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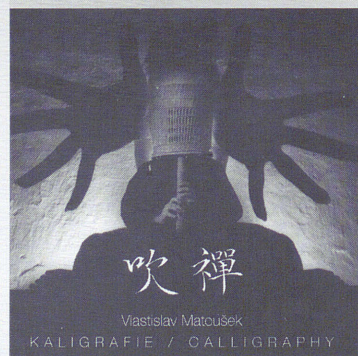
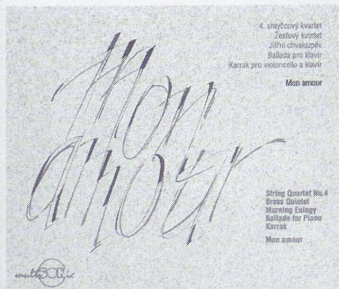
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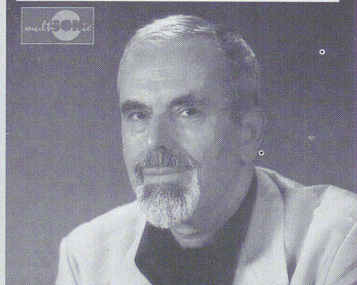
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Josef Horák

LIFE WITH A BASS CLARINET

45 Years Ago Josef Horák discovered a new solo instrument for the music world - the Bass Clarinet

PETAR ZAPLETAL

The musical public encounters the names of **Emma Kovárnová** and **Josef Horák** in concert halls all over the world, and we can find biographical information on both instrumentalists in all the major music encyclopedias. Nor do any of these works of reference fail to include the information that bass clarinetist Horák and pianist Kovárnová together founded the chamber duo **Due Boemi di Praga** in 1963. The unconventional instrumental combination proved to be not just interesting, but acoustically inspiring: the diversity and originality of the sound combination, the practically unlimited technical possibilities that the bass clarinetist found in his instrument and the expressive richness that

both performers showed from their

first joint appearances, inspired composers to write a whole series of new pieces for an instrumental configuration that was the first of its kind in musical history.

Today Due Boemi have a reputation that is both immense and unique. Their concerts attract enthusiastic audiences in the United States and in Africa, in London and Paris; Josef Horák has taught students from all over the world.

Interviewing Emma Kovárnová and Josef Horák was a very pleasant experience. Both performers have already reached the top, They have won fame and recognition, they have travelled the world and been applauded by thousands of listeners. Everyone who loves chamber music has their compact disks at home - and their experience has changed into an abundant source of instruction.

The initiating force behind the establishment of the unique chamber duo was, of course, Josef Horák (born 1931), who this year celebrated an important birthday. We congratulated him and then indulged our curiosity.

Professor, the bass clarinet has been making headway as an independent instrument in symphony orchestras since the early 20th century, even though its origins are linked to the instrument known as the basse-tube as early as 1772, and Grenser's Klarinettenbass in 1793.

Originally the instrument was given what was more just a timbre role, and we can find the irreplaceable colour of the bass clarinet tone among Romantic

orchestral composers. But it was only in the mid-20th century that the bass clarinet became a solo instrument, and this was thanks to you. You as it were raised it from the obscurity of the orchestra mass to the light of the front stage.

What was it that led you to this courageous step?

After studying with Prof. Doležal in Brno I became clarinetist in the Brno Philharmonic. In 1960 my colleagues from the Brno Wind Quintet asked me to go to Darmstadt with them to play Janáček's suite *Mládí [Youth]* as a bass clarinetist. There I met K. Stockhausen, L. Nono, B. Maderna, S. Gazellon and many other representatives of what was known as "New Music". It affected me like a drug. When I got back to Brno I founded the Musica Nova ensemble (flute, bass clarinet, piano and percussion).

Stockhausen sent me some notated material for his piece *Kreuzspiel*, and we then gave a concert that was the first ever performance of a piece by Stockhausen in the former Czechoslovakia. The response was terrific, but the results were harsh: the musicologist Jaromír Paclt who wrote about the concert was not allowed to contribute to the news for a year, and for a long time I was prevented from crossing the frontier to the West with the philharmonic. The same thing happened to G. Rozhdestvensky... Stockhausen sent me an open letter: "I thank you and your courageous colleague's - one performance behind the iron curtain is for me more valuable than three repeat performances in Paris..." Fortunately no one read it, or else we would probably have paid for it in the same way as the hero of Kundera's novel *The Joke*. That's why I left for Prague, to join the Vinohrady Theatre Orchestra.

But I had first begun playing the bass-clarinet earlier, in 1955. I had to step in for a sick colleague during the recordings of *Uspávanka [Lullaby]* with conductor Břetislav Bakala - and at that point the bass clarinet captivated me. It was love at first sight. In March of 1955 I had a full-length concert in Brno; except for two originals - the *Sonata* by O. Schoek and *Sketches* by J. Mašta - I mainly played arrangements of pieces by G. Frescobaldi, B. Godard, B. Marcello, J. Křtitel Vaňhal and so on... Then in Prague I worked with three otherwise excellent pianists before I met Emma and discovered that working with her is better in terms of sound,



unknown man replied "No he wouldn't be annoyed - I'm Paul Hindemith." That was a valuable exchange, since Hindemith later gave me the go ahead to play his *Trio for Heckelphone, viola and piano*. Then My Brno colleagues (O. Chlubna, J. and P. Blatný, M. Štědroň, A. Parsch and others) started to write for us. I plucked up the courage and asked Prof. A. Hába for the solo *Suite*, and also J. Křička. The old man had to refuse me at that point, but he recommended

K. B. Jirák to me, and Jirák wrote a long and difficult but beautiful *Sonatina*. Pieces have been written for us by K. Reiner, V. Kučera, I. Jirásek, S. Bodorová, Š. Luký and others, and by composers from abroad like K. Stockhausen, K. Huber, and S. Gubaidulina. Apart from P. Hindemith, P. Casals, O. Messiaen, F. Martin and K. Husa have authorised us to play arrangements of their works. Today this makes a grand total of six hundred original pieces by 142 composers from eighty countries.

Whether she likes it or not, Emma Kovárnová naturally has to play on the instrument that is available in any particular concert hall, but you take your instrument with you. What instrument do you play?

I used to play on an Amati, but its material didn't travel well. And so I went over to a Selmer instrument. Currently I have two.

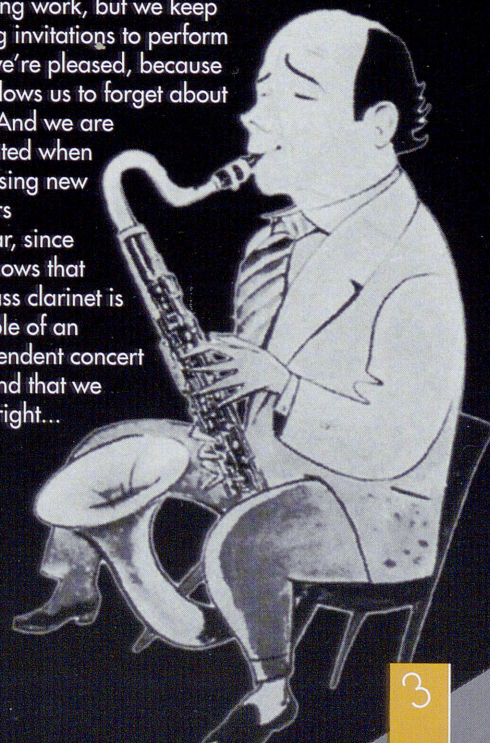
In the course of your career you have often been called "the Paganini of the bass clarinet", but you have also been regarded as a "lone ranger". Do you still feel that way, or do you think that you now have sufficiently numerous and worthy competitors?

In 1974-79 we both worked as teachers at the Prague Conservatory. In 1976 after my first bass clarinet recital in the USA I lectured at Denver University and at the World Clarinet Congresses (1982 Denver, 1984 London) led master classes. In 1988 I held a similar course in Rotterdam, and later in Antwerp, Ghent and elsewhere. Young players from fourteen countries including the USA, Japan and Australia attended the courses. The degree of interest, hard work and capacity to imitate among the Japanese players, for example, is remarkable.

Professor Kovárnová. In the duo you have often seemed to be the good fairy in the background, since attention is concentrated on the unusual, rarely seen or heard bass clarinet. Do you ever regret not having embarked on a solo career? No. Even before our fateful meeting (it happened by chance during a recording of some stage music at the radio), I was playing in chamber groups. Horák noticed how I would acoustically "adapt" to various different instruments, and asked me to work with him. I liked this kind of adventurous work with an unconventional instrument, and the fact that something important was emerging here and I was helping with it. I think we complement each other. Horák has an endless capacity for fantasy, while I'm more the rational type. The creative tension that sometimes develops in rehearsals can then be transferred into the pieces... But we've never experienced anything like cabin fever.

It looks as if time isn't something that much concerns you. But can I ask you about your plans for the future?

We're now going to do two concerts in Stuttgart and Biberach, and then to the Janáček Festival in Luhačovice (with a half-evening programme). In September we shall be recording a CD (by the way, today we already have fourteen profile CDs and 114 individual tracks) in Germany, then we're going to Belgium and Holland, where two colleagues are working in Antwerp and Rotterdam, we'll be playing twice in Prague (for Přítomnost and for the Association of Musical Artists and Musicologists), and at the beginning of next year we shall be performing in Paris. I hope that our health will hold up. Today we are naturally already orientating our work mainly to courses and teaching work, but we keep getting invitations to perform and we're pleased, because this allows us to forget about time. And we are delighted when promising new players appear, since this shows that the bass clarinet is capable of an independent concert life, and that we were right...



technique, expression, and on the human level. We've been playing together now for more than thirty years - but it was only six years ago that we confirmed our union with wedding rings. ...Since 1963 we have appeared as DUE BOEMI. It may not be the best name, since people might have thought we were a pair of cabaret artists (when all we wanted to express was the fact that we were two Bohemians in the sense of Czechs), but we can't change it now. After a time we added the DI PRAGA.

Today it's well-known that you have managed to extend the tonal range of the bass clarinet by a full five octaves. How did you manage it?

My father was a flautist. I used to ask him how to get the highest notes, because while that darkly dramatic deep register could convincingly signal the arrival of a murderer in a film, for example, it wasn't enough for me. I asked singers (Věra Soukupová, Brigita Šulcová and so on) about their falsetto notes. And then I tried to copy them. On the clarinet the high notes used to be played with a little force; the higher the notes the more it was necessary to "push". I took the opposite approach, and reduced the pressure as the notes went up. It took a long time, but today it works safely even for my pupils.

Your art has led a series of Czech and foreign composers to compose pieces for bass clarinet and piano. Who was the first - and how many composers have written for you?

The first Czech composer who did so was J. Mašta. Then a man I met in a Frankfurt studio advised me to play Hindemith's bassoon *Sonata*. When I expressed a fear that the composer would be annoyed because it would be an arrangement, the

Brno 2001

JAROSLAV PAŠMIK

It is the evening of the last Sunday in May. The heavy traffic on the main road around the factory halls of the Brno Vaňkovka plant, is gradually diminishing. The visitors to the last concert of this year's Exposition of New Music have left the factory, the festival venue, and are going home. Although it is cold and wet, they have every reason for good cheer. The music festival has brought the public and the musicians themselves many beautiful and thought-provoking experiences.

A REAL TREAT FROM SLOVAKIA.

The last concert was an appearance by a Slovak group of five improvising composers and one clarinettist. They call themselves Vapori del Cuore - a name that means "steam from the heart" and is taken from the poetry of the Italian avantgarde poet Edoardo Sanguineti. The Vapori's performance was accompanied at the front of the podium by an improvisation by two dancers, reinforced at the end of the concert by some Brno dance volunteer.

The music, or rather the performance itself offered a completely exceptional experience in this country. The musicians used a wide palette of sounds of traditional instruments (flutes, violins, clarinets) together with the sounds of objects on a resonating table. They also exploited various pre-prepared sounds on synthesisers and strings played on CD, and there was even a gramophone. The basis of the improvisations or compositions that emerged in the course of the concert was the interaction between the musicians and also free interaction between the musicians and dancers. Over time the structure of the improvisations changed in terms of different instrumental densities and dynamics. Sometimes inspirations from rock or pop music appeared, either as parody or at times entirely seriously. Fortunately there was no pile up of the kind of "masturbatory" repetitive models which sometimes tempt young

musicians and composers. The group really managed to reach the level of a multilateral conversation leading finally to a creative consensus. I believe that it almost had a politically educative effect on the public (even if only subconsciously). It can't be helped. Plato would have been delighted.

A STRANGELY STALE ENGLISH ROLL

The concert on the evening before the Vapori whirlwind, on the other hand, was stale and flat. Players from the British group Synchronicity with the singer Sarah Frances provided the sour experience. Using tenor saxophone, guitar, electric piano and advertised four-octave singing (which didn't in fact happen...but if only the problem had just been the number of octaves), the British offered a very tired and half-hearted performance. The inspiring improvisers and tireless seekers described in the programme changed into the exact opposite. It was an effort worth of a freejazz British group of the Third Division.

MAIN COURSE À LA KOPELENT

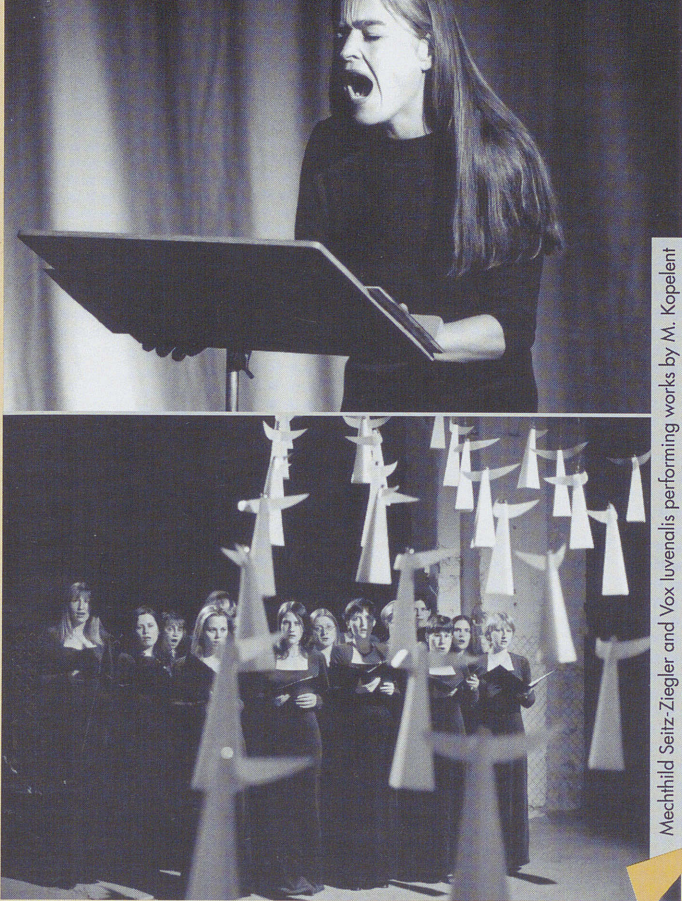
A concert profile of Czech composer Marek Kopelent was the centre of the festival

programme. The following pieces were performed in the presence of the composer: *Canto intimo* (1963) for flute and vibraphone. *Sonata for 11 Stringed Instruments - "Veronica's Robe"* (1972-73), *Rondo for Five Players on Percussion Instruments* (1974), *Mon Amour* (1988) for two voices, flute, clarinet, cello and percussion, *Cantus pro defunctis* (1994) and *Cantus de nativitate filii* (1997) for solo voice.

Many critics turned up their nose after this concert and blustered something about old-fashioned compositions in the spirit of Darmstadt. These objections demand a reaction. First and foremost, I regard criticisms of the old equals bad and new equals good type as completely irrelevant. The aesthetics of the new modern wave say absolutely nothing at all about the quality of music composed thirty years ago. Kopelent's works, largely on religious texts, are mature works of art that have lost nothing of their quality with the passage of time. Naturally they bear the stamp of their time and the school to which the composer belongs. That is completely inevitable. The *Rondo for Five Players on Percussion Instruments* shows the composer's strong feeling for colour and the colour combination of different percussion

Ensemble Damian performing Zouhar's Coronide (lower photo - artistic director Tomáš Hanzlík)





Mechthild Seitz-Ziegler and Vox luvenalis performing works by M. Kopelent

instruments even at extremely low dynamics. Even the players of the JAMU Percussion Ensemble themselves, who gave a virtuoso performance of the piece, were surprised at the resulting colour spectrum of their instruments.

The *Sonata for 11 Stringed Instruments*, "Veronica's Robe" provided another beautiful experience. As the title suggests the piece is programmatic. The first part is conceived as an analogy of textile fabric woven through with micro-intervals, the second part represents a kind of accompaniment to a non-existent melody, and the last part evokes an atmosphere of miracle when the final chord of C Major is drawn out into infinity in the whole spectrum of the chamber ensemble by pre-recorded playback.

BAROQUE SOUP WITH DUMPLINGS À LA REICH

The second concert evening of the festival was devoted to a chamber opera. And not just any chamber opera. This was a performance of *Coronide* by the young Czech composer Vít Zouhar. The work essentially originated with a commission from the Olomouc festival Baroko 2000 for the recomposition of an opera that was performed in the Chateau of Kroměříž in 1731 on the order of Cardinal Strattenbach. Only the libretto of the original Baroque work has survived and Zouhar was asked by the director of the festival to write new music for it. The resulting creation oscillates between the Baroque and the minimalist, with a more

pronounced tendency to the Baroque side. In the course of the performance I was several times disconcerted by what seemed to me a too obvious audible similarity to the work of one of the fathers of minimalism, Steve Reich (specifically the pieces *Different Trains* and *Tehillim*). I abandoned a demand that his name should be put at the head of the score, however, when I realised that it would have to be accompanied by the founders of Baroque opera as well. The music of *Coronide* is otherwise a very

skilled compilation of all the styles mentioned and testifies to the great taste of its author. On the other hand it says little about his individuality.

After this opera it was a striking contrast to hear the poet J. H. Krchovský reading his own poems in the second half of the evening. If in Zouhar's case one is not sure of his direction even after listening for an hour, one has no doubt of Krchovský's direction after a mere five minutes. Only his black humour frees us from the dark mood of his morbid poems.

SHARP CUTLERY BY GOODE

And now we are almost at the end, or in fact at the beginning of the Exposition. Officially it opened on the 23rd of May at 7.30 p.m. with a concert of music by the American composer and clarinetist Daniel Goode (born 1936). He had already visited Brno ten years before to rehearse with Posádková Hudba Brno and the Horňácká Muzika of Mirek Minks. Goode played various shorter pieces and two particularly interesting works: *Wind Symphony* and *Eight Thrushes in Moravia*. I would like to focus on *Eight Thrushes*, which was written (at least according to the programme) in the early Eighties. Its original name was *Eight Thrushes, Accordion and Bagpipe* and is conceived as a roughly thirty-minute long piece for an ensemble of different instruments (it was originally played by Goode's Down Town Ensemble), accordion and bagpipes. The melodies played by these instruments are actually transcriptions of the songs of thrushes, while the accordion

and pipes represent their opposite pole, human music, which is naturally no less vibrant. The piece reaches a certain climax at the moment of the when a human voice joins in in the form of human song.

ELECTRONIC HORS D'OEUVRES

A concert of electronic music from the Musica Nova competition for electronic music, annually organised by the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music, was included as a warm-up for the official programme. Initially I believed that this might be the most interesting concert of the whole Exposition, but I was wrong. With the exception of the composition *Sublimation* by Dan Dlouhý, who enlivened it by his appearance on the solo theremine, the pieces were prerecorded from data or other electronic media. This method seems to me rather unrewarding for listeners, and says a great deal about the prevailing introversion and isolation of a group of academic electro-acoustic specialists. In my view the era of concert presentation of electronic music from "tape" is long gone. Furthermore, intellectual complexity is presented as a virtue of the selected compositions, but even a generally well-informed listener has absolutely no chance of decoding it.



J. H. Krchovský

Let my final paragraph be a tribute to the organisers of the exposition. Special credit must go to the artistic director Jaroslav Štátný and manager Jana Škodová, who have managed to raise the festival's reputation to a European level. The sensible shifting of the festival from the autumn (when it collided with the Moravian Musical Autumn Festival) to the spring, the choice of the inspiring venue of the old Vaňkovka Factory as the central focus for the festival and the almost perfect programme design and organisation are all worthy of a festival with roots that reach back to 1969 (after its second year it was stopped by the normalising Communist regime and it was only revived in 1988). They are also highly promising for the future.

Vítězslava Kaprálová

LAST CO



ERIKA FROŇKOVÁ

The drama of composer Vítězslava Kaprálová's short life (1915-1940) has rather overshadowed the real significance of her music.

Kaprálová left orchestral and chamber works that included outstanding piano and vocal pieces. The major influence on her compositional style was Bohuslav Martinů, from whom she derived

a modern feel for melody, rhythm and harmony to complement her classical training in composition.

It is clear that the most important works for the understanding of the meaning of her music are pieces from the composer's last Paris period, in which her own compositional style was crystallising fully and rapidly. This means that we should be all the more grateful to the team of Brno musicologists, Miloš Štědroň and Leoš Faltus, who have reconstructed the composer's *Concertino (Concerto) for Violin, Clarinet and Orchestra*, her last and unfortunately incomplete work, from a surviving autograph copy.

The piece was only the second concertante work in Kaprálová's orchestral output, the first being the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in D Minor, op. 7* of 1934-35, which she rehearsed and conducted as her graduation piece at the Brno Conservatory. The last orchestral piece that Kaprálová was to write before the *Concertino* was the *Partitita for Strings and Piano, op. 20* of 1938-39.

According to a note on the first page of the autograph sketch, the composer started the three-movement *Concertino* on the 18th of March 1939 in Paris. The sources for reconstruction of the piece have been this autograph sketch (a four-line partitella consisting of the two solo parts and the piano arrangement, and a score of the instrumentated part of the first movement. Both sources are now kept in the music department of the Moravian Land Museum in Brno under sig. A 29.717.

The reconstruction of the individual movements of the *Concertino* can be described as follows:

1st Movement - the reconstruction contains a total of 28 numbered pages, with the autograph score (8 pages) corresponding to pages 1-9 and the autograph sketch (6 pages) to pages 2-28 of the reconstruction. In the first nine pages the editors have taken the autograph score into

CZECH MUSIC 2000

Kaprálová's CONCERTINO

account, and in the rest of the movement they have carried out the instrumentation on the basis of the autograph sketch.

2nd Movement - the reconstruction contains a total of 9 pages, with the autograph sketch (3 pages) corresponding to pages 1-9 of the reconstruction. The editors have instrumented this movement on the basis of the autograph sketch, taking account of the partial instrumentation notes that it includes.

3rd Movement - the reconstruction contains a total of 23 numbered pages, with the autograph sketch (3 pages) corresponding to pages 1-21a and the first bar of page 22 of the reconstruction. The editors have instrumented the movement on the basis of the autograph sketch and composed the end of the unfinished movement (in the reconstruction from the 2nd bar on page 21a to page 23).

Leoš Faltus was responsible for the reconstruction of the 2nd Movement, and the other movements were reconstructed by Miloš Štědroň.

The reconstruction respects the dynamic, agogic and phrasing notes in the autograph sketch and autograph score only at certain points. The dynamics and agogics are only specified in a general way in the reconstruction, and the work was moulded into final form in interplay with the performers and conductor.

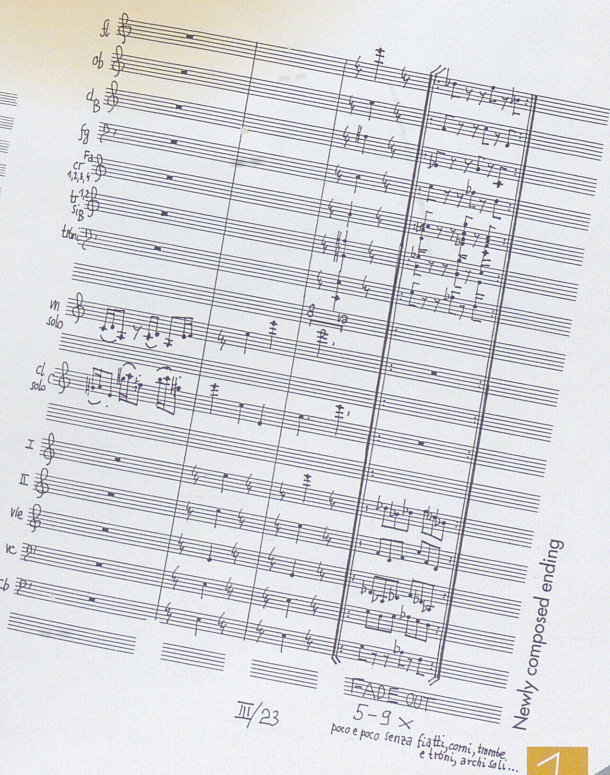
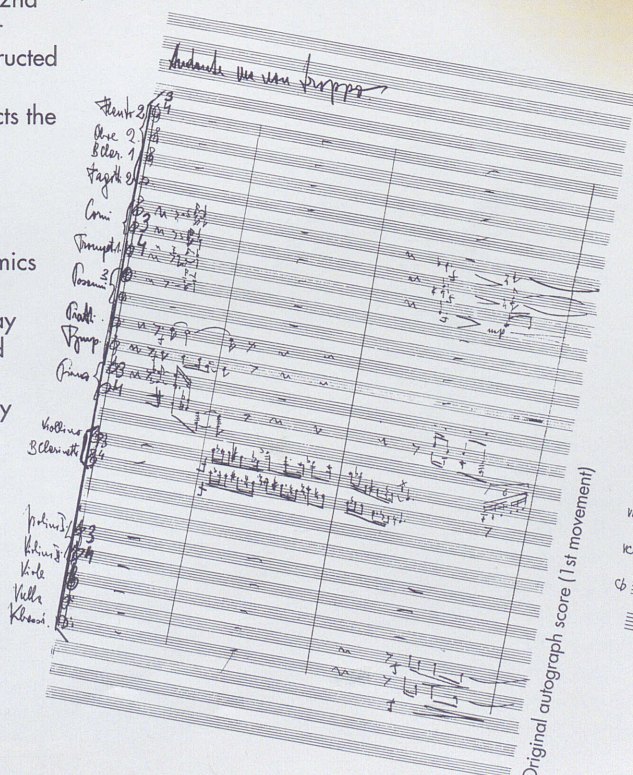
The initiator of the recording of the work, made on the 21st of February 2001 at Czech Radio Brno, was clarinetist Pavel Bušek, who recorded the *Concertino* with violinist Pavel

Wallinger and the Brno State Philharmonic conducted by Tomáš Hanus. This recording, musically directed by Petr Řezníček, was used in a new documentary by Czech Television Brno called *The Last Concertino*. The film was screened at the Golden Prague Festival and was premiered on Czech Television on the 3rd of June 2001.

Vítězslava Kaprálová's last concertante work was never completed, but an indication of the author's further intentions with the piece is perhaps to be found in references to two Old Testament verses that are jotted down before the last of the three notation systems on the last page of the autograph sketch of the *Concertino*. This last system, with which Kaprálová's manuscript ends, contains only two bars. The editors have created a conclusion to the work partially by using the composer's own motif material, and by symbolically using a final repeated bar as a FADE OUT. (note sample below on the right)

The biblical references are to Psalm 57 (on injustice and trust in the justice of God) and the Book of Job 30, 26 ("When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: And when I waited for light, there came darkness"). It is possible that apart from identifying the non-musical source of inspiration for the work, Kaprálová in these short notes was indicating the planned culmination of the whole piece. One possible explanation is that the author was considering inserting a vocal (solo or choral) element into the climax of the work, using the words from the biblical quotes.

There is no doubt, however, that the two quotations are related to the overall orientation of the work that responds to the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. Written under the immediate impression of this national disaster, the work shows the patriotic feelings of the young Czechoslovak composer.



Melodrama in Czech Music

VĚRA ŠUSTÍKOVÁ

The most dedicated heir of the melodramatic heritage of Zdeněk Fibich was **Josef Bohuslav Foerster** (1859-1951), whose long and fertile career is unclassifiable in terms of generation, style or identification with a certain movement or group (see the article in Czech Music



Josef Suk

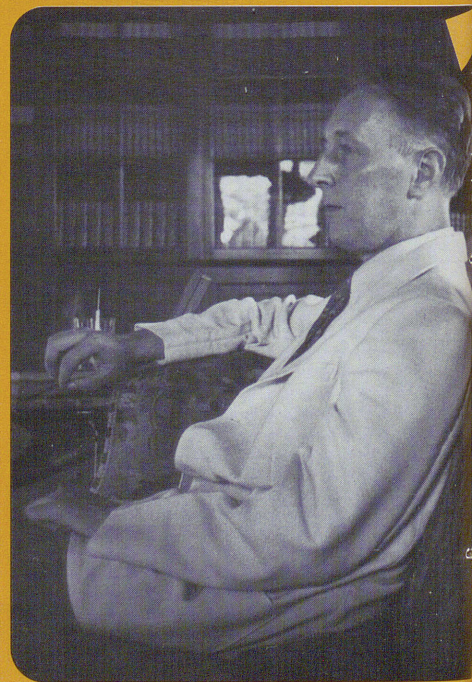
3/2001). Foerster was a contemporary of Smetana and Dvořák, but we can also count him as part of the post-Second World War generation! He was a man as universal as Fibich. In music he worked in almost all disciplines, and wrote the libretto for his four operas. He shared a love of the texts of Vrchlický with Fibich, but had a more spiritual temperament and brought a religious note to Czech melodrama. Unlike Fibich's, his world was not that of the ballad, but he extended the repertoire of Czech melodrama to include material from legend, the humoresque and

the lyrical contemplative. Foerster created over 30 melodramas. The most interesting include the Christmassy melodrama *Tři králové* [*The Three Kings*] on a poem by J. V. Sládek and *Mše biskupa Turpina* [*The Mass of Bishop Turpin*] on a text by Vrchlický (1920), which shows the author's musical wit. In contrast, the cycle of seven melodramas called *Z třicetileté války* [*From the Thirty Years War*] on poems by R. M. Rilke (1941) is serious in character. In this strongly anti-militaristic work the already 82-year-old composer abandoned his previous fullness of sound and achieved an extraordinary emotional impact with only a few carefully considered notes. Another member of the founding generation of Czech modern music was **Josef Suk**, who composed two lyrical stage melodramas at the turn of the century, *Radúz and Mahulena* and *Pod jabloní* [*Under the Apple Tree*] on romantic poems by Julius Zeyer. We also find the lyrical type of melodrama in *Romance o černém jezeře* [*Romance of the Black Lake*] by Suk's contemporary **Otakar Zich**.

The new generation of composers of the Twenties and Thirties drew inspiration from the social poetry of Jiří Wolker and Petr Bezruč. Leading figures here included **Emil Axman** with his melodrama *Jen jedenkrát* [*Only Once*], and **Vladimír Polívka** with his melodrama *Balada o očích topičových* [*Ballad of the Stoker's Eyes*]. Polívka was a major exponent of Czech expressionism in the Thirties, as he also demonstrated in another of his melodramas, *Balada v hnědi* [*Ballad in Brown*] (1944) to words by Josef Hora, which is an effective symbol of the atmosphere of the Protectorate and 2nd World War. His *Barikáda* [*Barricade*] to words by František Halas (1946) is of the same kind. The expressionist movement of the inter-war generation also produced **Jaroslav Zich's** melodrama *Romance helgolandská*

[*Helgoland Romance*] on a text by Jan Neruda, one of the most modern works of its time.

The position of melodrama as by now a characteristic element in the history of Czech music was confirmed by the fact that **Bohuslav Martinů**, one of the most world famous of Czech composers, who in his experimental inter-war period engaged with perhaps every musical style of the era except Expressionism, wrote three melodramas himself. His work combined the inspiration of contemporary European music with Czech folk music tradition. *Three Lyric Melodramas* (1913) date from his early youth. They are written on texts by French poetry and are entirely Impressionist in mood. *Vážka and Tanečnice z Jávy* [*The Dancer from Java*] are particularly impressive for inventive treatment of timbre in the sound combination of viola, harp and piano. Martinů's first melodrama *Večer* [*Evening*]



melodrama Cultural Culture



Alois Hába

Vít Nejedlý's *Umírající* [*The Dying*] (1933) on a poem by Jiří Wolker represents an example of engaged socialist art from before the war. It foreshadowed the postwar ideologically socialist works which while numerous had no lasting value. The actor, director and composer **Emil František Burian** (1904-1958), on the other hand, has a distinctive position in the field of melodrama, since in his dramatic works he often used long melodramatic passages that turned into the use of voice-band. Among the composers of the still living generation, **Jan Hanuš** was one who turned to melodrama

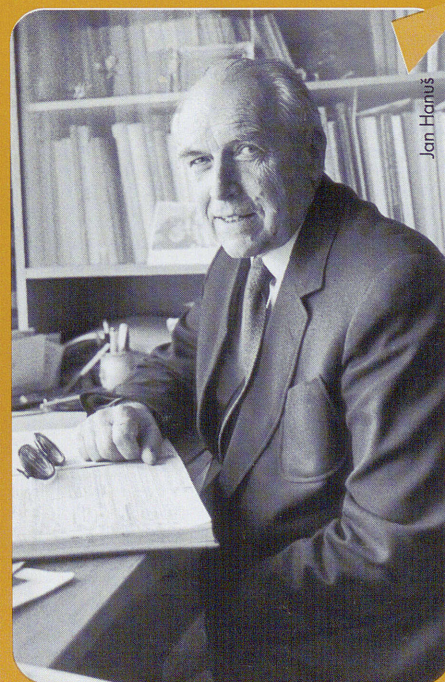
with solo harp foreshadows the future neo-classical musician. The linkage of word and music is distinctive in the composer's melodramas. For Martinů the words tend to have a purely symbolic character and are very restrained, while the music takes the main role.

Among the neo-Classical composers we should at least mention **František Bartoš** and his melodrama *Jaro* [*Spring*] (1925) on a text by Fráňa Šrámek, **Pavel Bořkovec** and his masterly melodrama *Jen jedenkrát* [*Only Once*] (1921) and **Vítězslava Kaprálová** with her melodrama *To Karel Čapek* (1939) on remarkable poetic texts by Vítězslav Nezval. **Jan Evangelista Zelinka** had a respectable number of melodramas to his name and while he was otherwise a second-rank composer, his concert melodramas, mainly on texts from popular Czech poets, were often performed in the period when they were written, 1925-1952. Zelinka was also the author of several stage melodramas, today forgotten. The most successful of these works was the melodrama *Kdybych byla malým klukem* [*If I were a Little Boy*] of 1925 on the text of a newspaper article by Lila Bubelová.

immediately after the war with his orchestral work *Karpatské requiem* [*Carpathian Requiem*] (1945). His later cycle of melodramas on the children's poetry of Václav Fischer, *Střepinky z Dětství* [*Splinters from Childhood*] (1972) has a fragile and moving lyricism. **Antonín Jemelík** (1930-1962), who died tragically young, wrote an outstanding *Three Melodramas* on poems by Jiří Orten, Fráňa Šrámek and Paul Verlaine. At the beginning of the Seventies the melodrama was enriched by **K. B. Jiráček**, a composer living in the USA with his *Praze* [*For Prague*] on a poem by Jan Noha (1972) and by **Alois Hába** with his *Tagebuch-Notizen*, on texts by Renata Pandulová, then living in West Germany. Concert life in the period of so-called Socialist Realism preferred large-scale musical forms and mass genres. The fragile chamber form of the concert melodrama gradually all but disappeared from public life. This means that some relatively serious meditative or purely intimate lyrical works, such as melodrama by **Václav Kučera**, **Jan Schneeweis**, **J. F. Fischer**, **Jitka Snižková** or **Elena Petrová** were overlooked.

Today the older generation of composers interested in melodrama includes above all **Jiří Matys**, **Jan Klusák**, **Marek Kopelent**, **Jiří Teml** and **Zdeněk Zahradník**. The middle generation is represented by **Ivan Kurz**, **Lukáš Matoušek**, **Emil Viklický**, **Petr Fiala**, **Sylvie Bodorová**, **Jiří Gemrot** and others. Among the youngest generations those who have drawn most attention are **Roman Novák**, **Jiří Pazour**, **Jiří Pakandl**, **Sylva Smejkalová** and **Petr Vočka**. For many of them the establishment in 1998 of what is still an internationally unique competition provided the impulse for writing in the genre. This is the **International Zdeněk Fibich Competition for Performance of Melodrama**, in which the 3rd round is a display of new compositions. Founded in the same year and immediately related to the competition is the **Prague Festival of Concert Melodrama**, which is more a platform for composers of the middle and older generation, as can be seen from premieres this year and last year of works written directly for the festival. These were *Jarní bubnování* [*Spring Drumming*] by **Jiří Matys**, *Melodramas on 3 translations of Shakespeare's Sonnet no. 66* by **Emil Viklický**, *Modlitba za atomového letce* [*Prayer for an Atomic Airman*] by **Zdeněk Zahradník**, *Halasení* by **Jiří Teml**, *Four Melodramas* by **Jiří Pazour**, *Milostná ronda* [*Amorous Rondos*] by **Jiří Gemrot** and *Pod kosou času* [*Under the Scythe of Time*] by **Lukáš Hurník**.

The interest of young composers and performers in this artistic genre and the existence of the two platforms just mentioned for the public presentation of melodrama give good grounds for believing that after years of a certain stagnation, Czech melodrama is once more heading for active development.



Jan Hanuš

2 x 3 = ...? TEREZÍN WEEKEND

WANDA DOBROVSKÁ

Encouragingly, the number of "cultural islands" in which the philosopher Harrie Salmon saw the basis for a new European spiritual culture, seems to be on the increase in this country. The civic association SHOCK (Soudobá hudba otevřená celé kultuře – Contemporary

Music Open to the Whole Culture) has some chance of generating a zone for meetings between free people who "are overcoming the materialist darkness with the spiritual light of their thought, developing the powers of their hearts and becoming original and creative once again". Another such focal point is the Duncan

centre, which has been strengthening these trends with its activities for some time, and yet another is the Middle European Colony of Contemporary Art (M.E.C.C.A.) in Terezín, which has only been in operation for a year.

The activities and vision of these three organisations came together at a Terezín Workshop held from the 11th – 13th of May. M.E.C.C.A. provided the space - the former storage facilities Kavalír 6 in the Terezín Fortress. For three days the raw space seemed to shed its history and dimensions through the installation and arrangement of open projects of quite unusual ambition, and became the venue for musical workshops, concerts and meetings organised by the SHOCK association. The thematic focus of the workshop followed on from what is so far a two-year cycle of magazine articles (Harmonie), radio programmes (Czech Radio 3 – Vltava) and student discussions (Department of Musicology of the Charles University Faculty of Arts) on Czech music. In the first year the students had the chance to meet selected representatives of the younger generation of Czech composers – Dan Dlouhý, Martin Smolka, Sylva Smejkalová, Michal Macourek, Vít Zouhar, Kryštof Mařatka, Kateřina Růžičková and Roman Z. Novák. The idea proved so popular that its

initiators (composers Miroslav Srnka and Michal Rataj, and musicologist Tereza Havelková) decided to use it again in the next year, this time extending it to include performers. The event now involved composers Peter Graham (Jaroslav Šťastný), Vlastislav Matoušek and Ivo Medek, and the concert artists Petr Matuszek (singer), Kamil Doležal (clarinettist) and Tomáš Ondrušek (percussionist). The Terezín weekend proved a "bonus" for everyone who participated in the programme in one form or another. The composers and performers figured both as lecturers and as protagonists (authors of pieces or players) of the compositions presented at the Saturday concert. The programme of the Friday concert consisted of works by students and fresh graduates of the composition department at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts (HAMU). It was envisaged that pupils, students and teachers of basic art schools and special middle schools, conservatories, and perhaps even music higher schools would be participants in the workshop and that the general and local public would attend the concerts.

The concept was well-thought out, but was in fact too ambitious. The workshop took place on the Saturday, but the excellent idea of first offering workshops led by individual artists and then three sessions with lectional composer-performer pairs (thematically focused on the evening concert) foundered on problems of time. The meeting with the invited musicians was so interesting that it carried on long past schedule. This was in itself no reason for disappointment, but one can only regret the loss of the anticipated second half – perhaps it will happen next time. It was definitely a good thing that the workshops did not overlap. Although some participants were more interested in composition and others in performance problems, there were enough people who were interested in both and were therefore not forced to choose. The unique atmosphere of both concerts was primarily the result of the unique space – the performers had to communicate

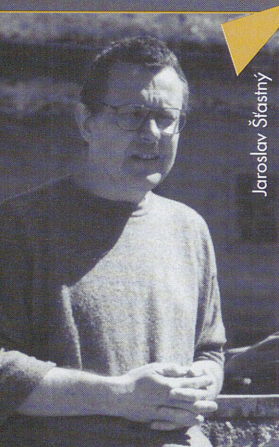
through the not particularly favourable acoustics of the long storage rooms with low ceilings, and this represented a creative challenge to which they rose. Even in the amplified

compositions the electronic element required a very sensitive approach (and results were still uneven). One inspiring aspect was the integration of visual and motion elements into some of the compositions and concerts – the event took place in collaboration with the Duncan Centre. The Saturday concert of works by participating lecturers-composers played by participating lecturers-performers (including a happening with students in Matoušek's Labyrinth) was generally more balanced, while the Friday concert brought more surprises. These were both positive – in the music of Ondřej Adámek, who has just returned from a period of study in Paris where he clearly made huge progress in the treatment of the electro-acoustic and percussion element, and negative – in the collective composition by Michal Nejtek, Roman Palas and Michal Trnka, which was laborious and encumbered by infantile non-musical ideas.

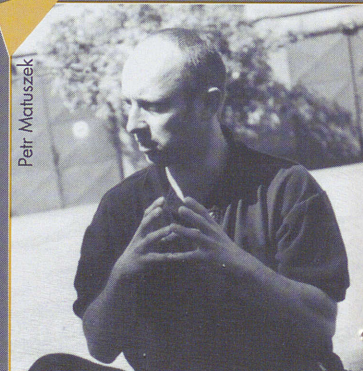
The meetings and discussions that were also part of the whole concept of the Terezín Weekend did not work as well as they might. One reason was once again a time problem, since the concerts ended quite late and the cold nights did not specially encourage follow-up intellectual analysis sessions. There also seems to be a still deep-rooted Czech timidity about asking questions.

Here and there someone asked a question at the workshops, but no real debates quite got going. Not even the final –

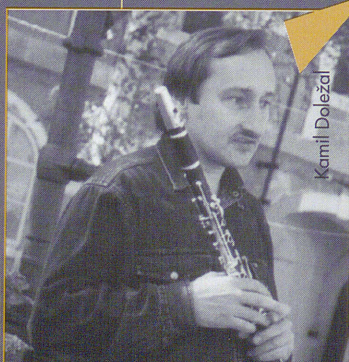
Sunday – meeting saw any useful exchange of views in the true sense of the word, but only a series of comments and minor impressions, although one was thankful enough for these in the circumstances. The final question must obviously be whether to carry on with the event or not. And the answer should be yes. Carry on. The shortcomings at the Terezín Weekend were not the result of failures of organisation or basic conception, but actually the desire to include more than was feasible in the time and with the theme proposed. The idea of holding the event away from a major cultural centre is definitely a good one, since no one thinks of hurrying home after individual items on the programme and there is more space for informal communication – including those discussions just mentioned, in which we still don't quite know how to cross the invisible dividing line between teachers and pupils.



Jaroslav Šťastný



Petr Matuszek



Kamil Doležal



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MORE ON THE STAGING OF OPERA TODAY

PETR POKORNÝ

In his thought-provoking reflections on the problem of contemporary production of opera (CZECH MUSIC 3/2001), Petr Kofroň clearly characterises the divergence in trends in the production of stage drama and opera. In my view, however, his insistence on intellectual "honesty" means that he sacrifices some approaches to the problem that are effective, even if not entirely "honest".

The two "honest" solutions that he proposes are either to stage operas in historically authentic, i.e. "museum" style, or to stage them as "interpretations" that will in fact turn out much more expensive than the "authentic" productions since they will involve the creation of new operas on old themes. There are, however, a whole range of other possibilities that are known in practice, even if they are less pure and honest. Some such approaches can be demonstrated from examples of productions by the Plzeň Opera, which Petr Kofroň himself heads.

My reflections are premised on the argument that only in exceptional cases do text and music, libretto and score, form a consistent and unified whole. This operatic ideal perhaps comes closest to fulfilment in Mozart's operas on librettos by the congenial Lorenzo da Ponte, or in those of Janáček's operas for which the composer himself prepared the libretto. But can one seriously claim that the dilettante rhymes of Eliška Krásnohorská measure up to the music of Smetana? And what about many of Verdi's libretti, which are notoriously so confused and illogical that only the dramatic power of music of genius rescues them? In the very basis of opera (in

complete contrast to stage drama) there is a contradictory tension in the relationship between word and music.

This tension need not always be so strikingly manifest as in Smetana's case. Fibich's *Šárka*, for example, has a libretto that is well written from the point of view of dramatic situations and overall structure, but when we read it we find that the language is often distorted to the extreme limit of comprehensibility. The written basis of an opera (text, music), therefore has two elements that need not be at the same artistic level and need not speak to the audience, especially the contemporary audience, about the same thing. In contemporary stage drama productions the text is directorially adapted but the direction is then entirely subordinated to the adapted text. This is not possible in the case of opera. If we stage it as a "museum piece", and thus meet the current trend in favour of "authentic interpretation", we may actually produce something unintentionally comic. If we stage it in "contemporary" style, then to the two original levels mentioned we add another - the director's interpretation. In the much discussed Plzeň production of Fibich's *Šárka*, the director Jiří Pokorný did nothing less (to put it in simplified terms) than set the mass slaughter with which the opera ends in the context of the mass slaughters of the 20th century. For the easy-going opera-lover a mass murder in mythical times is just an entertaining spectacle, and he is greatly discomfited to be reminded that something similar has happened and is still happening in his lifetime! It is just this approach, which Kofroň does not mention in his article and may regard as less than honest, that I consider very fruitful and also - and one needs to make this point - less expensive.

A second example is provided by the Plzeň production of Foerster's opera *Bloud [The Naif]*. The same applies to the production of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* at the Prague National Theatre. There are operas which in theme and treatment are so timeless that it will always be possible to stage them in a "timeless" way. This is true of David Radok's productions in Prague, and Michal Dočekal's productions in Plzeň. For his last opera Foerster drew inspiration from a short story by Leo Tolstoy, but he wrote the libretto himself. The opera ends with the understanding that there is no need to search for Christ in the Holy Land, because he is present everywhere. The current Plzeň production is very effective and testifies to the continuing relevance of the theme in the modern world.

I believe that there is no necessity to search only for pure, "honest" approaches. In the contemporary world, in particular, in which there is no single dominant style, and in which inspirations are found in both the past and the present, the near and the far, in high and low culture, it is possible to exploit a whole range of techniques and ideas in staging opera as in other areas of art.

One final thought. It is interesting and suggestive that Petr Kofroň, that eternal seeker and doubter, should now be the only upholder of the Czech operatic tradition. Which other opera company here produced one of Fibich's operas in the year of his double jubilee? Which other company commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Josef Bohuslav Foerster?

FRANTIŠEK CHAUN

Double Anniversary

JAROMÍR HAVLÍK

František Chaun (b. 26th of January 1921, d. 30th of December 1981) was a great individualist among Czech composers (and not only Czechs) and a highly unusual phenomenon in his native land. If we want to find some parallel, or similar type in the history of art, then E. T. A. Hoffmann, older by one and half century, naturally springs to mind. Like Hoffmann, Chaun had a regular profession much at odds with his natural personal inclinations. Hoffmann, by profession a lawyer and civil servant who submitted to the strict discipline of the Prussian bureaucracy, was by nature a many-sided gifted artist with a fertile and often bizarre imagination and an unfettered creativity in a whole series of fields of art - literature, painting and of course music. František Chaun was similar. A native of Kaplice in South Bohemia, he graduated in pharmacy and throughout his life followed the profession of pharmacist with its demanding requirements for exact knowledge and painstaking procedure. By nature, however, he was an artist par excellence - a man with huge powers of imagination and fantasy and an inborn urge to create, which he - just like Hoffmann - somehow balanced off against the limitations of his profession. In Chaun's case as well, this versatile creativity expressed itself in several fields of art. He was a skilful painter with a very

expressive idiom, a landscape painter and portraitist, and he was a writer with a tendency to grotesque vision and bizarre fabulation. And of course he was a highly individualistic composer. As an artist he was actually an autodidact in all fields, who used his natural talents for observation to absorb the basic elements of technique and methods of the different arts in order to adapt them to his own vision and creative needs. He created above all intuitively, with complete freedom, and without any scruples about combining logical with apparently illogical elements in works of art that are extremely expressive and powerful.

At heart Chaun was a romantic, and an individualist with a tendency towards deep and serious introspection and towards the grotesque, irony, parody and pastiche sometimes taken to the point of absurdity. In Chaun an inner complexity of personality also found expression in a stylised naiveté, which he sometimes used as a basis for frivolous games playing, but at other times employed as a metaphor to express complicated and deadly serious matters. Among composers he loved the great "musical actor and protheist" Igor Stravinsky (who also did not wear wisdom "on his sleeve" but like every real wise

clown kept it in his heart), and he loved naive artists of every kind, since he felt a kinship for them. This taste meant that he could not fail to appreciate Josef Hlinomaz (well-known czech actor and naive painter, *ed. note*), for example (to whom he dedicated one of his *Pictures for Orchestra* of 1980) or Jean Dubuffet,

with him he was linked by years of personal friendship on the basis of shared spiritual and artistic orientations. From the end of the Sixties he corresponded with Dubuffet and later they visited each other in person. Chaun had had much in common with Dubuffet, although the latter was twenty years older. Above all they shared unconventionality, a love of stylised naivism and primitivism (art brut), and a "total playfulness" leading to frivolous (or apparently frivolous) games, and at other times to the expression of a high and far from superficial seriousness. Dubuffet also became the dedicatee of one of Chaun's compositions - the *Double Concerto for Violin, Cello and Chamber Orchestra "Hommage a Dubuffet"* of 1970.

The pharmacist František Chaun gained a name as a painter at the latest from the end of the Forties, and he began to win a public reputation as a composer sometime later, roughly from the later Fifties. He learned the principles of composition privately with Jindřich Feld and later for a time with Klement Slavický. His musical idiom grew mainly from the "20th-century Classics", and above all Stravinsky. These influences are clear in his *Symphonietta buffa for Bassoon, Piano and Strings* (1962-63), the chamber *Divertimento for 9 Wind Instruments* (1960-61), *Serenata rabbiosa for Violin and 4 Double Basses* (1964), *Decimeto for Nonet and Piano* (1966), *Five Pictures for Orchestra* (1970), *Bruno-Quartetino buffo* (1975-76), the microcantata *"What I remember of Latin or Tender Memory of Igor Stravinsky"* (1979), *Picture for Orchestra. A Memory of Josef Hlinomaz* (1980) and many other compositions with which, mainly in the Sixties and Seventies - Chaun won a reputation with the music public as a master of musical humour and the grotesque, whose witty and refined music was both entertaining and elevating. This side of Chaun's personality was very strong and - especially in his musical work - is relatively strongly represented. Chaun's artistic clowning often included a taste for neologisms and unusual titles for his works (*Ghiribizzo for Piano and Orchestra*, 1965-66). On the other hand, however, Chaun was a philosopher capable of plunging deep into



SWISS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR FOR JEWELS OF SLAV MUSIC

TEREZA HAVELKOVÁ

What is now the sixth annual international *Concentus Moraviae* music festival took place this year over most of the month of June in thirteen towns of South Moravia. The theme this year was the presentation of the "Jewels of Slav Music" and artistic direction of the festival was entrusted to a foreign expert on Slav music, the Swiss Walter Labhart.

The Concentus Moraviae Festival asked you to put together the programme for this year's festival which was devoted to Slav music with a major representation of Czech music. How did you, as a Swiss, get involved in Czech and Slav music generally?

Czech music plays a really important part in my life because I have always regarded Prague and Czech culture in general as a kind of mid-point between Moscow and Paris...as a cultural and spiritual point of intersection between these two extremes. From my youth I have been strongly interested in French culture on one side and Slav culture on the other. After my first meetings with Prague musicians and above all Alois Hába I developed a taste for Czech music without my distinguishing what was Czech and what was Moravian music. I was just interested generally in Czech music. Roughly from the mid-Sixties I've made regular visits to this country, often staying for quite a long time and visiting various important places like Hukvaldy, Polička or Nelažozveves and other places linked to Czech musical history, and from a certain moment it was clear that I was going to be especially committed to Czech music in my various fields of activity.

I know that you're the owner of a private music collection that includes a great deal of material on Czech music...

Yes, I do have such a collection – it's a semi-public library, which is open on working days in the afternoon, and has several areas of focus. One is undoubtedly the whole range of Slav music, i.e. from Czech music to Russian and Ukrainian music, and including Polish music, Bulgarian and so on. Another focus is Jewish music, and another is French music, but in all cases only music of the 19th and 20th centuries.

One could call the programme you created for the Concentus Moraviae festival courageous in terms of its breadth, non-traditional choice of pieces and inclusion of little-played works and rarities. On what criteria did you choose the music and how did you manage to get agreement for the choice?

I don't know whether you could call the programme itself "courageous", but it was certainly brave of the festival director David Dittrich to hire me to put it together. Perhaps it comes to the same thing in the end.

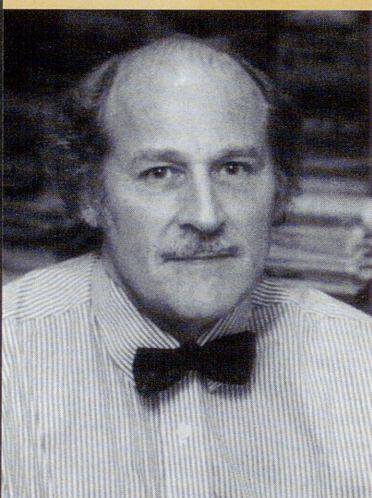
The basic idea was to present Slav music in the context of other cultures, and obviously with some particular categories emphasised. Since the festival is held in Moravian towns, it was a direct moral obligation to give space to Moravian composers in the first place, and then to Czech composers in general, and we also decided to emphasise Polish music as well as a result of funding from the Polish Ministry of Culture. Apart from that there was naturally a need to focus on Russian music, which is the



serious and fundamental themes, contemporary and timeless. Examples of this side of the composer's work include his "Ulysses" *String Quartet* (1969-70) and above all his unique trilogy of symphonic pictures based on the works of Franz Kafka: *The Castle* (1964-5, originally entitled "The Story of the Land Surveyor K"), *The Trial* (1967) and *Metamorphosis* (1968-69) - in the final order of *Metamorphosis* - the Castle - the Trial. The first completed part of this trilogy - *The Castle* - also shows Chaun's temporary inclination to serialism, with which the Czech musical avantgarde was trying very intensively (and sometimes too hastily) to come to grips as a way of getting over the handicap of the preceding era. In the two other Kafka pieces, however, the typically intuitive, free creativity that marked all his music prevails. In the Seventies, the period of his personal contact with Jean Dubuffet, Chaun created several concrete and electronic compositions in the Paris Acoustic studio, and in these he also gave free reign to his spontaneous and unfettered powers of creative fantasy.

Chaun's musical legacy is not extensive (compared to his hundreds of paintings). It consists of approximately 30 completed scores. These works, however, represent excellent music of lasting value, which succeeds in giving refined pleasure, stimulating the imagination and provoking reflection. Like everything that is an original enrichment of our spiritual world it is worth remembering and celebrating. In January this year we remembered the eightieth birthday that Chaun did not live to see, and on the 30th of December it will have been 20 years since his death.

archetype of Slav music - that is why the opening concert included two works with a close relationship to P. I. Tchaikovsky, who outwardly and in international consciousness is the symbol of Slav music in general (one of the pieces was his own and another was Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky by A. S. Arensky.)



I found it rather surprising the programme included names such as Tchaikovsky and beside them names that were almost unknown and rarities. On what basis did you choose these "specialities"?

Naturally I knew that festivals of this kind are and have to be to a certain extent commercial cultural affairs, and so there always have to be some big names like Tchaikovsky, Martinů, Janáček or Smetana from the point of view of audiences and finances. But I permitted myself to include some specialities alongside them, and the choice of these specialities was naturally limited by the availability of performers. For example in the case of melodramas I based my approach on the fact that their performance requires only a reciter and piano, does not create too many problems, and that it is natural, for example, to include classic pieces such as The Fisherman by Bedřich Smetana on Goethe's text or some Foerster and Fibich melodramas that are generally known. Alongside these, however, I chose a few rarities that could enrich a programme of this kind without problems. I wanted to confront the public with their own culture, which has rather been pushed into the background, as in the case of Emil Axman, for example, and other Moravian composers. I also wanted to exploit the chance to mix well-known pieces with unknown pieces that I was sure the public would accept in the same way as the famous pieces.

Were you expectations fulfilled? Looking at the programme it was my impression that especially in the case of the "melodrama" evening, it was a very select affair that would tend to appeal more to the expert than the general public.

I have to say, unfortunately, that the melodrama evening didn't in fact come off very well. I put it down to a certain laxity

or carelessness that meant the performers were not willing to rehearse certain pieces, some of them even classic and well-known pieces, and instead included notorious pieces that had been in their repertoire for years and were sufficiently well-known from the radio and recordings (Fibich's V podvečer [Early Evening] nebo Nálady, dojmy, upomínky [Moods, Impressions, Remembrances]). The musicians concerned were also an ageing piano duo, and I wasn't happy about that because I think the festival should offer space primarily to musical youth. It was a really big disappointment for me.

But I assume that most of the planned "specialities" at the festival were in fact performed. Could you mention any in particular?

First I should say that I wasn't trying to present great rarities as such, but just musically and artistically attractive works of value and with something to say to the public. That was why on the opening evening, for example, which was supposed to present the profile categories of the festival – Russian, Czech and Polish music – I suggested one such work, and the suggestion was accepted. This was a relative long variation piece on the basis of twelve-tone sequence from the first Polish dodecaphonic composer Józef Koffler, who fell victim to the Nazis. There supposedly exists a printed score of this 20th-century piece but the publisher could not provide it and the performance material was probably never even published. I hugely appreciate the fact that the festival staff were willing to create parts on the basis of an ordinary study score, and so make possible the Czech premiere of this exceedingly important piece for the history of twelve-tone music.

How much freedom of choice of pieces and performers did you have when you put the programme together?

The choice of performers was mainly a matter of the initiative of the festival director, who in this area has a better overview and knows which young ensembles have a brilliant standard – the presentation of young ensembles is one of the important features of the festival. So he chose the performers with a few exceptions that I recommended, some of them from Switzerland, and he managed to engage.

As far as choice of pieces was concerned I had a completely free hand, but obviously I had to reckon with the risk that many musicians would not want to rehearse them just for a single performance. This was the reason why there were certain surprises in the form of programme changes made at the last minute, which I knew nothing about, and there were

certain minor disappointments. Of course, programme changes happen at every festival, but in my view when an overall design concept exists, the musicians should respect it. I should add that all the works I suggested were available in my archive and I was prepared to supply them, and so the problem was definitely not any difficulty of getting hold of noted material.

Was this year the first time you had collaborated with the Concertus Moraviae festival?

It was the second time. Two years ago I was engaged to prepare the "French" festival, which presented only French music or music inspired by France in the short span of fifty years from French Romanticism to the Groupe de Six and up to the young Messiaen in the Thirties.

Are you planning any further collaboration?

Yes. I've been asked to plan another year of the festival, this time with the working title, "150 Years of Jewish Music". It won't only be concerned with the music of Jewish composers – we shall also include works by non-Jewish composers who used Jewish themes in their music (Bruch, Mussorgsky, Ravel, Shostakovich and others), but the focus will be on the work of composers of Jewish origin, again with an eye to the festival setting – Moravia. There will be works by Janáček's pupil Pavel Haas and Gideon Klein, who worked in Prague with Alois Hába, and works by Moravian and Czech composers of the 19th century who are today almost unknown, such as Mendelssohn's friend Moscheles, Alexander Dreyschock of Prague or Chopin's friend Jules Schulhoff. Today the music of such authors is practically never heard in their homeland.

How did the public respond to your relatively demanding programme design?

Since I regularly travel round Europe and attend concerts from Paris to Moscow and from Copenhagen and Stockholm to Rome, I have a basis for comparison with similar festivals and I can only sing the praises of the Moravian public. I have never yet met such an open, fresh, curious and rewarding public, so willing to accept unknown names in a programme without any kind of prejudice, and so responsive even to the most difficult pieces. I had the feeling that even when the audience were not entirely captivated by an unknown piece, they still regarded as something new and so an enrichment. And so I wasn't just satisfied with the public, I was euphoric about the public! It's one reason I shall continue to work with the festival, so that I can rediscover Moravian "specialities" for the Moravian public and open up new perspectives.

TEREZA HAVELKOVÁ

Although the Prague Spring Festival has no special contemporary music concert series, this year as so often it included a scattering of concerts that had the potential to become real contemporary events.

A few comments on programme design....

In a review of a Prague Agon Concert in the last issue, we mentioned principles of inclusion of contemporary music in the festival programmes.

Contemporary music appears at the Prague Spring in two basic programme forms, that we've called the "sandwich" form, and the "monothematic" form.

Prague Spring

AND ITS CONTEMPORARY EVENTS

There would be nothing fundamentally wrong in the fact that the programme design of our largest music festival steers an even course between the two principles described were it not for the way in which the sandwich principle has crept into the monothematic concerts as well. What am I talking about here? To a certain extent it is understandable that works of the Moravian 20th-century classics Martinů and Janáček should be included on the programme of

Ars Incognita

Despite the element of "sandwich" the concert by the Brno group Ars Incognita was more balanced than the Agon concert dealt with in the last issue. At least the inclusion in the programme of Janáček's *Concertino* meant that we in Prague were able to hear the brilliant young Brno pianist Jan Jiraský in performance (he won the Classic Prize in 1999). The first "tame" half of the concert also offered not only Martinů but also Ištvan's *Rotace a návraty* [*Rotations and Returns*] with its dominant cor anglais (seconded by viola and cello), in which the composer comes to terms with the principles of minimalism, which he of course integrates naturally into the context of his own musical idiom. In the second half of the concert the group presented a typical selection of its repertoire - contemporary music by living Moravian composers. While Alois Piňos belongs to the same generation as the late Ištvan, Zouhar and Medek represented the younger Brno generation. Zouhar's "...and coronide left her look" confirms that its author is the clearest minimalist on the Czecho-Moravian scene. This "foretaste of Coronide", Zouhar's Baroque minimalist chamber opera, is actually a small trifle, whose point is the Baroque cadence that emerges from the minimalist current of the music.

For me the high point of the evening was definitely Piňos's *Stella Matutina* - the Classic Prize jury was certainly right to award the prize to this work in 1999. Here the marimba, percussion and chamber orchestra spin an exceedingly fragile, allusive, colourful thread with almost impressionist qualities (the dialogue between vibraphone and piano was especially charming), but there are also more robust passages in which the percussion emerge strongly. The perfect proportioned character and balance of the whole piece is remarkable.

The concert ended with *Triax* by Ivo Medek, in which the austere and almost archetypal sound quality represented by the marimba, percussion and piano (the soloists here were Tomáš Ondrůšek on percussion and Mutsuko Aizawa on marimba), struggled with "sediments of emotion" in the form of overtones of orchestral cliché in the rest of the ensemble. I could not resist the idea that this was really a musical reflection on the situation of contemporary music.



Ars Incognita during the performance of Ivo Medek's *Triax*

The "sandwich" principle is based on the idea that contemporary music, in limited doses and moderate form, belongs in "normal" concerts, i.e. concerts orientated towards historical music. Here the concerts are usually symphonic and the pieces chosen are "digestible". This year, for example, this was the format in which we heard Husa's *Concerto for Orchestra*, Chaun's *Ghiribizzo for Orchestra and Piano* and Kalabis's *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 2*. The "monothematic" principle, on the other hand, involves the idea of contemporary music as an independent entity, and is orientated to the contemporary music public rather than the historical music public. This justifies the choice of "more audacious" contemporary pieces that the "normal" concert-going public would not accept. Most of the works in the "monothematic" category of concert are chamber music.

the leading Moravian contemporary music group Ars Incognita, since ultimately this provides a broader context. But why on earth juxtapose the string quartets of Jan Klusák with Verdi, d'Indy and Beethoven? Is it to attract more people? Yet Klusák's work still dominated the concerts and I don't think that Verdi-lovers are so easily duped. Is it because at the end of the day the pieces are all string quartets? From the point of view of genre context, it would surely be more instructive to include Bartók, even if two generations older, not to mention Klusák's contemporaries (what about Penderecki, for example, or Gorecki?). On the other hand, it would be unjust not to express appreciation for the fact that a living Czech composer has followed Bartók, Schönberg and Hába in being included in a prestigious Prague Spring quartet project.

The concert confirmed my impression that Ars Incognita is an ensemble with a level of performance that deserves full attention and recognition, and definitely belongs without reservation on the programme of festivals like the Prague Spring. I only hope that the organisers of the festival have realised this too.

when the whole ensemble was playing together there was never any dynamic drowning of the text, and for the most part the music offered a kind of instrumental interlude in the pauses between recitation. The only striking interruption and break from the markedly monotonous flow was a jazz-rock insertion of electric guitar solo.

been happy if it had lasted twice as long.

A Treat from Ostrava

If we wanted to be pedantic, then we should not include the following concert in our survey at all, since two thirds of it was devoted to "Classics of the 20th Century". Nevertheless, for me it was one of the most powerful experiences of the whole festival. This was not because of Paul Hindemith's celebrated *Symphonic Metamorphoses*, or the post-impressionist and not particularly exciting *Riverrun* by Toru Takemitsu (even with Igor Ardašev at the piano); it was Edgar Varèse's *Amériques* and the brilliant performance of the orchestra under the baton of Christian Arming that enthralled me. Despite the fact that *Amériques* was written at the beginning of the 20th century, it trumps many a contemporary novelty in its audacity of sound and uninflated drama. This itself is probably one of the reasons why it has not been included in the basic repertoire of symphony orchestras and its fame lives on mainly in handbooks to 20th-century music.

As far as the performance was concerned, I think it is fair to say that today the Ostrava Philharmonic leads Czech orchestras in the interpretation of contemporary music, and clearly this is



Reciters Jan Tříška and Jan Fišar, composer Petr Kotík playing the flute in *Letters to Olga* at the Prague Castle

Castle Event

Clearly the most socially prestigious of this year's Prague Spring contemporary events was the concert by Petr Kotík's S. E. M. Ensemble at the Prague Castle. Kotík's *Dopisy Olze [Letters to Olga]* is a setting of the well-known letters from Václav Havel to his wife. The promise of the presence of the author himself at their performance drew an unusually large audience to the Spanish Hall.

The almost hour-long piece surprisingly held the audience's attention, clearly mainly because they were able to follow the text for the whole period. This was because the version of the work being performed involved only two reciters reading extracts from Havel's texts (in the original version there had been five and played from a tape), and so the spoken word remained more or less comprehensible, and thanks to the slow tempo of the recitation and its strong emphasis - Kotík wanted the reciters (Jan Tříška and Jan Fišar) to read the text "as if for the first time" - the listener could often even make out two sections read out at one go. In some places the text was read in unison. The musical element might be described as "reverential". The instruments of the rather unusual chamber ensemble - two flutes, two trumpets, two guitars and a bass guitar - were often playing only in twos, and then in unison or fourth-fifth two-part harmony, and so the overall impression was mainly "melodious". Even

the space of the room (the effect is heightened by the distribution of the

musicians around the hall), can be appreciated and savoured only if we realise that our psychological state needs to be nearer to one of meditation than to a listening concentrated on contrasts as is usual in Western European music. This is

one of the reasons why the piece "goes on so long". The listener must gradually retune himself, so as to begin to understand the charm of the music. Anyone who succeeds in this process finds that he suddenly has a much sharper perception not only on the sound events produced by the musicians, but also of the other incidental noises: the squirming of bewildered listeners, the departure of people who can't stand it any more, the telephone in the next-door room, one's own breathing... The piece ended after roughly half an hour, to the great relief of many in the hall. I would have



Igor Ardašev, Christian Arming and the Ostrava Philharmonic

primarily thanks to its young principal conductor (he is only twenty-five years old!), who leads it with complete precision, confidence and stirring enthusiasm - both on the podium and conceptually. It is rare to find a Czech symphony orchestra playing a piece like *Amériques* with such discipline and such commitment.

REPORT

Karel Husa, the Czech composer living in the USA celebrated his 80th birthday on August 7, 2001.

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Sledě, živé sledě

CD REVIEW:

Pavel Fajt - Drum Trek

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