



14

Hana Blažíková

Kühn Children's Choir

Jan Novák

The Janáček school of composition

Národní  divadlo

opera

UVÁDÍME
V NÁRODNÍM
DIVADLE

Dirigent: Robert Jindra
Scéna: Martin Černý
Kostýmy: Kateřina Štefková
Choreografie: Jana Hanušová

www.narodni-divadlo.cz

Leoš Janáček

PŘÍHODY LIŠKY BYSTROUŠKY

2., 10. & 29. dubna, 1. & 27. června

Režie: Ondřej Havelka

Dear readers,

After a lengthy break, owing to a tough economic situation, you can again find a covermount CD with your Czech Music Quarterly. It is the first instalment from the monographic edition launched this year by the Czech Music Information Centre. Each CD will be dedicated to music by a contemporary Czech composer and you can look forward to other discs with future issues of the magazine. The edition has been relatively widely conceived in stylistic range and will feature composers of various age categories. We believe that over the course of time it will give a representative picture of the music currently created by Czech composers. The first CD contains works by

Petr Kotík – I wish you pleasant and concentrated listening.

I would also like to draw your attention to Miloš Zapletal's article focused on the composers and musicians who are usually considered pupils of Leoš Janáček. Since we did not find it appropriate to reduce unnecessarily the material dealing with this relatively scarcely reflected facet of modern Czech music history, we have divided the text between two issues.

Wishing you a nice spring, Petr Bakla

Contents:

Hana Blažíková:

Medieval and Renaissance music is still fresh to us

by Vojtěch Havlík

page 2

Kühn Children's Choir in the Year of Czech Music

by Petr Veber

page 11

Jan Novák: Musician and humanist

by Eva Nachmilnerová

page 17

Re-edition of Czech film music

by Matěj Kratochvíl

page 24

"Always seeking truth both in life and art."

The Janáček school of composition

by Miloš Zapletal

page 28

Reviews

page 36

Czech music information centre

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

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

Editor: Petr Bakla, Producer: Nina Koubová
Translation: Hilda Hearne
Graphic design: Ditta Jiříčková
DTP: HD EDITION. Print: Tiskárna Macík.
ISSN 1211-0264 (Print), ISSN 1804-0586 (Online)

MK ČR E 7099

Price and subscription (shipping included):
Czech Republic: one issue Kč 60,
subscription (4 issues) Kč 200
Europe: one issue € 6.25, subscription (4 issues) € 25.
Overseas countries: one issue \$ 9, subscription
(4 issues) \$ 36 or respective equivalents.
Electronic subscription: \$ 18 (see www.czech-music.net)

cover: Hana Blažíková (photo by Vojtěch Havlík)

HANA BLAŽÍKOVÁ: MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE MUSIC IS STILL FRESH TO US

Precious few Czech singers rank among the world's best in their category. Paradoxically, they are not paid overly much attention at home, in part because they simply do not perform in their native country. This, however, is not the case of Hana Blažíková, who can be heard in Czech churches and concert halls, as well as in rock clubs. Yet the soprano appears more frequently in Western Europe and Japan, working with the finest conductors and ensembles performing early music, the most renowned including Philippe Herreweghe, Masaaki Suzuki and Peter Kooij. Hana Blažíková mainly sings Renaissance and Baroque music, but she also devotes to even older styles – the Gregorian chant and medieval music. Furthermore, she plays the Gothic harp and bass guitar in the rock band Stillknox. And she has recorded, among other things, the complete Fryderyk Chopin songs. When at the beginning of March we were arranging a slot for an interview, Hana was just returning from a tour with Collegium Vocale Gent and was getting ready for her visit to Japan. At the same time, she was preparing for performances with Capella Mariana in Madrid, Collegium 1704 in Prague and Dresden, Tiburtina Ensemble in Gent, which would be followed by recording of Spanish cantigas, two concerts with Collegium Marianum, then a performance in Oslo and, in early April, singing Bach's St. John Passion in Amsterdam – the very first collaboration with Ton Koopman...





PHOTO: VOJTĚCH HAVLÍK 3x

The range of your activities is simply incredible. What is an ordinary day like?

I can't say there's such a thing as an ordinary day. I keep doing new projects, I travel a lot, and many times I don't even know what day of the week it is, merely taking my bearings by dates. When I do have a day off, I mainly practise and prepare for the next concert, or I spend the whole day at a rehearsal. I think it must be the same with every professional freelance musician. Perhaps this story can give a better picture – not long ago, I was on a tour with Collegium Vocale Gent and Philippe Herreweghe, several programmes were being performed and I was supposed to sing in just one of them. So I took my husband with me so we could enjoy the beauties of medieval Bruges, where we were rehearsing. And, above all, we looked forward to sampling the splendid local beer! I planned to have a little bit of a rest, explore and learn new pieces for the following projects. But on the day of the first concert, the other singer fell ill and I ultimately had to sing everything. I virtually sight-read two of the concerts, fortunately, I knew the rest...

You began as a classically trained singer. How did you actually get to early music?

I have perhaps always been familiar with early music, since my family often put on Bach and others, Michna for instance. My dad and I used to sing Renaissance songs together – I grew up in a very musical family. But until I reached a certain age I found all classical music “old”, I didn’t distinguish between Bach and Wagner, I wasn’t really interested in it. I most tolerated medieval music, which intrigued me because it sounded different, it wasn’t typically “classical”. When it comes to Baroque music, for instance, I only began to take an interest after completing my conservatory studies. At the time, I first learned that there was such a thing as historically informed performance and started to enjoy using my voice so as to best meet the requirements (or the sonic ideal) of this or that period. I wasn’t the type to study period treatises, I have always approached music rather intuitively. Of major significance for me was working with the people who occupied themselves with early music more profoundly and who provided me with valuable information essential for its performing: Robert Hugo, Jana Semerádová, Václav Luks and other specialists.

But I am of the opinion that informed performance should not only apply to pre-Classical music, since each period, country, as well as musical genre, requires a specific style of interpretation. I find it regrettable when Mozart is played or sung in the same manner as Verdi, or when a chamber song is performed as an aria.

And when did early music captivate you? Was there any turning point?

I have had perhaps a number of breakthrough moments in my life, but it is amusing that at the time I didn’t consider them turning points at all. It is difficult to pick out a single moment that can be deemed as the one to have steered me towards where I am today. For the most part, it was encounters with specific people that have turned out to be essential. My first trip to Valtice to attend early-music master classes, which revealed to me an entirely new musical world and where I met Robert Hugo, who later on invited me to perform with his ensemble – that was probably the start of my career as a singer. Or meeting the famous bass Peter Kooij, who after hearing me sing at his master classes invited me to his ensemble and virtually forced me to sing for Philippe Herreweghe (I was really bashful and didn’t feel sufficiently ready to do so...).

But perhaps the moment that played the most essential role in my life was an inconspicuous and somewhat painful one, when at the end of my studies at the conservatory I took the exams for the University of Performing Arts in Bratislava and they didn’t accept me. If they had accepted me at the time, I would probably have never got acquainted with Baroque music, I wouldn’t have continued to play the harp, I wouldn’t have had a band, I wouldn’t have met my husband... My entire life would have taken a totally different path.

But, fortunately, this did not happen and today you are one of the best. How does one get there?

That’s a tricky question; I’d rather let others judge where I rank at the moment. Since my time at the conservatory, I have striven to work hard to improve my skills. I have practised virtually every single day, be it singing, playing the harp, or both. I am never at rest. It is the price you have to pay for the endeavour to attain

perfection, even though this endeavour is never-ending and, who knows, perhaps even futile.

This may sound silly, but what is it about music you like so much that you have decided to devote to it a large part of your life? And do you perceive something like the specific beauty of early music?

I find it difficult to say what I like about music in general. Most likely the fact that it awakens my emotions and imagination to a degree far greater than any other art does. Music directly touches the human heart.

And if there is something specific I like about pre-Classical music? Medieval and Renaissance music has the advantage that it still sounds surprising to our ears, it was written within systems different to those we are accustomed to in later music, it's simply still fresh to us, because we haven't been flooded by it. When it comes to medieval music, I also value its simplicity; the power of a single melodic line is really underestimated at the present time. And as regards Baroque music, I like completely different things – the extreme emotions and complex harmony, the striking leading of parts...

And what do you have to say about the perhaps catch-all designation “old music”?

The designation is primarily used by those who don't actually deal with this type of music. Music dating approximately from the 11th to 18th centuries is not a compact trend, it passed through immense transformations between the origination of the early chant and the mature Bach works. We at least talk about the music of the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque, even though it is also necessary to define in more detail whether it is sacred or secular music or specify the exact period or country it dates or hails from. I give preference to the division used in the Anglophone world – Baroque and early music.

Is the quality of this music different to that from later eras?

As I have indicated, I cannot speak about pre-Classical music as a compact whole. Yet in quality terms, it does differ from, let's say, Beethoven in some respects – it was written for different reasons and for different purposes. Baroque and earlier music was mainly created to commission or for specific needs – either the liturgy or festive occasions, for instance. At the time, there were not yet composers in the sense we perceive them in Romanticism – people writing music because they are driven to do so by some inner force, coming up with the subjects themselves and basically having a free hand as regards the final form of the work. Although, of course, there were already exceptions; in opera, for instance, a somewhat different creative world took shape relatively soon. Baroque composers wrote with a lightness, they did not suffer when doing so, as did the Romantic composers, and they thanked God for the result. Medieval composers even frequently remained anonymous, they created music for the liturgy or simply took pleasure in it and competed with each other in writing a better conductus. So the answer is yes, the quality of music as a self-contained work does indeed differ. When it comes to aesthetic qualities, early music does not anyhow differ from later music, it all depends on individual taste, on what you seek in music and what you expect from it.



Some are of the opinion that in the sphere of early music compositions have been recorded that simply aren't worthy of being so as regards their quality, "second-rate" pieces – is it so?

Yes, of course. But there is nothing wrong about it. Why, archaeology or other artistic disciplines too are interested in everyday items from the past, so why not get to know once popular music that was heard from church lofts or at courts almost every day? If we want to better understand the musical milieu of the past, we also have to get to know compositions intended for common performance and not compare their quality with the pieces intended for an entirely different purpose. Many a time, such types of music contain gems one would not expect there. And it is even more complicated in the case of the oldest music preserved – how can we assess, for instance, the aesthetic values of a Gregorian chant or a song of which only the melody has been preserved? In such cases, we are grateful for all available sources and this type of music should be played and recorded.

Is there a difference between the perception of early music in our country and in Western Europe?

In Western Europe, early music became a regular part of performances a little bit earlier than here, they don't have a sharp dividing line between the "early-music" and "post-Bach" worlds. But the situation in our country has also been changing slowly and that which was previously perceived as second-rate music has finally been afforded the attention it deserves. It would also be good if this trend were to be reflected by Czech music-education institutions too. I think that many a thing is currently happening in the instrumental field, so let's hope that it will soon be

joined by the vocal sphere. Of late, many of our ensembles focused on early music have struggled with a lack of singers. Well, there are actually singers out there, yet precious few of them are aware of how this type of music should be performed. It's a pity that they don't come across anything like that within their training.

We've talked about Western Europe. But you often sing in Japan too. How do the Japanese perceive European early music? What is it like to sing Bach over there?

Japan is a large and colourful country and, even though I have travelled there frequently, I have only had the opportunity to get to know just a tiny piece of it. And mainly just a specific fragment of the population – I have above all been in touch with artists, most of whom have studied in Europe, speak several foreign languages, and a few of them are Christians (Christians form approximately 1% of the Japanese population). Thus I have been meeting people with an enormous interest in this type of music. It is generally known that European classical music is immensely popular in Japan – in my opinion, sometimes perhaps overly thrusting aside the traditional Japanese music, even though this has also been caused by other reasons besides the import of Euro-American culture in the 20th century. But I only know of one ensemble engaged in pre-Classical European music – the Bach Collegium Japan. In the sphere of Baroque music, their artistic director, Masaaki Suzuki, has been doing virtually pioneering work and the ensemble is extremely popular in Japan. Singing Bach in Japan is wonderful, and not only because you are in Japan. The local audiences are very receptive, most of them thoroughly prepare for a concert, and some even bring the sheet music along with them. I know some of the audience in person and feel very good among them. A Tokyo fan of mine even invited me to her wedding, which coincidentally was taking place at the time when I was in the city for a few days. Ultimately, it turned out that I was the witness, which I only grasped during the ceremony when they asked me to attach my signature! It was an interesting experience and a great honour that really touched my heart.

What have you sung over your career?

This is a question that would take a long time to answer, but it wouldn't be amusing at all. At home I have enormous piles of sheet music, pieces I sang on a single occasion and never returned to. If you devote to concert art and work with numerous ensembles, you manage to sing a truly incredible amount of compositions throughout your life. I have the sheet music of pieces by insignificant composers from country churches, as well as plenty of works by composers as famous as Bach, Handel, Mozart. Another enormous pile is formed by Gregorian chants, which I sang with the Schola Benedicta and now am singing with the Tiburtina Ensemble. The harp folder mainly contains secular medieval music, but also pieces somewhat straddling the sacred and the secular. My cabinet also contains operas, above all Baroque, as well as some of Mozart's works, which I used to sing at the beginning of my career, at the time when I wasn't yet so artistically crystallised or, say, established as an "early-music singer". And I also possess several contemporary compositions and Romantic song cycles...

That is a truly huge range. Which of this vast quantity do you enjoy most?

When I perform a composition I also strive to like it at the time. Admittedly, you cannot fully identify with everything, and many times you have to sing something that doesn't comply with your nature or taste. Then I have to seek within myself a corresponding feeling or even involve some acting. But I enjoy singing everything. My voice really agrees with Bach, who employs a host of utterly non-vocal techniques, with the human voice being put on a par with the musical instruments; he splendidly works with the text, and his music in general is an infinite source of inspiration. Yet perhaps I am most happy with medieval music, with the harp and some musical fragments, when I seek the corresponding musical accompaniment. This I not only enjoy, it truly fulfils me. At the moment, I am looking forward to, for instance, rehearsing the Spanish Cantigas de Santa Maria – the psalter specialist Marnit Übellacker will arrive from Germany and for three days she, Bára Sojková, the percussionist Martin Novák and I will seek the accordant sound for the individual songs. I am really curious about what the outcome will be...

How did you become a harpist?

I remember that when I was a little girl I really wanted to play the harp. But since it wasn't possible, I started learning the violin. For a long time, I of course completely forgot about the harp. Then when I was 15 or 16, I was enchanted by medieval and folk music, primarily Celtic, which abounds in harps, and came to love the sound. Fortunately, at the time our music school was just starting harp lessons, so I enrolled in the course given by the superb teacher Jana Střížková and thereby embarked upon one of the nicest chapters of my life. Playing the harp and singing concurrently is a truly great experience, nothing else that I do can compare to it. I don't know how to describe it, but when I sing and accompany myself, many times I find myself beyond time and space. Practising the harp is great relaxation for me too.

Do you actually listen to music when you aren't "working"?

Unless I'm rehearsing or practising, I don't put on classical music. But I am not the type of person who likes complete silence, quite the contrary. In our home there is always some music on, and I never go out without earphones – but I mainly listen to rock, occasionally medieval music.

You play with the rock band Stillknox...

Well, at the moment the band isn't performing – the vocalist (my sister) has a daughter a few months old and the guitarist (my cousin) will be having a baby too. We belong to the generation who grew up on grunge and it's pretty audible in our music. I would call it a sort of darker melodic punk.

Some listeners who have heard you singing Bach may be surprised when they find out that you play in a rock band. Perhaps because rock music can sound hard and harsh to those who listen to classical music? That it is, but cannot Baroque music be that way too?

Well, I don't know anybody performing both classical music and punk. But I initially wanted to be a punk singer! Classical music only appeared in my life

later on and I was reluctant to give up my love of rock, so I at least began playing the bass guitar. I understand that when someone is used to the sound of a classical orchestra it would be hard for them to become fond of the sound of electric guitars and the drum kit. On the other hand, at some moments the sound of the classical orchestra may be louder.

But now seriously – the music naturally often is like that: hard and harsh. But it was created for that very purpose. I like all possible hues in music; hence I also like dark, aggressive music, stuff that's not overly pleasant. And I also like sounds that are difficult to identify and such sounds are best attained by the electric guitar, which has an immense sonic potential. I even assume that if Bach or Vivaldi were composing today they would do so using the electric guitar! When talking about rock and more aggressive music, we get to more philosophical questions – what is music actually supposed to depict? Should it only be “beautiful”? What is beautiful and what is no longer beautiful? Or should music be “truthful” and not merely confine itself within limiting aesthetic barriers? Is everything by Mozart beautiful and good in itself and everything by, say, Marilyn Manson ugly and bad? My opinion is that this isn't true, of course it depends on every one of us as to what we actually seek in music.

Baroque music is not like that, nor can it be. If today it sometimes sounds almost rock-like, that's owing to a specific interpretation that, however, only appeared, say, over the past decade or two. The question arises of whether the music sounded that way back at the time of its origination or whether it is our experience with 20th-century music (be it classical or rock'n'roll), which we are not able to forgo, that we “smuggle” into the music. A Baroque composer did not aim to give vent to his emotions and frustrations through his music, this trend only emerged much later. If Baroque music does assume a harsher sound, it always merely illustrates while, unlike rock music, keeping a certain distance.

We have been discussing interpretation – sure enough a type of creation. Have you ever felt like composing? Do musical ideas occur to you?

I have no illusions whatsoever that performing someone else's work is a great art in its own right. It is fine to possess a voice able to pass over an idea to other people, yet it still remains an idea of someone else's. I can at most become familiar with it at that moment so as to make my performance credible. And I most feel like a creator with medieval music, since I often devise the accompaniments, arrangements, many a time even have to complete a melody, think up a rhythm, sometimes add another part. I love that moment when I sit down to an unfamiliar composition, begin playing it and something new starts to come to life under my hands.

And totally original creation? Of course it allures me, but I think it would more likely be in rock (or at least some type of alternative genre). Not long ago, my cousin Eliška Kohoutová and I were composing music to Jean Anouilh's play *Medea* for the d21 theatre and I really enjoyed it; it was wonderful to let ourselves be led by the text and try to flesh out by musical means a certain feeling that a scene should evoke. I largely used the bass guitar to express myself, I realised that it is the instrument I can compose on best, and I also played the harp, an old synthesiser, and the flute. I hope that the music has augmented the tone of the play; unfortunately, I couldn't attend the premiere since I was singing somewhere. I am also enticed by prose, concise forms, the short story, but I am probably too young or shy to write.

You mentioned literature – do you like reading?

I do enjoy reading, but I read much more when travelling. This may sound like a cliché, but I don't have enough time to read at home. I don't have any agency representation, I organise everything myself, and I work most when I am at home. I also practise a lot at home, and I strive to meet people for whom I don't normally have much time, I run around various institutions, I furnish the flat. In a nutshell, sometimes I have too much to cope with at home. Then I only get to read a book before going to bed, and I can only get through two or three pages... When travelling, I have much more time for such things; I read, watch films, write a little bit. I really like literature from the American South; my favourites are Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Harper Lee, and I keep returning to Charles Bukowski's poems. They're on my bedside table and when I can't sleep it's my reading of choice. I often read literature relating somehow to Japan. And I really like sci-fi, and occasionally read something more specialist, pertaining to astronomy.



*Born in Prague, **Hana Blažíková** graduated in 2002 from the Prague Conservatory, where she studied with Jiří Kotouč. Furthermore, she attended master classes led by Poppy Holden, Peter Kooij, Monika Mauch and Howard Crook. The young soprano soon gained recognition as an outstanding Baroque music performer and began receiving invitations to appear at concerts and record CDs from conductors of such renown as Philippe*

Herreweghe and Masaaki Suzuki. She has regularly worked with internationally acclaimed ensembles and orchestras, including Collegium Vocale Gent, Bach Collegium Japan, Sette Voci, Collegium 1704, Collegium Marianum, etc. She has performed at numerous international festivals (Prague Spring, the Festival of Early Music in Utrecht, Resonances in Vienna, Festival de Sablé, Festival de la Chaise-Dieu, Festival de Saintes, etc.). Hana Blažíková plays the Gothic harp and sings, accompanying herself in programmes featuring medieval music.

Selected discography:

Johann Sebastian Bach: Missa h-moll – Collegium Vocale Gent, Philippe Herreweghe, PHI 2011

Johann Sebastian Bach: Leipzig Cantatas – Collegium Vocale Gent, Philippe Herreweghe, PHI 2012

Tomás Luis de Victoria: Officium Defunctorum – Collegium Vocale Gent, Philippe Herreweghe, PHI 2012

Johann Sebastian Bach: Cantatas – Bach Collegium Japan, Masaaki Suzuki, BIS

Johann Sebastian Bach: Motets – Sette Voci, Peter Kooij, Ramée 2009

Harmoniea Sacrae – Sette Voci, Peter Kooij, Ramée 2009

Heinrich Schütz – Il Primo Libro de Madrigali – Sette Voci, Peter Kooij, CPO 2013

German Baroque Cantatas – CordArte, Pan Classics, 2013

Bach, Buxtehude, Telemann: Jesu, meine Freude – Gli Angeli Geneve, Stephan Macleod, Sony Classical, 2009

Purcell – Ensemble La Fenice, Jean Taubery, Ars Produktion, 2014

KÜHN CHILDREN'S CHOIR IN THE YEAR OF CZECH MUSIC



A normal weekday morning at the National Theatre in Prague. A dress rehearsal for tomorrow's performance of the revived production of Britten's opera *Gloriana* is under way. Backstage, the boys from the Kühn Children's Choir are changing out of their costumes into ordinary clothes. In a while, other children will arrive and begin rehearsing for the forthcoming premiere of a new production of Janáček's opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*. "Owing to its sound and intonation quality, our choir has always been a partner to professional musicians – and we would like to keep it that way in the future," says the choir master Jiří Chvála, who amid the frantic preparations gave us an interview. In addition to symphony concerts, the choir has frequently been employed in opera performances.

Professor Chvála has headed the choir, which the year before last celebrated its 80th anniversary, for an incredible 47 years. He himself is just a year younger than the ensemble. Josef Kühn, choirmaster and former singer, founded his choir in 1932 within Czechoslovak Radio. At the time, he put together a dozen children from a Prague school to meet the needs of radio broadcasting for schools. At the present time, the Kühn Children's Choir numbers approximately 600 singers, almost half of them pre-schoolers. *"It's been 80 years of systematic work, a great tradition,"* says Jiří Chvála, adding that in various situations and various places in Prague you can encounter people whose children or grandchildren were with the choir, or who sang in it themselves at one time. Former members of the Kühn choir include some of the most distinguished contemporary Czech vocal soloists and instrumentalists, as well as Jiří Bělohlávek, chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. *"Every season, hundreds of children sing in our choir. It's of major importance for them and Czech musical life alike. One of our most reputable traditions has to be cultivated,"* Chvála points out.

Naturally, he is not the only one to devote to all the children. Chvála shares his duties with the choirmaster Petr Louženský, a former pupil of his; Světlana Tvrzická, who in 1988 arrived in Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union and since 1989 has mainly worked with the preparatory departments; Tereza Bystřická, who has served as choirmaster since 1996; and others working with the ensemble. Its director is Jan Vávra, who as a child sang in the famous boys' choir in Hradec Králové, east Bohemia.

For the end of this year, the director plans to hold a concert within which former members of the choir are scheduled to appear too. *"They are a large family, maintaining contact with the choir, remembering. It's nice to observe how singing formed these people,"* says Vávra, with a smile on his face. No detailed statistics have been collated – yet if a thorough calculation were to be carried out he does not rule out that the total number of persons who have been involved with the Kühn Children's Choir could run into the tens of thousands. The still active former members are fewer, of course, but they still amount to hundreds. *"Showing the current members the high-quality of their predecessors – interconnecting the generations – that's an idea we would like to develop,"* Vávra adds.

After all, this was precisely the basis of the memorable concert at the Rudolfinum Hall in Prague that com-

memorated the Kühn Children's Choir's 80th anniversary the year before last. On that evening, broadcast live on the radio, the auditorium filled with the children's parents and, perhaps in an even higher number, those who had been members of the ensemble in the past.

The generations mingled. Children, parents, grandparents. On the occasion, it was logical to voice thanks to mums, grandmas, dads and granddads – they bring children to concerts, rehearsals and performances, and without their self-sacrifice the choir could not function...

The anniversary concert featured pieces by Bedřich Smetana and Zdeněk Lukáš, whose music is most frequently sought after by choirs, Ivan Kurz's *Stabat mater* for children's choir and *String Quartet*, Otmar Mácha's *Hymn*, to J. A. Komenský's text, Bohuslav Martinů's *The Shepherds' Song*, Petr Eben's music... Many of those present in the hall hummed along to the choir. And when folk songs, as arranged by Jiří Teml, the choir's court composer, had their turn, and by the time Jiří Chvála called upon the audience to sing, many of them joined in spontaneously and full-throatedly.

The Rudolfinum performance was opened by children from the concert department, followed by the youngest singers from the preparatory sections and, finally, the choir's former members, clad in black and white (the children had on blue-and-white suits with the logo of a bird and violin clef). The improvised ensemble sang Josef Suk's *My Mother* and Josef Bohuslav Foerster's *Czech Song*. They had had two rehearsals prior to the performance, yet they had worked hard and the result was good. Not surprisingly, since music is the hobby of many of the former choir members, while others have gone on to become professional musicians. At that moment, approximately 150 singers were on the stage.

And then everyone, both former and present members, got on the podium. There were probably up to 500 of them, including children so young that they had not even attended the preparatory training. And just like 10 years previously, the 2012 anniversary evening culminated in a mixture of folk songs, handing over of bouquets and a joyous celebratory turmoil.

The atmosphere confirmed that which Jiří Chvála says on such occasions: *"We have a good time together, we enjoy it."*

Professor Chvála remembers Jan Kühn, the choir's founder and his teacher, as an immensely charismatic personality. Kühn started as a singer and worked his way up to the post of soloist, concurrently trying to



*Children of the choir
with the legendary
comedian Vlasta
Burian, 1935*



*Preparatory department of the Kühn
Children's Choir, early 1960s*

gain recognition as a stage director. Yet at the beginning of the 1930s, in the wake of a voice crisis, he decided to pursue a different path: he put together a group of children so as to demonstrate on them how to sing correctly. Initially, he mainly trained the children in folk songs, yet soon he moved on – by the 1935/36 season, the choir had already appeared on the stage of the National Theatre in Prague, performing in a production of Dvořák's *The Jacobin*, an opera in which they have sung ever since.

Jiří Chvála considers his encounter with Jan Kühn fateful. He himself had never actually sung before, but when he began taking voice and choir-mastering lessons from Kühn his teacher discovered his vocal ability. At the time, Jan Kühn had started to build up a choir of adults who within a short time would appear alongside the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and other prominent ensembles. He had great faith in his student and, later on, young colleague, and entrusted him with specific and practical tasks, in the Czech Choir and the children's choir alike.

Ultimately, from the late 1950s on, Chvála collaborated with the two choirs, both at the time within the Czech Philharmonic, as a professional. In 1967 the choirmaster Josef Veselka asked him to head the children's choir, which following Jan Kühn's death had for 10 years been led by his wife Markéta Kühnová. Chvála duly linked up to the great legacy of his teacher and went

on to cultivate the choir's remarkable performance profile, one based on lucid sound, intonation certainty and an ample expressive scale. *"Jan Kühn's personality has been somewhat overlooked, yet his merits are colossal, manifesting themselves in both the professional mixed chorus, which for years has borne the name Prague Philharmonic Choir, and the children's choir,"* says Jiří Chvála, adding that the children's choir possesses a sound quality whose basis it has retained since the time of its founder: *"Unlike him, those of us who are now heading the choir are not singers, yet we adhere to the ideal – and I believe that our successors will continue to pursue this path too."* Today, Jiří Chvála can not only look back fondly on his (ongoing) work with the choir, but also his long-time teaching at the Faculty of Music of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. He has to his name more than 30 albums and an immense number of radio recordings: *"Of course, there is a difference between adults and children, but when it comes to the requirements for a pleasant, vocally correct formation of the tone, healthy for children, requirements for rhythm, intonation... they must be the same,"* Chvála explains. *"I can't imagine my life without the children. It's a specific type of work, since naturally they cannot concentrate as much as the adults can, but everything you inculcate reappears. Working with children is not a lesser matter than working with adults,"* Chvála once said in a radio interview.

In the Year of Czech Music 2014, the Kühn Children's Choir are scheduled to make a recording of folk songs, in which they intend to engage the youngest singers. *"We feel a social responsibility for investing in a good disc, with a high-quality repertoire and of top-notch artistic quality,"* says the choir's director. It will be a more time-consuming undertaking than may appear at first glance, since arranging folk songs in a manner that makes them sound simple is not simple at all. But it has to be done. The demand for something similar is evidently great – and a closer view of the market reveals that projects of this type have to date been purely commercial. Jan Vávra shrugs: *"Some of them are really terrible..."* The plan is for the songs on the new recording to be comprehensible, with their form possessing an artistic value so that children can easily imitate that which they hear. Therefore, the arrangements should match the possibilities of the youngest children, yet they will have to be sung by older children in the choir. *"At the same time, the recording cannot be made by the oldest ones,"* Professor Chvála points out, *"since it has to correspond to the age of those for whom it will be intended."* The reasons for the project, which has crystallised in the choir, are even clearer: families not only do not sing, they do not speak either: children in general are neglected when it comes to their language and musical expression. Folk songs can help in this respect.

This year, the Kühn Children's Choir recorded a double album capturing the best of their core concert repertoire over the past 10 to 15 years. It is important for the choir's current and former members, as well as for the public, and it was the first CD to have been produced by the choir themselves. The ensemble's repertoire mirrors its focus, as it has been set since the very beginning. According to Professor Chvála, owing to Jan Kühn the choir concentrated on the greatest composers of the time and maintained the proportions. *"Our repertoire has always comprised about 50 per cent sacred and 50 per cent secular music. And it ranges from Renaissance to contemporary music. We included on the double album pieces by modern composers that we have frequently sung on tours too, as well as such Czech classics as Zdeněk Lukáš and Petr Eben, and, when it comes to foreigners, Arvo Pärt."* New music for children has evidently somewhat stagnated of late. The number of new pieces today is far from being equal to that in the past – and the same trend, or rather, problem, is felt by foreign ensembles. *"Hence, all the more do we have to try to remain in contact with Czech composers so that they will write for us again,"* says Jiří Chvála,



Jiří Chvála

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER



pointing out that contemporary music is and has to be something like daily bread, without which no choir can exist. In this connection, Chvála names three younger composers with whom he is currently in contact: Marko Ivanović, Slavomír Hořinka, Jan Krejčík.

Do the Kühn Children's Choir intend to hold cycles of concerts for parents and children, in the fashion of all large Czech orchestras? According to Jan Vávra, this is not their intention – they would rather organise such performances to mark special occasions, as was the case last year at the Children's Day within the Dvořák Prague festival. *"We prefer to focus on great musico-dramatic things, which are more interesting for the younger children as performed by their peers. We deem it viable to give smaller*

theatre performances, for instance Václav Trojan's Beatles, Jiří Těm'l's chamber operas and the like. We are able to perform at a school assembly hall, or on the State Opera stage, where we have given a few performances for schools and for parents and children," says Vávra. The majority of the children are usually in such grandiose buildings for the very first time and it means a lot to them. Professor Chvála adds: *"Yes, if you invite parents and children, or schools, you need beautiful premises. But renting out, say, the Rudolfinum hall is financially difficult for us. The performance of Těm'l's chamber opera The Devil and Kate at the State Opera met with a great response, with about 800 children seated in the auditorium – yet only two of them said that they had been there previously..."*

Arousing interest in choral singing is no easy task. And it is necessary to acknowledge that the earlier methods

*In Bohuslav
Martinů's
The Miracles of Mary,
National Theatre
in Prague*



PHOTO: HANA SMEJKALOVÁ



no longer work. Orchestras too have changed their ways of intriguing and alluring children. *"We must win children over in bite-sized chunks, which they are able to digest,"* Jiří Chvála shrugs.

This year, the Kühn Children's Choir are scheduled to undertake two major foreign tours in the East. Petr Louženský will lead the ensemble at a festival in South Korea, Jiří Chvála at the Easter Festival in Moscow. The choir's operation will, of course, continue as usual. As Vávra stresses, it is not like in the case of a professional ensemble, whereby it is possible to say "now we are doing this", as there are always several lines running in parallel. We cannot tell the National Theatre not to stage some operas because the choir is on tour... Disengaging the children from school is not always easy either, and it becomes even more problematic towards the end of the school year.

"I am glad that more and more children are fond of singing and that our endeavour doesn't fall flat," says Jiří Chvála. The choir has succeeded in maintaining its high level, even though this requires great effort, as is the case of all ensembles. A good reputation at home is one thing; attaining acclaim abroad is an entirely different matter. *"I should mention a large tour of South Africa in October 2012. Choral singing is at a high level in that country. The response to our performances was excellent and we had the impression that the trip made sense. Another recent success was our participation in a competition in Tolosa, Spain, last autumn, where we won first prize in the children's choir category for the third time, which was exceptional."*

Joining the choir means the first encounters with music, various artists, composers, performers... and the first appearances on stage, great friendships, experiences, memories. Everyone has been affected for ever, everyone has received something that cannot be found elsewhere. And although the individual feelings and experiences

do differ, all have one thing in common: a great love for music, as all former members agree.

They fondly remember their teacher, who is able to keep children so focused that they do not divert their eyes throughout a composition. But they also recall a coach trip during with the professor told fairytales over the microphone.

"We strive to have a fairly high profile, so as to gain new members, children coming to join us of their own volition. We have made progress with the youngest kids, whose number has increased,"

Chvála and Vávra say, admitting that the general level of singing has been decreasing but there are still children out there possessing remarkable talent.

"Talent, disposition cannot simply vanish, the genes are still there. But we will intensify our efforts for winning over the most gifted children." This, however, should not result in an essential transformation. The Kühn Children's Choir have never merely focused on children with exceptional talent, being instead a platform for a much wider selection. And it will certainly remain this way.

The children's age ranges from the very youngest, who start in the preparatory departments and who still approach music as entertainment. It provides them with a solid basis to continue further. The choirmaster and pedagogues are well aware of the fact that if they manage to captivate the children at this tender age, music will undoubtedly form and cultivate them, even if they have to leave the ensemble. The oldest children appear on stages of Prague theatres and travel abroad to sing at large music festivals and within prestigious concert tours. For them, music is work, involving devotion and a strong sense of discipline.

The essential aspect has been appositely described by the Kühn Children's Choir's director Jan Vávra: *"In terms of our performances, we consider ourselves a professional ensemble, yet we can never forget that the performances are delivered by children!"*

JAN NOVÁK: MUSICIAN AND HUMANIST



To mark the 30th anniversary of the death of the composer Jan Novák, the Prague Spring festival has organised a concert in his honour featuring selected Novák choral and chamber works.

Jan Novák (8 April 1921 – 17 November 1984) ranks among the most distinct Czech post-war composers. The fact that his oeuvre is not overly known is in part related to the course his life took. At the time when he was at the peak of his creative powers, in August 1968 he left his homeland and went to live in turn in Denmark, Italy and Germany. For an artist who in the 1960s was in Czechoslovakia an acknowledged composer with a large group of supporters and friends, departure meant loss of background, performers and listeners alike. He found himself amidst the Western artistic milieu, where stylistic trends different to those back at home prevailed.



LIFE AND WORK

Jan Novák was born on 8 April 1921 in Nová Říše in Moravia. In 1933 he enrolled at the Jesuit Grammar School in Velehrad, which provided a first-class classical education, with emphasis being placed on languages (in addition to Latin and Greek, Russian, German and Esperanto were taught there). Yet owing to his transgressing the strict discipline that reigned at the institution he was expelled. Novák completed his secondary education at the Classical Grammar School in Brno and subsequently attended the Brno Conservatory, where he studied composition (with Vilém Petrželka), the piano and conducting. After spending two and a half years in Germany as a forced labourer, in 1945 he resumed his studies at the Brno Conservatory and after graduating in 1946 began attending the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, where he studied with Pavel Bořkovec, before returning to Brno to enrol at the newly founded Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts. As a recipient of a scholarship from the Jaroslav Ježek Foundation, from June 1947 to February 1948 he studied in the USA, first participating in the summer composition

MUSICIAN AND HUMANIST

master classes at the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood (in the class of Aaron Copland) and subsequently taking private lessons from Bohuslav Martinů in New York. The criticism Martinů initially levelled against Novák's work (highlighting the somewhat awkward treatment of themes and sloppiness in development of motifs), first acted like a "cold shower" on the fledgling composer. After recovering from the initial shock, however, he experienced a learning curve he would never forget, with the time spent with Martinů and their friendship playing a crucial role in his evolution. Novák returned to Czechoslovakia in February 1948, at the time of the Communist coup. He settled in Brno, mainly earning his living by composing music for short and puppet films, radio and theatre plays, and by giving performances in a piano duo with his wife Eliška Nováková. His works dating from the 1950s, revealing a distinct Martinů influence, were symbolically ushered in by the *Variations on a Bohuslav Martinů Theme* for two pianos (1949) and its arrangement for orchestra (1959). Attention was also gained by his symphonic and concertante pieces (e.g. the *Oboe Concerto* written in 1952). In the 1960s, Novák further extended his range of genres and compositional means; for a short time he employed elements of dodecaphony and aleatoricism in his compositions, first applying the twelve-tone technique as a thematic material

in the middle section of his *Capriccio* for cello and small orchestra (1958), with the chamber piece *Passer Catulli* (1962) being considered one of the apices of this phase. In 1963 he co-founded "Creative Group A", made up of Brno-based composers and musicologists. From the end of the 1950s, a vital role in his creation was played by his penchant for Latin. The original use of the Latin meter while respecting the proportion between long and short syllables would serve as an impulse for his entire further work. A liberal-minded composer who always avowed his artistic and civic opinions, Novák ran into trouble with the official authorities and the dogmatism of the Czechoslovak Union of Composers, who with great difficulty tolerated his openness and "commotions"; after in 1961 he refused to participate in the election of lay judges, he was briefly expelled from the organisation, subordinate to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Paradoxically, however, at that time he received commissions from leading Czech and Slovak film directors and created music for Karel Kachyňa (*Suffering, Coach to Vienna, Night of the Bride*, etc.), Jiří Trnka (*The Cybernetic Grandma*), Karel Zeman (*The Stolen Airship*) and Martin Holý (*Raven's Road*). Novák's experience with film and incidental music also manifested itself in the extreme dramatic forcibility of his cantata *Dido* (1967) for



Jan Novák's *Aesopia* – six sung and danced fables based on Phaedrus (1981), a production of the State Theatre in Brno, 1990



Sonata da chiesa I
for viola and organ (1981), excerpt

mezzo-soprano, narrator, male chorus and orchestra to Book 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, his paramount work prior to emigration.

The composer perceived with hope the gradual unclamping of the social situation in Czechoslovakia in the second half of the 1960s. When in August 1968 the Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia, he was on a tour of Italy with the Kühn Mixed Choir. Novák decided not to return to his homeland and he, his wife and two little daughters left via Germany for Aarhus, Denmark. He responded to the tragic events back at home with the choral cantata to his own Latin lyrics *Ignis pro Ioanne Palach* (1969); another piece with a clearly political subtext was his cantata *Planctus Troadum* written in the same year.

Dating from the time he and his family were about to move to Italy is *Mimus magicus* for soprano, clarinet and piano to Virgil's poetry (1969), which Novák composed to commission for the competition in Rovereto, where his family subsequently moved. During his time in Italy (1970–77), Novák mainly created vocal and chamber pieces. Whereas he performed his choruses to Latin texts

with his Voces Latinae choir, the bulk of his chamber works were written for his daughters, the pianist Dora and the flautist Clara.

In the final phase of his career, following Novák's departure for Germany, where in 1977 he and his family settled in Neu Ulm, he composed orchestral works (*Ludi symphoniaci*, *Vernalis Temporis Symphonia* for solos, chorus and orchestra, *Symphonia Bipartita*) and a number of pieces for chamber ensemble – *Sonata da Chiesa I* and *II*, *Sonata solis fidibus* for violin and the piano work *Hymni Christiani*. In addition to a looser fantasy form and a more extended structure, these pieces are characterised by a more profound musical expression.

In 1982 the conductor Rafael Kubelík and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus performed the cantata *Dido* in Munich. During his lifetime, however, Novák did not experience great recognition of his work. On 17 November 1984 he died following a serious illness.

In 1996, President Václav Havel awarded him a state honour in memoriam and in 2011 the composer's remains were relocated from Rovereto to Brno.

Novák's relatively extensive oeuvre includes orchestral, chamber and vocal pieces, an opera, ballets, music for theatre, film and radio plays. The fundamental traits of his musical language are remarkably constant – a lucid form, a bold rhythmic component with frequent use of syncopated and ostinato rhythms, sophisticated melodic ideas, buoyancy, elegance, humour and slight provocation, occasionally employing banalities and trivialities. His linkage to Classicism and inspiration by Bohuslav Martinů's compositional techniques, as well as the jazz influence and original application of the Latin meter, form a singular synthesis.

OBSESSION WITH LATIN

Motto: “Accordingly, with great pleasure I make use of this living language, more immortal than dead, for composing.”

(J. Novák in the preface to *Ioci vernaes*)

Novák's great fondness for the language of Ancient Rome began in the first half of the 1950s, when studying Latin became his main hobby and passion. The composer did not perceive Latin, which he brilliantly mastered in both spoken and written form as a poet, as a dead language but as a universal means of communication across the centuries. He systematically cultivated his interest and in the 1950s founded in Brno a Latin club whose members were only allowed to speak Latin. Novák's creative approach was also reflected in his conceiving words, enriching Latin with new expressions

(he sought fitting equivalents for “telephone” and “refrigerator”, for instance).

His proximity to the spirit of Latin was recalled by the violinist Dušan Pandula: “And there was always something mythological that he brought back to his everyday encounters with Latin and antiquity; since Jan scolded his children in Latin, spoke Latin with his friends, and used the language in telephone conversations with those who were at least a little bit on the same wave length. He conducted endless discussions with the ‘devotees’ in Latin, and he translated everything that got into his hands into Latin, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, for instance.”

VOCAL COMPOSITIONS

Novák's vocal pieces to Latin texts are settings of works by Ancient Roman poets and prose writers, medieval, Renaissance, as well as modern, authors, and largely his own texts. He made proficient use of the possibilities of the given metre's rhythm and worked with them in an original manner for the sake of underlining the text's meaning. The Latin metre also had a vital impact on his thinking when composing solely instrumental works, in some cases he put Latin verses *ad libitum*.

Evidently the very first composition setting Novák's own Latin text was *Exercitia mythologica* for mixed chorus, dating from 1968. The cycle, whose heroes are Antique mythological figures, consists of eight choruses of a madrigal texture whose metric pulse is based on quantitative meters.

Novák wrote the highest number of vocal pieces in Italy, where in 1971 he established the Voces Latinae choir (the cycle *Invitatio Pastorum*, the song cycle *Schola cantans*, the opera *Dulcitius*, etc.). Under his guidance, the ensemble started to perform almost exclusively non-liturgical choruses to Latin texts in the classical Latin pronunciation.

In one of his letters to Brno, Novák wrote in this regard: “As I have written to you, at an advanced age I had to set up a choir, even though I have no conducting ambitions whatsoever, but necessity is the mother of invention. (...) I am cultivating with them Latin pronunciation, since Latin phonetics has been neglected for some sixteen centuries. So I attend to the education of the European people...”

After moving to Germany, Novák composed to Latin texts the ballet *Aesopia* for four-part mixed chorus and two pianos or small orchestra (1981), based on “The Fables of Phaedrus”. The most comprehensive collection of his Latin songs is the *Cantica Latina* for voice and piano, published posthumously.



Fugae Vergilianae
for mixed chorus (1974), excerpt

TRIBUTE TO THE COMPOSER

At the 24 May concert within the Prague Spring festival, Martinů Voices with the choir master Lukáš Vasilek will present two Novák cycles that represent his crowning works in this genre.

The extremely difficult to perform *Fugae Vergilianae* (1974) for mixed chorus is probably Novák's most notable Virgil-based composition yet has never been sung in its entirety on a concert stage. Some 40 years after its origination, Prague Spring will be giving its world premiere. All the piece's sections play with the meaning of the word "fugue", which is derived from the Latin "fuga" (act of fleeing).

The contrapuntal tissue of voices is thus thematically linked by the motif of flight, be it departure from the homeland or the rush of transient time.

The setting of the satirical last will and testament by Novák's contemporary, the German writer and Latin poet Josef Eberle (1901-1986), in the chorus *Testamentum* (1966) is characterised by the unusual

application of four horns (in Ancient Rome they were the traditional instruments for mourning music) and imaginative twists of the tempo, rhythm, expression and dynamics, respecting the satirical nature and development of the text. Pungent humour gives way to the solemn tone in the poet's will: "May the world not be as I used to know it, may a person to a person not be like a wolf to a sheep." The selection of Novák's choral works will be rounded off at the concert by the chamber piece *Sonata super Hoson zes* (1981), which quotes the allegedly oldest preserved notation of Greek music, "The Song of Seikilos". It is one of the few works in which Novák was inspired by Ancient Greek music. The sonata will be performed by the composer's daughters, the flautist Clara Nováková and the pianist Dora Novák-Wilmington. The concert will be symbolically supplemented by the *Czech Madrigals* by Bohuslav Martinů, who remained one of Jan Novák's major models throughout his life.

www.dokoncertu.cz

RE-EDITION OF CZECH FILM MUSIC

Whereas at the present time the Czech film industry releases soundtracks as a common part of promotional campaigns for virtually all films, recordings of Czech film scores dating from the Communist era are scarce indeed. Over the past few years, however, this gap has been partially filled owing to the activities of Finders Keepers, a British label that unearths nuggets from the archives and returns them to curious listeners. How does this music come across when removed from the original film framework and with the time distance of several decades?

Over the past decade or so, Andrew Shallcross, better known as Andy Votel, a musician and record producer, has within the Finders Keepers label been a maniacal archive researcher seeking and bringing to light music that has fallen into oblivion. To date, the label has issued six discs featuring Czech film music, with the centre of gravity being the 1960s and 1970s, a period which in cultural terms we Czechs recall with nostalgia and with a certain degree of idealisation of a “golden era” during which, the Communist regime notwithstanding, bold and innovative works were created. The release in 2006 of **Luboš Fišer**’s score to the Czech film *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* (1970, directed by Jaromil Jireš) was the first step and met with an enthusiastic response, even among those who previously didn’t know the film. Next up were releases of the scores to Věra Chytilová’s *Daisies* (1966), Karel Kachyňa’s *The Little Mermaid* (1976), Václav Vorlíček’s *Saxana – Girl on a Broomstick* (1971) and, at the end of last year, the soundtracks to two Juraj Herz films: *Morgiana* (1972) and *The Cremator* (1968). Is there anything that links up the poetically spine-chilling atmospheres of Jireš’s and Herz’s works, Chytilová’s experimental provocation and the two fairy tales (in addition to the insignificant detail that all the soundtracks employ the sound of the harpsichord at some point)? In musical terms at least, we can say that the dramaturgy succeeded in capturing interesting combinations of conventional musical techniques with differing degrees of sonic and formal experimentation.

Fairy-tale electronics

The score to the fairy-tale comedy *Saxana – Girl on a Broomstick* was written by the Bulgarian-born Angelo Michajlov (1939–1998), a student in Václav Dobiáš’s composition class and an arranger and writer of songs, including for the iconic Czech singer Marta Kubišová. The story of a little witch who goes astray and finds herself in the world of humans unfurls against the backdrop of music

(performed by the Karel Vlach Orchestra) based on jazz, funk and rock. Michajlov enriched the big-band instrumentation with electronic effects, which seem to represent the realm of magic juxtaposed with everyday reality. Electronic effects were also applied by **Zdeněk Liška** in his score for *The Little Mermaid*, an adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's eponymous fairy tale. The tone of his music is, however, darker, with a major role being played by the choir and the electronic effects serving to create the illusion of the underwater world; yet besides quivery chords or glissandos it also applies relatively aggressive percussive electronically generated or modified sounds. The counterpart to electronics is formed by late-Romantic, or perhaps Impressionist, harmonies



Luboš Fišer



Zdeněk Liška



of acoustic instruments and the choir. With its wordless choral singing, the part called *The Song of the Siren* is clearly reminiscent of Claude Debussy's *Sirènes* from the *Trois Nocturnes*.

A fairy-tale atmosphere also pervades *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, based on Vítězslav Nezval's 1932 book, yet it blends with horror film elements, as well as erotic undertones. Luboš Fišer's music renders it by alternating innocent song melodies and the menacing sound of the organ and harpsichord or Latin chants. (Noteworthy is the fact that Jan Klusák, a leading Czech composer of the time, appeared in the film in the role of a lecherous missionary.)

A special case is the score to Věra Chytilová's film *Daisies*, composed by Jiří Šlitr, a musician and actor involved at the legendary Semafor theatre, together with Jiří Šust (1919-1995), a composer for whom film music was a lifelong mission. The music reflects the film's mosaic-like nature, with its main trait being fast cuts and jumps between musical styles: ranging from a hackneyed cabaret song to Renaissance reverberations, oompah, rock and roll, modern jazz and Dixie with scatting. The section titled *Dead Men Tell No Tales* sounds like an attempt at minimalism deformed by dissonant chords. Also made use of are recordings from old gramophone discs and a typewriter as a rhythmic instrument. Rapid transitions between stylistic and sonic positions make from such a seemingly disparate mixture a meaningful whole.

Beautiful horror

The latest instalment in the series, *Morgiana*, featuring Luboš Fišer's music, and *The Cremator*, with Zdeněk Liška's score, are available either separately on vinyl or packaged together on a single CD. The first variant is a real treat for connoisseurs and collectors, the second encourages comparing the two soundtracks, seeking nodal points and differences. Zdeněk Liška (1922-1983)

was a film-music composer to the marrow, a craftsman working rapidly and efficiently; he was only interested in making soundtracks. In an interview, Andy Votel praised Liška's works and said that he was probably "the best film composer in the world". Luboš Fišer (1935–1999) was 13 years younger than Liška, which reflected in a considerably different take on music. Although he created numerous scores for film and television, including for popular children's movies and series whose melodies are deeply rooted in the ears and minds of several generations of Czech viewers (Arabela, Mach and Šebestová, Krakonoš), Fišer mainly focused his attention on concert pieces, in which he strove to blend the traditionalist approach with that which he had captured from the current European avant-garde trends. He was influenced by the Polish school, Krzysztof Penderecki, Wojciech Kilar and other composers, who in the 1960s sought new sounds on old instruments. The two films, both directed by Juraj Herz, share a dark and dreamy atmosphere, which in *Morgiana* is underlined by colour treatment and Art Nouveau embellishment, and in the black-and-white *The Cremator* by Expressionist play with shadows. Both soundtracks feature several basic motifs that reoccur in transforming instrumentation and variously concur together. In the score to *Morgiana*,



Fišer employed relatively few instruments, with the main role being played by varied combinations of the harp, celesta and harpsichord merging into lulling chimes and the sonic contrast formed by flutes or the booming organ. The part titled *Cards* evokes pub *Schrammelmusik* pared down to a sequence of piano chords and with percussion instruments (reminiscent of the theme tune to the popular Czech late-1960s crime series *The Sinful People of Prague*, composed by Liška). Fišer primarily works with sounds, while melodies, if they do appear, are sketchy, jumping in large intervals and meandering disarticulately. On several occasions, the soundtrack contains a motif merging a harpsichord chord and pattering claves, which can be understood as a reference to Fišer's most famous "autonomous" composition, *Fifteen Prints After Dürer's Apocalypse* (1965), in which a similar motif serves as a dividing line between the scenes from the Book of Revelation. The music to *Morgiana* is not apocalyptic, but it forcibly depicts the dark atmosphere. The sound engineers of the time were already able to fiddle with studio technology and by so doing put acoustic sounds into a new light. In the case of this soundtrack, it mainly involves plenty of reverb, which affords the music the desired dreaminess, yet this also ruthlessly reveals its age.

Compared to Fišer, Liška's style is more sonically opulent and melodically forthcoming; at the same time, it is evident that he too was well aware of the current musical developments and was able to work with new compositional techniques. The opening roar of the chorus is followed by the appearance of subtitles and a waltz melody, beautifully vaulted and catchy, sung by a coloratura soprano accompanied by a full orchestra and choir. These are actually the two major elements alternating in *The Cremator*: a swinging waltz melody and almost inert choral areas in thick clusters expanding from a single voice to the entire scope of a mixed

chorus, remotely reminiscent of the liturgical music of Tibetan Buddhism. (We don't know whether Liška ever heard it in its original form, yet on all accounts he found a splendid parallel for the protagonist's fascination with Tibet.) The aforementioned theme tune to the TV series *The Sinful People of Prague* is echoed in *The Cremator* too, and tango is also applied as a period musical symbol of decadent dives. Even though Liška was open to working with electronics and sound technology (unlike Fišer, who never employed electronics in his own pieces), the music to *The Cremator* bears virtually no traits of additional studio effects.



Out of context

Does separate release of soundtracks help or harm film music? The majority of the mentioned recordings contain numerous passages that are interesting in their own right, without being accompanied by video, yet in some a few dead places are palpable, which is almost inevitable in the case of film scores. The music to *Saxana – Girl on a Broomstick* varies the titular song in several arrangements and tempos, which may at first be intriguing but gets tiresome after longer listening. When it comes to the double pack *Morgiana / The Cremator*, Luboš Fišer's music comes across slightly worse. When listening to it without watching the film, it is clear that it is a set of building blocks, musical fragments intended to be put together and cut for the sake of the resulting whole. This, however, does not detract from Fišer's composing skills and there are certainly many out there who will take pleasure in listening to these fragments as a somewhat grotesque sonic background.

Zdeněk Liška's clearly formed melodies and more comprehensible harmonies are easier to listen to without the pictures yet, on the other hand, his music in this form is deprived of the film's most expressive sonic element: the distinctive voice of the actor Rudolf Hrušínský, who afforded his character a matchless combination of macabre kindness. It is a pity that Andy Votel did not add a few dialogues in the fashion of the soundtracks to Quentin Tarantino movies. The Cremator's words "What about hanging you, my dear", would have had a splendid effect.

A few years ago, quite a stir was caused by the release of music to *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, when contemporary psychedelic and experimental musicians produced an alternative musical accompaniment and thus the disc titled "Valerie Project" had little in common with the original score. The fact that Czech music has been released abroad and that bloggers write about it as a "cult matter" may give rise to the impression that it is a great breakthrough. Nevertheless, it is difficult to gauge the actual strength and precise nature of the interest in the music from Czech New Wave films. The Finders Keepers catalogue files these recordings alongside 1980s Hungarian funk, Italian New Age and Bollywood soundtracks. Simply another obscurity for many purchasers, another item in the closet of curiosities. The release of the recordings, however, is of a different significance for Czechs. Film music has never been released much in our country. In the 1990s the Zóna label issued Liška's soundtracks to František Vlácil's films *Markéta Lazarová* and *The Valley of the Bees*, in 1967 the US's Mainstream Records released his scores to Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos's Oscar-winning *The Shop on Main Street*. Under the title "Adrift", MPO Records released the soundtrack to another Kadár and Klos film, *Desire Called Anada*. And that's it.

Fišer's film scores had yet to be released. It is good that these recordings have been released since owing to them we can recall an interesting side street in Czech music history and discover some of the forgotten treasures. Andy Votel deserves appreciation for the work he has done tracking down the original recordings and remastering them, as well as the nicely designed booklets, some of whose texts were furnished by Peter Hames, the author of a book on the Czech New Wave. The belatedly released soundtracks can hardly be deemed confirmation of the Czech New Wave myth, the creative rise of Czech art over the few years of social relaxation, yet they do serve to prove that bold individuals occasionally did well here in the domain of film music.

“ALWAYS
SEEKING TRUTH
BOTH IN LIFE
AND ART.”
THE JANÁČEK
SCHOOL
OF COMPOSITION

Even though the term “Janáček school” is known, if not frequently used, among Czech musicologists, writers and critics, the wider music-loving public only come across it rarely. This is, among other things (or first and foremost?), down to the fact that the works of the composers included in this overarching conception have hardly been performed – and as we know, those who are not talked about (or those whose music is not played) are dead as artists, they do not exist.



Left to right: Jaroslav Kvapil, Jan Kunc, Vilém Petrželka, J. Konvalinka, Josef Černík

As a distinct group of composers (“the sound of young Moravia”), Janáček’s pupils were first discussed back in 1913, when pieces by Petrželka, Kvapil and Mrázek were heard at an Umělecká beseda (Artistic Society) concert in Prague. Today, we understand the “Janáček school” as a “term defining a circle of Janáček’s pupils (especially from the Organ School in Brno) or, also, artists grouped around Janáček and linking up to his creative ideas and principles” (Brabcová-Bajgarová). Although the Maestro stimulated various composers in different ways, the core of the Janáček school may be considered to be formed by those pupils of his from the Organ School and the master class at the Conservatory who markedly responded to Janáček’s artistic and theoretical impulses. In particular, they include the following composers of the same generation and based in the same place (born circa 1890 and working in Brno): Václav Kaprál, Vilém Petrželka, Jaroslav Kvapil, Osvald Chlubna and Josef Blatný; while the “broader core” encompasses the somewhat older Cyril

Metoděj Hrazdira, Jan Kunc, Josef Černík, and the somewhat younger Pavel Haas, František Míša Hradil and Břetislav Bakala; and we can also add Milan Harašta to this group. Janáček’s music, however, also greatly influenced Hugo Mrázek, František Kudláček, Bohumil Kyselka, Vítězslava Kaprálová, Emil Axman, Jaroslav Křička, and other composers.

Janáček’s impact on his pupils at the Organ School was appositely characterised by one of them, Vilém Petrželka: “We were far from imitating, let alone reproducing, Janáček’s singular and realistically original musical expression. (...) Consequently, following Janáček’s advice, each of us pursued his own path. Yet Janáček – the human and artist – had a deep impact on us for our entire lives. This impact can be summed up within a single sentence: ‘Always seeking truth both in life and art.’”¹

Let us first briefly outline the chronology of Janáček’s music-teaching activities. Following his studies at the Prague Organ School and the Conservatories in Leipzig and Vienna,

¹ PETRŽELKA, Ivan. Vilém Petrželka. Z jeho životních osudů neznámých a zapomínaných. Brno: Šimon Ryšavý, 2005, p. 11.

in the 1870s and 1880s he worked at the Brno Teacher Training Institute and at the Old Brno Grammar School. In 1881 he founded and was appointed director of the Organ School (a post he held until 1919), which under his guidance attained Let us first briefly outline the chronology of Janáček's music-teaching activities. Following his studies at the Prague Organ School and the Conservatories in Leipzig and Vienna, in the 1870s and 1880s he worked at the Brno Teacher Training Institute and at the Old Brno Grammar School. In 1881 he founded and was appointed director of the Organ School (a post he held until 1919), which under his guidance attained a very high level and in 1919, in the wake of the establishment of the first Czechoslovak Republic, became the Brno Conservatory. After the school was nationalised, from 1920 to 1925 Janáček worked as a Brno-based professor for the Master School of Composition in Prague. As a pedagogue, he directly influenced more than 900 musicians of different generations. Naturally, over the course of time the methods and theoretical bases of Janáček's teaching changed, which reflected his intensive theoretical work.

The "Janáček school" conception itself is problematic and even though it has taken root in Czech musical discourse it has received with certain objections. The major difference between the "Janáček" school and the structures designated as the "Dvořák" or "Novák" schools rests in the fact that Janáček's style was so singular that it was impossible to imitate in a creative manner: it was only possible to take over the idioms of his musical language, mainly those relating to the use of folk material, and if the compositional style was taken over as such, the outcome can be deemed hopelessly derivative. It is too soon to pass such judgement, nevertheless, I assume that the future analytical research will confer the status of the one and only "true" Janáček disciple on Pavel Haas: the Maestro's influence is particularly perceptible in his music, yet it is absolutely original and "Haasean" (a certain role was in this respect played by the age difference of 45 years). Warranting a chapter of his own is the film-music composer Zdeněk Liška (1922–1983), who, of course, was not Janáček's direct pupil but whose specific, highly idiomatic style

bears significant traits of the Maestro's impact and whose importance in the history of post-1945 Czech music is yet to be fully appreciated by our musicologists and film industry alike.

Reflections on the "Janáček" school have to be incorporated into the context of reflections on "Moravian music" and its situation between 1890 and 1930, when the young and middle-aged composers were squaring up to the instigations of domestic and foreign modernism and the avant-garde and when cultural, social, economic, political and other circumstances were rapidly changing, which to a significant extent catalysed the local musical culture. Some of Janáček's pupils, Kunc and Petrželka in particular, were more affected by Vítězslav Novák (1870–1949), whose works enjoyed great popularity in Brno, especially after the famed premiere of his fantasy for solos, choir and orchestra *The Tempest* in 1910.

Finally, let us mention the continuity of Janáček's influence after his death and the shape it took. His main pupils, Kvapil, Kunc, Kaprál and Petrželka, themselves had a bold impact on the next generations of composers, Janáček's style fell on fertile soil within the context of the period folklorism in the 1950s, while Janáček stimuli were peculiarly made use of in Czech film music after 1956 and the "second (Brno) avant-garde", i.e. Josef Berg, Alois Piňos, Miloslav Ištvan, Miloš Štědroň, etc., mainly as regards the principles of montage, modality, and the like. In the present article, I will strive to outline the topic of the "Janáček school" in a biographical manner, although I am well aware of the limitations of this approach and of the fact that the "Janáček school" as a structure is impossible to define by means of merely listing and describing the entities forming it. Hence, the article is made up of profiles of the respective composers and the final critical evaluation. The succession is roughly chronological, from the earlier born to the younger artists.

The composer and conductor **Cyril Metoděj Hrazdila** (1868–1926) lived a varied and relatively adventurous life. He studied with Janáček at the Organ School from 1886 to 1888, in the 1890s he headed a church choir in Ostrava but was not overly influenced by sacred music, instead deriving much greater inspiration from

the industrial city's reality, the life of the local miners and other secular stimuli. Owing to his family's unfortunate situation, he left for Sevastopol in the Crimea to serve as a sea captain. At the very end of the 19th century, he returned from Russia to North Moravia. Between 1903 and 1907, he was Kapellmeister at the Brno Opera, where he gave the (from the current view, famous) premiere of Janáček's *Jenufa* in 1904 and the first performances of other new Czech works, and renewed the company's focus on Slavonic music. Following the end of World War I, he was not able to assert himself in Czechoslovakia and therefore accepted the post of chorus master in Split, Croatia, where he championed Czech music too. To all appearances, Hrazdira was a gifted conductor and composer, yet unfortunately he did not work continuously in his homeland. If the music by the majority of Janáček's pupils is virtually unperformed today, this holds doubly so in his case; of all the mentioned disciples, Hrazdira was evidently the least original. At the present time, his compositions could perhaps be played as curiosities, documenting the very solid craft of the erstwhile musical "labourers". Of historical significance are above all his arrangements of Silesian folk and miners' songs, some of which were still sung in the 1960s.

Jan Kunc (1883–1976) was not only a reputable composer but also an adroit critic and organiser. After graduating from Janáček's Organ School in 1903, he moved to Prague, where he studied at the Conservatory with Karel Stecker and Karel Knittl and attended private lessons with Vítězslav Novák. Until 1920, Kunc earned his living by teaching at various secondary schools, as well as the Organ School. A prolific music critic, mainly writing for the Brno-based daily *Lidové noviny*, his opinions were initially influenced by Janáček, especially when it came to his castigating Novák, yet later on he found fault with Janáček's music too (*Jenufa* in particular). As a music writer, he had a major impact on the cultural life in Brno and Moravia in general in the 1910s, nurturing young Moravian composers and audiences of the time. As in the case of many other artists, the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 opened to Kunc a host of new possibilities. Thanks to his good relationship with Karel Kovařovic, at the time



Cyril Metoděj Hrazdira

Director of the Opera section of the National Theatre in Prague, in 1918 he was engaged as the ensemble's rehearsal accompanist, yet he soon returned to Brno, where in 1923 he was appointed Director of the Conservatory, which he elevated to a high level. It comes then as no surprise that due to his overall workload – just like Kaprál, Petrželka and others – he did not have much time left for composing. Kunc's style was above all affected by Pavel Křížkovský, Janáček and Novák, and he was also greatly inspired by folk songs. His best pieces include the ballad for alto and orchestra *Stála Kačenka u Dunaja* (Kate Stood by the Danube) and the chorus *Ostrava*, to verse of the then renowned poet Petr Bezruč (1867–1958), and the symphonic poem *Píseň mládí* (Song of Youth). In 1935, Kunc's harmonisation of the Czechoslovak national anthem was acknowledged as official. Although undoubtedly an extremely gifted composer, for various reasons Kunc did not sufficiently develop his talent. His major contribution to Czech music is thus his critical and pedagogic work.

Václav Kaprál (1889–1947), who it would seem was the most dissimilar to Janáček of all his pupils, spent most of his life in the town of Královo Pole, today part of Brno. Hailing from a humble background, he had a very close



Jan Kunc



Václav Kaprál

and heartfelt relation to nature and owing to his origin had a deep social sentiment. Kaprál studied with Janáček at the Organ School from 1908 to 1910 and in the mid-1920s attended master classes led by the renowned pianist Alfred Cortot in Paris. During WWI, he fought in Albania. After returning home, he further studied composition with Vítězslav Novák. At the time, he worked as a piano teacher at his own private music school; in the second half of the 1920s he was also a university lecturer. In 1935, he became a professor at the Brno Conservatory. During the Nazi occupation, he was imprisoned in an internment camp in Moravia, which further damaged his already failing health. After the war, he was named the first chairman of the Syndicate (later on, Union) of Czechoslovak Composers.

An outstanding pianist himself, Kaprál mainly composed piano and chamber pieces. The main aesthetic qualities of his music are lyricism and a penchant for miniaturisation (*Cradle Song*, *Lullabies*). His works for piano reveal a true mastery of the instrument, which is not the case of, for instance, all Dvořák's and Novák's compositions of this genre. In general, his works indicate his familiarity with the sonic potentialities of individual instruments.

As has been said, Janáček's influence is not too evident in Kaprál's music, with perhaps occasional flashes in the form of the typical curtness, brevity of ideas and the characteristic expressivity or modal (flexible diatonic) thinking. Kaprál was also dissimilar to Janáček when it came to his nature, with his clear compositional model being Novák, primarily as regards consistent thematic and polyphonic work. Certain traces of Debussy, Schumann, Chopin and Brahms (particularly in his piano works) are reflected in his music too. Kaprál's pupils (sometimes labelled as an independent "Kaprál school"), Miroslav Barvík, Gustav Křivinka and Milan Harašta, to name but a few, were really fond of their teacher – which cannot be said of the pupils of the notoriously moody Janáček...

The bulk of Kaprál's oeuvre is clearly formed by piano compositions (the cycle *Lyrica*, *Nocturne*, *Berceuses de Printemps*, *Suita romantica*, *Miniatures*, *Fantasie*, *Dumka*, *Three Piano Pieces*, four *Sonatas* and *Sonatinas*) and chamber music, with his three string quartets ranking among the finest Czech works created in the genre, comparable even with Janáček's acclaimed quartets, with the second and third (*Autumn Song*) written – evidently under Schoenberg's influence – for

string quartet and voice. In the piano *Miniatures* (also inspired by Schoenberg), which caused a commotion in his time, Kaprál achieved a singular variant of Expressionism. His orchestral works, however, are not of major significance, this genre evidently did not suit his nature. Kaprál's vocal pieces, on the other hand, are masterful indeed (*Nocturnettes*, *Melancholic Songs*), and his *Lullabies* garnered acclaim at the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Barcelona in 1936. He also wrote a number of choruses, including to verse by Rabindranath Tagore, a poet extremely popular in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. His daughter, Vítězslava ("Vitulka") Kaprálová (1915–1940), a pupil and close friend of Bohuslav Martinů, was a distinguished figure in Czech music in the 1930s and 1940s, with some of her mature compositions (the remarkable, highly emotional *April Preludes*, featuring Janáček intonations, the song with orchestral accompaniment *Waving Farewell* and the Janáček-inspired *Military Sinfonietta*) very nearly eclipsing her father's creations. Vítězslava's untimely death following her departure for France and gruesome war experiences most likely accelerated Kaprál's death, in 1947. The most salient traits of Kaprál's style are unexpected modulations, flexible diatonicism (mainly major/minor oscillations) and modality, employment of ninth, augmented and fourth chords, quasi improvisations, a penchant for repetition of the motif in various harmonic, dynamic and other connections, finales in pp, brilliant piano stylisations with spread chords in the left hand and use of extreme positions of instrumental playing. Kaprál was fascinated by nature and night, was a master in depicting delicate, variable, elegiac and sad moods ("laughter through the tears"), yet his compositions are devoid of playfulness, humour and scathing irony. He did not embrace asentimentalism and motorism, fashionable in the 1920s, or jazz. With the exception of a few trifles dating from his youth, all Kaprál's works were performed during his lifetime and published, and, owing to the pianists Schulhoff and Fírkušný, were known abroad too. After Janáček, Kaprál was the first non-Prague composer to gain international recognition (thanks to his *Lullabies*). In 2012, Radioservis released a profile CD featuring his most representative works.

Today, when our "practical" awareness of the "Janáček school" composers is rather fragmentary, it is difficult and perhaps even irresponsible to assess their value, yet, alongside Pavel Haas, **Vilém Petrželka** (1889–1967) was clearly the most talented and most original of the Maestro's pupils. Whereas Haas's works are occasionally performed at the present time, this is not the case of Petrželka's. And regrettably so. (*Mikuláš the Sailor* was played in Brno in 2012 within the 3rd Janáček Brno festival and there is also a good LP containing the piece.) Petrželka's father played in a military band and hence young Vilém grew up surrounded by music. His love of music was so strong that he even abandoned the grammar school so as to study at the Organ School in Brno, where he was profoundly influenced by Janáček. Like the majority of Janáček's pupils, Petrželka too took lessons from Novák (prior to the outbreak of WWI). In 1919 he played a major role in setting up the Brno Conservatory, where he worked as a teacher. After the end of WWII, he assumed a pedagogic post at the newly founded Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts. During his time at the two schools, he nurtured numerous noted composers (Zdeněk Blažek, Vítězslava Kaprálová, Jan Novák, Josef Berg, Gustav Křivinka). From 1958 to 1962, Petrželka had a great cultural and political influence as chairman of the Brno branch of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers. His musical development can be summed up as follows: from a young avant-garde artist in the 1920s to an old, conciliatory and forbearing mentor to the avant-gardists of the 1960s. Initially, his approach to composition was characterised by the prevalence of reason over emotion, the endeavour for a solid and logical structure. When it comes to his teachers, he was closer to Novák than Janáček, perhaps because the music of the father of Czech modernism had influenced him before he actually became his pupil. From among all Janáček's pupils, besides the younger Haas, Petrželka was the one who most intensively responded to the avant-garde trends in European post-war music – although Kaprál wrote the "Schoenbergian" second quartet and *Miniatures*, he was essentially a traditional Romantic artist who did not embrace



*The teaching staff of the State Music and Drama Conservatory in Brno, 1927
(photo by Atelier Stoklas, Brno)*

the principles of avant-garde thinking, which were alien to him. In his avant-garde direction, Petrželka was greatly affected by his time in Paris, where he rapidly absorbed everything possible, mainly the stimuli of the civilistic tendencies. He was evidently allied to the entire “spirit” of the 1920s. Just like a great deal of the products of the interwar avant-garde, today some of Petrželka’s creations come across as “mere” experiments, yet his works were noted for a certain artistic sincerity and probity, which he also inculcated in his pupils.

Petrželka wrote sonatas for piano, violin and cello, a piano trio and piano quartet, five string quartets and other chamber pieces. He was also skilled at composing music for orchestra (*Moravian Dance*, *Scherzo in Old Style*, *March of the Bohemians*, *Pastoral Sinfonietta*, a violin concerto, etc). He created four symphonies

and excellent vocal and, particularly, vocal instrumental works. His most significant compositions are the *Štafeta* (Relay), a cycle of songs for voice and string quartet to verse by Jiří Wolker and Jules Romains, and the cantata *Mikuláš the Sailor*, one of the most remarkable works of this genre in Czech post-Dvořák music (based on the same Jiří Wolker poem was Boleslav Vomáčka’s cantata *The Lighthouse Keeper*).

(to be completed in the next issue)

Reprinted with the kind permission of Harmonie magazine, edited for Czech Music Quarterly.

HIS VOICE

časopis o *jiné* hudbě

1

The new issue of HISVoice is on sale now



Zdeněk Sýkora
Půlstoletí HIS
Hudba a obrazy
Michael Gordon
Francisco López

www.hisvoice.cz



Apokalypsis

**Tiburtina Ensemble,
David Dorůžka Trio.**

Text: Eng., Cz. Recorded: Dec. 2013,
Royal Palace, Zvíkov Castle. Released:
2013. TT: 63:37. DDD. 1 CD Animal
Music ANI 041-2.

Music serves to express human emotion. This holds true for medieval and contemporary music alike," writes **Barbora Sojková**, a brilliant soprano and musicologist, and Artistic Director of the Tiburtina Ensemble, in the booklet to the "Apokalypsis" album. With regard to the joint project with **David Dorůžka** and his friends, she adds: "Our wish was not to disturb the mysticism of medieval sacred music, with the very opposite being the aim of our cross-genre project: to underline it and to combine the two worlds distant from each other at first glance." And I for myself may add that the outcome is extraordinary indeed! How have they arrived at it?

Communicating medieval music with contemporary phraseology has been done before in our country. A significant accomplishment in this respect was the unique "Close Voices From Far Away" project, implemented in 2007 by the Schola Gregoriana Pragensis and the Gyosan-ryu Tendai Shomyo, an ensemble of Japanese Buddhist monks, which presented a dialogue between the two spiritual cultures on the basis of the music repertoire of the Christian and Buddhist traditions (Sony-BMG). The **Tiburtina Ensemble** and the **David Dorůžka Trio**, however, have gone much further, with the participation of top-notch jazz musicians forming an integral part of the recording, equally supplementing, supporting and highlighting the female choir as well as, at a number of junctures, being the "bearer, protagonist of the action", not only when expressing various Apocalyptic scenes.

"Apocalypse" refers to the New Testament's Book of Revelation, believed to have been written by John the Apostle circa 95 AD. At the present time, influenced by Hollywood films, people in general imagine it as predicting the ghastly end of the world. Each

event of the Book, however, represents God's revelation, a "report on the state of the world, humankind and future, hope". The CD's repertoire is based on works from the 13th-century Spanish music manuscript Codex Las Huelgas from the Cistercian Santa María in Real de Las Huelgas convent in Castile, as **Barbora Sojková** explains. Some of the compositions hail from the Graduale Triplex and the Library of the Prague Metropolitan Canonry. The listener is thus guided through the Apocalypse events by means of a number of forms – conductus, motet, offertory, antiphon, introit, canticum, the sequence Dies irae, monophonic and polyphonic female chant. The Tiburtina Ensemble, made up of seven members, is so perfectly balanced that it does not matter who sings the solo – it is always wonderful, and I do not know of a more harmonic and homogeneous sound of the female schola cantorum in our country! The bold improvisations of the distinguished Czech jazz band **David Dorůžka Trio** (**Dorůžka**, **Marcel Bárta**, **Martin Novák**) occasionally transcend the realm of jazz and dip their toes into the waters of 21st-century contemporary classical music.

Apocalypse is about fire and destruction, as well as hope. The literature on which the music is based says: "When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth...", but it also says: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God", or: "Blessed is the end that has no error, the new beginning is beautiful and brings love". I consider the album, released at the end of 2013, the best Czech CD of last year. The CD has an interesting sleeve (**Zuzana Lednická**) containing high-quality photographs (**Dušan Tománek**) and an extensive booklet, and possesses a great sound (artistic directors – **Barbara Sojková**, **David Dorůžka**, sound engineer – **Petr Ostrouchov**, sound – **Aleš Dvořák**).

If you are fond of informed historical performance, have your heart open and like modern jazz too, you can expect plenty of bliss, food for thought and unheralded discoveries.

Luboš Stehlík



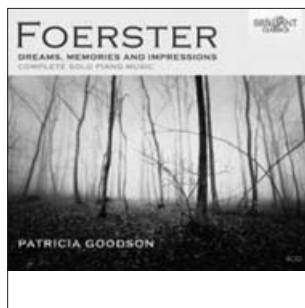
Violin Sonatas

**Leoš Čepický - violin,
Ivan Klánský - piano.**

Text: English. Recorded: Sept. 2013,
Martinů Hall, Academy of Performing
Arts, Prague. Released: 2014.
TT: 74:31. DDD. 1 CD Nimbus
Alliance NI 6265.

The winner of the Kocián Competition and laureate of other prestigious contests, **Leoš Čepický** is above all known as first violin of the Wihan Quartet. His busy concert schedule as a member of a chamber ensemble only occasionally makes it possible for him to appear before audiences as a brilliant soloist possessing a very intriguing and singular musicality. **Ivan Klánský** is one of the foremost representatives of the grace of Czech piano and chamber artistry, and his performances, both as a soloist and a member of the Guarneri Trio Praha, evoke in the listener almost extrasensory experiences. Klánský and Čepický have seldom been afforded the opportunity to play together – mainly at moments that could be deemed "active relaxation". In the case of mediocre performers, such "side projects" usually expose various hampering differences, many a time audible not only in the details. Yet when artists of a similarly high instrumental mastery, musical imagination and chamber sentiment get together, the effect of their performance increases and something extraordinary is accomplished. And this recording is a prime example in this respect.

The two-movement *Sonata in E minor, KV 304*, for violin and piano, written by Mozart at the age of 22, is one of a set of 40. In the original, they are unusually titled *Sonatas for Piano and Violin*, and, indeed, the piano does play an essential role in them. In tandem with Čepický's sensitive violin, Klánský's mastery highlights this role to the finest detail with astonishing cogency. Brahms's three-movement *Sonata No. 2 in A minor, Op. 100*, has been executed and recorded by so many celebrated performers that any new disc exposes the respective artists to the risk of being mercilessly compared to what has come before. Čepický and Klánský's performance, however, matches even the most intriguing



recordings. Ondřej Kukul is one of the most gifted and most versatile musicians of Čepický's generation. He is an outstanding violinist, conductor and composer, and his delivery of his own orchestral opuses once came as a revelation to me. For the piece *The Late Hour* for solo violin, Kukul was inspired by Edvard Munch's picture and it was premiered by Norway's Henning Kraggerud, yet he newly arranged it for Čepický. Being familiar with the instrument and its timbre possibilities, the composer weds in the work a near-mystical poeticism and dramatically virtuoso flashes. Čepický's performance seems to suggest the freedom and inspiration of direct improvisation of a Nordic shaman. Luboš Fišer's one-movement *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, "Hands", was originally titled "Crux", which best corresponds to its content, yet at the time of its origination, 1961, the sponsors would not have approved such a moniker, hence the composer allegorically changed it. Fišer dedicated the work to Ivan Štraus, who put it on concert stages, just as he did in the case of other contemporary pieces. The sonata symbolically reflects the Stations of the Cross and is more structurally complex than the simpler arch of the later "Crux" for violin and timpani. (I would like to hear Čepický playing this work too.) Fišer was one of the most talented 20th-century Czech composers and this recording clearly documents the fact.

Puzzling out all the encrypted complexities of Bohuslav Martinů's wonderful *Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano* may be difficult for many of those allured by the score, which is intricate owing to its scope and structure alike. There are precious few compositions in which the performer has to fathom, perceive and "play" not only his/her part but also the entire score throughout as a single integrated multicoloured line to such a great extent. Čepický and Klánský's is probably the most interesting and most singular rendition I have heard. And this, after all, holds true for the entire recording. The two artists are evidently connected by the same experience with chamber music, since their interplay and take on each of the works featured on the CD gives the impression that they have been polishing them together for decades. The booklet contains Ivan Štraus's text in English.

Pravoslav Kohout

Josef Bohuslav Foerster Dreams, Memories and Impressions Complete Solo Piano Music

Patricia Goodson - piano.

Text: English. Recorded: 2010-2013,
Sound Studio, Music Faculty
of the Academy of Performing Arts,
Prague. Released: 2013. TT: 73:41,
60:26, 58:17, 58:02. DDD.
4 CDs Brilliant Classics 9283.

Josef Bohuslav Foerster (1859-1951) is undoubtedly one of the towering figures of Czech culture. He is best known as a composer, yet he was also an esteemed writer and painter. Foerster lived to the ripe old age of 92 (he was only nine years younger than Fibich), grew up in the period of late Romanticism but also witnessed to the full the boldest trends of modern music of the first half of the 20th century (without their having any significant impact on his own creation). He was highly revered by his contemporaries, from 1931 to 1939 he even held the post of President of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Arts, and in 1945 he was the first Czech musician to be awarded the "national artist" title. A prolific composer, Foerster wrote works spanning virtually all genres and bequeathed to us an extensive oeuvre, of which mainly the choruses remain very popular. His piano music includes 17 numbered opuses and several minor, unnumbered pieces. Although virtually all his piano compositions were published during his lifetime and are available in archives, pianists today – both Czech and foreign – tend to overlook them. The recording of Foerster's complete solo piano works, released last year by Brilliant Classics, is therefore truly extraordinary.

The main "manager", and the sole performer, of the praiseworthy extensive project is Patricia Goodson, an American pianist who has been living in Prague since 1991. Over four discs, the artist guides us through a wonderful world, one giving the impression of time having come to a standstill. Foerster composed pieces for piano for nearly six decades: his oldest – *Miniatures*,

Op. 17, and *Allegro and Scherzo, Op. 5* – were published in 1885, while the last – *Memories of Youth* – dates from 1942. The relatively long time range notwithstanding, the composer's piano works do not reflect a significant stylistic development. Foerster almost exclusively wrote for the piano cycles of "lyrical pieces", with the lyrical tone being evident from their very titles: *Dreaming, Roses of Remembrance, Evening Music, Charcoal Sketches, Impressions, And The Apple Trees Blossomed, Pages from My Diary, Memories of Youth, Spring Moods, Music for My Young Son, Osenice Suite, Jičín Suite*, etc. The music mostly flows in a slow or medium-fast tempo and, with a few minor exceptions, all the pieces are written in triple time. Their musical language draws upon Romanticism, which is occasionally and mildly seasoned with Impressionist harmonies (but even when the composer attempts a looser formal structure or a more "misty" rhythmic outline, it is still far from a Debussy or Ravel).

The previous paragraph may have given the impression that Foerster's piano works have nothing to say to the contemporary listener, yet the very opposite is true. I must admit that I wasn't bored for a single second when listening to the four discs. Foerster's music evokes something pleasantly idyllic and agreeably old-worldly, like rummaging through old picture postcards or albums from the first half of the previous century – yet, at the same time, it is music characterised by a surprising, almost spring-like freshness and a certain singularity. Patricia Goodson dedicated three years of her life to recording Foerster's piano works and approached the project with the utmost responsibility. Her account is earnest in both technical and expressional terms, which is all the more admirable given the fact that she can perform on concert stages just a fragment of that which she has explored. Since there are precious few recordings of Foerster's piano works out there, it is not possible to compare Patricia Goodson with other artists. Nevertheless, I can conceive that it is possible to play Foerster's music with an even greater imagination and some of the passages would benefit from a more cantabile cantilena or a more fluid bass line, and many a rubato could be played more forcibly too. Yet this does not anyhow diminish



Patricia Goodson's merit in being the first (and probably the only one for a long time to come) to record the complete Foerster solo piano music. The booklet (in English only) contains a very nice text written by Goodson herself about the composer and his piano oeuvre. The carefully set up track list gives not only the English translations of the titles but also their original versions (regrettably, there are a lot of mistakes in the Czech spelling). The editor furnished the opus numbers and years of publication with the abbreviations of the works' publishers, which is undoubtedly creditable, yet the list of abbreviations is, somewhat impractically, only placed after the colophon, with UE (Universal Edition, one of the most prominent publishers of Foerster's works) missing. These minor defects, however, do not anyhow change the fact that the 4 CDs represent one of the most important and most groundbreaking recordings of the past few years relating to Czech piano music.

Věroslav Němec

Anne-Sophie Mutter Dvořák

**Anne-Sophie Mutter - violin,
Berliner Philharmoniker,
Manfred Honeck - conductor.**

Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: June 2013, Philharmonie Meistersaal, Berlin. Released: 2013. TT: 55:08, 51:29. DDD. CD + DVD Deutsche Grammophon DG 479 1984.

For Anne-Sophie Mutter, one of the finest violinists of the present time, 2013 was Dvořák Year. She performed his works with various orchestras and conductors all over the world just as frequently as she had played pieces by Mozart and Beethoven in the years when she intensively devoted to them. In point of fact, on the eve of the Year of Czech Music, Mutter was the best ambassador of Dvořák's violin compositions. She and the producer selected a truly superlative orchestra and the conductor who best agreed with her, one ranking, in her opinion (and in the opinion of the present reviewer too), among the most erudite interpreters

of Dvořák's music. Last summer, Mutter recorded, in my judgement, an engrossing album, which, as is always the case with her discs, will cause quite a stir in the Czech lands because her take on Dvořák is markedly different to what we are accustomed to. I will try to explain that which makes it so extraordinary, and different. For the *Concerto in A minor*, I have chosen two previous recordings to compare. The first of them is the legendary fruit of collaboration between the young Josef Suk, Karel Ančerl and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra dating from 1960 (Supraphon), the second a recording made in 1998 by Pamela Frank with the Czech Philharmonic, conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras (Decca). The Suk-Ančerl album is a benchmark title, a kind of distillate of the notion of pure "Czechness", a model of how the concerto should sound. Although with the distance of decades some of the partial elements have grown obsolete and come across as somewhat ponderous, Suk's suavity and range of vision, and the orchestra's accuracy and equanimity, are still extraordinary. Pamela Frank is nimbler and in places I can sense a slight disagreement between her and the conductor, yet Mackerras provides the orchestra with scope for regulated freedom, which occasionally overly competes with the soloist. Frank's performance may be straight-lined but delicious nonetheless... Mutter is undoubtedly familiar with the Suk recording and in all probability respects it, yet the only thing that connects her with Suk is a strong personality and the conviction that with all due humility to the genius of the score the violinist is not a mere mediator but an interpreter of the notation. If I took issue with this philosophy in the case of Mutter's recordings of Beethoven and Mozart, as regards this Dvořák CD, after listening to it for the fifth time I realised that no matter how provocative it is (including the distinct glissandos, a Mutter trademark) she actually rediscovered Dvořák for me. Even though the basic speed is among the slowest I am familiar with, within a single movement incredible things are happening – slight modifications, with none of the phrases being ordinary or flat, and immense dynamism, unexpected accentuations and phrasing that I have not previously heard. This applies both to the *Concerto* and the *Mazurek*, as well as, to a very small degree, the *Romance*. Not even the simple *Humoresque*, as the project's

appendix, with Ayami Ikeba on the piano (of course, as arranged by Fritz Kreisler, who has the closest affinity to the violin), is run-of-the-mill (enchancing glissandos, variable vibrato, pauses, the fabulous G string). Many a listener will certainly have the impression that the *Concerto* (the third movement in particular) as performed by Mutter is insufficiently "Czech". While leaving aside deliberations on what "Czech" actually means in this connection, her using softer accents (and sometimes in different places) and vibrato than the majority of Czech violinists does not, in my opinion, mean that her conception can be deemed stylistically flawed. It is merely a different approach to Dvořák, yet one presented at a fantastic level. When it comes to the orchestra, I feel I must point out, with all due respect to the Czech Philharmonic, that the **Berliner Philharmoniker** is more precise and sonically more dainty (especially the strings in full assembles). And as for the phrasing and shaping of phrases, the input of **Manfred Honeck** is substantial. In the final analysis, the Dvořák album has joined the best recordings Anne-Sophie Mutter has made. The *Concerto in A minor*, the centrepiece of the album, was premiered on 14 October 1883, with the soloist František Ondříček. Anne-Sophie Mutter's CD was released by her label, Deutsche Grammophon, on 25 October 2013. I simply cannot image a better celebration of the 130th anniversary... The bonus, which may allure many buyers, is a DVD featuring a live recording of a concert in Berlin in February 2013.

Luboš Stehlík

Ebony Band Around Prague 1922–1937

**Barbara Kozelj - mezzo-soprano,
Ebony Band, Werner Herbers -
conductor.**

Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 2012, 2013 Muziekgebouw aan't IJ, Amsterdam, 2000 Muziekcentrum Vredenburg, Utrecht (live). Released: 2013. TT: 78:26. DDD. 1 CD Channel Classics CCS 34813.

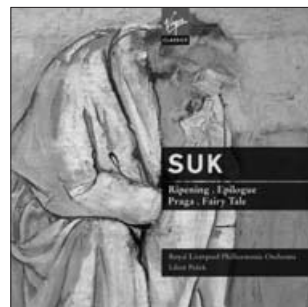


Following the concert given by the Netherlands's **Ebony Band** at the 2004 Prague Spring festival, I wrote: "The *Ebony Band* set out on an adventurous journey of seeking out and bringing back to life a forgotten repertoire. The prospecting zeal of Werner Herbers, the ensemble's artistic director, is contagious and the results are convincing indeed. The seeking in libraries, archives, private collections and personal effects has brought unique discoveries. The favourites of the *Ebony Band*'s repertoire include Czech interwar music, which Herbers refers to as a 'bottomless treasure trove'." Ten years on, all this still holds true: admiration for the music of interwar Czechoslovakia continues to drive the Amsterdam-based artists forward. Their latest disc features compositions by Miroslav Ponc, Hans Aldo Schimmerling, Emil František Burian, Alois Hába and Viktor Ullmann, the representatives of the Czech- and German-speaking avant-garde in Czechoslovakia at the time. Their music reveals an enchantment with jazz, Dada, Expressionism, and is imbued with unsentimental lyricism and the urgency of those who wanted to be heard, mocking conventions, fidgeting with tones and, veiled in irony, raising serious questions. The CD's centrepiece is the 1926 incidental music by Miroslav Ponc (1902–1976) to Jean Cocteau's *Les mariés de la tour Eiffel*, from which the conductor Štěpán Koníček put together a suite in 1981. Ponc, a pupil of Alois Hába, employed the quarter-tone piano and harmonium in the suite, whose sections serve as a sort of guide through the walk "around Prague" between 1922 and 1937. Ponc's *The Wedding Party on the Eiffel Tower* is the album's oldest recording, made in 2000, while the other compositions were directly recorded for the CD. The *Six Miniatures for Chamber Orchestra* by the Brno native Hans Aldo Schimmerling (1900–1967), one of the many artists driven out of Europe by the Nazis and finding refuge in the USA, who, however, did not forget about his homeland. E. F. Burian (1904–1959) is represented on the CD by the *Small Overture* and the song cycle *About Children*, and František Branislav's and Josef Hora's verse. Alois

Hába's one-movement *Nonet No. 2* forms the dramaturgical centre of the album. Last year's double anniversary of the Czech composer has thus been commemorated by a foreign ensemble, whereas it was totally ignored by labels in his own country. Admittedly, with the obstinate promotion of athematism and microtones (whose moderate use enriches the musical language, as documented by Ponc's *The Wedding Party on the Eiffel Tower*) Hába may have done a disservice to his work, his notion of possible refining of the human ear so as to perceive tonal particles has failed to materialise, yet a number of his semitone pieces definitely deserve to be performed, as does the music of his other contemporaries, which is virtually unknown to concert-goers too. The album features another three Ponc compositions, the études *Five Small Pieces*, Op. 9, and *Five Polydynamic Pieces*, Op. 3, and the piano cycle *Cheerful Acoustics*, Op. 12 (amazingly performed by **Gerard Bouwhuis**), and musical portraits of the persons with whom Ponc associated (Alois Hába, Vladimír Helfert, Jiří Mahen, the Schulhoff couple, etc.). Viktor Ullmann's 1937 cycle *Six Songs*, Op. 17, to Albert Steffen's poetry, is the youngest piece on the CD.

The walk "Around Prague" symbolically ends prior to the outbreak of World War II and the disintegration of Europe. The *Ebony Band* have a refined sense for the music, whose main element is rhythm and colour, all its members are brilliant soloists and their interplay is exemplary. The Slovenian singer **Barbara Kozelj** demonstrates her stylistic sentiment and successfully copes with Czech in the Burian songs. Viktor Ullmann's songs, written for voice and piano, are included on the album in Geert van Keulen's instrumentation made two decades ago. The booklet contains an informative accompanying text and the lyrics of the songs, including the original Czech ones, without any errors. The sleeve is stylish too, featuring as it does a Miroslav Ponc watercolour dating from 1925.

Vlasta Reittererová



Josef Suk Ripening, Praga, Epilogue, Fairy Tale

Luba Orgonášová – soprano, **Ivan Kusnjer** – baritone, **Peter Mikuláš** – bass, **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir**, **Ian Tracey** – chorus master, **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**, **Libor Pešek** – conductor.
Text: Eng., Ger., Fr. Recorded: 1992, 1997, Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool.
Released: 2013. TT: 66:53, 70:07. DDD.
2 CDs Virgin Classics 50999 9125762 8.

In 2013, when the Czech label Supraphon commemorated the 80th birthday of **Libor Pešek** with a representative set of his recordings (4CDs, SU 4132-2034), EMI Classics reissued on Virgin Classics the conductor's older recordings of Josef Suk's orchestral works made with the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**, which Pešek headed as chief conductor from 1987 to 1998. Pešek's name is primarily mentioned by discophiles in connection with his landmark recordings of Mozart, Dvořák and Mahler pieces and 20th-century Czech music (Novák, Martinů), yet Josef Suk is the Czech composer to whom he has devoted with the greatest passion. Pešek has enthusiastically recorded Suk's music since the 1980s, when he made his first discs with the Czech Philharmonic and other Czech orchestras for Supraphon (*Serenade in E flat major*, *A Fairy Tale*, *Under the Apple Tree*, *Fantasy in G minor*, *Praga, A Summer's Tale*). Pešek again returned to his beloved Suk in the 1990s, at the time when he was serving as music director of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Those who, in addition to the Virgin Classics series, were to purchase the double album featuring *Asrael* and *A Summer's Tale* (Virgin Classics, 2010), could thus boast of having in their record collection a representative Suk section that would even withstand the competition of the older discs recorded by Talich (*Serenade in E flat major*, *A Fairy Tale*, *Asrael*, *Ripening*), Kubelík (*Asrael*, *Ripening*), Ančerl (*Asrael*, *Ripening*) or Neumann (*Symphony in E major*, *Asrael*, *Ripening*,



Epilogue), or the more recent ones made by Bélohávek (Chandos and Supraphon, with the Czech Philharmonic and the BBC Symphony Orchestra) or Kirill Petrenko (*Tale of a Winter's Evening, Asrael, A Summer's Tale, Ripening*; Czech Philharmonic).

Whereas Pešek's creations sound today, to my taste, rather loose as regards interpretation and, when working with Czech orchestras, overly liberal in discipline, the recordings made in Liverpool capture him at the height of his powers, in a form perhaps even better than in the case of the disparate and strangely semidetached Czech Philharmonic-Liverpool set of Dvořák symphonies (Virgin Classics 5618532). The conductor's Suk homage on two sonically creditable CDs opens with the magnificent *Ripening*, followed by the symphonic poem *Praga*. The introduction to *Ripening* is interpreted by Pešek in an extremely pliant manner, without striving for more precise rhythmicisation and phrasing (Neumann), yet by no means does he have any trouble building the musical architecture in the most complicated Czech score of the first third of the 20th century, to which the middle parts had to be sacrificed. The recording's sonic apex is the final fugue and coda, whose gradation waves are well captured by the recording technology. Even though I personally prefer Neumann's album, with this recording Pešek ploughed a deep furrow in the field of Suk interpretation. His famous colouring magic and impressionistic defocusing of sound are audible in *Praga*, rhythmically marching forward and possessing a sonically intoxicating lyrical middle, as well as in the *Fairy Tale*, the orchestral suite from the incidental music to Zeyer's symbolist drama *Radúz and Mahulena*. The difficult to perform *Epilogue*, the vocal-orchestral full stop after the tetralogy *Asrael – A Summer's Tale – Ripening – Epilogue*, is presented by Pešek with a dapper view, allowing one to forget about the complexity of the composition with vocal parts, which are splendidly delivered by Ivan Kusnjer, Peter Mikuláš and, most notably, Lubica Orgonášová, a soprano possessing a beautiful voice. The choral part in the *Epilogue*, far more extensive than that in *Ripening*, was undertaken by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir

under the chorus master Ian Tracey. By releasing the Suk album, Virgin Classics have given a fitting present to mark Libor Pešek's birthday.

Martin Jemelka

Il Violino Boemo Virtuoso sonatas of famous Czech violinists

**František Benda: Sonatas in
B flat major, C minor and A major;
František Jiránek: Sonatas in
F major and C major; Josef Antonín
Gurecký: Sonata in D major**

**Lenka Torgersen – violin
(Sebastian Klotz, ca 1760),
Václav Luks – harpsichord
(Pavel Vyhnaček 2012, copy
of a Pascal Taskin model),
Libor Mašek – cello.**

Producer: Matouš Vlčinský. Recorded:
Aug. 2013, Church of the Evangelical
Church of Czech Brethren, Prague-
Vinohrady. Released: 2013. TT: 63:26.
DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 4151-2.

On the eve of the Year of Czech Music 2014, Supraphon paid tribute to Czech violin history with a truly extraordinary project. The harpsichordist Václav Luks, artistic director of Collegium 1704, the violinist Lenka Torgersen and the musicologist Václav Kapsa joined forces and put together six sonatas for violin and basso continuo, some of which oscillate between Baroque and Classicism, while others are fully anchored in the new style. The bulk of the music on the CD, three pieces, is by the celebrated František Benda (1709–1786), while there are also two sonatas by František Jiránek (1698–1778) and one by Josef Antonín Gurecký (1709–1769). Some of the pieces can, in my opinion, be compared with the creations of the top European composers of the time. While in the case of Benda this could have been expected, Jiránek

was a pleasant surprise, and I consider his *Sonata in C major*, featuring a wonderful Adagio and refined, variational Gavotte, the apex of the entire recording.

Another surprise was Lenka Torgersen, whose accomplishment matches that of the concert masters of famous European ensembles focused on historically informed performance of 17th- and 18th-century music on copies of period instruments. Her playing possesses remarkable emotionality, is technically impeccable and I had the feeling that this is precisely the way in which Maestro Benda himself must have executed it. Lenka Torgersen has undergone excellent training abroad, has gained ample experience, yet it is not generally known that she once studied at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague with Václav Šnitil (the famous pedagogue evidently has not only nurtured Pavel Šporcl.) After a long time, Václav Luks again captivated me as a harpsichordist. His playing is so sophisticated, refined and effervescent that it would be good for him to appear in this role in public more frequently. Owing to the perceptive cellist Libor Mašek, the bass line is pleasant and underlines the nightingale sound of the violin. By the way, he is one of the few instrumentalists mastering at a high level both early music and the requirements of the modern orchestra (he performs with the PKF – Prague Philharmonia.)

The "Il Violino Boemo" recording, whose title paraphrases the nickname used in connection with Josef Mysliveček in Italy, is of a top-notch standard, which is also highlighted by the sleeve notes carefully prepared by the musicologist Václav Kapsa, the sterling work of the recording team and a subtle graphic design. Supraphon rounded off 2013 with an exceptional violin recital!

Luboš Stehlík



SIR SIMON RATTLE & MAGDALENA KOŽENÁ

PATRONS OF THE YEAR OF CZECH MUSIC 2014

CZECH PHILHARMONIC \ NATIONAL THEATRE PRAGUE \
NATIONAL MORAVIAN-SILESIA THEATRE \ NATIONAL MUSEUM \
PRAGUE SPRING FESTIVAL \ JANÁČEK MAY FESTIVAL \
CZECH DREAMS FESTIVAL \ ARTS AND THEATRE INSTITUTE \
CZECH RADIO \ CZECH CENTRES & OTHERS

SUPPORTED BY



MAIN PARTNER



MEDIA PARTNER



czech music quarterly



CzechTourism



2014

\ year of czech music

www.yearofczechmusic.cz

f

Czech music at the 2014 PRAGUE SPRING FESTIVAL

15/5

PRAGUE RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
& PETR ALTRICHTER**Janáček:** The Cunning Little Vixen – The Fiddler's Child
– Our Father**Skoumal:** Violin Concerto (world premiere)**Dvořák:** Te Deum, Op. 103

ROMAN RABINOVICH

Smetana: Czech Dances (selection)

16/5

GIDON KREMER & KREMERATA BALTICA

Fišer: Crux for Violin and Percussion

18/5

PRAGUE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
& PAVEL TROJAN JR.**Novák:** In the Tatra Mountains, Op. 26**Mácha:** Variations on the Theme and Death of Jan Rychlík

19/5

KONVERGENCE & IRENA TROUPOVÁ

World premieres of music by Czech composers

20/5

DAMIEN GUILLON & COLLEGIUM MARIANUM

Zelenka: Lamentationes Jeremiæ prophetæ, ZWV 53

21/5

MISCHA MAISKY & MORAVIAN PHILHARMONIC
OLOMOUC & PETR VRONSKÝ**Martinů:** Intermezzo, H 330**Dvořák:** Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104**Krejčí:** Serenade**Smetana:** Richard III., Op. 11

23/5

JANÁČEK TRIO & IRVIN VENYŠ

Jírovec: Nocturno in F major**Gemrot:** Story (world premiere)**Novák:** Piano trio in D minor, Op. 27

24/5

CLARA NOVAKOVA & MARTINŮ VOICES

Jan Novák: IV fugæ in Vergilium – Sonata super Hoson Zes...**Martinů:** Czech Madrigals, H 278

26/5

JULIA FISCHER & MILANA ČERNJAVSKA

Martinů: Sonata No. 3, H 303

27/5

POLISH NATIONAL RADIO SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA KATOWICE & ALEXANDER
LIEBREICH**Janáček:** Sinfonietta

29/5

PKF – PRAGUE PHILHARMONIA & JAKUB HRŮŠA

Schulhoff: Concerto for String Quartet and Wind Orchestra**Dvořák:** The Spectre's Bride, Op. 69

2/6

PRAGUE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
& TOMÁŠ VÍŠEK & VLADIMÍR VÁLEK**Fišer:** Double for Orchestra**Ježek:** Concerto for Piano and Orchestra**Smetana:** Triumph Symphony in E major, Op. 6

30/5 – 1/6

CZECH CHAMBER MUSIC WEEKEND


www.festival.cz

Generální partner



Oficiální partner



Hlavní mediální partner



Partner koncertu



Oficiální automobil



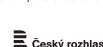
Oficiální hotel



Mediální partner



Mediální partner od roku 1946



Mediální partner

