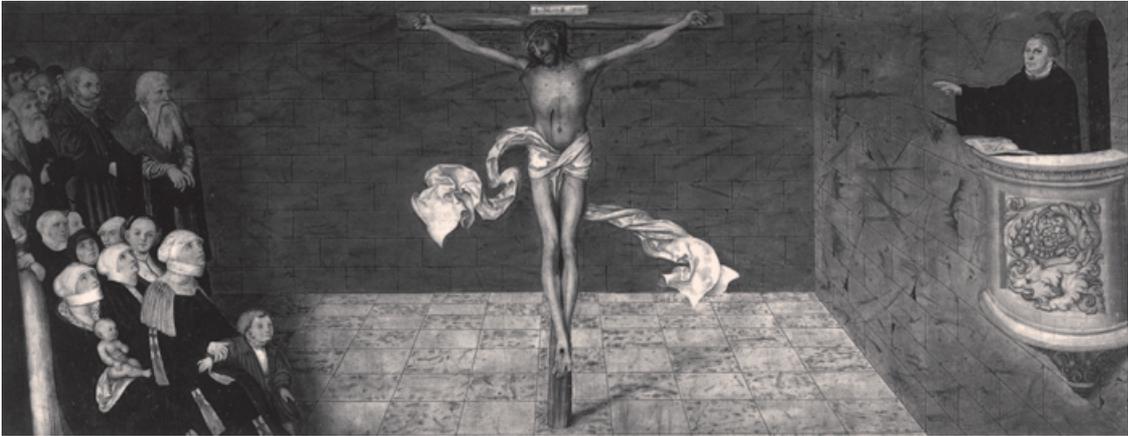
his legendary translation of the New Testament into German.

Excommunication, i.e. expulsion from the church, meant an end to dialogue from the papal side, opening the path towards reformation outside the Roman Catholic Church. The Imperial Assembly (or *Reichstag*) of the Holy Roman Empire in Augsburg proved to be a turning point: on the 25th of June 1530, the evangelicals presented a summation of the essential church teachings, called the Augsburg Confession. This had been prepared by another Wittenberg theologian, Philipp Melancthon (* 16th of February 1497, † 19th of April 1560).

The Liturgy and Music

The evangelical church, with its foundation in the Augsburg Confession, is often referred to as the singing church. The reform of the Wittenberg theologians had a considerable impact on music. Luther was an important supporter of sacred music, which he derived from Old Testament Psalms. The groundwork of the liturgy fully respected the established form of the traditional mass before the Council of Trent. In the main liturgy, Latin remained the language of the service. In keeping with requests for comprehensibility from lay believers, however, some parts were translated into the national language. Luther could fall back on a number of biblical examples and instigations to teach Scripture, and also in the apparition of the Holy Ghost as it is recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, after which God's followers began speaking many languages so the people could understand.

1) Hus was a theologian and preacher who – inspired by John Wycliffe – led the Hussite or Bohemian Reformation in the Czech lands in the early 15th century.



Luther preaching at the castle church in Wittenberg

The change, which took the early Christian church as its example, was related – among other issues – to one’s religious confession. While in the Latin Mass Ordinary, the Credo took the form of a difficult polyphonic piece, which – given the extensive text – was the longest part of the Mass, the evangelical context also introduced another version (in addition to the Latin form), in which the entire congregation took part. As a sacred song, we also find this variant of the Credo in the 15th century with the Czech Utraquists,² who also struggled with similar liturgical questions during the Bohemian Reformation.

In 1527, Luther collaborated with composer Johann Walter on a new ordinary, titled *Deutsche Messe*. As the title suggests, the entire mass was in German, and this simpler form was originally intended for smaller village churches, where professional musical standards could not be maintained as they could be in cities or at aristocratic courts. Thanks to its complete comprehensibility to utter laymen, the mass became very popular, and it is used in the German evangelical church to this day. Both forms were equal, and in Leipzig, for example, where Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the cantors, the original Latin liturgy was served for the university community.

A crucial change brought about by the Lutheran Reformation was an emphasis on the comprehensibility of the text. Given the fact that the text usually came from Scripture, whether it was a paraphrase or an interpretation, it was considered obvious within the context of these attempts at a comprehensible liturgy that the text is paramount and its structure

cannot be lost even in the dense matter of polyphonic voices.

This tenet was universal, regardless of whether it concerned a Latin motet, an arrangement of a German song, the Easter passions, or – later – a spiritual cantata. This feature became typical of protestant music, and we can trace it in the work of all important composers from the aforementioned Johann Walter, through Heinrich Schütz, Dietrich Buxtehude, Johann Sebastian Bach or Georg Philipp Telemann, all the way to Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and later composers.

Luther was also responsible for establishing the tradition of vespers, also aptly called sacred concerts. This was an evening service that included a gospel and sermon, generally held on Saturdays as a preparation for Sunday Mass. In addition to biblical exegesis, music was centre stage. Compositions were selected depending on the periods of the liturgical year and also respected the liturgical structure of worship. The music itself was played on the choir loft. The listeners were therefore not distracted by observing the performers, and could use the music in a sacred space to enter into divine contemplation.

As this was still a religious service, however, it had to include a sacred song for the congregation to sing. This evening vespers tradition continues in a number of evangelical churches to this day. One of the most renowned is in the Church of St. Thomas in Leipzig, which often features the Thomanerchor, with which Bach performed many of his Sunday cantatas.

Singet dem Herren ein neues Lied

The coming together of the liturgical tradition of the Lutherans, alive to this day, and the very organic inclusion of the musical arts as an ideal for both a personal and collective expression of faith gave rise to an incredible environment for the creation of musical

² The Utraquist church was the largest of the churches in Bohemia after the Hussite wars. Its name is derived from the Latin sub utraque specie, meaning ‘in both kinds’: the Hussites maintained communion under both kinds (both bread and wine), as opposed to the development in the Roman Catholic church, which reserved the blood of Christ for the clerics alone.



The city of Wittenberg in 1536

works. Furthermore, thanks to the aforementioned liturgical continuity, these can still serve – and often do serve – their ecclesiastical function, and are not restricted to concert performances.

During the first century of the Reformation, the *missa brevis* was one of the most popular forms: the so-called short mass, containing only a Kyrie and Gloria. On certain special occasions or vespers, the polyphonic Credo could also be added, but it was rarely used in common services.

Other parts of the mass were replaced by songs and motets in Latin or the national languages. These generally concerned pericopes of the liturgical year. Renaissance motets, which thanks to the development of print began to be published in collections or anthologies at the beginning of the 16th century, remained an active component of the musical life in evangelical churches until the beginning of the 18th century.

Song, however, was really the iconic form of the Reformation. The song tradition continued on from medieval Latin *cantio*, and in many cases, these were traditional melodies whose texts had been translated from Latin. A number of new songs were also composed. These were then collected in hymnals, which became a reformation phenomenon and ultimately influenced musical culture in some regions under Roman Catholic jurisdiction. An excellent example are the Czech lands, which were mostly non-Catholic. Before the Thirty Years War, this was a very religiously tolerant part of Europe with an immensely rich hymnologic tradition, documented by dozens of printed and manuscript hymnals of Utraquist, Brethren,³ and Lutheran origin. The popularity of this genre was accepted by the Roman church in the period of recatholisation that followed the Thirty Years War, as it was clear to the Catholic clerics that it would be better to use it as a missionary and pastoral element rather than try to eradicate it.

Martin Luther himself took part in the creation of these songs: not just as an editor, but also as author. The most famous is doubtless *Ein feste Burg is unser Gott*, a setting of Psalm 46 which became the notional anthem of the Lutheran churches. Especially at the outset, he collaborated closely with Johann Walter, who not only composed some of the melodies, but most importantly arranged the entire hymnal in three- to five-voice polyphony, creating a unique monument to both the music of the early reformation, and to his own compositional skill. The *Geystliche Lieder* are usually considered Luther's final edition: printed by Valentin Babst in Leipzig in 1545, this songbook is often referred to as *Das Babstsche Gesangbuch*.

Luther also devoted a number of texts to the musical arts, including a prologue “to all good songbooks”. In the conclusion, we read the following lines:

*Voran die liebe Nachtigall
Macht alles fröhlich überall
Mit ihrem lieblichen Gesang,
Des muß sie haben immer Dank,
Viel mehr der liebe HERRE Gott,
Der sie also geschaffen hat,
Zu sein die rechte Sängerin,
Der Musiken ein Meisterin.
Dem singt und springt sie Tag und Nacht,
Seines Lobs sie nichts müde macht,
Den ehrt und lobt auch mein Gesang
Und sagt ihm ein ewigen Dank.*

*And most the tender nightingale
Makes joyful every wood and dale,
Singing her love-song o'er and o'er,
For which we thank her evermore.
But yet more thanks are due from us
To the dear Lord who made her thus,
A singer apt to touch the heart,
Mistress of all my dearest art.
To God she sings by night and day,
Unwearied, praising Him away;
Him I, too, laud in every song,
To whom all thanks and praise belong.*

³ The Unity of the Brethren, also known as the Czech or Bohemian Brethren, is another church whose foundations lie in the Hussite movement, with an emphasis on the non-violent teachings of Petr Chelčický.



Luther's Ein feste Burg

Regnum sub utraque species

The reformist teachings of the evangelical theologians at Wittenberg were not restricted to the German states of the Holy Roman Empire. They also reached other areas, particularly the Scandinavian and Baltic countries. They also contributed to the secularisation of Prussia and the demise of the age-old dominions of German and Livonian knights. The Czech lands were not spared, of course, as they directly neighboured Saxony, the “melting pot” of attempts at reforms of the church. The relationship and contact between the new reformist movement and the Czech ecclesiastical setting was truly unique, as the Bohemian Reformation had already taken place in the 15th century.

At the time, the Czech lands were the most religiously liberal in Europe. The Hussite Reformation was represented by the Utraquist Church, sometimes also referred to as the Calixtinistic church. Additionally, there were other smaller churches, most notably the Unity of the Brethren, and various sectarian societies. These, however, operated on the fringes of the law, their existence and subsistence often depending on the support of aristocrats or municipalities.

The Utraquist reformation was territorially confined to Bohemia and Moravia, but its position was entrenched in important and indisputable documents:

the first of these were the Compacts of Basel, ratified in 1436, and the so-called Religious Peace of Kutná Hora, signed in 1485, with which Vladislaus II Jagiellon confirmed religious freedom in the land of the “dual populace”.

For the representatives of Czech Utraquism, Martin Luther’s proclamation was first and foremost an opportunity to break free from international isolation and establish a number of new contacts. Given the similarities between the Utraquist and Lutheran position, the Wittenberg Reformation was most actively received by the German-speaking population of the Czech lands. While Bohemia and Moravia were religiously mixed, where the Czechs were closer to Utraquism or the Unity of the Brethren, which gradually gathered followers, and the Germans generally kept to their Roman Catholic faith, both Lusatia and Silesia had previously been exclusively Catholic, and it was these regions that most took to the ideas of the Reformation. The new teachings, however, also served as inspiration for Utraquist and Brethren theologians, even though the Brethren finally moved closer to the more radical Calvinism.

In Bohemia, Lutheranism mostly spread to the west and the north, i.e. the regions neighbouring Lusatia and Saxony. The most suitable conditions were to be found in the Loket and Cheb regions. They both had sizeable German populations that were culturally allied to their

Saxon neighbours, and furthermore, both regions had considerable autonomy within the kingdom. The rich mining town of Jáchymov became the centre of the action, developing dynamically and attracting not only businessmen, but also scholars.

By the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, Lutherans had become a stable part of Czech society, and we find amongst their ranks leading noblemen such as Zdeněk Brtnický z Valdštejna, Jáchym Ondřej Schlick, or Jindřich Matyáš Thurn. In 1611, the foundations were laid for a new church of Holy Saviour (St. Salvator) in the Old Town of Prague, on land bought for the local Lutheran community by Schlick. Personages of local importance were present at the event, as were the couriers of the Elector of Saxony. The construction of the church was a demonstration of the dynamic development of the evangelical church. Not long after that, this development was cut short by the recatholisation which followed the Battle of White Mountain. Amongst these memories of the Czech Lutherans of the 16th and 17th centuries, we find a number of musical works whose composers are often unjustly overlooked.

Isaac's Pupil Balthasar Resinarius

One of the leading figures in the Czech lands at the beginning of the Reformation was Balthasar Harzer, also called Resinarius (* around 1485 in Děčín, † 1544 in Česká Lípa). He was educated as a vocalist in the court ensemble of Maximilian I, led at the time by the renowned composer Heinrich Isaac. He began studying theology at the university in Leipzig in 1515, as attested by a record of *Baldassar Harzer* in the university register. After finishing his studies in 1523, he returned to Děčín, where he was active as a Catholic priest.

There, he crossed swords with some Lutheran preachers from Saxony and even turned directly to king Ferdinand I for support. He eventually converted under the influence of the new protestant teaching, and from 1534 until his death, he was an evangelical preacher in Česká Lípa. At this time, he was also already using the Latinized form of his surname.

Today, we only know Resinarius' sacred music. The time of its composition is unknown – the prints thanks to which we still have access to them were only published during the last two years of the composer's life by the important Wittenberg printer Georg Rhau. The two volumes included Resinarius' complete collection of eighty Responsorias and the St. John Passion. Rhau published these as a collection of works by one author, rather than the usual anthologies of different composers, which demonstrates that both



The Wittenberg printer Georg Rhau, publisher of the works of Balthasar Resinarius

the works and their author were held in high regard. In addition to the Latin motets, Resinarius also wrote songs, of which the best-known today come from the *Neue deudsche geistliche Gesenge* (1544) and *Sacrorum hymnorum* (1542) collections.

The compositions were intended for liturgical purposes of the Lutheran church, representing a concept well known from the Wittenberg theologians. Attention is focused on the text, which bears most of the meaning. Resinarius' compositional style was relatively conservative – doubtless under the influence of Heinrich Isaac, his music continued in the work of the fourth generation of Franco-Flemish composers. Most of his pieces make use of a cantus firmus – a fixed melody, often derived from Gregorian chant and generally appearing in the tenor voices, which formed the basis for the construction of the piece. They also display a clear effort to express the words as clearly as possible. That seems to have been part of the reason for how popular his music was at the time. In *Economion musicae* (1551), Johann Holtheuser from Wittenberg calls him one of the greatest masters of the present. The number of copies made from Rhau's prints also attests to the music's popularity.

Kliment Ursin Bosák

Kliment Ursin Bosák is known to us mostly as a composer of remarkable sacred songs. His life story, however, is relatively unknown. We know he was a Franciscan monk in the first half of the 16th century.

He was a preacher in Jindřichův Hradec. At the time, the Reformation resonated in a number of monastic communities. Bosák was also open to these new ideas, and he finally left the order. His Lutheran conviction is betrayed by the lyrics to his songs, of which at least fifteen have been preserved. If Kliment were his secular name, then he might also be Benedikt of Pilsen, which would make the latter his monastic name. Benedikt was also a Franciscan, a preacher in Jindřichův Hradec and an adherent of Lutheranism – in 1524, the Franciscans from Bechyně attempted to incarcerate him in the monastery's prison, albeit unsuccessfully.

Bosák's further activities are once again unclear. Following one hypothesis, he could be Kliment the Brethren preacher († 1561), who was ordained in Prostějov in 1537, later served in Jaroměřice and died in Přerov. The connection to Kliment Bosák is a mention by Jan Blahoslav, who lists the Brethren Kliment as a composer of sacred songs.

The so-called Habrovany Hymnal or *Christian Songs to the Grace and Praise of God (Písničky křesťanské ku cti a chvále Boží, 1530)* is an interesting source in this respect: for eleven songs, it lists as their author “Kliment, sometimes preacher in Hradec”. The potential link to the religious community in Habrovany, however, is also a subject for future research, hopefully yielding more information about the life of one of the first authors of Czech Lutheran songs that made their way into both the evangelical and Catholic repertoires. An interesting fact: the important Jesuit censor Antonín Koniáš recommended that Bosák's songs be removed from Catholic songbooks. Despite his own recommendations, he printed three of them in his own hymnal.

The Cantor of Jáchymov: Nikolaus Herman

Herman († 15th of May 1561) is among those figures whose fate is tied to the history of Jáchymov in the Ore Mountains. He was probably born in 1500 in Altdorf near Nuremberg, Bavaria. From 1518 to 1557, he was the cantor and organist at St. Joachim's Church in Jáchymov, and he also taught at the local Latin school.

His close friend and collaborator was the important scholar and theologian Johannes Mathesius (1504–1565), a rector at this school from 1532 to 1540. From 1542 to 1565, he was preacher and pastor in the Jáchymov church. They were both fervent adherents of Luther's reformed teachings. They helped defend and disseminate these through their various activities, and they were also in friendly personal contact with Luther himself. Under Mathesius' and Herman's direction, the school attained a very high standard and became well known across the land and at the court in Prague.

The weight of Herman's oeuvre lies in spiritual songs, to which he applied himself as both composer and poet. He often used the same melody for several songs (a common practice at the time), writing new lyrics for the same tune. His texts are written in simple German with an irregular metre so as to be comprehensible to a wider community of worshippers. The-matically, they are very close to Luther's works. Some of these became a stable part of the evangelical repertoire. An important collection is Herman's *Die Sonntags Evangelia uber das gantze Jahr in Gesänge verfasset*. They were printed in 1560 by Georg Rhau in Wittenberg, and they were the inspiration for a similar repertoire that became the standard in the 17th century. In some of Herman's melodies, we find elements that are typical of folk music in the Ore Mountain region (located on the borders of Czech Republic and Germany today). This is particularly true of his *Bergreihen* – mining songs – and *Abendreihen*, evening songs sung in a circle.

From Rudolf II into the Uproar of the Thirty Years War

The turn of the 16th and 17th centuries was a prosperous time for evangelical confession in the Czech lands, now also among the Czech population. Some church communities became emancipated, breaking their ties – in some cases, purely formal – with the Utraquist consistory in Prague. Religious life in a confessionally pluralistic kingdom was certainly not without its conflicts and tensions, but it was generally peaceful, as attested by how commonplace mixed marriages among the local aristocracy were.

These conditions also allowed for the development of scholarship and culture. The fate of a number of remarkable figures is tied to the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Their works and activities made their mark on the history of evangelical music. After the defeat of the Bohemian Revolt – a failed attempt by the Czech aristocracy to stop the accession of King Ferdinand II, which started the Thirty Years War – and the ensuing anti-protestant campaign, many were forced to emigrate.

Hymnal prints provide some proof for the increasing need for spiritual music. The first Lutheran songbook in Czech was *Songs for the Praise of God (Písně chval božských)* by Tobiáš Závorka Lipenský (1553–1612), a Moravian preacher and writer. They were published in 1602 and 1606. They were followed by the *Hymnal (Kancionál)*, printed in 1620 by Daniel Karel (Carolides) of Karlsperk, active in Prague from 1612 to 1622. Apart from these publications, which served the everyday needs of the church, we cannot forget the work of professional composers and musicians. Some of the figures connected to our lands belong to this day among the most important in pre-Bach musical life.

The Silesian Evangelist at St. Henry

The fate of Johann Knöfel (* around 1530, † after 1617) provides an example of the lively contacts between Prague and the other lands of the Bohemian Crown, but we do not know much more about his life. He was married in 1569, and also became Capellmeister at the court of prince Henry XI of Legnica from the house of Piast family. It was to this aristocrat that Knöfel dedicated his collection *Dulcissimae cantiones*, printed in 1571. In the preface, he mentions his devotion to the Augsburg Confession, which took hold in Silesian Wrocław during the first years of the Reformation. His next collection, *Cantus choralis* (1575), was dedicated directly to the Wrocław municipal council. This work represents the chants of the proper mass for the needs of worship of the liturgical year.

The dedications to his ensuing works suggest that he was Capellmeister at the Heidelberg court of Prince Elector Ludwig VI from 1579. In this year, the composer dedicated a mass based on a motet *In me transierunt* by Orlande de Lassus to the Elector as well as the collection *Cantiones piaae* (1580). In 1583, however, the Prince Elector died, and his successor John II Kazimir Vasa enforced Calvinism. As a Lutheran, Knöfel lost his position, and after a brief stay in Silesia, he moved to Prague.

There is a mention of him in 1592 as organist and cantor at the Church of St Henry, which had a renowned choir at the time. The preface to a new collection *Novae melodiae* was written that same year and published by Jiří Nigrin. Knöfel mentions that he had been living in Prague for some time. His trace then disappears again, and appears only briefly in the administrative records of Klagenfurt on the 21st of April 1617, when the Carinthian authorities paid him 30 Florins for the dedication of unspecified compositions.

Knöfel's surviving works are in the traditional protestant style. His compositional language, however, was also influenced by the works of Orlande de Lassus. He mostly worked with Latin texts, which could be a sign of his humanist education, as Latin conversation was an everyday affair at the school in Goldberg. He worked with German only in the *Neue deutsche Liedlein* collection and a few hymns. Even though he was quite a conservative composer, he did not avoid experiments with certain modern techniques, such as *cori spezati* (several separate choirs placed in different locations around the church), *canzonetta* forms, or the use of chromatic movement. His work with Gregorian melodies and sacred songs achieved a high level of elegance, building up polyphony from these simple foundations.



*The Church of St. Henry in Prague,
workplace of Johann Knöfel*

Christoph Demantius, musicus freybergensis

Demantius was born on the 15th of December 1567 in Liberec (Reichenberg) in northern Bohemia, and probably got his education at the local Latin school. At the beginning of the 1590s, he might have been teaching at the school of St. Lawrence in Budyšin (Bautzen) in Lusatia, where his pedagogical music theory text *Forma musices* was published in 1592. Later, on the 17th of February 1593, he enrolled at the university in Wittenberg, but no more is known about his studies there.

Between 1594 and 1595 he moved to Leipzig, where his first musical collection was published in print: *Epithalamium honori nuptiarum*. In 1597, he obtained the position of cantor in Zittau (Žitava) in Lusatia, which he left after seven years to Freiberg in Saxony, which we know from a municipal record from the 27th of April 1604. His responsibilities included the music in the main municipal church and teaching at the Latin school. Demantius held this position until his death on the 20th of April 1643.

He bought a house in Freiberg in 1610, and received town privileges the following year, making him a full citizen, proof of Demantius' financial security in his new home. He had much less luck in family life. He was married four times and many of his children did not survive infancy. Compared to the extensive list of publications from the beginning of the 1620s, the last twenty years of Demantius' life was comparatively poor for printed works. This could have been caused by the intensity of his commitments at the church and



The Saxon city of Freiberg in 1597
Only a few years later, Christoph Demantius became cantor



Protestant priest and writer Jiří Třanovský

the school, or perhaps the difficult times of the Thirty Years War, which affected Saxony greatly.

Christoph Demantius' oeuvre is fairly balanced in respect to sacred and secular music. He continued in the direction set by previous protestant composers, as well as taking inspiration from Orlande de Lassus. His Lutheran motets on Latin and German texts are perhaps the most notable. In the cycle of mass proper and ordinary pieces *Corona harmonica* (1610), he elaborated the main excerpts of Sunday biblical pericopes. Demantius' sacred works display an extraordinary feeling for expressive linguistic onomatopoeia. In this he differed from his contemporaries, despite the value which their protestant musical tradition placed on the meaning of the text.

As far as secular music is concerned, Demantius composed mostly German songs. Another important aspect of his work are music theory writings. These represent the tradition position at the time, as outlined in Michael Praetorius' famous *Syntagma musicum*. Demantius' texts were very popular, as attested to by their repeated editions. *Isagoge artis musicae*, for example, was published eight times between 1607 and 1632.

Georgius Tranoscius

The evangelic preacher and writer Jiří Třanovský was certainly one of the key figures of the protestant reformation in the Czech lands. He came from Těšín, where he was born in the spring of 1592. His father Valentin worked in the brewery, but the family came from Třanovice, from which the surname is derived. Between 1607 and 1611, Jiří studied theology and philosophy at the university in Wittenberg.

After he returned from his studies, he decided to leave to Prague, as the prince Adam Václav of Těšín converted from the evangelical faith to Catholicism and expelled all the Lutheran preachers from the city. For some time, he was a teacher at the gymnasium of St. Nicholas, later a tutor at the Třeboň court of the important Czech nobleman Jan Jiří of Švamberk. In 1613, he acquired a teaching position in Holešov in Moravia, but in 1615, he left for Valašské Meziříčí, where he became parish priest the following year. He also married Anna, the daughter of an ex-notary and priest Jiří Polany of Polansdorf, who came from Banská Štiavnica (now in Slovakia).

Given the restless situation after the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, he took his family back to Těšín. His worries about his parish in Meziříčí, however, brought him back. He was active in secret, but he was captured and imprisoned for several months. When he was released, the plague had gripped the city, taking the lives of more than two thousand locals, including his children. In 1624, an imperial mandate expelled all evangelical clerics from the land. Třanovský took his wife and their son Samuel, only a few months old, back to his home town.

Baron Jan Sunegh of Jasienice offered a helping hand: also a protestant, he offered Třanovský the position of chaplain at his court in Bielsko. When the sorrows of the Thirty Years War spread to Silesia, the entire court relocated to Sunegh's castle in Budatín in Upper Hungary, now Slovakia. Here, Sunegh introduced Třanovský to the influential Hungarian magnate Gáspár Illésházy, who employed him as chaplain at Orava Castle. Jiří stayed with him until 1631, when he moved to Liptovský Mikuláš. Here, he was accepted among the clerics of the local evangelical seniorate, but this



A 1768 edition of Třanovský's *Cithara sanctorum*



The Orpheus of Zittau: Andreas Hammerschmidt

work was once again not to last long. Imprisonment and the repeated escapes had such a great impact on his health that he died prematurely on the 29th of May 1637.

He left behind a remarkable and very valuable theological oeuvre, for which he is sometimes referred to as the “Slavic Luther”. He published a translation of the Augsburg Confession (1620), three books of 150 settings of Latin odes, *Odorum sacrarum sive hymnorum* (1529), or a book of Czech prayers, *Phiala odoramentorum* (1635). Perhaps the most important, however, is the hymnal *Cithara sanctorum*, whose first edition from 1636 included the lyrics and melodies for 416 songs. There were many later editions, often including extensions: 140 up to the 20th century.

A number of Třanovský's songs remain justly popular components of the contemporary evangelical repertoire, including his anthem for all evangelical Lutheran churches, *Our Lord God is a Stable Castle* (*Hrad přepevný jest Pán Bůh náš – Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*). Třanovský's work in Czech also contributed considerably to sustaining a sense of national identity among Slovak evangelicals, some of whom later participated in the Czech national renaissance.

“The Orpheus of Zittau”

Andreas Hammerschmidt might belong among the composers of the Baroque period, but he entered our selection as he was born in pre-White-Mountain Bohemia; in Most in the north of Bohemia, to be precise, probably around 1611 or 1612. The exact date of his birth is unknown today because parish books from the Protestant church in North Bohemian Most from 1609 to 1622 have not been preserved. His father Hans Hammerschmidt (1581–1636) came from Carthause near the river

Zittau in Lusatia, but he worked as a saddler in Bohemia, first in Žatec, and from 1610 onwards in Most.

With the Battle of White Mountain and the ensuing recatholisation, the family left for Saxony sometime between March and August 1626. In 1629, Hans became a free citizen of the city of Freiberg. Nothing is known about Andreas during this time – we do not even know who he studied music with, as there is no mention of him in the Freiberg gymnasium archives.

There were excellent musicians active at the time in Freiberg, such as Christoph Demantius – mentioned above – or the organists Balthasar Springer, Christoph Schreiber, and Stephan Otto. We only know of a connection with the latter, as they maintained a friendly relationship with Hammerschmidt, as attested by Otto's laudatory poem *Kronen Krönlein* from 1648. As for Hammerschmidt's teacher, Schreiber is a possibility, as Andreas twice replaced Schreiber in his position.

In 1633, Hammerschmidt became organist at the court of count Rudolf von Büнау at the Saxon castle of Weesenstein, where Stephan Otto was cantor. The following year, the position in the Petrikirche in Freiberg became available, as Christoph Schreiber left for Zittau. Hammerschmidt's request from the 9th of October 1634 was answered positively on the 8th of December, but he only began his work in July of 1635, as he had to fulfil his duties at his previous place of employment. With this organist's position, he became the main organist of the city, but his wages were still very low. At this time, he published his first collection in print, *Erster Fleiss* (1636), dedicated to the local mayor and his councillors. He probably also composed the first part of his *Musikalische Andachten* (1639) here, for liturgical use in the Petrikirche. The church also saw his wedding with Ursula Teuffel on the 22nd of August 1637: she

was the daughter of Martin Teuffel, a man of business in Prague. They had six children together.

When Schreiber died in 1639, Hammerschmidt became his successor as organist at the Johanniskirche in Zittau. He gave his farewell to the Freiberg city council in a letter of thanks from the 18th of September 1639. The remaining 36 years of his life were spent in Zittau. It was here that Hammerschmidt reached the peak of his artistic abilities. Tragically, these works were all lost in a city fire in 1757. His colleagues at the time were Simon Crusius, cantor and teacher at the Johanneum gymnasium, and Christian Keimann, the rector of the school.

The organist's responsibilities included composing and directing music for the liturgy, working with the soloists of the school choir (led by the cantor), as well as instrumentalists. As the only musician in the town who could provide an education in keyboard instruments, he also had a number of students.

He was also prized as an organ connoisseur, and like Johann Sebastian Bach some years later, he was often invited to test new organs: Bautzen in 1642 and Freiberg in 1659 and 1672. Although he remained in Zittau, his travels to Saxon and Lusatian towns are well documented (Bautzen, Dresden, Freiberg, Leipzig, Görlitz).

The high regard he enjoyed is suggested by the fact that the municipal council named him the town and forest superintendent in Waltersdorf an der Lauscha. Thanks to all these circumstances, he was financially secure. In 1656, he bought a house in the Webergasse, across the street from the church. He added a garden, and in 1659, he bought some land outside Zittau, where he built a summer house. When he died on the 29th of October 1675, his funeral was well attended. The inscription on his tombstone read: "The Orpheus of Zittau".

Hammerschmidt's compositions have become very popular, as evidenced by a number of prints, and he is still considered one of the foremost composers of Protestant spiritual music. In 1655, Johann Rist called him "the world-famous Mr. Hammerschmidt". His correspondence, as well as the prefaces with which he introduced his collections, show clearly that Hammerschmidt was a very learned man. In his rich work, he focused mostly on sacred music, publishing over four hundred pieces in fourteen collections. These include masses, madrigals, cantatas, motets, chorales, and concerts. His musical language was based on the modern Baroque concertante style, which he enriched with a distinctive instrumentation and remarkable melodic invention.

Hammerschmidt most enjoyed composing motets, sacred concerts, and arias. A unique compositional form he employed were the dialogues, in which he set biblical texts. Examples of these are collections such as *Musikalische Andachten* (1639–52/53) and *Gespräche über*

die Evangelia (1655, 1656). That is not to say he avoided secular genres, particularly songs and dances, which were published in several collections.

Conclusio

The musical culture of the Wittenberg Reformation might not have been one of the dominant religious movements, but it is still an important – and often neglected – part of our culture. During the course of the first century after Luther's critique, the Czech lands saw the creation of a number of polyphonic figural compositions and songs. A number of these became more stable parts of the repertoire of evangelical houses of worship. The songs of Nikolaus Herman, Tobiáš Závorka, or Jiří Třanovský can be found in hymnals to this day.

The religiously and ethnically plural land saw inspiring meetings and permeations of various cultural and spiritual movements, which created a suitable atmosphere for the development of culture, crowned by the presence of the imperial court. From the Lutheran point of view, the proximity of Saxony and other similarly oriented states was important, given the transfer of culture. There were personal connections too, however. The Saxon Capellmeister Hans Leo Hassler (1564–1612) had an interest in the construction of musical automatons which captured the attention of Rudolf II, who then offered him a place at his court in Prague. Czech musicians were also active abroad, Johann Knöfel, for example, who later put his experience into practice upon his return to Prague.

After one hundred years, the comfortable development of evangelical culture came to an end given the defeat of the Bohemian Revolt which followed the Battle of White Mountain, and especially the ensuing campaign against the Reformation. Evangelicals managed to secure their religious rights only in the Aš region and in Silesia. In Bohemia and Moravia, there was only a partial loosening at the end of the 18th century, thanks to Joseph II's Patent of Toleration.

Even during the course of a single century, much of the repertoire put down roots abroad. Furthermore, the composers and cantors Christoph Demantius and Andreas Hammerschmidt were also active abroad, both important representatives of sacred music in Saxony and beyond. The Czech linguistic legacy is preserved today thanks to the admirable oeuvre of Jiří Třanovský, which remained vibrant both among Czech exiles in the German lands and among Slovaks in what was then Hungarian territory. At the end of the 18th century, Slovak clerics were instrumental in renewing the development of evangelical Christianity in the Czech lands once the Patent of Toleration was published.

**Josef Mysliveček
Violin Concertos,
Sinfonia & Overture**

Leila Schayegh - violin, Collegium 1704, Václav Luks - conductor.
Text: English, French, German, Czech.
Recorded: July 2017, St. Anne Church, Prague Crossroads. Released: 2018.
DDD. 1 CD, ACCENT ACC 24336.

The new recording made by **Václav Luks** and his **Collegium 1704** orchestra could – if seen through the prism of their long-term focus on the Baroque – may come as a surprise. When you, however, bear in mind the amount of Classicist works they have performed, you could have expected that Václav Luks's enthusiasm for Josef Mysliveček's music would evince itself in a well-considered and rehearsed programme (the documentary about the artist *Confession of the Forgotten*, the opera *L'Olimpiade*). I must admit that I was rather surprised by the album's foregrounding the violin, yet that is logical too, since precious few are aware of the high quality of Mysliveček's violin concertos. What is more, Lux has known **Leila Schayegh** (b. 1975), a renowned Swiss violinist and specialist in historically informed performance, for years, having worked together on a number of projects (including the 2011 recording of Franz Benda's sonatas for Glossa, which has received a Diapason d'Or). The present album is the sixth Collegium 1704 have made for Accent, while being the first featuring music of the second half of the 18th century. By engaging an international group of musicians (including the violinist **Ivan Iliev**, the double-bass player **Miriam Shalinsky**, the oboist **Katharina Andres**, the horn player **Erwin Wieringa** and the harpsichordist **Emmanuel Frankenberg**). And the fruit of their joint efforts is astonishing indeed. But I will start my review from the end. Worthy of praise are the excellent recording director **Jiří Gemrot** and the likewise outstanding sound engineer **Aleš Dvořák**. The pleasant,



atmospheric layout was the work of **Joachim Berenbold**, while the compelling sleeve notes were penned by **Leila Schayegh**. The text is accompanied by photos taken at the recording sessions, as well as pictures of the artists, made by **Ondřej Bouška**. Yet the main thing is the music itself, and its performance, which is splendid indeed. For that which he has done to promote Josef Mysliveček's mastery, Václav Luks should receive a medal or, at least, special thanks from the Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic. One way or another, the programme should be presented within Collegium 1704's subscription cycle concerts in Prague, at festivals like the Prague Spring and Concentus Moraviae! All the compositions featured on the album bear witness to Mysliveček's music being diverse, harbouring ample, breath-taking melodies (reminiscent of those of Antonín Dvořák's), grandiosity and melancholia. In the sleeve notes, Leila Schayegh pointed out: "From this music, one can hear that the author was also a superb opera composer: the quickly alternating themes are well defined in character, whether sounding serious or boisterous, pleading or alluring, questioning or majestic, friendly or imperious. Figuratively, we find ourselves on the opera stage." And she is absolutely right – both in terms of their macro and micro dimensions, the compositions are so contrastive and striking that the listener would by no means get bored. Anchored in its era, containing archaisms even, Mysliveček's music is not as timeless as that of Mozart, but when it comes to his concertos, which surpass the common period creations, they are very close to the point. I was particularly taken by the *Concerto in E major*, and impressed to an even greater degree by the 1772 *Symphony (Overture) in A major* and the 1777 *Symphony in E flat major*, which have been recorded for the very first time. Both of them teem with emotion and spirit. When I listened to the album, I immediately praised Václav Luks's abandoning the current fashionable trend of effectively fast tempos, and admired the musicians' perfect interplay, focus on detail and, in the case of Leila Schayegh, the faculty



of rendering melodic embellishments in an authentic manner, the transparent playing, the brilliant right hand and virtuosity. (The concertos are quite challenging in technical terms.) Initially, I had the feeling that I would give preference to a more succulent tone, played on an even better violin (the Russian-British violinist Alina Ibragimova crossed my mind as a suitable performer of Mysliveček's works), yet when listening to the concertos over and over again I realised that the homogeneity of Collegium 1704 and Leila Schayegh was entirely satisfactory. Even though I would perhaps like the arduous melodies to be played by some of the famed virtuosos, I have arrived at the conclusion that the "non-stellar" Swiss violinist agreed with my taste better. Schayegh wrote in the booklet notes: "Our major aim was to present Mysliveček's music precisely as what it is: not clenched by the strict Classical form, yet spirited at every single moment." And in this respect, the musicians have utterly succeeded.

Luboš Stehlík

**Antonín Dvořák
Piano Quartets op. 23 & 87**

Busch Trio (Mathieu van Bellen - violin, Ori Epstein - violoncello, Omri Epstein - piano), Miguel de Silva - viola.
Recorded: Dec. 2016, and Mar. 2017, Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel, Haas Teichen Studio, Waterloo.
Published: 2017. TT: 71:05. 1 CD Alpha ALPHA 288.

The young Belgian-British chamber ensemble **Busch Trio**, which bears the name of the legendary German violinist Adolf Busch (**Mathieu von Bellen** performs on his instrument) had already published a recording of Antonín Dvořák's piano trios in early 2017. Now, they have put out a new recording, this time of the composer's piano quartets from 1875 and 1889. The publishers entice us with the promise

of two more CDs with both piano quintets and the early piano trios op. 21 and 26, which should be the culmination of the planned four-part collection of recordings of Dvořák chamber pieces with piano. Much of what was written a few months ago is also true of this recording: the young ensemble possesses remarkable technical skill and great interpretive potential; their international carrier is enviable (and incomparable to generationally identical Czech trios). We can be glad, however, that the first recordings of this promising ensemble are devoted to Dvořák's work, including the early pieces op. 5, 21, 23, and 26. Dvořák's three-movement *Piano Quintet D major* op. 23 from the blessed creative year of 1875 – composed around the same time as the first surviving piano trio, the serenade for strings, or the 5th symphony in F major – is a tough interpretive nut to crack, although all the more enticing for performers (I counted at least eighteen commercial recordings between 1941 and 2016). The proportions of the opening movement are impressive; it is Schubertian not only in its dimensions, but also in the number of themes and their wide-tracked developments. The variation movement is a more confident anticipation of the composer's intellectual abilities, and the finale is his last attempt to combine a scherzo with a rondo-sonata finale. Without a shred of artistic nationalism, I must admit that for me – unlike with the quartet op. 87, composed at the height of the composer's creative powers – the Suk Quartet recording of the earlier quartet with Josef Kodous at the viola still reigns supreme (Supraphon 1982, SU 11 1464-2131). Especially in the first two movements, the Czech performers display an inimitable central-European sonic melos. No traces of such an approach are left in this newest recording, which is no harm to the work: the Busch Trio plays the first movement with a nervous longing, similar to the wait for a beloved being, full of visions of joint experiences. The listener is suddenly immersed in the atmosphere of the serenade for strings in E major. The variation movement goes through a number of atmospheres,

escalating in urgency, reaching an exalted sonic palette. Here too, Omri Epstein's piano sets a nervous, at times almost anxious atmosphere. Their detailed reading of Dvořák's score came to fruition, transforming the music into a tense listening experience full of hidden programmes, from which the release comes only with the rondo-finale, sharing smiles all around. There are twice as many commercial recordings of the *Piano Quartet no. 2 E flat major* op. 87 as there are of the older D major quartet. The 41 recordings made between 1941 and 2017 cannot compete with the inexorably rising number of recordings of the popular *Piano Quintet no. 2 A major* op. 81, but even 41 recordings attest to the popularity of Dvořák's later quintet. In the quartet, the *cantabile* and lyrical character of the A major quintet is replaced by a more complex construction in E flat major, the lyrical dumka substituted with a variation movement in two blocks, and the furiant-as-scherzo by one of Dvořák's wildest scherzos, with an almost orientally-sounding trio. Dvořák's E flat major quartet is a truly testing piece, both technically and interpretatively. There are huge differences in tempo from one recording to another, from the curt Galimir String Quartet version (1950, 30:24) to Suk's recording with the Kubelík Trio (1997, 37:38). In their previous Dvořák records, the Busch Trio goes against the flow, opting for slower tempi which allow the compositions to breathe and the listeners to observe in detail the internal movement in the middle voices. Their newer recording, then, is also among those more liberal in tempo (36:59) without being boring or simply stepping back and forth from one bar to the next. Quite the opposite: in the variation movement, they enjoy emphasising the frowning face of Dvořák's composition, bravely floating onto the sea of existential tones in their performance of the finale, which they transform into an almost carnivalesque whirl of masks and images. All this from within a technically masterful package, from which the slim voice of violoncellist Ori Epstein projects, never lacking discretion. We can look forward to the continuation of the Busch Trio's Dvořák project: the early piano trios and both piano quintets. Hopefully, the wait of the Dvořák disco-philis will soon be over.

Martin Jemelka

Petr Eben Faust

Irena Chřibková - organ, Alfred Strejček, Hana Benešová - recitation.

Text: Czech, English, German.
Recorded: June 2017, St. James Basilica, Prague; July 2017, studio Martinec (recitation). Released: 2017.
TT: 63:48. 1 CD, Rosa RD2489.



Irena Chřibková, the head organist at the St. James Basilica in Prague, has performed Petr Eben's music for more than a quarter of a century. She has presented in Czech premiere his *Four Biblical Dances* for organ and two dancers, and the extensive *Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* for organ and narrator. She also played Eben's music at the St. James Basilica during the ceremony of bidding farewell to the composer in the autumn of 2007. Last year, Chřibková dedicated her performances within the Saint James Autumn festival to the tenth anniversary of Eben's death. Her album featuring Eben's music contains the almost 50-minute organ cycle *Faust*, extended with recitation of extracts from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play (in Otokar Fischer's Czech translation), which in this form saw its world premiere. Eben first treated the complex subject of *Faust* back in the 1970s, when he wrote the incidental music for an adaptation of Goethe's drama to commission for the Burgtheater in Vienna (directed by Otomar Krejča). Between 1979 and 1980, he used the score's motivic material to build up a cycle for organ, in which he opted for employing the instrument not only to express serious aspects, but also ventured to assign it a few passages rendering caricature and sensuousness. The eternal feud between good and evil, taking place in the human heart, reflects in the divinely pure choral quotations, tender tones, higher, delicate registers, as well as provocative, mischievous, grinning even, colours of the darkness. Eben reveals spheres into which precious few of us dare to peep. Although he never goes to the very bottom, as did Gustav Mahler, for instance, and does bring hope, the composition may be rather chilling. The album serves as yet more proof that Irena Chřibková ranks among Europe's most accomplished organ players, and that she is an ideal interpreter of Petr Eben's music. Her performance is pregnant, musical, certain in all respects. She duly respects the composer, his expression and register requirements, she plays in chime with the local acoustics and is capable of making the best of the gigantic

St. James Basilica organ. Chřibková has succeeded in breaking into the mystery of interpretation that reverses the composer's wishes more than anything else, with the performer serving as his medium for communication with the audience, while maintaining one's own. Those who manage to do so win, primarily vis-à-vis themselves. The masterful recitation of **Alfred Strejček** and **Hana Benešová** further augments the overall impression. Still and all, I would welcome either another two narrators, who could render the roles of the Angels and Mephistopheles, or the engagement of a male actor as expressive as Benešová. Nonetheless, Strejček's humble and noble approach becomes the recording too. When it comes to the booklet notes, I am of the opinion that Kateřina Vondrovicová, a leading Czech "Ebenologist", should have been afforded greater scope for the composition's description and elucidation of the text's extracts, so the listener could have a better bearing (at least in the case of all the references to the chorale). In this regard, Hyperion's album of Eben's organ music (CDA67195) comes across as better, having abridged the composer's biography and quoting his words in the text describing the piece (the CD was released during Eben's lifetime), and including fragments of the notation. What is more, the booklet for the Rosa label's album lacks the mention that the performance of Eben's work accompanied by recitation has actually been presented in this form in world premiere (the information is only provided within the note to the recording on the website). Notwithstanding this, the album is absolutely gorgeous.

Dina Šnejdarová

Luboš Fišer Complete Piano Sonatas

Zuzana Šimurdová – piano.

Text: English, German. Recorded: Dec. 2016, DanLyn Studios, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Released: 2017. TT: 68:55. DDD. 1 CD, Grand Piano GP770

The Grand Piano label has an interesting specialisation: it makes and releases recordings of complete piano works of lesser-known music creators. Last year, its remarkable catalogue (which encompasses the complete piano oeuvres of the Czech composers J. V. H. Voříšek, Erwin Schulhoff and Vítězslava Kaprálová, Leopold Koželuh's piano sonatas and J. K. Vaňhal's piano capriccios) was extended with a CD of all the piano sonatas written by Luboš Fišer (1935–1999), as performed by the Czech-Canadian pianist **Zuzana Šimurdová**. It is the very first complete album



of the composer's piano sonatas, with three of them – Nos. 3, 4 and 7 – even being referred to in the track list as "world premiere recordings".

Between 1955 and 1995, Luboš Fišer wrote eight piano sonatas, of which he later on discarded *Sonata No. 2* from the list of his works. *Sonata No. 1*, made up of three movements, came into being in 1955, during the time of his studies at the Prague Conservatory. The second movement of *Sonata No. 3*, dating from 1960, when Fišer attended the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, is one of the most intriguing pieces of music on the present album. A truly breakthrough work, *Sonata No. 4* ranks among the composer's best piano sonatas, the first in which Fišer applied a number of principles that would be characteristic of his following sonatas – a condensed one-movement form, markedly contrastive, many a time relatively succinct sonic areas. These areas are often based on several-tone motifs or brief melodic sections, which are frequently repeated or disintegrated, and whose fundamental building material is often represented by semitone techniques. *Sonata No. 5* is the only one in which Fišer used the more avant-garde aleatoric notation. *Sonata No. 6* bears the title "Fras", meaning "Devil" in colloquial Czech. The apices of Fišer's sonata creation are the highly impressive *Sonatas Nos. 7 and 8*, dating from 1985 and 1995, respectively. Zuzana Šimurdová studied at the Ostrava Conservatory and the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts (JAMU). Subsequently, she was trained in the UK and Canada. She has garnered accolades at a number of competitions. Having dedicated her thesis at JAMU to Luboš Fišer's piano works, she had the theoretical basis to perform his piano sonatas. And after listening to the present recording, I can confirm that her actual performance is very good, technically impeccable, convincing in expression (although one could perhaps question some of her rubatos), emotional and colourful. All in all, I would heartily recommend her album to Luboš Fišer fans and all those interested in 20th-century piano music alike.

Věroslav Němec



Stratoccluster Éternagy

Marcel Bárta, Jan Faix, Prokop Jelínek, Jan Kulka, Ondřej Komárek, Mikuláš Mrva, Tomáš Mika, Ian Mikyska, Jaroslav Noga, Lucie Páchová.

Recorded: Mar., Apr. 2015, in Prague and Armenia. Published: 2018. TT: 63:04. 1 CD Polj EPP 131-27

Following the release of their cassette *Apples, Pears, Overhead Projectors (Jabka, hrušky, meotary)*, the shape-shifting art collective centred around Ian Mikyska is back with a new record: a radiophonic experiment titled *Éternagy*. Stratoccluster bombards the listener with snippets of music, and indulges in a live composting of pop-music. The album offers a selection of musical motifs, scripted dialogue (including a voice-band musing over the programme of Prima TV), newspaper headlines, and so on. It is impossible to tell which sections are scripted, and which are field recordings or randomly captured everyday situations. The music miniatures also come from an eerie world, one of frenetic piano tapping, somnambulist clarinet solos, free-jazz intermezzos and decorous grooves, all warped and abrasive. As a result, the piece is ingeniously fragmented yet unhampered by effects, delay, fade-out experiments, or indeed any of the usual sound magic. Everything has been meticulously cut, the virtual editing board being the main instrument here, along with the space where the individual sonic adventures were recorded. Even without electronic effects the resulting structure is highly psychedelic – a psychedelia of the everyday, with music and sonic fragments inter-grafted with varying force, their seams and hinges unshamedly open and even emphasised: the occasional chew and rumble of the magnetic tape, for instance, suggests that a tape and/or voice recorder were used, at least for parts of the recording process. At times, the piece resembles the kind of work radiophonic workshops used

to produce, with tape as the main medium and scissors as a dominant instrument. Still, everything is in perfect rhythmic order and the record is pleasantly paced, with no overlay of individual entries as they take swift turns in attracting the listener's beam of attention. Michal Rataj succeeded in underscoring all of that in the mastering. Truth be told, Stratocluster's bizarre composition won't be to everyone's taste: it will likely be dismissed by most listeners as an un-listenable scum of random sounds. Not everyone will appreciate its pure psychedelic quality, and a few may even feel that the gentlemen of Stratocluster are subjecting them to a lobotomy in full consciousness. The open-face Dada sandwich can be hard to stomach! Stratocluster aren't trying to pigeon-hole their album into the sound or style of a specific era, although the magnetic tape automatically transposes the material to an unspecified past, a hauntological timelessness, or a parallel universe. Some passages seem to reference Zappa's *Freak Out!* experiments, other entries recall the messy jamming of the Davenport Family project. Nevertheless, the album is firmly rooted in the present by means of newspaper headlines and current events, often strangely recited and chanted. The organising logic behind the material also mimics the way we often read online content, or engage in reckless TV channel-surfing, preferably with a remote in one hand, a newspaper in the other, and with the radio on. *Éternagy* combines sonic and compositional radicalism with humour and ease – a rare occurrence in experimental music. Personally, I appreciate that the humour is genuinely Dadaistic: no strained punchlines, no pressure to "get the joke," and no puns save for the album title (a combination of the words eternal, "large ether" in Hungarian, and the name of the Czech pop singer from the socialist era, Peter Nagy). The CD, released by the Prague-based indie record company Poli5, constitutes a long single track. The download version, available on Bandcamp for name-your-own-price, has three 21-minute parts, which is a simple technical division (60 minutes being the maximum length per audio track upload on Bandcamp). The inner CD sleeve includes a track list of the individual sonic events, with the word "radio" used several times. They are somewhat too anecdotal for my liking, and I have to admit I am glad I didn't read them before listening to the album for the first time. The listener's imagination is fuelled from the start by the record's mysterious world and quite unnecessarily, the track list brings it right back to the ground. However, that remains my only reservation about the record. *Éternagy* is an outstanding album, and while it may not attract large crowds of listeners, every sound adventurer and Dada aficionado ought to give it a chance.

Tomáš Procházka

Michal Rataj Sentenceless Sentence

String Noise (Conrad Harris, Pauline Kim Harris) - violins, Jindřich Pavliš - clarinet, Tomáš Liška - double-bass, Jaromír Typlt - voice performance, sound objects.

Recorded: 2014–2018. Digital album published 26th of January 2018, distributed by Supraphon, iTunes, Spotify, and Bandcamp.

With *Sentenceless Sentence*, his newest album, Michal Rataj – a leading figure of Czech electroacoustic music – looks back across the last four years of his distinctive work for electronics, either alone or paired with selected musicians and performers. The light blue cover, which features a blurred misty landscape, is an adequate illustration of the content and the gentle mood of this predominantly instrumental album, whose music flows naturally and without haste. The album, whose name is an oxymoron, opens all the more paradoxically with *The Long Sentence II* for two violins and electronics. Rataj's live electronics enrich, widen, reflect, and also unite and balance the context of the String Noise duo's virtuosic playing. This is particularly true in live performances, where the violin signal is divided through a multi-channel system throughout the performance space. The piece is inspired by diary entries made over the course of a single year in the composer's life. Over the course of its twelve sections, which represent the twelve months, it oscillates between the more traditional space of contemporary instrumental music, and electronic ambient music. Both sides of this constant dialogue are then brought together in an exalted passage around the thirteen minute mark. Over the course of its sixteen minutes of duration, *The Long Sentence II* offers a wide range of expressive possibilities to the world-class modern violin playing of the Harris-Kim married duo, and a palette of electronic effects and sounds: no less extensive, it was derived from their instrumental performances. The electronically generated sounds – and not just in this opening piece – evoke various moods, situations, weather conditions, and even specific materials. Glass, for example. It is to this material – and to the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution – that the delicate miniature *Glassy Fragile* is dedicated. Within the symbolic 89 seconds of its duration, the sonic character of this material is thoroughly explored. *Winter Shadow* then describes the seemingly motionless winter timelessness and everything that comes with it: snow crackling under one's feet, icicles and their crystalline reflections, visible (and audible) breath. Rataj, however,



does not fall back on bland descriptiveness. Instead, he paints a truly dynamic scene in which the tension never wavers. The twenty minute title track is truly an acousmatic composition *par excellence*. It presents a wide, changeable, and most of all *active* ambient or artistic soundscape. Here too, Michal Rataj confirms the high level of his unmistakable musical (or rather acoustic) language, in which sounds, noises, and tones of various origin are skillfully mixed into a highly compact resultant form. He always selects and processes carefully, tailoring the materials to every piece individually. But this is not purely acousmatic music. In *Small Imprints*, the electronics are sidelined at first, complementing the clarinet's overall atmosphere – performed excellently by Jindřich Pavliš – from a distance. During the composition, the interaction becomes complete: the melodic lines of this traditional woodwind instrument become fragmented and are processed by the electronics to an always greater extent. The same is true of *Basso Spatio*, which is led at times by the jazz-tinged double bass of Tomáš Liška and his strong pizzicato. The electronics part then enriches the sonic character of the recording in a manner of which no traditional instrument is capable. In this respect, Rataj took his final exam in a duo with poet Jaromír Typlt, with whom he created – among other works – the album *Škrábanice (Scribbles)*, 2014). In *O to dřív (The Sooner)*, Rataj and Typlt use what we could call the original and also the most versatile musical instrument of them all – the human voice. Typlt's pleasant, heterogeneous, but still believable recitation is layered, played in reverse, and stretched to the edges of comprehensibility. Michal Rataj often likes to work with spatially distributed sound, site-specific performances and live interactions between musicians and technology. A mere recording will therefore naturally fail to provide the scenic and spatial experience of a live performance. However, it remains true (and this is usually the case with Rataj) that the recording is meticulously balanced in sound, and the use of high-quality gear allows for a top-class sonic experience. Perhaps in the future, we will have access to a truly spatial mix.

Jan Borek



© Pavel Hejný Veronika Panochová — violin

Dvořák. Korngold. Smetana. Fibich. Martinů.
Ullmann. Wajsbauer. Trojan. Parsch. Reindl.
Janáček. Haas. Hába. Ištvan. Kabeláč.
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