

Sona Cervena

Ondřej Vrabc

The Dvořák Battles

1 | 2008





Dear Readers,

It has been a year since Czech Music Quarterly came with a free CD and now here is another one. It brings you music by composers who appeared on the scene in the sixties and in various ways responded to the development of the post-war New Music. Although the name of the CD contains the world „generation“ it needs to be remembered that the composers represented on our sampler cannot be considered members of a single artistic group of any kind. Their music, opinions on music and ultimately their trajectories in life differed and still differ. What they have in common was the resolute attempt to turn their backs on academic traditionalism. In free association with the CD, the magazine includes Viktor Pantůček's historical sketch, offering a view of the cultural and historical context in which these four composers wrote their music.

I would also like to highlight the interview with the mezzo-soprano Sona Cervena, a truly exceptional personality with great charisma. As will be clear from the interview, she is also an enormously versatile and energetic person whose breadth of artistic activities is not confined just to opera. I am delighted that she gave us the time for such a lengthy interview and regard it as a great honour for the magazine.

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PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

THE FLEXIBLE VOCAL CHORDS AND IRON WILL OF SONA CERVENA

Sona Cervena is a versatile artist with an unusual breadth of creative interests and talent in several fields and genres – not just opera singing, which has been her domain for most of her theatrical career, but drama acting and work with the spoken word as well. Yet all her activities have the same common denominator: music. After a dazzling operatic career, during which she worked all over the world with directors, conductors and singers who are today legends of the cultural history the 20th century, she returned to the Czech Republic following the fall of the Iron Curtain. Here she has been continuing her artistic activities with astonishing vitality not only in National Theatre productions but also in film, plays, and projects that interest her inside and outside Prague, and always with remarkable results that deploy her lifelong professional experience to excellent effect.

BUT ABOVE ALL SONA CERVENA IS A FASCINATING PERSON. A MEETING WITH HER, WHETHER ON OR OFFSTAGE, IS ALWAYS AN EXCITING, INSPIRING AND ENRICHING EXPERIENCE, CONFIRMING THE AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY OF HER ART. WE FEEL IT IN EVERY WORD OF THE INTERVIEW THAT SHE HAS GIVEN US.

There have been plenty of published interviews with you, and you have published a small book of memoirs. It might look as if your artistic career has already been mapped in detail and there are no longer many questions left to ask you. But of course your memories and above all your experiences in life can hardly all be fitted into one little book, and in any case you are still an active artist and so are still adding to them. With your kind permission, might we consider what you haven't yet said and what has not been published yet?

If you mention memory – I don't have one at all. I'm like a computer, and everything I don't need I erase. That's why I'm quite good at learning texts by heart. Secondly I'm not a communicative person. I don't like talking about myself and I don't like to take myself seriously. I've already said everything I wanted to say at some point and somewhere. I've a sister who is quite grumpy and severe, and she's always criticising me, saying, "that interview with you was boring, you've already said it all". I answer that I've only lived one life and

I talk about that. And so if you want to hear some new moments, memories, experiences, you'll have to dig them out of me.

Well then...What was the key moment that once set you off and sent you on an artistic course that led to the dazzling career you are still continuing?

It was definitely my father and my childhood, where there was a lot of talk about music, and amateur music-making. It was there that the seed was sown in me. But most probably it actually happened because God gave me the two things that were the most important for my career – flexible vocal chords and an iron will. If it's the other way round it's a catastrophe. Rigid vocal chords and a pliable will? You won't get anywhere with that. But I'm grateful for the combination and also for the fact that I kept going with it, because it is a tough road.

For over fifty years you have been moving in the exclusive environment of high art throughout Europe and America – or to put it better you are an active part of that world. How has it actually changed in the period of your career? What had a direct impact on you, what did you perceive as important, or what has had a practical effect on your life?

We won't talk about the two occupations that hit my life, of course [*the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and the invasion by the Warsaw Pact forces in 1968 – editor's note*]. But what has changed (though not exactly in your philosophical sense of the term) is that in my younger years or during my career not every production was filmed, there was no video, and television wasn't making such a splash in pictures and colours. What we created and achieved vanished. Today's singers and today's world full of pictures has the great advantage of being able to map everything. That's wonderful, maybe the only thing I envy them.

How much of a view of the surrounding world did you get from your world of rehearsal rooms, stages and hotels? Does an artist with a career like yours have any time or opportunity to realise what is going on around her?

None at all. I wasn't even interested in trying to get a view of what was happening in the surrounding world. Of course, when I left this country I kept up with what was happening here, but in a different way... For example the news – I'm sorry to say that to this day I don't read the newspapers, and I don't watch the news. Back then, all those years ago, I decided I wouldn't let anything influence me, or let anything wash my brain, that I didn't want to join any societies and wouldn't get involved in any politics. I'm completely untouched by it.

Over your career the world of opera has also changed from the point of view of how the profession actually works. The position of director, the demands on soloists, production practice...These have all changed.

Once, even before my time, the most important element in the world of opera was the music – performers stood on the ramp and sang bel canto. When I was starting out and above all when I got to Germany, the cult of the director was just beginning to develop, and I mean cult in the positive sense of the word. Opera directing was being taken up by brilliant directors, even directors from the world of spoken drama who understood music a little, sometimes a great deal. I was there and experienced all the initial stages of the process in the world. I found it wonderfully appealing. That was why I also got together with those excellent directors – Walter Felsenstein, Volker Schlöndorff, who was a film



*Sona Cervena as Countess Geschwitz
in A. Berg's Lulu (Stuttgart, 1966)*

director but created a fantastic Katya Kabanova with our company in Frankfurt. And many others that I gravitated towards. That was why Robert Wilson eventually sought me out, and I worked with him for ten years. Only the trend eventually went so far that the cult of directors – and now I use the expression in the bad sense – started to get the upper hand. First the cult of directors and then the cult of dramatic advisors. Dramatic advisors are terrifically useful people and clever, and I know some that are very clever, but they haven't a clue on stage. I have encountered this again and again. This all diverts opera from its proper path, or at least the path I would personally like it to take.

And which path would that be?

Back to the music, back to the composer and back to librettos. I think the composers knew why they chose them and how they conceived the texts. Some people say that you can't watch Wagner for five hours – but you can! Because the music is tremendous and he wouldn't probably care how we interpret the libretto... But today all the gears have been changed, all the points on the rails have shifted... Let directors do their own thing, but they shouldn't interfere with the finished work. And the same goes for dramatic advisors.

What do you see as the position of the director in opera – what kind of directorial conception and what kinds of directors do you prefer?

What is important is that the director – whether he mainly works in opera or comes from stage directing – should really understand the music, respect it and develop his ideas from it. This is the operatic stage, and you can't approach it with a different psychology than the one that is in the opera. It is important –



On the stage with Fanyka (Funny Face)

and I've nothing against directors from stage drama – that they should also be musicians at heart. Mostly I have had good luck, and had good directors... only the good that happened and had its effect on me remains with me. I can't recall – but as I said maybe that's because I've erased it from my memory – anything that didn't suit me, or annoyed me.

When you say the good...What do you mean by that?

I've already said it. A director who approaches direction in a way that shows that he respects the music first and then the libretto. And if he doesn't happen to like it, then let him do something else. And who also respects the singers – not sparing them, no – but giving them the chance to really get into the music and libretto in an unforced way.

You must certainly have experienced directors with different approaches to and methods with soloists. Some of them have a clear idea in advance, and have planned a soloist's every movement and looking detail, while there are directors who just sketch a kind of basic plan and leave it to you to fill it in somehow. Which appeals to you more?

I'll tell you from my subjective point of view. I like it when I can trust a director and entrust myself to him, when he comes completely prepared and says exactly what he wants from me. Then I'm happy to submit, and in that sense I'm not a feminist at all... When I believe in the director and can rely on him, then I'm happy when he brings me his ideas and even his demands. Then all's right with the world as far as I am concerned. But the kind of improvising that happens in stage rehearsals today, with the director saying, "the stage is yours", that's something I hate... When everyone sticks their oar in: one person sees it this way, another person thinks that would be best, then it's a catastrophe. It's a modern



*As Kabanicha in
Janáček's Katyá
Kabanová (Frankfurt
am Main, 1974)*

vice, that freedom on the stage. It's not in fact freedom for the artists, it's more helplessness on the part of the director. It completely appals me – the result is the kind of performance that we sometimes get here. For me the ideal situation is when I am perfectly prepared for the production – well, not perfectly, because no one can ever reach perfection – but when I come prepared from the very beginning. The prevailing bad habit these days is that singers come to the first répétiteur sessions without even having opened the piano reduction, and just let the répétiteur cram their part into them note by note. This can never be a good thing, because it means there is nothing inside them to mature. Today there's always time pressure, planes flying everywhere, everything in a hurry, but a singer – me anyway – has to find time to prepare for the work that is coming, initially just for himself or herself. For me it's unthinkable to come to a rehearsal unprepared, or to wander about on the stage with a piano reduction at rehearsals. This means hell for the director when he tolerates this practice.

Have you ever had your own idea and then had it vehemently changed by the conductor or director?

Vehemently no, you can't take a vehement line with me. There is always something that provokes thought and debate, and we exchange views, but in most cases it's a matter of minor points and we reach agreement. If a conductor who has the music at his fingertips comes and wants something from me that I might not have agreed with initially, it is always beneficial. You can only grow when you try to do something different – so long of course as he convinces you he is right.

In the course of your career, demands on the "dramatic" skills of the soloists and their physical appearance have changed a great deal – today casting singers of the precise vocal type needed, who not only sing perfectly but can also act their roles in a dramatically effective way, is not problem. What is behind the change?



In the role of Flora (La Traviata) with Dr. Kurt Herbert Adler, the intendant of the San Francisco opera (1969)



As Carmen in the Deutsche Oper Berlin, with James King as Don José (1962)

Television and film have been the main factors in the change. You just couldn't show those corpulent or wooden singers of earlier times in film. The initial solution was to use actors on screen with the singers "just" singing. The raised requirements were a result of the time and technology and so it's right that today a singer on stage needs not just to sing well, but to look good and act well too. Anyone who can't do this can't succeed and doesn't belong on stage.

But isn't the price of these increased demands for perfection in all aspects too high? For example sports stars are admitting to doping and we're beginning to hear hints of the same sorts of practices among today's opera stars as well. What do you think about this?

I've never heard of doping among opera singers – it wouldn't be good for the vocal chords. I wouldn't dramatise or generalise too much. If someone doesn't have enough self-confidence, perhaps he or she will take drugs, and so eventually drop out of the running all the sooner. It's a matter for each individual and in every field.

You are known for your preference for 20th-century music. How do you explain the fact that the major part of repertoire at opera houses still consists of works from the 18th and 19th centuries? Is it because of the taste of the public or a lack of good new operas and librettos? Or do we not know how to stage new works? Maybe it's because theatres have such a job on their hands getting people to come to the theatre. I wouldn't say there are no good librettos. Yes, I prefer

20th-century works. One reason I was attracted by the 20th century is that you can get your head round the librettos, not like *Trovatore*, for example, where you don't know which brother is which and who killed whom but nobody cares a bit because the music is divine. But I was fascinated by 20th-century music from a very early stage – Janáček, Martinů, Berg, even some Richard Strauss – it is such wonderful drama, in music and text.

When you say theatres have to keep an eye on the money, that means keeping an eye to pulling in audiences – but then they can't forget public taste. Why do you think that romantic and veristic operas are still so popular?

It's probably partly the way audiences were brought up, they were rocked to sleep by that 18th and 19th century. But look – Debussy or Berg were once unbearably modern and today they are classics – it only needs time.

In this context let me ask more about Janáček – abroad you sang in many Janáček productions that were received warmly, even enthusiastically, whereas here he was performed more just out of a sense of obligation and didn't get big audiences. And this situation to some extent continues. Why do you think that Janáček is so difficult to put across to Czech audiences and yet gets a very spontaneous reception in the rest of the world?

But that's not my problem! I can't give you an answer on that one – it's probably local feebleness or apathy, I'm sorry to say. Abroad I have experienced many Janáček productions that were absolute hits.

Can any opera diva expect to be able to protect her right to privacy and a personal or family life? And, especially as a woman, has she any chance of combining personal life satisfactorily with a top career and its demands?

No, she can't and she hasn't, and there's nothing at all to be done about. A violinist, for example, can put his violin back in its case after a concert and go to a pub or cafe to drink and smoke and chat – he can be there all night and nothing will happen to the violin. But for me that would have been absolute infidelity to my vocal chords. After performances I used to trudge back in a well-behaved way to my impersonal hotel room. That was how I lived. Yes, it was a monastic life, but a superb monastic life! After all, it's a privilege to sing. Even though that glory, the stage, the lights, the admirers, isn't everything – it also means lugging heavy cases when there's no porter to hand, living in hotels all the time and not going on the razzle-dazzle... But I loved the profession, with all that it entailed.

You are in admirable condition physically and psychologically. Is that genetics, or the result of your conscious efforts, work on yourself? Tell us – is there some recipe?

I'd be happy to tell you the recipe if I had one. But probably it is a question of the discipline that I definitely have. I was born under Virgo, and so perhaps it's related to that Virgo who is strict and almost off-puttingly orderly and order-loving. Yes, it's a matter of discipline, of leading life with humility. Sometimes I exercise, and I nibble ginger in any form – that's a treat! But it's a positive approach, a good mood that has the biggest effect. I consider bad moods a sign of bad upbringing, and I avoid people who have bad moods. And I'm always looking forward to something or getting pleasure from something. And always looking ahead, never behind. I'm always on the look out for what's to come, what I'll still have time to do. And I look forward to it.

What sort of regime do you keep to before performances? Does diet influence artistic performance in some way?

I don't underestimate the importance of the right regime, but the only principle I have is mainly not to eat just before a performance. I have lunch and then coffee. I think a half-empty stomach is the right state. I'm going to disappoint gourmets and everyone who loves eating or cooking, but I consider it a foolish waste of time... I'm a vegetarian for philosophical reasons - nothing should die so I can live. This knowledge gives me strength and calm.

Czech is your mother tongue however much you were bilingual from childhood. Your Czech is beautiful and in one interview you said you had deliberately kept it up even abroad. I would be interested to know what from the perspective of your experience today is fundamental for the feeling of home?

You're going rather fast with that association of language and home. I understand what you're driving at but I'll probably disappoint you when I say that the word "home" is alien to me. Not because I'm not a good Czech - but I'm a globe-trotter, a homeless person, the type they mean when they say, "wherever he hangs his hat that's his home..." "I think that if I were to fasten on some home or other, that would be another emigration, and I would be rejecting all the other homes. I don't want to say "here I'm at home and there I'm not". I really am at home everywhere I happen to be. For example, I'm at home on any stage - I am altogether the happiest and the most at home on stage. Home doesn't have anything to do with language - nothing at all.

Although you reject the link between language and home... I find your Czech so pure and elegant that it's almost intoxicating.

Czech is inside me like a categorical imperative. It's something I have to have, and is part of my mental hygiene. Speaking Czech correctly is like brushing my teeth everyday. And on Czech stages what I hear is that many people don't brush their teeth - and that's the core of the problem of what is happening here with Czech. We are supposed to be a cultured nation, but we don't give a damn about Czech. That language is our national treasure. I don't speak all that many languages, but I know that few languages are as rich as ours. For example I think of the word nehoráznost [rudeness, outrageousness]. Wherever did it come from? Isn't it wonderful? Or our verb aspects!

Words like pozapomenout [to "nearly forget" or to "dismiss from one's thoughts"] - in another language you would need three words or sentences to express the same thing. When I got back here I thought - Good Lord, what have they done with Czech? It took me a long time to realise that when they said kerej, it meant který [which, who]. And people were going to šopovat [shop] and bukovat [book]!! We are losing hundreds of marvellous words.

What led you to come back and live in Prague?

Well, if I said I was at home here... But two things: First I was born here and grew up here, and second Czech is the language here. And Prague and the Vltava and everything - it definitely has a tinge of home about it, but I don't want to put that in words.

You have an absolute mass of experience - can it be handed on in any way? What would your advice be to talented soloists just starting their careers, and what would you steer them towards? What can in fact be handed on and what does the



*With the director Robert Wilson
(Hamburg, 1999)*

artist have to find out for himself or herself? And what is absolutely essential to the extent that if they don't have it they shouldn't even try for a top solo career in opera?

I can't advise, I don't want to. I have often been asked to teach, asked to listen and give advice. I can't. I'm so terribly impatient – but most of all with myself. If I were to teach or advise people I wouldn't be able to give them “the first and last”, as the nice Czech expression goes. Perhaps I might be able to give them the “first”, but I wouldn't give them the “last”. Because the last is what leads me along the path of the theatre, where there are no ifs or maybes, and I couldn't bear it if someone didn't keep to it. I would destroy the poor people with my impatience, as I destroy myself.

But I'll still try and ask – what in your view is essential for a young person today who wants to make a career in the world of opera?

He or she has to have two things – talent and discipline. The one without the other is useless.

Yesterday you watched a live broadcast from the MET in a Prague cinema. What impression did it make on you and how do you see the penetration of new technologies into the opera world?

I was enthused and carried away that a performance like that, taking place live in New York, could come to our nostalgic little Aero cinema at the same time. The only thing that bothered me there was that some of the audience behaved as if it was just normal cinema. Surely there was no call for them to be wandering out and coming back in again during such a grand opera production...

So you wouldn't be afraid of those details, revealing and perhaps even unflattering camera shots at a moment when you are fully concentrating on singing?

No, that's just a part of dramatic expression. If I take a role on stage, then I accept it with everything that goes with it.

After your return here you accepted the role of Fatum in Janáček's Fate, and Historicus in Lacrimae Alexandri Magni [opera by T. Hanzlík, see CMQ 2/07], and at a gala concert you also recited the Prologue from Suk's Radúz and Mahulena – roles that seem as if created directly for you.

I enjoy doing melodramas, for me it's all to do with the combination of word and music and then the spoken word with music. They are two completely different things – the spoken word and the sung word – but the music remains,

it has to carry the word. Melodramas I find very attractive, and excellent composers are writing for me – Otomar Kvěch, Aleš Březina, Miloš Štědroň, Tomáš Hanzlík, which delights me and is great fun.

Given your propensity to look ahead, we have to ask what you are planning at the moment.

We are preparing a chamber opera titled *Zítřa se bude...* [*Tomorrow there will...* – a reference to the song associated with enthusiasm for building communism, “*Tomorrow There Will be Dancing Everywhere*”] about Milada Horáková [a Czech politician; she was executed by the communist regime in 1950]. It uses the authentic texts of the trial – nothing will be poeticised, added, dramatised. The music has been composed by Aleš Březina, so it will be music of the 21st century. You can approach the theme of Milada Horáková from many angles – rather like the crucifixion of Jesus Christ or the burning of Jeanne d’Arc. The essential thing, and I emphasise that, is that we should not “dismiss Milada Horáková from our thoughts”, because people need to be reminded of this story again and again. It’s important to keep coming back to it. Since I started music and stage rehearsals I’ve been sleeping even worse than usual. I’m an insomniac but now I’m not sleeping at all. Dealing with a theme like this is crushing, but necessary, and it is fascinating.

I’m sorry if this is too personal a question...In your book you describe the fate of your mother, whom at the beginning you call Mrs. Žofie – is it difficult for you to work on a theme that directly touches you and your family?

On the contrary – I can go far deeper into what I am now studying than anyone else. I can remember that time – the Pankrác jail, the female warders, everything that my mother suffered... They didn’t publicly hang her, they killed her a different way. You are right, it is personal – but you can publish it. Now I can talk about it and sing it from my soul.

I know you keep up with current cultural events intensively...

I go to a lot of plays in Prague. What the companies offer, the repertoire, is remarkable – Dejvice, Celetná, Dlouhá [*all small Prague theatres, translator’s note*], wherever something is going on, I fly off there. I go somewhere every evening because, as I say, I’m a migratory bird and every evening I migrate somewhere to the theatre or a concert.

Is there something I’ve overlooked and would regret not having asked?

Thank you for not having asked how many dogs I’ve had or how many lovers. Perhaps at the end I can mention something that sometimes chills me. That people don’t tell the truth. Here they are always playing a game in some way. Obviously it’s legacy of those forty years when people were afraid of speaking the truth and had to put up a pretence. It’s being transmitted from generation to generation. Here there is even a sort of trend to people saying only what the other wants to hear. But that’s pointless. Let’s have more courage to say what we’re really thinking. You’ll see how pleasant life can be – without pretence. And one more thing: when I’m walking along the street or riding in the tram, I notice that people have such worried faces! I’m sorry about it, I would wish there to be more sunshine here.



PHOTO: KAREL ŠLUSTER

Sona Cervena

The mezzo-soprano Sona Cervena (Soňa Červená) was born in Prague into the family of the founder of the famous First Republic cabaret Červená sedma [Red Seven], the lawyer Jiří Červený; her great grandfather was Václav František Červený, the ingenious inventor of musical instruments, who in Hradec Králové founded and managed a factory producing world renowned brass instruments (see CMQ I/06). She started in theatre after the war in the Voskovec and Werich company, but her international career is inseparable from opera. After an engagement in Brno and guest appearances in Prague, from 1958 she worked first in Berlin (Unter den Linden, Deutsche Oper), and later mainly in Frankfurt am Main and San Francisco, performing as a guest in Bayreuth and Salzburg, and appearing throughout Western Europe from Barcelona and Milan to Paris, Vienna and Amsterdam, and in America from Los Angeles to Chicago. She was twice honoured with the title Kammersängerin (Chamber Singer). She created more than a hundred roles. She was outstanding in the operas of Strauss as Herodias (Salome) and Clytemnestra (Elektra), Mozart (Cherubino), Wagner (Brangän in Tristan und Isolde), Verdi (as Maddalena in Rigoletto, Ulrika in Un ballo in Maschera and Quickly in Falstaff) and in a celebrated Carmen with more than a hundred and fifty reprises. A systematic interest in the music of the 20th century led her to the operas of A. Berg, I. Stravinsky, S. Prokofiev, K. Weill, B. Britten, H. W. Henze, G. C. Menotti, L. Nono, G. Ligeti and B.A. Zimmermann. She has also used her talents in productions of the works of Leoš Janáček: She has sung the roles of Old Buryjovka (Jenufa), Kabanicha (Katya Kabanova) and Zefka (Diary of One who Disappeared) in San Francisco, Wexford, York, Frankfurt, Lisbon, Munich, Edinburgh, Geneva, Bonn, Darmstadt, Brussels, Paris and Berlin. From the end of the 1990s she worked with the director Robert Wilson and worked in the Hamburg Thalia Theatre. She returned to the Czech Republic on the stage of the National Theatre in the symbolic mime role of Fatum in Wilson's production of Janáček's Fate (2002) and created further stage and film roles. This year she is preparing for the central part in the world premiere of Aleš Březina's opera-trial Tomorrow there will... Sona Cervena is also the author of an autobiography Stýskání zakázáno [Nostalgia Forbidden] and the book Můj Václav [My Václav] about her great-grandfather Václav František Červený.

SOME EXPERIMENTAL TRENDS IN POST-WAR CZECH MUSIC

The radical transformation of society embarked on by the new socialist state after the communist take-over in 1948 had a major impact on Czech culture and art as well. The artist, who for more than a century had been the prototype of the free individual and held up a mirror to the time in which he lived, who had demolished conventional stereotypes and outraged bourgeois society by his freedom of thought, was now supposed to become a servant of the monstrous machinery of “building better tomorrows”, “creating the classless society”, the “planned economy” and above all “achieving prosperity for every worker under the banner of the communist party and eternal friendship with the Soviet Union”. But how was everyone to be brought to do not what they wanted but what was wanted of them?

Composers want to be played, painters to be exhibited and writers to be read, so that if what could and could not be presented in the public realm could be defined and policed, then the task was straightforward. The system of control established was clear and practical. Monopoly organs (in the case of musical culture the Union of Czechoslovak Composers [Svaz Československých skladatelů]) were set up on the model of the organisation of political power in the country, with a leadership consisting of chairman, secretaries and central committee in authority of branches established in the provincial towns. Platforms for official opinions, i.e. monopoly periodicals, monopoly publishers and monopoly censors and inspectors were set up as parts of the necessary centralisation of all cultural life, and these were unconditionally subordinate to the interests of the central committee of the different cultural unions, and by extension to the organs of the Communist Party.

This process took place gradually for all the branches of the arts, not excluding music. As early as March 1948 a decree of the action committee of the National Front abolished all unions and clubs that had survived the war or been re-established after it,

and through the network of new action committees progressively transformed them into the single, all-powerful Union of Czechoslovak Composers represented by reliable people. Socialist realism was also enforced in our state on the model of the USSR as the only possible artistic doctrine. The impact on Czechoslovak society was unimaginable. Permanent “brain-washing” characterised by the destruction of books, the banning of authors, annual congresses, empty citations, endless meetings, training courses in scientific communism, stuffed and degenerate Marxism. Constant “witch hunts”, sometimes directed against genetics, at other times against sociology or depth psychology, but also against cybernetics, semiotics or linguistics. An unending struggle against religion, mysticism, against every non-Marxist philosophy or aesthetics. All this created an atmosphere of encirclement by “hostile imperialists” and “cosmopolitans” (in part of “Jewish origin”), an environment of unrelenting “class war”. Political show trials helped to confine the Czechoslovak intelligentsia in a stifling atmosphere of constant tension and fear for the present and future. Creative art was suppressed and replaced by socialist propaganda. The remnants



The 1960s Genera



of free art moved from official platforms to private studios, flats, cellars and cafes.

An extraordinary unofficial intellectual climate, spread from the then middle generation (who had been educated in the pre-war republic) and unwittingly encouraged by the state nomenclatura who denied those involved any outlet for their talents and interests other than mutual meetings and exchange of views, became the motor of changes that even in the absence of any public interest were still expressed in the work of many artists and writers, and rather belatedly composers as well. The misunderstood graphic artist Vladimír Boudník with his “explosionalism”, wandering through the streets and forcing people to create art from stains on the walls, his experiments with new print techniques, with text, and even with his own body and “soul” leading ultimately to attempts at suicide. The hectic workaholia of the painter Mikuláš Medek and his search for a new spirituality on the borders of ir-

rationalism and Surrealism. The unpretentious poetry of everyday life from the pens of Jiří Kolář and Josef Kainar, Kolář’s experiments with the visualisation of poetry, the extraordinary texts produced by Bohumil Hrabal, the “radical Marxism” of the philosopher and writer Egon Bondy, the “artmusdramas” [malmuzherciády] of the Prague arts group known as the “Šmidrové”, the persisting influence of the artists and writers from the circle of the defunct Group 42 and the art historian Jindřich Chaloupecký – all of this had its effect on the composition of original music as well. After all, the Prague composer Jan Rychlík regularly met with artists and had a deep interest in their work, as well as engaging in writing himself. Rudolf Komorous was an active member of the “Šmidrové” art group, the composer and flautist Petr Kotík grew up under the influence of the work of his father the painter and print-maker Jan Kotík and his father’s friends, and the composer Vladimír Šrámek

(almost a creature of myth), was in his introverted way interested in absolutely everything outside the conventional art of the time. In the later fifties these (and many others I have not named), created works that not only avoided the officially enjoined socialist realism, but also had serious potential as contributions to development and debate in world art.

In the later 1950s, therefore, almost all performance geared to contemporary, new music, developed more or less in opposition to official cultural programmes, was based on private initiative and was frequently very raw and elemental. It was fortunate for the composers that at least a few people prepared to support the new experiments appeared relatively soon in our somewhat embittered society; these were not only musicologists but above all performers, often from among the composers themselves. Unfortunately Rudolf Komorous did not manage to push through his vision of the creation of an ensemble

ST 1964
Státní divadelní studio Reduta Praha 1, Národní tř. 20

MUSICA VIVA PRAGENSIS

Program :

Petr Pokorný	Sextet Carmen de relationibus
Petr Kotík	Etuda 7
Krzysztof Penderecki	Miniatury
Eric Satie	Descriptions automatiques

Přestávka

F. Landino	Per mie dolce piaga
Morton Feldman	Two instruments
A. Logothetis	Mald paraleza

Hrají :

Karel Lang	hoboj
Rudolf Komorous	fagot
Vladimír Kubát	lesní roh
Bohuslav Ruzger	housle
Pavel Janda	viola
Jan Širc	violoncello
Arnošt Wildt	klavír
Zbyněk Vostřák	koordinátor

*Programme of a concert by Musica Viva Pragensis
(February 8th, 1964)*



Libor Pešek and The Chamber Harmony



ble specialised in contemporary music to a successful conclusion before his departure for China (where he taught bassoon at Peking University) in 1959, and it was only later, after 1960, that several ensembles focused on modern music emerged.

One of the first impulses was the formation of the Chamber Harmony under the leadership of the conductor Libor Pešek, which from 1960 included premieres of music by Czech composers with contemporary ideas, above all Jan Klusák, alongside 20th-century classics in the programmes of its concerts at the Na zábradlí Theatre. From the end of the 1950s Klusák had been exploring the possibilities of rational composition systems. Czech isolation from western culture meant that he had no contact with the work of Karlheinz Stockhausen or Pierre Boulez, but he soon arrived at a more freely conceived form of twelve-tone composition through his individual reaction to the music of the leaders of the Second Viennese School, above all Alban Berg. Also the Novák Quartet focused increasingly

on the New Music thanks to the second violin Dušan Pandula. In Brno, the chamber ensemble Musica Nova was formed in 1961 – initially as a trio – on the initiative of bass clarinetist Josef Horák, and in 1963 the Studio of Authors ensemble under the conductor Jiří Hanousek. In Bratislava the violinist and composer Ladislav Kupkovič co-founded the ensemble Hudba dneška [Music of Today] (1963). When Josef Horák moved to Prague he then helped to create the ensemble Sonatori di Praga (1963) and the world famous Due Boemi di Praga (with the pianist Emma Kovárnová; 1963).

Prague Musica Viva Pragensis played a major part in the emergence of a more experimental branch of contemporary music; it was founded by the flautist and composer Petr Kotík, who together with the composers Vladimír Šrámek and Jan Rychlík managed to persuade some Prague Conservatory teachers to take up the idea of a new music ensemble. Its first concert took place on the 20th of June 1961, but its activities were to develop fully and have the greatest

Generation

impact rather later, from 1962. At that time its core consisted of Petr Kotík, the bassoonist and composer Rudolf Komorous, the pianist Arnošt Wilde, the violinist Bohuslav Purgr and the clarinetist Milan Kostohryz. Also associated with this pioneering ensemble were the composers Zbyněk Vostřák, its musical director and conductor since 1963, and Marek Kopelent, who took over the leadership of the ensemble after the departure of Petr Kotík in 1965. The latter ceased to work with the ensemble after a row following the performance of his *Music for Three* at the Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1964 and subsequent criticism, and in 1967 he founded his own ensemble QUAX with Jiří Stivín, Jan Hynčica and Václav Zahradník.

The appearances of these ensembles at world festivals meant that international audiences became aware of contemporary Czech music and, albeit slowly, it started to make up for many wasted years. But we must admit that its reception by critics and audiences on the “Western scenes” was very lukewarm. The problem was that the techniques used by our composers had already been explored years before in the west and so the “new ideas” from Czechoslovakia tended to be regarded as behind the times, even though they had often actually been developed without any contact with world musical life and the composers had therefore been developing an original understanding of composition in many respects distinct from “Darmstadt” production.

But let us go back to the domestic scene. The Musica Viva Pragensis association of composers and performers at the Prague Conservatory originated as a chamber wind ensemble, but gradually turned into a group specialising in contemporary music and from 1962, and most

strikingly from 1963, it proved a success in bringing together people interested in contemporary Czech and world music. Petr Kotík and Rudolf Komorous shared a particular interest in trends in the circle of John Cage, and this had a major influence on the repertoire and programmes of the whole ensemble. A number of composers and performers who found this line appealing or at least not too distant from their own approach soon gathered around Musica Viva Pragensis. Vladimír Šrámek and later Zbyněk Vostřák produced music that was ever more emancipated from ordinary post-Weberian composition, moving into work with chance, new composing techniques and material. Šrámek and Kotík experimented with tape recorders and notation on millimetre paper, Komorous and Vostřák with silence, space, graphic notation and the new spirituality, and Kopelent with instrumental music theatre.

These trends helped to bring about a gradual transformation of official platforms, particularly the union apparatus. The majority of critics, and indeed prominent figures in official musical life, were still artistically, intellectually and of course to some extent politically unable to consider a major break with tradition, but the political climate was changing, with official criticism of the dogmatism of the fifties offering “experimental” composers effective weapons against their critics. Criticism of Stalin’s “cult of personality” became the focus of most statements on cultural policy especially following the 3rd Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers (April 1962). As a result, the reviews in the daily papers were now written in very neutral terms, i.e. they suggested that what came from the west should be heard

so that we could then criticise it. In concert life itself, we can then trace the inclusion of previously unacceptable works in the programmes of official festivals – for example Krzysztof Penderecky’s *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* and Luigi Nono’s *Le Victoire de Guernica* could be performed at the Prague Spring in 1963.

In this situation of conflicting views of contemporary western music – actually one in which most of the musical public knew nothing about contemporary music and those that knew something identified it mainly with music of the first half of the 20th century – the monopoly agency Pragokonzert, pushed by Petr Kotík, arranged an appearance by John Cage together with the Merce Cunningham Company in Prague. All through September 1964 posters in Prague advertised the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, John Cage, David Tudor, Musica Viva Pragensis and Robert Rauschenberg over the title “West Side Story Style Dance”. As Petr Kotík later recalled, around two thousand people turned up at the concert, most of them just attracted by the title and evidently without any idea of what was in store. Cultural officials and celebrities and members of the diplomatic community also attended. The reaction of the critics was very mixed but the reviews in the daily press were on the positive side. John Cage had personally asked Petr Kotík (they had met in Vienna) to engage musicians who were absolutely forbidden to rehearse anything before the concert. The instrumental parts were taken by members of the Musica Viva Pragensis ensemble. Merce Cunningham tried in his choreographies to liberate the dance from the music. Rauschenberg used chance found materials to create a large assemblage for

the performance, which was then destroyed afterwards by the cleaners. David Tudor and other performers produced unusual sounds rather than recognisable melodies on their instruments. The result was an undoubtedly colourful event of a kind unfamiliar to the local public and entirely incompatible with official art.

„[...] unfortunately we learned not to trust the masses, we became eminent individualists, people more introverted than extrovert”. This rueful comment from the musicologist Vladimír Lébl, in an article in the first issue of the first year of the magazine *Konfrontace* [Confrontation], offers a telling insight into the character of the Czech arts scene forming at the beginning of the sixties. On the one hand resistance to the all-embracing standardised style of art and life, but also the fear of elitism and abandonment of the possibilities of communicating with a large audience. On the one hand constant search for one’s own individual form of expression, but on the other fear of rejection and a failure to be understood. The impossibility of total rupture of ties and yet a constant stretching, sometimes almost to breaking point, of the umbilical cord of tradition and experience or else, on the contrary, what was often an uncritical glorification of all things western. The atmosphere of Czech music was marked by “superficiality and a lack of thoroughness in ideas and deeds, accommodation to

passing mood and vogues, eclecticism in opinions, earthbound practical orientation essentially deforming the idea of musical progress (Vladimír Lébl).

In a situation of conflict and contradiction between the official standpoint of the union organisation and the often distorted ideas of the composers, the phenomenon of New Music came like a bolt from the blue and from the outset was regarded as a heterogeneous element. Neo-classicist compositions had caused ripples in the still waters of socialist-realist production and Stravinsky had created a sensation not so long before, when suddenly our musical public, unprepared and deliberately kept in the dark, had been confronted by the fact of twelve-tone composition or “worse”. Some music critics sounded the alarm, warning their readers against anti-art. Even after 1956 (the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), the New Music was received very coolly in official quarters. A few pieces appeared at the Union of Composers listening sessions or here and there recordings were played at Prague’s Theatre of Music, and most importantly at the Thursday listening seminars held in the music history department of Charles University. Although a new production of Berg’s *Wozek* in 1959 had – in the grand phrase – “proved the durability of contemporary music”, only

Honegger, Hindemith and (with some embarrassment) Stravinsky were accorded any degree of favour. It was only after the 12th Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1962, which proclaimed democratism and a final break with the surviving remnants of the cult of personality, that the 3rd Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers was able to make what was in many respects a break with the past, so that even in the official circles of the ruling Union power apparatus people started to talk about the Western composition techniques hitherto considered “decadent”. Not that the “advances” of West European culture were directly approved, but the bigwigs in the Union now spoke of the necessity of studying them deeply in order to assess their value, or preferably lack of value.

Free-thinking and excessive openness to the Western world continued to irritate the Czech cultural policy makers. The performance of Petr Kotík’s *Music for Three in Memory of Jan Rychlík* at the Warsaw Autumn festival, for example, provided one opportunity for them to show their teeth; official functionaries expressed the opinion that such experiments ought not to be export items, and this was not a dignified way to present Czech music abroad. The ensemble *Musica Viva Pragensis* was punished for the offence by being prevented from participating in the festival

of contemporary music in Zagreb in 1965. The international scandal that this provoked led one of the main “spokesmen” of the Czech protagonists of the New Music, Vladimír Lébl, to write an article in *Hudební rozhledy* magazine that sparked off a heated debate, but unfortunately Lébl’s reactions to the attacks of the other side were not printed.

Despite the political thaw of the mid-1960s, cases of this kind and other administrative attacks were nothing very unusual at the time. *“The rigid monolithic cultural-political regime had started to collapse, at the official level dogmatism gave way to an intellectual bog, and iron diktat was replaced by small tyrannies, then official bullying, then haggling and finally apathy, here and there interspersed by hectic attacks”.* (Vladimír Lébl)

Even so, despite the fact that the era was far from free of problematic political interference, we can speak without hesitation of a golden age of Czech experimental art. This was a new art not produced by imitation of particular models and accommodation to an “approved aesthetic” but characterised by free thinking and an unflinching desire for authentic expression, for the creation of an individual language that required the same inner freedom and courage from the audience to decode it. It remains here only to say in sorrow that this emergent movement directed to freedom of artistic creation, whatever the results, was violently curtailed in our country by the intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 and above all by the ensuing “normalisation” policies of the all-powerful Communist Party in the 1970s. Those who did not emigrate were pushed by union purges and normalisation conditions to the margins of society and for several years their work found no place in either official or unofficial Czechoslovak venues.

A FEW WORDS ON THE COMPOSERS RERESENTED ON THE CD

The beginning of the 1960s saw a crucial turning point in the style and idiom of the composer **Jan Klusák (1934)**. After a period of enthusiasm for Neo-Classicism he had been one of the first in post-war Czechoslovakia to venture into the musical world characterised by the banners of the Second Viennese School, twelve-tone music, serialism. A new Prague production of Berg’s *Wozzek* (1959) was a major event, and one that captivated Klusák, for it seemed to him a manifestation of the ideal that had been crystallising with ever greater clarity in his theoretical ideas and his music. An attempt to achieve a deep emotional effect by using rational techniques of composition and thinking through the principles of musical form is evident in Klusák’s music to this day. A perceptible shift away from the canon of neo-classicism into a new musical world can be seen as early as his piece *Four Small Vocal Exercises on Texts by Franz Kafka* (1960), while later works show the application of the principles of twelve-tone composition and serialism, especially *Invention I, Sonata for Violin and Wind Instruments, Pictures, 2nd String Quartet* and, supremely, *Variations on a Theme by Gustav Mahler*. The composer conceived the *Variations* as early as 1960, but did not complete it until February 1962. *Variations on a Theme by Gustav Mahler* is the most impressive composition in Klusák’s output of the time, not only in terms of the scope and variety of techniques, but especially in terms of the thoroughness and purity of a musical thought new for its time. Klusák does not cite just his chosen theme, but the whole relevant section of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony. His aim is to

Klusák
1960's
Generation



PHOTO: KAREL SJUSTER 2x

present to the audience a composer whom he admired, and who was at the time somewhat underrated, to break down Mahler's music into elementary units and then gradually use them to create a new structure. The musical material remains, but its organisation is transformed with the help of freely conceived twelve-tone technique, often breached by the composer's Mahlerian reminiscences. The variations were first performed on the 4th of April 1963 at the Comedy Opera in Berlin, where it was conducted by Václav Neumann with the local orchestra. On the 10th of December 1963 the same conductor gave the piece its domestic premiere in the Smetana Hall in Prague with the Prague Symphony Orchestra.

Marek Kopelent (1932) began to mature as a composer when working as an editor in the State Belles Lettres and Music Art Publishing House, where from 1956 he came into contact with all kinds of different note material. This prompted the young composer to many reflections on the rationale of the Neo-Romantic principles that had been the basis for his music up to that point. Here he also first encountered the New Music. In the more relaxed atmosphere of the following years Kopelent took an active part in international festival life. With his temperamental orientation to rational composition, he found in the post-Weberian principles of the New Music the new order he had so much lacked, enabling him to create an entirely new musical world within the meaning of "composition as

traditionally understood", always governed by a rational but not a dogmatic order. The abundant use that he made of aleatorics was for Kopelent an enrichment of rational form, but not its fundamental principle. The composer also richly exploited the possibilities of the spatial diffusion of sound and microtonal possibilities. His *Nenie with Flute for the Late Hana Hlavsová* and above all his *Third String Quartet* of 1963, which won him a strong position in the European avant-garde, may be considered break-through works. The Novák Quartet, to which he dedicated the quartet, played it more than fifty times in the years 1963 – 1968, including performances at a number of international music festivals. In the period of normalisation that followed the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968, Marek Kopelent was banished from the concert repertoire at home, but his work had already won a firm place in European concert halls, where it was performed (without the composer being present or involved) throughout the seventies and eighties. His piece, *A few minutes with an oboist* was commissioned by the Italian-born American conductor Maria di Bonaventura for the summer festival in Aspen in 1972. Unfortunately it was not to be performed there. It was premiered two years later at the Wittenberger Tage für Neue Kammermusik, but the most important performances of the piece can be considered those at concerts in Huddersfield and in Warsaw with Heinz Holliger as both soloist and conductor. Kopelent himself said of the piece that "it is influenced by my then rather ironic relationship to the concerto



PHOTO: OCNN

form (the constantly returning ‘court’ flourish in the oboe part is always associated with a gesture inviting a certain player to play, and later the conductor himself – hence the subtitle, ‘concerto galante’), the period when it was written (in the second ‘cadence’ we hear the Russian ‘kazachok’, symbolising the forces occupying the country), and a longing for colourfulness of sound (prepared piano, multiple sounds on the solo instrument, children’s sounding toys in the conclusion, and so on.).“

What we might call the authenticity of the artwork is the most characteristic element in the music of the composer, flautist, organiser and free thinker, **Petr Kotík** (1942). An unflinching interest in art and literature led the young composer to an almost unbounded freedom of musical expression, in terms of both social and personal attitudes, unparalleled (except perhaps by Vladimír Šrámek) in the deformed conditions of the totalitarian system. In fact his meeting with Šrámek at the end of the 1950s was of fundamental significance for Kotík’s work. Vladimír Šrámek was experimenting with the possibilities of creating music with the help of a tape recorder. Petr Kotík also owned what was then a rare and much prized item, and so he was invited to co-operate. When Šrámek had finished his composition, he suggested that Kotík bring a composition of his own the next time, and that was where it all began. Kotík explored the possibility of creating music with the help of visual perception, i.e. the exploita-

tion of a graphic element and its arrangement in space (for example on millimetre paper), the principle of the chance distribution of different musical parameters with the aim of applying the undetermined order of nature... Commenting on his composition *Spontano*, created before his emigration in 1969 Petr Kotík wrote that, “After finishing *Music for 3 – in memory of Jan Rychlík* in the spring of 1964 I started to compose *Spontano*. I completed the piece in the summer when I came back to Prague for the vacation from my studies in Vienna. The asceticism in the sense of the sound material was most probably a reaction to *Music for 3*, where I tried to exploit the maximum in terms of instrumental possibilities. At that time I was planning a major appearance in Prague, where Frederic Rzewski was going to be performing as well. *Spontano* was supposed to be part of the enterprise and Rzewski was to take the piano part. The title refers to the composition process: for the first time I used spontaneously and intuitively altered material resulting from my compositional method. Up to then I had always kept to a strict method, following it right through from the initial concept to the final result.“



Vostřák

Until he was forty, the Czech composer and conductor **Zbyněk Vostřák** (1920–1985) was one of the leading representatives of the Czech late romantic tradition. His operas and ballets were part of the core repertoire of Czech theatres and in 1962 he had won the UNESCO Prize for the radio recording of the one-act comic opera the *Broken Pitcher* based on Kleist's play. This award was made, however when Vostřák's style of composition was already in the process of fundamental transformation. At the beginning of the 1960s he encountered new West European techniques; the resulting radical change in the music of an already established composer was remarkable. From 1962 his music expresses an interest in use of the twelve-tone row that led to a totally mathematically organised work. He developed a method of composition supposed to remove the individuality of the composer from his music. The music was not supposed to say anything, but only to convey ideas, of which God was the only idea worthy of it. Music appeared to Vostřák as the "unity and opposition" of three principles: *statics*, *kinetics* and *rhythmics*. The musical structures in which the listener ceases to notice the division of time were what Vostřák identified as statics, the notes changing pitch in a continuous row were what he characterised as kinetics, and where the sounds and tones are perceived in continuous order above all in relation to changing lengths (durations) he saw rhythmics. Composition then consisted in the counterpoising and balancing of these principles. The musical material was essentially a matter of indifference, derived from numeri-

cal orders and later intuitively, with the help of aleatorics, or performers. Vostřák himself often employed the same metaphysical idea – which for him always was the starting point and central focus of composition – in several different ways. His access to the musicians of the *Musica Viva Pragensis* ensemble allowed him to test out his hypotheses. We can follow his progressive development from the song cycle *While Falling Asleep* of 1962, influenced by twelve-tone music and serialism, through *Affects* for seven instruments of 1963, where he already exploits aleatorics and graphic notation, *The Pendulum of Time* of the years 1966–1967, where he also adds electronics, *Tao* for 9 instruments, written on twelve separate sheets with the order up to the performers, to the *Book of Principles* of 1973, which consists of 6 verbal scores for undefined chamber orchestra.

PIANOS FROM THE LITTLE CZECH VILLAGE OF DIVIŠOV ARE SOUGHT AFTER WORLDWIDE



Paul McNulty, an American, whose copies of historical fortepianos are played by musicians all over the world, has been living for the past thirteen years in the beautiful countryside around Český Šternberk in central Bohemia. *"I found a source of high-quality timber here, which is essential for instrument making. The spruce that grows in the Schwarzenberg Forest was chosen by most Viennese instrument makers from 1790 until 1850,"* Paul says, explaining what brought him to the Czech Republic in 1995. Upon leaving the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore he took to the study of piano technology in Boston. He avoided working in a modern piano factory, but before long, several pioneering artists in the fortepiano field took notice of his plan to build fortepianos, and set him on his way.

His wife, the pianofortist Viviana Sofronitzki, leads us across the yard to the workshop, whose façade still bears the sign *Strojírna* (engineering works) from before World War I. The warm scent of timber is reminiscent of a joiner's workshop. As we enter the second room the characteristic shape of a fortepiano lid leaves us in no doubt about what is manufactured here. The raw timber is seasoned until it becomes the material to make the instruments from which the master craftsman will extract sound in proportion to his controlled effort, much as musicians will do.

We go upstairs to the second floor and peep into the room where the instruments are polished. In the brightly-lit room next door, where a constant temperature and humidity are maintained, stand seven completed fortepianos begging to be played. Viviana doesn't resist for

a moment and sits down at each of them in turn to demonstrate the differences between them. She, the daughter of the legendary Russian pianist Vladimir Sofronitzki, is a fortepiano specialist who once visited Paul as a customer – and stayed. She has recorded Mozart's complete works for keyboard instrument and orchestra in Warsaw. Now she is playing Schubert, C. P. E. Bach and Beethoven, according to the period of the original instrument that Paul McNulty copied. The subtle and distinct sound of the Mozartean piano give way to the more boisterous and darker tones of the younger Bach's imagination; by the use of stops, Schubert's Moment Musical becomes delicate and full of colour. She is utterly at home with the instruments and knows all their foibles and characteristics, and how to make the best use of them – and she need know nothing



about the mysteries that still puzzle her husband. How is it that no two pianos of identical construction sound the same? How can one best imagine producing 36 pianos per year with twelve assistants, as did the great Anton Walter in his heyday, long before electricity? Is there a way to make the later Graf pianos truly sing, even with their English-inspired soundboards?

Paul models his instruments on the renowned instrument makers Georg Anton Walter, Ferdinand Hofmann, Conrad Graf and Johann Andreas Stein. *"Mozart loved Stein's fortepiano and wrote to his father about it. However, his father replied that Stein was excellent but expensive,"* Paul McNulty tells me. Whereas the builders of those days were capable of producing dozens of instruments annually, Paul's workshop turns out about ten per year. Paul has five assistants, but the "fine work", such as building the soundboard or covering the hammers with leather or tuning the action – not to mention the oversight of the entire process – is entirely in the master craftsman's hands.

There are about ten people in the world specialising in the manufacture of fortepianos *"but only about four of them are coming anywhere close to Paul's standard,"* Viviana maintains. This is no empty praise – the quality of McNulty's instruments is confirmed by the creditable list of renowned musicians who have had instruments built in

his workshop. They include Paul Badura-Skoda, Alexei Lubimov, Jacques Ogg and other pianists who have found they need something other than the modern piano. Ronald Brautigam has recorded all of Beethoven's Sonatas on a Paul McNulty fortepiano. *"Paul McNulty's fortepianos are by far the best,"* he declares. *"His instruments are the only ones I've ever played that have a 'soul', rather than being 'museum replicas'. I truly believe that he is the only fortepiano builder who has managed to capture Anton Walter's spirit in his pianos and am convinced that, had he lived and worked in the late 18th-century, there wouldn't have been 'Anton Walter & Sohn' but 'Walter & McNulty.'"*

McNulty's instruments feature on many recordings by Czech musicians, notably those of Jaroslav Tůma. Instruments with the McNulty trademark are not cheap to buy, of course, but Paul has plenty of orders. From time to time he will load a piano onto a van and drive it to a competition or a concert – air transport is too costly and unsafe.

Paul specialises in instruments from the late eighteenth century, but he is about to embark on a new order – a copy of a Pleyel from 1830. It stands in a corner, and it takes my breath away to think it was touched by the fingers of long-ago pianists. *"Compared to the Mozartean fortepiano, the strings are much thicker, so the frame has to be sturdier,"* the builder says, explaining the basic differences –



which are anyway obvious at first glance even to a layperson. *“At that time the ideal was a bigger, fuller sound – the one-man orchestra. Times and aesthetic opinions had changed – the French Revolution had turned many heads.”*

Paul McNulty finds an interest in the context and circumstances of the period in which the instrument he is copying was made. He relishes the stories of builders’ lives emerging from recent research, and is full of quotations of musicians talking about their pianos. He acquired his experience in museums here and abroad, and learned a great deal by restoring originals. His first job is to measure the original instrument. *“It gets easier to measure these old pianos as I am better able to determine the intention of the builder, which usually means an approach more reliable and simple than a beginner would imagine,”* he explains. *“The measured dimensions of an old piano reflect years of production on the part of a successful builder who wasn’t at all confused about his instrument, so I copy the soundboards and hammer action without varying from observed data. When I was working in Amsterdam not much was documented from the few early pianos which had been opened and repaired. With a little guesswork, I nevertheless arrived at a working design of a Walteresque piano, however slightly bulkier in its musical dimensions than later emerged from a unique examination of a five octave Walter in the Czech Republic. So my instruments of that period have bigger hammers than they ought to have,”* Paul says, recalling the time he worked in Holland. He explains patiently and clearly how the piano action evolved. He takes apart a fortepiano as if it were a construction kit and picks up some of the resilient hammers. *“These hammers, which fall back quickly – the so-called ‘Viennese action’ – were Stein’s invention. Great acceleration is generated with little movement,”* he says, thrumming a hammer with his finger. It also depends on the point where the head of the hammer touches the strings – in the top treble it strikes at a tenth of the string length, corresponding to the musical interval of a third. This simple rule helps Paul locate the maker’s ‘sweet spot.’ *“When I was measuring the Stein I kept finding the number 15.3 mm in the mechanism and soundboard. It is very attractive to suppose there were literally rules of thumb, and many organologists today explore instruments employing the scale of inches of a particular place and time.”*

Anyone who tries one of McNulty’s copies can confirm that the keys react more sensitively to the softest touch than the modern instrument can manage. Lisztian technique, suitable for larger, heavy pianos, doesn’t work well here. Paul’s careful replicas of pianos from an unimaginable time, long ago, are brilliant evocations of the spirit hidden in some of our most treasured musical scores.

THE PLUSSES, PITFALLS AND PROSPECTS OF ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC MUSIC

**Last November
MUSICA NOVA,
the international
competition in electro-
acoustic (EA) music
took place in Prague.
Already in its 16th year,
the competition attract-
ed 85 pieces by
composers from
26 countries.**



Left to right: V. Delaney, L. Dohnalová, J. Wyness and B. Schumann

It has two categories: purely electro-acoustic music (Category A) and music combining electronics with a live instrument or voice (Category B). The winning pieces were presented together with their authors at a concert in the Czech Museum of Fine Arts in Prague on the 14th of December. In Category A the laurels went to the Scot James Wyness for *devoiler, deplier...* (1st Place), the French Charles Eduard Platel for *Sawlogy* (2nd Place) and in Category B to the Portuguese Joao Pedro Oliveira for *L'accordeon du diable* (1st Place) and the Korean living in the USA Kyong Mee

Choi for *Slight Uncertainty is Very Attractive* (2nd Place). The concert also features Michal Rataj's *Dreaming Life* from the Czech round of the competition and pieces by the youngest composers to win an award in both categories, i.e. the Canadian Valerie Delaney (Category A, *Different Shades of Blue*) and the German Bernd Schumann (Category B, *Heranreifende Unausbleiblichkeiten*). As always, the concert and competition were organised by the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music, with support from the Ministry of Culture, the Prague City Authority and music foun-

dations.

The Prague competition was founded in 1969 and like other long-standing festivals with a clear focus and wide competitor base it is to some extent an evolving document of the changes in practice, taste and theory. The competition is not anonymous and it requires composers to offer a written commentary not only on the piece they enter but also on their attitude to the field, their motivation and so on. The winners are regularly asked questions on the advantages, risks and prospects of a genre which today seems omnipresent,

especially in pop music, but is very much a minority pursuit at the experimental arts top end.

The organisers have deliberately avoided extending the competition to include multimedia, pop and open works, partly because of the difficulty of comparing qualities across so wide a spectrum. They concentrate exclusively on music, and on artists for whom choice of material, and compositional and technological treatment is not a routine matter but a creative experimental venture from the detail to the whole. The versatile composer Kyong Mee Choi (born 1971, teaching EA composition in Chicago), put it this way: *"In EA music some people think authors need no education in composition and can make do with just a knowledge of programming, technology and recording. I'm sure that EA music demands exceptional musical abilities and skills. My aim is to go further in understanding and developing musicianship. When composing I trust my intuition."*

It may seem banal today, but it was the chance to tape record sound that more than fifty years ago made it possible to involve in the creation of music the whole sound environment in which we live, to draw it in as material so that it could be explored, manipulated in ever more sophisticated ways and become the basis for the creation of new sounds. In an era that gives precedence to visual or multimedia communication, so that simple listening is in decline, sound heuristics and the phenomenology are the water of life for sound and music art. This new perspective even allows the qualities of standard instruments and instrumentation to emerge into a fresh new light. It is rather symptomatic of the situation that quite a number of composers are unnerved by the idea of the public listening to music without a visual support such as the presence of the per-

former (i.e. what is known as the acousmatic approach, where attention is focused exclusively on the sound form in itself, ideally in darkness.) They are nervous either because they don't have enough faith in their own abilities (this kind of presentation makes the music as if too naked in their eyes) or they don't have enough confidence in the abilities of the listener (who finds the expressions and gestures of the performer an aid to orientation in the sound, or a welcome distraction if he is not fully orientated in it). The acousmatic tradition was represented among the prize winners last year by James Wyness (b.1956) from the Birmingham School, Valérie Delaney (b.1982) and Charles-Edouard Platel (b.1946), who was originally a sound engineer.

Among the arguments composers offer for choosing EA, and indeed the reason that Stockhausen gave when he started on his own EA music, is that it frees the composer from dependence on the performer, the technology allowing him to create and test the whole process of creation immediately. Last year's competition winners formulated the point in several different ways: *"I have a chance to create my own sound material and express myself directly in an individual way without dependence on performers."* (Delaney); *"The whole composition process is under my control"* (Platel); *"I can create sound practically out of nothing like a sculptor"* (Oliveira); *"I can compose in a practically unlimited range of timbres with extremely fine control of detail"* (Choi). Subtle creative work in the field of acousmatic music brings up issues of the compatibility of materials that are in different degrees concrete or abstract, and of different sources of sound, as well as the problematic of continuous and discontinuous transitions between sound objects and layers, the construc-

tion of virtual and real spatiality, semantic effects of a Surrealist character, mode of narration etc. (Wyness) or listening strategies (Platel). Ch.E. Platel, originally a sound engineer, just recently published a study *Musique imaginaire* (2007) in which he explores what is a major problem for all beginners in the field. This is how to embody one's intention in the sound in a way that ensures that it is adequately grasped and understood. Often even a good composer fails to master this parameter of composition fully: the virtual space may not have the required depth for the chosen sound material, for example, and so the different layers and details are not identifiable within it and there is an undesirable mixing and masking of the sound elements. The problem here is that the EA composer does not have a source of support in the tradition of instrumentation and orchestration that is available to the composer of vocal-instrumental music. Composers see the disadvantage of the genre precisely in this very testing aspect of compositional work, unavoidable if you want to do more than just some banal exploitation of the "precooked" sound and software options that are accessible even to laymen today. The composer has to be competent in more than one field and has to be extremely focused because he is composing in a very individualised language (Delaney, Choi). This aspect is also an obstacle for the listener, who likewise has no a priori stylistic model and has to perceive the course of the piece with an open mind. The composer has to know how to offer the listener a comprehensible acoustic orientation in the music (Platel), because today we can no longer rely on the pattern that applied specifically from the 1950s to 1970s, i.e. contem-

porary art is the object of snobbish interest (T. W. Adorno, W. Allan) and snobbish interest gradually becomes adaptation to the new, which is accepted.

What do the composers see as the prospects for the genre? The consensus is that it is a bad thing to concentrate on one single presentation strategy, e.g. listening just from reproduction, or else bringing the performer (or composer at the mixing console) back to the podium at any price. What is crucial is to ensure an adequate hearing for the piece in appropriate even if heterogeneous settings. If people today can listen to music at a high technological standard including multichannel projection in the comfort of their homes, then public presentation has to offer them something more. First, the programmes have to be expertly thought out not just in terms of the combination of pieces but also from the point of view of the parameters of the hall and its technological equipment, since otherwise the result may be counterproductive. Second, given that the ordinary listener is being presented with a kind of terra incognita, a commentary is useful. The piece itself must be comprehensible in terms of sound and must respect the health-ecological point of view. Acoustically unpleasant music (which does not mean structurally unusual music) should be an episode with contextual meaning, and not the object of an extensive project. That would make it damaging to health. Pleasantness doesn't have to be trivial or kitschy. Third, the technological equipment of halls, and the application of the norm of quality surround sound playback are enormously important. Fourth, there is ever more live flexibility in the relationship between EA and the acoustic instrument. Fifth, the spatial aspect of presentation of music will be developing too, and in pop music as well. It would also be a good thing for the future if the teaching of the young ear could involve not just the acoustic world of classical music (Platel).

Recognising the sound quality of the environment, perceiving and responding to it a creative and ecological way, and cultivating the abilities of the ear, can generally be said to be very positive goals worth working towards, and good composition and presentation of EA music can contribute to them. This way greater understanding for the ecology of sound and more as yet unappreciated silence may eventually make headway in our

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ONDŘEJ VRABEC: I AM ANCHORED IN THE SYMPHONIC REPERTOIRE

Ondřej Vrabc is one of those people who seem to be oblivious to the astronomical constant of the twenty-four hour day. His activities are extensive and his interests wide-ranging. He is the first French horn player in the Czech Philharmonic, devotes himself intensively to conducting and plays in several chamber ensembles. With one of these ensembles, the Brahms Trio Prague, he recently completed a CD, very positively received by the critics, that he also personally recorded, edited, and prepared for release, producing the cover photo to boot... Knowing Ondřej as I do, I can see that all this is just the beginning.



Your professional life started very untypically – you started to play in the Czech Philharmonic at seventeen. How did it happen?

By the ordinary route – applying for an advertised place by audition. My professor at the Conservatory Bedřich Tylšar told me about it – even though applying at my age was almost impudent. Initially my rating wasn't actually above the level necessary for the appointment, but it was the highest of any applicant and so the committee decided to give me a kind of year's internship in the orchestra, where I played anything that was needed, from fourth horn to first. The next year they advertised the post again (1998) and then I filled all the requirements. Finally in 1999 I got a full contractual place, right after my graduation concert in the Rudolfinum hall.

You were studying conducting at the Prague Conservatory at the same time.

Actually I only started that after finishing studies in the French horn. I graduated in conducting in 2002 – they let me arrange for an individual study plan and so I shortened the study programme to three years. After the vacation I went on to the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. I graduated from there last year.

Then in the spring of 2007 came the Prague Spring Festival Competition, where you, as conductor, finished in very tight fourth place, although the critics didn't



The Brahms Trio Prague

© PHOTO ONDŘEJ VRÁBEC 7x

overlook your performance and rated it very highly. Are you planning to go in for any other competitions? Are they at all important?

I'm afraid they are important. It annoys me a lot. Earlier I thought that the main thing was to play well, go into it in the greatest possible depth, take as humble an attitude as possible to the music and oneself and the rest would somehow fall into place. But then you discover that the kind of work you achieve that way doesn't always play the main role. Sometimes soloists, even those appearing with the Czech Philharmonic, are quite an eye-opener... Competitions often look less like a display of artistic creativity and unique individuality than some sort of sports tournament, a match about who plays faster, higher, who can produce more surprises in terms of polished and above all faultlessly presented artistic numbers. It's only when you get further despite this necessary tax that you can in some way start to realise your real vision, if you have one of course – and that is often the source of the lack of fit between competitions and real concert practise. Competitions are actually only good in the sense that they offer prestige to people who don't want to rely on the conclusions of their own ears and hearts. Generally people today don't stick by their own views much; the important things are trends, admiring the same as the others, what is considered "in", what is recommended, what is most pushed by advertising. Music stars today support a vast machinery of small parasites and big vampires, who would never exist if this wasn't the general habit, and so no one actu-

ally wants music lovers themselves to look for diversity. They are supposed to consume what is served up to them and to pay into the right pockets. The problem was very nicely expressed by the harpsichord player Zuzana Růžičková in an interview. Roughly what she said was that when she was young the people who went talent-spotting were impresarios, mostly former musicians themselves with professional musical experience, who understood the field and were interested in the exceptional qualities of young musicians. They used to watch them at work for a long time, and go to their concerts. Today this is the task of managers, whose only perspective is commercial gain and who rely more or less solely on competition results when choosing suitable candidates. Today they're selling bread rolls and the next day violinists. Decisions on a human fate are made on the basis of just thirty or sixty minutes playing time on the podium... A huge amount of money makes the world go round in music. When I got to Japan, in the column on my visa for occupation I am defined as "entertainer" – in my view that give you an accurate picture of the world today. But in one respect competitions, especially the conducting ones, are irreplaceable. I can be the greatest possible conductor but unless I get a chance to stand in front of an orchestra and show what I can do, no-one will ever know that. In a competition everyone who gets through the preliminary selection gets the chance. Of course he or she is under enormous pressure and the conditions are diametrically opposite to normal work, ending in the concert, but the chance is



*The Brahms Trio Prague
(Monika Vrabcová, Daniel Wiesner and Ondřej Vrabec)*

there. If you just sit and wait for an invitation, it's almost certain that nothing will ever arrive.

Does your – quite prestigious – engagement with the Czech Philharmonic help you in any way in your conducting career?

Yes, it helps. But not so much in the sense of getting me opportunities – chiefly in the fact that when I stand up in front of an orchestra the performers appreciate that that I'm not someone who has been teaching himself to conduct in front of a mirror, but that I know the orchestra from the inside, I know how it functions and what it needs. As an orchestral player I watch plenty of conductors every day at work, some of them excellent, some surprisingly bad – regardless of their status. School is good in the sense that students get a chance to conduct district orchestras, and are forced to work systematically, to build up their repertoires. But nothing can replace the practical school of working in an orchestra! This kind of experience has a perceptible effect on conducting. The players then tend to be pleasantly surprised that such a novice knows the orchestra better than they would have expected from anyone so young.

If everything goes as you would want it to, what kind of repertoire would you want to concentrate on as a conductor?

I am very much anchored in the symphonic repertoire, even though just because I work in an orchestra I am far from idealising the orchestra in any way. The role of conductor of a symphony orchestra isn't a bed of roses, but when I stand in front of it and can work with it, I feel at home; it is close and familiar to me. I am also grateful for the chance to work with a chamber orchestra, but I can't easily imagine conducting a choir, for example – I don't even have any experience of that. Opera attracts me, and I've already tried it in a small way. Actually this is a symphony orchestra as well, with the voice as another dimension. But it is very demanding – the conductor has to react even more flexibly to what is going on at every moment, and be on his guard all the time. The success of a symphonic concert mainly depends on the care devoted to rehearsal, but in opera something you can hardly be prepared for can happen every night. On the other hand, it's true that because opera works on the audience in so many different ways – instrumentally, vocally, visually on the stage and so on –, there is a substantially higher level of tolerance in opera for any small hitches that may occur.

Does a brass player conduct in a different way than, say, a string player? After all, the strings have a particularly important role in the orchestra.

In that sense I probably do have a slight handicap, but you learn a great deal through actual practise, for example about bowing. My background in wind is recognisable, for example a hand gesture sometimes de facto symbolises what someone should do or should want to do with his breath. The strings feel it a little differently, but in fact it's actually similar. Breathing is the foundation.



What does a horn player actually hear in the orchestra? Tell us about your sound perspective when you are sitting in the orchestra...

Unfortunately sometimes you only hear the cymbal behind your head. Even when things work as they should, the position of the French horns to the back is a little unpleasant in the sense that often, for example in the faster rhythmic passages, you can't rely on what you're hearing because the sound comes to you late. In moments like that I sometimes have to supplement my hearing with my sight – for example I observe the movements of the strings on the first desk. Sometimes you even need to play slightly early, because the sound of the French horn doesn't go directly into the hall, but is reflected from the wall.

When you then go to play chamber music, do you have to spend some time adapting to the different situation?

No. I would argue that there is no difference between orchestral and chamber play. That's an excuse put forward by some older orchestral players who think they are somehow enhancing their own importance by claiming that orchestral play is something entirely specific. I don't agree. I know from experience that some people will immediately grasp how an orchestra functions and will be able to react immediately to what is going on around it, and others won't ever grasp it to their dying day. The principle is the same as in chamber play, just with the difference that in a small ensemble you concentrate exclusively on what you can hear whereas in an orchestra you also have to follow what is happening visually (the conductor etc.), and constantly assess these perceptions, because the results often diverge quite a lot. And you have to add in the fact that 90 people are having to make these decisions at the same time. This constant "switching between the eye and the

ear" can be very demanding in terms of attention. You need a bit of time to get used to some things in the orchestra, that's true. But otherwise it is purely a question of musical intelligence and adaptability, and in that sense there is no difference between chamber play and the orchestra.

Academies in particular are very much orientated to solo or chamber play. Would you agree that the teaching of orchestral play is seriously neglected?

Yes. Another pernicious practice is that in orchestral part lessons at the schools all the attention is focused just on the exposed passages, the solo entries. At auditions a player will often come in at all but double tempo, because he or she has absolutely no idea of how the whole thing is really played. Often students would do better if they listened to the whole piece on CD once rather than just constantly practising selected snippets from those little books that are the bibles at the schools. The effect is that often they haven't a clue about the pieces as wholes. When several players leave an orchestra all at once and are replaced by young players it's normal to find that its performance suffers for a time. This means that the best solution of all is the practise of orchestral internships (like the Berlin Philharmonic academy, for example), where a young player gets the chance to sit in the orchestra among seasoned colleagues, play a few concerts and get to know a real orchestra at a real concert, and not that school "trial-run". This is genuine experience.

Let's turn now to your chamber music activities. What are you focusing on in all this?

I had to cut back my chamber activities seriously because of my conducting studies, and so I really focused just on the ensembles that in my view had the best prospects. That was the Juventus

Quintet, a wind quintet founded back in 1996, which has recently been relatively dormant, unfortunately, because of the other work commitments of all the members. At the moment the priority ensemble for me is the Brahms Trio Prague, which fulfils my ideals of deep and creative chamber co-operation. The Philharmonia Octet Prague is also important to me. It's only been in existence for a short time so far, but it brings together outstanding players, real soloist individual personalities – I think it has a great future.

Getting back to the Trio. It consists of French horn, violin and piano, which is quite an unconventional combination. Is there any problem with lack of repertoire?

Only at a first perfunctory glance – unfortunately the sort of glance typical of concert organisers. As far as I know, there are about ten original pieces from earlier times for the combination. Surprisingly these are to be found even in Classicism – for example Dusík's trio. The cornerstone of original compositions is naturally the work that is our trio's emblem – Brahms's op. 40. And of course there is the Ligeti, which we are just preparing now. There are also trios originally written for oboe instead of violin, for example, which it is no problem for our combination to play. Most of them sound even better than in the original version. When it comes to transcription, perhaps one day we shall be a little more impudent and arrange the cello part in Shostakovich for horn, for example. But original pieces will always remain the main interest. We also play the solo repertoire for individual instrumental combinations at our concerts. We are motivating contemporary composers to write original new works dedicated to the BTP. For example we provided the impulse for a new piece from the English composer Andrew Downes, and recorded it in world premiere on our CD.

Your debut CDs (see review section) which you christened on the 5th of February in the Suk Hall at the Rudolfinum, were made in quite an unconventional way – you yourself recorded them in Regensburg, Germany, and edited them yourself. Can you tell us more about this?

We wanted to create a really unique recording and that meant we had to have full control of

the entire process – from setting the microphones to the final mastering –, and this is something people were unlikely to let us do in a studio. Apart from the basic economic factor (you can't imagine how hard it is to find sponsors even for the most unique project and how much recording frequencies cost in a qualitatively comparable hall in the CR), the freedom of time that organising the recording process for ourselves gave us played a role as well. That was one reason why we were ready in a record 2.5 days. Last but not least I wanted to push my own limits a little further – sound engineering has been one of my big hobbies for a long time. When thanks to the generosity of the local university and my friend the conductor Graham Buckland I suddenly had a chance of getting a completely unique Audimax hall in Regensburg totally free of charge and with a brand-new Steinway too, there was no question but to go for it.

Of course I have no professional knowledge of acoustics and the other disciplines that sound engineers are trained in, but even though I've naturally read quite a lot of technical material, I think it is above all a question of talent, will and ear. A so-called professional sound engineer has completely ruined our sound several times. I don't want to generalise, but even when it comes to medicine a white coat doesn't make a doctor a doctor and there are doctors and Doctors. And unfortunately it's the same way in sound engineering. The way customers often behave is that the bigger the mixing console they can see the more they trust a firm – and it's the same with makes of microphones. Studios are often full of useless stuff that they never ever actually use but a studio just must have in order to look sufficiently professional... For me professionalism doesn't consist in the fact that someone graduates and does his or her work as a „profession“, but means that they deliver perfect work, which they regard as a vocation and master better than anyone else!

Today the sound equipment commonly available even to me is incomparably more sophisticated than what Messrs. Burda and Kulhan used to record the Czech Philharmonic in the



sixties, and yet – listen to those recordings and compare them with today’s! It is almost incredible what they knew how to do. Today every instrument, or instrumental section in the case of an orchestra, is recorded by several microphones at once onto many tracks – each part separately. This means studio work has been shifting from quality of performance to post-production – everything is subsequently mixed, the good highlighted and the bad covered up, and all kinds of things can be helped in an almost incredible way. It’s hugely advantageous for the recording industry – it saves the time that would have been necessary for perfect fine tuning of the recording before it even gets to the microphones. But for all that, could you stick your neck out and say that today’s recordings are better?

We went back a little to the good old days. We were recording using the simplest setup possible for our purposes Two microphones – i.e. a simple stereophonic recording technique, the shortest cable route to the digital converter and a digital recording into a stereo track in the computer. This kind of method excluded any kind of subsequent correction of the record-

ing and as so the resulting balance and sound design of the final product depended only on the performance itself. The record was born directly on the podium – during the play, not later during studio processing. This approach demanded painstaking preparation in Prague. Then we just simply tried to play with the greatest possible elan – as at a live performance, while attempting to minimise the number of cuts so as to preserve the expressive integrity of the recording. This approach may be uncomfortable by today’s standards, but it is the only one that leads to the goal – which is for the trio to sound to listeners just as it would at concerts. The direction remained completely in our hands, all the technical equipment was located on the podium and employed while we were actually playing. This was the only way we could live up to our ideas of the right quality.

Doesn't it interfere with your performance when you have to take care of the recording as well?

No. As I’ve described, the whole technique is very simply, and during the recording itself all I had to do was “turn on/turn off”.



You have a very professional and vivid web site (www.vra-bcovi.cz), where one of the sections is called "Horn Clinic". Should we gather from this that teaching attracts you?

I don't teach on a permanent basis at any institution and I don't have any regular private pupils, but students often come to me for consultations. Some of them are preparing for auditions, and others have some particular technical problem. With the horn clinic I try to give students even easier access to the necessary information - I reply to the more generally relevant questions with articles permanently available on the web, and answer individual student problems by e-mail or a personal visit. From the start the horn clinic was conceived to be a part of the horn players' favourite server www.lesniroh.cz, where not just me but any of the visitors to the pages could answer the questions. Good advice - that's the dearest and least available kind of commodity!

I am also involved in a project run by the company And Vision Inc. Tokyo, founded by Mr. Hirotsugu Ikeda. A film-maker by training (he studied in New York), a cosmopolitan and every inch a visionary as well as a capable organiser, Ikeda sees the often pretty rigid system of Japanese education from a different perspective. He

has created and is extending a network of foreign lecturers to whom young Japanese musicians can go for courses and consultations to open up different horizons for themselves. Generally, to answer your question directly, I greatly enjoy teaching.

Having started to play in our foremost orchestra while still at school, you actually began at a place that many will never manage to reach even at the peak of their professional careers. I assume that sitting in the orchestra until you retire is not your idea of your future...

Indeed not. But in moments when the players are focused, prepared and the orchestra is playing as it should I say to myself that this is something that I probably couldn't live without. When you know the orchestra from the inside, it's not always entirely edifying, but then when everyone shuts up and plays, you have to love it. You hate it during rehearsals and love it at concerts...

Of course in this respect chamber music is completely different - you have to keep on trying new approaches even in pieces that you have long ago rehearsed to the point where you know them inside out. If someone fails to do that, if he isn't flexible and doesn't keep looking for

new levels, it's the end. In the orchestra this is always a danger, this succumbing to a certain laxity, indifference, and actually pessimism. I was lucky that at the time when I joined the Philharmonic, and was starting to stick my nose in the air and gradually absorb that orchestral ennui, Mrs. H. A. Gaifmann dragged me off to the Sándor Végh (today the Bohuslav Martinů) Academy at the chateaux in Dobříš and in Brandýs nad Labem. Musicians came there from all over Europe, and they had a completely different approach to music. For example the bassoonist Sergio Azzolini – a genius of world stature, completely untouched by normal life, who would routinely decide that he wanted to practice at two in the morning. And nobody could bring themselves to go and yell at him on account of those beautiful notes and lost sleep. On our Portuguese tour together, on the way to the airport, he even practised in the car! Or then again once I was woken up in the night by Zelenka's sonatas. I got dressed, went out to see where the sound was coming from and found a few people playing in the chateau stables by the lavatories just for pleasure – but how they played! There I got to know a completely different standard, which took me over and which I never want anyone to take away from me! In the end, in this respect Professor Tylšar at the conservatory taught me a huge amount too. In this light work in the orchestra can often grind you down. But it should be said that this is a general problem, and far from relating just to the Czech Philharmonic.

So what about the future – will it be the French horn or conducting?

That's the usual question and I was waiting for it. And so I'll give you my tried and tested answer. I don't think that in today's society, which is so unfavourable to culture, I am likely to get so many opportunities whether as horn player or as conductor in future that I would actually be forced to choose one field and abandon the other for good. It's possible that one day I just won't have the time capacity and strength to work as an orchestral player. It's sometimes already a problem today – for example because of my duties in the CP I can't take part in two conducting competitions that would have interested me a great deal. But to give up conducting, chamber music, solo activities, wine, sound mastering, photography and so and so on?! Only a little bit of me would be left...



Ondřej Vrabc (*1979)

is a graduate of the Prague Conservatoire in French horn and conducting. He continued his conducting studies at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, from which he graduated in 2007. He holds the title of the absolute winner in the competition of the conservatoires in Ostrava, and has won several other prizes as a chamber player (Concertino Praga, Chomutov competition, the competition of Mozartes community in Prague etc.). In the International conducting competition of the Prague Spring Festival 2007 he took fourth place, gained an honourable mention of the jury and two prizes for the most successful Czech participant. At the early age of 17 he started to work with the Czech Philharmonic, and in June 1999 he was appointed principal – solo horn player. In 2002 and 2004 he was awarded scholarships for London Master classes, where – under the direction of the chief conductor of the Boston Philharmonic, Benjamin Zander, he worked with the London Soloists Chamber Orchestra. Besides his activity in the Czech Philharmonic and conducting, he focuses his artistic effort most of all on chamber music (Brahms Trio Prague, Juventus Quintet, PhilHarmonia octet, The Czech Philharmonic Horn Club), soloist activities and recently teaching as well (in co-operation with the Japanese foundation And Vision Inc. Tokyo). He regularly records for the Czech Radio.



THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE PLACE OF ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK IN THE HISTORY OF CZECH NATIONAL MUSIC

The title of this article might be regarded by many as an overstatement. Indeed it is almost hard to believe that at the close of the 19th century, when Antonín Dvořák – and thanks to him, Czech music as a whole – was enjoying not only recognition at home but also enormous success in Europe and overseas, a group opposed to Dvořák came into existence at Prague university, which would subsequently try to leave him out of the picture when chronicling the development of modern Czech music. The issue subsequently became a matter of public debate on the music scene in the period 1911-1915; dubbed the “Dvořák battles”, it would fill the pages of the music journals and the daily newspapers.

In that period, which was so sensitive about national matters, objections were even expressed to Dvořák’s growing success beyond the borders of Bohemia. His success was interpreted as a betrayal of the nation’s art, and because he accepted commissions from abroad he was accused of trading his art for momentary success. The idea of progress – as the keynote of historical thinking in Czech and European musicology well into the twentieth century – engendered a stereotypical construct that contrasted the successful (albeit conservative and spontaneous) musician that was Dvořák, to the suffering, progressive genius and thinker that was Bedřich Smetana, regarded as the founder and creator of Czech national music. Although

it may seem no more than a brief polemical episode, the extreme anti-Dvořák standpoints of those days cast a shadow for a long time over the historical appreciation of the period of development of modern Czech music, as well as over Dvořák himself. And because it was closely bound up with the issue of what history is and what creates the national culture, it also determined what questions were posed by historical research.

The following metaphor from Jaroslav Vrchlický’s elegy *Tó Antonín Dvořák*, which the great Czech poet wrote immediately after the composer’s death in 1904, might serve as a fitting introduction to our reflection on the way Dvořák was received at the time: “*In the desert God*

created an oasis and a crystal cavern, And a swaggering Czech hurled a stone therein.” These lines also express the sharp contradiction that Vrchlický and much of the Czech music public felt between what Dvořák’s music said to them and what the Czech music historians were trying to foist on them – and this was long before the period of uncompromising controversies. The fact is that in the critical reflections about Dvořák’s music around the turn of the century, the composer was viewed exactly in the spirit of Vrchlický’s metaphor as “the creator of a positive antipole to the world of power, reason, reflection and creative sorrow, of escape from the world of reality”, as an antithesis to the “world of the diseased and the weak”.



Zdeněk Nejedlý

“[The opera]Dimitry was a demonstration of Dvořák’s overt and conscious opposition to Smetana’s efforts [...] It was his success in England that set Dvořák firmly on this reactionary path. That unmusical country, where the tradition of Händel’s oratorios has been as strong throughout the century as sometimes the Mozart tradition is here, was so enthusiastic about the Stabat Mater [...] that Dvořák was invited to conduct his own work. In March 1884 he was a triumphant success there [...]. That was how Dvořák was celebrated for his conservative works at a time when our most progressive composer was dying.”

Zdeněk Nejedlý, The History of Czech Music, Prague 1903

“At the moment when the tragedy of Smetana was reaching its climax in the game lodge at Jabkenice, bringing to a conclusion that unhappy genius’ battle with fate, [Dvořák’s] international fame was attaining unsuspected proportions.”

Vladimír Helfert, Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák, in: Index VI, 1934

Let us therefore attempt to view the controversy from a musicological standpoint, even though one cannot tackle fully either the personality of the main protagonist of those polemics, Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962), Professor of Musicology at Charles University in Prague or that entire period of controversy solely from the viewpoint of a single field of study. A musicological approach can, however, help throw light on the basic issues of those debates and proclamations, which seem so impenetrable in terms both of their extent and the knottiness of the arguments, particularly in view of the fact that the arguments to do with music history and compositional techniques were sometimes

a front for cultural and political interests.

In a way, the controversy over Dvořák was a continuation of the disputes between Czech Wagnerians and anti-Wagnerians from the 1870s, which, in view of the approaching tenth anniversary of the Provisional Theatre (the first permanent Czech theatre, 1862), coincided with reflections on the present and future of Czech national opera. To a large extent, the arguments and opinions in the Dvořák debates were the same as those formulated in the Wagnerian camp by one of the founders of Czech musicology, Otakar Hostinský (1847–1910). Under the banner of Hostinský’s idea of national music and progress,

Nejedlý’s camp (or the “Hostinský School”, as it called itself), associated with the music journal *Smetana*, went into battle against Dvořák in the name of “justice in the entire orientation of Czech music” (as one of Nejedlý’s pupils Vladimír Helfert wrote as late as 1934, at a time when he was beginning to revise his radical attitude to Dvořák from before the war). These anti-Dvořákians above all shared Hostinský’s opinion that the alleged dispute about the basic orientation of Czech music – which they perceived and whipped up as a conflict between the “progressive” Smetana trend on the one hand and the “conservative” Dvořák trend on the other – could and must be solved “scientifically”.

Inspired by the so-called Neudeutsche Schule and its ideologist and spokesman, the music historian Franz Brendel, Hostinský regarded the history of music as a single, progressive, evolutionary line proceeding step by step with historical inevitability to further stages of perfection; he considered musical progress in his own day to be represented by musical drama and the symphonic poem. Hostinský demanded that national art should aim uncompromisingly at the apex of European progress (and it was the job of the music theorist to help composers find their way onto that path), and he believed that Bedřich Smetana was the composer capable of fulfilling that role. Hostinský was no dogmatist, however. He strove constantly – often with great difficulty – to integrate the variety and wealth of the live music of his day into his speculative construct of the requisite progressive line of development. Nejedlý and his pupils reduced Hostinský’s entire historical and philosophical concept of Czech modern music to the dogma of progress as an absolute and implacable criterion. For Nejedlý, only progressive deeds in the field of composition according to criteria of the pre-defined sole progressive line of development entitled a composer to be included in the written history of the national music. However, when history is conceived in that manner the work of art is reduced to a mere example for the future and it was in the name of the future that Nejedlý saw the need to settle the supposed dispute – including the “Dvořák controversy”.

Whereas Hostinský encompassed the various different lines and trends of artistic development, at least by including along-



Otakar Hostinský

side the one progressive line of development a category of quality of compositional technique and authenticity of empathy, whereby so-called conservative works were given a *raison d'être* within national music as a whole, Nejedlý and some of his followers, in order to include Dvořák’s oeuvre in the history of Czech national music, were obliged to construct an ahistorical and speculative line of development, in which Dvořák was presented as a composer belonging to the pre-Smetana or even pre-Beethoven period. In 1901, in his first, extensive formulation of the concept of historical development, which was included in his book on Zdeněk Fibich as the founder of scenic melodrama, Nejedlý summed it up as “Dvořák adds *ex post* what was lacking before Smetana”.

Dvořák still fared quite well in that particular version of the historical construct, because he was at least included as part of national music. This was before the period when the controversy over Dvořák descended to the level of journalistic polemics and the delivering of final verdicts. “Dvořák doesn’t interest me”, Zdeněk Nejedlý would write in 1913. “In



Vladimír Helfert

“In the year that Smetana went deaf (1874), the young Dvořák started to enjoy increasing success. [...] In the year Smetana died (1884), Dvořák achieved his greatest successes in London. In 1892, when Smetana’s music had its first convincing success abroad, the illustrious Dvořák left for the United States.”

Miloš Jůzl, Otakar Hostinský, Prague 1980

my view it’s a chapter of Czech music that is over and done with and has little to offer the inquiring mind [...] Dvořák means the same to me as Mendelssohn, on the reduced Czech scale [...] and my knowledge of history teaches me enough about the fate of phenomena of the Mendelssohn type [...]. It belongs to the past, but we will have to wait for time to digest what it needs of it.” Typically Nejedlý refers to the inevitable

“Insufficient artistic intelligence disqualified him [Dvořák] at the outset from the musician’s modern paradise.”

Zdeněk Nejedlý, *The History of Czech Music, Prague 1903*

“[Dvořák] is a chapter of Czech music that is over and done with [...]. It belongs to the past, but we will have to wait for time to digest what it needs of it.”

Zdeněk Nejedlý, *The Battle against Antonín Dvořák, in: Česká kultura I, 1912/13*

course and “just verdict” of history, which is inextricably bound up with the idea of progress in this concept of history, and which had entered Czech music criticism as a welcome and readily manipulable stereotype at the end of the 1860s. It is also closely related to another argument, that of novelty and originality. In the controversy over the orientation of Czech national music, originality and eclecticism played the role of scientific evidence and were the criteria advanced to determine whether a composer should or should not be assigned a place in the national history. Dvořák was criticised on those very grounds by the aesthetician and composer Otakar Zich. And just as in the earlier case of Mendelssohn on the German musical scene (in respect of his so-called conservative attitude to musical forms and in the light of Wagner’s opinions), so also in the case of Dvořák, Zich’s “proofs” of his eclecticism were used as argument for concluding that Dvořák was irrelevant to the development of Czech music. Because Dvořák allegedly contributed nothing new, “as the price of this truth we owe it to the future to renounce even such a prominent musical figure as this”, wrote another of Nejedlý’s supporters, Josef

Bartoš – i.e. Dvořák could not be included in the history of Czech national music.

As mentioned earlier, in support of its attitudes Nejedlý’s camp sought arguments based on the technical aspects of composition. But that was precisely what discredited them in the face of their opponents who, in the main, were musicians, composers and theoreticians, as well as music teachers. For Nejedlý and his followers, the fundamental criterion was what they termed “innovative musical form”, but presented in a schematic and simplistic fashion. However, when Nejedlý tried to present its concrete analysis limited to seeking of leitmotifs on the example of Smetana’s *Bartered Bride* in 1908, his analysis was subjected by the composer Ladislav Vycpálek to a just and devastating critique on expert grounds including examples of Nejedlý’s ignorance of harmony, as a result of which Nejedlý almost never again illustrated a problem with concrete musical examples.

The evidence for Dvořák’s eclecticism, which Otakar Zich presented as “scientific” proof of the composer’s insignificance within the history of Czech national music, was based on a search for reminiscences of

melodies, phrases or stylisation from the works of other composers, which were often part of the common European musical language of the day. Whenever Zich found Czech colour in Dvořák’s music, he always held it to be reminiscent of Smetana. In his survey on Dvořák, Zich went to absurd levels in dealing with works of music in the manner known in European critical circles as *Reminiszenzenjägererei* (“reminiscence huntmanship”), which made its appearance in Czech criticism in the 1860s, at a time of intensive pursuit of means of creating a specific Czech colour and achieving an ideal of unique Czech national music. In the search for what might be regarded as Czech and nationally distinctive and the effort to detect what was foreign, derivative and unoriginal, individual works of Czech composers were perceived – on the basis of associations that would be hard to reconstruct now – as entities comprising passages that sounded Czech and original, or foreign and unoriginal. According to Zich, Dvořák’s music was a mixture of foreign influences, which he had exposed by “scientific” research. His colleague, Josef Bartoš, expressed the same view in the terse phrase: “*The world did not check from where Dvořák obtained his goods; it regarded everything as his own invention and therefore ascribed such originality to him.*”

The concept of originality employed by the opposing, pro-Dvořák side of the controversy – which was largely neglected by Czech musicology because it was not promoted by “founding” figures of the discipline – was undoubtedly more modern than the one then current in university circles. “*The similarity of certain components is of no great import,*” wrote the music teacher and composer Antonín Srba in response to

Zich's assertions. *"It is the structure of the entire composition that matters. [...] If a passage is found that resembles another, there can be no objection to it if it derives from earlier content."* For that matter, Nejedlý himself made a similar point in his study on Mahler, which was written with remarkable sympathy – although he added the caveat that it takes a genius to assess positively the cultural property of the past, and at that time Dvořák was no genius in his view.

At that juncture, the reality that had been looming behind the welter of words of the anti-Dvořák polemic came to the fore. The arguments advanced in favour of "scientific" arbitration of the alleged controversy over the future correct orientation of Czech national music and over the place and importance of Antonín Dvořák in its overall history were based on stereotypical judgements rooted in the critical reflections of the 1860s and '70s, particularly those of Otakar Hostinský. By then, however, those judgements had become detached from the reality they originally referred to and also from the context of Hostinský's idea of Czech national music. They were treated simply as props to be placed when needed (with the appropriate positive or negative connotation) into the pre-determined construct of the single correct line of development for Czech national music. Meanwhile the criterion of progress revolved around a fairly vague rag-bag of notions about Smetana's "progressive" approach (the so-called "Smetanism"), while Dvořák was transformed into its exact opposite in a fairly mechanistic and simplistic fashion. This would seem to help explain the vehemence of the anti-Dvořák outbursts on the eve of World War I – the Nejedlý camp was

"[...] then will be voiced about Dvořák what we feel when we listen [...] when at last he is written about by a historian unconfused by Hostinský's theories and Nejedlý's prejudice."

Antonín Srba, The Battle against Dvořák, Prague 1914

provoked by the most recent international successes of Dvořák works, whose living existence was regarded by the anti-Dvořákians as a threat to the radiance of the Smetana legacy, because it might overshadow it. Similar attempts at "excommunication" as in the case of Dvořák would emerge in the Czech music world right into the inter-war period, often on convoluted grounds, but always under the banner of defending Smetana's legacy, and their targets would be some members of the subsequent generations of Czech composers.

As indicated earlier, the attitudes adopted, particularly in the anti-Dvořák camp, still have a certain influence on present interpretations of how Czech modern music culture emerged and of Dvořák's role within it. This is because they have, to a marked degree, determined the stereotypical areas of questions that musicology asks itself. This is evident, for instance, in the Dvořák research that started to develop fairly promisingly in the last third of the twentieth century, which constantly sought to demonstrate above all that although Dvořák was different from Smetana, he was also progressive, that although Dvořák was different from Smetana he was not just a spontaneous musician, but also a thinker, etc, etc.

However, there would seem to be yet other reasons why the exposition and understanding of the Dvořák polemics of those

days are of importance, namely, the still largely prevailing historiographic method of writing history on the basis of a construct of specific concepts about the direction of musical development at a particular period of history, and of trying to identify the main regulatory ideas sustaining historical movement, and then to judge works of art or their creators according to how they correspond to this construct, i.e. to what extent they are up-to-date or anticipatory of future developments, or alternatively, how remote they are from it, or behind the times, or on a divergent track. Wasn't this the method used in the Dvořák debates, albeit taken to absurd lengths, by the wholesale application of the notion of unidirectional progress and also because there was no corrective in the form of aesthetic judgements based on a belief in the musical work and its quality? However, this would raise fundamental questions about what history is and how it should be written – questions which are very topical and widely discussed. From this angle – to return to the topic of this article – the debates over Dvořák that preceded World War I are of relevance above all for musicology as a discipline and for its self-reflection.



Brahms Trio Prague

Downes: Sonata for Violin, French horn and Piano op. 93, Herzogenberg: Trio in D major op. 61, Brahms: Trio in E flat major op. 40

Monika Vrabcová – violin, **Ondřej Vrabec** – French horn, **Daniel Wiesner** – piano.
Production: John W. Nomis. Text: Cz., Eng. Recorded: 9/2007, Auditorium Maximum (Audimax), Regensburg, Germany. Released: 2008. TT: 68:11. DDD. 1 CD ArteSmon AS 726-2.

The Brahms Trio Prague is an ensemble with a short history (it was formed in 2005), top quality presentation (see www.vrabcovi.cz) and considerable artistic potential, as its first album shows. In this spoilt, vain, often superficial world the Trio has not chosen an easy path to audiences. Judge for yourself: their combination of instruments is unusual, and some, perhaps all concert organisers naturally ask whether they can fill up the hall; they have chosen a label known only to real connoisseurs and without hundreds of thousands of crown for promotion; and they obstinately offer a non-commercial repertoire. Despite this, or perhaps for this very reason, this is an immensely remarkable project, even a recording that deserves an international gramophone award.

Chamber music is the foundation stone of the work of composer Andrew Downes (1950), professor at a music academy in Birmingham. He also quite obviously loves the French horn and, it seems, Czech musicians. For example, in 2001 his *Sonata for Wind Sextet* had its premiere in the Dvořák Hall of the Prague Rudolfinum, where it was performed by the Wind Sextet of the Czech Philharmonic, and a year later so did his *Concerto for four French horns and orchestra* (recorded in 2003 by Czech Radio). His *Five Dramatic Pieces for Eight Wagnerian Tubas* were premiered in 2005 in a scintillating interpretation by the horn group of the Czech Philharmonic. His *Sonata for Eight Horns* and his *Sonata for Four Horns* are often played on the international scene. The composer's detailed knowledge of the instrument is also evident in the world premiere of his *Sonata for Violin, French Horn and Piano*. The three-movement work is thematically very

tightly conceived, stands firmly on the tried and tested foundations of the 20th century music and has great emotional pull. I don't know the composer's work well enough to generalise, but his sonata has a distinct creative poetry and is appealing to the listener without being ingratiating. The inclusion of this work on the programme is at first sight surprising, but nonetheless rewarding. The *Trio in D major* by Heinrich von Herzogenberg was a real discovery for me. On the trio's web pages they advertise it as one of the evening's highlights under the heading "Imitator or Unappreciated Master?" It is entirely appropriate to point out the connection with Herzogenberg's contemporary and model Brahms, but this work at least has evident compositional qualities that make it more than just a copy of the Master. He does not achieve the same level as Brahms, but his music has indisputable quality. It reminds me of the debating point from the Venetian Baroque: the pair Vivaldi – Marcello, the "professional versus the enlightened amateur". Today it is clear that Marcello could not beat Vivaldi, but without Marcello the Italian music of the time would not be complete. The Brahms needs no comment. It is a musical jewel pulsating with life in every bar. If you think that a chamber ensemble made up of a brass and string instruments and piano cannot produce a homogeneous sound, then you are deeply mistaken. Of course all three musicians have to be brilliant soloists and have to have enough musical empathy. There is no need to write at length about **Ondřej Vrabec** (1979), who has provided convincing proof of his musical qualities in his role of first horn at Czech Philharmonic concerts. But he has not found the horn enough for his self-realisation, and is emerging as another promising Czech conductor as well. Visit his web site and you will find that he is also a connoisseur of wines with a sense of humour. **Monika Vrabcová** (1983) has abundant study and performance experience abroad, which is now bearing fruit in chamber and in solo play in which she has until now been relatively unknown. By contrast the qualities of **Daniel Wiesner** (1969) are already familiar to audiences, and he undoubtedly belongs to the Czech piano elite; he has also had the luck to make this recording on an obviously "well played in" Steinway. Now we arrive at the performance itself, and what is in the Czech Republic a revolutionary approach to recording: the music and sound direction remained in the hands of the Trio, and

above all perhaps Vrabec, from the first take to the final mastering. This represents both an advantage and an increased responsibility. The Trio could fulfil its artistic ideas and demands to the last detail, but at the same time are as it were naked before the specialist public. They left themselves with no room for excuses. In the recording technique they went back to the old stereophonic practice of using just a few microphones (at the time of writing I have no data on their origin). Acoustically this is an unforgiving, uncomfortable choice that rules out subsequent proportional modifications but is capable of creating the same effect as at concerts. What is more, in my view it is the path of the future. I was impressed by the very soft, plastic sound of the recording, which testifies to the exceptional acoustics in the Audimax hall. The Brahms for example sounded very compact, the musicians had no technical problems; on the contrary they were able to realise their interpretational vision to the full. Some passages are from the level of dreams, for example the superb honeyed colour of the third movement *Adagio mesto*, when the horn in pianissimo sound like a mysterious bass clarinet. The Trio's "namesake work" emerges marvellously in every aspect. I know of no better recording!

And another thing. This is the first booklet for a long time that has a witty idea, although after reading the web glossary by Vrabec with the title *Horn Clinic* I am not surprised.

Luboš Stehlik

Leoš Janáček String Quartet no. 1 Pavel Haas String Quartets no. 1 in C sharp minor op. 3 and no. 3 op. 15

Pavel Haas Quartet: Veronika Jarůšková, Marie Fuxová – violin, **Pavel Nikl** – viola, **Peter Jarůšek** – cello.
Production: Petr Vít. Text: Cz., Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 6-7/2007, Studio Domovina, Prague. Released: 2007. TT: 57:35. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3922-2.

The interpretative concept behind any performance of the quartets of Leoš Janáček is usually clear in the very first bars. The sharpness of the contrast between antithetical motifs, the way they are brought out in terms of dynamics and tempo, how sharply the accents are modelled, whether the motifs are spaced or follow



on immediately – all this also functions as a posed question as to how the further course of the music will develop, and foretells the dangers from which there is no escape from the moment when the piece starts. This was evidently what Janáček wanted – the subtitle “under the impression of Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata*” is enough for us to unconsciously create our own interpretation of the flow of the music. The difference in performances lies in the intensity of the nervousness that is contained in the piece. Into it Janáček wrote many notes that are explicitly ugly, unmelodious, cruel, and beside them little motifs that are tender, loving, coquettish. Ensembles that are already part of history, the Janáček Quartet and the Smetana Quartet, struggled with these two treasures of chamber music throughout their careers, their view of it changed as they themselves changed. Leaving aside this older generation, I have before me five recordings of Janáček’s *String Quartet no. 1* from recent years, recorded by quartets of the middle and younger generation: the Doležal Quartet (Arta Records 1992), the Wallinger Quartet (Musica Classic 1993), the Vlach Quartet (Amadis 1995), the Škampa Quartet (Supraphon 2001) and most recently this recording by the **Pavel Haas Quartet** (Supraphon 2007). For me they are all proof that what is known as the Czech quartet school has continuity and there is no reason to fear for its future. The youngest are no longer afraid of those raw, naturalistic tones or the fleeting tremors of tenderness of which Janáček seemed to be almost ashamed. In the recording by the Doležal Quartet, a generation older, there is still a clear attempt to balance the contrasts, to seek connections between the sharp reversals; the catastrophe is happening as if from some mere misunderstanding and after it the nightmare fades away in the fourth movement. The Vlach Quartet is also still searching for the more melodious passages and pointing them up, and the “conversation” of opposites is less full of contrast. The Wallinger Quartet plays in a way that is very free and relaxed in dynamics and tempo, the accents come like blows (in the 1st movement), while the polka rhythm in the 2nd movement, for example, remains rather in the background. In the Škampa Quartet’s interpretation the female and male element fight very hard, and clashes can be felt even in the polka (while in preceding interpretations the “characters” tend rather to disappear here), while the scraping tones in the third movement

are really lacerating. In this interpretation by the Pavel Haas Quartet, whose concept of the music is similar to that of the Škampa Quartet (both ensembles have worked under the guidance of Prof. Škampa), both the two levels – the sharp contrasts and the continuity of the “story” – are equally represented and the music continues to tremble neurotically; the placing of caesuras between the terse little motifs, but also minimal or scarcely any pauses between the individual movements contribute to the success of this approach. All four instruments are well balanced in terms of sound in the passages of joint play, and the imitative passages are distinct (perhaps this is the result of the equal representation of the male and female element in the ensemble). As on their first album (Supraphon 2006) the Pavel Haas Quartet has combined music by Janáček with music by his pupil Pavel Haas, this time the latter’s one-movement *String Quartet no. 1* and *String Quartet no. 3*. It is an unusually happy combination in view of both the personal closeness of the teacher Janáček and the pupil Haas Haas, closeness in terms of time, and the Moravian character that they both expressed in a highly individual way. Haas’s quartets deserve to be included in the core quartet repertoire of the 20th century (among Czech ensembles they were first recorded by the Kocian Quartet for Harmonia mundi in 1999). The performers have managed to capture not only the energetic moments in Haas’s music but also the thoughtful, meditative tones, linked in a peculiar way with the earthiness of the rhythmic element that while less sharply carved than in Janáček is something that the two composers have in common. The tone culture of all the players, their verve and full submersion in the music have already rightly won them a leading place among string quartets on the international scene. With their two CDs so far they have shown imagination and foresight in choice of programme and a sense of style that makes us look forward with all the more excitement to what they will produce next.

Vlasta Reittererová

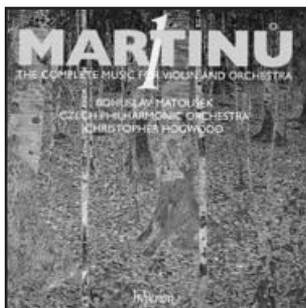
Gustav Mahler Symphonies nos. 1 – 9

Gabriela Beňačková, Magdalena Hajóssyová, Inge Nielsen, Daniela Sounová-Brouková – soprano, Eva Randová, Věra



Soukupová, Libuše Márová – alto, Christa Ludwig – mezzo soprano, Thomas Moser – tenor, Wolfgang Schöne – baritone, Richard Novák – bass, The Prague Philharmonic Choir, The Prague Radio Choir, the Kühn Children’s Choir, the Czech Philharmonic, Václav Neumann.
Production: not stated. Text: Cz., Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 1976–1982. Released: 2006. TT: 73:59, 75:36, 56:30, 34:41, 55:52, 69:54, 79:00, 46:17, 59:28, 54:59, 77:28. ADD, DDD. 11 CD Supraphon SU 3880-2.

This re-issue in one box and with only minimal textual supplement makes one very much aware of how much has changed since the first publication of Neumann’s complete set of Mahler symphonies on LPs in the 1980s, with artistically designed sleeves and the aura of an exceptional event. Supraphon policy has changed, but so too has the world of Mahler recordings, in which **Václav Neumann** can no longer be regarded the sole messenger and discoverer that he was considered to be in the years when he stood at the head of the **Czech Philharmonic**. Today we are allowed to say that the very first complete set of Mahler symphonies was actually Rafael Kubelík’s recording with the Bavarian Radio Orchestra a good ten years earlier, and there are some grounds for thinking Kubelík’s complete set to be the more interesting. On the other hand I discovered with pleasure that Neumann’s complete set has much to offer even alongside the remarkable creations of the last two decades. Unlike the dramatic Kubelík, Neumann does not go to extremes, maintains as it were a birds-eye view, captures the ironic humour and robust rhythm, and imbues the dance parts with a peculiarly “Viennese-Slav” air. Nor does he choose extremes when it comes to tempos – on the slow side in the scherzo, where he maintains noblesse, but in contrast to the great Mahlerian mystics choosing quicker tempos in the slow movements and gambling on colour and emotional immediacy. In many places the orchestra sounds exquisite, soft, and in a distinctive scale of expressive levels – the night music from the *Seventh* or the natural scenery from the *Third* have great atmosphere. One might carry on for some time listing very successful passages. The choice of soloists, from the fresh voices of **Eva Randová** and **Gabriela Beňačková** to the ripe timbre of **Christa Ludwig**, is another of



the strong aspects of the set. Its weakness is a certain lack of balance – beside an individual and uniquely well played *First Symphony* we find a *Ninth* in which the internal drive is not so persuasive and much could have been improved in the working through of the detail. In the *Eighth* too one has the feeling that rehearsals were rushed to meet the recording deadline – even though with such a colossus it is rare in our conditions to be able to bring it off to this level. And here too the soloists are outstanding. If we are to take a sternly critical line, then the fact that the conductor nowhere “pushes things through to the limit” seems a little like laxity and a reliance on natural beauty at the expense of fully thought out overall structure and more subtle details. The sound is then sometimes needlessly robust and the listener gets lost in the boundless orchestral palette of instruments. Yet these recordings have virtues that will not date and their own spirit, which soon wins the listener over, and it is a very good thing that they came out together in this form. They stand up even in today's competition.

Jindřich Bálek

Bohuslav Martinů

Concerto for Flute, Violin and Orchestra H 252, Duo Concertante for Two Violins and Orchestra H 264, Concerto in D for Two Violins and Orchestra H 329

Bohuslav Matoušek - violin, Janne Thomsen - flute, Régis Pasquier - violin, Jennifer Koh - violin, Czech Philharmonic, Christopher Hogwood.

Production: Simon Perry. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 6/2004, 12/2005, Rudolfinum, Dvořák Hall, Prague. Released: 2007. TT: 55:06. DDD. 1 CD Hyperion CDA67671 (distribution Classic).

Bohuslav Martinů is a composer whose music it is still very pertinent to present in interesting combinations or complete sets. This is because every new exercise in setting his music in genre or period context represents a further justification and revelation of the value of his very extensive oeuvre.

Martinů's concertante work is correspondingly extensive and not all of it is well known and frequently played. The Hyperion record company's plan to publish Martinů's complete works for violin and orchestra is therefore very promising and let us hope that other parts of the complete set will follow this successful CD. The chief pair of protagonists – the conductor **Christopher Hogwood** and the violinist **Bohuslav Matoušek** – is in itself a sure guarantee of the quality of interpretation of Martinů's music, with which both have great experience. Matoušek has already recorded Martinů's complete works for violin and piano for Supraphon with the pianist Petr Adamec. This CD, however, takes us into the completely different, stylistically sharply defined concertante world of Bohuslav Martinů. These works reveal a very different Martinů to that of the chamber music, the six symphonies and a number of other genres. In the concertante works (written in the 1930s with some later), Martinů turns away from the avant-garde and contemporary inspirations and finds new impulses in older historical periods and their stylistic demands. All the pieces presented here are for more than one solo instrument – in the *Duo concertante* and *Concerto in D major* these involve another violin, and in the first piece on the CD, the *Concerto for Flute, Violin and Orchestra* the instruments are even from different instrumental groups. Its is perhaps precisely in the latter piece that the combination of two different solo instruments sounds surprisingly integrated and as natural as if it were one of the most usual chamber sounds familiar to us. In this piece and the other two for two violins and orchestra there is a pure clear dialogue between the groups soli and tutti in accordance with Baroque principles. The fast movements are performed very briskly and in the slow movements there is only a mild holding back of the tempo and lingering in the cadences, and so we never abandon the purity of style that meant so much to Martinů. Matoušek's sober, intelligent and yet superb tone is complemented by his excellent solo partners (Janne Thomsen, Régis Paquier, Jennifer Koh) and the Czech Philharmonic under Hogwood's direction.

Eva Velická

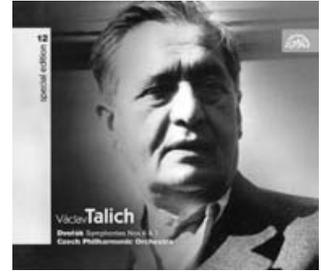
Bohuslav Martinů The Greek Passion

John Mitchinson - tenor, Helen Field - soprano, John Tomlinson - bass, Jeffrey Lawton - tenor, Arthur Davies - tenor, Geoffrey Moses - bass, The Prague Philharmonic Choir, Josef Veselka, The Kühn Children's Choir, Jiří Chvála, The Brno Philharmonic, Sir Charles Mackerras.

Direction: Tomáš Šimerda.

Text: Cz., Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 6/1981 Stadion, Brno (sound); 1999 Brac Island, Croatia (picture). Released: 2007. TT: 93:10. Picture format: NTSC 16:9. Sound format: PCM Stereo Dolby Digital 5.1. 1 DVD Supraphon Music SU 7014-9.

Bohuslav Martinů's *The Greek Passion* appeared on a Supraphon LP shortly after the making of a high quality recording with conductor **Charles Mackerras** in 1981. This recording was made in the the Stadion Studio in Brno with soloists from the Welsh National Opera, the **Brno State Philharmonic**, the **Prague Philharmonic Choir** and the **Kühn Children's Choir**. Mackerras's close connection with Czech music started when he studied with Talich at the end of the 1940s; his love for it has lasted to this day, and has brought much especially to the music of Janáček and Martinů. It is interesting that Mackerras was always a recognised interpreter not just of Mozart but of Janáček's music and his concerts and recordings were always taken as literally model. The same is true of his relationship to Martinů, whom Mackerras understood and presented with extraordinary feeling and warmth. In the case of Martinů's last opera *The Greek Passion* this is particularly evident. This was a work that had undergone literal martyrdom just in preparation and in the attempt to get it on the opera stage. Martinů read the Greek novelist Kazantzakis's book *Christ Recrucified* in 1954, and the story set in the harsh conditions of the author's native Crete completely ravished him with its dramatic clash between proclaimed and real Christian and humanist ideals in the small environment of a mountain village. Martinů's need to condense the plot into an opera libretto led to a long series of letters and personal meetings with Kazantzakis, but the musical element from an experienced and mature composer who by that time already had many international successes behind him



provoked mixed reactions. It was agreed that the opera would be premiered by the London Covent Garden Opera in 1958 under the baton of Rafael Kubelík but not even the Czech composer's personal pleas could dissuade the opera management from rejecting the first version of the Greek Passion and Martinů, although already ill, immediately embarked on a reworking of the piece. He completed the second version at what was indeed the eleventh hour at the beginning of 1959 (he was only to live for another six months), and did not live to see the premiere, which was presented thanks to the efforts of his great friend P. Sacher in Zurich in 1961. (The first version was finally premiered decades later, in 1999 at the festival in Bregenz when, in the words of the director of the B. Martinů Foundation Aleš Březina, after more than forty years the professional and lay public could see for themselves that both Martinů and Kubelík had been right to try so hard to get it staged.) The DVD now released by Supraphon has been made from the TV film of 1999 co-produced by Czech Television and RTV Slovenija. The highly skilled television crew, outstanding stage design and artistic approach including the casting – we shall recognise many well known Czech actors here, headed by **Miroslav Etzler** in the role of Manolio – made for an emotionally powerful project using Mackerras's recording with the exceptional performances of the Welsh soloists and Czech choirs and orchestra. The DVD thus had all the preconditions for a very good result, and it is only a pity that the not entirely faultless picture quality, the very meagre accompanying information on the DVD itself (no bonus, and no further information on shooting, photography and so on), and the very slender booklet quite unnecessarily undermine the chances of this quality DVD making an imposing impact on the Czech and foreign market.

Marta Tužilová

Monika Knoblochová Inventions (J. S. Bach, Jan Novák)

Monika Knoblochová – harpsichord.
Production: not stated. Text: Cz., Eng. Recorded: April 2007, St. Lawrence's Church in Prague. Released: 2007. TT: 60:54. DDD.
CD Cube-Bohemia in collaboration with the Prague Spring Festival CBCD2738.
The self-possessed and energetic young

harpsichord player **Monika Knoblochová**, well-known as the first woman to win the Davidoff Prize, has recorded pieces by Johann Sebastian Bach. It is a hugely daunting to record Bach solo music, especially his technically less difficult harpsichord pieces, because it makes you one of so many trying to compete with all the Bach recordings on the Czech market, let alone the European or global market. This ingenious and ambitious performer has chosen a strategy of her own in the face of the challenge. She offers a juxtaposition of Bach with the excellent but little known music of another composer – pieces that are now half a century old now but extremely appealing for modern audiences. This is music by Jan Novák (1921–1984), born in Nová Říše, who studied at the Brno Conservatory, became a pupil of Bohuslav Martinů in the United States, and after 1968 emigrated and worked in Denmark, Italy and Germany. Novák's work embodied the best from European musical traditions, but also employed the most advanced modern composing techniques. Monika Knoblochová has called her CD "Inventions" after the popular two-part and two-page pieces by Bach that were precisely what inspired Novák in length and form here. Novák wrote his dozen *Inventions* in the twelve-tone system in 1960 for the Brno harpsichord player Hana Šlapetová – with explanatory and also almost onomatopoeic and witty subtitles in Latin (the composer was famous for being an ardent Latinist). Typically, he exploited all his ingenuity as a composer to create a modern, sometimes ironic and at other times loving opposite pole to the Bachian language, even directly referring to the Baroque legend with the theme B-A-C-H (*Invention XI*) and accompanying Latin verses (*Invention X*). The two series of brief mutually interlarded pieces, truly aptly titled, represent the core of the album. They are augmented by sonatas by both the composers – Bach's *Sonata in D minor BWV 964* and Novák's *Sonata brevis* (like the *Inventions* written in 1960). The harpsichordist is outstanding in the motoric, fiery and striking expressive passages, and performs with the approach that is native to her – with commitment and energy, but in places she could have shown greater inner depth. Surprisingly, her alternation between two instruments – a modern Goble & son harpsichord of 1992 and a 1982 copy of a harpsichord of 1760 made by the German builder Michael Scheer – is not distracting. Nothing can threaten the status of Johann

Sebastian Bach, of course, but on this CD it is Jan Novák who attracts notice; although since 1989 his music has been heard in Czech concert halls more frequently (and is even attracting young musicologists), he still deserves even more attention. This CD is therefore a welcome step in promoting Novák's work, which is still waiting to be accorded its true place in the history of 20th-century Czech and international music.

Jana Slimáčková

Václav Talich Special Edition 12 Antonín Dvořák Symphony no. 6 in D major, op. 60, Symphony no. 7 in D minor, op. 70

The Czech Philharmonic, Václav Talich.
Production: 2007 Supraphon Music. Text: Cz., Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: November 1938, HMV Abbey Road Studios, London. Released: 2007. TT: 80:59. ADD, digitally remastered. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3832-2.

Václav Talich Special Edition 13 Antonín Dvořák Symphony no. 8 in G major, op. 88, Symphony no. 9 in E minor, op. 95 "From the New World"

The Czech Philharmonic, Václav Talich.
Production: 2007 Supraphon Music. Text: Cz., Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: October 1951 and September 1954, The Dvořák hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague. Released: 2007. TT: 77:12. ADD, digitally remastered. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3833-2.

The special Talich edition launched by Supraphon in 2005 continues with another two purely Dvořák CDs offering the composer's culminating symphonies: *no. 6 in D major* and *no. 7 in D minor* (Special Edition 12) and *no. 8 in G major* and *no. 9 in E minor* (Special Edition 13). Right at the start it occurred to me that this release might actually have deserved to take the form of just one double-CD set, because it is in fact a unique portrait of the **Czech Philharmonic** with **Václav Talich** in the years 1938 and 1951-54, and at the same time the four most frequently played Dvořák Symphonies. The recordings of the Sixth and



Seventh were made in November 1938, when Talich was with the Czech Philharmonic in London, and they are the result of his English tour, which had been preceded by numerous successes abroad in the 1930s. The two recordings, made in two days at the London studio of His Master's Voice, are a unique document of the performance of the Philharmonic between the wars, which had attained a high level. In view of the time when they were made, the sound quality after digital remastering is truly amazing. The recordings of the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies are younger by thirteen and fifteen years respectively and were made in Prague in the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague. On the technical side these two recordings (likewise digitally remastered) are audibly of better quality; the individual instrumental groups are more distinct in the sound and overall level of hum is far lower, which makes listening more comfortable. In my view, Talich's recordings of Dvořák's Sixth and Seventh Symphonies in 1938 are outstanding, but his Eighth and Ninth from the 1950s are downright phenomenal. In the detailed conception and treatment of the sound, purity of performance and style, and fidelity to Dvořák's classical-romantic synthesis, I believe that in their category (historical recordings) both CDs may be regarded as major points of reference. This year the Special Talich Editions is to be completed (with three more CDs). I am already wondering whether the Ančerl and Talich project will be followed by another comparable project. The Supraphon archives are enormously rich in what today are historical and often unique recordings that should not go unnoticed. I hope that the publication planning of what is still our most prestigious recording company will carry on in a similar spirit, since there is definitely much to choose from and much to offer.

Libor Dřevíkovský

Smetanovo Trio
Dvořák: Piano Trio in B major op. 21
B 51, Fibich: Piano Trio in F minor,
Martinů: Piano Trio in D minor H 327

Jitka Čechová - piano, Jana Nováková-Nováková - violin, Jan Páleníček - cello.
 Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. Recorded: April 2007. Released: 2007.
 TT: 59: 48. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3927-2.

Relatively soon after its triumphant success with Dvořák trios (the BBC Music Magazine Prize, Diapason d'Or), the **Smetana Trio** has recorded another jewel, and I have to say without blushing that I am bowled over. Indeed, for me it was an even greater personal experience than the last recording. One reason is certainly the interesting overall conception of the album, but it seems to me that all three pieces come out of it with their particular virtues highlighted. **Jitka Čechová** gets the piano to ring, murmur, purr and bubble superbly, **Jan Páleníček's cello** is velvet smooth and sure and the violin? Ever since **Jana Nováková-Vonášková** became a member of the trio her performance has risen rapidly to unexpected heights. Her passionate play, emotionally engaged in every note, has also acquired a lyrical dimension. In the trio it has simply blossomed into delightful musical beauty. Today the Smetana Trio is a stabilised, excellent ensemble, and in my view at a high international level. I would not want you simply to concentrate your attention on the necessarily dominant Dvořák. Certainly, the Smetana Trio has given it an expressiveness of tone that I missed even in the Smetana Trio recording by the Guarneri Trio (although that of course has its own qualities) but the trio takes brilliantly to the full-blooded romanticism of Fibich in the first movement, while they will certainly play the central *Adagio ma non troppo* rather differently in the fullness of time, perhaps even more subtly in the details. The lyrical Martinů trio from the composer's later synthetic period in a certain way picks up intellectually from the preceding works. It too is music as it were made-to-measure for the Smetana Trio, who know how to play the sensitively urgent passages wonderfully. I was electrified by the sovereignty with which all three instruments mastered the transformations in the brilliantly composed finale. I think that the Smetana Trio could not have chosen a better culmination of their project.

Luboš Stehlík

André Gertler
Violin Concertos
(Malipiero, Casella)

André Gertler - violin, Prague Symphony
Orchestra, Václav Smetáček.
 Production: not stated. Text: Cz., Eng., Ger. Recorded: January 1971 and March

1974, Smetana Hall of the Municipal House, Prague. Released: 2007. TT: 53:28.
 ADD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3904-2.

André Gertler (1907–1998) was one of the few artists living in the West who were permitted to visit Czechoslovakia relatively often under the communist regime. He was the first to perform Alaban Berg's *Violin Concerto* here (in 1948 with the Czech Philharmonic). He regularly presented the works of Béla Bartók, with whom he had shared not only a native country but a personal friendship and whose complete works he recorded for Supraphon (the recording has now been digitalised) with Diane Andersen, Josef Suk, the Brno and Czech Philharmonic and the conductors János Ferencsik and Karel Ančerl. With **Václav Smetáček** and the **Prague Symphony** he recorded Darius Milhaud's *2nd Violin Concerto*, and with the Czech Philharmonic and Karel Ančerl Paul Hindemith's *2nd Violin Concerto*. His recordings of violin concertos by Gian Francesco Malipiero and Alfredo Casella were also made in Prague with the Prague Symphony and Václav Smetáček. Both these Italian composers were known in the circles of the International Society for Contemporary Music between the wars and as such were performed in Czech music clubs. Their work was never widely diffused, however – not even in their country which lived and still lives above all for opera. We can only welcome the fact that the Supraphon Archive is making this practically unknown music available today in a re-edition with re-mastering by **Stanislav Sýkora**. Malipiero's concerto was written in 1932, Casella's in 1928. It is worth remembering the historical context in which they were composed, and so to notice the fading influences of Impressionism and the new objectivity, Neo-classicism and Neo-Baroque and the recasting of these trends in the works of two contemporaries (there was only one year's difference in age between Malipiero and Casella), and to see how they fit in beside Stravinsky, Hindemith, Martinů and others. And also just to enjoy the technically sure, passionate and stylistically well-thought-out performance by André Gertler and the Prague Symphony Orchestra under the baton of their legendary long-term conductor in chief.

Vlasta Reittererová



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16. 10. 2007 Praha - „MLADÍ JAPONŠTÍ VÍTĚZOVÉ“

Bennewitzovo kvarteto; Vilém Veverka, hoboj

J. S. Bach / W. A. Mozart, A. Webern, J. Haydn, Y. Yun – česká premiéra, R. Schumann

13. 11. 2007 Praha; 14. 11. 2007 Trutnov

Merel Quartet (Švýcarsko); Stamicovo kvarteto

R. Schumann, David Philips Hefti – světová premiéra, F. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy

11. 12. 2007 Praha; 12. 12. 2007 Liberec

Modern String Quartet (Německo)

FEVER – 10 jazzových variací na téma Beethovenova opusu 7 Mich brennt ein heisses Fieber a jiné melodie – česká premiéra

15. 1. 2008 Praha; 17. 1. 2008 Brno; 18. 1. 2008 Brno

Ben Kim, klavír (USA) – cena pro vítěze soutěže ARD Mnichov 2006; Stamicovo kvarteto

A. Schnittke, F. Chopin, R. Schumann

19. 2. 2008 Praha; 20. 2. 2008 Děčín

Royal String Quartet (Polsko); Vladimír Leixner, violoncello

A. Webern, K. Szymanowski, F. Schubert

18. 3. 2008 Praha; 19. 3. 2008 Jičín

Pavel Steidl, kytara; Stamicovo kvarteto

J. K. Mertz, N. Paganini, N. Coste, M. Giuliani

22. 4. 2008 Praha; 21. 4. 2008 Nelahozeves, 23. 4. 2008 Chrudim

Miró Quartet (USA); Irvin Venyš, klarinet

Ch. Ives, J. Zorn, J. Brahms

20. 5. 2008 Praha; 21. 5. 2008 Ostrava, Janáčkův máj

Leipziger Streichquartett (Německo)

**L. van Beethoven, J. Widmann – česká premiéra,
F. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy**

17. 6. 2008 Praha; 16. 6. 2008 Havlíčkův Brod

**Aquilon Wind Quintet (Francie) – cena pro vítěze soutěže ARD Mnichov 2006;
Stamicovo kvarteto, Petr Ries, kontrabas**

J. Francaix, J. B. Foerster, H. Tomasi, B. Martinů

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