

Zbyněk Vostřák

80 Years after His Birth

COMPOSER

If he had lived, the Czech composer Zbyněk Vostřák would have celebrated his eightieth birthday this year. In his time he was a composer about whom many people talked and many stayed silent. Even in his lifetime his music was very rarely performed and today, as time goes by, awareness of his music is fading. There have been only a few performances of his works in the last decade (they could probably be counted on the fingers of one hand), and only one CD has been released, and even then not of an especially representative work. Yet few people would disagree that Vostřák represents an exceptional phenomenon in Czech music. What is the reason for this contradictory situation? Why has it not proved possible to revive Vostřák's legacy at least in part, as

has happened in the case of Kabeláč, for example? The answer would seem to lie in an unfortunate combination of historical circumstances. Vostřák dedicated most of his musically active life to composing in the style known as New Music, the aesthetics of which he adopted and with which he fully identified himself. Together with a few other Czech composers (who can also be counted on the fingers of one hand), he thus filled a gap in the stylistic spectrum of Czech music. Moreover, even within this group of composers he can be regarded as an unusually radical creative type. As such he perfectly corresponded to the stereotype of the enemy as it developed in communist cultural policy from the Seventies to the mid-Eighties. In 1985 Vostřák died suddenly, and so he did not live to see the mild

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political relaxation of the pre-revolution years. After the revolution in 1989, lack of support and internal fragmentation meant that Czech contemporary music started to have problems surviving. Vostřák's music of the Sixties remains too inaccessible to audiences for it to be domesticated in normal concert repertoire, but it is already insufficiently fashionable to attract the organisers of avantgarde festivals. For this reason, we are still waiting for his renaissance. We may not wait in vain, however, since unrecognised and half-forgotten personalities are sometimes later lifted onto a pedestal. And when the time comes we may immediately have several premières of unperformed works (*Vítězná perla* [The Victorious Pearl], *Tajemství růže* [The Secret of the Rose], *Sinfonia*) which Vostřák wrote in his period of greatest isolation at the end of his life.

Let us, however, look again at the qualities that make Vostřák's work so exceptional and make it so worthy of a renaissance. In his youth Vostřák proved his musical talent as the author of successful operas and ballets (*Snow White*, *Viktorka*) which in the Eighties were still to be found in provincial repertoires. Contemporaries can also remember his operas of the Fifties. At that time Vostřák was still composing in a late Romantic and Neo-Classical style like the great majority of Czech composers then active. In 1960 he reached a turning-point. At the time when he was finishing his last opera *Rozbitý džbán* [The Broken Jug] he was already getting to know the works and texts of the composers of New Music. He studied Jelínek's *Introduction to Dodecaphony* in Eduard Herzog's translation, the texts of



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Adorno and Boulez, and the music of Webern and Stockhausen. Together with other Czech composers he attended the Darmstadt courses. His decision for the new style was absolute and thorough. Unlike the majority of Czech composers whose knowledge of New Music led them to use elements of the new technique on the basis of Neo-Classical musical thought, for Vostřák the change meant a thorough-going rejection of tradition at all levels. It was as if a different composer had appeared, and for a composer to take such a step in his forties is very courageous. In the Czech environment, moreover, it promised no easy path but on the contrary, relegation to the category of suspicious cranks on the margin of official musical life. Fortunately, the Czechoslovakia of the Sixties was gradually opening up to the world and Vostřák was given the opportunity of directing the ensemble *Musica viva pragensis*, which performed at important European contemporary music festivals. With the ensemble, Vostřák's music reached the

Warsaw Autumn, Donaueschingen, the Venice Biennial and other leading festivals. Vostřák also conducted at the ISCM festival held in Prague in 1967 after a long interval. After the invasion of 1968, *Musica viva* survived for another four years until 1973, when it was prohibited from appearing after purges in cultural circles. In the Seventies Vostřák hung on for a time as an independent composer thanks to occasional commissions from abroad, but later he could only make a living transcribing parts. The Union of Composers on three occasions showed some indulgence for non-members at that period: in 1981 with the premièring of *Fair Play* (*Mahasarasvati*) and *Parabolas*, and in 1982 *Variations for Orchestra* (*Cathedral*) at Union concerts. But Vostřák never heard most of his new works, since their premièring either took place abroad or they were never performed. Yet it was in the last fifteen years of his life that Vostřák wrote the most interesting of his works. He theoretically elaborated and perfected his own compositional method

based on separating out and rendering independent the three main formal principles and serialising them, so that charming, crystal clear musical patterns emerged. Into the structure of his works he systematically projected his non-musical ideas, which he drew from his broad interests in mysticism, philosophy, science and religion. According to his creative poetics, not everything was worthy of representation in a work of art, and least of all the subjective emotions of the author himself. He was interested in the depersonalised, objective principles, of course sanctified by some spiritual idea, that generated musical form. From this point of view he was more an ecstatic than a romantic in music. His late private work, written in solitude and isolation with unbelievable effort and humility, has given us several remarkable pieces of music, quite unlike those which are responses to social demand and commission.

/Miroslav Pudlák/

Gruppen in Warsaw

This year's 43rd Warsaw Autumn Festival of contemporary music (Poland) took place on the 13th - 23rd of September, and for the first time ever in the history of this celebrated world avantgarde event a Czech symphony orchestra was taking part, in the form of the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra.

Three years of collaboration with the Prague composer and conductor Petr Kotík, who since 1969 has lived in New York, has brought the JPO not only to last year's Prague Spring, but this time to a prestigious appearance in Warsaw. Their concert at the Legia Sports Hall was attended by about a thousand, confirming the prediction of the main Warsaw Spring organiser Krzysztof Knittel that the crown of the week-long meeting of fans of new music would be the performance of *Gruppen* by the modern German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, as the work's Polish première. This highly complex work was written in the later Fifties and is regarded as one of the weightiest works of 20th - Century music. Its performance requires the presence of about 120 players, and so the JPA was augmented by the New York S. E. M. Ensemble, German soloists and players from the DAMA DAMA group.

Although a similar programme had been presented last year in the Spanish Hall of the Prague Castle, all three conductors - Petr Kotík, Zsolt Nagy and Christian Arming literally had their hands full preparing for the concert. Before their departure for the Polish capital the musicians spent four days rehearsing in Ostrava and then three days rehearsing in Warsaw from morning to night in unbelievably cold conditions. The forty-year-old composer from Prague, Martin Smolka, was present at rehearsals and so had an exceptional opportunity to follow progress on his composition called *Neš'í* which he had previously known only on paper. He wrote this remarkable three-movement work as a commission from the management of the Warsaw Autumn, as a logical complement to the design of an evening for three orchestras and three conductors. This year it had its world première in Poland and opened the long anticipated concert. Cries of "bravo" and tumultuous applause greeted the end of the second piece on the programme, which was based on acoustic waves fully exploiting the spaces between the different orchestras. It had been written for last year's Prague Spring by the American composer Alvin

Lucier and he had flown straight from the USA to hear the performance of his composition *Diamonds*. By the time of the second interval the atmosphere in the hall was charged with energy, and the mainly young public engaged in lively discussions, but also looked with interest at the unusual percussion instruments that any Stockhausen expert would immediately have recognised as a sign of the experience to come in the next 25 minutes. No changes were made in the staging of the third piece. The public continued to sit in the centre between the three orchestras, two of which were placed opposite each other at a distance of several dozen metres, while the third closed the space between theme and the conductor of the middle orchestra Zsolt Nagy therefore took on the greatest share of the responsibility for the interplay between all three orchestras. The conductors stood facing the audience and for the while time never took their eyes off each other, while the players sat with their backs to the audience. Finding oneself in the middle of an orchestra, literally in the turmoil and hullabaloo of the drastic tones so cleverly and painstakingly written by Stockhausen, was a completely unique experience for everyone. The performance of his *Gruppen* is demanding financially as well, and so Stockhausen-lovers can only expect to experience something of the kind perhaps two or three times in their lives.

The "third time" for the JPO will be next year in New York, to which the philharmonic received an official invitation shortly before the Warsaw appearance. It is essential to praise the JPO, which after exhausting commitment in terms of rehearsal time and despite the often very unusual form of interpretation gave an absolutely concentrated performance. This too was rewarded in Warsaw by long and loud ovations.

/Renata Spisarová/

▼ Conductors P. Kotík, Z. Nagy and Ch. Arming (from left)



Faidra

OPERA

A New Opera for Prague

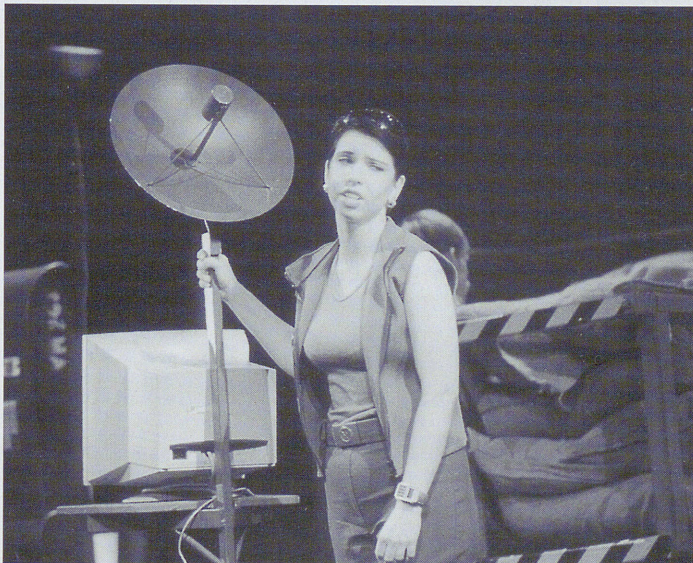
There is no doubt that the première of Emil Viklický's *Faidra* [Phaedra] was an eagerly awaited cultural event, and one that attracted a degree of media interest that is unusual here for any new opera. Its success seemed to be a foregone conclusion for several reasons. It was the winning opera in the international competition, "A New Opera for Prague 2000", and it is the work of a Czech who is mainly known to the public as a jazz composer and musician, and so promised a "fresh wind in the sails". It also has an intriguing and attractive subject - an accusation of rape in the modern military. It was clear in advance that the opera would not be some indigestible piece of avantgarde, since in that case the jury would certainly have chosen one of the other works entered for the competition. There was no real prospect of an opera première of ground-breaking significance in the context of the most recent developments in contemporary music, i.e. an experiment that could turn out to be either an artistic triumph or a total flop. On the other hand, there was a real opportunity to open the way for a contemporary opera that would address a new, mainly young audience, and so offer a more cultivated alternative to the popular musical in this country. The idea is wholly understandable and legitimate.

The opera's production team worked with this principle in mind. The director Jiří Nekvasil chose young singers who looked the parts they played, and the stage designer Daniel Dvořák created an impressive and "realistic" set (of the type used in musicals), while Simona Rybáková designed equally realistically perfect costumes. The main action of the opera - the story of a woman driven by the sudden incomprehensible coldness of her lover and injured pride to make false accusations of rape - is given another political and social dimension by the division of the stage. The main action unfolds front stage in an IFOR base, and the director decided to contrast this with the "real" Balkan situation by filling rest of the stage with a crowd of Balkan refugees who as it were live their own life consisting of unending displacement and violence. This was clearly a way of underlining the protected and artificial environment of the base with its "pseudo problems", in this case the main action, with the "real" events and problems of the region. The juxtaposition of the two worlds culminated in a rather superficially conceived staging of a visit from Lady Di, accompanied by the only longer section of purely instrumental music in the opera. The staging described has two main effects. The quantity of background scenes (fights between the refugees, the visit to the field hospital and so forth) means that

the audience is never bored, but they also divert the audience from the front-stage action, and render it comparatively lifeless. This is clearly the main stumbling-block of the opera. While Eva Petrová's libretto was based on the real case of an American woman sergeant who accused a Czech soldier of rape, the librettist herself says that the primary inspiration was the classic mythological parallel, the story of Queen Phaedra, in its abstract form as a tragedy of pride injured by rejection and leading to uncontrollable vengefulness. The problem here is that while we expect strong emotions and violent behaviour from the ancient heroes and tragedy resulting from the fatal logic of actions and their results, it is hard to believe in comparable emotions and acts when faced with young contemporary characters, especially if we are not given sufficient insight into their thoughts and behaviour and the end of the whole "tragedy" remains open. It is hard to avoid the feeling that "nothing much has happened".

In conclusion I should like to make a few comments on the music. Viklický is undoubtedly a composer with great natural musical feeling, and in *Faidra* this is expressed above all in his fresh melodic approach. On the other hand, I regard him as principally a master of fusion, and his decision to write the opera purely in the style of serious music seems to me unnecessarily limiting and even damaging. The orchestral score reflects not only Viklický's love for Janáček but also his experience with film music, which at times becomes a little too obtrusive. The instrumental intermezzo using electric guitar, however, shows that there is absolutely no need to fear such effects, and that they can only liven up the flow of a symphonic music that has no aspirations to innovation.

/Tereza Havelková/



▲ Jana Sýkorová as Faidra

Competition Results

● The International Ema Destinnová Singing Competition was this year moved from August to the 15th-16th May. The international jury, presided over by Hana Štolfová - Bandová from Bratislava, awarded the absolute victory to the holder of the 1st Prize in Category B (up to 35 years), Karla Bytnarová. The second place

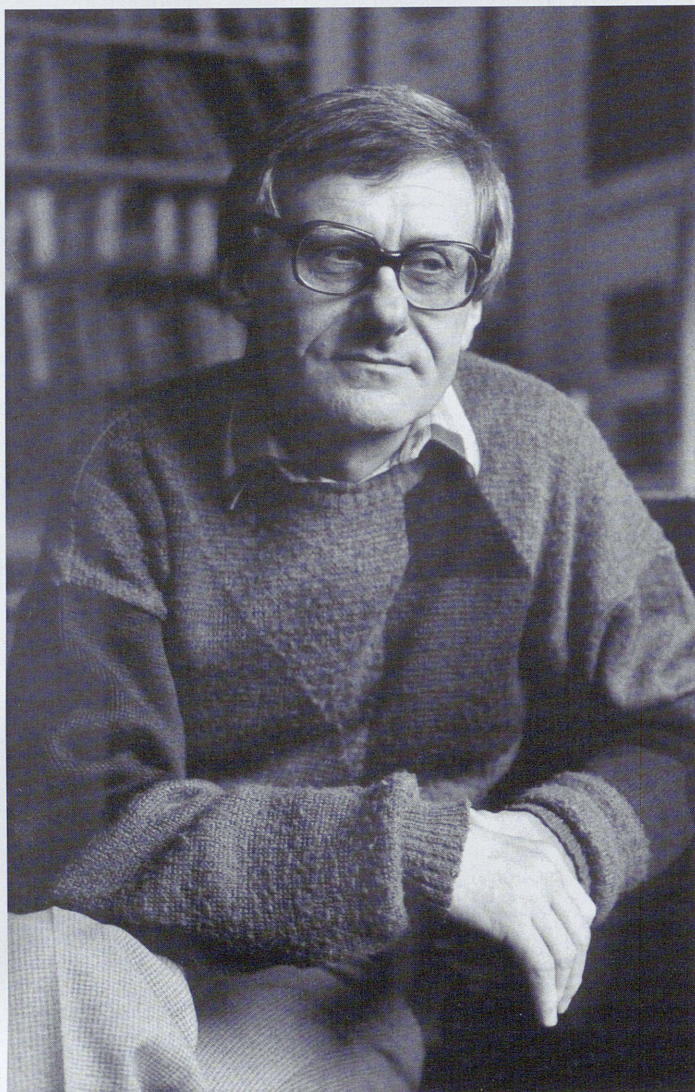
went jointly to Dong-Sook Shin of South Korea and Barbora Velehradská, and third place went to Hiromi Mieno of Japan. In Category A (up to 24 years) the first prize was not awarded, Andrea Kalivodová was placed second and Dana Budínová 3rd.

● In the television festival Zlatá Praha (Golden Prague) the best placed Czech programme was the film version of Bohuslav Martinů's opera "The Greek Passion", which won an honourable mention. The first prize went to Swedish SVT television for its film version of Tchaikovsky's ballet "The Sleeping

Beauty". The four "Czech Crystal" prizes in individual categories also went to productions from abroad. The German company Eins 54 Film won the prize for the best music programme with its visualisation of Schönberg's "Pierrot Lunaire", called "One Night, One Life". The French film "Jazzman from the Gulag" won the documentary section. The Swiss project "Passengers" took the prize in the dance programme section, and the British film of Jonathan Dove's opera "Flight" was the victor in the film recording section.

Marek Kopelent

- Portrait



Marek Kopelent was born on the 28th of April, 1932. He studied composition in the class of Prof. Jaroslav Řídký at the Prague Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts, where he graduated in 1955. He is one of the composers who from the Sixties on has systematically drawn on new trends in world music, both in terms of his own compositions and in his activities as a music organiser. As early as 1969 he won a scholarship from the German Academy (DAAD) to study in what was then West Berlin. From 1965 he was artistic director of the ensemble *Musica viva Pragensis*, which focused on the performance on New Music. In the period of what was known "Political Normalisation" the activity of the ensemble was banned and Kopelent also lost his job as editor at Supraphon. In 1976 - 1991 he made his living as a co-repetitor at the dance department of the People's School of Art in Radotín. At this period he composed many works that were, mainly only performed abroad. After 1989 he became a professor of composition at the Prague Music Faculty (HAMU). In 1991 - 2 he worked as a music expert for the Office of the President of the Republic and in 1995 - 6 was a member of the Ministry of Culture Board for the Czech Philharmonic. Marek Kopelent is a founder member of the *Ateliér 90* association, takes part in the organisation of the *TRÍDENÍ* (Three-Day) contemporary music festival, and annually organises the International Composing Courses in Český Krumlov. In 1991 he was awarded the title of "Chevalier des arts et des lettres" by the French government.

Recently you were awarded a Classic Prize for life-long services to Czech musical culture. What does the prize mean to you?
Above all, of course, I'm delighted. What does it mean to me?

It ought to mean something. At the moment I'm waiting to see what it means in practice. In a way it took me unawares, because I don't know if I really deserve it. Another thing is what difference it makes to the public attitude, but given the lack of interest of the Czech media in what is going on in serious music, one probably shouldn't have too great expectations. Because the reaction not just to my prize, but to the Classic Prize as such, doesn't seem to me to be adequate to the importance that we, the musicians, might attribute to it.

Do you mean the interest of the musical public, or the general public?

The general public has to hear about these things somehow. But between the musicians themselves and the public there's an intervening layer, the media, and that's the fly in the ointment. Some of them try to insist that the public isn't interested in serious music, but we know from what happens behind our thick forest frontiers that it isn't necessarily true. It's enough to look at Finland, for example. Maybe it's because of this headlong changeover to a capitalist system, so everything is judged in terms of money and every step has to be based on as much popular interest as possible. Incidentally, Communist ideology used the same kind of slogan, always talking about the people and using the argument to force artists into a corner, saying they had to create the kind of work that would appeal to a popular audience. Now we seem to have got back to the same point, with the idea that what interests the broadest public has to be the guideline for the public media, whether television or radio, and probably the press as well. It's a very Czech situation.

In the relevant circles, the state of contemporary serious music in this country is regarded as gloomy. Do you yourself have any proposals or ideas on this to improve the situation?

This state is mainly the result of indifference. Indifference from various quarters. It's natural for the public to be uninterested, and that's not the public's fault, since it needs to be somehow led to have an interest. But then there's the problem of lack of interest from the performers, and this is a very serious problem, which goes back to the communist era when there was a huge decline in the level of information. The educational system, special music school system and above all the higher educational institutions are to blame as well. This is because with few exceptions the teachers in instrumental and vocal fields didn't pay enough attention to contemporary music, and in my view that means they didn't fulfil their functions as higher schools. The longer this situation goes on, the fewer performers there will be who are trained for contemporary music. Fortunately, the way life is means that you always find some individuals who are attracted to contemporary music among performers, and so the whole area isn't turning into a complete desert.

Another source of indifference is, as I've already said, the media. I mean Czech Television, but also Czech Radio, where even the Vltava station, which is designed for serious music, has to fight for its existence simply because it has to show certain audience ratings. The time allocated to contemporary music is very small here, and I personally have criticisms of the whole planning concept. Some time ago I thought up and submitted a proposal that at least two time sections should be devoted to contemporary music. One of them could include anyone who wanted to play - that's the old rather socialist principle of equality, which ensures that in our radio you always get space given to composers who in my view should have been forgotten long ago. But then I thought there should be a kind of gold series, where the editing team would try to make quality distinctions in modern Czech music. Some kind of filter has to come, and it's absurd that there should be 200 composers in such a small country, as there used to be in Czechoslovak times. Certainly it's also a question of personnel and positions. In my experience, it's the musicologists who occupy similar decision-making positions abroad,

and not the composers, since composers don't have the necessary objectivity.

How then do you see the prospects for finding a way to the general public?

It's a question of habit. Contemporary music has to be played, put on. It's nonsense to talk about the general public, since it will never take up contemporary music. Even classical music in general only has a narrow audience. But that was always the case and only romantic ideas, for example the ideas of our national revivalists, meant that people wrote national operas and classical music became a political issue, which was of course just a phase in social development. But even that thin layer of the public has become thinner. I have to repeat that it's a problem of the education system, and even of elementary schooling, where roughly from the 60s music teaching became archaic, and I have the general impression that the situation hasn't improved much. First we have to teach people to listen, and only then can we expect them to start appreciating contemporary music.

You are one of the Czech pioneers of "New Music" and in fact it's "Grand Old Man". How do you see its position at present, and how do you see its future in the existing plurality of styles?

New Music with a capital "N" - *c'est fini* - it's an epoch that ended sometime in the 1970s. In Czechoslovakia in the 1960s we were able to get on a train that was picking up speed, as soon cracks appeared in the system, and those were fantastic years. Then the unified style fragmented and today the situation is truly complicated. It's a paradox that I've lived for ten years in a free country, and can travel, but in fact I travel less because of it, and so I don't have an entirely objective view of the situation in contemporary music. At home people keep arguing about how this music is finished, and as you suggested in your question, plurality of styles is the order of the day. I don't know how to come to terms with it, since I belong to a generation for which style was a major direction-finder in artistic production. There are problems with this polystylistic atmosphere in teaching as well, since the relativism that you find there can in my view even be dangerous. How can you get some idea across properly when on all sides you're immediately bombarded by the notion that everything could be completely different. Then you either have to give up teaching, or try and find some acceptable way of defining a threshold beyond which one cannot go. That's my motto, I call that modernism. Nobody wants music to be written using dodecaphonic technique, or to beat on the empty straw of aleatorics, but it's a question of the vertical axis - the harmonic order. That is what we all struggle with.

So how do you try to educate your students?

It's my view that the task of the school is primarily to teach students their craft. The knowledge of craft means, among other things, the art of choosing from the quantity of given material, and this in turn means a certain discipline. That's the reason why the first function of the teacher is an effort to limit, almost at the expense of fantasy, and to strengthen inner discipline, and only then can fantasy be released again and the range of possible methods be extended. Relativism in the post-modern spirit often leads to a sense of absolute creative freedom that results in compositions that go almost beyond Scriabin, and that's a major step backwards. I don't understand or approve this road. Teaching is at least fifty percent a psychological question. Sometimes I feel like a doctor, and that's the exciting element - the fact that you have to find a way to the soul of a person who is struggling against you, but at the same time keep the relationship on a friendly basis.

Do you think that New Music put down sufficient roots in this country, and was given enough space. Don't you sometimes feel like a lonely long-distance runner?

To a certain extent yes, and in fact that's logical. We had the bad luck that after the 60s the regime became so rigid. The first wave of composers who discovered themselves in New Music came in the late 50s and early 60s. Their numbers gradually increased, but of course at the beginning of the 70s many of them rapidly abandoned New Music and started to proclaim very loudly that their music was accessible. They were giving into the ideological and political pressure of the regime. But even before, the monopoly of the Union of Composers had been so solid and the people in decision-making positions so conservative that the take-off of the Czech avantgarde had taken a very long time. *Musica viva pragensis* had won a reputation abroad and at home it was still being ridiculed. The period of respect was actually confined to 2 - 3 years, 1968 - 70. How could New Music ever have put down roots in such a short period? To a certain extent it perhaps put down roots in consciousness and survived in verbal communications, and private meetings to listen to recordings, for example at my home. But it's true, of course, that communist ideology succeeded in pushing the few composers with an interest in New Music to the margins and unfortunately I have the feeling that this syndrome persists, especially in the brains of people in some institutions, whether the Prague Spring, the radio or the television.. There's still a certain prevalent suspicion, and people still have that feeling that everything must be "rubber-stamped". And that has got itself into the heads of performers too, I can imagine that when they hear Kopelent, they prefer to look the other way.

Your music is often performed abroad, and even in the communist period you were regularly invited to foreign festivals. Alongside Miloslav Kabeláč and Petr Eben you are probably one of the most performed Czech composers of the later 20th Century. At home, of course, your work was never so frequently presented. Has this changed in the last 10 years or do you still feel a certain deficiency? There are maybe 18 or 19 works that have never been performed here, of which 2 or 3 have never been played at all. You won't believe it, but in this country where there are so many good choirs, there's a deficiency in the performance of choral music. One reason is because singers here haven't been trained in what is known as "solfege", i.e. intonation, and contemporary works are just too difficult for the choirs. Of course we also have performers who are very keen. Every composer probably always thinks that his works aren't performed enough. Perhaps, given the award you mentioned at the beginning, I have a right to think this as well.

In the last decade you have devoted a lot of time to organisational activities. Has this had an effect on your composing?

It has limited it in terms of quantity. But - to put it in a nutshell - I regarded the work as my duty. I couldn't just stand idly by when I knew that since 1948 I had lived in parallel with something that I had never identified with and that I had finally lived to see a free republic. I think organising activity is natural to me, and it's probably significant that when I was a child I was a member of a club similar to the Junák Club and attended Sokol, and was a cultural officer at my secondary school and directed the girls' choir. When I was only ten I organised folksinging by the children from the neighbourhood, and had a little stick and conducted them. I'm a busybody. But of course it means that I don't have so much time for composing.

Can you think of any event in Czech cultural life in recent times that has given you special pleasure?

Last year I very much enjoyed the performance of Stockhausen's "Gruppen" at the Prague Spring, and I always enjoy the Marathon of Contemporary Music, which I regard as very important. And certainly there are plenty of other things that I can't immediately bring to mind.

/Tereza Havelková/

A Czech Accent

was the subtitle of this year's EXHIBITION OF NEW MUSIC, which took place in Brno in the first week of October. After several years in which this festival of new music had been "dominated" by the import of composers and performers from abroad, this "Expo 2000" was devoted to Czech and Moravian authors with only one exception - the concert by "Meta duo" from France.

KIENTZYAD IN THE CENTRE OF BRNO

The 13th Exhibition of New Music, subtitled "A Czech Accent" was launched in a "typically Czech" way, by the Franco-Cuban META DUO - Daniel Kientzy and Reina Portuondo.

It was an uncompromising opening (unleashing a superb bass saxophone sound attack on the audience), a surprise (although I was familiar with Kientzy's earlier performance, my eyes [ears] were really popping out) and in some respects quite unexpected. But the "unexpected" ought, of course, to be a characteristic of new music if it is to be genuinely new. Professors enjoy telling people to "be specific" ! So let's be specific.

What was in this country an unusually high-quality sound apparatus offered eight-channel reception from amplifiers located at the front, sides and back. This enhanced individual pieces that already made colourful use of the sound/space relationship. De Laubier's *Saxophonerie* was probably the most effective composition piece of the evening. The conjoining of composer, sound engineer and Kientzy's performance on the bass saxophone made possible the creation of a variable field that filled the space, to the last square metre, with a vivid river of sound that as it were flowed backwards from the ocean to its source.

Most of the audience at new music concerts are orientated to relatively "academic" music, but I think that if an orthodox heavy-metal fan and a professor of music were sitting next to each other, they would both have been satisfied. The following world première of *Pour Jorge* by Cornel Taran was dedicated to the memory of the excellent Portuguese composer Jorge Peixinho. Kientzy is deeply familiar with his work, having performed his four long pieces of 1995, for example. The extremely impressive work of this pupil of Messiaen convinced us that we would witness an outstanding evening. The next piece, *Lisboa, Tram 28* by Elżbieta Sikora began with the creation of interesting sounds directly on the body of the instrument, to continue later with solo instrument accompanied by an electronic part containing natural sound

(conversations..) and synthetic sound. The radical turning-point came in the third part with the entry of "metal" digital acoustic colours. In the fourth part the piece got round to vividly justifying its title (with sounds of trams, braking cars, voices and so forth). After the interval Kientzy engaged in musical dialogue with himself in the form of saxophone parts on a "preburnt" CD (could prerecorded tapes and DAT be on the way out?). Now we got to the advertised Czech accent in the *Conversations with Meta Duo* by Arnošt Parsch. Putting this piece immediately after *Lisboa*, in which the electronic element was very strong, was a clever idea. In Parsch's piece, it was the compositional technique of the individual saxophone parts that stood out. This was the world première of a composition written directly for Meta Duo. *Tibia* was a piece from another Brno composer - Rudolf Růžička. This pioneer of electronic music in the Czech Republic composed the work in 1984 and only a year later Kientzy recorded it on disk as the piece that won the Marcel Joss Prize in Paris. This unobtrusive and in its way fragile, progressively intensifying piece, was once again performed with great skill and feeling, and an emphasis on the acoustic shades of the solo instrument.

The electronics then modulated the instrumental reverberations with the help of a continuously flowing accompanying element. This evoked different kinds of pipes and flutes. Unfortunately, acoustic interference in exposed parts of the piece gave the impression of distortion of an otherwise excellent sound. *Pulsions* by Anatol Viero depended on finger acrobatics with a subtle electronic input. The concluding *Rituel Violet* by the Brazilian composer Jorge Antuna brought a highly effective and acoustically interesting series of spatial high jinks with the tenor saxophone. Kientzy waved it and lifted

it up to the heights in an imagined dialogue with an imaginary world invisible to us. Tumultuous applause was the logical end to a performance that had lasted almost two and a half hours.

Just two final comments. I have deliberately not mentioned all the kinds of saxophone, from soprano to bass (and Kientzy owns a mammoth double-bass as well) that were used in the course of the performances. And now to the less visible half of the duo. The lady in the background - Reina Portuondo - operated a battery of the most diverse effect processors, a harmoniser, sampler and CD. In some of the compositions the interaction in real time was more marked, and elsewhere the interaction was based on precisely formulated time data in the scores. A specially developed system of eight-channel sound projection known as enneaphony was used. The most important aspect, of course, was the overall, extraordinarily professional performance of the duo and the corresponding reaction of the public in this sound laboratory deep in the dark gullet of the Experimental Theatre Centre in the House of the Lords of Fanal, in the Year of Our Lord 2000, on Sunday the 1st of October.



Daniel Kientzy

PORTRAITS

While the opening and closing concerts of the festival were devoted to music by several composers, the three intervening evenings each featured the work of one of three composers of different generations and different concepts of music.

The first evening belonged to **Alois Piňos** (1925). The music chosen for the concert from his extensive works consisted of electro-acoustic music from the Sixties to his most recent output in 1999-2000. In the field of EAM Piňos is clearly one of our most important composers and his corpus of work in the field is one of the largest. His *Concerto for Orchestra and Tape* of 1964 is a reminder of a time when technical advances allowed the production of the first work for tape in this country as well. From the point of view of the use of electro-acoustic elements, this is the first Czech composition combining the sound of an orchestra and magnetic tape. The second movement, full of vitality and optimism, was played at the concert.

Static Music (1970) is one of the pieces that is inextricably linked to a visual element created by the important Brno artist Dalibor Chatrný, with whom Piňos also worked on other pieces presented at the concert - *Mříže* [*Grille*] and *Geneze* [*Genesis*], both from 1970.

Kontrapunky přírody [*Counterpoints of Nature*] was written in 1978 and consists of an electro-acoustic triptych (the 2nd and 3rd parts, *Zoo* and *Bel Canto*, were played at the concert). Although they were created by what today seem very unsophisticated means, they remain impressive for their philosophical coherence and methods of composition that in their time were undoubtedly ground-breaking.

Metatance [*Metadances*] of 1975, which was played at the concert in the version for flute, violin and tape, and which is based on the electronic transformation of already existing dance music, is a typical example of Piňos's popular alternative compositions. The piece has often been performed in the version for percussion and electric violin (The Konvergence Duo), and the version for solo percussion (Dan Dlouhý) plus tape. Here the live realisation of *Metadances III* was taken up the members of the Golean Duo, Lenka Šimková (flute) and Lenka Šupková (violin and electric violin).

Pantha rhei? is among those of the composer's works that are closest to authentic sacred music, while still being far from the popular idea that equates the sacred with the (almost) liturgical. The final part "Catharsis", which was played at the concert, only confirmed that in the fifteen years of its life it has retained its spiritual resonance.

The last three pieces at the concert were, by contrast, devoted to some of the most recent of Piňos's works.

Stille Nacht recalls the famous carol by Gruber, but it is present only latently and in the course of the music never appears in recognisable form. The use of the name alone, however, underlines the poetic and even spiritual atmosphere of the work. *A View into the Windy Landscape* is a team composition by Alois Piňos and his son Mikuláš, in which an electro-acoustic component (created by Mikuláš in 1999) interpenetrates an acoustic component written by Alois for the Golean Duo a year before.

The last piece of the evening was *Lux in Tenebris*, inspired by the attempt "to express in my own way the eternal and so actually slightly banal but urgent theme of the battle of good and evil. Light and darkness, hope and despair".

The concert provided a remarkable cross-section of Piňos's work in the field of EAM, showing both the "buttresses" of the author's approach to composition and the mutability of his form of expression that allows for great variation and flexible application. The visual component used in most of the pieces for tape alone also ensured that the whole concert - more than one hundred minutes without a pause and so very demanding on audience concentration - never lost interest.

Josef Adamík (1947) is a rather mysterious figure in Czech contemporary music. After several remarkable compositions in the Seventies and early Eighties there was a long, fifteen-year silence, at the end of which works appeared that testified to a rejection not only of modernism, but perhaps of modern civilisation as a whole. The *Wind Quintet* (1977-79) is a reminder of the first period of the author's career. It is based on alternative approaches to both instrumentation (different combinations of the world of instruments and the world of toys) and form (the order of movements). Since today it is practically impossible to buy usable toys for the performance, the piece was played by the Brno Wind Quartet in the more usual instrumental version. *Memories of Better Times* is the first piece Adamík wrote after his long period of silence. It is a long series of short movements for piano or harpsichord (in this version it was played by Barbara Willi, as brilliantly as ever), which give the audience the sense of having fallen into a dream full of strange fragments of the music of past centuries. These are not in concert form, but as if coming from meetings at some evening school for amateurs with all kinds of lapses of memory, mistakes, and wrong-turnings... Passages are constantly broken off, patterns fade into oblivion, and there are blank

spots, as if dissolving fluid had dripped onto a classical score. It is precisely these moments that are the points where the contemporary survives in Adamík's work, perhaps more forcefully in this "naked" form than in the following much more highly worked piece with which the concert concluded. This was *Il ritorno* for clarinet and piano, performed very persuasively by Kamil Doležal and Hanuš Bartoň. It is hard to say whether these first pieces that Adamík has written after his long silence are only a kind of reconnaissance of the terrain or a basic change of platform. Given the mysterious character of the author (who did not even attend his own concert), any guesses are of dubious value.

Miroslav Pudlák (1960) is one of the most distinctive of his generation of Czech composers. His poetics emerge from the inspiration of night and darkness, making him a composer both peculiar and impossible to ignore in the context of Czech contemporary music.

The concert included music he has written in the last fifteen years, but especially post-1993. Despite the undeniable "external" or - to put it better - the immediate variety of his work, ranging from the quiet introverted music in *Letím* [*I fly...*] to the vigorous and resolute work recalling minimal music and elements of rock in *The Last Word* and even the "quasi-bar" passage in the piece *Chandra*, Pudlák's music rests firmly on certain pillars. For all the composer's fondness for the fleeting, for introversion and for mystery, these firm elements are enough to create centripetal forces of purely musical quality that are sufficiently powerful to maintain a remarkable unity in all the individual works. The capacity of these elements to metamorphose in the different pieces, sometimes appearing in the notes, sometimes in the timbres or in a combination of all parameters, testifies to the author's broad spectrum of building techniques. In fact he reminds me of a good architect, who on different occasions uses a frame, a monolith or traditional masonry as the main bearing element, but always manages to leave open the possibilities for an unconventional design of the facade, or arrangement of the interior. As far as the other pieces included in the concert were concerned, *The Last Word* (1993), *Sextet* (1995) or *OM-Age* struck me as the most compelling. But this is naturally a question of individual taste. Miroslav Pudlák is definitely a composer who despite drawing (as he has declared) on a single source of inspiration in the form of that "view from the darkness of night", brings new sources of sound and formal designs to each of his compositions.

/Ivo Medek/

THE TRSTĚNICE PATH (TO BRNO)

The final concert of this year's Exhibition of New Music was called the Trstěnice Path and was the first Brno presentation of the Trstěnice International Composition and Percussion Courses. While the founders and organisers of the courses, composer Ivo Medek and percussionist Tomáš Ondrůšek often appear like their course colleagues in various concert projects on the domestic new music scene, and they are among the few persevering activists of new music in this country, this is the first time they have addressed the Brno public in this particular context.

The evening's programme was based on compositions and performances developed at the Trstěnice courses. Just before the beginning of the festival, however, the original concert plan had to be substantially modified. One of the Trstěnice teachers, the German percussionist and composer Jeff Beer, suffered serious injury and this affected the form of the final concert. Nonetheless, the Trstěnice concert remained a representative, organisationally rather loose but perhaps for that very reason more immediate, and above all illuminating and distinctive view of the activities at Trstěnice. The whole programme was a chain of solo pieces performed by Tomáš Ondrůšek and Mutsuko Aizawa, moving towards the final team composition, *InterAction*, produced by the students and teachers at this year's summer courses in Trstěnice. We should take them in order.

The first piece at the festival evening was *Rebonds* for one player on percussion instruments by Iannis Xenakis. This fierce composition constructed on the principle of a gradual, irregular increase in the density of sound in a way suggestive more of the possibilities of a whole percussion ensemble than of a single player, is one of the central and pioneering works in solo percussion repertoire. Tomáš Ondrůšek performed the piece with brilliance and great suggestive power, and even played it twice, after first one and then the other of his sticks "flew away" in a particularly acoustically dense passage. Ondrůšek smiled and repeated the whole piece again, perhaps with even more concentration and power of suggestion. The ravishing Xenakis was followed by *Litanei 2* by the German composer Johann Fritsch. The Japanese soloist Mutsuko Aizawa, who is a permanent guest of the Trstěnice courses, played Fritsch's piece for solo marimba and recitation with a noblesse and precision all her own. My only unanswered questions relate to the text that she recited through a microphone to the sound of the marimba. The relation between text and music seemed to be neither one of deliberate connection nor one of deliberate disconnection, nor conflictual, nor anything

else that I could grasp. I still don't have any idea whether I failed to perceive the basic intention, or whether I failed to perceive that I ought not to perceive something of the kind, or whether Aizawa's emotive Japanese pronunciation of the German texts, sometimes turning into abstract phonics, resulted in something that the author had not intended.

All the rest of the pieces included were pure "Trstěnice" productions. *Chiming* by Martin Smolka, who lectured on the courses again this year, is part of the Tomáš Ondrůšek's core repertoire. This time too, thanks to Ondrůšek's refined, pithy and above all playfully vigorous performance, the solo percussion piece written for different types of bells, klaxons and other sounding objects positioned in the hall, proved one of the most attractive for the audience.

In contrast to the first piece performed by Mutsuko Aizawa, her second number - the première of *Migrations* by Ivo Medek, was lucid and captivating. It was clear that here Medek had produced an attractive but complex piece, full of opportunities for the performer, that was made to measure for

the Japanese marimbist. As in his other compositions of recent years, Medek here continued in his tried and tested technique of multi-layering, which he uses to construct vivid, long, multifaceted passages. The result was in this case a brilliant structured whole, rewarding for performer and listener alike. The following piece, Peter Graham's subtle and tactful *Secreta*, was in definite contrast to Medek's attractively conceived composition. *Secreta* is also a piece that Tomáš Ondrůšek regularly includes in his programmes, but for completely different reasons. Its fascinating charm lies in its location at the opposite end of the aesthetic and poetic spectrum of contemporary music, in complete resignation and simplicity. Graham's quiet breeze was followed by the final team composition *InterAction*. Its separate individual parts had been composed by students attending the Trstěnice courses this year: Markéta Dvořáková, Martin Kostaš, Bohdan Sehin (from Lvov in the Ukraine), Ondřej Adámek and Jan Kavan. Ivo Medek and Peter Graham had

completed the whole. It was a composition in which the solo line of the preceding programme was continued. Medek and Graham had not tried to mould the often very diverse conceptions of the students into a single unity, but on the contrary had built up *InterAction* on the principle of mutual contrast. After the sonic (and lightly theatrical) passage for solo tam tam (Dvořáková) came the rhythmically pregnant tomtom section (Kostaš), and then two studies (Sehin) with electronic pads. The finale of the piece and the evening (Kavan) brought everything together, and moved from rhythmatised vocals (Kavan) to final drumming by all the Trstěnice performers. For me the most compelling part of *InterAction* was Ondřej Adámek's section, which Ivo Medek enlivened by amplifying the instruments only to let them mysteriously resonate with subtle, gentle movements (sand falling on the drum surface and so on). It's signed and sealed! The Trstěnice Path project is one of the most captivating events that this year's Exhibition of New Music has brought us.

/Vít Zouhar/

Mutsuko Aizawa



What else should we add to this report on the 13th Exhibition of New Music? Certainly it was useful in promoting awareness of what we can offer in the field of contemporary music, even if only the "tip of the iceberg" can be presented. But in the context of world music even this limited selection is of a standard high enough to export. To whom, however can we offer it? The usual good practice is for every major festival to attract participation from foreign theoreticians and journalists by having conferences and workshops. This year the absence of such people and such associated activities was particularly glaring. It would be a positive thing if the festival could be made more visible, so as not to be just a "poor relation" to the Moravian Autumn of which it is a part (but not a much advertised part). The fact that it has maintained its high artistic quality over several years created a most important basis. It is crucial, however, to think of ways of creating an organisational and publicity capacity that corresponds to this standard. Certainly the festival deserves it...

EVENT

Prague 2000 for Karel Husa

In the third week of October the Czech composer and conductor Karel Husa (born 1921 in Prague) visited his native city after a seven-year interval. Husa, who has lived in the USA since 1954, since 1959 as an American Citizen, is the author of an extensive oeuvre including the famous *Music for Prague* 1968, and is now emeritus professor of Cornell University in Ithaca, State of New York. On this occasion Prague provided him with several exceptional opportunities to present his work. His chamber music was performed on Monday the 16th of October in the Old Town Church of Ss. Simon and Jude at an evening of Husa's work organised by the FOK Concert Agency to launch this year's "Czech Composers at the Turn of the Millennium" Cycle (composers to be featured in later concerts include Sylvie Bodorová, Jan Klusák and Petr Eben). Leading Czech soloists and ensembles performed Husa's *Évocations de Slovaquie* (1951, J. Hlaváč - clarinet, I. Štraus - viola, E. Rattay - cello), *Poems for wind quintet* (1994, the Prague Wind Quintet), *Postcard from Home* (1997) and *Élégie et rondeau* (1961, both pieces performed by the ensemble Due Boemi di Praga) and *String Quartet No. 4 ("Poems")* (1990, the Suk Quartet).

The next day, Tuesday the 17th of October, Husa talked to a predominantly young audience about his life and experiences in the Mirror Chapel of the Clementinum at a meeting organised by the two major Prague libraries - the National and the Smetana Library. At the end of the meeting the miraculous thirteen-year-old virtuoso pianist Lukáš Vondráček played a selection of Husa's music from memory, including the composer's technically demanding debut piece, the *Sonatina for Piano No 1* (1943).

On Wednesday the 18th of October the musical programme of Husa's visit to Prague culminated with a symphonic concert in the Smetana Hall of the Municipal House, The Prague Symphonic Orchestra conducted by Jiří Bělohlávek performed Husa's *Symphony No. 1* (Paris, 1953), in what was a Prague première delayed by half a century. Before the concert Husa's programme included a meeting with friends in the "Vox Humana" studio of the distinguished artist Jan Kristofori, and a more than hour-long interview at Radio Free Europe, as well as several other friendly meetings and working discussions.

The culmination of Husa's visit was then the degree ceremony in the Bohuslav Martinů Hall of the Lichtenstein Palace in the Lesser Town, at which the Academy of Performing Arts awarded the composer an honorary doctorate. "I am particularly proud to be receiving this honour in the hall dedicated to Bohuslav Martinů", said Husa in the opening lines of his doctoral address, "since the winds blew Martinů to France and then to America much earlier than me. His yearning for knowledge and his music have made a great impression on me.



▲ Karel Husa receiving the honorary doctorate.

I conduct his pieces with delight - and free movements especially with unbelievable emotion, since in them I see Polička and the composer's inexpressible longing to return home, which alas at that time was impossible." Husa went on to offer an apotheosis of Czech music, calling it a world phenomenon and asking, "which small nation can boast composers of such genius as Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, Martinů and many others who are outstanding? And remember that the Czech Republic is no bigger than one of the smallest of the fifty states of America - Connecticut! Czech music recordings are no less world famous. Czech orchestras, ensembles, quartets and soloists are in the international elite, which given the present level of competition is an extremely important fact." In his conclusion Husa appealed for mutuality between Czech and American musicians, saying that "American musicians play Czech music very often and the American public listens with enthusiasm. But don't forget that America too, my adopted homeland, has its own great composers such as McDowell, Ives, Barber, Copland, Bernstein and others. You, Czech concert musicians, should try to play and sing their works as well!"

Husa's doctoral address at the official ceremony, which opened with the Czech and American national anthems, was received with sincere ovations. The AMU honorary doctorate is an honour that is relatively new, and just developing its own tradition. After President Václav Havel, the film director Miloš Forman and the conductor Sir Charles Mackerras, Karel Husa is the fourth to be awarded this doctorate, and the first Czech composer.

Husa's visit to Prague this year was an important event in Prague cultural and public life. Every night during the visit, Czech Radio broadcast hour-long programmes in its *Musica Moderna* series under the title "Karel Husa Week in Prague 2000". Czech TV shot footage that will be used, for example, for a planned hour-long TV documentary to be made next year to mark the composer's eightieth birthday.

/Jan Ledeč/

Reports

● On the 29th of September we commemorated what would have been the eightieth birthday of **Václav Neumann**, who achieved fame particularly as the principal conductor of the Czech Philharmonic in 1968-1990. In addition to the music of the Czech classics and the basic world repertoire, he also conducted and recorded works including the complete symphonies of Bohuslav Martinů and Gustav Mahler, for which he won several important foreign

awards. It was Neumann who ensured performance of such works as Sommer's *Vocal Symphony*, Klusák's *Variations on a Theme by Mahler*, Bořkovec's *Silentium turbatum*, Fišer's *Fifteen Prints from Dürer's Apocalypse* and even Kabeláč's *Symphony No. 8 "Antiphonae"*. Václav Neumann was also highly successful as a conductor of opera, especially the works of Janáček.

● **The Czech Music Council Prizes for 2000** were awarded to the American musicologist Michael Beckerman for his works on Czech music, especially Dvořák and Janáček, and

for promoting Czech music abroad, to the conductor Jiří Bělohlávek for exceptionally successful direction of the Prague Chamber Philharmonic, to the conductor Jiří Kout for artistically convincing presentation of Czech operas abroad and also for introducing challenging works into opera repertoire at home, to the Due Boemi di Praga ensemble for lifelong work and the commissioning of new music at home and abroad, and finally to the composer, teacher and organiser František Kovaříček, for thirty years of selfless work for the Jeunesses Musicales of the Czech Republic.

Fibich's Stage Melodrama in the Year 2000

EVENT

After a quarter century the National Theatre has returned to the unique musical-dramatic work represented by the stage melodrama of **Zdeněk Fibich**.

The whole trilogy was last performed here directed by Karel Jernek and with musical direction by Ladislav Simon in the 1974-75 season. Let us say at once that the première of the new production of the third part of the trilogy, *Smrt Hippodamie* [*The Death of Hippodamia*] which took place on the 22nd of October 2000, was a resounding success for both Fibich and the National Theatre. The efforts invested in the staging alone won the production a response of unusual warmth, since the Czech public is usually stingy when it comes to shouting "bravo". The National Theatre Company and all concerned approached the work with great responsibility and honesty, and the result was correspondingly excellent. A century after its birth, Fibich's stage melodrama remains an isolated form of musical drama in the history of theatre, and the phenomenon is thought-provoking. Let us take a look at Fibich's concept with the experience of the development of music drama in the 20th Century. It will not detract from the unique character of the work to stop and consider several questions that arise in the context of the new production. First of all we should admit that if this year had not been a double Fibich jubilee (his birth and death), the production would not have been included in the plan for the season. Although we cite Fibich and his stage melodrama with pride as part of the list of the major achievements of Czech music, we actually tend to regard it as a museum exhibit. The original idea of presenting the first part of the trilogy, *Námluvy Pelopovy* [*The Courtship of Pelops*] was abandoned, apparently because no-one suitable could be found for the role of the young Hippodamia. This raises an argument used to explain the very sporadic staging of the melodramas, i.e. the absence of special acting and voice training for the form, which is even more technically demanding in the case of staged rather than concert melodramas. This argument is rather too convenient, however, since it also protects the work itself from historical and stylistic criticism.

In his trilogy Fibich was trying to find a new solution to the relationship between word, music and stage that at the end of the 19th Century remained more deeply in the shadow of Wagner than the post-Wagnerian composers themselves realised.

Testimony to this situation is to be found in the series of failures by followers of Wagner and the range and diversity of deliberate efforts to repudiate Wagner. Fibich's stage melodrama is itself often presented as a transformation of Wagner's idea, but as the Fibich scholar Jaroslav Jiránek has shown, Fibich's path led above Wagner, or even against him. It can be argued that in this way Fibich was liberating himself from dependence on Wagner, since under the influence of the aesthetic theory of Otakar Hostinský, he allowed both arts - drama and music - to exist side by side on the stage without losing their separate character. In other words, Fibich did not seek for a synthesis of the two. This approach, however, meant that Fibich had to impose limiting conditions on his project, for example in relation to subject matter. Here he needed a subject that allowed or even depended on a certain static character, and he found it in ancient, classical material. (His sense of the stage and its needs is demonstrated by the fact that when dealing with material from Czech mythology, such as *Šárka*, he felt the necessity to return to opera. Incidentally, the same return is evident in the case of one of the greatest admirers of Wagner, Engelbert Humperdinck, when he operationally "reset to music" his *Königskinder* of 1897 thirteen years after he had first written it.) Even in the case of a classical subject, however, in which the epic takes precedent over the dramatic, there are moments when the ever-present colouring of the action by music becomes superfluous and the word by itself has greater expressive power when its impact and rhythm can rise straight from the

actor's unrepeatable emotion, and not be subordinated to a musical structure (however miniature). Such moments occur mainly in dialogue situations. On the other hand, there are moments of overflowing emotion, and swelling climaxes, in which the spoken work "merely" undersketches by music seems insufficient. At such points - if we as audience have been "brought up" in the history of opera - we expect singing. In Wagnerian musical drama of course the music itself speaks at such points, and Wagner abandons the word in favour of pure (symphonic) music which expresses that which cannot be communicated in words. Another questionable aspect of Fibich's work is the way in which he uses leitmotifs - the technique in which he is closest to Wagner. Fibich employs these in the belief that they integrate and clarify the musical-dramatic structure, but it is precisely these moments that from the point of view of a century's distance arrest the flowing connected current of musical ideas. The associational function of the motifs interrupts the continuity of perception given by the development of the story (including the musical story) in unbroken time. Finally, the purely instrumental numbers (ceremonial march, mourning scene), which in terms of style remain within the limits of the conventional stage music of the time) are the least adventurous elements of the work. These considerations are in no way meant to raise doubts about the greatness of Fibich's work, but they are nonetheless an attempt to indicate that the staging problems associated with the work are to a certain extent inherent in the work itself. If we remember that at the time of Fibich's death Arnold Schönberg was starting work on his monumental *Gurre-Lieder*, which started from the legacy of Wagner in order to achieve a liberation from that legacy over ten years of work, we can only regret the more that Fibich - one of the most educated artists of his generation - was not granted more time.

Hana Maciuchová as Hippodamia and Ondřej Vaněk as Atreus



Let us return, however, to the production itself. Under the direction of Josef Průdek a remarkable well-balanced whole has emerged. Hana Maciuchová is physically the most subtle of all Hippodamias to date, and her highly convincing acting created a Hippodamia unique for her charm and internal power. The role of Pelops is no less difficult, and Alois Švehlík's interpretation was outstanding. The Macbethian development of a marital relationship formed the axis of the production, but the crowning achievement was nonetheless that of Bořivoj Navrátil in the role of Myrtil. His experience with melodrama and the role itself gave him distinct advantages, and experience likewise counted with those "bards" of the art of declamation, Radovan Lukavský (Minstrel) and Miroslav Doležal (Jolos). Those who played the younger roles brought a different type of acting to the stage, justifiable in terms of the generation difference and the characters themselves: it is not without interest that critics drew attention to different "generational" concepts of role and technique in connection with Ostrčil's production in 1925! (see *Dalibor* 15th Dec. 1925). Ondřej Vaněk as Atreus, Michal Jagelka as Thyestes and Tomáš Peřík as Chrysispos have embarked on a road that should bring the "beauty of the word" back to the stage through the younger generation of actors. Jana Janěková ought, however, to put more individual character into her Airopa. The stage design (Ján Zavarský) and costumes (Eva Farkašová-Záležáková) subtly combine classical elements (the plot) and Art Nouveau (the period when the melodrama was written). And sensitivity to colour and refinement in the lighting design were among the production's best points. The music could perhaps have been interpreted with a greater range of colour and dynamics (Bohumil Kulínský). Microports were used for the first time for Fibich's work, and this may be controversial. In my view technical advances should be used if they are of genuine benefit. (This was unfortunately not the case with the poor sound production at the concert performance of the *Death of Hippodamia* at this year's Prague Spring). Today's audiences, used to the ratio between the intensity of speech and accompanying music in films, would find it difficult to follow unamplified speech against symphonic music and their receptive capacity would be diminished. And now that we talk of film. Isn't there a chance here of producing a fully-fledged, living version of Fibich's work in which sound level problems could be technically fully overcome and the use of subtitles would help win the melodrama greater international recognition?

/Vlasta Reittererová/

The Rebirth of Czech Melodrama

The magical turn of the century, when Prague became "European City of Culture 2000", saw the double jubilee of the youngest of the three founding fathers of modern Czech music of the 19th Century. 150 years had gone by since the birth of **Zdeněk Fibich** birth, and 100 years since his death. It is natural that Fibich admirers should focus on the event as a unique chance to draw the attention of the Czech and international public to this Czech composer and his extraordinary but not very well-known work.

The **Zdeněk Fibich Society**, which is part of the Czech Music Association and is led by its chairman Prof. Jaroslav Jiránek and secretary Dr. Věra Šustíková, initiated and drew up an ambitious project of celebrations for the Fibich jubilee, which is included on the UNESCO list of world anniversaries. The focus of the project was a part of Fibich's output that represented an important chapter in Czech, European and world music, i.e. his **concert melodrama**. In addition to the ambitious stage melodrama *Hippodamie*, unique in world music literature, that Fibich wrote on the text of Vrchlický's ancient classical trilogy, the composer also wrote a series of superb concert melodramas, in which he achieved absolute mastery of the form and which have become the model for modern Czech melodrama.

The celebrations had already been launched in 1998 with the organisation of the 1st **Festival of Concert Melodrama** involving some of our leading actors, reciters and pianists. The festival met with notable interest from the public and performers and in subsequent years it has become a welcome part of Prague concert life in the Autumn. In 1990 the Czech preliminary round of an international competition in the performance of melodrama took place in Prague.

The major celebrations of Zdeněk Fibich culminated in the Autumn of 2000. Under the patronage of UNESCO and "Prague 2000", an **International Musicological Conference** on the theme of Fibich, Melodrama and Art Nouveau, was held to great acclaim. It was attended by more than 30 musical scholars from the Czech Republic, the USA, England, Ireland, Germany, Austria and Slovakia.

The **1st International Competition in the Performance of Melodrama** - the first of its kind in the world - attracted 16 performer pairs (reciter and pianist) aged between 15 and 35, from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, the USA, Sweden and Japan. This unique contest aroused an unusual level of interest and it is now clear that it will be continued in subsequent years. The members of this year's jury from the USA, Germany and Austria intend to hold

preliminary national rounds on the Czech model in their own countries next year and so to prepare young performers for the second year of the international competition, which is planned to take place again in Prague in 2002.

As part of the Fibich celebrations, the Museum of Czech Art opened an extremely effective exhibition on **Zdeněk Fibich (1850-1900)** in the Lobkovitz Palace at Prague Castle, and the Prague National Theatre presented a new production of the third part of Fibich's stage melodrama **Hippodamia** (see the opposite page).

Like the three years of the Festival of Concert Music, both competitions have shown that melodrama, which in recent decades has been only a rare guest on our concert podia, is once again appealing to a very wide spectrum of listeners and musicians. We have been witness to the genuine renaissance of this music drama genre, not only in terms of captivating performance, but in terms of the production of new works. A number of renowned composers of the middle and young generation have begun to take an interest in melodrama and are creating new and remarkable works of lasting value. It would appear that the Zdeněk Fibich Society has achieved the seemingly impossible, by awakening general interest in melodrama and resurrecting the genre as a living form.

/Mila Smetáčková/

UNESCO
Světové výročí Zdeňka Fibicha
(1850-1900)
zakladatele českého melodramu



**3. FESTIVAL
koncertního
MELODRAMU**

**3rd FESTIVAL
of Concert
MELODRAMA**

1. 10. - 29. 10. 2000
PRAHA



Miroslav Pudlák: A Winged Creature

Letím. [I Fly...], The Last Word, A Winged Creature (*), Chandra, OM-Age Ensemble Mondschein Prague Chamber Philharmonic (*)
Miroslav Pudlák
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The name Miroslav Pudlák is today associated not only with composing and musicology, but also with tireless effort to ensure that new music should keep on reaching the concert podium. In 1985 he co-founded the Agon Ensemble, and from the mid-90s has collaborated closely with another leading group exclusively focused on contemporary music - the Mondschein Ensemble. This new album contains pieces which to a certain extent overlap with the author's work in the groups mentioned. The earliest composition recorded on the new CD (*Letím... [I Fly]*) was written for Agon in 1985 while the latest (*OM-Age*) was written two years ago specially for the Mondschein Ensemble.

Letím... is an almost twenty-minute "composition of the space". Different notes, sounds, short tonal and colour passages are introduced freely, one after another, at a slow tempo and with soft instrumental expression, without hurry and with enough time for the listener to absorb his "feeling from the sound". Listening to the whole of the relatively long chamber composition you are drawn into a kind of "unreal" world, which flows freely and continuously until the moment when it is interrupted by a kind of phantasmagoric trumpet passage. Here you are suddenly in a completely different world, comic, mechanical, unnatural., but this then all at once returns to the original state, and the level of tranquillity. Perhaps only the occasionally not quite clean use of the effect processor leaves a tiny scar.

The main element that penetrates the consciousness when you listen to the motoric and highly energetic piece, *The Last Word* (1993) is the running, endless, "tiresome", unrelenting and sometimes distorted rhythmical beat. This basic characteristic - which the author calls "irritation and nostalgia" - makes a fundamental and substantial demand for precise ensemble playing in all three instruments (flute, cello and piano). At the end of the piece - in the rhythmically most drastic passages - this is slightly unfocused, although this does not diminish the appeal of the composition. In the one orchestral piece on the CD *A Winged Creature*, (1994), we find much in common with the two earlier pieces - musical and sound space (especially thanks to the airy instrumentation and perhaps also other dream inspirations), a kind of steadfast motor energy and a diversity of colour shades. This time in the full orchestral palette. Perhaps more than the others, the piece has been recorded in a very good stereophonic picture, and so the acoustic impression (especially in the places where Pudlák works with whole blocs of orchestral colour), is highly plastic. In the context of the whole composition one must praise the static sections, in which there is an almost mystical interpenetration of fine instrumental shades - it looks as if the composer-conductor devoted special care to these in his work with the orchestra.

With the next piece for the instrumental trio of clarinet, cello and piano (*Chandra*, 1995) we draw near the end of the CD in a way that mirrors the beginning in terms of structure of ensemble used. The shortest piece of the album contrasts a kind of lunar mysticism with an "ordinary" bar-room nostalgia verging on the sentimental.

In this sense the choice of the two solo instruments, with their specific colouring, entirely suits what is, as it were, the inner "story" in the composition. Compared to the other pieces it is particularly demanding, since it is so highly concentrated both in terms of expression and in terms of the selection and unwinding of musical material. It hence gives the impression of a very tight, compact organism, which at the beginning moves in inconspicuously ... and at the end fades out into the space.

The final piece *OM-Age* (like the first piece) is a composition for instrumental septet. It is the most different in style from the other four pieces, but certain compositional signs, idioms and stereotypes (the feeling for sound in space, motoric rhythm etc.) remain clearly readable within it. The composition completes the overall arch of the album design, which gives the collection an overall sense of closure (for all its internal variety).

If we look at all five recordings together, indeed, they give the very intense impression of a kind of closed block of music which in each individual piece considers similar compositional problems, sources of inspiration, and informing ideas in a different way... The very close contact between the composer and performers (or indeed his direct involvement in performance), and his perfect knowledge of their undoubted qualities, have clearly had a major effect on the tight consistency of overall artistic conception and sound. Against the background of these five recorded pieces, then, we can see Miroslav Pudlák's music as a music of very pure instrumental thought and above all as the music of "great space". In which there is enough time for the perception of every communication, and for its examination and tranquil resonance in the mind of the listener.

/Michal Rataj/

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