



# Looking back at Miloslav Ištvan

COMPOSER

# Czech Music 2000

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On the 26th of January 1990, the composer Miloslav Ištvan, one of the leading figures in Czech music of the later 20th Century, died at the age of 61. After completing secondary school and a course at the Brno Conservatory, Ištvan was admitted to the Janáček Academy in Brno, which he entered in the stormy year of 1948, when the communists seized power. Vilém Petrželka, with whom Ištvan had wanted to study, was forced to leave the academy for political reasons, and so Ištvan joined the class of the only remaining professor of composition, Jaroslav Kvapil. He graduated in composition in 1952 and embarked on three years of postgraduate study, after which he was appointed as a

teacher at the Department of Composition. He stayed there until his death, teaching composition and composition theory as lecturer and, after 1966, as docent. Ištvan's creative direction was based on the logical line leading from Moravian folklore to Janáček and toward the broader horizon of the folklore of other countries and the composers who made use of it. Here a major influence was Béla Bartók, and especially his modal technique, but Ištvan was also inspired by Rumanian and even non-European folk tradition, particularly African and later Javanese-Balinese music. The gradual evolution and the shifts in his technique that were based on work with these elements can be traced in his works of

theory; he produced a series of texts that represented less phases of smooth development than progressively more precise attempts to express what he wanted to say, in substance and in refinement of terminology. Ištvan was an open-minded person. He always tried to get to understand new trends and movements and to use whatever he found useful there in his own work. A whole range of later 20th-Century composers were therefore of fundamental importance for him, of whom we should name at least Stravinsky, Messiaen, Varése,

Lutoslawski, Ligeti and, in the Eighties, Xenakis and the American minimalists. His approach was a mixture of interest, scepticism and criticism (even of "accepted" authorities), but he also frequently went through long processes of transformation himself.

The short thaw of the later Sixties allowed him to establish contacts with West European new music. He used the knowledge he gained by listening to scores and studying them, and through personal contacts (for example in 1966 at courses in Darmstadt), not only in his own music, but in teaching. At the Janáček Academy, together with A. Piňos, he created the background for the new music that after long years of domination by the socialist-realist ideas of the Prague (and Bratislava) music academy, attracted students of composition from throughout Czechoslovakia. Links forged around the two teachers led to the emergence of a platform for what was known as the "Brno school of composition". In this context we should not forget to mention the "outside school" activities closely connected with a third figure on the Brno scene, Josef Berg. These included, for example, the founding of the first post-war Czech composers' association, "Skupina A" [A Group], and the first team compositions.

Ištvan's work is extensive and contains orchestral, chamber and solo instrumental music, and from the end of the Sixties vocal and electro-acoustic music as well. He was also well-known for his collaborations with a series of theatre directors, for whom he created stage music. These scores he quite often later recast as independent compositions.



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It is beyond the scope of this memoir to mention particular pieces. The reader can obtain more detailed information in the book by J. Bártová, *Miloslav Ištvan*, which includes a catalogue of his works. In the following paragraphs we present - without any editorial changes - a few opinions from representatives of more than one generation of composers and theoreticians. They constitute a retrospective look at one of the most important of late 20th-century Czech composers, ten years after his death.

**Jindřiška Bártová** (musicologist, author of a book on M. Ištvan)

"All that is in the world flows like water, and like the shadow of man will suddenly pass away..." These verses by an anonymous Baroque Czech author, which Miloslav Ištvan used in 1967 as one of the texts on which he based his piece *Zaklínání času* [*The Enchantment of Time*] might serve ten years after the composer's death as a motto, but also a stimulus to brief reflection on the fortunes of Ištvan's work in the last decade of the 20th Century.

Given that the composer died at the outset of a period of rapid social changes, he was naturally unable to react in his work to the stylistic transformations that they brought, especially the very striking rise of post-modern trends. Ištvan's work has therefore remained something of a closed monument and witness to its era. The power of his artistic testimony, however, is undiminished. This was evident, for example, in a concert entirely devoted to his music, held to mark the seventieth birthday he did not live to see. Here his oratorio, *I, Jacob*, performed for the second time ever, made a profound impression. Another occasion that bore witness to his lasting power was a memorial concert for the 10th anniversary of his death, at which young musicians gave what were mostly outstanding performances of his works. This association with youth is, in fact, the guarantee of the future of Ištvan's music. His creative methods are still being explored and developed by the pupils (up to two dozen) that he educated during his thirty-five years of teaching at the Janáček Academy. In all this, Ištvan's personality continues to radiate impulses into the contemporary world. On the other hand, Czech music still has an unpaid debt to the composer in the form of four pieces that have yet to be performed. They are all choral works. Are we going to receive instalments over the next decade?

**Alois Piňos** (composer and music theorist)

It is difficult, in a few sentences, to summarise my memories of my dear friend, colleague and fellow-pilgrim in life, Miloslav Ištvan, with whom I was in close contact over forty years, whose fortunes were to some extent

similar to mine, and whose son Radomír was among my pupils of composition at JAMU. His outstanding lifelong oeuvre as a composer was born of a combination of individual talent and systematic endeavour, deep knowledge of contemporary music (not only European) and his own research in composition. He was a workaholic who resisted all the snares that would have distracted him from creative work and reduced his precious time, whether these were professional meetings and training courses, or more attractive enticements. When we both attended the Darmstadt vacation courses for New Music in 1966, for example, which for us was a unique chance to take a look at the world beyond the Iron Curtain, he did not use his spare time for excursions, or visits to cinemas, exhibitions and the other Western attractions of Frankfurt or its surroundings, but sat and systematically composed. He was also a great enthusiast for sports, canoeing, cycling and hiking. Naturally he did not regard sports, contact with gifted pupils, "seminars" in Group A and Camerata, chats with friends over glasses of red wine, cultivation of his supportive family in Brno and recreational-composing visits to his cottage in Sněžné as encroachments on his time - quite the reverse. From these he drew new strength and inspiration. Ištvan's sudden death ten years ago was a shock. The day before he had spent the whole afternoon with us in friendly musical company in the Brno Slavia Restaurant - as photographs record. And there was no hint that his life was so soon to be cut short.

**Pavel Novák - Zemek** (composer, pupil of M. Ištvan)

I last met Docent Ištvan just before Christmas in 1989. Since I have such pleasant memories of that meeting and a fine thread seems to lead from it into the following period, I am always glad to return to it. My wife and I were at Dr. Ištvan's house. We were talking about what everyone was probably talking about at the time, and only at the end did we turn to the subject of music. Dr. Ištvan opened his desk, took out the black files that contained his sketches and showed three almost completed pieces. "I would be pretty surprised if I hadn't managed to make some progress in these things" - I still remember his brisk comment on the score. I was delighted to look at the work and went over it thoroughly. We chatted for a little longer and then we hurried home as we usually did in those days, since we had a baby.

As time went by, I became curious to find out how far Dr. Ištvan's comment had been justified, and in what precise form. I am convinced that the change is most striking in *Rotace a návraty* [*Rotations and Returns*] (editor's note: for cor anglais, viola and

violoncello). In the final movement Ištvan's characteristic islands of metro-rhythm are linked up into a single whole, which the development in the preceding three parts has been leading up to. *Roční doby* [*Seasons of the Year*], (more precisely *Makrosvěty - Čtyřero ročních dob* [*Macroworlds - a Foursome of Seasons*] for 4 players on percussion instruments - editor's note), also seems to me to show more unity of formal development, and emphasises not only rhythm but the tonal colour of the instruments employed, particularly the reverberation of the metalophones. At the end of the Eighties Ištvan's view of the formal whole probably changed in the direction of emphasis on unity. It is possible that had he lived, he would also have recast the montage method he had been continuously trying to develop in the Seventies and Eighties. Thanks to our Christmas meeting I now have a closer relationship to some of Dr. Ištvan's last compositions and I am glad that I saw (if only fleetingly) his work in progress. Fate decreed that this should be my first and last opportunity to do so.

**Miloš Štědroň** (composer and music theorist)

Only now, after years, am I coming to a full appreciation of Miloslav Ištvan's worth, primarily as a great figure in composition, guided by his own instincts regardless of the fashions of the moment, nonetheless near to those fashions, but coming from somewhere else. Through modal flexion inspired by Bartók and Janáček, he reached his "linkage of contradiction" - which I understand primarily as montage tectonics and the replacement of the traditional hierarchy derived from harmony by a new, as yet not entirely familiar hierarchy of rhythms and colours, and finally a return to chordics, instead of the former harmony... It was this that made his encounter with the wave of minimalism and reductionism during the Eighties could be so intimate and so fruitful, without his having to change any of his musical habits and techniques! I regard Ištvan's theoretical works as a very different chapter. These are evidently marginalia to his music - a record of ideas, but clearly not a complete theory. In my view, those who want to trace his footsteps here need to undertake a new reading, explanation and clarification of this part of his output. They should definitely refrain from regarding it as some definitive system, and should not present them to students as "orthodoxy". That would be to do Ištvan no real service. Ištvan's oeuvre is a "gold reserve" of Czech music of the Sixties to Eighties. There is therefore a need to provoke new interpretations, and so remind ourselves of what was then played only by chance, and



with no special "fanfare". In the problematic conditions of "impoverished" music, this will prove a particularly responsible and difficult task. But Miloslav Ištvan was used to that kind of situation throughout his life...or wasn't he?!?

**Arnošt Parsch** (composer and teacher)

I have the temerity to claim to have attended all the Brno premieres of the works of Miloslav Ištvan since 1959.

In the last two years I have heard new interpretations of some of his chamber pieces and each time the impression was profound. The new generations of performers who have acquired experience of playing contemporary music, have found a way of colouring the different layers, emphasising the fierceness of the rhythms, and bringing out the form. This really started with the outstanding CD recordings of his chamber music made by performers from Brno and Prague. Then there was the concert for the 70th anniversary of his birth on the 18th of October 1998, which included a new performance of his chamber oratorio *I, Jakob* after a gap of more than 25 years, and a concert premiere of his *Sonata for Violin and Chamber Orchestra* (Jiří Novotný and Ars Incognita). His quintet *Ommagio à J. S. Bach* was played by the Foerster Wind Quartet at a concert in the "Meeting of European Contemporary Music" series in 1999, and one year later performances of his *Zatemněná krajina [Darkened Landscape] Quartet* (the Moravian Quartet) and his *Canto II for Solo Flute* (Kateřina Novotná) were included in the same annual series. At a "Studies in Contemporary Music" concert held at the Janáček Academy on 26th of January 2000 to mark the 10th anniversary of his death, the programme was made up of his *Canto I for solo viola* (Petr Pšenic), *Rotations and Returns for Cor Anglais, Viola and Violoncello* (Zdeněk Nádeníček, Petr Pšenic and Josef Klíč) and his *Variations on the Key of D Minor for Two Pianos* (Marta and Milan Vašek).

**Jan Grossmann** (composer, pupil of M. Ištvan)

For me, studies with Dr. Ištvan meant first and foremost a huge sense of liberation. This was not just because we got on so well as human beings; it was because he somehow freed me from something that had fettered me and stressed me up to that point. One of the things he told me was that it wasn't important which material you used, but the contexts in which you used it. I may not have fully realised the importance that the statement would come to have for me, but immediately he said it, I felt that it was precisely what I had been looking for. To me it suggested that writing

contemporary music didn't mean I had some obligation to write in some particular system, set of rules and technique. I could take my set of rules, my order, from the sources that suited me, and it did not have to be some artificially created system of inter-relations. Instead, it could be some higher order, something that I feel is present in the Spirit, just as in music. In this case, of course, the order is not something we create, but something that we discover.

**Zdeněk Král** (composer and music writer)

I never knew Miloslav Ištvan personally (and he never knew me). I first came to the Janáček Academy in 1993 (having lived in Brno from 1992), and since my musical knowledge went no further than Janáček, I didn't even know Ištvan's music. I first encountered his work at a concert while still a student of composition. It was the piece *Hard Blues* and played from a tape. I know that after hearing it I felt a kind of relief and hope that there actually existed, after all, a contemporary classical music that appealed to me, and that I could understand (since at that period, when our professors prescribed high "doses" of contemporary music, I tended to respond with bewilderment at its incomprehensibility). Ištvan's theories of composition, however, rather "passed me by". I always took no more than "teaspoonfuls" and composed according to my own "life theories".

My relationship to Ištvan is not personal (in photographs he is always frowning), but I feel a certain respect - for a man who worked hard, and pursued his own ideas without demanding reward or recognition.

**Leoš Faltus** (composer and music theorist)

I had many conversations with Miloš Ištvan at the meetings of CAMERATA in Brno, or independently. Most of them were about problems of composition, its novelty or its derivative quality. Miloš always expressed himself concisely. "I have to do it in a way I enjoy and find interesting", he said, in response to the complaints of performers that his music was rhythmically difficult. It is of course true that M. Ištvan introduced many new elements into the structuring of rhythm (metre, movement and its density), and not only into rhythm. What is typical of him are the polarities of his vision: dodecaphonic balance in contrast to modality and non-harmonic tonality, his way of organising by using numerical orders set against natural rhythms, the accentuation of the shaping of the musical theme, and other methods. Fortunately, the main principles of his method as a composer are set down in his books and teaching texts, and so the Department of Composition, which still adheres to his legacy, can use them for teaching purposes

and is trying to disseminate this theoretical material in foreign language publications as well. "I hope that my friends will tell me when I start to go gaga", was a comment he sometimes made as he approached his sixtieth birthday. It was an occasion we celebrated (with the Bártas and Alena Němcová) at the Ištvan's cottage, and none of us who were there (or other friends), had any idea that we would be losing his wife after a year, and in another year death would deprive us of Ištvan too. Ten years on from that sad event we still remember him...

**Dan Dlouhý** (leader of the Central European percussion ensemble DAMA DAMA)

My occasional meetings with Miloslav Ištvan over the years 1985-88 became more regular when we started to co-operate on the composition *Makrosvěty [Macroworlds]* for percussion, which he was commissioned to write in 1989 for the then newly founded DAMA DAMA Central European percussion ensemble.

Miloslav Ištvan approached the work with great responsibility. He attended several of our performances, and later visited me and my colleague Adam Kubíček to make a thorough investigation of the possibilities of the special percussion instruments that we could offer. These included plastic flowerpots with various pitches, octobans, metal "shards", "lids" (chimney collars) and so forth, and all kinds of ways of playing them, using sticks, bare hands and so on. (During our discussions I discovered that he was deeply interested in questions of rhythm and - just like me - laboriously hunted for examples of African, Indian and other non-European music which were hard to get hold of here at the time.) He never, alas, lived to hear us perform the completed work (the fair copy was finished by his son Radomír Ištvan), and so could make none of the corrections that are usual after pieces are premiered. But in his case I don't think this mattered at all; the proportions of the piece and its impact, produced on instruments that he had never actually heard in combination, were still entirely precise. All that is necessary for an optimal performance is to find a hall with suitable acoustics, where the result will be exactly what it should be, both in my view and according to the title of the whole piece and individual movements - a mysterious and in parts ecstatic celebrations of life and the world.

/Ivo Medek/



# The Bohemia Saxophone Quartet

ENSEMBLE

The origins of the Bohemia Saxophone Quartet go back to the later Eighties, with the formations of the Badot Quartet. This ensemble involved a saxophone quartet (substituting for the whole wind section in big band), as well as a rhythm section (piano, guitar, double-bass and percussion), female vocals and a male vocal quartet. Its repertoire was more or less based on archaic jazz and swing. During the Nineties, the groups Swings and Ondřej Havelka's Melody Makers were gradually to "develop" out of it, and the saxophone section started to perform independently even while the group was still in existence. At first the section had confined itself to arrangements of older jazz, but soon the first pieces of classical music appeared in its repertoire, and its first independent "saxophone" concerts were held at the end of 1990. At that time the group consisted of the following: Pavel Fiedler - soprano saxophone, Roman Fojtíček - alto saxophone, Zdeněk Kašpar - tenor saxophone, and Jan Majer - baritone saxophone.

Their repertoire was divided between arrangements of pieces by various composers of the baroque and classicist periods (Henry Purcell, Pavel Josef Vejvanovský, Josef Mysliveček, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and others), and arrangements of pieces influenced by jazz (George Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein, Jaroslav Ježek). The members of the quartet also asked several Czech composers to write something for them (Eduard Douša, Libor Dřevíkovský).



A turning-point came in 1994. The group renamed itself the Bohemia Saxophone Quartet and finally decided to go fully independent. It began to focus more intensely on classical music, and started to import original music - the world repertoire for saxophone quartet - from abroad. Increasing emphasis on classical music meant changes in the composition of the group. J. Majer and Z. Kašpar were replaced by Jiří Hanzlík (born 1966) and Pavel Škrna (born 1974). Management and artistic direction went to R. Fojtíček (born 1963) and P. Fiedler (born 1963), who have led the group ever since. At this point it should be pointed out that it had never been a jazz ensemble in the full sense, and had always tended to play arranged rather than improvised music.

In 1995, with the Hradec Králové Philharmonic, they gave their first performance of Eduard Douša's Concerto for Four Saxophones and Orchestra, which they later recorded with the Prague Chamber Philharmonic for their first CD, entitled simple "Bohemia Saxophone Quartet" (released by Oliverius Records). The CD also contains other original pieces for saxophone quartet - the Small Quartet by Jean Francaix and the Quintet for Harp and Four Saxophones by Libor Dřevíkovský. In terms of both choice of music and performance, the group had taken a major step towards the more demanding contemporary repertoire. The Bohemia Saxophone Quartet also started to represent the Czech Republic as musical envoy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (performing at the request of ambassadors in different countries, mainly at receptions organised by embassies for state events). This means that the

quartet has now played in Indonesia, the Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan and Israel. In 1997 they were among the performers on the CD "Umlkání" [Falling Silent - released by Happy Music Production] - a profile of composer Petr Pokorný on which the quartet recorded his piece, Podzimní příběhy [Autumn Tales]. They recorded their own second CD, "Jazz Inspirations" (released by MusicVars) in 1998. Apart from various arrangements, this includes two pieces dedicated directly to the Bohemia Saxophone Quartet. They are Saxomania by Emil Viklický, and Jen tak...[No Hassle...] by Michal Macourek.

In 1999 they collaborated with the Brixii Academic Ensemble on the recording of a CD of arrangements of choral music by Johann Sebastian Bach and the Stabat Mater by František Ignác Tůma.

The last change in the composition of the band took place in the Autumn of 1999, when Kateřina Stupková (born 1979!), replaced J. Hanzlík as baritone saxophonist. Together with the Bohemia Saxophone Quartet, a new generation of Czech saxophonists are emerging (the Prague Saxophone Quartet should also be mentioned as a forerunner), who are importing the "know how" necessary for the use of the instrument in Czech classical music. It is, however, a slow and painful birth, especially since as yet none of our conservatories or academies teach classical saxophone as first instrument.

## I talked to Roman Fojtíček about the quartet today.

*It seems quite incredible that when you auditioned for a baritone saxophonist last Autumn, the winner was an amateur saxophonist in her first year of flute studies at the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory. Does this mean that there just aren't any baritone saxophonists in the Czech Republic?*

In my view Kateřina has quite exceptional musical talent, and is also musically extremely adaptable and responsive, which is the key consideration when you have to master a large and difficult repertoire in a relatively short time. Otherwise, it's true that the number of baritone saxophonists here is limited.

*It strikes me as a clear indication of the fact that the saxophone has not yet, as it were, "put down roots" here. We seem to be still at the beginning. Unfortunately there are no resources to hand here. In France, for example, when a professional saxophonist leaves a group, there's no problem finding a replacement. And that applies whichever kind of sax is involved, since world-class players can't get away with specialising in just one kind, and professionals often master them all. In our country, however, the instrument failed to establish itself and no saxophone departments were opened at conservatories and music academies. The former regime was partly to blame for that, but there are still no departments today. The only opportunity*

*to study the saxophone is at the Ježek Conservatory in Prague, which is orientated to jazz and dance music. In the past you could take part-time courses there, combining them with a job, and so older people could study as well. It was common for people to study clarinet at a state conservatory and then go on to study sax at the Ježek Conservatory, but this option is getting more difficult now because the Ježek Conservatory has become a normal state conservatory and older students have little chance of getting in. The range of choice in music education offered by the state has been curtailed, and while this situation suits civil servants, it contradicts the real needs of musicians here.*

*Of course, the situation in the Basic Art Schools [Czech voluntary schools for children with vocational orientation to the arts - translator's note] has improved somewhat. Here more attention is being paid to the saxophone. It is also easier to obtain music for the instrument now, except that the parts and scores are too expensive for music schools to buy for their libraries. In most cases people get over the problem by copying parts, but thank God for that! The trouble is that young people who try the saxophone at Basic School*



have very little opportunity to go any further. If someone wants to continue with classical sax, he or she has to get a place in a school abroad.

*Your most recent recording work was collaboration on an arrangement of baroque music for saxophone quartet, mixed chamber choir, violin and bass continuo. What would you see as the point of these kinds of arrangement?*

If a piece of music speaks to people, why not include it in the repertoire? In any case, baroque music played in a church on saxophone sounds very interesting. The timbre of the saxophone is unique.

*The saxophone is a relatively young instrument. Is there yet enough original material for it?*

Internationally speaking, yes. Here, however, it's a different matter. For many years there was no one here to write it for. Naturally it's taking a long time for composers to "get the feel of it", as it were. They have to have a certain level of knowledge of the potential of the instrument. Several of the French composers who write for saxophone quartet are excellent saxophonists themselves.

*You took part in a chamber ensemble competition in Paris the year before last. How important to the quartet was the competition?*

The competition provided us with an important motivational push. It motivated us to try Jindřich Feld's *Quartet for Saxophones*, which was written for Paris Radio and published by the prestigious French company Leduc. It's a work that is part of the basic world repertoire for saxophone quartet, and our group was the first to perform this difficult piece here in its entirety.

*Tell me something about the basic world repertoire for saxophone quartet today? Which composers have established themselves internationally in this genre?*

I'll start with the Czech composers. Jindřich Feld and his *Quartet for Saxophones* definitely belong in the world repertoire. Other world legends include the French composers Gabriel Pierre, Alfred Desenclos and Florent Schmitt, and the Russian composer Alexander Glazunov. These all write very difficult music, which requires players to master modern techniques including micro-intervals and multiphonic tones (Editor's Note: special multiple tones played by a single player, based on mixing the basic tone with different harmonics of that tone).

*It looks as if you want to devote yourselves completely to classical music in the future. Or at least that seems to be the direction. Clearly a modern saxophone quartet can't do jazz and classical music at the same time.*

There are groups in existence who manage to keep up both genres. In our case the scales tip more in favour of chamber classical music, but this doesn't mean we don't cover a range of different genres. The best evidence of that is our recordings, and we want to continue to be a group with a lively spectrum of genres.

*The history of your ensemble would suggest that you started with jazz and ended up with classical music, but your musical training has mostly been classical, and so in fact one could say that you originally went over to jazz from a classical background. Indeed, your second CD, "Jazz Inspiration", shows that you are more at home in classical music than in jazz. To what extent do you still draw on jazz inspirations today?*

The jazz inspirations are still there in our work. We still have pieces in our archive that we would be happy to try, but there hasn't yet been time for them. For years now we've been thinking about a piece by Phil Woods (editor's note: the American jazz alto-saxophonist and composer), which is based on jazz, but also on classical chamber music. What's more, we now have Kateřina in the group. She has been active in the jazz scene, and she herself writes arrangements that are designed more for a jazz saxophone quartet.

*On the Petr Pokorný CD you got to rub shoulders with such highly rated Czech ensembles as DAMA DAMA and Mondschein. What is the attitude of your group to contemporary classical music? For example, why don't you play more world music written for saxophone quartet?*

I think the quartet needs, as it were, to mature towards that genre. It took us a certain amount of time to find our path to contemporary classical music. We first had to work our way through the basic literature in order to get any further. Now contemporary pieces are shifting us forward. We don't want just to parrot work that has been played over and over again and is well-known, but on the other hand, contemporary compositions are very demanding for both performers and audiences, and so we tend to include them in our concerts more as spice than as main course.

**/Jaroslav Pašmik/**

For more information on the ensemble, go to:  
<http://www.saxofon.cz>

## Reports

### ● In the 8th Annual International Competition for Blind and Sight-Impaired Composers

the first prize was not awarded. Two second prizes went to Heinrich Hartl from Germany, the third prize to Silvia Zaru from Italy, and honourable mentions to Kalmán Dobos from Hungary and Jan Budín from the ČR.

### ● In the 9th Annual Competition for Blind and Sight-Impaired Performers, held in Prague on the 6th -13th February 2000,

first, second and third place went respectively to the Russian pianist Alexei Panov, the Portuguese flautist Sonia Ferreira, and the Russian singer Natalia Tsernyevskaya.

● The Jihlava 2000 International Composition Competition, the fifth time in the series, received more than a hundred and fifty entries, which were judged by a panel consisting of Jan Maria Dobrodinský, Ladislav Fučík, Petr Hradil and Otmar Mácha. In the category of compositions for secondary school choirs, they did not award a 1st Prize, but the 2nd Prize went to *Salve Regina* by Bernat Vivancos from Spain, and 3rd Prize to the composition *Epistula Choralis Et Vernalis* by Charalampos Goyios from Greece. In the category of compositions for mixed chamber choirs, the 1st Prize was awarded to the American Jesse Allisoni for *To Die with Him*, the 2nd Prize went to the Belorussian Jauhenu Paplansky for his

choirs cycle, and 3rd Prize went to the Canadian Robert A. Baker for his composition *Two Anthems*. In the category of compositions for large mixed choirs the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Prizes went, respectively, to Jiří Teml for *Kredo*, to José Juan Hernandez Martinez from Mexico for *Sol sobre una manta* and Alexei L. Larin from Russia for *Anima*. The winning compositions will be performed at the summer Festival of Choir Music in Jihlava, and the panel also recommended performance of compositions that received honourable mentions, and several others, including work by Czech composers - *Les visages d'amour* by V. Neumann, *Z českých erbů* [From Czech Coats-of-Arms] by J. Málek and *Matčina píseň* [Mother's Song] by B. Sedláček.



# Jindřich Feld

## Celebrates His Seventy-Fifth Birthday

COMPOSER

Jindřich Feld is generally known as a composer whose work has shown a remarkable capacity to cross the frontiers of our state, even at a period when this was difficult, especially for the work of those artists whom the totalitarian regime has not succeeded in bringing to heel. Even today, ten years after the revolution that ended the country's isolation, there are few who can compete with Feld in terms of the frequency of performance of his works abroad. This is because all aspects of Feld's music are of such high quality. The composer makes no secret of the fact that he prefers to write on the basis of specific commissions and with a clear idea of the future performer. This creates favourable if not ideal conditions for adequate performance of the work both in terms of fidelity to the author's ideas and in terms of fit with the personal musical orientation and capacities of the performer, and the combination cannot but have a beneficial effect on the audience response to the work. It is clear that Jindřich Feld has been composing since childhood; although I have never seen the fact recorded and never asked him, I can deduce it with almost complete certainty from a knowledge of his family roots and from his music itself. If the term "virtuoso" were applied to composers as well as performers, then Jindřich Feld would be awarded the title without discussion. He has always impressed me with his technical "craftsmanship" and skill in developing structure in all the genres, forms and types of ensembles for which he has written. He has also impressed me by his searching curiosity as a composer, and the openness to all the new ideas and approaches he has encountered in his musical career - and which he has tried out, thought through, evaluated and then accepted (or not) into his expressive register - without ever succumbing to any of the artistic movements of the later 20th Century uncritically or simple-mindedly. Feld is also an intellectual, with a degree in musicology (PhD 1952); he has a refined critical spirit, and the capacity for disciplined analytical thought and work - which when combined with innate creative gifts and spontaneous musicality always brings major advantages in a composing career (for which he ultimately decided). From 1952, when he defended his musicological dissertation at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University and at virtually the same time graduated from the composition department of the Music Faculty of the Prague Arts Academy with his brilliant *Concerto for Orchestra*, he became primarily a composer. This was an entirely free decision, since he could easily have become a professional musicologist, or a classical philologist, specialist in Romance languages, historian.... Feld is a universally educated man with an interest in both the arts and sciences. The arts finally prevailed - and today we can see that it was the right decision, taking him in a direction for which he had the best background and qualifications. He was born into a musical family: his father, a distinguished Czech violin teacher, naturally guided his son towards music and especially to the violin. The young Feld was an excellent violinist (and violist), highly proficient as a chamber or orchestral player (he managed to "play his way" through his compulsory army service in what was then the Army Arts Ensemble). Nevertheless, he finished his grammar-school studies and only after his final school examinations did he enter the conservatory (joining composition class under Emil Hlobil straightway), and from there moved on to the Prague Academy of Arts to study with Jaroslav Řídký. In parallel, he studied at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University, taking a range of historical and philological subjects, and graduated as a musicologist

(the theme of his dissertation was also characteristic - *Josef Slavík*). Feld's AMU graduation composition, the *Concerto for Orchestra* was more than an apprenticeship piece proving that he had learned his lessons well...we need only to consider the introductory flute ideas, which contain all twelve tones of the chromatic scale without repetition. This is not yet a true dodecaphonic order, and in this piece he handles it in the same way as a classical theme, but contact with dodecaphonic composition had been established even in this early work. I should emphasise, of course, that this was in 1952, which in this country was still rather early for more consistent dodecaphonic composition for many reasons (although the first experiments were already being made - obviously without hope of public performance). Two years later Feld wrote one of his most successful works - the *Concerto for Flute and String Orchestra*, which the then promising (and later celebrated) French flautist Jean Pierre Rampal included in his repertoire. Later Feld composed his *Sonata for Flute and Piano* for Rampal, which he premiered at the 1957 Prague Spring Festival (it remains internationally one of the most often performed of Feld's works). Subsequently it was again Rampal who commissioned Feld to write his difficult *Concertante Fantasia for Flute, string quartet and Percussion*, designed as a compulsory piece for the final round of Rampal's flute composition in Paris in 1980.



Feld's works of the Fifties include what is as yet his only opera (1956), the children's opera *Pošťáková pohádka* [*Postman's Fairytale*] based on a story by Karel Čapek. Its excellent quality is underlined, for example, by the fact that it is now in its fifth season of unbroken and successful performance in České Budějovice. We have already mentioned dodecaphony, which has played an important role in Feld's development as a composer, as it did in others. In this respect Czech music lagged behind and Czech composers came into closer practical contact with dodecaphony and the movements associated with it in European post-war music only from the very end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, when the chances of its public performance also became slightly more favourable. I must stress the word *slightly*, since even in the 1960s the totalitarian regime was scarcely enthusiastic about all these "western" movements, and tried to suppress them ideologically, if no longer physically. Official "critics" of these movements were in much demand, and if their arguments were in places laughable, the end was held to justify the means. Thus in 1962 (or 1963) an internal, informational replay of problematic pieces that smelt of formalism was held at the headquarters of the then Union of Composers. The suspicious repertoire played included Feld, who at the beginning of the 1960s came closer to dodecaphony, as is clear from his *String Trio* (1961), for example, or his *Duo for Flute and Bassoon* (1962).



Shorter chamber pieces represented a perfect field for studying and testing the variety of dodecaphonic techniques, and most responsible composers at that time tried out dodecaphonics and other modern techniques first in small chamber works. I personally regard Feld's *1st Symphony* for large orchestra of 1966-67 as the culminating expression of Feld's development toward dodecaphony. This five-movement work is eloquent testimony to Feld's sovereign skill in the construction of lines and surfaces, and the arrangement of the proportions of the macrostructure (the symphony is perfectly symmetrical around the axis of the most serious and the longest movement, the 3rd - a concentrated passacaglia). The symphony is thoroughly dodecaphonic in composition (as far as I know, it was the first ever work of this kind here), with the additional use of elements of directed aleatorics in certain places. At the same time, there is a clear and audible centralisation of the nodular points of the structure towards a "tonal centre" defined in various different ways. If the use of dodecaphonics is thorough, it is not orthodox or extreme - after all, Feld also behaves like a spontaneous and emotionally direct musician, for whom order means primarily simply music. In this respect he is quite a typical representative of Czech music of the later 20th Century. In his subsequent work Feld never actually abandoned dodecaphony, but his relationship gradually changed: to this day the composer uses dodecaphonic elements in most of his works, but in a way that is to the highest degree individualised and co-ordinated with all the other aspects of his music. Practical musicianship is a very characteristic part of Feld's personality as a composer: he started as a violinist and still enjoys playing in a string quartet with his friends. He has an affinity with amateur musicians; he knows and fully appreciates the importance of amateur music activities and gladly writes for amateurs. To date, he has written a total of 195 works, the largest group among them representing instrumental chamber music (the key pieces here are six string quartets, together with the "double quartet" - the *Concerto da camera*, the *Laus Cantus* for string quartet and soprano, and the *String Quintet* with two violas). In orchestral and concertante music, Feld has concentrated on instrumental concertos - 19 titles to date (including concertos for accordion, saxophone and harp), which represents a truly remarkable achievement. Of his three completed symphonies, the "Third" has still to be performed: it was finished in 1998 and bears the emblematic subtitle, "Fin de siècle".

We have already spoken of Feld's versatility and suggested the range of fields in which he has been active, or is still active. One that we have not yet mentioned - although for fifteen years it has been his "second profession" - is teaching. Feld started to teach in Australia, working at the University of Adelaide in 1968-69. It was here that he experienced the dramatic events of the "Prague Spring" and occupation of the country by Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968 (after his return to Czechoslovakia he composed his *Dramatic Fantasy for Orchestra* with the subtitle "August Days"). From 1971 to 1986 he was professor of composition at the Prague conservatory. He taught a whole series of composers who are now well-known - his pupils included František Chaun (who was 4 years older than his teachers), Zbyněk Matějů, Jindra Nečasová, Radek Rejšek, Miroslav Pudlák, Ondřej Kukul, Jiří Churáček and others. In the first period after November 1989, Jindřich Feld put his experience and legendary capacity for hard work at the disposal of the musical section of what was then Czechoslovak Radio in Prague, where he also showed his organisational and management talents. He remained and remains, however, first and foremost a composer. The disciplined character of his work is evident even from a glance at his scores, and the success of his work and its widespread international reception is eloquent testimony to its musical qualities. Feld's music is extraordinarily refined, luminous, lucid and - given Feld's fondness for composing with a particular idea or, even better, direct knowledge of the future performer - exceedingly effective. Feld succeeds in writing music that is lyrical, playful, brilliant and highly dramatic, and which always sounds convincing and authentic.

I attribute this capacity above all to the way in which he reflects on himself and his environment with a high degree of sobriety and a broad perspective. He is no emotionally unstable romantic, and is one of those people I greatly admire, who think of the word "depression" as applying to simply to meteorology or astronomy. And I have left the least important detail to the very end - on the 19th of February Jindřich Feld celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday.  
/Jaromír Havlík/

# Atelier 90

## Journeys towards the Light

EVENT

The idea behind the free concert cycle organised by the Atelier 90 Group is clear from its title "Searching for Connections". The first concert in this, the second annual series, was held on the 19th of February in the Gallery of the Liechtenstein Palace in Prague, and was conceived in an unconventional spirit as a "composed evening", which in this case meant a continuous series of compositions without interval or pause, and with special lighting effects. The programme consisted of works by members of Atelier 90 - Petr Pokorný, Michal Macourek, Marek Kopelent, Alois Piňos and Pavel Zemek - and by the foreign composers Giacinto Scelsi, György Kurtág and John Cage.

I don't know how far the organisers regarded the event as purely an experiment in concert design, but from the point of view of the public the impression was of an exceedingly creative step towards meeting the current need to bridge the gulf between podium and auditorium. In the overall conception of the evening there was clearly an emphasis on the role of performer not as mere interpreter but as communicative "agens" or initiator of the (aesthetic) experience, and (in the positive sense) manipulator of the atmosphere. The protagonists of the concert - singer Petr Matuszek and clarinettist Kamil Doležal - are people whom it is always necessary to see as musical creators themselves. Now leaders in their fields, it is they who are creating through their artistic activities a new type of musician, in whom the previously divided roles of composer and performer are once again united. The young composer Ondřej Adámek is coming close to this unity himself from the opposite direction. Although none of his pieces were presented at the concert, he contributed to the reality of the evening in a fundamental way - as a performer, playing percussion. Instead of pauses between the applause after one piece and the start of the next, the audience heard his improvisations, in which he always tried to capture "something" of the preceding composition, but more as impression than as report. The least impressive of the four soloists was the dulcimer player, Jan Mikušek. This was partly because of the nature of the works performed, but he was also overshadowed by colleagues more experienced and more self-confident in the unconventional conditions of the concert.

The evening was of course far from a concert-ritual in the full sense, but a certain important shift had been accomplished. Elements that created barriers to the goal (if such it was) included the acoustics, which are very dry in the underground gallery, and also to some extent the musical thinking behind the music presented in the programme. To put it in a nutshell, this is music based on ideas and functioning in terms of analytical reflection.

It is good to see that Atelier 90 has lost its inhibitions about offering illusion. This will never turn into mere illusionism, because the programme of Atelier 90 is the idea in music.

/Wanda Dobrovská/



# The Reality that Becomes History

Reflections on the renaissance of the forgotten music of our century

● "If we ask what is just going on, and what is history, then we are making a distinction between simple events and historical events, even though it may be hard to apply in certain cases. Something is always going on - and it is not these ordinary daily happenings that we wish to follow - but only an infinitesimal part of what happens becomes history or is capable of becoming it."

The choice of this quotation from *Svoboda a bezmoc* [Freedom and Powerlessness] (in Czech, Prague 1998) by Hans Günter Adler, is related to the theme of the article not only in content, but on a personal level. The Prague-born H. G. Adler (born 1910, died 1988 in London), was one of those to be imprisoned in Terezín, live through Auschwitz, and become the only survivor of his family. From 1947 to his death he lived in England. He was the author of the first monograph on the Terezín ghetto (*Theresienstadt 1941-1945*, 1955), and wrote his own testimony on the Auschwitz factory of death (*Auschwitz: Zeugnisse und Berichte*, 1962). After the war he was the owner of part of the music written by Viktor Ullmann in Terezín, since it was on Adler's text that Ullmann had composed the song cycle *Der Mensch und sein Tag* and the cantata for mezzo soprano and piano *Immer inmitten...* in Terezín. Adler was the first, in his book on Terezín, to try to give a comprehensive picture of the life of the camp from the perspective of an artist-poet and sociologist.

Another ten years went by before the collection of memoirs, *Theresienstadt* came out, first in English (1965) and three years later in German. Like all memoir literature, it was characterised by the subjectivity of the accounts, but eye-witness testimony was obviously essential for any start to be made on writing the history of the camp. After several more years a series of specialist studies on individual aspects or people began to appear (in this country by Jitka Ludvová, Lubomír Peduzzi and Milan Kuna), up to Kuna's monograph on musicians from the Czech Lands in the concentration camps, *Hudba na hranici života* [Music on the Boundary of Life] (1990). Several composers of this devastated generation found their biographers, and a series of books were published: Lubomír Peduzzi on Pavel Haas, Josef Bek on Erwin Schulhoff, Milan Slavický on Gideon Klein, and others. A number of international conferences and seminars were organised, recordings have been made, and the music of the composers once branded "entartete Musik" by the Nazis is becoming a normal part of the repertoire. The wrongs inflicted on these people can never be righted, but the debt to their work, which remains, can be paid. The rediscovery of the music of composers silenced by Nazism has been several times compared to the renaissance of Bach, dated from Mendelssohn's performance of the Matthew Passion in 1829. At that time too, more than sixty years after his death the composer of the High Baroque returned to musical life. Of course, the analogy starts and ends with the element of chronological discontinuity of reception. The reasons, and also the consequences of the return of the composers of so-called "degenerate music" to the repertoire, differ strikingly from those of previous rebirths and revivals. The nature of the attempt to expunge this art from history has left a permanent scar on historical memory. Not only their works, but the composers themselves were to cease to exist. If they were already dead, then they had to be excised from books and encyclopaedias. Even those who managed to escape the "final solution" and physically survive, still often suffered creative death, as their art was uprooted and withered. Interest in these composers was awakened, first and foremost, by the guilt complex from which we all suffer, even generations born after the

war. The first stage was a systematic search for everything that had remained and escaped the process of destruction. New names appeared on concert programmes, and many performers specialised in the revived works and put together their repertoires on the basis of a thematic and theme-creating principle of selection. Nor is there any point in hiding the fact that this development often went hand in hand with modishness and commercialisation. The wave of fashion was intense, but necessary. Only as it receded did the lasting values emerge. The original phase consisted of performing, recording and releasing the works mainly of composers who aroused the strongest feeling of guilt - those who had actually perished in the concentration camps. This meant that the first to be included in the repertoire were the words of Haas, Krása, Klein, Ullmann, Schulhoff, and only subsequently the music of Korngold, Braunfels and Goldschmitt. Both to name our composers, and also to draw attention to the lack of balance in concert, recording and publishing activity, we should mention that no attempt has yet been made to give due weight to the work of Rudolf Karel (although he did not return from the concentration camp), Karel Reiner, or even Jaromír Weinberger, to mention only three examples. The interest of performers encouraged publishers, but unfortunately the first wave of rather shoddily prepared editions has slowed down the presentation of academically reliable results. For example, a critical edition of Ullmann's opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* has been complete for several years, but the hastily published edition by the Schott publishing house is still being distributed.

The renaissance in concert and opera repertoire caused over recent years by the revival of the work of the interwar generation raises many questions. The process of evaluation of its work could not be abstracted from the historical fact of the machinery that attempted to annihilate the "degenerate" generation both physically and intellectually. Awareness of this fact has been written into aesthetic and musical-analytic criteria from the very beginning of the revival. This means that most of the works by the composers concerned have not undergone the usual process of reception. In some cases we do not have a way to objectivise our viewpoint on the basis of comparison with views voiced in the period, and in others we have a record of contemporary reactions but the work itself is missing. Specialisation by performers has developed out of a certain isolation of repertoire. On the one hand it is defined by the piety accompanying many posthumous premieres, and on the other by an absence of the continuity of performance that would create a tradition. The music of the circle of composers involved, developed in the contest of a certain culture, and were parts of that culture (regardless of whether their creators consciously followed an existing cultural line or reacted violently against it). Their presentation as revivals, however, de facto stamps them as exceptional, and thereby once again tears them from context, whether their own or ours.

It is for this reason that doubts are sometimes voiced about the "justice" of a historical choice conditioned by these circumstances. I believe that there is no special justification for these fears. This is because another parallel process is at work here which we can perceive on the basis of Carl Dahlhaus's reflections on the growing popularity of the work of Gustav Mahler in the Sixties (In: *Die Zeit*, 10th May 1956, reprinted in: *Musik-Konzepte* 106, X/99). At that time the music scene was characterised by aleatorics and a preference for sound, but also by beat and the vogue for Mahler. Certain elements of Mahler's music directly linked him with trends in sixties' avantgarde music, which perceptibly influenced Kagel, Ligeti and Luciano Berio. According to Dahlhaus the gulf between tradition and the avantgarde is much narrower than it seems. If today, at the end of another century, we have already experienced a renaissance of Mahler (and after him of Zemlinsky), the revival of the composers of the inter-war generation is its logical continuation. To return to the quotation from H. G. Adler at the beginning, that which is capable of becoming history will do so, as it filters through the different historical layers of the reception now underway.

/Vlasta Reittererová/



**Komponisten in Theresienstadt.** Compiled and edited by Cornelis Witthoefft, published by the Hans Krása Initiative, Hamburg, 1999. ISBN 3-00-005164-3, 80 pp.

PUBLICATION

## Komponisten in Theresienstadt

Pavel Haas  
Gideon Klein  
Hans Krása  
Karel Reiner  
Sigmund Schul  
Viktor Ullmann

Hrg.: INITIATIVE HANS KRÁSA Hamburg

This slender volume contains a summary of the most basic and up-to-date information about the composers on whom a common denominator was imposed by the destructive machinery of Nazism. *The Hans Krása Initiative*, founded in Hamburg in 1994, takes its name from one of them. It holds concerts and lectures and aims to introduce the public, and above all the younger generation, with an artistic legacy that fate prevented from being absorbed into musical life in the normal way. The studies in the booklet are devoted to six - Czech and German - composers who were imprisoned in Terezín. Pavel Eckstein writes on Pavel Haas, Milan Slavický on Gideon Klein, and Ingo Schultz on Sigmund Schul and Viktor Ullmann, while the editor of the publication Cornelis Witthoefft contributes two studies on Hans Krása and Karel Reiner. Given that four different authors have contributed, the booklet is admirable for its balance and unity of approach, with each article containing basic biographical data and sketch of artistic development, accompanied by tasteful and informative illustrations. The publication therefore manages to provide an overall view of musical life in Terezín, its leading figures and the way in which it could be organised. Its value is enhanced by a chronological table on the history of the town of Terezín and catalogue of the works of the individual composers (including information on published editions), together with a select bibliography of relevant literature.

/Vlasta Reittererová/

**Bohuslav Martinů: Le larmes du couteau** [Tears of a Knife], **Hlas lesa** [The Voice of the Forest]  
1 CD Supraphon SU 3386-2 631  
Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Cz. TT:61:43

CD REVIEW

In recent years Supraphon has been releasing recordings of the operas of Bohuslav Martinů on CD. In most cases these have been re-issues of older recordings, some of which were earlier released on gramophone records. In 1999, however, the firm launched an entirely new recording of two one-act operas by Bohuslav Martinů on the market. The first of these is *Les larmes du couteau* [*Tears of a Knife*], a dadaist French opera that the composer composed in 1928 using his own libretto based on the play by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes. On the CD the opera is sung in a Czech translation by Eva Bezděková. The work reflects the prevailing character of Martinů's work in the Twenties, which was marked by compact racy sound, abrupt dissonances and complex rhythmical structure. To lighten the theme and express an anti-romantic attitude, Martinů used not only these stylistic features but also a combination of several musical genres

precisely responds to the libretto by Vítězslav Nezval, in which the lyrical quality of the content, not events, takes precedence. In terms of quality, the performance of *The Voice of the Forest* on the CD rather limps behind that of the first opera. The problem does not lie with the Prague Chamber Philharmonic or Jiří Bělohlávek, who perform with the same high quality as in *Tears of a Knife*, nor is it easy to fault the Chamber Choir and many of the soloists, such as the huntsman (Jaroslav Březina), the publican's wife (Lenka Šmídová - apart from a few hesitations of tone), or the principal bandits (Roman Janál, Vladimír Okénko and Zdeněk Harvánek). These all sing with a lightness of touch and persuasiveness of expression, and together create a compact group with flexibility of colour. Unfortunately, however, Helena Kaupová in the role of the bride is at odds with the rest of the cast, since she burdens her dramatic soprano with an unnecessarily strong vibrato that is not only acoustically unattractive, but shifts the role onto a psychologically more serious level. From the point of view of the role of the bride this is a casting error, since this kind of voice is not suitable for portrayal of an innocent young girl.

It should be said in conclusion, however, that despite these criticisms, the CD is of a high standard. The erudite text by Aleš Březina on the character of the two operas and their historical context enhances the overall quality of the album. If you love music, especially the operas of Bohuslav Martinů, and you want to add psychologically uncomplicated and delightful works to your collection, you should not hesitate for a moment.

/Sandra Bergmannová/



(the influence of jazz music is evident here). There are three characters in the opera: Eleonora (Hana Jonášová), the mother (Lenka Šmídová) and Satan (Roman Janál). Jiří Bělohlávek conducts members of the Prague Chamber Philharmonic. It is almost impossible to find fault with the recording. The orchestra is pregnant in rhythm and intonation, and deliberately sober in expression, and it should be added that the singers are excellent for the roles. All three have the vocal colour that precisely suits the characters in the opera; they also have good intonation and brilliant elocution. My only reservation concerns the young soprano Hana Jonášová, who in the higher registers has too narrow a tone. The second opera *Hlas lesa* [*The Voice of the Forest*] was composed in 1935. Martinů was commissioned to write it by Czechoslovak Radio in Prague. In contrast to *Tears of a Knife*, this opera is much more melodious, harmonically uncomplicated and reflects the melodic of Czech folksong. In this it

## Reports

● In the **international opera contest**, first announced in 1998 by the Prague State Opera, the first prize was awarded to **Emil Viklický** for his opera *Phaedra*, the second prize to Hayden Wayne of the USA for his opera "Neon" and the third prize to Bruno Moretti of Italy for "Lady E". Viklický's "Phaedra" is to be performed for the first time on the 20th of September this year.

● **The Prague Wind Quintet** has won the "recording of the month" award in the magazines *Repertoire*, *Classica* and *Musique de la Monde*, for its Prague recording of works by L. Janáček for the Czech-French company Praga Digitalis. It has also won "Choc" (shock of the year) prize for the best recording of the year, awarded by *Musique de la Monde* magazine.



# Czech Philharmonic Offers

CONCERT  
CYCLE

## 10 x Orchestral Music By Czech Composers (1)

For this year's season the Czech Philharmonic has come up with an ambitious plan: a ten-part "representative cycle of Czech orchestral music" presenting a total of sixty compositions. Twentieth-century composers predominate, but since it was felt that Suk, Ostrčil or Janáček might not draw sufficient audiences, music by earlier authors has been included in several of the concerts. The programme therefore includes work by Jan Křtitel Vaňhal, Josef Mysliveček, Pavel Josef Vejvanovský, Jan Václav Stamic, Antonín Rejcha, Jan Dismas Zelenka, František Václav Míča, František Xaver Richter, Jan Václav Hugo Voříšek and Josef Družický, and - of the composers of the 19th Century - Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák and Zdeněk Fibich. Classics of the 20th Century presented in the cycle include Josef Bohuslav Foerster, Otakar Ostrčil, Vítězslav Novák, Josef Suk, Jaroslav Řídký and Leoš Janáček. The remainder of works on the programme consists of music that is very rarely to be heard in concert, and music by living contemporary composers. The goal of bringing audiences music rarely heard and generally not solidly established in the repertoire is praiseworthy, and the series has been conceived and organised with admirable thoroughness. Inevitably, however, it has encountered certain pitfalls. The most striking problem is the number of works chosen and so the unusual length of the individual evening concerts. They start as early as 7.00 p.m. (already preceded by public discussion with the composers), the shortest programme has taken 89 minutes (to judge by reliable information in the brochure), and the longest 100 minutes. This has created listening marathons attended mainly by specialised professionals, while ordinary concert-goers have been rare in the Dvořák hall, and some of them have left the Rudolfinum early. The range of music to be covered in the concerts has also been a handicap. In my view, the problem of how to add music by Josef Bohuslav Foerster or even Jan Křtitel Vaňhal to contemporary music by Vladimír Sommer, Pavel Haas, Jaroslav Ježek and Marek Kopelent, without the programme having a disparate, incongruous effect is almost insoluble, just like the problem of creating some organic programme using works by out of works by Otakar Ostrčil, Jiří Těm, Ivan Kurz, Svatopluk Havelka and Josef Mysliveček. The inclusion of earlier composers was supposed - apart from rendering the cycle generally representative

- to attract audiences by "sugaring the pill" of the less accessible modern music. Even judged from this perspective, however, the programmes on individual evenings gave an unbalanced impression. One of the concerts (19th April 2000) will be made up entirely of music by Jiří Kalach, Alois Hába, Zbyněk Vostřák, Ladislav Vycpálek and Jaroslav Smolka, all composers with a reputation among audiences for difficulty. At another concert (15th February 2000), by contrast, apart from two Czech later 20th-Century composers (Ivan Řezáč and Jaroslav Rybář), the authors represented were all definitely more familiar established names (Jan Václav Stamic, Bohuslav Martinů, Josef Suk, Pavel Bořkovec and Iša Krejčí). A third problem arises with the choice of participating orchestras, since although I have great respect for the efforts of symphony orchestras from outside Prague, the variations in their standard of performance cannot be ignored. Despite all these reservations, however, I have to admit that in organising this cycle, the Czech Philharmonic undoubtedly deserves thanks and appreciation from at least one point of view. However much we can argue about whether Jan Hanuš's *Štafeta [Relay]* symphonic allegro (22nd February 2000) or Jindřich Feld's *Srpnové dny [August Days]* orchestral fantasy (9th March 2000) represent the best works of the composers concerned, and however much we can complain that Jaroslav Doubrava's legacy contains unperformed scores more major than the *Autumn Pastorale* in the pious arrangement of Otmar Mácha (3rd February 2000), it must be said that no one before has offered us so ample a view of Czech symphonic music. The critics who immediately after the launch of the cycle pointed out (e.g. Petr Veber in *Lidové noviny* newspaper on 7th January 2000), that less could have meant more, certainly have some justification. After all, it would definitely have been possible to approach the concept of such a cycle from another direction and to present programmes of "normal" length including, for example, the symphonies of Doubrava or Kabeláč, Vycpálek's *Cantata* or Janáček's rhapsody *Taras Bulba*. This would convincingly reflect the idea of a "representative" selection, but perhaps only thirty rather than sixty composers would be represented, and there would clearly be no room for such pieces as Jiří Jaroš's symphonic poem *Stařec a moře [The Old Man and the Sea]* or for a movement from the *Unfinished Symphony* by Pavel Haas. Indeed, we would

undoubtedly be able to find fault with any more limited programme, since anyone planning a cycle is faced with just too many considerations. J. Smolka has done his best to take them all into account. Given the very large number of pieces performed, I cannot deal with all in the same detail here. The first concert (5th January 2000) very creditably resurrected the prelude to Vladimír Sommer's *Antigone*. This piece, written more than thirty years ago, emerged as testimony to the purposeful way in which the composer's musical language was developing its own individuality, and to the suggestive urgency (and at the time the contemporary eloquence), with which Sommer exploited the dramatic character of the story of *Antigone*. I cannot have been the only member of the audience to find the performance of Foerster's exquisite lyrical song cycle, *Čisté jitro [Pure Dawn]*, a real discovery. The presentation of Kopelent's symphony must have given major satisfaction to its author, who in 1982 dared to write a "risky" score with a reference to the funeral of Jan Patočka. The performance showed that while the symphony demands intense concentration from the listener, its message and technique have remained clear despite the passage of time and it is still modern or - if you like - contemporary. The Prague Symphony Orchestra with conductor Bohumil Kulínský must take much of the credit for the success, and there was also a quite exceptional contribution in the form of the brilliant performance from the soprano Zdena Kloubová, who with each successive concert develops more and more capacity in the field of chamber singing as well. The second evening (18th January 2000) featured the Moravian Philharmonic Olomouc, led by its principal conductor, Yin Wang. It was clear even beforehand that the piece that would attract the most interest, after five shorter compositions, was Svatopluk Havelka's *Hommage à Hieronymus Bosch*. It was still a good thing that Havelka's tried and tested work enjoyed some equal "competition" here, in Ivan Kurz's *Parabola* for symphony orchestra, and especially Jiří Těm's Symphony no. 3 ("Kafka"), which I would have no hesitation in calling his best composition so far. The third concert (3rd February) was supposed to have been conducted by Vladimír Válek, but his sudden indisposition meant that he was replaced by Ondřej Kukal, who took on the demanding programme at very short notice. It consisted



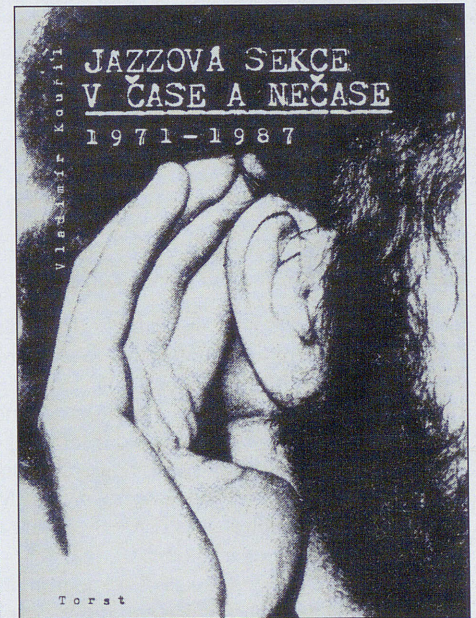
of six pieces, and was the only concert of the ten in the cycle to be played by the Czech Philharmonic itself. Attention focused mainly on Máchá's arrangement of a sketch by Jaroslav Doubrava, originally conceived as the free movement of his fourth symphony. Otmar Máchá had worked with such a strong empathy for Doubrava's stylistic world that I was able to accept the inclusion of the *Autumn Pastorale* with great gratitude and now appeal to the repertoire planners of Czech orchestras to follow suit. Leo Marian Vodička sang dazzlingly in three songs from Otakar Jeremiáš's superb cycle *Láska [Love]*, even though his tenor had inevitable difficulty making itself fully heard against the overblown sound of the orchestra. Lukáš's *Ouvertura Boema*, op. 187, made a very favourable impression; it is clear that Czech orchestras could and should find rewarding "opening numbers" to symphonic programmes in precisely this more traditional kind of musical language. After a first encounter with Kubelík's one-movement *Symphony of 1968*, however, it is hard to say whether the rather unenthusiastic reaction of the audience was due to faults in performance or to the composition itself. I am inclined to the second explanation; while this surprisingly aggressive and structurally rather obscure piece, somewhat flat in terms of invention, was not entirely uninteresting, it still failed to provide an exciting experience. Evidently not every world-famous conductor can compose with the same success as Gustav Mahler, or in our country Otakar Ostrčil... The fourth concert (15th February), contained only one piece by a living composer, *Sny a krajiny [Dreams and Landscapes]* by Jaroslav Rybář, although it also featured one work, the *Anděl na smetišti [Angel on the Rubbish Dump]* Symphonietta by the composer Ivan Řezáč, who might still have been with us but for his premature death (1977). The other pieces on the programme (Bohuslav Martinů's suite from *Veselohra na mostě [Comedy on the Bridge]*, Suk's *Meditation on the St. Wenceslas Chorale*, Bořkovec's *1st Piano Concerto* and Iša Krejčí's *Serenade for Orchestra*) also belong to the first half of the 20th Century. The performers deserve praise, despite the fact that they did not manage to give a persuasive rendering of Řezáč's work - it was as if conductor Jan Chaloupecký had not understood its very subjective, introverted and intellectually complex message. On the other hand, the Plzeň orchestra gave a distinguished performance of Rybář's composition in memory of B. Martinů - a piece whose virtue lies in its perfect overall construction, thorough working of the theme, and unusually vivid degrees of colour. Jan Simon gave a noteworthy interpretation of the solo part in the Bořkovec concerto, and at the

end of the evening the orchestra played Krejčí's *Serenade* with such brilliance and obvious enthusiasm that the captivated audience made them repeat the virtuoso final movement as an encore. The first half of the cycle concluded on the 22nd of February with a cycle by the Hradec Králové Philharmonic conducted by František Vajnar. The programme began with the symphonic *Allegro* by the Nestor of Czech composers Jan Hanuš, who celebrates his eighty-fifth birthday on the 2nd of May. Hanuš was present in the Dvořák Hall and received well-deserved acclaim for a composition from the year 1968. He wrote it as a response to the Soviet occupation, and after more than thirty years it remains distinctive as an expression of militant resistance. Fibich's melodrama *Vodník [The Water Goblin]*, based on the poem by Erben, was then recited by Radovan Lukavský. His sober yet dramatic rendering well suited the character of Fibich's generally dark, fateful and theatrically evocative music, although the music was perhaps kept too much in the background of the gripping events of the narrated story. Antonín Rejcha's *Symphony in E flat* was meant to provide a counterweight, but could do so only partially. This was partly because in terms of inventiveness the piece is not such as to go beyond Rejcha's undoubtedly valuable chamber works, and partly because the Hradec Králové orchestra were clearly unable to offer the chamber unity of sound and perfect precision that the piece demanded. Kalabis's *Symphonic Variations*, however, is a composition that has proved its artistic value over many years, and here conductor Vajnar deserves acknowledgement for the thorough way in which he respected the structural unity of this exceptional music and the distinction with which he balanced its three basic moods - lyrical, tense and overwrought, and humorous - moulding them into a unified whole. The orchestra also coped very well with the difficulties of performing the technically demanding *In Honour of Charles Baudelaire* by Ivana Loudová. The brilliantly worked composition *Spleen* already has more than three decades of successful performance behind it, and remains clear testimony to the composer's exceptional ability to handle timbres and establish an attractive musical space in which the continuous tension never vanishes for a second. The virtues of the piece were again confirmed by the tumultuous applause that greeted it. The final composition on the programme was Karel Boleslav Jirák's *Philharmonic Variations*. A pupil of Novák and Foerster, Jirák wrote the piece for the Czech Philharmonic in 1940. He gave it a beautiful, lyrical theme of great spaciousness, and the ten variations are

developed in so diverse and vivid a manner that even in a relatively long composition, they never tend toward stereotype. I shall come back to the next five concerts after the 26th of April, when a concert by the Brno State Philharmonic will close the cycle.

/Petar Zapletal/

## New Publication



Vladimír Kouřil's 400-page **Jazzová sekce v čase a nečase 1971-1987 [The Jazz Section in Fair Weather and Foul]** (only in Czech) has been published by the Torst Press in Prague. It is the chronicle of an organisation that was a continual thorn in the side of the communist regime, which ultimately prohibited its activities and arrested and imprisoned its leaders in 1987. Its work was then at least partly taken over by the Unijazz organisation, aimed at promoting multigenre and alternative cultural activities. Between the two parts of a 77-page history of the organisation, there are chapters offering condensed versions of the incredible quantity of periodical and one-off printed materials published by the Jazz Section, which had interests not only in jazz, but also in rock, alternative and classical music, the visual arts and literature (including L. Vrkočová: *Hudba terezínského ghetta [The Music of the Terezín Ghetto]*, J. Kladiva: *E. F. Burian, F. Nietzsche: Richard Wagner*), a selection of minutes from the organisation's committee meetings, official letters and documents and a recapitulation of the 9 Prague Jazz Days that the section held (out of a total of 12 planned).



# Martin Opršál: Reverberations

P. Włosok, J. Druckman, D. Dlouhý, A. Pape,  
N. J. Živković  
Bárny v.o.s. 1999, Bárny 007



The marimba player and percussionist Martin Opršál (born 1968), is one of the products of the percussion department of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno. His CD "Reverberations" is the first world-class marimba album ever to be released in this country. M. Opršál currently teaches melodic percussion

instruments and chamber music at the Janáček Academy (JAMU). He was also one of the founder members of the DAMA DAMA ensemble, in which he continued until 1997.

The percussion department at JAMU was opened in the early Eighties, and since then has trained a series of outstanding musicians. However incredible it may seem, no percussion department at all has yet been opened at the Prague Academy (HAMU), and so we in Prague and other major cities can only dream of the kind of results that JAMU in Brno has achieved.

The CD "Reverberations" takes its name from the cycle of six shorter pieces for solo marimba by the composer Pavel Włosok (born 1973), who comes from Český Těšín. The CD is framed by recordings of *Reverberations I* and *III*. From these two examples of the cycle it appears that the author has drawn inspiration from Chick Corea's cycle of shorter pieces for piano *Childrens Songs* (in his turn, Corea had drawn on Bartók). Since only two pieces are presented one cannot, of course, judge whether the whole of Włosok's cycle is closely inter-connected, or whether, as with Corea, it is simply a "free" series of miniatures influenced by jazz and minimalism.

The second piece on the album is *Reflections on the Nature of Water* by the American Jacob Druckman (1928-1996). The information in the booklet reveals that the composer was interested in "exploring sound and its colours in natural and electronic form", and this orientation is clear in the *Reflections*. Here the marimba often seems to be simulating electronic sounds, different tonal clusters and sonic fields, but at other times its natural qualities emerge strongly. The piece consists of six parts, of which only four are presented on the CD.

*Levitation* by Dan Dlouhý, the 6th piece on the CD, is another of the composer's small programmatic works. This duo for marimba, viola (played by Pavel Cypris), bells and chimes, is conceived by the author as a "purification". The players begin at the deepest levels (from the "mud"), and via an essential passage in "the middle", grow up to the heights and levitation (and all in eight minutes and three seconds). The piece would not be so arresting if it were not for the remarkable passages in its second half when the marimba keys are (I believe) played with bows. This magical sound is twice interrupted by marimba glissandos on the "white" keys.

The title of the seventh piece on the CD, by the Danish composer born in the USA Andy Pape (born 1955), is "Marrimba". The word rouses Latin American or Afro-Caribbean expectations (arriba, marrimba, rumba), but these inspirations are very hard to

identify in the music itself. This is more a playful exploration of the technical capacities of marimbists (to play accompaniment and solo at the same time is difficult on all instruments, but doubly difficult on the marimba). In my view the high point of the whole CD is the piece placed second to last: *Uneven Souls* by the Yugoslav (?) composer Nebojš Jovan Živković (born 1962). It is performed by Opršál and three members of DAMA DAMA (Dan Dlouhý, Ctibor Bártek and Stanislav Pliska) on various percussion instruments, and a quartet of male voices (Marek Olbrzymek, Jiří Ressler, Vít Šujan and Štefan Bugala). For the sixteen minutes and forty-four seconds it takes to play the piece, we are offered a sound portrait of "homo balkanicus" at the end of the twentieth century. This portrait does not, however, fulfil the stereotypical expectations that many of us may have. The CD concludes with *Reverberations III* by Pavel Włosok.

The CD is very well put together in terms of choice of music and overall artistic conception. It includes music that is more accessible to the listener, and very difficult music. To sum up: Martin Opršál's CD "Reverberations" is an excellent album, in which there are some quite astounding moments, music that you will listen to with your head in your hands, and music that will caress you and to which you would happily wake up in the morning.

/Jaroslav Pašík/

● The music of Jan Jirásek has already been performed abroad with notable success on several occasions, and 1999 brought further international presentations of his work. In March his choral work *Te laudamus* was premiered in the Church of St. Bartholomew in New York by the Hradec Králové children's choir Jitro [Dawn] directed by Jiří Skopal. The children from Hradec Králové then sang the eight-minute piece at all the concerts in their Spring tour, which continued in Germany and Austria. The Czech premiere of this work is planned for some time this year. Jirásek's *Kyrie eleison*, premiered in 1994, was released in October 1999 on a CD published by the World Festival of Sacred Music in Stuttgart at the suggestion of the Dalai Lama of Tibet, who chose the pieces. It was the only contemporary classical piece on the CD apart from one composition by A. Pärt.

Orff's arrangement of Bach's *St. Luke Passion*, which Jan Jirásek has reconstructed from Orff's notes as a commission from the Munich Biennial, came out in January 2000 on a CD co-produced by the Classico firm in Denmark and the Czech firm Bonart with an international team of performers.

The Editor would like to request all our friends who reprint material contained in Czech music 2000 kindly to send him either the respective copy of their publication or otherwise to inform him about the reprinting of our texts, and thanks them in advance for their courtesies in this matter.



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