

Martin Marek in Conversation

Czech. 2001 music

Prague 2001 Opera Festival

From Pseudolus to Martinů

The Eclipse of Music Criticism

2

VISIT THE FIRST SPECIALISED
CD SHOP

SPECIAL

exclusively Czech contemporary music

VIRTUAL

<http://www.musica.cz/cdshop>

AND ALSO VERY

REAL

at the Czech Music Information Centre

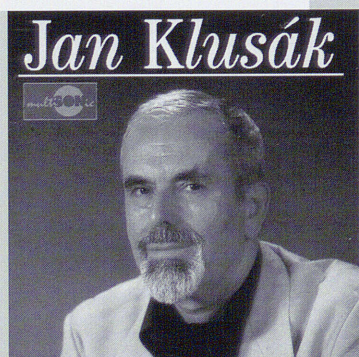
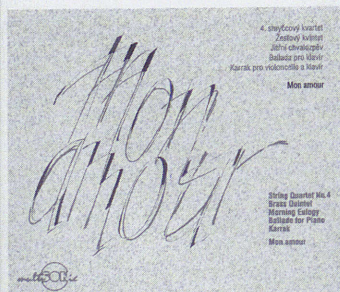
Besední 3, 118 00 Prague 1

Czech Republic

fax: +420 2 5731 7424



MAREK KOPELENT



Peter
Graham
Ensemble Mondschein



CZECH MUSIC
INFORMATION
CENTRE
BESEDNÍ 3,
118 00 PRAGUE 1
CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech
music

2001

CONTENTS

2

2001

C
Z
E
C
H
M
U
S
I
C

2
0
0
1

- PAGE 2 MARTIN MAREK
- PAGE 4 OPERA AS THE THEATRE
HERE AND NOW
- PAGE 6 MARATHON OF NEW
MUSIC 2000
- PAGE 8 FROM PSEUDOLUS
TO MARTINŮ
- PAGE 9 THEME: THE ECLIPSE OF MUSIC
CRITICISM IN BOHEMIA,
MORAVIA AND SILESIA
- PAGE 12 THE LIGHT OF THE STRANGE
SACRAMENT OF MAREK KOPELENT
- PAGE 13 WEIS'S THE POLISH JEW
- PAGE 14 IVANA LOUDOVÁ JUBILEE
- PAGE 15 A NEW CD FROM JAROMÍR HONZÁK
- PAGE 16 EDITING THE WORKS OF BOHUSLAV
MARTINŮ

The Editor would like to request all our friends who reprint material contained in Czech music 2001 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 courtesy in this matter.

Czech Music 2001 is issued bimonthly with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, Bohuslav Martinů Foundation, Leoš Janáček Foundation and the Czech Music Fund

by the **Czech Music Information Centre**,
Besední 3, 118 00 PRAHA 1, CZECH REPUBLIC.

Fax: ++420 2 57317424,

Phone: ++420 2 57312422

E-mail: his@mbox.vol.cz

<http://www.musicca.cz>

The subscription fee is \$ 25 for Europe,
\$ 30 for overseas countries,
or respective equivalents.

If you want to be put on our mailing list
please write to the Editor.

The Editor: Adam Klemens

Translation: Anna Bryson

Graphic design: Altair DTP studio,

Libor Kačaba

Photos: J. Fišer (p. 2),

H. Smejkalová (p. 5 - Tristan), J. Ptáček (p. 8),

K. Šustr (p. 12), F. Ortman (p. 13),

P. Neumann (p. 14) and Archives

Print: Tobola

ISSN 1211-0264



**ETHEL
IS ONLY
A LITTLE
BIT
PREGNANT.**

**HOW IS
MARTIN'S
FREE
ATONALITY
FARING?**

**Martin
Marek**

MIROSLAV PUDLÁK

MARTIN MAREK (1956)

Started to gain a reputation as a composer only relatively recently, but with striking success. His "Alban Arthuan" trio won the Egidio Carelli Prize in Val Tidone in Italy, his septet "Cosciette di Roncole alle Luigi Galvani" was nominated at the International Rostrum of Composers, and "Hi-Castle Blue" for piano and acoustic tape was performed at Jazzvenue 2000 in the Bimhuis in Amsterdam. His piece "Voce taciturna" was chosen for the ISCM 2001 festival in Yokohama.

Martin Marek's music is distinctive for the multiple layers of its structure and the full elaboration of detail. His route to composing was not direct. After studies at the Prague Conservatory he worked for 12 years as a cellist in the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra and only returned to the study of composition at the Academy of Performing arts in the 1990s, in Professor Marek Kopelent's class (graduated in 1997).

It seems to me that your music has grown out of the traditions of "echt" atonal New Music. How much space is there for developing this style today?

The space for developing any kind of music is whatever space you can make your own. After all, we have a huge amount of freedom, or does someone still have any doubts about that? But you're apparently talking about the limits to the realisation (performance) of that strange, complicated, richly layered, artificial but still exciting music in the context of the turn of the Billennium. Permit me first to return

to that dreadful verbal combination at the beginning of your question, that word play that I'll try and deconstruct. The point is - "traditions of 'echt' atonal New Music" - what on earth is that? What does it mean? Is there some tonal New Music perhaps? And what about that "echt" atonal Old Music then? (a penitent - jealous brute Don Carlo Gesualdo?) And then what about some "non-echt", slovenly, frivolous, relaxed, pedestrian atonality. Yes, that's the thing! Free atonality! I've always really liked this kind of nonsense. I developed a taste for it a long time ago, at the Prague Conservatory. It reminds me of a Jewish joke, when Apfelbaum tells his potential son-in-law that his Ethel is just a little, tiny bit pregnant. I don't see the concept of "atonal music" as a pure negation of some positive opposite pole, and for me, too, what is crucial is the degree of freedom and equality of the individual sound that one is dealing with. (Compare this with the state of contemporary society: one is no longer dealing with a slave or serf, one is messing about with a free person!) Isn't that progress perhaps? For me what is by far the most important matter is the quality of sound, colore, timbre. In my view what is concealed here is a decisive hierarchy, here you have the bearer of affect and idea, and a connection to the nerves.

Musical instruments today are often perfect to the point of sterility, at the expense of disappearing characteristic.

Markers, sometimes interfering, but natural (I'm thinking for example of "wolf tones" of stringed instruments, for which there are now traps - "wolf tone removers", which naturally detract from the quality of the sound of the instrument in its entire range - the removal of

interference between very low frequencies damages the overall acoustic quality of the instrument), and also all kinds of new flaps and mechanisms on wind instruments, and extra valves. It's a wonder that they don't have sensors and chips (but then why not equip instruments with deck recorders to help investigation of musical catastrophes?) Everyone can certainly work out why we find so few pieces in A Flat Major or D Sharp Minor in the literature for stringed instruments, and why brass instruments were originally made in whole sets, depending on range of keys. Certainly anyone can follow, step by step, the process of equalisation of quality of sound starting with the tempering of keyboard instruments, and carrying on through construction changes in wind instruments, and through continual raising of the reference note concurrently with proliferating alterations and harmonic complications (here, if you recall Ethel, she probably already looked as if she was heading for mischief), right up to chromatics and the first "echt" experiments. And paradoxically, it is precisely that "echt" music that knows how to recapture those natural, unequalled, fresh, untrapped, undegenerate notes, sounds, and cacophony (from the time when little Ethel was still making mudpies in the sandpit), and to assimilate them as sovereign, free, and manipulated (gently) slaves, (but with all privileges and social benefits), as parts of its structures and substructures. Incidentally, the first "echt" atonal composers had an extraordinarily well-developed feeling for sound apparatus.

As far as my own music is concerned, the "sacred" legitimization of atonality or

whatever is completely marginal. For several years I've been using a system in which atonality and tonality are subsets and I am more interested in the psychological aspects of what is presented to the ear. The problems of the adaptation of thought, impulse, resonance, sound mass, energy transfer - these are the contemporary (urgent) quantities. Private research in the field of pitches, and the search for latent tonal centres among "echt" atonal composers are among my malicious hobbies, but they nonetheless only confirm my suspicions, and from the musical point of view this is not much of an achievement. One interesting approach is to interpret the same material in an ambivalent way; you can let yourself be guided by the "echt" representatives of both camps and have terrific fun. If the entertainment gets through to the audience as well, then all is well. This sort of number was carried off brilliantly by Schnittke, the equilibrist Berio and the clowning Kagel, but of course I leave it to others to judge whether this knowing "utraquist" approach is of real value.

And now as to the performance of contemporary serious music in the age of post-industrial consumerism. Well, my lad, what on earth are you asking for? Some space for activities that might systematically upset a group of potential customers by exposing them to strange music and might even sometimes lead them to ruminate and reflect on that strange music (and the time) when their job is to freely and liberally run around evening supermarkets and BUY GOODS, for which they freely decide under the influence of liberally high-quality advertising, ad music and ad films? Here you have a guide to the function of art in the 21st century! And what's more, you and your family are known to be almost vegetarian! And then you have the impudence to want society to provide you with some space for developing some dubious style? Let's leave this and get onto the next question.

Your music makes heavy demands on performers. Is this inevitable?

Ho ho! What a label! You're doing a great advertising job for me! You may laugh, but in fact I trust my performers. At the very least because I was a performer for years, and I know that complicated music is often easier to play than music that looks easy at first sight. That kind is deceptive, that's where you get the most accidents. Any performer will tell you that the hardest music to play is Mozart, you can't cover anything up. It's like a black box recording. That's why they want Mozart for competitions and auditions. And so with demands on performers it's really not so simple that you can formulate

the problem as some kind of direct proportion like "less notes equals easier music".

As far as my music is concerned, the difficult for performers is more a matter of demand for maximum concentration and adaptability in interplay, rather than technical instrumental difficulty. The technical limits I know, I don't go beyond them and my interpreters know that I know that they know that I know them. Also, when I'm composing I reckon with a certain entropy. There are "silent-blocks" there to help lessen nervousness in difficult situations.

Do you think that contemporary music needs specialised performers, or that anybody should be able to play it?

The ideal performer is obviously the universal performer who has a complete mastery of his instrument (voice or baton), is expert in the nuances of all styles and genres that have ever been developed and is open to everything new, already on the horizon, or beyond it. The most valuable thing about such a performer is his awareness of the connections and continuity of musical development and capacity to embody it in sound.

There is a relevant quotation from Augustine here. "The past, present and future do not exist. There exists only the past in the present, the present in the present, the future in the present."

As is probably still coming out in the wash, I played in a symphony orchestra where the repertoire looked as though it changed frequently from the point of view of a new player, but after ten, or - if he keeps going - more seasons, he realises he is gradually becoming a sort of animated gramophone, an instrument that on command plays this or that ever repeated song from the so-called core repertoire. This way he becomes a narrow specialist on orchestral parts from the 19th century and the so-called musical classics of the 20th century.

Chamber groups also have a relatively narrow repertoire, but there it is balanced by the possibility of detailed work, which provides some satisfaction.

There isn't always a free choice even for the soloist, but like an actor he ultimately manages to convince himself that he chose the music and stands up for it.

What I mean by all this is that starting with training and ending with concert programmes, it is made rather difficult - to put it politely - for the performer to gain experience of all musical styles and periods, techniques, or to experience difference performing routines. There are of course performers who manage it, and I raise my hat to them!

So - specialised performers - yes. Working with them saves time, they don't have

problems with rather different technique or reading the score, they are quicker on the uptake and have less trouble making the right distinctions within a given style. But I'm not convinced that these positive points balance out the overall personality of the universal performer. Musical hygiene ought to require that from time to time you should play something different, and by that I don't mean just as an aspect of "business".

Your individual development appears interrupted, but nevertheless coherent.

Can you say something about this?

That development may seem very long to the eye, and so encourage plenty of speculations and suspicions. But it somehow all went by very fast. Essentially it's nobody's business but mine. It's my look back on time lost!

After the conservatory and army service I spent 12 seasons with the Czech Radio Orchestra. It was a good school of instrumentation and how a symphony orchestra works. I travelled, and I even had to travel at a time when private trips abroad were out of the question. Idiosyncrasy is an awful word, but its content is even worse. As soon as that flood of sound on all sides begins to bother you, and as soon as you begin to hate the building (American bombs missed it by a hairlength), and the rituals during the concerts, and the penguin suits, then it's time to go. And so I went back to composing, although it's true to say I went back with more concrete ideas and much more determination.

The obligatory question now. What's the future of our difficult concert music?

Uncertain. But that was always the case and above all it doesn't mean that there are no prospects for better times.

What would be the most important thing for improving its situation?

Organisational support, that important infrastructure, strong nerves and money. To put it plainly, when here in Czecho, factories are no longer there to make anything, but to have state funds poured into them, and when banks operate as black holes and not as financial houses, I'm an optimist, because this is a sign that we are one of the richest nations in the world and some petty cash must certainly be left over for what you call our difficult concert music. It is a good investment (and always was), especially when you think that the funds invested in the building of a non-functional power station (that I won't name, although by all accounts it's a complete waste of time), could enable the whole of Czech culture, including repairs to castles and chateau, to survive at a decent level for several decades.

OPERA AS HERE AND NOW

On the Margin of the Prague 2001 Opera Festival

VLASTA REITTEREROVÁ

The festival, which takes place every two years and brings all the permanent opera companies of the Czech republic together with productions from the music schools to Prague, was held for the fifth time this year. This year's theme was *Opera as Theatre Here and Now*, and was intended to try and answer the question of "what sort of operas are being performed in the Czech Republic at the turn of the new millennium, and how are they being performed." As always the event concluded with a conference, which put together assessments of the operas performed at the festival and threw up new questions.

Michael Renier - Othello - F. X. Šalda Theatre in Liberec

THEATRE

The three opening papers (from the programme director of the National Theatre Jan Panenka, and music critics Jan Dehner and Vlasta Reittererová) immediately offered a confrontation of views of the kind that is always present between dramatic practice and dramatic theory. Unfortunately, such clashes are the subject of much criticism, although it is precisely in the conflict of views that the road forward must be sought, as in the pattern of ancient symposia. It appeared that what one side (dramatic practice) regarded as progressive and justified, the other side (critical reflection) often considered to be a pose, lack of respect for the work itself, and mere exhibitionism on the part of the production team. As an example let us present two diametrically opposed views of a production by the Chamber Opera of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno - Monteverdi's opera *The Return of Odysseus*, updated in the form of the television serial *Chicago Hope*. The ordinary opera-goer stands somewhere between the two views; he or she usually wants a familiar work to be performed "as it stands", is not too keen to go beyond the boundaries of his or her established opera horizons, wants to hear good singing, is much less interested in the visual element and not at all interested in interpretative levels that defy normal expectations of the work.

The opera companies were supposed to present a representative work from their current repertoire and readily did so, but the criteria of what is "representative" could be very different. Here, for example, the South Bohemia Opera from České Budějovice relied rather too much on the fact that it was offered the Estates Theatre (formerly the Nostic Theatre) for its production of the Mozart opera *Don Giovanni* that had been premièred in the same building in 1787. The South Bohemia company's *Don Giovanni* gave the impression that maybe theatre had been performed in the same sort of way back in the 18th century, but beside the other festival productions it seemed rather provocatively "archaically patriotic"

A total of 16 productions were presented at the festival, the oldest of which being the production of Verdi's *Othello* from the F. X. Šalda Theatre Company in Liberec. This was also the only production at the festival to mark the Verdi anniversary. The most recent production was the *Return of Odysseus* already mentioned, from the Brno Chamber Opera, which had been premièred less than a week before it was presented in Prague. Given that the theme of the 1999 festival had been Czech opera, it is gratifying to find that even when there was free choice, the share of Czech titles was satisfactory this time as well. Out of sixteen titles seven were Czech: Smetana was represented twice, Martinů three times, Janáček once (*The Cunning Little Vixen* from the Municipal Theatre in Ústí nad Labem) and one original opera trifle, *Žižkov Duets* by Šimon Voseček and Jan Panenka performed by the Prague Conservatory. In the case of Martinů, the choice was from his comic work: the rarely performed *Comedy on the Bridge* (the Ostrava Conservatory), *Theatre behind the Gate* (National Theatre of Moravia and Silesia in Ostrava) and *The Soldier and the Dancer* (State Opera Prague). The Ostrava students had used Martinů simply as a basis for the creation of their own work, but this meant that the anti-militaristic ideas of the Martinů and the original Klicperka model got lost. It was also

MUSIC 2001

impossible to form a clear judgment of the vocal and instrumental performances, since there was no way of telling if the woodenness and naivety of style and delivery were the results of directorial decision or the limited abilities of the performers. Since at the last festival the Ostrava Conservatory offered a very effective and entertaining parody based on a story from the life of Leoš Janáček, it would be a good thing if next time the young opera students of Ostrava tried to pick a genre in which "amateurism" cannot so conveniently hide.

The prime importance of playfulness for Ostrava theatre was demonstrated in the production of Martinů's *Theatre behind the Gate* presented by the National Theatre of Moravia and Silesia. One's only objection, was that the limit has been rather overstepped when the form of the opera disintegrated in extemporising and high jinks. Admittedly the ensemble had chosen a work that partly invited this approach; Martinů himself left notes on performance to the effect that "the play and the whole must give the impression of improvisation, ...the director therefore has complete freedom, as do the actors... the basis is the concept of the dance movement" On the other hand, theatre has an order and framework that must be respected.

Janáček and Martinů are today reliable export commodities in Czech opera of the 20th century, and they are beginning to be core parts of the repertoire even here at home, even though - as audience statistics showed - it was these productions that attracted the smallest audiences. The problem is related to the legacy of past decades and a general lack of the courage to present 20th-century works (Martinů, moreover, was almost a prohibited composer in the years of "real socialism"). There is still much hard work

Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, in a pure, balanced and persuasive production. It must have to fight for the work with its local public, but paradoxically it has been the Opava opera that has shown several times that it is ready to take a risk and always comes up with something out of the ordinary. Czech national opera was represented here by two productions of Smetana's *Hubička [The Kiss]*. One was a version from the Plzeň Opera which was problematically transformed by direction and, worse, musically interpreted against the grain of the work. The other was a pure, naive, slightly unprofessional but sincerely, faithfully and humbly interpreted production from the Pardubice Conservatory. As far as the orchestra was concerned, the Pardubice musicians could have served as a model for many professional ensembles that played indifferently and merely note by note.

One definite repertoire discovery, in its way, was the Brno production of Giordano's *André Chénier*, a work that has not been performed in the Czech Republic for many years. The Olomouc Opera presented Offenbach's *Tales from Hoffmann* in a production that offered several promising performances by young singers. The work of the Orfeo Brno Chamber Opera (Telemann: *Pimpinone*) deserves special mention, and - as an example to be followed - the co-production by the Prague State Opera and the Music Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts (Britten, *The Turn of the Screw* under the Czech title, *Utahování šroubu*).

At the closing conference there were several calls for order and discipline, and with appeal to the founding father of Czech modern opera direction Ferdinand Pujman, this demand was raised as a priority for all work in the theatre. It was in this context that there was praise for the Liberec Opera's *Othello* as a stylistically pure production (director Anton Nekovar, stage designer Jan Vančura, conductor Martin Doubravský).

The festival prize went to the *Dialogues of the Carmelites* from Opava (director František Preisler, music director Petr Šumník) and there were four awards for the Prague National Theatre's production of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (director

Jan A. Piťrský, conductor Jiří Kout) including prizes for the leading role (Sergei Lyadov for Tristan) and supporting role (Yvonna Škvárová for Brangäne). In the last season *Tristan and Isolde* had proved a real revelation. A week after the end of the festival it was back in repertoire but on its festival night the National Theatre presented Janáček's *Jenůfa* instead, due to the illness of Yvonna



Sergei Lyadov (Tristan) and Ulf Paulsen (Kurwenal)

National Theatre Prague

Škvárová. Jiří Kout took over the performance at his own request and despite the lack of even an hour's rehearsal Prague experienced a *Jenůfa* of a standard it could hardly remember. It is a pity that someone like Jiří Kout cannot work with our performers more often. For the first time the festival also included a television afternoon. It presented a cross-section of the work of three operatic directors - Jaroslav Hovorka (*Gassmann, La contessina*, Martinů, *Mariken of Nimegue*), Jiří Nekvasil (Martinů, *Voice of the Forest*) and Tomáš Šimerda (Martinů, *Ariadne*, Fišer, *Lancelot*, Martinů, *The Greek Passion*). If the economic conditions for production and sales can be secured, then television seems to be a promising medium for successful presentation of Czech opera abroad. In the final debate the Austrian director Anton Nekovar had encouraging words for our sometimes almost too self-critical opera community. In comparison with his experiences from many European opera-houses, he said, what he particularly appreciated in Czech opera was delight in play, spontaneity, capacity to improvise and a simple love of theatre that has almost been lost in the commercialised world. Let us add that it is important that our praised capacity for improvisation should not be a substitute for fidelity of approach and solidity. The Opera Festival 2003 will, I am sure, show such fears to be unfounded.

Theatre behind the Gate



National Theatre of Moravia and Silesia

waiting for programme directors and performers, but also some highly stimulating tasks. The Silesian Opava Theatre had the courage to reach out for a work never before performed here. It offered the Czech première of Francis

THE BRNO

MULTIMEDIA



in the Seventies
and Eighties

SCENE

IVO MEDEK

The political situation after 1971, known as "normalisation" meant that any activities in the arts that failed to reflect the principles of socialist art were systematically suppressed and their exponents were persecuted. Multimedia art in its very essence, with its multiple layers, its demands for active perception and its other features was definitely not something that met ideological demands for accessibility to the masses. Purges in the Composers' Union, which expelled among others the members of Group A that had contributed the most to the multimedia work of the Sixties, brought restrictions on this kind of art by making it very difficult for it to be publicly presented. The Exposition of New Music, an annual event that had been developing promisingly, was prohibited. Another blow was the death of Josef Berg, one of the leading figures of the genre, in February 1971.

The last surviving "islets" of artistic freedom were the Theatre on a String [Divadlo na Provázku] in Brno and the Small Music Theatre [Malé divadlo hudby], where A. Piňos, in particular, over many years produced a series of programmes on contemporary world music in which multimedia was strongly represented. Piňos involved many other composers in the programmes, of whom we should mention at least E. Herzog, M. Štědroň, V. Lébl, J. Valoch, M. Adamčíak, D. Chatrný, Z. Vostřík, and of the younger generation J. Šťastný, I. Medek, Z. Plachý and others. Apart from playing recorded material, and holding lectures and discussions, Piňos also

held a series of live concerts. Let us mention here at least some of the events directly relating to multimedia that he organised over his fifteen years of work at the Small Music Theatre. In the 1977-78 season (in the Smiles of Serious Music cycle) there was the "Multimedia Works - from Opera to Happening" with J. Šťastný and S. Halas, and a year later "Multimedia Works, Audiovisual Pieces and Graphic Scores" and "Music Theatre and Music Happening" including performances of *Hlasová vernisáž* [Voice Private View] and *Mlčení ptáčků v lese* [The Silence of the Little Birds in the Forest] [see the article by A. Piňos in the last number of Czech Music]. Podium productions in 1979 included J. Bělík with mobiles and J. Valoch with *Ajka the hound*, and also M. Adamčíak. J. Valoch was to appear several times at the Small Theatre in subsequent years, for example in 1982 with an evening on phonic poetry, and in the same year as host of a well-known Berlin artist appearing under the name of Julius in the programme "Sound and Word" or a year later with letteristic voice compositions. One of the very rare examples of an event successfully organised elsewhere was the happening organised by Piňos, Valoch, Kofroň, Chatrný and Šťastný in Adamov near Brno.

During the forced retreat of the Brno musicians in multimedia, the appearance of visual artists in the field was a very welcome source of revival. A particularly central figure here was the current Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno, Tomáš Ruller. Of his work we should mention his project "On the Road" from 1974 in the Pekárna Cave in the Moravian Karst,

"Meditation" of 1977 in Mušov, the "In Search of Autumn" and "Bag of Leaves" happenings in Brno (1978) or the ritual "To be or not to be" again in the Moravian Karst.

Although Ruller's starting point was the perspective of the artist, music played an important role in his performances, to which Brno composers (such as M. Košťál) contributed. Not even Ruller avoided confrontation with the regime and, for example, he had long-drawn-out problems with the police after an event in which he dug himself out of a heap of sand entirely naked.

Another notable phenomenon of the Seventies was the *Via Lucis* group founded in 1976 by docent Jan Doubek and led by Ing. Jiří Novotný, who were both working in the field of optics and infra-technology. Their activity was based on the artistic exploitation of lasers, both for the creation of autonomous audio-visual works and for unusual effects at concerts. The group called its activity "optophony" to emphasise the balanced role of music and visual art. *Via Lucis* also collaborated with Brno composers such as A. Parsch. The lodestar of the avantgarde art scene was without a doubt the Theatre on a String, which during the Seventies and Eighties staged a series of productions in which music played a major role. Two of these projects clearly spilled over into the realm of music theatre: *Chameleon* (1984, music by Miloš Štědroň) and *Ballet Macabre* (1986, music by Miloš Štědroň and Leoš Falus), both involving a number of well-known performers (M. Donutil, V. Javorský, I. Bittová, L. Loubalová and others).

From the mid Eighties another element with a major impact on multimedia work appeared on the Brno scene. This was the ensemble Art Inkognito, which developed from an initiative by Ivo Medek and Zdeněk Plachý when they were students of composition at the Brno Janáček Academy under Alois Piňos. The young composers had several reasons for founding the new ensemble. The first was the complete absence of a group specialising in contemporary music, and another was precisely the desire for involvement in multimedia and collaboration with actors, artists and writers. The composition of the group reflected this purpose, since it included not only musicians but also the actors Lenka Loubalová and Vladimír Javorský from the Theatre on a String, already well-known for film and TV performances. Other interesting musicians also helped to found the group, however, and they were mainly students at the Janáček Academy. Among them we should at least mention the percussionists Dan Dlouhý and Adam Kubíček, who form the core of the well-known Central European percussion ensemble DAMA DAMA, the

flautist František Kantor, soloist at the Brno Philharmonic who now heads the flute class at the Janáček Academy, guitarist Petr Vít, who in recent years has given performances all over the world and particularly in Latin America, and the conductor Petr Šumník.

The aims of the group were clear - to liberate contemporary music from the then popular concert scheme according to which any performer - from soloist to orchestra - would play one contemporary piece (rehearsed just a couple of times and with the illusion of financial support from the Czech Music Fund) at the beginning of the concert before the "real" concert of historic music started, and to free it from the atmosphere of what was known as "Composers' Wednesdays", which were concert cycles at which new music would be played in traditional conservative settings in the presence of all the composers' relatives and a few loyal pensioners. It was a question of getting music into an environment that would be interesting and would attract young people as potential listeners and viewers.

By coincidence Art Inkognito appeared just at the time when the theatrical group called Ochoťnický Kroužek (Amateur Circle) was stepping up its activities. This theatre held its performances in a club on Šelepova Street, and here Art Inkognito regularly performed in the period 1987-1988, always once a month from October to May and always with a new programme. Naturally, given this truly "diabolical" frequency, carefully rehearsed shows alternated with looser improvisational events. This parallel activity with the Amateur Theatre led to collaboration and mutual influence, both in terms of theme and participants (J. A. Pitínský, M. Dohnal).

In contrast to the Prague group Agon, which focused mainly on the "import" of West European music, "Inkognito" really only played pieces written directly for the ensemble. It had presented multimedia work from its very first concert, which included pieces with multimedia elements: *Towers of Babylon* by Daniel Forró, *Four Situations* and *African Caterpillar* by Ivo Medek and *Bare Feet* by Peter Graham.

Other projects were entirely multimedia in character. Among a whole series we should mention at least a few, all with the common denominator of frequent mystification and intergenre overlap and interaction. One example might be the joint event by the young Brno artists (Laco Garaj, Rostislav Čuřík, Petr Kvičala and others - presented by J. Valoch), in which the artists reacted to pieces played by the ensemble (composed by Plachý, Medek, Addeh, Adamík and others) by immediately creating art objects, most often drawings and paintings in various techniques. The concert was followed by a view of the art and some

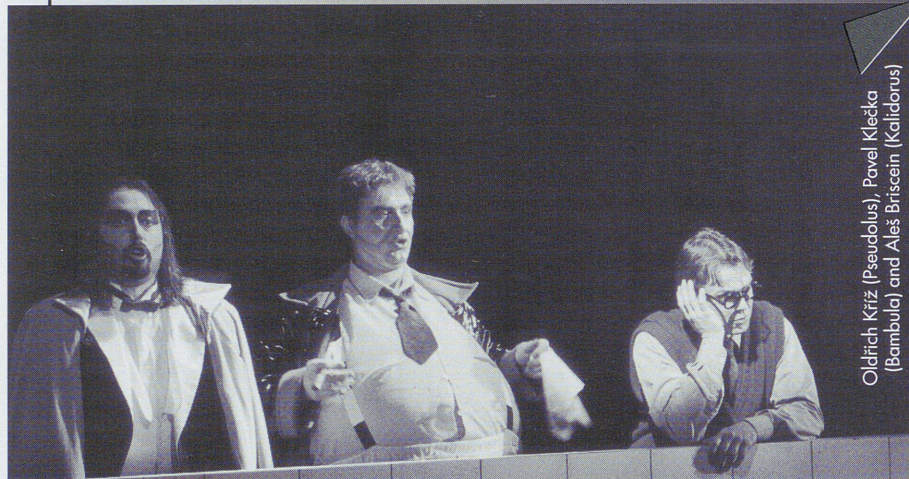
pictures were then used, conversely, as graphic scores for further musical treatment. An important aspect of all the events put on by the group was the attempt to unsettle the public, and the achievement of a certain degree of uncertainty so that it was usually unclear for a relatively long time whether the event was a seriously intended presentation of a contemporary piece or a practical joke. One example here might be the composition *Prima vista* of 1987, in which the group played the notes of Dvořák's *Humoresques*, which Z. Plachý gradually wrote on a huge sheet of paper on a board. As soon as the whole theme was down on the paper, the graphic record started to waver - the notes ceased to be legible, the lines warped and the writing gradually turned into a graphic score. With the destruction of the "instructions-score" the behaviour of the musicians changed and gradually became one of open aggression towards Plachý and his "work". The sheet of paper was torn up and the pieces scrunched up and hurled at the conductor (I. Medek), and Plachý, and finally the aggression was directed against the audience itself. Using their instruments as weapons the members of the group launched an assault on the public. The hall had been full and the musicians were forcing people back to the sides of the room and then to the rear. Meanwhile the lights dimmed until there was complete darkness. In the chaos chairs were upset and the manipulated public started to make sharp protests, with all kinds of shouting and cursing. People bumped into each other and squashed each other. The atmosphere thickened. People at the back discovered that the rear exit was locked. Someone screamed that "we're can't breathe in here!". And at the agreed moment the lights went back on and the audience realised that they were squashed into a corner but no-one was attacking them, since the members of the group were sitting by the board at the head of the hall and happily eating salami, salad, and drinking beer. Nobody made any further announcements, and the whole concert ended. As soon as people realised that no one was paying them any further attention, they began to react on an individual basis. Some were demented, some furious (including some family and friends of the musicians, who had suspected nothing) and others were enthusiastic.

Another example of mystification was Z. Plachý's *A Little Night Music*. The composer first gave a long lecture explaining how he had become the only true author of this very famous piece, and then invited the whole ensemble onto the podium. As the conductor came up, however, the lights went out and the original old Mozart music was played on tape.

As a final example we could mention the piece *Panoptikum of Lubomír Muller or the Man who will Never Compose like Dvořák, Janáček, Schumann, Bach and Smetana, Miloš Štědroň and Haydn*. This happening was put together from extracts of the music of all the composers named in the title played by the group conducted by Martin Dohnal with what were mainly humorous visual accompanying and explanatory "samples". It was one of a whole series of events in which humour was the basic element of construction.

Art Inkognito also appeared in a series of concerts of more conventional type, either purely in the field of contemporary serious music or in crossover genres. In the first category we should mention at least its appearances at festivals in the Czech Republic (for example at the revived Exposition of New Music, and abroad (at the Dresden Centre for New Music, in Mannheim, and in small-scale form at the 1990 Darmstadt courses). In the second category we should note its repeated involvement in the Prague Rockfest together with other representatives of the then very impressive Brno alternative scene (I. Bittová and P. Fajt, Váša's Z Kopce [Downhill] group, Kokolja's E group, Dunaj and others).

From the point of view of the arts the Eighties brought a certain thaw - especially towards the end of the decade. Nonetheless, performances were still sometimes subject to visits from the police, who on one occasion even - quite unawares - became direct parts of the performance. Variability of venue meant that the group used to play wherever they liked in a particular venue, i.e. sometimes on the podium, sometimes in the middle of the room and so on. On the night in question the police took their usual route through the back doors, but in so doing arrived not behind the audience, but right in the middle of the performers. Few people present could believe that it wasn't just part of the show... There were also the regular group "replays" in front of the committee of the relevant district cultural centre, which usually turned into private happenings, since the committee rarely had any idea what on earth the group was doing and what it was going to present. Rather than trying to get any explanation, the committees ultimately found it easier to ask one of the group to play a bit of something he was studying at the Janáček Academy - preferably some Tchaikovsky or Shostakovich. The committee members would find the technical standard of the players so unusually good, that the group always got approval in the end. Art Inkognito dissolved in 1990 when its percussion section went independent and formed DAMA DAMA. Its rebirth in the form of a chamber group had to wait until the mid-Nineties.



Oldřich Kríž (Pseudolus), Pavel Klečka (Bambula) and Aleš Břiscein (Kalidorus)

FROM PSEUDOLUS TO MARTINŮ

The Soldier and the Dancer at the State Opera in Prague

VLASTA REITTEREROVÁ

At intervals that are irregular, but all the more striking and concentrated for their irregularity, the Prague State Opera offers a dramaturgic surprise. After years of the uniform repertoire that the united National Theatre company was offering in the years 1948-92, the artistic directors of Prague opera gained the opportunity for competition and confrontation that had been so lacking here. The current leadership of the State Opera in the form of the Daniel Dvořák - Jiří Nekvasil team has been continuing the trend started by the first artistic director of the State Opera after it won its independence, Karel Drgáč, which was only temporarily interrupted by the period under Eva Randová. The State Opera programme is being systematically enriched with works previously neglected for a range of reasons, new premières, and commissions or winning entries to new opera competitions.

Bohumil Martinů's first opera, *The Soldier*

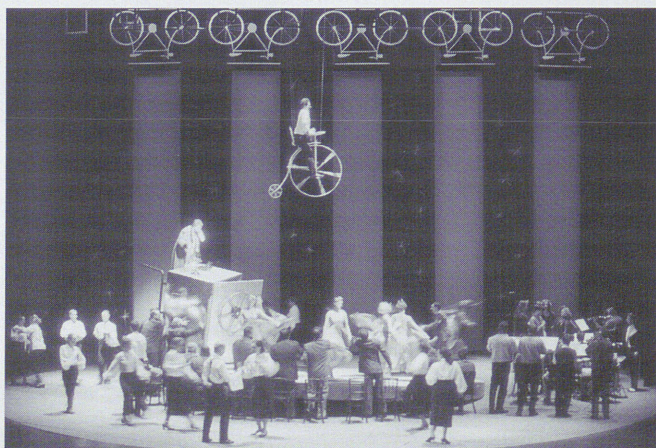
and *the Dancer*, written in 1927, had its Prague première here on the 15th of December 2000. (After its première in Brno in 1928 it was performed only in Olomouc in 1966 and in Ostava in 1990). The production was entrusted to the English director David Pountney, who had drawn attention with his production of Martinů's *Julietta* with Opera North in Leeds (in March 2000 the English company presented it in the Prague National Theatre) and above all by his production of the first version of Martinů's *The Greek Passion* for the festival in Bregenz. There was no doubt of his expertise with Martinů, but some curiosity as to how Pountney would handle the comic genre. He found support and inspiration in the assistance of Nicola Raab, whose contribution to the final form of the production was very significant. In contrast to his approach to "serious" Martinů, Pountney here opted for authentic fidelity to the original. He made the atmosphere of the time in which Martinů wrote his opera the centre of his conception, drawing on its

intoxicating dance, jazz-inspired music, and revues (there is an irresistible association with Křenek's "jazz opera" *Jonny spielt auf*, which had its première in 1927), Jan Löwenbach's libretto (he used the professional pseudonym J. L. Budín) turns, against the background of the basic plot of *The Fox Pseudolus* by Titus Maccius Plautus, on the

problem of authorial and stylistic originality, or persiflage in the arts, one of the greatest problems of 20th century art in general. Löwenbach was a leading expert on authorial legal rights at the international as well as the national level. His little scenes in which the director intervenes in the play (when he loses control of the events on stage), and there is prompting from the public (since after all it is the public that has the right to say who it wants on the stage), Cato (the dictator who determines taste) and his officials, and the "original" authors Plautus and Molière (Plautus accuses Molière of stealing his work), became less important in Pountney's conception of the work. Perhaps it would have been possible to introduce more topical elements here, and arguably an opportunity was lost. Instead Pountney took the path of vivid, spectacular, spontaneous, and in places slightly titillating entertainment full of gags, reflecting the approach of theatre directors at the time when the piece was written. The collage of the widest possible range of genres from revue, cabaret, clowning, film grotesque to realist theatre, and the alienation of the



original style functions of these genres was the basis of the work of Max Reinhardt and of Vsevolod Meyerhold. Martinů's opera makes such an approach possible, since his music is also polystylistic, including dances of the time (Pountney treats the score freely, introducing music from other works by Martinů), ironically "borrowed" elements from Czech national opera (the opera was originally supposed to be called "The Bartered Dancer" and there is no ignoring tones from Smetana) and the operetta genre (Fenicie's dream of Arcadia parallels a scene from Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*). The staging and costumes (Duncan Hayler) and above all the choreography (Regina Hofmanová) contribute to the atmosphere of light spectacle. Martinů's revue-opera does not offer major challenges for singers, but the performers rose fully to its theatricality, consisting to a certain extent in improvisation. There were noteworthy performances from Oldřich Kríž (Pseudolus), Pavel Klečka (Bambula), the Cook (Tomáš Černý), Anna Janotová (Fenicie) and Robert Šicho (Kalidorus). Vojtěch Spurný was musical co-director and conducted the orchestra.



THE ECLIPSE OF MUSIC CRITICISM IN BOHEMIA, MORAVIA AND SILESIA

WHEN A CRITIC IS SILENT
HE TELLS NO LIES, BUT NOR DOES HE SPEAK THE TRUTH
(VLADIMÍR BOR)*

WANDA DOBROVSKÁ

Art criticism is a genre that goes back more than a century. If the guardians of tradition today - in 2001 - are to make appeal to the customs and forms that originally created music criticism in the 19th century and sustained it in the earlier 20th century, they have little chance to remedy our present situation. The golden age of criticism is over, the "times" have changed out of all recognition.

INTRODUCTION OR WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MUSIC CRITICISM...?

Music criticism long ago lost the purity of a textbook genre - if it ever appears in this form, then this is only on the pages of specialist periodicals (currently it enjoys the most space in *Hudební rozhledy* magazine [Music Outlooks], which gives it so much space compared to other media, indeed, that the journal seems cast in the role of hard-line defender of traditional values). In media with a broader cultural focus and readership (music-lovers rather than just professionals), it is vanishing. The key question must be the following. Is there any point in appealing to the mission of the genre, its golden age and the critical legacy of the great figures of the past? Is there any point in trying to restore music criticism to its place not only in academic but in all broader cultural media, and revive its credit inside and outside professional circles? Is there any point in training musicologists, music historians and publicists from the ranks of the new generation for the purposes of music criticism?

In the past music criticism developed in symbiosis with the printed media, and it was in this symbiosis that it became a distinct and respected genre located between scholarship and journalism. Today it can find a place in other media as well, performing similar functions (informing, popularising and commenting) on the radio, television and Internet as well as the daily press and magazines. Theoretically, art criticism should find its proper place in all these areas, and to some extent it has done so. The multiplication of outlets, however, has also

brought the need to diversify the form or forms of criticism; a genre which originally possessed an easily mastered newspaper and magazine vocabulary has been adapting to the specific demands of other media with greater or lesser success. And whether it adapts or not, it must take the consequences for its traditional conception. If it fails to adapt, it loses resonance for its audience. If it takes a form that would be brilliant on the pages of a newspaper or magazine, (music) criticism on the radio, television or Internet proves indigestible for the listener, viewer or "user". If it adapts to the newer media, it ceases to be the kind of critical belles lettres that is the legacy of the penetrating spirits of the past.

In short, music criticism is losing its original function. I don't know if this means it will become extinct, which is why I have deliberately called the article the "eclipse" rather than the "twilight" of criticism. In fact, the space for music criticism in the printed media continues to be generously filled - by information, reports, comment, various kinds of reviews, reportage, interviews etc. While this is not for the most part textbook music criticism, its forms represent a kind of replacement. And because they are generated on the basis of the requirements of (media) practise, which unlike deadly academicism can be life-giving, this is all in order.

The answer to the question I stated at the beginning, then, is above all one of scepticism.

WHO IS INTERESTED IN THE OPINION OF THE MUSIC CRITIC OR WHO IS INTERESTED IN MUSIC CRITICISM...?

The critic cannot just think about a work of art or its author, but must also consider for whom he is writing - the reader, the public, the second part to which he hopes to introduce or explain the art. This is the purposeful level of the work. Without this awareness and without this sense of service, it would be enough for the writer just to seek out the creator of the work in the coffee-house. (Vladimír Bor)*

Recently I led a radio debate on the theme of "music criticism - a dead genre?".

I invited a composer (Marek Kopelent), a music critic (Miloš Pokora) and a representative of the "ordinary" media with cultural ambitions (the cultural editor of the daily newspaper *Lidové noviny*, Marta Bystrovová). The idea of the debate - at least on my side - was to compare the interest of the different guests in the existence of music criticism. Who needed criticism, what they needed it for, what function criticism fulfilled or could fulfil - at the practical, and not the theoretical or ideal level.

Miloš Pokora:

"Criticism - not just of music, but of the arts in general - creates a climate of argument without which no branch of art would be possible. This climate ensures that so-called artists who want to do something that is merely calculated for effect, realise that it won't be so easy to get away with it. The main function of criticism is to distinguish the beautiful from the false." **

But for whom is criticism in this function designed, or who cares about it?

Marek Kopelent:

"In the depths of his soul every creative artist has some mechanism that manages to block off the natural ego that is scared of failure, and is therefore capable of a certain objectivity. In this case we are talking about self-criticism, which the artist can then measure up with the opinion of the critic, and in this way even appreciate the opinion."

In my view this brings up one of the key areas of misunderstanding in professional musical circles. The critic does not publish his opinion on the pages of newspapers or magazines, or on the radio or television or on the Internet, just so that it can be read or heard by those whose work or performance it analyses, but mainly in order that it should reach readers, listeners and viewers.

I can make some comments drawing on my own many years' experience as a music publicist. Major interest in my music criticism has been from the side of the organisers of music events, record companies and publishers of printed media, and artists - more performers than composers. This has not been because they were interested in my critical opinion, but because they might have an interest in quoting me in their publicity materials. They were gathering publicity. The organiser of a musical event usually has an institutional sponsor who wants him to demonstrate that the sponsored event was attractive to the public. State institutions want a guarantee that the investment of tax-payers' money has benefited a culturally valuable activity, and the purely private sponsor wants to know that his money has had some publicity impact for his own firm, even if only in the form

of a side event. Especially in the first case, the donor cannot directly monitor all the events supported, and so at least requires cuttings from the newspapers and magazines (donors are rarely very interested in radio, television and Internet reactions since it is technically harder to get hold of these). Naturally they want the reviews to be as positive as possible. The record company, performer or performer's agent, naturally wants to print a couple of sentences of positive reaction to a CD, studio or concert performance by one of its "stable" of artists on the back of the CD notes or other material. They are happiest when the name in brackets by the quote is that of a well-known critic or well known publication.

Marta Bystrovová:

"Criticism not only interests the author, performer, impresario, agency, or record company, but also the educated reader - at the very least in the sense that he wants to be informed, to form a view, to put something in context."

The music critic is in the same boat as the media. Only the media is able or willing to give him an independence without which his purpose would be to serve various interest groups and not the reader. The media has (at least in outline) mapped the terrain of specific reader response, and so

the interest (or lack of interest) of the media in publishing music criticism and features in cultural sections may be regarded - within practical limits - as the most objective feedback to the work of critics. It is the editor who guarantees the critic access to the readers, listeners viewers or users to whom he is offering his opinion. It is hardly the empty space that the medium provides for the critic that is interested in his views, but the reader, listener, viewer or user. At a concert the critic sits with the public and as such still has the opportunity to fulfil his original vocation - to make available to his "co-listeners" his professional background, education, share of information and experience, which can be expected to be

deeper and broader than that of those whose profession is not music.

Recently, however, it seems to me that this has been ceasing to be true, and this is the source of my scepticism. If in the first half of the 20th century the critic - whether originally historian, aesthetician or artist - was genuinely the best informed, the most experienced and the best orientated - in the age of recording technologies, radio, television and the Internet this may be far from the case. Now recordings and electronic media exist alongside visits to concerts as ways to get to know music. Access to information is no longer to be gained only through music education institutions but takes various other routes. The trend of "the times" which is in my view dictated by the philosophy of the market - is toward alternatives: stop (any time and anywhere), come closer, take a look, try it and decide for yourself what is on offer, if you want it, and if you will come back next time. This is an increasingly wide-ranging development in social and psychological fields as well. From my music therapy activities I remember an important instruction (generally applied in group therapy): don't judge, don't interpret. Don't say what such and such is like or what it means. Don't even say what it is. Just say what you see and what you hear - as an individual, each person for himself. Don't judge! Leave it to your neighbour, your colleague, or anyone else who shares with you a relationship to the matter in question (a problem, a story, an event, a picture, music.) to decide for themselves what it is, what it is like and what it means. Admit that it may be something different for everyone and don't try to influence anyone's opinion with your own interpretation. You hear music, he may hear notes, and someone else again may hear noises. No generalisations! To judge - to influence others, manipulate them, impose your point of view. It means to inhibit others in the development of their personalities, to undermine their sense of identity. Let everyone form his own opinion by himself - in that particular state of structure of awareness given by disposition, upbringing, education and awareness in which he finds himself. Of course, even non-judgment is in its way manipulation, and even a much more refined form of manipulation than the handing down of an opinion by some kind of authority. The appeal for precedence to be given to the individual's own path rather than the path mediated by authority is one that plays on the adolescent string in the psychological map of the individual - and the community. I leave it to the reader to consider what it means about the maturity of Czech "society" in the post-1989 period.

THE MOTIVATION OF THE CRITIC OR WHY DON'T CRITICS GO TO CONCERTS...?

In the Nineties there used to be an association in the framework of the AHUV (Society of Musicians and Musicologists) called the Club of Music Critics and Publicists of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. Its prime activity was the annual organisation of the Criticism Prize, which was awarded to the best work by a contemporary Czech composer premièred in the year concerned. It was adjudicated by a jury who would listen to recordings of works that had reached the final round on the basis of nomination. The club had several dozen members, and the great majority of the works nominated came forward on the basis of nomination by



a single member (i.e. the only critic who had heard the work in concert). In the last years it generally happened that pieces that were genuinely worthwhile, as became apparent when they finally came to life via the mechanisms of concert and studio work, never reached the shortlist. On the other hand, pieces that two or - exceptionally three - critics had just happened to hear reached the final just because the critics had heard such a limited selection of what might be interesting and were simply nominating the little they had heard. Moreover, by coincidence such works would have been presented at the kind of "well-trodden" events that long-term music professionals have been "taught" to attend (subscription series, composers' festivals). I should add that the prize was not financial, and so there was a good chance of objectivity. The problem was the impossibility of getting together demonstrably credible entries.

In the autumn of 1999 the club president Miloš Pokora sent a letter to all members indicating that he was halting the in any case fading activities of the club. He appealed to members - if they had any proposals for reviving the club - to approach the two vice-presidents. I was one of them, and to this day no one has

contacted either me or my colleague Jaromír Havlík.

Are critics declining in numbers, or are they just losing faith in the meaning of critical practice?

Using the criterion of concert-going, it would seem that numbers of critics are dwindling. One or sometimes two critics will attend a concert, and faces come and go. If critics are not systematically following concert life, then logically no one has anything to write about it. This means that it seems to the composers, performers and presenters that nobody is writing, and it seems to editors that there are no critics.

In fact critics still exist. But what kind of motivation do they have to follow concert life, i.e. (first) to attend a concert, and (second) to write about it as well.



1. The critic attends a concert because he is told to do so.

In this case we could speak of work obligation, but this is mere theory. In this country nothing like the profession of music critic exists. No institution has the money to employ an expert purely as a music critic. The music editor, who is usually also a writer, has a whole range of other duties, many of which make it difficult for him to devote himself to deep, well-researched and concentrated analytical writing. Editors are usually reliant on external experts, but do not have the capacity to motivate them. Here I do not mean simply the economic motivation (practically not worth mentioning) but other kinds of motivation such as scope and regularity of commissions. Cultural pages have so little space for music that editors are not motivated to cultivate external experts, while the external expert sees little room for his analytical talents and so takes his activities elsewhere.

2. The critic attends a concert because he is invited.

This is a very important motivating factor, but does not necessarily lead to published music criticism. On the contrary, in this area the critic can sometimes find himself faced with all kinds of complications that threaten his independence. Critics are

usually invited by the organiser, one of the artists, the manager etc. If the invitation is based on friendship or desire to increase the prestige of the event, all is well. The invitation can hardly, however, be issued on the condition that the critic will write about the event, because that is a matter for negotiation between the critic and the media, and so here the event organiser or participant is "outside the game". Nonetheless it is common for the invitation to be issued with the politely tacit expectation that the critic will try and make sure that he can refer to the "product", which has been made available to him free of charge by his host, on some public platform and if possible positively. Communication takes place on a non-verbal level - and you find out the real state of affairs when you write according to your conscience (whether in praise or "critically") - if the "host" is dissatisfied, you won't be invited next time. The organiser (and also the publisher, who doesn't invite the critic, but provides the product) is first of all a businessman, who measures professional success in terms of profit from the sale of something that he "gives" you. I shall therefore now say something very tactless, by asserting that the acceptance of free tickets or CDs from an organiser or publisher has some features of accepting a bribe. I acknowledge that the matter requires extreme watchfulness and that one is not always, or sufficiently promptly on one's guard. Despite this, if I can I always give preference to contacts made through the editor.

3. The critic attends a concert out of his own interest.

Whether he writes about the concert or not will then be up to him. This is a matter of a sense of critical professionalism. He follows concert life (opera, new recordings, original radio and TV programmes about music and so on), but only writes on whatever he regards as interesting or important, and on real events. The critic's work starts (in co-operation with the media) with the very choice of event or phenomenon that he will write or talk about. Commentary on events that are only a link in the routine chain of musical life devalues the authority of the critic. The composer, performer, or organiser always sees whatever he is engaged in as important, but the critic's criteria are and must be different. Why write about subscription series concerts which always ring the changes on the same range of repertoire, albeit with different performers? As a subject for criticism, I regard performance as a secondary phenomenon, and so I almost never go to "routine" concerts in the role of critic. The systematic following of musical life in all its forms should not be fragmented into scraps of "critical" gloss

in the media, but ought to encourage a consciousness of connections through which the critic can then place his opinions in contexts - and only then publish them. I must admit that I am frugal when it comes to attending concerts by composer associations; after years of practice I have come to the conclusion that these are primarily intended for the composers to hear their own music. This is a perfectly legitimate purpose from the point of view of the composer who wants feedback, but for the critic or publicist it is not very interesting.

CODA OR A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DECLINE OF NUMBERS OF MUSIC CRITICS.

When I go to a concert out of my own interest, then the crucial motivation for me to write something public about it is the experience that the concert brought me. When the experience is not significant, I don't regard it as necessary to bother the reader, listener, watcher or user with any comments at all. This is the real point of (my) work in music criticism - if a concert (performance, recording, programme) gives me something, I regard it as my professional duty to convey to other people - whether or not they were sitting with me in the audience - that this was something worthwhile or not worthwhile, and thanks to my education, knowledge and experience I am - I hope - capable of saying why. Music as an experience, however, is not something much acknowledged in the concept of classical (Helfertian) criticism.

References:

* Vladimír Bor, *Hudba-film-kritika*, Prague (Panton), 1990

** The radio discussion from which some of the opinions of the guests were taken was broadcast by Czech Radio 3 - Vltava as part of the programme *Naše téma* [Our Theme] on the 14th of February 2001.

The Light of the Strange Sacrament

of Marek Kopelent



MIROSLAV PUDLÁK

Spiritual inspiration can take various different forms in music. A subject like the life of St. Agnes of Bohemia suggests an unusual work. She is the most mystical of Czech saints and although she did not write anything, she otherwise much resembles St. Hildegard. Her legacy is one that balances the harsher side of Czech history with the spiritual. Her canonisation in 1989 was the event that first gave Kopelent the idea of creating a work on St. Agnes, but at that time its realisation was not possible, and so the composer did not start on the project until 1994. It resulted in the original oratorio *Lux mirandae sanctatis*, unique in Czech music in the sense that it was conceived and produced for the setting and acoustics of the Convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia in Prague. (Perhaps the only comparable work in this respect is the *Canciones de circulo gyrante* by Klaus Huber, written on texts of Hildegard and conceived for Cologne Cathedral). Kopelent then spent several years of alternating hope and disappointment as he strove to get the oratorio performed, since it had not been

commissioned but written only from internal, psychological impulse. Time and again a performance was planned, but then the choir would drop out, or the convent would not be available, and so on and on. Yet thanks to the will and perseverance of the composer, it was finally performed on the 11th and 12th of February 2001 with members of the Chamber Orchestra of the Prague Symphony, the Prague Singers, the Radost children's choir, sopranos Sylva Čmugrová and Tereza Mátllová, and reciters Marie Tomášová and Otakar Brousek. Even at the rehearsal stage it was still not clear whether the première would ever happen, since the score involved not only major instrumental apparatus, lighting, reproduced music and projection, but also a complicated plan for the movement of instrumental groups and singers from place to place in the convent,

their synchronisation using co-ordinators linked by transmitters and shifting the audience to different locations. Parts containing more instructions than notes made some performers hysterical, things kept going wrong and the transmitters wouldn't work. At one point it seemed that despite the large amount of sponsorship the première would never take place, and there was general chaos (one of those involved called it "the Czech Apocalypse". The day was saved by the chief transmitter co-ordinator, Sylva Smejkalová, who kept a cool head. At the final rehearsal the work was born. The seats for the public were placed along the sides of a square cloister. Part of the orchestra was located at points on the right side, with the choir on the other side; the two reciters were placed at the front in a way that meant the public always heard

one from a distance and one close-up depending on the side where their seats were placed. During the first five sections of the oratorio, however, the musicians and reciters change places, thus allowing each listener to experience the full range of acoustic and spatial configurations and to enjoy an overall sense of the events in the cloister even from one seat. The text offers the life story of the king's daughter Agnes, who spurned worldly glory and promised herself to Christ. It is based on a medieval legend translated in Czech, verses by Jaromír Hořec and Jan Zahradníček, with other religious texts. The narrative is accompanied by the acoustically picturesque commentary of the instruments, static expansive sections expressing Agnes's mystic ecstasy, disturbing drumbeats, confusion and horror from the period of the Brandenburg incursions in Bohemia.



The depth of the spatial setting is emphasised by echoing resonance and the dialogue of instruments in the distance is always linked into the play of musical symbols. A girls' choir, which sometimes circumbambulates while singing, recalls the constant of the spiritual life in the midst of stirring historical events. The audience's trance is broken in the sixth part, during which listeners get up and are led to the Chapel of St. Salvator to the sound of a flute. There in the dim light the most effective parts of the work continue in a kind of contemplation of the symbol of the cross. A soprano voice comes from the interior of the chapel, filling the space with echoes, like the choir, while we hear the sound of the drums from the opposite side. A cross is projected into the chapel. Then the audience moves from the dark chapel to the well-lit hall, where the orchestra is already playing and the whole choir and soloist is ready. When everyone is seated, the music rises to the final hymn *Salve crux sancta*, which crowns the whole oratorio in ecstatic jubilation. The work lasts about 80 minutes. We realise that we have heard something unlikely to be repeated again in Bohemia.



Weis's The Polish Jew

AT THE PRAGUE
STATE OPERA

PETAR ZAPLETAL

The creative legacy of Karel Weis (1862-1944) has remained almost entirely neglected in performance, although the composer was successful in his time. This success, of course, was conditioned by the taste of the time. Both Weis's operettas (*Vesniční muzikanti* [The Village Musicians], *Revizor* [The Government Inspector], *Sultánova nevěsta* [The Sultan's Bride], *Expresní vlak do Nizza* [Express Train to Nizza] etc.) and his operas (*Viola*, *Polský žid* [The Polish Jew], *Útok na mlýn* [The Attack on the Mill], *Bojářská nevěsta* [The Boyar's Bride], *Lešetínský kovář* [The Blacksmith of Lešetín]), show signs of an eclectic imitation that fails to go beyond the frontiers of Romantic musical expression and in which invention is confined within a field of creative lack of originality.

Of Weis's five operas the tragic story of *The Polish Jew* (1899) created the most stir. The opera, premièred in Prague's German Theatre (3rd of March 1901), had a very mixed critical reception here but had already been performed in many German theatres before the year was out. It was then presented in Amsterdam, Berlin, Budapest, Salzburg, the Hague, Rotterdam, Vienna and Wiesbaden (1902) and in 1921 at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Here it continued in active repertoire into the Twenties and Thirties (Kladno, Olomouc, Liberec, Ostrava).

In the Sixties the Czechoslovak Musical Encyclopaedia (SHV, Prague 1965, pp. 944-946) had this to say on Weis's work. He is "...fundamentally an imitator and an eclectic, who succeeded in suiting the tastes of bourgeois society at the end of the century with the humour and the solemnity of his conventional music, flowing and musically refreshing..."

This quote alone is enough to justify asking of why the State Opera Prague has decided to present the opera *The Polish Jew* on the stage again (première on the 3rd of March 2001). The producers seem on the one hand to have wanted to highlight the traditions of the building in which today's SOP works and which is associated with the dramaturgically adventurous presentation of works by Czech and world authors (e.g. Ernst Křenek and others) and on the other to have wished to offer an attractive and also

artistically high-quality production of a dramatically and musically very accessible work and so appeal to a wider public. Exceptional attention has been devoted to the staging of the opera. The director Jiří Nekvasil and the stage designer Daniel Dvořák have divided the stage space horizontally into three rectangular sections. The functional value of this arrangement becomes fully clear in the second act when fateful judgment is delivered from the upper section by three judges whose menacing demonic figures stand out from the dark background (on the principle of black theatre); in the middle section there is a restaurant room, and in the bottom section the main character gives his confession.

The story of the innkeeper and mayor Jan Mathis, who years ago murdered and robbed a Polish Jew, is haunted by pangs of conscience and in the course of preparations for the wedding of his daughter Annette succumbs to a stroke, has

been updated to Alsace in 1958, with the characters given highly effective costumes (Zuzana Ježková).

Musical direction and arrangement of the text are by conductor Bohumil Gregor, and the music is also the most valuable element of the production.

Under Gregor's baton the orchestra plays with precision, and the intensity of the scenes is well graduated.

Excellent casting has given the title role to Richard Haan, whose performance is impressive not just for his perfect mastery of the vocal part, but also for his dramatic presence, vibrant acting and capacity to "draw out" the final monologue so convincingly that the long passage does

not bore the audience. Jitka Svobodová as Annette manages not to be overshadowed by Haan's brilliant performance, but the others tend to dwindle into the background although their performances generally accord well with the director's conception of the work.

This time, as well, Czech critical reaction to the production has been mixed. While Jitka Slavíková, for example, was unambiguously positive (without of course being able to go into the work itself and the rationale for its choice in so small a review - see *České slovo* 6th of March 2001), Helena Havlíková in *Lidové noviny* (5th of March 2001) branded the production as "...surfing on a wave of conjuncturalism," and added that "...it would now be enough just to read about [Weis's opera] in books". I think the judgment is unnecessarily harsh. Weis's *The Polish Jew* is not, it is true, a work of exceptional value as far as musical imagination is concerned, but I regard its staging (which is in line with the general policy of the State Opera in systematically presenting avantgarde and forgotten opera composers) as worthwhile, especially when it is presented in so theatrically and musically effective a way, and despite the fact that the auditorium was not full when I saw the repeat of the opera on the 7th of March Today ordinary music-lovers know almost nothing about Weis, and to recall an author who was once so popular



Miroslav Kopp (Kristián) and Richard Haan (Mathis)

at home and abroad by bringing his work to life is definitely worthy act.

In this respect I entirely agree with the musicologist Jarmila Gabrielová, who in a reply to Helena Havlíková wrote, "...I would definitely much rather go and see operas than just read about them in books." (*Lidové noviny*, 8th of March 2001).



IVANA LOUDOVÁ JUBILEE

JAROMÍR HAVLÍK

Like all artists who seem to have been born with their talents, Ivana Loudová (born 8th of March 1941 in Chlumec nad Cidlinou) showed natural gifts for composing even as a child. Thanks to the understanding and care of her family and friends, this talent developed quickly, and so after taking her final secondary school exams she was able to go straight into the 3rd year composition section of the Prague Conservatory, finding a place in the class taught by M. Kabeláč. (1958-61). Later she went on to the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (AMU) with E. Hlobil (1961-66), under whose supervision she graduated in 1966 with what was already her 2nd symphony. She then took up postgraduate studies with Kabeláč and studied for half a year in Paris with O. Messiaen, A. Jolivet and in the Centre Bourdan experimental studio at ORTF. Since completing her extensive and many-sided musical training in 1972 she has devoted herself to composition and then also to teaching at the AMU Music Faculty as a senior lecturer in composition and music theory. Here, in 1996, she founded STUDIO N (Studio for New Music), with which she works on a range of activities and concerts. In 1998 her theoretical work *Moderní notace a její interpretace [Modern Notation and its Interpretation]* was published by the AMU Publishing Centre. She has won a series of prizes in Czech and foreign competitions (Jihlava, Jirkov, Mannheim, Praha, Arezzo, Moscow, Verona and elsewhere.) including the Heidelberg Art Prize for 1993. Over more than four decades of creative development, Ivana Loudová's composing style has undergone many changes. Her original starting-point can be said to have been a traditional style in

the broadest sense following on from the impulses of the classics of 20th-century music, but even as a student she adopted some modern forms of expression into her musical idiom (*The Sonata for Violin and Piano* of 1960 – 61). Personally and as a musician she matured in the inspiring atmosphere of the Sixties, which in modern Czech musical history are a synonym for light in the darkness or at least in the generally dim and flat panorama of Czech music culture in the era of totalitarianism. In the development of her talent she had the benefit of help from first-class Czech and foreign composers and teachers. In the Sixties she progressively (and successfully) tried out almost all the modern composing techniques of the time, including serialism, aleatorics, the music of timbres, electro-acoustic music etc. Today, when Ivana Loudová has so many excellent works in so many genres already under her belt, what emerges as their common denominator seems to be a modern conception of modality, and it is not surprising that two of her most important teachers – Kabeláč a Messiaen – are also highly individual and distinctive representatives of modern modality in 20th-century music. Deep and frequent sources of inspiration for Ivana Loudová's work include the ancient and timeless legacy of Christian culture (male choir on the text *Stabat Mater*, 1966, male choir on the text of the Book of Proverbs *Ego sapientia*, 1969), the spiritual legacy of the Renaissance (a series of pieces on Renaissance poetry – e.g. male choirs with piano and flute *Setkání s láskou [Encounter with Love]*, 1966 or *Italský triptych [Italian Triptych]* for mixed choir a capella, 1980), and poetry of the 20th century (Morgenstern, Czech poets – Hrubín, Procházková). She enjoys writing concertante works, in which she often

concentrates on percussion and wind instruments (*Magic concerto* for xylophone, marimba, vibraphone and large wind orchestra, 1976, *Zářivý hlas [Radiant Voice]*, concerto for cor anglais, wind and percussion instruments, 1986, *Double Concerto for Violin, Percussion and Strings*, 1989 and many others). Pieces for children – songs, choral works, small cantatas and ingenious instructive works – are also an important part of Ivana Loudová's musical output. To date her list of compositions includes more than a hundred pieces, and many have been printed or recorded by well-known publishers abroad - C. F. Peters Corporation and G. Schirmer (USA), Computer Music (NL), BIM Editions (CH), Edizioni Suvini - Zerboni (I), as well as the Czech firms - Panton, Supraphon and ČHF.

Major works that represent milestones on her path as a composer so far include, for example, *Kuroshio* (a dramatic fresco for soprano and large mixed choir 1968), *Spleen. Hommage a Charles Baudelaire* (for large orchestra, 1971), *Concerto for Percussion, Organ and Wind Instruments* (1974), *2nd String Quartet "To the Memory of Bedřich Smetana"* (1973-76), *Dramatic concerto, for solo percussion and winds* (1979), *Concerto for Violin, Percussion and Strings* (1989), and in recent years *Echoes for French horn and percussion* (1997), and *Ad celestam harmoniam* for 8 cellos and concealed voice (1998). Ivana Loudová likes to compose for specific performers whose style she knows well and whose inclinations and special talents she takes into account when writing. This is one of the characteristic elements that guarantees her work lively reactions and interest not only among performers but from a wide spectrum of listeners.

A NEW CD FROM JAROMÍR HONZÁK

Jaromír Honzák / *Earth Life*
Released by: Cube & Metier, Prague
December 2000
Recorded: Spring 1998
Total time: 46:35
Production no.: MJCD 2009



"Earth life"
of the jazzman
means life
in the big city

JAROSLAV PAŠMIK

In a recent interview for HIS Jazz double bassist Jaromír Honzák (born 1959) was asked "what are the specific features of Czech jazz?" His answer was like this: "Its lack of specific features. Most musicians keep to the closely defined genres, such as bebop or fusion."

Honzák's new CD *Earth Life*, released by Cube & Metier last year in December, shows an absence of stylistic orthodoxy that runs entirely counter to this judgment. Honzák has composed all the pieces on the album with the exception of Monk's *Monk's Dream*, and in terms of genre they range all the way from bop through fusion right up to a piece for double bass and harp that defies categorisation. It is no wonder that in Czech conditions Honzák had trouble finding a publisher for such an unusual project.

A truly select international group gathered together in the spring of 1998 for the recording. On percussion there is the Spaniard Jorge Rossy, the famous drummer from the American jazz pianist Brad Mehldau's trio (Rossy is also said to be an excellent trumpet player). On guitar we have David Dorůžka, at the time a fresh eighteen-year-old. On piano there is the

Pole Kuba Stankiewicz and on tenor and soprano sax Piotr Baron, also from Poland. The last two had already appeared on Honzák's first solo disc "Getting it Together" [PJ Music 1995]. The *Earth Life* project also included singer Inga Lewandowska, the harpist Ivana Pokorná and Ondřej Hájek, keyboard player. These all played on only one track each, which says a great deal about the genre diversity of the album. It is not, however, some kind of incoherent goulash. Although some pieces might recall jazz-style setters like Miles Davis or Wayne Shorter, the CD as a whole bears the stamp of Honzák's own originality.

The players show their strong sides on the CD. Rossy in particular excels with his brilliant feeling for tempo and keeping up the tension. In the slower balladic pieces Stankiewicz is dazzling, and Baron shines in the modal pieces. Dorůžka is outstanding for his calm at faster tempos and the reflection that informs his improvisations. Honzák is reliable in accompaniment and relaxed in solos where he embarks on high registers that I have rarely heard in his club performances.

Among the compositions, the title track *Earth Life* deserves special note. It is just for "strings", i.e. for harp and double bass. This duet rather eludes the character of the rest of the CD, although it is the longest track on the album. The double bass combines very well with the harp, which in fact accompanies it with two-tone rising motifs. We could certainly have taken more of this kind of experimentation of the CD. Perhaps we shall be rewarded next time.

The CD is also excellent in sound quality and it is clear that Honzák managed to get his way with its preparation. The jacket is actually a description and guide to "Earth Life". It is a naive collage of pictures of Prague, Barcelona, Warsaw and Boston, the cities from which Honzák gathered his team. Given the usual awfulness of Czech jazz CD jackets, Honzák's CD is in this respect a welcome change, and refers to the well-known fact that for jazzmen life on earth is above all life in the big city. Overall Honzák's album is a sample of an honest and professional approach. It also shows a trend to experimentation with new combinations in jazz which is not all that usual. I think this is the right road. It would be wonderful if we could see this group in the Czech clubs, or at least at one of the festivals here.

DIRECTOR POUNTNEY, EXPERT ON CZECH OPERA, WINS PRIZE FOR MARTINŮ

PETR VEBER

British director David Pountney, who is to stage Smetana's opera *The Devil's Wall* in the Prague National Theatre, has won the prestigious Olivier Award in London for his production of Bohuslav Martinů's opera *The Greek Passion* last year. In an interview for the Czech Press Agency he said that Czech music was the dominating theme of his opera career.

"I want to stage *The Devil's Wall* in my own way - if the National Theatre wanted a "traditional Czech conception" then they probably wouldn't have invited a director from England," Pountney commented in the e-mail interview, insisting on his intention to approach the opera on his own terms, but not in any "specially peculiar" fashion. "Naturally, I don't have any idea if it will pass muster with the classical Czech conception," he admitted.

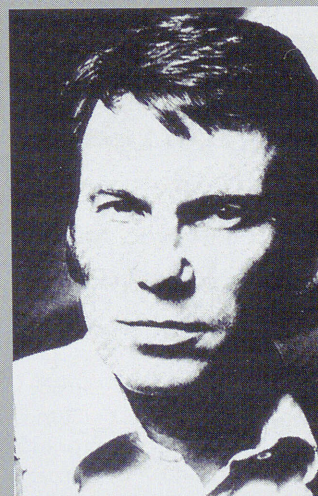
Pountney regards the *Greek Passion*, which in the reconstructed original version was acclaimed as the best production of the year at the London Royal Opera, as an outstanding work. "It will never be comparable with the masterpieces of Leoš Janáček or Alban Berg, which are probably the most important operas of the 20th century, but the *Greek Passion* has its place as a very well written piece with a very topical subject," he said.

In his view Martinů was an intensely theatrical composer and his operas offer a director wonderful opportunities. "While he's not my "one and only" composer in Czech music, which is my major interest, he plays a major role," Pountney emphasised. At the end of last year he staged Martinů's debut opera *The Soldier and the Dancer* at the Prague State Opera (see page 8 in this issue) and Prague also gave an enthusiastic

welcome to Pountney's co-production of the opera *Julietta*. For Pountney the Olivier Award is a very gratifying mark of recognition. "Such awards are very important in the context of the London theatre; it is not a matter of the worth of the work itself, but if the *Greek Passion* had been a weak opera, it would

have been hard to win the prize," he commented. The British press considered Pountney's production one of the best things he has done yet, and as captivating, historical and unique. In London the conductor of the project, first presented at the festival in Bregenz in Austria the year before last, was Charles Mackerras. Stefanos Lazaridis was stage designer for both productions (see *Czech Music '99*, Nr. 5).

Other productions nominated for the Olivier award included Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande*, and Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea* from the English National Opera, and Prokofiev's *War and Peace* from the Kirov Theatre, St. Petersburg at the Royal Opera in Covent Garden.



EDITING THE WORKS OF BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ

25 - 26 May 2001
Zdenka Podhajská Hall,
Kinský Square 3,
150 00 Prague 5,
Czech Republic

Preparing a complete critical edition of the works of Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959) is one of the long-term goals of the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation and Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague. To this end, a conference will be held on 25-26 May 2001 in which future editors of Martinů's works and representatives of Czech and foreign publishing houses will discuss the musicological, organizational, and jurisdictional terms for this huge project. It will be the first gathering aimed at surveying results achieved so far and setting the direction for the coming decade. Works of Martinů have been published by numerous publishing houses on several continents - in the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, France, England, the USA, and Israel. Almost completely absorbed by composition of new works, the composer devoted little time to reading proofs of printed materials; we certainly cannot speak of any systematic editing. Thus the degree of accuracy of printed editions of his works has always depended on the carefulness of editors and publishers. With the growing number of performances of works by Martinů on the international scene, the interest of performers in the most exact and authentic reading of the composer's notation has grown as well. The demand for clarification of dubious passages has been increasing, as has the number of persons interested in studying Martinů's autographs scattered in numerous libraries and private collections worldwide. Consequently, the Bohuslav Martinů Institute (founded in 1995 in Prague) has begun to collect all available source materials. Thanks to contacts with both Czech and foreign institutions (the Bohuslav Martinů Memorial in Polička, the Museum of Czech Music in Prague, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., and the publishing houses Boosey & Hawkes, Schott's Söhne, Universal Edition, and Bärenreiter), and also thanks to purchases and occasional donations, it has been possible to acquire many autographs and photocopies over the course of the past five years. Large collections of Martinů's

correspondence with friends, performers, and patrons (Serge Koussevitzky, Paul Sacher, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, Frank Rybka, and Karel Novák), some première recordings of major works, and contemporary reviews are also deposited in the Martinů Institute. Late in the year 2000 work began on digitalization of Martinů's autographs; this will facilitate their filing and easy accessibility in facsimile form. Thus it is now possible to take the next step: theoretical and practical preparations for a critical edition of Martinů's complete works.

There are several basic questions associated with such a large-scale and long-term project. What is the present state and accessibility of sources for Martinů's works? Which works are preserved in more than one autograph score? For which of them did the composer write out performance parts in his own hand? What is the status of sketches for his works? Are there photocopies of autographs with additional annotations by the composer? If so, what is their significance - do they pertain exclusively to one particular performance or are they valid and binding for all future performances? In what cases did Martinů correct proofs and under what conditions did he do so? Are there première recordings by performers who consulted the composer regarding their interpretation? Do we have correspondence with performers, publishers, journalists, or close friends concerning the works? When will it be possible to prepare a complete thematic catalogue of works by Martinů and to develop editorial guidelines and the



Sixth annual International Conference
25-26 May 2001
held by the Bohuslav Martinů Institute
in cooperation with the Prague Spring
International Music Festival
and the Institute of Musicology of the Charles
University Prague
With the financial support of the Bohuslav
Martinů Foundation

division of the edition into series and groups of works? When will it be possible to begin one of the major tasks of the Martinů Foundation and Martinů Institute - the complete critical edition? On a higher level, all of this will lead to more general questions: what was Martinů's compositional process like, and how will our view of his creative personality be affected by more thorough knowledge of his works and of the diversity of his means of expression?

The conference is being organized by the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation and Bohuslav Martinů Institute in cooperation with the Czech Musicological Society and the Institute of Musicology of the Charles University in Prague. Dr. Ulrich Uchtenhagen, former director of the Swiss Copyright Organization (SUISA) and permanent associate of the International Copyright Association (OMPI), will serve as an expert advisor in matters of copyright.

CONTACT ADDRESSES:

Aleš Březina, Bohuslav Martinů Institute,
nám. Kinských 3, 150 00 Praha 5,
Czech Republic.
Phone/Fax: ++ 420 2 57320076,
e-mail: ales@martinu.cz

Jarmila Gabrielová, Institute of Musicology,
Charles University Prague,
nám. J. Palacha 2, 116 38 Praha 1,
Czech Republic.
Phone: ++ 420 2 21619 222 (4),
Fax: ++ 420 2 232 86 02,
e-mail: jarmila.gabrielova@ff.cuni.cz

International Workshop on

EDITING THE WORKS OF ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

27-28 May 2001
Zdenka Podhajská Hall,
Kinský Square 3,
Prague 5, Czech Republic

A meeting on problems of work on the new critical collected edition of the works of Antonín Dvořák will be held in the Zdenka Podhajská Hall on the 27th and 28th of May 2001. The meeting follows on from an international seminar held on the theme in May 2000 and will focus on the editing principles of the planned work.

In the next issue:

Czech
music 2001 3

THEME:

Melodrama in Czech Musical Culture

CD REVIEWS:

A new double album from the Robert Balzar Trio
New CD from Iva Bittová

FESTIVAL:

Prague Spring 2001

ANNIVERSARY:

Josef Bohuslav Foerster

