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**Pavel Zemek Novák**

**Siren Test Concerts**

**Klementina Kalašová**

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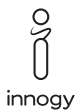
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## DEAR READERS,

as we welcome you on these pages once again in the new year, the situation in Czech music is much the same as it was before Christmas: no public concerts or theatre performances are allowed. Nevertheless, as our Czech Music Everyday section makes clear, Czech musicians are doing their best despite the restrictions, making good use of both streaming and recording technologies. February also saw the conclusion of the Music for Sirens project, which continued almost unchanged (though without live listeners, that is) from its previous form – the sound broadcast on radio and the video on social media. However, this issue of Czech Music Quarterly pays tribute to a composer we could describe as inhabiting the other end of the technological spectrum: Pavel Zemek Novák doesn't own a mobile phone, and though he agreed to set up an email account a few years ago, he only checks it on Monday afternoon. You can dive into his work through a new interview, an older but updated text by his compositional colleague Jaroslav Štátný, or, perhaps most appropriately, through the wonderful premiere recording of his evening-length chamber piece *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, which you will find on the CD attached to this issue.

*Wishing you a musical spring,*  
Ian Mikyska  
deputy editor-in-chief



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Cover: Excerpts from a manuscript by Pavel Zemek Novák



PHOTO: MARTIN WIESNER 2x

**To Experiment,  
To Be Wrong,  
To Try New Things.**

## Composer **Pavel Zemek Novák** and his Journey to Complexity

Starting out as an oboe player in an operatic orchestra, Pavel Zemek Novák arrived at his own compositional style, one that programmatically renounces any external lustre. His compositions bear no trace of the opulence of the grand operatic theatre. Instead, the unison takes centre stage. For the sixty-three-year-old Moravian composer, however, the unison does not necessarily represent a trajectory towards simplicity – rather, it aims at what is

musically and spiritually essential. His pieces are a reflection of his way forward: indirect, meandering, full of decelerations and silences that resonate with memories of both the ancient and recent past.

The first milestone in Zemek's unison works was the 2005 composition *The Prophecy of Isaiah*. In the autumn of 2020, the Brno Contemporary Orchestra and its conductor Pavel Šnajdr made the first ever studio recording, for Czech Radio, which was which was published by the Czech Music Information Centre and which you will find attached to this issue of CMQ. This was the perfect opportunity to speak to the composer about how the piece and Zemek's thinking about music has changed over the past fifteen years, and why Puccini, Verdi, and Mozart are all important for him.

*Do you choose the subject matter of your pieces, or do ideas come to you by themselves?*

Sometimes, it's the former, sometimes the latter - it usually has to do with a particular occasion or opportunity. With *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, the inspiration came from the text, which had been sitting in my memory for as long as I can remember. The musical occasion only came later. Connections between the music and the text began appearing, and over the course of a year's work, both components became intertwined. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* was thus composed from both sides at once, as it were: the Book of Isaiah influenced the musical component, which in turn influenced my perception of the text foundation.

*Did you only begin sketching the music once you had received the commission, or had it begun taking shape prior to that?*

It only really materialised with the commission, and it was accompanied by a third element: my ideas about unison at the time. This was a period of utter fascination and excitement - I was discovering entirely unknown connections across European music. I don't want to speak of a complete elimination of verticality, but through its reduction, I kept arriving, more and more often, at the shape of the melodic line of Gregorian chant. This created connections - bizarre ones, from my point of view - which were then realised in the score itself and mirrored in the messianic poem of the Book of Isaiah.

*It really isn't true that you've completely done away with verticality in music - after all, that is practically impossible, unless one were to compose using single pure sine tones.*

I often encounter the criticism that I write music without verticality. But in reality, all I am doing is an intervallic reduction to the unison, octave, double octave, and



so on within the space music makes available to us. In addition to this general verticality, there is another, a hidden verticality, contained in the linearity – a succession of tones might reveal triads and their inversions that are both audible in the music and discernible in the score.

*Did it ever happen that you were rereading the Book of Isaiah and found that it was speaking to you directly in music?*

No, never – the process was a combination of my knowledge of the text, my direction in music, and the commission, which tied it all together. Another important aspect was my euphoric response, at the time, to the discovery that the unison technique can work musically and can therefore be used to construct extended pieces musical. For me, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* was the first experiment on a larger scale concerning temporal spans in musical form.

*Who commissioned the piece?*

The composer Jaroslav Štátný, who often uses the pseudonym Peter Graham, played an important role. He was the dramaturge of the Exposition of New Music festival in Brno, which commissioned the piece. Thanks to him, I also received the support of the Ministry of Culture and was able to collaborate with the MoEns ensemble, who performed the world premiere in 2005.

*Fifteen years later, the Brno Contemporary Orchestra recorded the piece in a Czech Radio studio. Does it help the piece to “stay on the shelf” for that long?*

I cannot be the judge of that, but it certainly pleases me, and that’s important too.

*Did you make many changes to the score before the recording?*

I certainly did. Thanks the patience of the MoEns ensemble, I had made many corrections before the first performance, particularly as regards the colour of the melodic line, as well making certain segments shorter, as the temporal scale is very demanding considering the level of musical invention that the piece contains. Fifteen years later, we can hear the original shape of the piece, but many details – as well as extended sections – have been reworked or completed, particularly regarding musical colour.

*You used to be an oboe player in the Brno opera orchestra. What did this experience give you as a composer?*

My memories of this time are wonderful in all respects. The most useful aspect, however, was the insight I got into the woodwind and brass instruments. I also observed the problems in the strings that were addressed by the conductor and concertmaster. I got a sense of which sections were difficult for the orchestra and had to be repeated many times in rehearsal; where the borders of calm and concentrated coordination are located and where rising demands increase the pressure on the musicians to an unbearable degree. I also left the orchestra with a number of lifelong friendships.

*So the orchestra provided you with an opportunity to understand music better both practically and technically?*

Precisely. My time at the Brno opera coincided with the tenure of Václav Nosek as dramaturge of the company. We performed new productions of Martinů, Stravinsky, Janáček... I could explore how it all sounded, how the parts were written. I was often surprised by how some canonical composers who are not among my favourites and whom I wouldn't usually listen to intentionally (Puccini, for instance), had scores that were worked out with precision and a beautiful sense of colour. I think this was a positive influence.

*Composing in unison, colour becomes, of course, an enormously important means of expression. Since you mentioned Puccini, I'll say that if there is a musical element that typifies him, it is the use of unison in duets. I thought this might have caught your attention.*

In the theatre orchestra, I had the opportunity to experience some very interesting unison structures – with Puccini, the brass unisons are also remarkable. I was also surprised to find this in Verdi: I remember playing a less popular opera of his, *Simon Boccanegra*, which contains beautiful, delicate unisons for the clarinet, oboe, and flute. Taking part in these unisons is among the most beautiful experiences I take away from my operatic practice. I'm sure I was influenced by them, just as I was influenced by the unisons I heard in the Classical repertoire – Mozart is rich in unisons – followed by Bruckner and others in the Romantic period.

*Looking at your list of works, it is somewhat surprising how little you compose for solo melodic instruments.*

It's a question of opportunity. It just depends on whether I am approached by a soloist – like I was recently approached by the Slovak violinist Milan Paľa. If an ensemble commissions a piece, I can highlight the solo instrument, but the fabric of that specific ensemble is more important. I've written more pieces for solo woodwinds, but that's just down to the soloists – sometimes, I'm approached by a member of an ensemble after having worked with the whole group. I enjoy reminiscing on my twenty years collaborating with the cellist Jiří Bárta, and, over the course of the last ten or fifteen years, with the clarinet player of the Konvergence ensemble, Jiří Mráz.

*Were you ever tempted to write pieces for oboe and perform them yourself?*

You're talking about a dangerous moment that is usually referred to as "capitulating to the instrument". When I began studying at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno, my composition teacher Miloslav Ištvan told me: "And no writing for oboe!" There was a deep meaning in that and I'm still thankful to him after all these years – pieces by composing virtuosos often leave me with an unsatisfactory feeling.

*Do you hear unison music "in colour" as you're composing it?*

Over time, I discovered – thanks to revisions of older pieces – that the colour component is the most sensitive and needs to be worked out in the greatest detail. I corrected or completed the metro-rhythmic structure to an incomparably lesser extent, and the same is true of the melodic lines. At the beginning, the composer establishes – either intuitively or consciously – an intensity of colour that he must sustain and develop. Every incompleteness, every less-than-adequate reduction

unanimously participates in the decrease in tension of the melodic line, meaning this must be completed after the performance. After twenty years of working with the unison technique, my imagination has a lot to do with my experiences. At the moment, I am trying to focus on the unison and nothing else – in the past, I combined it with standard textures. But my imagination is developing too, of course. It often happens that I hedge my bets safely by applying a relatively high dynamic, only to discover – two or three years later – that this is also not ideal, because what results is the opposite of inappropriate reduction: inappropriate excess. I then attempt to continue on the basis of these experiences and comparisons.

*The choice of instrumentation is also closely related to colour. Do you sometimes feel limited by what is available?*

I find that the most interesting instrumentations are those that contain reverberation, because it often creates unexpected and generally richer relationships in the melodic line – spatially, this works by separating the instruments by the interval of an octave. In the texture of the piano, for instance, thirds and tenths are very different, the latter rings out better, and if everything moves an octave or two into the bass, the difference becomes enormous. On an excellent piano, a bass note at the very bottom of the range, articulated *forte*, can ring out for thirty seconds or more.

Recently, however, after several performances of my pieces and extensive work, I discovered that my path in future works is to stop making my life easier by using the piano pedal, as well as the celeste and metallophones in the percussion section, all of which can work utter miracles. I am attempting to write extended scores without these instruments, as well as reducing the number of pizzicatos in the lower strings. All the time, I am focusing on colour, but also on the shape of the melodic line: I work by developing the metro-rhythm, which I call the “time drum”. I have come to realise this is a more demanding way of working, but it definitely makes sense to me to experiment, to be wrong, and to try something new.

*If you're trying to disengage from instruments with long reverberation times, does that mean a further reduction of (or perhaps the creation of a greater transparency in) the vertical structure?*

Because of this reduction, most of the means available to me have tend towards complexity. The path to simplification and reduction is, it would seem, natural for our field of work and leads to the culmination of the creative path. Further work in the future represents, for me, further disengagement, reduction, and simplification – all this, however, is always connected with the risk that the unison line will fall apart. It might mean cancelling the premiere of a piece that simply isn't working out. Return, reduce, complete, and continue towards a clearer expression. It's a nice journey, and I don't think there's any other kind for me.

*It seems that whenever you are spoken of or written about, the phrase “composer of sacred music” comes up. Are you a spiritual person?*





I can only hope that I am.

*One cannot avoid religious themes in your pieces.*

Not at all. It seems this is related to me, and I would hope it is an innermost link that creates this, rather than the mere wish to stylise myself in a particular manner and exhibit that to the outside world. I wish for it to be a true manifestation.

*Is this something you think about a lot, whether in the form of meditation, prayer, or rational thought?*

It is. I have to admit these are difficult subjects that I struggle addressing using specific terms. But this is an everyday concern for me - an area I discover again and again and to which I retreat.

*At the beginning of our interview, you mentioned that the Book of Isaiah has been part of your memory for as long as you can remember. Do you read the Bible every day?*

A younger friend of mine once told me to read one chapter from both the Old and New Testaments every day. I'd never thought of that before, but for several years now, I've been returning to both books in this manner. I am very happy that this way, I am beginning to attain a different - and, I hope, better - understanding of the unique whole that arises from these two volumes, which includes things that remain difficult for us to understand. I'm referring primarily to the various military histories of the Old Testament. Through frequent returns, however, something more important than external phenomena and events begins arising from the texts. The other planes, which are present in several layers, become clearer by a millimetre.

## Pavel Zemek Novák – On the Beauty of Fellowship

When I called Pavel  
to tell him I wanted  
to write  
about him and whether  
he could provide me  
with  
some materials, he told  
me:  
“Write it all about  
yourself  
and just put my name  
at the  
beginning and the end!”

*The composer Jaroslav Štastný (Peter Graham) met Pavel Zemek Novák, his fellow pupil at the Brno conservatory, in the beginning of 1970s, and they have been friends ever since. More than fifteen years ago, Štastný wrote a text about Zemek's music for HIS Voice magazine. As no discussions of Zemek's music in recent years have provided the depth of understanding present in this older text, we asked its author for an update. He obliged, even meeting Zemek in person to discuss his development as a composer. The fruits of this conversation are printed below.*

Whenever talk turns to the spiritual dimension in Czech contemporary music, I think of one name: Pavel Novák, who uses the composing name Pavel Zemek, is, I believe, one of the most interesting composers alive today. His work can be described as thoroughly spiritual. His works relate to the spiritual domain not only through frequent biblical references in their titles or subtitles, but also in the music itself, which contains a strange spiritual emanation.

Pavel Novák the citizen is a Christian, a Catholic. This fact influences his life, opinions, actions, his attitude to life. Pavel Zemek the composer, however, is certainly not a typical composer of conventional church music who produces single mass chants that are easy to sing and remember. His music places considerable demands on

its performance and virtually all of it is intended for the concert stage. Better put: it might be that his music would often be well suited to the acoustics of a church, like in the cases of Galina Ustvolskaya and Sofia Gubaidulina, but these are pieces intended not for liturgical use but for concert performance. They are autonomous musical works, often written for common instrumentations such as a piano quartet or string quartet, various instrumental trios, duos, and solos, as well as concertante pieces and symphonies for both larger and smaller orchestras.

However, his oeuvre also includes pieces for relatively unusual combinations of instruments, such as *To the Memory of Pavel Snižek (Památce Pavla Snižka)* for trombone, cimbalom, and timpani (2001), or the "string quartets" (the third for two violas, cello, and double bass, or the fifth for four double basses). Whatever the instrumentation, Zemek's music always comes across somewhat strangely on the concert podium – as if it were the bearer of tidings from another world. In contrast to the pieces usually represented on concert programmes, these works focus inwards. They speak of spheres we cannot ever hope to describe appropriately. They arise from a particular depth and also resonate with something hidden deep inside listeners. Zemek's music is certainly not easy to play, but it does speak to listeners with a considerable degree of directness. His pieces are the testament of a believer who is capable of transforming his faith into music. And a highly unusual music at that, one that – despite all his efforts to make it simple – oversteps the confines of our common expectations. It has the capacity to capture performers and set them alight with a strange fire that is then necessarily transferred to the listeners.

The most remarkable thing, however, is that this striking music in fact arises from the common European tradition. It does not demand of the performers anything alien to them; anything arriving from elsewhere. What it does do is place these commonplace elements in a highly unusual light, combining them in such a way that they fall outside of this tradition, particularly in the sphere of expression.

As if the composer were searching for the cracks in the grand structure of the European musical tradition, attempting to fill them with common material treated in an unorthodox manner. "I'm a composer who comes from musical practice. I adhere to what Antonín Dvořák said, claiming his simple musician's background even during his greatest glory: I want to remain a simple musician with the aim of changing at least something in music."

Pavel Novák (born 1957) exhibited considerable musical (and artistic) talent as a child. Intense support from his parents and development aided by the best pedagogues available soon bore fruit: even before enrolling in the conservatory, he was seriously applying himself to composition.

Pavel is five years younger than me, and when I met him at the Brno Conservatory, he first attended the "experimental class" – a kind of preparatory for elementary school pupils hoping to later study at the conservatoire. Even then, he was always composing. Bohuslav Řehoř, with whom we both studied composition, would tell me how Pavel had no problems writing three hundred bars of a symphony for large orchestra within a week. He also had musical interests that were incomprehensible given how young he was: Shostakovich, Bartók, Janáček, Mahler... At his age, I only appreciated the Rolling Stones. And as his talent was eminently practical, it was also manifested in performance: Pavel graduated from the oboe department of the Brno conservatory, then continuing at JAMU (the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno). Following that, he spent years as the first oboe of the opera orchestra at the Janáček Theatre in Brno.

This experience allowed him to become acquainted with a considerable portion of the operatic literature literally first-hand – for a young composer, it was an excellent schooling to experience many scores "from the inside", to hear them as a player, to live through their problems, and to experience the interpretive approaches of a great many conductors. His orchestral practice, however, also left Pavel with a certain dislike of dissonance – particularly in the brass instruments. As the first oboe, he experienced their power directly behind his head. This too became one of the impulses for his search for a unique musical style.

However, he also established a number of friendships with his colleagues, to whom he could also turn for performances of his music. His skills as an instrumentalist got him the respect needed for his highly elaborate and difficult pieces to be taken seriously. His primary interest, you see, was always composing.

His desire to refine his compositional skills brought him to Miloslav Ištván's composition class at Brno's JAMU. Ištván was a distinctive character with fiercely held opinions who uncompromisingly taught his students his own compositional technique. Pavel gradually felt a greater and greater need to extricate himself from this influence. This was a relatively complex process

4. INIZIANDO 4  
 (after J. Chr. Fr. Bach)

♩ = 92 (♩ = 184)

*piz.*  
*esp.*  
*pp*  
*Meno (poco) in esp*  
*a poco*  
*cresc.*  
*poco rif. fermata*  
*♩ = d presto*  
*c. 32''*  
*a. 3'*

No. 4 from Pavel Zemek's piano quintet "Homage to Bach Family" (2007-10)

through which he gradually fought his way to different positions – positions entirely his own. Even so, he was always grateful to his teacher, as he stood up on his own two feet precisely because of this confrontation with Ištvan's powerful example.

Composing intensively, he gradually arrived at a more refined and personal form of expression. Two pieces written towards the end of the 1980s, *Stabat Mater* for solo harp and *Zahrada lásky (Garden of Love)* for soprano and two percussion players, on texts by St Paul, marked out the direction of development of his mature compositional style.

At first, I considered Pavel's composing from the perspective of someone five years his senior. Once, however, Vlastimil Peška – then the dramaturg of BROLN (BROFI); the Brno Radio Orchestra of Folk Instruments – organised a special concert for radio broadcasting made up entirely of contemporary compositions written for this ensemble. Pavel submitted a score that seemed like the work of an eccentric: strings accompanied by two clarinets always in unison... What was that supposed to be...? The performance of his arrangement of the religious song *Obávám se súdu Tvého (I Fear Your Judgement)*, 1991), however, was like a lightning strike. This is the work of a mature composer! Since then, I've had this feeling with all of Pavel's pieces.

A certain turning point in his music took place after 1989, when a serious illness prevented him from working as he was accustomed to for an extended period. The convalescence period of several months allowed him to dedicate himself to composing relatively uninterrupted. He finished a number of pieces in progress and created several new ones too. He also had the opportunity to think through the elementary questions of compositional activity. Not only "how" to compose, but also "why" and "for whom"; "with what aim". "I realised I wouldn't be here forever and that I had often allowed inessential things to distract me. These changes in perspective might be more common at an older age, but they can be just as beneficial to a thirty-year-old."

One of these questions was the composer's relationship to contemporary music and the contemporary world. Pavel was never an uncritical admirer of contemporary composers, a position strengthened by Miloslav Ištvan. Pavel himself was always aware of the value of his roots. His south Moravian origins brought him closer to folk song, whose diatonicism he absorbed and transformed into the foundation of his own expression. The grand

European musical tradition is another root, stretching far into the past, and Pavel acknowledges it as a value he proceeds from. For instance, he still admires how Beethoven gradually thickens the texture at the end of the piano sonata op. 109, only to allow the sparingly delivered theme to ring out above a whirl of trills and virtuosic runs – this passage encouraged Zemek's experiments with form.

Pavel is also connected to the old masters by his high degree of self-discipline at work. He devotes practically all of his energy to composing, which is to him both a need and a habit. He also diverges from contemporary composers in how little he cares for publicity and his own personal image. If the contemporary composer also has to know how to play the keyboard of useful contacts and self-promotion, Pavel has little interest in these realities – he doesn't even use a mobile phone! He is fully immersed in his work, into which he inserts all his desires and in which he develops daring projects. He thought nothing of spending seven years composing the evening-length *St John's Passion (Pašije podle sv. Jana)* despite the fact that chances of a performance were slim for a long time. The strict measure he applies to himself leads him to correct and improve seemingly negligible details, even in pieces that were performed years or decades ago.

At all times, Pavel carries his writing implements and the music he is currently working on around with him. He uses every occasion, every free moment to write out parts or make corrections to finished scores. He uses a great array of diverse tools. I once visited him at the conservatory and complained that I had to make some corrections to my music, but that even the narrow felt-tip pen I use to write my scores will bleed on paper that has already been written on once. Pavel took out a black ballpoint pen and told me: "Take this one. It has served me well many times."

An even deeper root for Pavel is Christianity, which crucially formed his character. He considers it of great value; something one can lean on. It is also where he finds the central inspiration for his work. This is not simply Christianity as a world-view or a school of thought but as a moral imperative and life practice, as well as the entire field of Christian culture, particularly medieval, which he relates to in his works. This is also the perspective from which he considers the problems of today and the problems and conflicts of today's music:

"The fragmentation of today's life is also manifested in the excessive fragmentation of music, which



often goes as far as individualism *in extremis*. We are exposed to constant distraction. This increases the need for concentrated art in which individuality is dissolved in the experience of oneness with others. Ingmar Bergman noticed that music achieves the deepest effect in connection with liturgy. The way I understand it is that music thus becomes part of a higher whole that then retroactively sanctifies each of its parts."

Pavel was always excited by the idea of the low notes of the marimba in a church. He always wished to contribute to the liturgy with his music. But the times when the duties of the church included securing the aesthetic education of believers are clearly in the past. Even so, the composer-believer attempts (unsuccessfully, he admits) "something fitting for the liturgy". Here, he puts aside his usual high demands on the instrumentalists. His newest pieces are simple and concentrated, available for performance by musicians with little experience, the composer's aim being to contribute to the experience of Christian communion and fellowship. These works include the *Three Little Liturgical Unisons (Tři drobná liturgická unisona, 2020)* for French horn and cimbalom, *Koncert-Unisono (Concerto da chiesa)* for viola and chamber ensemble, and his seventh setting of a consistently attractive subject: *Seven Words of Jesus VII (Sedm Slovo Kristových VII)* for mixed unison choir and trumpet (2021).

Pavel believes music must respect its part in the liturgy. There is no space for exhibitionism on the part of the composer or performer, and the task also demands a purification of the musical structure. The aim is clearly defined: "Handing the musicians a score that is worked out as cleanly as possible is a perennial task for the composer." However, Pavel also warns us: "Our greatest enemies are desire for fame, power, and money, as well as our own impatience."

The composer Pavel Zemek adds that over time, he lost faith in established compositional systems: serialism, modality, and even tonality. All these seem to him to be "intoxicating means" that draw one away from one's true goals – the aim of attaining purity and unity. "The unison is a means to attain such goals, the instruments no longer standing against one another, fighting each other, but instead creating a wholeness that was, in my opinion, the greatest strength of medieval music."

It was his Christian faith and certain moral models that helped Pavel overcome the temptation of composerly exhibitionism that drives one to draw attention to oneself and one's capacities: "Jan Palach, a person

who managed to exceed himself, is a symbol of timeless value, a symbol of foregoing one's own individuality for higher goals. The *Kvartet* (for clarinet, violin, viola, and cello) dedicated to his memory was my first attempt at a composition in unison in which I diligently persisted until the end." (*Jan Palach was a Czech student who, in 1969, self-immolated in protest against the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia – editor's note.*)

Zemek balances out the limitations of the unison primarily through a complex treatment of time and a sensitive opposition of contrasts. For the listener, it is supremely interesting to observe the unexpected transformations that the simple single-voice texture can achieve. Pieces like *Medjugorje* for piano and ten strings (1995/2002), *Symphony no. 5 "Sources of Mercy and Light in Brno's Church of St James"* (2002), and *Isaiah's Prophecy* (2005) are samples of rich variations upon and inspired solutions to this problem.

Christian themes and spiritual experiences are transformed into the very structure of the music: *Medjugorje*, for instance, is not – despite its instrumentation – a piano concerto, but a kind of musical image of the pious pilgrimage, in which the individual voices gradually merge into a monumental whole. The fifth symphony relays a musical message on the beauty of fellowship through the unison of the entire orchestra. *Isaiah's Prophecy*, an evening-length unison for seven instruments, links Wagner with Perotin, Janáček with Guillaume de Machaut, Satie with Gesualdo, and so on, creating a kind of musical allegory of the prophet's words: "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat..." (Isaiah 11:6)

"I am constantly trying to find the most perfect form possible in which the unison can manifest itself. Although I respect the traditional laws of contrast when creating unison compositions, the unison manages to unify certain differences among the opposites. When shaping the melody (which inevitably leads to the creation of both consonances and dissonances), I am mostly guided by my ear. So too the listener selects certain points from the complex line to help him with orientation. This is why the key to understanding is in the listener."

When I came to see Pavel to get some material for this text, we also discussed the problems and hardships of the composer's lot. Then Pavel fell silent for a long time before finally saying: "... But it's beautiful anyway, isn't it... Whatever anyone may think, it's still beautiful that you can write..."



# ONE TWO, TESTING, ONE TWO – The Berg Orchestra's Siren Test Concerts

Every first Wednesday of the month (with some exceptions), sirens ring out across Czechia. This aim is practical: to test the operability of the public warning system that serves to alert citizens in case of danger. However, the sirens are so loud and the test so regular that it has become something of a ritual, which also boasts its own dedicated fan groups on social media. Many musicians and composers have thought about using this sonic ready-made – indeed, some have organised concerts in the past. But none have been as diligent as the Prague-based ensemble for contemporary music, the Berg Orchestra, who commissioned twenty new pieces by Czech composers to accompany the siren test on the occasion of their twentieth anniversary season, all to be broadcast live on national radio.



## THE SIRENS

The siren test takes place at noon on the first Wednesday of every month. Its purpose is to test the warning system that is in place throughout Czechia (including small villages), and which is set to warn the population in the case of a variety of critical situations: fires, natural and industrial disasters, or military attacks. The sirens are administered by the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic, which also decides whether or not to cancel the siren test in case it risks alarming the population, for instance during the high points of the recent coronavirus crisis, in the event of massive flooding, or on the eve of a meeting in Prague between Barack Obama and Dmitri Medvedev at which the presidents of the USA and Russia signed a nuclear disarmament treaty.

The test itself consists of one hundred and forty seconds of a straight, unwavering tone relayed through a system of both mechanical (rotary) and electronic (digital) sirens located on various private and public buildings throughout the country – the audible difference between the two types is that the mechanical sirens perform a slow “glissando”, upwards at the start and downwards at the end, whereas the digital sirens perform a digitally recorded “fake” glissando that often reaches its final note – a slightly sharp G sharp – a little faster than the rotation sirens.

Somewhat confusingly, the test of sirens is also sometimes used to commemorate the heroic passing of soldiers and firefighters. On these occasions, the test may sound on other days, not only the first Wednesday of the month, often leaving listeners a little worried if they missed a crucial bit of news. However, there is one piece of information that is key for understanding the siren test: whenever the sirens are used for testing or commemoration, the signal is a straight tone, whereas any real warning will take the form of an oscillating tone that moves up and down in pitch. The test is also accompanied by a short verbal warning before and after the sound in Czech and English (emanating only from the digital sirens), which informs listeners that this is only a test. Again, rather confusingly, this message is not heard during the commemorative alarms, nor is it replaced by another message.

## THE BERG ORCHESTRA

Established twenty years ago as a student orchestra at HAMU (the Musical Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague), the Berg Orchestra has become one of the most significant ensembles on the Czech new music scene. Instrumentally, the ensemble transformed from a traditional chamber orchestra to a new-music-style large ensemble (usually performing with one or a few players per part). More importantly, however, the group went from existing within the confines of academia to becoming a dynamic ensemble that often presents music in conjunction with other art forms, in non-traditional spaces, and as part of broader dramaturgical concepts. It has acquired a loyal audience and is now in the rare position – for any contemporary music ensemble – of boasting an attendance of several hundred listeners at each of their regular season concerts (see CMQ 2019/1).

The Music for Sirens project was planned for Berg’s twentieth anniversary season, and it falls right in with Berg’s outreach activities. One is reminded of a quote by Hegel, “Reading the morning newspaper is the realist’s morning prayer,” which has also come to be understood as reflecting the ways in which media connect society – in this case, by many people reading the same paper in the morning. The test of sirens is something everyone in the country hears at the same time, and thanks to the ensemble’s partnership with Czech Radio Vltava, many people now hear new compositions to accompany it broadcast live on the airwaves every month. New music is often presented at unpopular times on radios around the world – here, once a month, contemporary sonic art is broadcast at a prime time.

In the words of the ensemble’s manager, Eva Kesslová, “The sirens project is in line with our philosophy – we search for opportunities to introduce contemporary music to a wider range of listeners than only to those who are accustomed to attending contemporary music concerts. The siren pieces get to many people who would probably never think of listening to contemporary music. And as they are short and infiltrate their ‘natural habitat’, they have a better chance of really getting through to them – at least as a little foretaste of what new music can be.”

Berg found an excellent partner for the project in Czech Radio Vltava and an ideal ally in Ladislav Železný, director of the Radiocustica platform for radio art and contemporary music at the station (see CMQ 2019/1). The concerts are broadcast live on air at noon and there is also a video stream on the station’s social media pages.

It is a rather remarkable occurrence for radio, as with each of these broadcasts, listeners involve their radio receivers in a sonic relationship with the acoustic sound of the sirens as they come in through the walls and windows at the listener’s location, unique for each location since they change in pitch depending on distance and air pressure. A truly momentous occasion demonstrating how even archaic media like the radio broadcast can serve to connect a community through sound. The sirens project has already been successful at several radio competitions, including the Grand Prix Nova Bucharest 2020 and the Prix Europe 2020 in Potsdam, where the juries highlighted the project’s innovative use of phenomena traditionally falling outside the scope of radio broadcasting.

The links with radio go deeper - Czech Radio has consistently employed many composers as sound designers, music directors, and music editors. A number of these composers are also among those who have written a piece for the sirens project, including Martin Klusák, Jan Trojan, Mirisolav Pudlák, and Jakub Rataj. Rataj's piece was to be performed in the courtyard of the radio headquarters in the centre of Prague, but unfortunately this could not take place due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Trojan's piece was the most "radio specific", as it involved three instrumentalists linked by radio waves playing in three different locations: the New Town Hall and the courtyard of HAMU in Prague and the Upper Square in Olomouc. Interestingly, the Olomouc region, in the north of Moravia, is the only part of the country where the siren test takes place at a different time - ten minutes past noon, so that the melody played by the astronomical clock located on the Upper Square is not disturbed even once a month.

### SITE/LOCATION

In most cases, it is the composer who proposes where they would like their siren-composition to

be performed in order to best correspond with the concept they have in mind. The first crucial parameter, of course, is how far away the site of the concert is from one or more sirens - there is a very handy map on the City of Prague's website displaying the location of all the sirens in Prague, including information on whether they are mechanical or electronic (see below). The volume of the sirens is also determined, to a large extent, by whether the performance takes place in an indoor space or out of doors, and, in the case of the former, whether the windows are left open or closed and whether there are any other sound sources inside (such as the various machines used to produce graphic art whose sounds are used in Michal Nejtek's composition).

However, the Berg Orchestra's aim with these pieces is also related to an area commonly known as outreach: bringing contemporary music to audiences that would not usually come across it. To this effect, it often sets up partnerships with other institutions (schools, universities, research centres, galleries, etc.), whose students, employees, or fans are then invited to the concerts as guests of honour. This is entirely in keeping with the Berg Orchestra's focus on outreach, never missing a chance to try to build new audiences for the future.







A particularly poignant example is Martin Klusák's composition, performed at the Jan Kepler Grammar School, his alma mater. The performers in Klusák's piece were students at the school rather than professional musicians, and he worked with them during the course of several workshops and rehearsals to create a piece that was then performed for the entire school (and also broadcast live on radio). For many of the high school students, this was a rather exciting first encounter with contemporary music.

The very first siren concert took place at the large lecture hall of Charles University, and the music was composed by Miroslav Pudlák, who is also a lecturer at the Institute of Musicology there, so the hall was overflowing with students. Petr Hora's siren piece, *A River Call*, was performed at the T. G. Masaryk Water Research Institute, located directly on the Vltava river just north-west of the city centre. The performance took place directly in the large hydraulic hall, which includes several downscaled models of various fluvial areas that are used to simulate water flow. Hora's piece is a play on words, "siren" meaning both the warning sound and the Greek mythological creatures who would lure sailors onto the rocks. The concert was preceded by a guided tour, including an explanation on how the scale models work and why they are more precise than computer simulations. In a sense, Berg's "lunchtime" siren concerts are a kind of simulation in miniature of the creativity, adaptability, and playfulness often present in the new music they present at their regular concert season.

## PREPARING THE CONCERTS

The siren concerts offer a unique set of technical challenges to the production team of both the Berg Orchestra and Czech Radio Vltava, as well as the composers. The first level of planning involved

the ensemble manager, Eva Kesslová, communicating with the individual composers about their wishes for a venue (dependent on the acoustics, the volume of the siren, and the character of the space) and then trying to put all the locations together on the map (and across time) to create a coherent whole.

Then came the negotiations, i.e. convincing a number of companies, schools, leisure centres, and other institutions that a midday concert is exactly what they need. Once the location was confirmed, a team from Czech Radio had to make sure that it would be possible to broadcast from this location, and, in the case of outdoor performances, find a source of electrical power.

All this had to take place well in advance, as there was only once chance for a dress rehearsal: on the first Wednesday of the month preceding the concert. This meant that there were always two parallel production teams at work: one performing that month's siren and the other doing a dress rehearsal for next month's. And, of course, there was no chance for corrections if the dress rehearsal did not go well.

Despite the meticulous preparations, chance was never too far off. For Ian Mikyska's siren piece, which took place outdoors at the Albertov Park, several audio recordings of the siren test at this location were used to compose the form of the piece, with the individual sections (before, during, and after the siren) timed to various elements of the test (the spoken introduction, the beginning of the ascent of the sirens, etc.). Everything ran perfectly during the dress rehearsal, but during the performance itself, the nearest (and therefore also loudest) sirens started with a delay of over a minute, leaving the musicians faces flushed with the confused look of one looking for the missing gesture of a conductor – only in this case, it was an absent siren.



## PREHISTORY

Of course, the Berg Orchestra is not the only one to have noticed the remarkable sonic and ritualistic nature of the sirens. They were certainly not even the first to combine the siren's sound with music. That particular honour goes to *Simfoniya gudkov* (*Symphony of Factory Sirens*) by the Russian composer Arseny Avraamov. It was performed in Baku, now the capital city of Azerbaijan, in 1922. It featured not only a large orchestra and chorus, but also navy ship sirens and whistles, bus and car horns, factory sirens, cannons, the foghorns of the entire Soviet flotilla in the Caspian Sea, artillery guns, machine guns, hydro-airplanes, and much else besides, all coordinated by a team of conductors who replaced their batons with flags and pistols. The piece was performed at the Moravian Autumn festival in Brno in 2017 in an adaptation by the German musical duo Ammer & Einheit – available on YouTube are both a short edited video showing the performative dimension of the piece, and a longer, audio-only binaural recording of the piece.

More recent, and more specifically related to the siren test, was an event organised in 2012 by the composer and saxophone player Jan Grunt in his home town of Louny, about an hour's drive north-west of Prague. The title was *The Harmonic Spectrum of the Louny Siren*, and the aim of the happening was to “invite as many people as possible to use their voice or any instrument they wish (musical or otherwise) to create a harmonic chord” around the siren. Some two hundred people took part in the event, though the organisers admit that most of these were children from several local schools who arrived at the event in buses.

## REVERBERATIONS OF THE SIRENS

The Berg Orchestra are by no means the only fans of the siren test. A Facebook group, *Posluchači*

*pravidelné zkoušky sirén* (*Listeners of the Regular Siren Test*), was established in 2012 and now boasts over five thousand members. On most days of the month, activity on the group page mostly consists of photographs of sirens taken by group members around the country, often in small villages that only boast a single siren, usually located on the building of the town hall or fire station.

Every first Wednesday of the month, however, the group is flooded by reviews of the siren test. Here are a few from the January 2021 test. Dana Peterková accompanies her video with the following words: “Adamov by Brno! You just have to hear it and marvel at the perfection. Unfortunately, I missed the Czech [announcement], but even so, it must be clear to everyone that we are redeemed!” (This is a reference to the recent series of cancellations due to the coronavirus pandemic.) Petr Frinta shared the following: “10/10 today. I listened from a roof in Dejvice [in Prague], nine sirens altogether with a delay of up to four seconds, and, thanks to the clearer skies, also a better *musique concrète* background. A good start to the season, the siren team is in good form!” Michal Vrabel commented on his recent relocation: “Having moved from Dubina to Pískové doly (both in Ostrava), I anticipated this day with a little dread, but the sound was good – I will be happy here.” The first siren of the year seemed to awaken particularly poetic feelings in many listeners, like Adam Rek: “My heart clenched! In Dejvice, it wailed like it was to be the last time – I don't remember when I last heard it singing so powerfully, shakily, intensely, passionately, and for such a long time. With a lump in my throat, I close the window.”

It is sometimes hard to gauge the extent to which members' comments are intended seriously – for some, this is probably no more than a bizarre meme, and one which has garnered increasing popularity



online. However, the number of passionate posts and the fact that the group does not seem to be losing any steam both suggest that there is a considerable amount of genuine devotion. There are even several individuals whose expert knowledge often leaves one wondering whether they are extremely devoted fans or have made purchasing, selling, and maintaining sirens their life's work (both types are represented in the group).

Indeed, when Berg first began organising the siren test concerts, many “purists” in the group expressed their dismay – either at the fact that anyone dare defile the perfect sound of the sirens with the addition of other sounds, or because they feared this would make siren enjoyment too “mainstream” (in other words, “I liked the siren test before it was cool”). Since then, however, many have come to enjoy the siren test with the addition of music written specifically for this purpose, while others remain faithful to the pure experience.

### **SIRENS WITHOUT AUDIENCES, SIRENS WITHOUT SIRENS**

From its inception, the siren project was conceived as contemporary music “putting its foot in the door”; connecting with audiences who would not otherwise come across it. An important element of this was literally taking the music to the people’s doorstep – to their places of work and study; universities and research centres; offices and places of leisure.

The second wave of epidemiological restrictions, which in Czechia took effect in October, put a stop to these plans. Indeed, if it weren’t for the partnership of Czech Radio, it would have meant the end or postponement of the entire project. There is no doubt that the concerts are now a somewhat poorer experience – as many musicians have learnt by experience in this past year, playing without an audience provides its own set of challenges and significantly changes the energy of the situation. Nevertheless, the radio continues providing a rarefied sonic experience in conjunction with the sirens – many listeners have gotten in touch with the Berg Orchestra to relay their experience, which is that their preferred manner of listening is turning the radio on and flinging their windows wide open, allowing for the two sound sources to mingle in a novel spatial arrangement.

The coronavirus pandemic, however, has also had another, somewhat unforeseen effect on the sirens project. It is up to the Fire Rescue of the Czech Republic to decide whether to cancel the siren test on any particular first Wednesday. This is perhaps the first time in history (or at least since the premiere of Avraamov’s *Symphony of Sirens* in 1922 Baku) that a music administrator has entered into such extensive and repeated conversation with various departments of a country’s fire rescue service.

As one might expect, however, firemen do not consider a series of micro-concerts of contemporary



music a relevant factor in deciding whether or not to go ahead with the siren test, so some of the concerts had to be cancelled (often at the last moment). This is why the project came to its natural conclusion a little later than originally anticipated, beginning in March 2019 and ending in February 2021.

However, with frequent cancellations, Berg also had to find a viable alternative. They did so by making high quality audio recordings of the siren sound *in situ* that could then be played back for the concert. In this sense, the regular siren test functioned as an indicator of the “state of the nation”: if I can go to the concert in person, all is well. If I can listen to the pieces on the radio and hear all the sirens around me, things are difficult but not bleak. But if I can hear the siren *only* on the live radio broadcast, I know it’s probably best to remain indoors.

## IN CONCLUSION

Originally, the Berg Orchestra had planned to organise a grand concert to conclude the project that would feature all of the siren compositions performed back to back. In addition to the natural challenges this poses to the listeners (hearing the siren test once a month can take on the regularity of a religious ritual - but hearing *twenty* tests back to back?), this idea has now joined a long cue of plans that have been shelved for the time being due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The ensemble is now fully consumed by presenting the fruits of another twentieth-anniversary labour of love: the 20x3 project, in which Berg commissioned twenty composers with whom they have worked in the past to compose twenty three-minute pieces that can also be performed as a single composition. As the originally planned concert cannot currently take place, videos of the compositions (accompanied by short interviews with the composers about their piece and their relationship with the ensemble) are gradually being added to the Berg Orchestra’s YouTube channel.

Although Marek Keprt’s siren piece, performed at the art nouveau Church of St Vojtěch in Prague’s district of Libeň on February 3rd 2021, was the last commissioned premiere, this is not the end of the sirens project. After launching the Music for Sirens website, where one can listen to all the pieces, watch the videos from the premieres, and read a few words by the composers, the Berg Orchestra has begun planning for the project’s “afterlife”, offering to organise a siren concert (hopefully with the live

siren) for any university, institution, festival, or other subject who expresses such an interest - the only condition is that the planned event take place during noontime on the first Wednesday of the month. The website also includes a voting system - of the first ten compositions, Petr Hora’s *River Call* proved to be the most popular among listeners. You can go online now and vote for your favourite from the latter half of the compositions now, or simply test the operability of your own home siren system.

## LIST OF ALL SIREN CONCERTS

March 6th 2019, Miroslav Pudlák: *Music for Sirens* (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague) | April 3rd 2019, Jan Trojan: *Tráns-mi-sirénēs meí* (HAMU and the New Town Hall, Prague and Upper Square, Olomouc) | May 1st 2019, Ian Mikyska: *A Succession of Several Sounds and Silences* (Albertov Park, Prague) | June 5th 2019, Martin Klusák: *Mycelium* (Johannes Kepler Grammar School, Prague) | August 7th 2019, Petr Hora: *A River Call* (T. G. Masaryk Water Research Institute, Prague) | September 4th 2019, Jiří Lukeš: *Staircase* (Jan Deyl Conservatory, Prague) | October 2nd 2019, Michal Nejtek: *Graphic Symphony* (Prague Graphic School) | November 6th 2019, Michal Rataj: *Siren - Fanfare - Who Knows?* (Faculty of Architecture, Czech Technical University in Prague) | December 4th 2019, Matouš Hejl: *Music for the December Siren* (Jan Neruda Grammar School, Prague) | February 5th 2020, František Chaloupka: *Joy* (CAMP - Center for Architecture and Metropolitan Planning, Prague) | March 4th 2020, Slavomír Hořinka: *Rejoice!* (Convent of Saint Agnes, Prague) | June 3rd 2020, Jan Ryant Dřížal: *The Sirens of Titan* (Podolí swimming pool, Prague) | July 1st 2020, Petr Wajsar: *Developer* (Lhotka swimming pool, Prague) | August 5th 2020, Petr Cígler: *Siren 2020* (Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague) | September 2nd 2020, Tomáš Reindl: *Seirénēs* (Studio ALTA, Prague) | October 7th 2020, Jakub Rataj: *Attention!* (Duncan Centre Conservatory, Prague) | November 4th 2020, Jonáš Starý: *Euterpé* (Jan Deyl Conservatory, Prague) | December 2nd 2020, Ondřej Štochl: *Sotto voce* (Fortna Carmelite Convent, Prague) | January 6th 2021, Jana Vöröšová: *Three Sirens* (Czech Radio Studios - Karlín, Prague) February 3rd 2021, Marek Keprt: *plavě pro Chvěla stínem ouška* (Church of St. Vojtěch, Prague)

# CZECH MUSIC EVERY DAY

## EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

### IN THE WINTER OF 2020/21

Given the continuation of the epidemiological crisis, all musical activities in Czechia this winter took place online. It seems that more and more organisers are opting to mediate the concert experience in this manner instead of cancelling concerts, though the programming is often reduced. The Days of Contemporary Music festival, for instance, uploaded thirty videos onto its YouTube channel of pieces planned for the festival, performed instead by musicians in empty concert halls around the country – listeners could thus experience at least the works written for smaller instrumentations. Chamber concerts of contemporary music were also live streamed by the festivals The Musical Present and New Music<sup>2</sup> as well as the Berg Orchestra with its Music for Sirens project (see our article in this issue) and Ensemble Opera Diversa. The Berg Orchestra also celebrated its twentieth season online – they commissioned twenty composers to create as many three-minute miniatures inspired by a specific year between 2001 and 2020. The pieces, along with short interviews with the composers, were published online.

The most prestigious event was the premiere of a new symphonic work by the internationally successful composer Ondřej Adámek. The thirty-five-minute *Where Are You?* for mezzo-soprano and orchestra focuses on the search for the existence of God, using the story of the prophet Elias to express the individual phases of this grand and difficult spiritual journey. Once again, Adámek uses the human voice not only as a vehicle for text (in five languages) but also as a musical instrument. The piece was commissioned by musica viva and the London Symphony Orchestra and premiered by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra with Magdalena Kožená conducted by Simon Rattle.

2 December 2020, online stream from the Town Hall of Slezská Ostrava, Ostrava. **Musical Present**, "An Evening of Composers from Ostrava". **World premieres:** Markéta Kapustová: *Fantasy for Flute No. 2 and No. 3*, Tatiana Korimová – flute; Irena Szurmanová: *Dance intermezzi*, K and duo; Pavel Nesit: *Biwa*, Marek Chmiel – guitar, Markéta Schacherlová – dance; Milan Báchorek: *Contrasts* for bassoon and accordion, Jan Soukup – bassoon, Marcela Kysová – accordion; Jan Grossmann: *There Once Was a Grandpa from Dublin*, Katarzyna Gattnar – recitation, Marcela Kysová – accordion; Daniel Skála: *Only so, so, so*, Daniel Skála Trio; Pavel Nesit: *Serotonin*, Eva Sýkorová – piano.

7 December 2020, 7pm, online stream from Löw-Beer Villa, Brno. **Radim Bednařík: *Microworlds IX* (world premiere)**. Trio Aperto.

16 December 2020, online stream from the Alfred ve dvoře Theatre, Prague. **Patrik Kako: *finitika*; Petr Hora: *A Window* (world premieres)**. Director of *finitika*: Kateřina Dudová. Barbora Jirásková, Annabelle Plum – voice, Ensemble Terrible.

6 January 2021, online stream from Czech Radio Karlín. Music for Sirens... micro-concerts with the emergency siren test. **Three Sirens (world premiere)**. **Concept / music: Jana Vöröšová**. Magdalena Šmídová Turchichová, Daniela Smutná, Jana Vöröšová – voice.

Days of Contemporary Music 2020, recordings available online. **World premieres:** Jan Beran: *Als welkten in den Himmeln ferne Gärten*, Ludmila Pavlová – violin, Barbora K. Sejáková – piano; Ivo Bláha: *Hades* – ancient image for contrabassoon and piano – new version, Ondřej Šindelář –

DECEMBER

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Magdalena Kožená and Simon Rattle performing Ondřej Adámek's "Where are you?"

contrabassoon, Stanislav Gallin – piano; Milada Červenková: *Three Portraits for Oboe Solo*, Magdaléna Moníková-Franková – oboe, Pavel Hrabánek: *Footsteps for wind quintet*, Prague Wind Quintet, Marios Christou: *Echoes of Greek Liturgy (In Arvo Pärt's Garden)*, Andrea Mottlová – piano; Elena Kiral: *Music on Poems by Russian Poets*, Lucie Prokopová – soprano, Ivana Millek – mezzo-soprano, Elena Kiral – piano; Jaroslav Krček: *String Quartet no. 6*, Czech Philharmonic Quartet; Jiří Laburda: *5. Quartetto per archi*, Martinů Quartet; Vít Micka: *"Sic transit gloria mundi"* – Elegy for String Quartet, Martinů Quartet; Karel Mirošník: *Reflexion* for tenor saxophone and piano, Roman Fojtíček – tenor saxophone, Daniel Wiesner – piano; Vlastimil Peška: *Mirabelles One Hundred Twenty* for oboe, heckelphone, and piano, Liběna Séquardtová – oboe, Ivan Séquardt – heckelphone, Yukie Ichimura – piano; Jiří Smutný: *Three Songs for Medium Voice, Oboe and Harp on Lyrics by Pavel Tylšar*, Veronika Kaiserová – voice, Pavel Tylšar – oboe, Lydie Härtelová – harp; Jaroslav Šaroun: *Sonata for Piano* – new version, Filip Martinka – piano; Zdeněk Šesták: *My Heart Is Shaking Violently*. Song cycle for soprano and piano on ancient Egyptian poetry (premiere of the whole cycle), Miroslava Časarová – soprano, Daniel Wiesner – piano. **7 January 2021**, online stream from the Concert Hall of the Prague Conservatory. New Music<sup>2</sup>. **Pavel Trojan: Duo Concertante (world premiere)**. Ladislav Horák, Josef Hřebík – accordion.

**1 February 2021**, online stream from the J. S. Bach Music School's concert hall, Dobruška. New Music<sup>2</sup>.

**Jiří Bezděk: Exposé for two accordions (world premiere)**. Ladislav Horák, Josef Hřebík – accordion.

**3 February 2021**, online stream from Church of St. Vojtěch, Prague. Music for Sirens... micro-concerts with the emergency siren test. **Plavě pro Chvěla stínem ouška (world premiere)**. **Concept / music:**

**Marek Kepřt**. Pavla Radoštová – soprano, Anna Romanovská Fliegerová – violin, Helena Velická – violoncello.

**25 February 2021**, online stream from the Slovak State Philharmonic Košice, Slovakia. **Lukáš Sommer: Funky Concerto for bassoon and chamber orchestra (world premiere)**. Jan Hudeček – bassoon, Slovak State Philharmonic Košice, conductor: Zbyněk Müller.

**6 March 2021**, online stream from Gesteig, Munich. **Ondřej Adámek: Where are you? for mezzo-soprano and orchestra (world premiere)**. Magdalena Kožená – mezzo-soprano, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Simon Rattle.

**20x3. Twenty life stories in miniatures by twenty composers – a project for the BERG Orchestra's 20th birthday**, online stream. František Chaloupka: *Reflexio* (2020), Marek Kepřt: *vodnoSvětí* (2019), Jan Ryant Dřízal: *Marche nuptiale* (2018), Jan Trojan: *Just a Little Note to the Year* (2017), Martin Klusák: *In B* (2016), Tomáš Pálka: *Trans-Berg* (2015), Miroslav Pudlák: *2014*, Jakub Rataj: *Inhale* (2013), Jana Vöröšová: *2012*, Miroslav Tóth: *The Last Black Angels Song* (2011), Michaela Pálka Plachká: *Trans-Berg-2010*, Jiří Lukeš: *2009*, Matouš Hejl: *2008*, Petr Wajsar: *Cat haiku* (2007), Jacek Sotomski: *2006* (in memory of Keith Flint), Slavomír Hořinka: *A Few Minutes with BERG* (2005), Michal Nejetek: *2004*, Roman Pallas: *D* (2003), Luboš Mrkvička: *For Large Ensemble, Part E* (2002). Martin Hybler's graphic score inspired by the year 2001 will be premiered live. BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrabel.

# Klementina Kalašová

## THE BRAZILIAN OPERATIC DIVA FROM HORNÍ BEŘKOVICE

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*What does Karel Čapek's (and Leoš Janáček's) Emilia Marty say to the solicitor Vitek when he wishes to compliment her by saying she is "a true Strada"? Vitek has mentioned a legend, but Marty responds with derision:*

*"You heard Strada? Strada whistled. Corrona had a dumpling in her throat.  
And Agujari was a cow."*

*Anna Strada, Sophia Corri, Lucrezia Agujari. These three names and the derision of Emilia Marty: proof of how little we can know of an art as ephemeral as singing, particularly in pre-technical times. And how much do we know of the life of Klementina Kalašová, who was born on the 9th of September a hundred and seventy years ago?*

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The volatile and adventurous life of Klementina Kalašová and her death in far-away Brazil inspired the imagination, but even the authors of factual news generally had to rely on second- or third-hand news. In the same manner, Ladislav Novák, in his *Stará garda Národního divadla (The Old Guard of the National Theatre, 1944)*, makes several erroneous statements on the very first page of his text on Klementina Kalašová, including the date of the singer's birth. We can assume Novák included her in his book because he was captivated by her complicated life and the haze of mystery that had gathered around her name over the years. All this despite the fact that in all honesty, her engagement of a few months did not really make her part of the National's "old guard".

### The Call of Faraway Places

"Between 1820 and 1883, Europe lost eleven million inhabitants to North America. This is a social phenomenon that must be taken seriously. All attempts to limit or even prevent it will fail until the conditions from which it stems continue to exist." Such were the words used by newspaper articles warning against the hasty decision to unroot and move over the ocean. They alerted readers to the inhuman conditions in which many travelling abroad would be trapped, particularly the danger of the South American countries, where slavery is still rampant, chaos often reigns, and both minor and major armed conflicts still break out periodically.



They warned of fraudulent “agents” and missionaries.

Within South America, Chile and Peru were considered the truly dangerous places, but even calmer states like Argentina and Brazil did not only hold delights for the common European. Nevertheless, Brazil was a little more welcoming: “He who finds no sustenance at home travels to South America, especially to Brazil, because there at least, he may eat every day and not suffer from cold” – these words were written in 1860. In 1822, Brazil rid itself of Portuguese rule and declared itself an empire led by Pedro I. His successor, Pedro II, loved music, and even wished to commission an opera by Richard Wagner. In the Czech lands, information about Brazil could be acquired from a series in *Literární listy* (*The Literary Papers*) called *Obrazy z cizích zemí* (*Images of Foreign Lands*), which also included a section on the Brazilian federative republic, Bahia, and its eponymous capital (now called Salvador). “Travelling along the coast is highly pleasant, as for the entire journey, you see a lovely row of hillocks; an amphitheatre of mountains. Bahia is a pretty city, but superstition flourishes here as in our inauspicious middle ages. Every family has its saint like every house in Ancient Rome had its *Penates*, and this saint is responsible for everything that takes place in the house. The most popular is St Anthony.” Slaves, apparently, generally chose a dark-skinned patron, most commonly St Benedict. The city is predominantly black and the slave-owners do not hold back their harsh punishment – the author, however, expresses no surprise, as the slaves could certainly not be described as diligent. In the second half of the 19th century, slaves represented about half of the city’s population, and not much changed after 1888, when slavery was abolished. What did Europeans of the time know about these countries? And what could



the artists working with as fragile an instrument as the human voice hope for? The Czech singers who travelled beyond the borders of their homeland generally remained on the continent, finding employment in Vienna, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Dresden, Leipzig, in the southern Slavic states to the south (Ljubljana, Zagreb), as well as in Italy, or in Riga and St Petersburg to the north.

Though a few singers of Kalašová’s generation made it to a different continent, their names are entirely unknown today: the Olomouc native Georgine von Januschowsky, who followed her husband, the composer and conductor Adolf Neudorff, to New York, Ernestine Schumann-Heink and the tenor Wilhelm Sedlmayer, both from Prague, who performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Perhaps the only other vocalist to make it to Latin America was Theresina Singer, who was probably born in Šternberk. The first Czech singers to really make an impact over the ocean were Ema Destinová (Emmy Destinn) and Karel Burian.

Everything suggests that in addition to the stage, Klementina Kalašová also loved the sun, travelling, and the exotic,

and perhaps it was this combination (in addition to the feeling of being underappreciated, which plagued her constantly) that drove her to travel to Brazil, where she finally found gratification. And an early demise, too. She was probably the most travelled Czech singer, of her time at least. Perhaps that is why there is so little in her life story that is certain and reliably documentable.

### Searching for Traces

She was born on the 9th of September 1850 in Horní Beřkovice to a doctor's family. She began learning the piano and was sent to Bedřich Smetana's music school. The story is often recounted that it was he who discovered her singing talents. Klementina followed his advice and transferred to study with František Pivoda. She later probably studied in Italy with Francesco Lamperti (1811?-1892), but sources differ as to the years in which this training took place (no uncommon occurrence in Kalašová's biography). In 1870, the Russian prince Yuri Nikolaevitch Galitzine (1823-1872), a composer and musical benefactor, visited Prague. His visit fit right in with this era of pan-Slavic and pro-Russian excitement, and the concert which the prince organised in Prague on the 27th of June with the participation of the Hlahol choir and the orchestra of the Provisional Theatre, from the opening, with the song *Kde domov můj* (*Where My Home Is*), until the very climax, was marked by a rising of "general elation, unspeakable pleasure up to the most impossible of degrees. We can no longer deny that it is from the originality and purity of Russian national music that it is pertinent to search for the source of a future Slavic music," as wrote Ludvík Procházka in his ecstatic review.

Prince Galitzine met the twenty-year-old Klementina Kalašová on this occasion and invited her to Russia. There, she received further training from the Swedish singer Henrietta Nissen-Salomon (1819?-1879), who settled down in St Petersburg after concluding her active career and lived out her life as a singing teacher.

In the autumn of 1871, Kalašová made an appearance in Prague and offered to organise a benefit concert for the Women's Production Club and the adjoining girls' orphanage. The concert took place on the 22nd of November 1871 in the Provisional Theatre and the orchestra was conducted by Bedřich Smetana. The programme took the then-popular form of the academy. Participants included Jan Sitt performing Mendelssohn's violin concerto or a trio



of Karel Sladkovský, Jan Sitt, and Alois Neruda performing a single movement from an unnamed trio by Beethoven. Also on the programme was Mendelssohn's overture *Ruy Blas*, and recitation by the actress Julie Šamberková. A critic hiding under the initial P. (once again, Ludvík Procházka, in whom the singer clearly found a vocal supporter) wrote that the singer had made "remarkable progress in Russia as to her handling of technical material", that her cantilena was beautiful, and that she had generally grown as an artist. She sang arias from Friedrich von Flotow's opera *Alessandro Stradella*, Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and songs by Boris Sheremetev and Anton Rubinstein. Not worthy of the reviewer's praise, however, was the audience: "The listeners, composed mostly of ladies, did not grace the artist with the zealotry of mind which the presented songs - and the thoroughly artful manner of their presentation - justly deserved. They were, on this occasion, highly ungrateful, particularly if one remembers the often trifling pettiness for which these gentle hands are willing to get dirty," wrote Procházka, letting his indignation flow freely.

On the 6th of January 1872, Kalašová sang as part of the programme of the so-called Historical Concert, directed by Procházka on the Žofín Island on the Vltava River in Prague. Other performers included Emilie Bubeníčková, Josef Förster on harmonium, the pianist Žofie Dittrichová, and a choir. Kalašová performed arias by Leonardo Leo and G. F. Händel, songs by Johannes Brahms and Václav Jan Křtitel Tomášek, and an aria from Mikhail Glinka's opera *A Life for the Tsar*, which was (along with *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, also by Glinka) her operatic debut in St Petersburg in 1874.

It is to this occasion that we can trace a phenomenon that occurs again and again throughout the singer's lifetime, though we also know of this only through mediated (and often conflicting) sources. Allegedly,



Klementina Kalašová had arranged a three-year contract in St Petersburg, but it did not materialise due to scheming and plotting by others. Other sources claim it was she who refused the contract, while there are also those who claim that she ran away from St Petersburg to accept an engagement with the Italian company working in London's Covent Garden. This was led by Frederick Gye (1810-1878), who was also responsible for introducing the work of Richard Wagner to England.

At the beginning of the 1874/75 season, Kalašová was listed in the overview of engaged artists under the name Clémence Calasch as a debutante. She also allegedly performed in London as Azucena in Verdi's *Il trovatore* and as Ortrud in Wagner's *Lohengrin* (premiered on the 8th of May 1875), but the Azucena of the premiere was Zelia Trebelli (1836-1892) and the part of Ortrud was sung by Anna d'Angeri (1853-1907). Kalašová herself claims she first sung Ortrud in New York in 1881.

Perhaps London's climate was not to Kalašová's liking - in 1875, she had to travel to the Alps for her health. In 1877, Ms Calaš (the detective work of finding her in the archives is complicated by the many diverse variants of her name) suddenly appeared in Madrid.

### Poetry and Truth

"During the weaker, summer season, visitors of the Czech theatre often complained that there were few good days, but we feel this was unjust. If they had stuck to Goethe's advice and left their hearts open to the good things offered to them by Maýr's leadership, they would perhaps have enough strength to stomach the inferior offerings, and would therefore not have to wait blindly for the child of our homeland, now the pride of artistic circles in distant lands and therefore arousing double the attention, Ms Climene Kalaš, member of the royal Covent Garden in London, to contribute, through a guest performance, her noble art to the opening of the new season." A few words on Klementina Kalašová's welcome in Prague in 1879. She performed at the New Czech Theatre on the 25th of September in the part of Azucena, singing her role in Italian in this bilingual production of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*.

"It is understood that the exceptional artistic environment in London, as well as her other engagements during travels in Italy and Spain alongside artists of the very first class, all had a definitive influence on the development of the entire

artistic individuality of our compatriot. She has, in short, become a whole artist, a perfect artist, who serves to beautify the Czech name. Her Azucena was so remarkable, so unusual - never before have we heard and seen this part sung and acted in this way. Every tone, every melodic phrase, every movement of her towering figure, even each quiver of her distinctive visage and every flash of her penetrating gaze - all this connected into a single beautiful whole in harmonic accord," wrote a Czech critic.

German critics, on the other hand, wrote that "in the fire aria and the ensuing recitative and duet with Manrico, she demonstrated a full and voluminous voice, though in the scene with Luna, her tone sounded a little tired. Tone production and declamation belie good training and routine, though they are not devoid of some bad habits. This is particularly true of the deeper tones. (...) She appears to be an operatic actress with a good understanding for her part."

Her second guest appearance was delayed - *Norma* was performed instead, on the 30th of September, so audiences had to wait until the 4th of October to see Kalašová perform the part of Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. "Our special guest, Ms Klementina Kalašová, has lived in recent years only in the warm climates of Italy and Spain, and therefore had to redeem her return to her homeland by a fair case of catarrh, under whose influence she sung Azucena, not wanting to call off her first performance. Illness was the only reason for which - following her express wish and the agreement of the directorship of the theatre - her guest appearances were put off until today."

Kalašová sung Gluck's opera, which for this single performance, the theatre "awakened from its archival repose, similar to a deathly sleep." "In addition to certain dramatic accents, she also managed to capture the soft character of the lyrical passages and the deeply tragic tone of this work by an immortal master."

The performance of *Ruslan and Lyudmila* on the 10th of October 1879, however, was merely a sad ending - the production garnered only disparaging responses: "A work so remarkable, so clearly the work of genius in the musical respect, should not have been made comical through an adaptation so unprecedentedly shabby; so unspeakably poor. (...) Some piety our nation has for great Slavic art! (...) Boredom of a spectacular variety therefore lulled many to a calm, soulful sleep! On top of all this, our esteemed guest Ms Kalašová (Ratmir) was not as vocally disposed as on other occasions, thus further paralysing our interest in the whole. Not for all



Antônio Carlos Gomes (1889)

the world would we wish to suffer through one more such performance!”

### The Second Layover in Prague

Foreign lands and experiences continued enticing Klementina Kalašová. She sung in Italy and Spain, and in 1880, she toured the United States. Educated, well-read, and universally talented, Kalašová had at her command several of the world’s languages, and everything seems to suggest she felt better in foreign countries, particularly those with welcoming climates. Despite this fact, she wished to go home. Her plans changed, however, on the boat back to Europe, where she had a fateful encounter with a Brazilian composer. His name was Antônio Carlos Gomes (1836–1896), he had studied in Milan, and his opera, first performed in the city in 1870, garnered the praise of Giuseppe Verdi. We can be certain Gomes and the Czech singer soon found shared interests to discuss. (As for Verdi and his partner Tereza Stolzová, there is much that remains unclear too, though it appears that Kalašová probably never performed on stage with Stolzová, as is often claimed.) Gomes put together an opera troupe with which he planned a tour through Brazil, and he invited Kalašová to join him. Klementina never forgot this successful Brazilian tour, but her second visit to Brazil was also to be her last journey. Four years passed before Kalašová made another appearance on the stages of her homeland. On

the 9th of August 1883, she played the part of Fides in Meyerbeer’s *Prophet*. Two weeks later, news was printed claiming the Ms Kalašová would “probably receive an engagement”. The contract was signed on the 15th of August 1883, and, according to public reports, for one year with a three-month holiday, suggesting that neither the singer nor the theatre were interested in a longer contract (yet?). The press also claimed her first role would be Adalgisa in *Norma*, but this did not materialise: the Provisional Theatre was no longer performing *Norma* before its relocation to the National Theatre and the new production was only premiered on the 5th of October 1884, by which time Kalašová had already left her engagement at the National Theatre. Her contract ended on the 30th of September 1884 and she departed amidst much disagreement. It is remarkable that the director of the National Theatre, František Adolf Šubert, does not mention her even once in his memoirs.

Her performances at the National Theatre are well documented. She sung only three parts: Amneris in *Aida*, twelve times, Azucena in *Il Trovatore*, three times, and, on a single occasion, Maffio Orsini in Donizetti’s *Lucrezia Borgia*. She alternated with Marie Larra-Srbová (1858–1932) in the parts of Amneris and Azucena – the younger singer was also employed in 1884 and did not remain at the National for much longer than Kalašová.

### From Bohemia to the End of the World

Following her departure from the National, Kalašová spent several years travelling across Europe before she received a new invitation to Brazil from Carlos Gomes. She performed at the Teatro São João in Bahia, but she maintained contact with her homeland through correspondence, including with such poets as Julius Zeyer and Jaroslav Vrchlický. One day, Vrchlický’s letter returned unopened, with a scribbled note saying “è morta”.

Klementina Kalašová fell ill with yellow fever and the doctors’ attempts to save her came to nothing. *Národní listy* (The National Letters) brought details adapted from Brazilian newspapers about the last days of the singer’s life, and her funeral, adding: “It is true that when the poor soul left Bahia eight years ago amidst the clamour of ovations, covered in gifts and flowers, she could not have thought that she would return here; that she would conclude her life’s journey here. She died far from her homeland and family, but until her very last breath, she had the comfort and help of devoted, friendly hearts. Sleep sweetly, poor artist!”



*Teatro São João da Bahia*

Somewhat surprisingly, the news reached Prague sooner than they did American Czechs, whose weekly paper *Slovan americký* (*The American Slav*), published in Iowa, only brought news of the singer's death on the 4th of September, claiming that "when and where our excellent patriot perished is not yet known. (...) This news awakened much grief among the circles of the Czech intelligentsia, as the deceased artist was highly esteemed and truly loved wherever she was known. Klementina Kalašová was an artist of grand style, a spirited and brilliant dame, unusually educated and noble-minded, (...) an ardent Czech, and enthusiastic patriot!" An addendum, adapted from the Brazilian press, only appeared in *Slovan americký* on the 11th of September. At the time, news travelled through detours and roundabouts, seemingly in a separate temporal dimension.

"Far beyond the ocean, completely secluded from her homeland and all those dearest to her, one of our most precious theatrical artists, Klementina Kalašová, died on the 13th of June 1889. World-famous theatres in Russia, Italy, and England considered her among the best singers in their employment, and Czech artistic society valued most the uncommon combination of rare natural gifts, the purest and highest conception of art, and an unceasing diligence in technical education and artistic intensification in the service of artistic perfection. In short, she had a purely idealistic and impeccably patriotic mind. Kalašová only

became a member of the Czech theatre at the very end of her artistic career, but she soon garnered the extraordinary respect of all those who have a feeling for true art, creating an enviable memory," claimed an obituary in *Osvěta* magazine. *Ženské listy* (*The Women's Papers*) claimed: "Sad is the fate that befell the excellent Czech artist, deeply moving all of our circles, all the more tragically those where it is still remembered what an alien, unacknowledged atmosphere greeted her among us when she spent only a short time in her homeland, determined to contribute her art to the National Theatre. Not prized in the country of her birth, she turned back towards foreign lands, where she also found her grave. Oh, if only she herself had once been welcomed by the sympathy that now adorns her memory."

In 1902, the ethnographer and botanist Vojtěch Frič travelled to Brazil and found the singer's grave in Bahia. He wrote home to the Náprstek family: "Despite all obstacles, I have succeeded in finding the grave of our artist and am attaching a photograph and a few leaves from the tree that now grows in front of it. Klementina Kalašová performed in the theatre here and was welcomed with great excitement. She lived in a small street behind the theatre, Rua das Vassouras, with a black woman named Sophie. She is buried at the Quinta dos Lázarus cemetery, in a department dedicated to the company of artists. Her tomb has a marble stone with an inscription whose Czech words 'na shledanou' surprises all who walk by."

## JAN SIXTI OF LERCHENFELS

### *Singer to Rudolf II and Provost of Litoměřice*

*In Rudolfinian times, not all singers and musicians could make a living through music. They often sought to apply themselves to other professions in order to ensure future income. One example of the successful career of a former imperial singer who did not give up on music after the conclusion of his engagement in the court chapel, is Jan Sixti of Lerchenfels (ca. 1565–1629).*

Sixti's biography is unclear. He was born in Prague, his father perhaps a member of the Old Town municipal council. In 1574, he was enrolled in the Jesuit convict of St Bartholomew in the Old Town of Prague (other sources claim he was enrolled in 1582 at the eponymous convict in Plzeň). Ten years later, he became a singer (alto) in the ensemble of Rudolf II. He was probably still active there in 1593 as court chaplain, receiving his wages until the year 1612. He was also a singer of the Marian congregation at the Clementinum, where, in 1593, he also held the position of the musical prefect of the sodality (another term for a male-only congregation). In 1594, he departed for his studies in Olomouc as a papal alumnus (i.e. the recipient of a direct scholarship from the Roman Curia), first defending a bachelor's thesis on the subject "Whether Vocal or Instrumental Music is More Powerful and Sweet", and then a doctorate with the title "Is It True That Poets Fabricate Copiously?", finally being consecrated as a priest a year later. Sixti did not give up on music during his studies in Olomouc, becoming

a prefect of the choir of the Jesuit church and a member of the congregation of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was also active as a poet in the circle around the Olomouc professor of poetry Johannes Clingerius, with whose help he probably published a poetic description of the Letohrádek Hvězda (which translates as Star Summer Palace) in Prague.

After his return to Prague, he was still listed as a court chaplain and singer, but in truth, he applied himself more to developing his career as a clergyman. In 1601, he received a coat of arms and the nobiliary "of Lerchenfels", a year later, he was named the Archdeacon of Plzeň, and he continued collecting positions: canon at St Vitus' Cathedral in Prague, Stará Boleslav, Budyšín (Bautzen), and Vyšehrad in Prague, where he was named dean in 1613. Through his loyalty, hefty diplomacy, and appropriately timed occasional prints, he managed to curry the favour of three successive Holy Roman Emperors – Rudolf II, Matthias, and finally also Ferdinand II. In 1617, he was awarded the rank of the Litoměřice provost as a special demonstration of Ferdinand's

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<sup>2</sup>) Academy of Performing Arts, Bratislava





A depiction of the seven liberal arts; the swan symbolises music, copper engraving  
(*Emblemata VII artes liberales*, Olomouc: Georg Handelius 1597)

Title page of the second edition of the Star Summer Palace (*Stella Boemica*, Prague: Tobias Leopoldus 1617)

favour. He also operated a private printing press in Litoměřice, having bought it from the estate of the deceased Prague printer Tobiáš Leopold. Its operation served Catholic propaganda, but Sixti also used it to publish his own occasional prints.

He was knighted in 1623 and died in Litoměřice six years later. Sixti took a great liking to the eight-year-old Bohuslav Balbín (later a famous historian and proponent of the Czech language), whom he also remembered in his will (though Balbín never ultimately received the inheritance). In his *Bohemia docta*, Balbín has the following to say of Sixti: “He was a highly educated man and wrote much prose and poetry. This, however, was not enough, so he set his own poems to music.”

### The Star, the Swan, and Philippe de Monte. Sixti as an Author in Latin and Czech

Linked to the youth and studies of Jan Sixti is Latin poetry, which he wrote himself at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, and which he also received from numerous friends. Again and again, we encounter music, which was of paramount importance to him at the time, and through which he was perceived by those around

him. In a congratulatory print for the Olomouc graduates, which takes the forms of the symbols of the seven liberal arts, Sixti was grouped with *Musica* and its symbolic swan, which signifies song and poetry. In another occasional poetic print, which is dedicated to Sixti on his graduation, his schoolmate Franciscus Mollerus from Vienna (also a singing colleague from both the imperial choir and the Clementinum congregation, where he replaced Sixti as cantor in 1594), showers him with praise and describes the procession of musicians waiting to congratulate Sixti:

*Sixti crowns his temples with laurels, oft the musician of the Emperor himself. All musicians applaud this honour, those who have mixed with the angels in heaven, and also those who are still nurtured by Mother Earth: Philipp de Caesareo Monte, the current Capellmeister, Orlando di Lasso, known around the world, Josquin, Regnart, Clemens Non Papa, the three Sayves, Vaet, Porta, Pinellus, Stabilis, Vecchi, Sale, Camillus, Clavius, Gabriel, Praenestinus, Marenzius and Iovanellus, Luython, Wert, Victoria, Asula and Handl.*

On the woodcut depiction of Poetry, who is crowning Jan Sixti with a laurel wreath on the occasion of his graduation, the accompanying



A woodcut of Poetry giving Sixti a laurel for being awarded his doctorate (Franciscus Mollerus, *Melicum poema*, Olomouc: Georg Handelius 1597)

inscription refers to Sixti as *Musicus*, rewarded by poetry by verse and also crowned by her.

Philippe de Monte, on his way to a musical feast at the Letohrádek Hvězda, is described by Sixti in his poem *Stella Boemica*, first published in 1597 under the pseudonym Julius Torzarrellianus, republished again twenty years, slightly edited and under his own name.

Philipp de Caesareo Monte recently walked accompanied by the imperial choir to a beautiful palace in the shape of a star...

In the 1617 version, the character is replaced with the Capellmeister of Emperor Matthias, Christopher Strauss.

After the conclusion of his studies, Sixti only wrote poetry occasionally. His poems, which include those of the *poesis artificiosa* type (poetry based on formal play that often involves both text and image), betray the training of Johannes Clingerius. One of Sixti's last poetic prints is *Luscinia coelestis* (*The Celestial Nightingale*) from 1599; an epicedium for Mikuláš Popel of Lobkovicz: As for Sixti's last extensive poetic work, this was the occasional poetry print *Stella stellae* (*The Star of the Star*), with which he celebrated Ferdinand II and his victory at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620.

As part of his career as a clergyman, Sixti was famed as a popular preacher. Several of his sermons were published in print in Czech, such as the funeral oration for Kryštof Popel



Copper engraving of the Lobkovicz coat of arms from an epicedium by Mikuláš Popel of Lobkovicz (*Luscinia coelestis*, Prague: Václav Marin of Jenčice 1599)

of Lobkovicz or Zdeněk of Šternberk. He also translated religious prints about the lives of the saints from German to Czech, including treatises on St Norbert, St Catherine, and St John the Apostle. Furthermore, he translated the medieval benedicamen *Johannes postquam senuit* (*After John Aged*) from Latin to Czech (the benedicamen was a form popular in the Middle Ages – settings of the *Benedicamus Domino*, often involving early forms of polyphony).

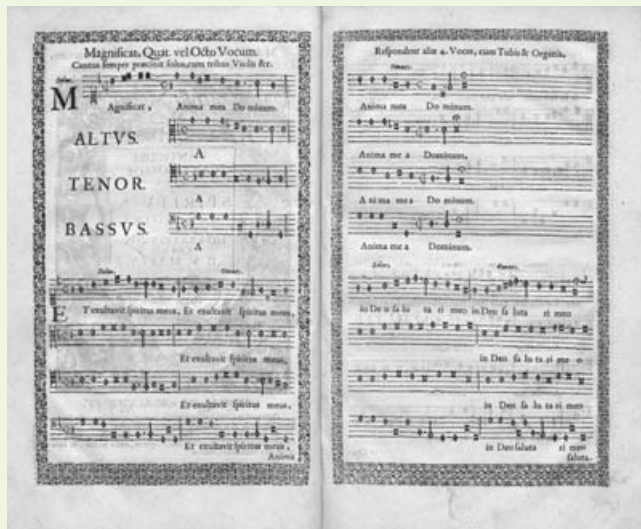
### Sixti the Musician

Sixti is an example of a broadly educated person, devoted to the ruling Habsburg dynasty and the Catholic institutions that educated him, supported him existentially, shaped him, and supported him financially. Numerous mentions of music as the dominant interest of his life confirm the fact that he was a talented musician. His disposition, supported by his being a singer at the court since childhood, turned him into a sought-after and capable performer capable not only of singing but also of directing an ensemble. His musical education included the foundations of composition and music theory. He made use of this too, particularly towards the end of his life, when, as the owner of a printing press and provost of the Litoměřice chapter, in 1626, he published a minor occasional print, *Trino et uni laus, honor, virtus, gloria, triumphus et victoria* etc., with which he





Depiction of the symbol of the Star in the *Stella stellae* print (Prague: s. t., 1621)



An extract from the notation of *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* (*Trino et uni laus*, Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)

celebrated the victory of the Catholic League, under the leadership of Johann Tserclaes, Count of Tilly, over the Protestant army of Danish king Christian IV at the Battle of Lutter.

In addition to its dedication and several laudatory texts, the Litoměřice print also contains nine notated compositions to which Jan Sixti claims authorship. The most extensive of these is the four-voice *Magnificat, quatuor vel octo vocum* (*Magnificat for four or eight voices*), written in a simple homophonic style, alternating with an almost monotonous regularity between choral passages with sections for the solo voice and a simple instrumental accompaniment. The piece cannot be considered a particularly original work, let alone an exceptional one. Rather, it is an example of a successful school exercise with which the adept of composition could proven his knowledge of homophonic voice leading. Even so, the piece is dedicated to the Empress Eleonora Gonzaga, wife of Emperor Ferdinand II.

The second longest piece in the collection is the laudatory hymn *Tē Deum laudamus ... harmonia quatuor vocum*, which, according to the introductory dedication, was composed by Jan Sixti in the 1590s. Despite the employment of short passages suggestive of imitative technique, it is, again, a rather declamatory piece, composed in a style that attempted to respond to the transformation of musical style

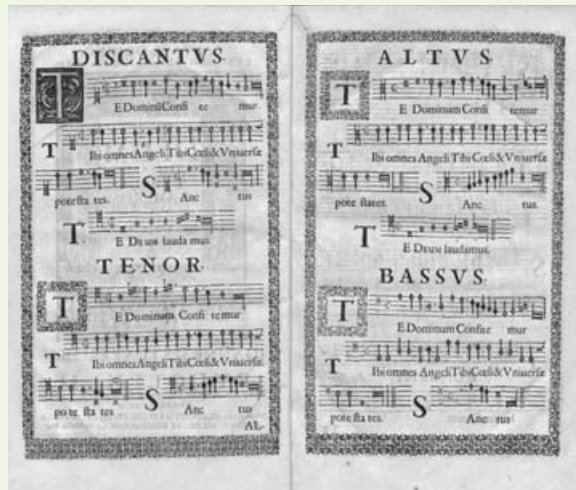


Title page of the print *Trino et uni laus, honor, virtus, gloria, triumphus et victoria* etc., (Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)

around the year 1600. It must be said, however, that it does so without providing any original contribution. The published version includes settings of only the odd lines of the hymn. We can therefore assume that the even lines were to be interpreted chorally.



Title page of the composition *Te Deum* (*Trino et uni laus*, Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)



An extract of the notation of *Te Deum* (*Trino et uni laus*, Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)



*Victoriosi duces* (*Trino et uni laus*, Litoměřice: s. t., 1626)

The remaining pieces in Sixti's anthology are contrafacts, created by adding new text to pieces of Italian origin well known at the time, described as lauda (spiritual songs). The exception to the rule is *Amor vittorioso*, a popular homorhythmic madrigal by Giuseppe Gastoldi from his 1591 collection *Balletti a cinque voci*, with new lyrics and in a new arrangement. Sixti provided this piece, with its simple melody and distinctive chorus, with several new texts: the most important is a collection of four stanzas in four languages (Latin, Czech, German, and Italian) that were used in Bohemia at the time and which celebrate the victory of the empire in the Battle of White Mountain. Then, there are three spiritual texts: the first, in Latin, is intended for the celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the second, in Czech, celebrates the resurrection, and the third, also in Czech, the birth of Jesus Christ.

Jan Sixti of Lerchenfels is an excellent example of an average poet and musician who significantly expressed his political and confessional positions and institutional relations in both his music and poetry, making him one of the few pre-White-Mountain Catholic intellectuals who deserve the attention of both researchers and the general public. His life and work are an excellent reflection of this complex time of religious strife and the beginnings of the Thirty Years' War.

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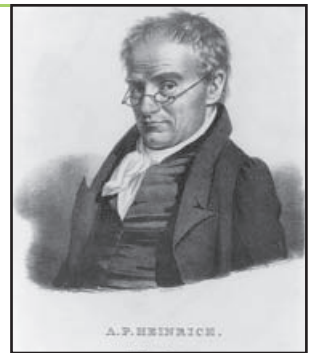
# The Western Minstrel – Voyages through the life of **ANTHONY PHILIP HEINRICH**

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Compiled and edited by Peter J. F. Herbert. 259 pages with photographs, plates, and musical examples. Language: English. The Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak Music, 2020. ISBN 978-0-9562608-3-3

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**The Dvořák Society of Great Britain has added a new title to its list of *Occasional Publications* with a new international collaborative study of Anthony Philip Heinrich (1782–1861). Apart from academic studies, this is the first exploration of the composer's life and music in English since an American biography of 1939. A book about Heinrich by Pavel Farský was published in Czech and German in 2018. Heinrich was born into fabulous wealth, lost it all because of the Napoleonic wars and died in poverty. Largely self-taught, he enjoyed huge success as composer and performer, but was in many ways in advance of his time. He loved both America and England but never lost a deep affection for the Bohemia of his childhood.**



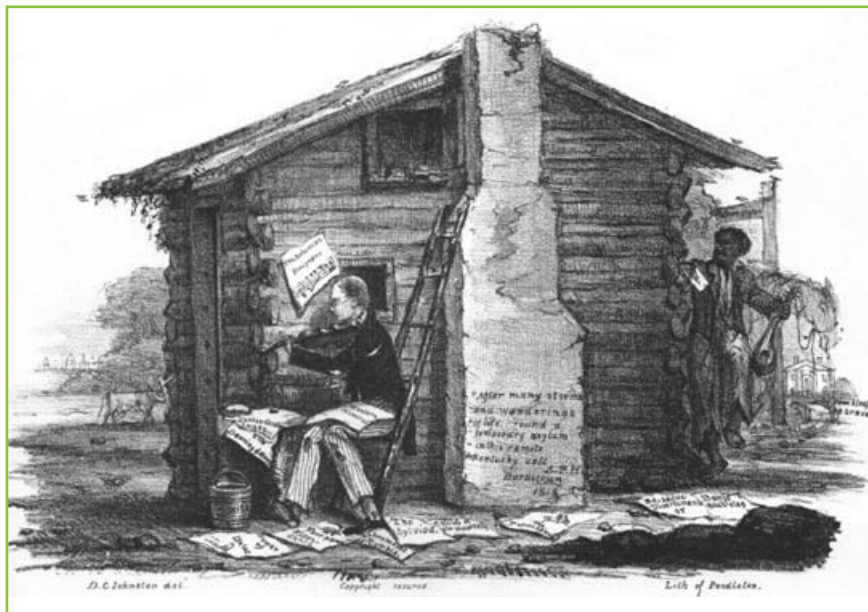
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Anton Philipp (Anthony Philip) Heinrich was born on 11 March 1781 in Krásný Buk (Schönbüchel). His mother, Dorothea Storchin, came from Tábor and his father was probably Philipp Friedrich. He was adopted by the childless manufacturer and trader Anton Heinrich, who died in 1800, leaving his adopted son a huge fortune.

Heinrich appointed managers for his business and sold his mansion, 22 Krásný Buk, for 10,000 Gulden. Music was his abiding passion. He had been taught by Thaddeus Palme and violin probably by local virtuoso Joseph Heinrich. He travelled Europe as agent for his business and to hear and play music. In Malta he bought a Guarneri violin. He even sailed to America, taking in such sights as the Niagara Falls.



*Anthony Philip Heinrich surprised by a slave while playing his violin. Extracted from the frontispiece of *The Log House*. Drawing by David Claypoole Johnston.*



The Napoleonic wars devastated Europe and bankrupted Austria. In 1810, Heinrich took a ship of Bohemian glass to America to rescue his business but the fate of the Austrian economy caused the loss of his entire fortune, equivalent to about €13,000,000. For a while he was Music Director of the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia without salary, surviving by teaching. On his birthday in 1814, he married Wilhelmina Otto. The couple sailed to Europe and spent Christmas in Krásný Buk. Their only child, Antonia, was born shortly after but Wilhelmina was seriously ill. They hurried back to America leaving Antonia with friends, but after a terrible journey, during which the sailors threatened to throw Heinrich overboard, Wilhelmina died and was buried in Philadelphia.

Heinrich walked from Boston to Pittsburgh to be Director of Music at the theatre. The theatre closed but a friend, teacher and musician Peter Declary, encouraged Heinrich to follow him to the wild west. Heinrich again walked and sailed by barge to Lexington, Kentucky. Within days he conducted a concert, including the second performance in America of Beethoven's *First Symphony*.

Sudden illness halted everything. Illness recurred throughout his life. Given shelter by Thomas Speed in a log cabin at Cottage Grove near Bardstown, practised his violin as he recovered, and was startled

one night when an African American slave burst in and offered money to continue to play. In later years, Heinrich was firmly allied to the anti-slavery movement.

Heinrich composed furiously. He moved to the home a Speed's brother, Judge John Speed (later Lincoln's Attorney General) and taught his children and others near Farmington, Louisville. He announced his Opus 1, *The Dawning of Music in Kentucky or the Pleasures of Harmony in the Solitudes of Nature*. It had 269 pages of written introductions with 31 pieces for piano, 26 for voice and piano and 2 chamber works. Wiley Hitchcock later described it as "the most extraordinary opus 1 in the history of music".

Heinrich's Opus 2, *The Western Minstrel*, followed. This had 6 pieces for keyboard and 12 for voice. Now in Philadelphia, Heinrich had to pay for both publications and was briefly in prison for a debt of \$5. Compositions came rapidly, including a melodrama, *The Child of the Mountains*. By June of 1821, he again suffered "severe illness and the pangs of poverty". A ballet, *La Belle Péruvienne* was given in New York. In a review of *The Dawning of Music*, Heinrich was called "The Beethoven of America", neatly echoing his teacher, Thaddeus Palme, later known as "the Krásna Lípa (Schönlinde) Beethoven".



The destruction of Heinrich's violin as illustrated on the frontispiece of his work *Storia d'un Violino*, which he dedicated to Paganini. Drawing by David Claypoole Johnston.

member of the band stepped on Heinrich's Guarneri violin, smashing it beyond repair.

In November 1831, Heinrich sailed for Boston. Much music followed but in 1833 he returned to his post at Drury Lane. Alongside songs and piano pieces, orchestral works began to feature strongly. Many of the works were programmatic symphonies. One example is *The Treaty of William Penn with the Indians*. Current events were also an excuse to write symphonies such as *The Tomb of Genius, to the Memory of Mendelssohn-Bartholdy*.

Heinrich's Opus 3, *The Sylviad or the Minstrelsy of Nature in the Wilds of North America* was published between 1823 and 1826. Another 359 pages of music in 34 pieces, it was mostly more easily performed by amateurs than the first two. Heinrich moved to Boston to take up a post as organist at the Old South Church. He conducted the first American performance of Haydn's 103<sup>rd</sup> *Symphony* and was described as "the first regular of general American composer". Many concerts included his compositions and he was encouraged to plan a career in England as a composer and violin virtuoso. On 16 September 1826, Heinrich sailed to Liverpool.

Disasters came once more. An accident broke the forefinger of his left hand which was crooked for the rest of his life and ended his virtuoso dream. Another illness left him at death's door but he was nursed back to health by one Dr. Edward Tuke. Heinrich's friendship with the Tuke family lasted the rest of his life. Penniless, Heinrich became a violinist in the band at the Drury Lane Theatre, also playing at Covent Garden and Vauxhall Gardens. Paid just 30 shillings a week, he was "living on bread and milk". Heinrich intended to study orchestral writing and he was probably taught by Tom Cook, the Irish composer and leader of the Drury Lane band. Playing in a professional band also helped Heinrich become a more rounded composer. Further disaster struck when a clumsy

In August 1835, Heinrich entered his symphonic *Ornithological Combat of Kings* in a competition at the Concerts Spirituel in Vienna but the event was won by Ferdinand Lachner. He resolved to revisit Bohemia but was again taken ill in the London Hospital. On recovery, he journeyed to Prague, visiting many old friends. In Vienna he was soon seriously ill but later had the joy of hearing a concert of his music conducted by Anselm Hüttenbrenner in Graz. Moving on, he was so ill in Pest that he was given the last rites! In Venice he nearly drowned in a canal. He was robbed in Ljubjana and again mugged in Bordeaux. Taken ill in Paris, he was rescued by an American couple who brought him back to America, finally meeting his daughter Antonia after 22 years.

Known universally as "Father Heinrich", some happiness came to him with the marriage of Antonia to an Alsatian doctor and in 1840 by the birth of a granddaughter, Wilhelmina. Busy as ever with composition, he was of such importance in musical circles as to be elected Chairman of the meeting that founded the Philharmonic Society of New York.

Heinrich's friend Aloys Mussik published a biography, *Skizzen aus dem Leben des sich in Amerika befindenden deutschen Tondichters Anton Philipp Heinrich*. An audience with President John Tyler at the White House ended in disaster and Heinrich walked out,





First page of Heinrich's 1845 *To the Spirit of Beethoven, the Monumental Symphony for a Grand Orchestra*. Ms. in the Library of Congress.

“Mein Gott in himmel! De peebles vot made Yohn Tyler Bresident ought to be hung! He knows no more about music than an oyshter!” [sic]

Enormous concerts of Heinrich's music were given but failed to raise money. A second granddaughter, Antonia, was born in 1849. He now planned once more to visit his homeland. He sent letters ahead of the journey, prepared two collections of music to present to the National Museum in Prague and embarked in November 1856 for Europe. Three concerts featured his music, one conducted by František Škroup; press reports were favourable. There was a visit to meet Liszt but all ended in a poverty-ridden winter in the Prague of 1859. On his return to New York, his health declined and he died of the effects of carbuncles on 3 May 1861. Heinrich's final contact with John Audubon was to be buried next to him in a vault at New York's Trinity Church. The American Civil War had already started and memories of Father Heinrich, the Beethoven of America faded.

A biography by William Treat Upton was published in 1939 and a revival of academic interest came in the 1970s after it was republished in 1967. My own interest in Heinrich was prompted by research for a talk on Czech composers in America. I quickly found that contemporary critics were out of tune with him whereas the later academics took the trouble to see that greatness lay behind both his life and his music. This informs the chapters of this new book about Anthony Philip Heinrich.

Michael Beckerman introduces the scope of the book admirably and explains the range of the composer's attributes. A timeline of Heinrich's life leads into a journey through the fragile archive in the Library of Congress and Viola Shaula Valerio expands on much of the composer's life and music with illustrated descriptions. Fred Baumgarten, scholar of birds and music and expert on John James Audubon, describes all the links between Heinrich and the Audubon family. A chapter on hitherto hidden aspects of Heinrich's birth, parentage and marriage is followed by one on two cycles of music called *The Musical Week*, which led to the discovery of lost works in the Hüttenbrenner collection in Graz. Peter J. Evans expands on his writings about Heinrich's use of American Indian music and reveals Heinrich as a pioneer in this respect. A complete annotated translation of Mussik's 1843 *Skizzen* details the extent of Heinrich's network of associates. An iconographic chapter contains many images of and descriptions of Heinrich. Composer/pianist Neely Bruce uses several of Heinrich's works in an essential demonstration of his methods of working. As well as an index, an extensive list of books and papers, printed music and recordings is provided.



## Antonín Dvořák Symphony no. 6

**Deutsche Radio Philharmonie  
Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern,  
Pietari Inkinen - conductor.**

Text: GE, EN. Recorded: March 2019,  
Large Radio Hall of the Saarbrücken  
Radio. Published: 2020. TT: 77:38.  
1 CD SWR Music SWR19093CD.

The beginning of the tenure of the Finnish globetrotter **Pietari Inkinen** as the principal conductor of the **Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern** marks a crucial personnel change in the only project presently running abroad aiming to record Dvořák's complete symphonic oeuvre, by the SWR Music label. Inkinen inherited the project from his predecessor, Karel Mark Chichon, who recorded the Dvořák's symphonies no. 1 and nos. 3-5 in 2014 and 2015. So far, Inkinen has contributed with the Symphony no. 2 (2018, SWR19083CD) and with this most recent disc, containing the Symphony no. 6 in D major op. 60 along with three overtures. Chichon's renditions were of an undeniable quality and reliably represented the Saarbrücken radio orchestra's strengths - I am of the opinion that other European radio orchestras can hardly measure up to them, including British, French, and central European orchestras. Inkinen's second recording in the planned complete set of Dvořák symphonies, the first ever by a German radio orchestra (Kubelík made his with the Berlin Philharmonic and Bosch with the Nuremberg opera orchestra) continues in the dramaturgical concept, which brings together symphonies with both operatic and orchestral overtures. The operatic overtures are full of symphonic scale and the drive of the stage. The first was never a subject of the debate, but the second

is still a matter of contention today. Inkinen's recording of the younger and more extensive overture to Dvořák's five-act opera *Vanda* op. 25 has both true symphonic lustre and operatic drama. Even more successful is the overture to the two-act comic opera *Šelma sedlák* (*The Cunning Peasant*) op. 37, in which Inkinen excellently captured the pomp and circumstance of the imperial court, the rhythmic vigour of the peasants' countryside, and the lyricism of a pair of lovers tested by fate. I am sure Šejna (1943), Bakala (1951), Vajnar (1986), and Gunzenhauser (1990) will forgive me if I say this is the best recording yet of Dvořák's version of the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*. The most attention is naturally garnered by the dramatic overture *Husitská* (*Hussite*) op. 67, which is, along with the *Scherzo capriccioso*, one of Dvořák's most complex orchestral works. The slow introduction, which mixes the melodies of a Hussite hymn and a hymn to St Wenceslas with a lyrical theme by Dvořák, is arched by Inkinen in a broad tempo and poignant sound - a sound I would not hesitate to describe as warm-hearted in a particularly Czech manner. In the sonata section, the themes collide with each other heavily before struggling through to the coda, a point at which many a recording runs out of breath - perhaps with the exception of Kubelík's live recording from Salzburg (Orfeo d'Or 1967). There, the players seem to be playing for their lives, but there also occasionally make mistakes. Inkinen's rendition is balanced from the introduction all the way to the wild climax. Dvořák's sixth symphony was tailored to the musicians of the Vienna Philharmonic. The first movement evokes Brahms's Symphony no. 2, the second reminds us of the slow movement in Beethoven's ninth, the finale, like Brahms's second, is a tribute to Haydn, and the fierce furiant of the Scherzo is Dvořák's postcard from the Czech lands. Inkinen's Scherzo takes one's breath away and the finale has a perfectly transparent

sound that allows us to follow the internal structure and long build-up of the final movement. The sonic transparency in general is a great advantage of both the recording and the orchestra, though in the nocturno second movement, I could imagine more vibrato and warmth of expression. Inkinen understood perfectly the background and historic context of this work, through which Dvořák aimed to express his mastery and ambition in Vienna, thus placing himself in the pantheon alongside Haydn, Beethoven, and Brahms. You simply must hear this new recording of the *Hussite* overture. The overture to *The Cunning Peasant* is one of those operatic overture recordings that make you immediately want to hear the entire opera. And Inkinen's Symphony no. 6 fulfils all the possibilities both of the work and the orchestra. The conductor has in front of him recordings of the composer's supreme symphonies and discophiles certainly have much to look forward to. I personally would be delighted if the last three discs were also to feature the dance scenes from Dvořák's operas.

Martin Jemelka

## Antonín Rejcha Lenore

**Martina Janková, Pavla Vykopalová  
- soprano, Wojciech Parchem -  
narrator, Jiří Brückler - baritone,  
Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno,  
Petr Fiala - choirmaster,  
Brno Philharmonic, Dennis Russell  
Davies - conductor.**

Text: CZ, EN, GE, FR. Recorded:  
Besední dům, Brno 2020. Published:  
2020. TT: 38.31 + 44.53. 2 CD Brno  
Philharmonic FB 001-002.



**Antonín Dvořák**

**Symphony no. 1 / Bagatelles**

**Brno Philharmonic, Dennis Russell Davies – conductor.**

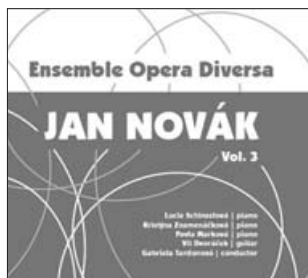
Text: CZ, EN, GE. Recorded: Besední dům, Brno June 2020.

Published: 2020. TT: 67.56. 1 CD Brno Philharmonic FB 003.

It was late September 2017 when the media reported the appointment of the new artistic director of the **Brno Philharmonic**, and I could not believe my ears. I knew **Dennis Russell Davies** as a passionate champion of contemporary music, an eager musical organiser, an inventive dramaturg, and a matter-of-fact conductor who recorded not only complete sets of Haydn’s and Bruckner’s symphonies but also Janáček’s opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*. When it was announced that the programme of Davies’s inaugural concert on September 18th 2018 would include the Czech premiere of John Adams’s *Harmonielehre* paired with Dvořák’s Symphony no. 1 in C minor, op. 3 “The Bells of Zlönice”, I could not believe my eyes. Even when Brno’s leading orchestra repeated Dvořák’s first during their guest appearance at the large hall of Vienna’s Musikverein in the spring of 2019, I thought I was dreaming. Let’s be honest for a moment: which Czech conductor would programme Dvořák’s first symphony on the opening concert of his guest run in Vienna, stigmatised as it is by the reputation of a juvenile work of extreme scale and immature musical material? I was only jerked out of my dream by two new recordings made by the Brno Philharmonic and published on their own, newly established label (that’s what I call “resistance in times of crisis”!). The recordings also include Dvořák’s first symphony, subtitled *The Bells of Zlönice* (a town about an hour north-west

of Prague). We must concede that Brno’s orchestra chose well – their bet on Davies was a good one, and it’s paying out double during these pandemic times. Both recordings under review – the Dvořák disc and Rejcha’s innovative cantata *Lenore* – attest to the fresh dramaturgy of the Brno Philharmonic, which last year became virtually the only Czech symphony orchestra to commemorate the 250th birthday of Antonín Rejcha: they rehearsed *Lenore* (written between 1805 and 1806) in the spring and recorded it in the summer of 2020. Davies’s rendition is not a premiere recording – it is in competition with older recordings by Lubomír Mátl (Supraphon 1986) and Frieder Bernius (Orfeo d’Or 2001) – but is certainly interesting and attractive to listeners with its inner drama. The participation of the **Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno** led by their choirmaster **Petr Fiala** is always a safe bet, and this is confirmed on this recording, which is otherwise dominated by the beautiful sopranos of **Martina Janková** and **Pavla Vykopalová**. Keeping up with them is baritone **Jiří Brückler**, a generation younger and better with every role. The only error of judgement was the engagement of Polish tenor **Wojciech Parchem**, who struggled and finally lost his battle with German declamation. Those with clear memories of Erben’s and Dvořák’s *Svatební košile* (*The Spectre’s Bride*), which deals with a similar theme as Gottfried August Bürger’s *Lenore*, might be disappointed by Rejcha’s seemingly tame musical language. But if we compare this work to Beethoven’s cantatas or the opera *Fidelio* (originally titled *Leonora*), we realise how step-motherly we behave in overlooking Rejcha’s oeuvre, including this oratorio-cantata. There are no doubts that this is a work that speaks to us today, given as its subject matter are the existential impacts of war. The second album under review was not recorded during the September 2018 inaugural concert, nor during

the orchestra’s time in Vienna in 2019, but in June 2020 in Brno’s Besední dům, with a small audience present. Davies chose one early piece and one late piece by Dvořák, acting not only as conductor but also as arranger. Only a few recordings of Dvořák’s First Symphony relay the piece without the cuts suggested by the critical edition (I. Kertész, W. Rowicki). Davies, however, was not satisfied merely with leaving out repetitions. Like José Serebrier before him (Warner Classics), he edited the opening and closing movements from the perspective of an imaginary mentor to Dvořák who advises the twenty-four-year-old composer. This is, to be sure, a highly speculative and problematic approach. These significant encroachments on the composition’s instrumentation and harmonic structure, however, are led by good intentions. It is only a shame that their description in the booklet is limited to a short general paragraph written by the conductor. I was expecting a more detailed explanation of the changes made with examples from the score, so that even a listener without the score at hand could understand what’s going on. This is one of the few problems with this album, whose contents and graphic design are excellent – indeed, the visual form could serve as a model for other Czech publishers with all their trite artist portrait photographs on the front cover. Dvořák’s first symphony is rounded out by the *Bagatelles* op. 47 from the compositionally fruitful year of 1878 (which saw the composition of the serenade for winds, the *Slavonic Dances and Rhapsodies*, the string sextet, and others pieces), but not in the original chamber version for two violins, cello, and harmonium, but in an arrangement (made some years ago by the conductor) for chamber orchestra, with woodwinds taking up an important role along with the strings. This is the second recording of Davies’s arrangement, the first having been made in 1990 in Bonn with Beethoven’s orchestra (Music Masters).



Though I am certainly a purist reviewer, Dvořák's *Bagatelles* in Davies's delicate sonic palette of oboes, clarinets, and horns replacing the harmonium are a delicacy for a string orchestra. If it weren't for the drastic cuts in the finale of Dvořák's "Bells of Zlonice", which I simply cannot accept, the album would truly be the *crème de la crème*.

Martin Jemelka

## Ensemble Opera Diversa

### Jan Novák Vol. 3

Lucie Schinzelová, Kristýna Znamenáčková,

Pavla Marková – piano,  
Vít Dvořáček – guitar,

Ensemble Opera Diversa, Gabriela Tardonová – conductor.

Text: CZ, EN. Recorded: 2019, hall of the Convent of the Brothers of Mercy in Brno. Published: 2020. TT: 67:55. DDD. 1 CD, Ensemble Opera Diversa, z.s.

**T**he work of Jan Novák (1921–1984) should long have been incorporated into concert life (and also become a Czech "export item", just like the works of Miloslav Kabeláč, for instance) – and not just because its generally neoclassical conception makes it remarkably listener-friendly. Unfortunately, Novák's works are in the background today, just like the Latin language, which the composer loved, set to music, spoke fluently, and wrote in. Novák lives on in the general consciousness, he is respected, some of his pieces are performed occasionally, but not nearly as often as his legacy deserves, for this is clearly a composer of European dimensions. In this situation, this project by the Brno-based

**Ensemble Opera Diversa** seems like an apparition, and also as a textbook example of a long-term, directed plan, thought up by the dramaturg and artistic director of the ensemble, **Vladimír Mañas**. Since 2014, the group has begun performing and recording Novák's complete oeuvre for string orchestra (occasionally enriched by several other instruments), almost exclusively under the baton of their principal conductor, **Gabriela Tardonová**. The third CD is the conclusion of these activities, though the orchestra will continue developing them in the future. 2021 is a Novák anniversary year and Ensemble Opera Diversa can boldly state: we are ready for it. On its two earlier Novák albums, the orchestra collaborated with experienced soloists – oboist Vilém Veverka, pianist Alice Rajnohová, flautist Kristina Vaculová, and mezzo-soprano Lucie Hilscherová. This time, it decided to feature students or recent graduates, proving that there are many excellent performers of Novák among young musicians. **Lucie Schinzelová** and **Kristýna Znamenáčková** impart the impression of an established duo, giving the concerto for piano four hands and strings, *Concentus biugis* (1977), the desired drive, both in the mechanical and lyrical passages. Guitarist **Vít Dvořáček** also took full advantage of the opportunity in his performance of the *Concentus Eurydicæ*, subtitled *Sette tempi per chitarra ed orchestra d'archi* (1971). In both pieces, the orchestra displays a wonderful, full sound and excellent coordination, built up through years of collaboration between a stable core of musicians and their conductor. The recordings were certainly also aided by the fact that the orchestra had rehearsed the pieces well for their concert performance. The twenty-minute cycle of playful variations on Moravian folk songs, *Rustica Musa II (otto divertimenti su canzoni popolari morave)* for piano four hands (1975), recorded by Kristýna Znamenáčková and **Pavla Marková**, concludes the album, and it is more of a bonus, though it has

a clear dramaturgical connection with the opening piece on the album. Perhaps the remaining time on the CD could have been used for something else, something involving the orchestra, perhaps an ad hoc arrangement of a chamber piece for string orchestra, or a suite from the film music from *Kočár do Vídně (Carriage to Vienna)*, originally composed for strings, organ, and harp. The choice of a cycle for piano four hands, however, is not without justification (among other factors, this is the first recording made by Czech performers) and embodies a humorous punchline to the entire project – after all, Novák was famous for his sense of humour. Ensemble Opera Diversa's Novák project is a significant contribution to a broader knowledge of Novák's oeuvre and a challenge to all concert programmers. I do not hesitate to place it alongside such Novák recordings as Kubelík's rendition of Novák's cantata *Dido* from the 1980s, made with the male chorus and symphony orchestra of the Bavarian radio, the Martinů Voices album of choral pieces, or the recordings of Novák's chamber music made by the composer's daughters, Clara and Dora. I wish the entire three-volume series, published by Ensemble Opera Diversa itself, would be available in broader distribution networks so as to make its way to many music lovers – it certainly deserves it. And as a personal postscript, allow me to add: more Jan Novák – not just in 2021 and not just performed by Ensemble Opera Diversa.

Vítězslav Mikeš





## Rudolf Firkušný Soloist and Partner

Rudolf Firkušný – piano, New York Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Rafael Kubelík, Hans Rosbaud, William Steinberg – conductors.  
Text: GE, EN. Recorded: 1949–1962.  
Published: 2020. 10 CD Profil – Edition Günter Hänssler PH19013.

In 2019, Sony published an eighteen-CD box set of recordings by the Czech pianist **Rudolf Firkušný** (1912–1994), made between 1949 and 1993 for the American labels Columbia and RCA Red Seal. A representative collection of recordings with a significant proportion of Czech repertoire (Dvořák, Janáček, Martinů) was published on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the artist's death (2019). In August 2020, another collection – this time of Firkušný's solo and chamber recordings – was published by the German label Profil – Edition Günter Hänssler, which put out ten CDs of recordings made between 1949 and 1962. Several recordings (Janáček, Mozart, Schumann), are the same as in the Sony box set, while others already featured on archival recordings released on Tahra (Martinů) and Diapason (Beethoven), or live recordings, particularly from the Salzburg Festival, published by Orfeo d'Or (Dvořák, Chopin, Mussorgsky). Czech repertoire, which Firkušný obstinately championed throughout his career on the world's concert stages, is represented here by Dvořák, Janáček, and Martinů. Of the eight recordings Firkušný made of Dvořák's piano concerto, the box set features perhaps the most artificial, made in Cologne in 1960, on which **Rafael Kubelík**

is constantly stepping on Firkušný's toes. This live recording is not without errors, and especially in the opening movement, the soloist and conductor are constantly searching for each other across various tempos. However, the recording succeeds in demolishing the notion that Dvořák's piano concerto is insufficiently spectacular. I consider the recording of Martinů's *Incantations* (1958) not much more than a valuable historical document attesting to the Romantic agogics with which Martinů was interpreted even during his lifetime. Janáček's piano works frames the convolute of recordings – the collection begins with the *Piano Sonata r. X. 1905*, performed at the Salzburg Festival in 1957, and ends with a studio recording made in 1953. Firkušný's interpretation of Janáček's piano works is considered highly authentic: the artist's touch is considerably more fragile than that of younger pianists, the expression is extremely simple, but agogically, these are very lively recordings. Perhaps the only recording to sound outdated is the *Concertina* (1952), but this is also one of the oldest recordings of this work (if not the oldest). Firkušný's recordings of Janáček are far beyond mere sonic documents and continue to serve as models which generations of Janáček's interpreters will have to measure up against. Of the Romantic composers, the most space is dedicated to Brahms (op. 15, 76, 79, 116, 118, 119, 120). I was more taken with Firkušný's interpretation of Brahms's solo and chamber works (the viola sonatas recorded with **William Primrose** in 1958) than with his take on Chopin (Piano Sonata no. 3), Schumann (*Phantasy* op. 17) and Mussorgsky (*Kartinki*). Firkušný generally excels at Viennese repertoire, whether that means Mozart (KV 457, 475, 369), Schubert (*Impromptus* D 899 and 935), or Beethoven, who is the composer with the most pieces on the disc. The imperial concerto (1958) has flair and a brilliant shine, the *Pathétique*, *Moonlight*, and *Waldstein* sonatas (1960, 1962)

display a firm rhythm and elegant touch, while in the violin sonatas op. 24, 30/2, and 96, Firkušný's delicate expression even overshadows violinists of such calibre as **Nathan Milstein** (1958), **Erica Morini** (1961), and **Tossy Spivakovsky** (1949). It is clear that Firkušný felt secure in the interpretive tradition and ideological background of the Viennese composers. And a surprise to finish with (at least for me): Franck's A major sonata with Erica Morini (1961) and Debussy's *Children's Corner*, *Étampes*, and the *Suite Bergamasque* (1956) are, in my opinion, recordings that masterfully resist the march of time. If only for the French repertoire, it is worth listening to this convolute of Firkušný's recordings made between 1949 and 1962, though the set should have been better editorially prepared, particularly as regards the clear and easily avoidable mistakes in dating.

Martin Jemelka



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PHOTO DANIEL HAVEL

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