czech music *quarterly*

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Luboš Mrkvička

Ostrava Days 2023

Hidden on Tape

30TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT
SEASON 2023•2024

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DEAR READERS,

you might well notice a tendency shared by several texts in this issue towards a rather more candid and personal writing style than is usually the standard on these pages. Thankfully, all of these forays, whether in Ian Davis's interview with Luboš Mrkvička or my own "dictionary" of the Ostrava Days festival, are honestly motivated, so we firmly believe you won't be too dismayed at this change of style. And for some antidotal academic dryness, you can turn to two texts from a recently published collection of essays about Czech electronic music. These are, perhaps, some of the less riveting contributions to the volume in question, but as our plan is to publish a selection from the book as a series, we hope you will take this material (detailing the sonic archive on whose research the book is based and the theoretical foundations behind Czechoslovak electroacoustic music) as a taste of the fascinating material still to come.

Wishing you a musical autumn,
Ian Mikyska

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William Lang in rehearsal, Ostrava Days 2023. Photo by Martin Popelář

by Ian Davis

Music as a Single Entity

***LUBOŠ MRKVIČKA** HAS BEEN A STRONG PRESENCE ON THE CZECH COMPOSITIONAL SCENE FOR MANY YEARS, BOTH AS AN ACTIVE COMPOSER AND AS A PEDAGOGUE. HIS MUSIC AND COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH HAVE A HIGH DEGREE OF INNER CONSISTENCY – HE IS A DEDICATED THINKER EXPLORING IDEAS AND TECHNIQUES IN DETAIL OVER TIME. IN THE CD ATTACHED TO THIS ISSUE, YOU CAN EXPLORE HIS MOST RECENT MUSIC, BUT THIS INTERVIEW – CONDUCTED BY COMPOSER AND ONE-TIME STUDENT OF LUBOŠ IAN DAVIS – DELVES DEEPER INTO THE THINKING BEHIND THE MUSIC, LUBOŠ'S RELUCTANCE TO GIVE HIS PIECES TITLES, AND THE DETAILS OF HIS COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS.*

Can you tell us a little bit about your upcoming release with the Czech Music Information Centre?

The CD will include pieces I wrote between 2014 and 2021. Two of them are composed for large instrumental ensembles and three for solo piano. They represent two extreme positions in terms of instrumentation, but from a musical point of view, like all my compositions, they are very closely connected. They address similar compositional problems, although they do so in slightly different ways.

What kinds of "compositional problems"?

Okay, well, I see that I ran into this question, although I admit I was trying to avoid it entirely. Specific examples would certainly be outside the scope of this interview, so I will at least try to give a more general answer. By "compositional problem" I mean some aspect of musical structure that can relate to basically anything. In my first compositions this primarily involved harmony; later the treatment of different types of pulsations in connection with changes of time signature

PHOTO: MARTIN POPELÁŘ 2x

(this was mainly based on the idea that written and sounding music do not exist separately, but are closely related to each other); then an increasing focus on the linear aspects of the musical structure, which eventually resulted in working with separate simultaneous layers (the result of these most recent tendencies are all the compositions from recent years, i.e. also all the compositions on the CD). Although it can seem rather abstract and complex when I put it this way, in reality the "compositional problem" is always something very simple and straightforward. Even the seeming complexity that I sometimes arrive at in my compositions (and, unfortunately, almost always when I start discussing in more detail the technological side of my compositions) is only a consequence of proliferation of the original, simple idea. And without a doubt, it is also a consequence of the fact that, as a composer who writes extremely continuously, it usually happens to me that the moment I "solve" a specific compositional problem for myself, I simply take over and repeat this solution in the following composition, and the "compositional problem" becomes something else. This, I think, is also one of the main reasons why my compositions, in a certain sense, are becoming more and more complex, even though their starting points still remain extremely simple.

In the liner notes you write that "since [you] first began composing, [you] felt a reluctance to give [your] pieces titles". Can you tell us a little bit about your earliest experiences with composing? What did these pieces sound like that you were reluctant to give titles to?

The issue, I think, isn't so much how the pieces sounded, as the fact that I've never written music that directly refers to any extra-musical content. Even though I don't want to lie to myself that the way I write music has not been influenced by anything from my (that means also non-musical) life, trying to make any direct connection would seem completely contrived to me. I find the creation of both poetic names on the one hand and "technologically-structural" names on the other to be ridiculous.

Have you ever seriously considered leaving your pieces untitled? What do titles facilitate for a composer?

Not only have I seriously considered this eventuality, but I feel as though I am essentially doing just that. The way I mark the compositions is not actually a title, but just a kind of "catalogue" designation describing both the instrument(s) for which the composition is written (For...) and then an indication of whether I have already written pieces for the given instrument(s) (Part A, B, C etc.). What role the attribution of titles plays for other composers is an issue that, certainly thanks to my total limitations in this area, has simply never really interested me.

Yes, I suppose this is what I was getting at in asking this question; that titles, for any composer, facilitate record keeping and the building of an archive. It's interesting how hard it is to avoid giving a piece a "title" and even more interesting that you've felt ambivalent about titles from early on. I appreciate the system that you've arrived at which makes the chronology of your work immediately apparent. It reminds me a bit of the street addresses in Queens which tell you the nearest cross street or avenue in the building number – you always know where a building is just by looking at the address.

You speak of "an immediate, almost physical pleasure in musical detail", for you, is that "musical detail" something visual, auditory, conceptual, or some combination of these?

This is a very interesting question, although, to be honest, I have never thought about it before. I'm guessing that it will be a combination of something auditory and visual in the first place, but I would like to add for myself, even though it might sound a little strange, something tactile, olfactory or gustatory. However, it seems to me that an immediate, almost physical pleasure in musical detail is something I can hardly imagine in connection with something conceptual. I can quite easily imagine falling in love with a concept (in fact, this has to happen if I'm going to start writing anything new at all), but that immediate tantalising effect you were asking about is, I suppose, simply not of an intellectual nature to me.

You write "I have always had a tendency to see all music as a single entity, as something that is, despite its structural variety, still essentially the same thing". In my understanding, you're talking about maintaining perspective on an artist's entire output rather than thinking of one particular piece in isolation. I wonder if you could speak a little bit about context and personal growth in relation to this "single entity"? In other words, music exists in several forms; the score, the recording, the live performance, memory – where does this "entity" exist and does it ever change or do we just change in relation to it?

In my view, it is not only a question of a kind of targeted focus on the entire work of a given composer, and not only on an individual composition (it can certainly happen even to me that I like a composition by an artist of whom I know nothing else). I would not in the least want to create the impression with this statement that I am trying to create some kind of guide on how to arrive at a given perception of the world. This statement was not based on something that I had been working towards for a long time, and certainly not on the basis of something that I had once set as my goal in the past. Far more, it simply describes a way of seeing that I did not arrive at, but which, as it seems to me from today's point of view, I simply always had, only without articulating it in any way in the past. It is a description of an, I would say, extremely self-centred way of seeing which, try as it may, finds the same things everywhere it looks. And I say this with the full knowledge that, as Friedrich Nietzsche put it, the ability to see similarities between things is not a sign of good eyesight. However, this "same thing" remains very unarticulated even for me, and by mentioning it, I am committing a logical fallacy and demonstrating considerable pretentiousness, as I am talking about something that I am not capable of talking about. Therefore, I am unable to tell you anything about the question of where this "entity" exists. Perhaps it's just that I don't perceive this "entity" as something that exists outside of me, but rather I myself am this "entity". I suppose it must be clear from what I have already said that I am far from thinking of this "entity" as something unchangeable.

We met in the fall of 2009 when I was a wide-eyed college student experiencing Prague for the first time. I had studied classical music since I was six years old, but I grew up in the American education system and within an American musical culture and I remember feeling like I had wide gaps in my formal compositional training (I still do!). You also teach at the Academy of Performing Arts (HAMU) working with mostly Czech and European students. I wonder if you could talk about your relationship to teaching more broadly, how it is connected or separated from your compositional work? What is your experience working with young composers from different parts of the world and the different perspectives that you've observed?

Before I say anything else, I just want to state the oft-repeated statement that I, too, do not believe that composition can actually be taught. Only the craft of composition can be taught, however: a) from the teacher's point of view, this is the least interesting part of their activity; and b) a teacher is not really needed if you want to acquire these skills. The relationship between student and teacher is completely equal within the university environment (what's more, it often happens that some students, even though they are less experienced than their teachers, surpass them in many respects). Although teaching and composing are different activities, I believe that – for many reasons – it is more than beneficial for the teacher to be an active composer as well. Perhaps not because they primarily teach their students to compose in the same way as they themselves compose (unfortunately, this happens mostly in the case of less interesting composers – although the opposite excuse can also be used by teachers who are bad composers themselves), but rather because compositional technique has not become something closed; something ready-made which could simply be passed on with ease.
Of course, teachers who are active as composers themselves but approach technique as something closed and write routinely – they can be as active as composers as they want, but the damage they can cause is comparable to that done by teachers who are

not active composers. Therefore, I believe that composing itself should be related to teaching primarily to the extent that it helps the teacher approach compositional technique, the craft, as something living, constantly changing and constantly being created. As for the difference between students from different parts of the world and the different trainings and perspectives that I have come into contact with over the years, I feel that, considering the extreme individualism which is an integral part of compositional activity, I am unable to make any general observation worth noting.

We recently spoke about complexity in music and how despite the fact that you yourself have complex elements in your own compositions, you can experience an aversion to complexity in other music when it feels disingenuous, flashy, or unnecessary. How might a composer establish a genuine relationship to complexity? In other words, how might a composer know that they need to use complex means in order to realise something genuine and not just caving to a certain pressure that to be taken seriously as a composer, one must do complex things?

Yes, we were speaking about complexity at the time, but one that is first and foremost a manifestation of the composer's virtuosity, the type of virtuosity that I would call a manifestation of technical skills. This virtuosity can manifest itself in various ways, but it is true that complex scores are probably the most common result. In short, I don't like when virtuosity flaunts itself in order to hide the fact that the piece of music is just an inflated bubble that actually has no solid core, and therefore has nothing to say at all. That's also why I have a tendency, despite the way my music often looks, to surround myself to a much greater extent with music that would more likely be described as raw, harsh, lo-fi, and so on. On the other hand, I am very well aware of the fact that a certain type of virtuosity can be part of that sensory complex we talked about a moment ago, namely the complex that is the source of an immediate, almost physical pleasure in musical detail. As for how to behave in order to prevent the complexity which eventually occurs

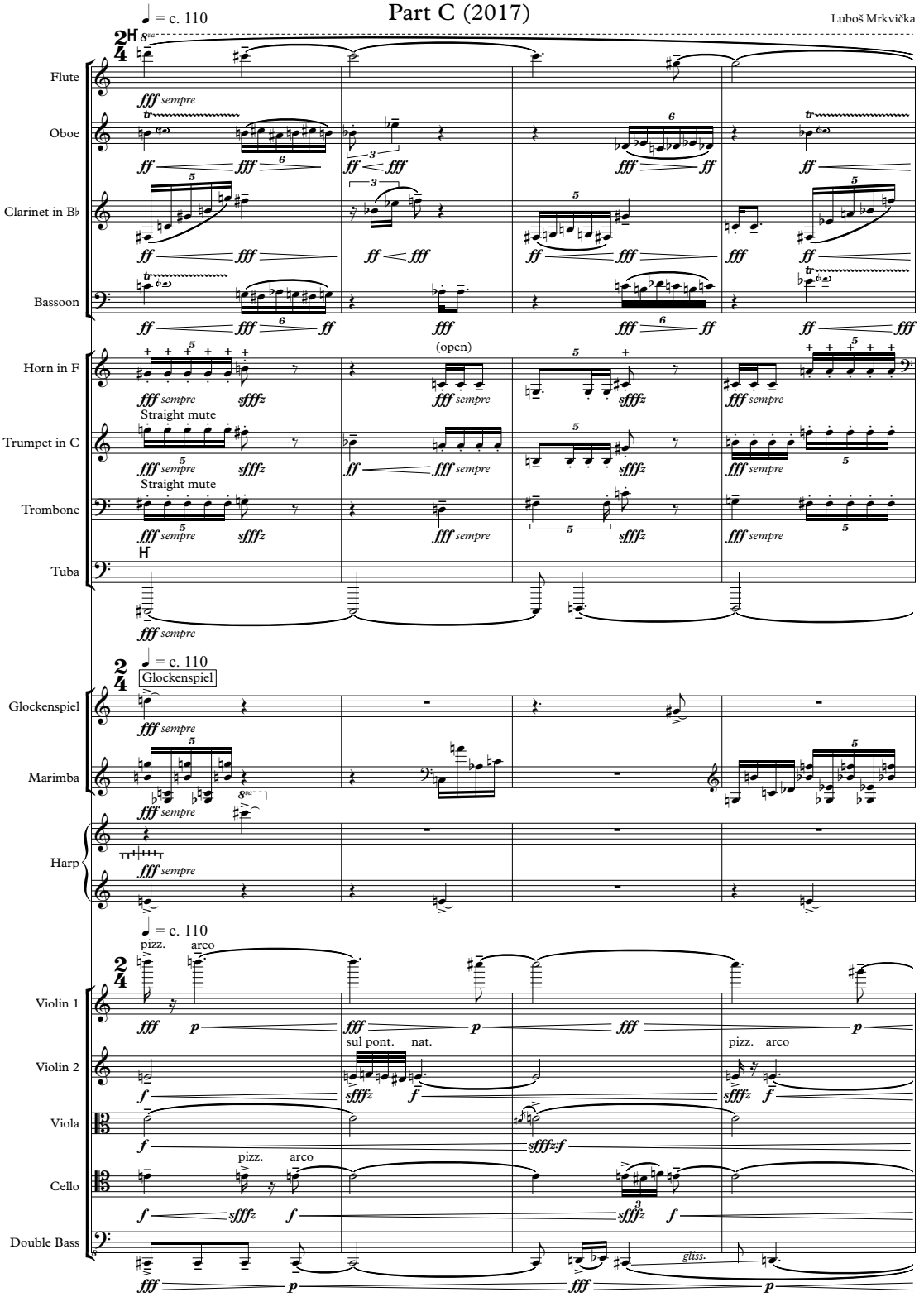
from being just a shiny, inflated bubble, I am unfortunately unable to give any guidance on that. I think the reality is actually very simple: either the composer has something to say or they don't. Whether the result will be complex or not has nothing to do with it. I don't believe that a good composer chooses whether his music will be complex or not, although some of them are able to pretend – and even convince themselves – that they have decided for this or that. In fact, it is simply the old saying "making a virtue out of necessity" at play, because good music is primarily the result of processes that are completely beyond our control. And worrying about social pressure (what a composer should look like in order to be taken seriously), which in the end is primarily pressure we put on ourselves, I consider a waste of valuable energy.

We were also talking about intuitive composing versus a more structured approach. I was struck by what you said – and I'm paraphrasing – about the freedom that you find in setting boundaries for yourself. How have the parameters you set for yourself become an integral part of your practice rather than, as you said, merely a "tool" that you use to compose?

It seems to me that the need to experience a certain sense of freedom while composing is a fairly common theme with many composers. I have often heard from those around me statements like "so many rules and restrictions make me unfree, I need to feel freer to be able to create anything at all". I assume that the aforementioned feeling of freedom is related to the feeling of a kind of creative power that occurs at the moment of finding the "right" path; finding the best possible option. But the question is whether the feeling of freedom is experienced more by the one who makes a decision among a thousand options, or by the one who chooses among a far more limited number? I have a feeling that someone who can do everything has no idea about the feeling of freedom at all. That is why I believe that a certain reduction of possible paths must necessarily occur for all composers, regardless of whether this takes place with the help of predetermined rules or thanks to – perhaps even unconscious but nevertheless existing – limitations that we accept before we start composing the piece itself. If we consider Morton Feldman, for example, who liked to claim that he never set any rules in advance, it is quite obvious that the number of possible paths is quite limited within his style. So the way we approach the rules is crucial. Feldman and others like him do not like them, because they sense alienation and perhaps even violence in them. As far as violence is concerned, I believe that across all artistic disciplines we can find artists who are more oriented to force than others, and among those I count myself. These artists are those who do not avoid "violence", or perhaps better said, resistance, but on the contrary, they seek it out, because it is thanks to overcoming resistance that they are able to experience that feeling of creative power, i.e. creative freedom. These artists very often like to work with various types of restrictions; rules that they impose on themselves. The key question for this type of creator, I think, is how to ensure that the aforementioned alienation does not occur by setting the rules. The fact that the rules have to be set in advance, played with, and rationalised creates a far greater danger than in the case when one works in the so-called purely intuitive manner – after a while we begin to realise that the rules we are working with are not ours, but as if they belonged to somebody else, that they are completely external to our music. If we continued to work despite this feeling, the result of such an effort would be pure and utterly

For Large Ensemble
Part C (2017)

Luboš Mrkvička



despicable academicism. For composers who work in a deterministic way, therefore, it is important to create a sense that the set of rules they apply is entirely their own, and are thus an integral part of their music. This needs to happen even when this is not true, that is, when the composer steals (in the end, no one can avoid a certain degree of stealing). It is necessary for such a composer to make a certain type of appropriation, acquisition, in short, to be a thief with a clear conscience. Needless to say, the value of a composer is certainly not determined by the degree of purity of their conscience – there are many epigones who do not know about their plagiarism at all, and there is undoubtedly also a handful of authentic composers who from time to time doubt their authenticity and thus unnecessarily complicate things for themselves. In any case, I am of the opinion that the lack of a clear conscience in its consequence can be a great obstacle to the achievement of what we might call authentic art.

Regarding the second part of your question, how the parameters I set for myself have become an integral part of my practice rather than merely a "tool" that I use to compose, I would say this: There are composers (perhaps the majority) who most definitely think about the things I just talked about, that is, about issues of technique in general, only to the extent that the technique is merely a means to create a composition. They usually devote their compositional life primarily to searching for the most efficient possible way of achieving a result that is, more or less, known in advance. Such thinking is completely foreign to me. For me, technique and result are not two entities that are only loosely related in a utilitarian way – I believe that one directly determines the other. However, I am far from turning the situation upside down and, like some other artists of a structuralist bent, consider the way in which a given composition is made to be the core of the composition, and thus elevate the technological side of things to a pedestal where it simply does not belong.

Can you talk about your relationship to instrumentation? Are there specific instruments that can more readily convey your musical vision than others?

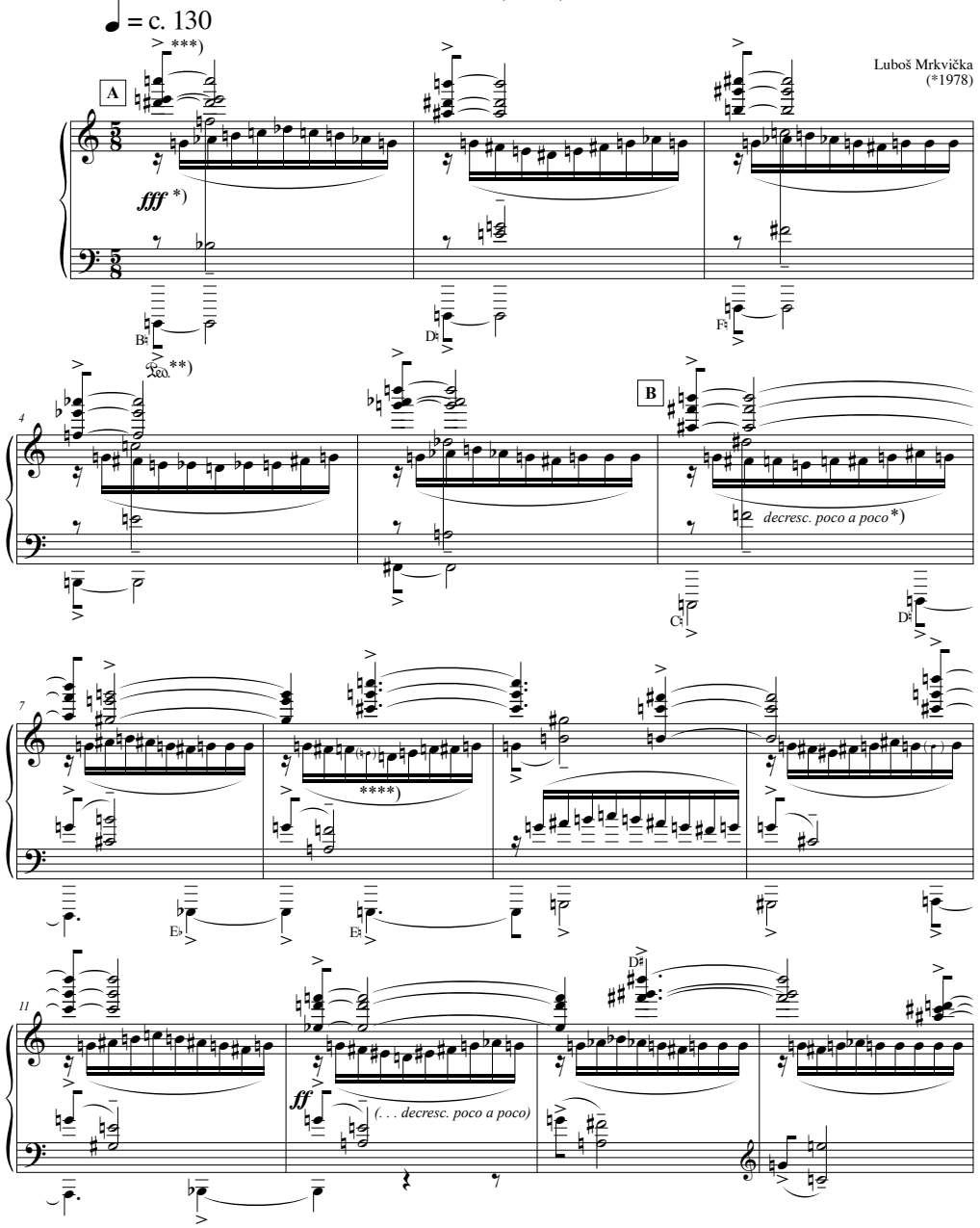
As a composer, I am very inflexible in many ways, but in the area of instrumentation I think I am pretty flexible. Basically, I like every commonly available instrument of Western provenance, and particularly all their possible colour combinations. It would be a bit more complicated for me if I had to write a solo piece for just one of them. In such a situation, with the honourable exception of the piano (!), I usually don't feel completely comfortable. Not to mention the various exotic instruments, although I might like them very much as a listener.

Can you talk about the headspace that you need to be in before you compose and how you access that state?

Composing for me tends to have two main phases that flow into each other at a certain point, the first usually taking place outdoors in nature and the second indoors in the workroom. The first one is shorter, but (and maybe that's why) more painful, the second one is much longer, but I would dare to say that it's utterly joyful. I like to compare the whole process to the following image: at the beginning, I see the piece from far away, only its outlines, but gradually, I get closer to it, I start to see its details, until the moment when I am so close that I can start

For Piano

Part L (2016)



*) All dynamics are approximative and serve as "points of orientation". Decresc. in parentheses does not mark abrupt dynamic changes but only the overall tendency. The whole piece is conceived as a large single decrescendo divided into eleven gradually decreasing dynamic "waves".

**) With much pedal; all accented notes should be played distinctly and should always be sustained (with pedal or/and with hand) until the next accented note.

***) In all accented three-note chords the top note should always be played extra markedly.

****) Small notes in parentheses may be omitted.

writing the notes, which marks the aforementioned transition, i.e. the beginning of the second phase. However, both phases are necessarily preceded by a moment when – as David Lynch put it – I fall in love with an idea. This idea is usually some partial aspect of the musical structure, something I called a "compositional problem" earlier, that I am able to see, at that particular moment, in a light in which I had never seen it before. This moment, in fact, is the driving force of the piece. Unfortunately, I can't even imagine that without this "falling in love" I would see any point in writing a new composition, which I perceive somewhat painfully from time to time, because, as is known, the ability to fall in love usually decreases with age. As I already mentioned, the entire first phase tends to be quite painful at times. To keep the feeling of being in love and to find the right framework in which the composition will later stand is a very uncertain and cautious activity. In addition, it is not at all clear how much time this activity will ultimately take, so it is impossible to plan your work schedule in advance at all. One has to hold the idea, be with it very intensely, and yet not think about it too much. If the idea were forced into a frame that was not its own, it would be lost. It's all the more difficult because that framework (in musical terminology we could refer to it as a form, as a boundary within which the idea will develop) is something very general, something that has already been used a million times by someone else before you. Therefore, it is imperative to tread very carefully to avoid the alienation I spoke of earlier. This first phase usually consists of a lot of walking, sitting, and lying down (ideally somewhere in nature) and, as they say, "staring into space". At a certain point, when I can see the composition from a sufficient distance, I start occasionally sitting down at the computer to define that frame in more detail. At that moment, gradually and slowly, the skeleton of the composition is created using the restrictions that I talked about in general terms earlier. When these constraints reach the desired degree of grip, in other words when the "pitch is lined up" and the rules of the game are set, I can finally proceed to write the music itself, fully and undisturbed, because I don't have to deal with anything else – I can immerse myself in the musical moment, indulge in the musical detail. Phase two begins, which unfortunately takes place entirely in a closed space at the computer and not outside in beautiful nature, but I still consider it very joyful.

I know that I probably got away from your question a bit, because you were more interested in what I do before I even start composing than in the composition process itself. In other words, how I get myself in the state of mind to be ready and able to fall in love with that initial idea. I have – like many other composers, I suppose – a variety of different activities and inactivities that I believe are beneficial in this regard (from lifestyle to what and who one surrounds oneself with). However, I believe that these matters (to what extent are we even capable of controlling them at all?) are extremely fragile and volatile, so if we start to talk about them, it could well happen that they stop working. Not to mention that in most cases, talking about them would feel rather awkward and out of place.

PHOTO: MARTIN POPELÁŘ (16x)

A PERSONAL DICTIONARY

Every two years, we at Czech Music Quarterly are faced with a dilemma: we know we have what amounts to an obligation to cover the Ostrava Days festival, but the sheer size and breadth of the event means that any attempts to cover it in its entirety are doomed to superficiality. This year, then, we present a series of three shorter texts with a more specific focus: two contributions by our editor (and Ostrava Days Institute resident composer) Ian Mikyska, the first an insider's "dictionary" on what it is that makes the OD Institute special, and the second an exploration of the links between the festival and the Czech musical scene, while the final article in the triptych, by New York-based journalist Kurt Gottschalk, discusses several pieces at the festival that made use of text – not as lyrics or song, but as spoken or projected text.

STRUCTURE

In temporal terms, the Ostrava Days festival has three "layers". Those who spend the longest period in Ostrava – roughly three weeks – are the resident composers who participate in the institute (thirty-five young-ish composers from Europe, North America, and beyond), a few of the guest composers who teach at the Institute (idiosyncratically and endearingly referred to as "lectors"), and the festival team. Then, the vast majority of the musicians (including all members of the resident ensembles, Ostravská banda and the Ostrava New Orchestra) arrive in the second week, bringing the total count of new-music-obsessed individuals walking around this post-industrial town up from fifty to around two hundred. Finally, for the last ten days, the festival proper begins, with public concerts every day until the end of the event. This doesn't only mean the inclusion of the general public, however – visiting composers, musicians, and participants in previous editions all make their way to Ostrava during this time, resulting in a remarkably lively melting pot.

by Ian Mikyska

OF THE OSTRAVA DAYS INSTITUTE

N.B.: While this text will focus primarily on the experience of the Institute residents, much of what is discussed here is also true for those participating as musicians or even simply as festival visitors in the last ten days of August. While this text is written from an admittedly self-declared subjective perspective, it also includes information gleaned from interviews I conducted with dozens of participants while working on a documentary film about the festival.

FOOD

While this might seem a rather shallow starting point, it really is a more significant point than it might at first seem. The festival provides participants not only with accommodation but also communal meals, with lunch at one restaurant and dinner at another (breakfasts are served at the respective hotels). These are excellent opportunities to mix within the respective groups and outside them as well – you might find yourself sitting with young members of the Ostrava New Orchestra from Spain and Norway at lunch, then legendary composers and performers from New York for dinner. Any potential imperfection in the service provided becomes a shared talking point, as does the dinner salad bar, for some reason dominated by cabbage. Rehearsals are reflected on and themes arising in the day's lessons and lectures are developed (and new discussions can be finished in the pub later that day). And most importantly: you talk not as professionals, but simply as human beings.

EGALITARIANISM

In fact, this last point demonstrates another crucial element: a feeling of equality, which is

ONO orchestra double bass players (opposite page)

Miroslav Beinhauer playing the sixth-tone harmonium at St. Wenceslas Church

Tamás Schlanger practising at Triple Hall Karolina

ONO orchestra rehearsal with conductor Pavel Šnajdr

in part fostered by these communal meals (by contrast, think of the dons at Cambridge and Oxford, seated at – literally – a higher table to the fellows, who sit higher than the graduate students, and so on). At other similar contemporary music festivals, there is usually more of a feeling of participants (on both "sides") thinking about hierarchy; about how they position themselves; about politics and careers. There is a much more open atmosphere at Ostrava Days: nobody worries about "who you are" before they start talking to you, and you might well be speaking to someone for a while before realising it is someone you have deeply admired for years. This is also reflected in the programming: the "student" pieces are not tucked away somewhere as a footnote, on a "student concert" – they are proudly presented alongside legendary compositions from half a century ago and new works by renowned composers.

OPENNESS

Once one has been immersed in the world of contemporary music for some time, the various scenes, styles, and spheres of influence become apparent, and determining where an event "sits" within these coordinates is usually a matter of briefly studying the programme and list of participants. With Ostrava Days, such attempts are generally futile – while there are several distinct and unique focus

SitbQ performing during the Minimarathon of Electronic Music

areas (the New York School and American experimentalism more generally; the work of members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians), there are few "negative" delineations to be found: the festival can accommodate contemporary Czech Catholic composer Pavel Zemek Novák's hour-long meditation on biblical texts, Alvin Curran's piece for orchestra and a team of young basketball players, representatives of more mainstream German "Neue Musik", as well as reductionist, conceptual, minimalist, performative, meditative, improvisational, participative, and intermedia pieces. And this is reflected in an unspoken axiom among the resident composers and "lectors" at the Institute: any way of using sound and music is valid as long as it is the result of an earnest exploration.

CONTINUITY

There is something to be said, of course, for "giving everyone a chance". But with Ostrava Days, one can also witness the benefits of giving continuity a chance. Naturally, it makes sense to invite the same musicians multiple times (and some have been coming for every edition from 2001 to 2023), but the remarkable thing about this festival is that the Institute resident composers and "lectors" also often attend repeatedly. These are also generally the individuals who appreciate and actively contribute to the atmosphere described in the previous entry, thus creating a positive feedback loop. And it also makes for stronger ties between these visiting artists and locals, be they members of the festival production team or simply audience members and fans of the festival.

EMOTION

In a discipline often lambasted for its supposed lack of emotion, there is really a surprising amount of it going around during the end of summer in Ostrava. I have heard many musicians say that during this time, they hear and perform more of the music they truly love than in the two years that separates the biennials. And this, of course, gives rise to a particular type of friendship, one based in shared labour, shared exhaustion, and shared passion. It is often a shock to realise how little "clock time" one has spent with people whom one considers truly close friends – or how much one has missed them in the two (or four; or six) years that have passed. And in a field full of professionals who are overworked and underpaid, it's so refreshing to hear people say, in a heavy and earnest tone, "Wow, I just *love* music" – they might be overworked and underpaid here too, but here, it all makes sense.

THE TEAM

And it is not only these "first-line participants" that the previous entry is about. Of course, one expects those responsible for the establishment and continued life of the festival, Petr Kotík and Renáta Spisarová, to have a close emotional relationship to this "child" of theirs. And even for Barbora Skálová and Kristýna Konczyna, the only two employees of the Ostrava Center for New Music, who work on the organisation's activities year round, it makes sense. But I really don't know any other event where even the drivers, the people responsible for setting up music stands, the technical engineers, the stage managers, and the orchestra managers have such love for the music and the event, and such strong friendships with the musicians and composers.

Composer George Lewis with František Výrostko

This was reflected rather spectacularly at this year's edition with an unofficial "after-concert". Following the end of the concluding orchestral concert at the Karolina Triple Hall (which, in keeping with Ostrava Days tradition, ran from 6 p.m. to about 11:30), everyone vacated the hall and headed to the one opposite for a reception. The plentiful orchestral percussion section had been left standing, to be packed up the following day. I am very grateful to have been among the handful of people who were there to watch in amazement as the entire technical staff, numbering about twenty people – some of them cimbalom players, singers, or bassists, some of them not musicians at all – proceeded to play an improvised set of about twenty minutes, with dramatically conducted episodes involving a chair and a startlingly loud water barrel. Not only did everyone agree that this performance could have been a fixture on the programme – many added that it would have ranked higher on their personal list than some of the other pieces on offer (!).

ZEAL

It is very much in the spirit of the festival to always go one step further; to always say yes; to always find a way. Perhaps this might mean that the (relatively little) money there is has to be spread thinner. But ultimately, the people who keep coming back (and following Petr Kotík in his other endeavours) do so not because of a decent pay check, but precisely because of this vision, zeal, and passion – the sense of necessity; of these activities being important and necessary to do. Of course, this situation reflects the generally unsatisfactory conditions for musicians and composers working in experimental music around the world, but here, the atmosphere is not depressive but *festive*.

INTENSITY / EXHAUSTION

It is hard to describe the tempo that picks up if one allows oneself to be fully immersed in Ostrava Days (and nights) – lectures, one-on-one lessons, workshops, meals, encounters, improvisation sessions, rehearsals, concerts. This "regimen", of course, only applies to Institute participants – the performers face a completely different set of challenges, with the busiest musicians often interpreting fifteen and more highly challenging pieces (and even then they find time between rehearsals to hear lectures or take part in Thomas Buckner's improvisation workshop).

But not even the audience is spared exhaustion: concerts begin at six or seven in the evening and often run until eleven, midnight, or later. (Though when I asked Tom Buckner about what had changed in the twenty-two years that he's been coming to the festival as a singer, he immediately answered that the concerts used to be "*much* longer".) On the third day of the festival, the Minimarathon of Electronic Music refuted the prefix "mini" in its title by running from 2:30 p.m. to after 2:30 in the morning. It is simply not possible to focus on listening in the way we are used to focusing on listening in day-to-day life – there is not enough mental capacity for this, be it for listeners, players, and composers. But there is another space that opens up as you double, triple, and quadruple your limit of music, and wondrous things can happen in this space beyond exhaustion and listening fatigue. Especially when it's a fatigue shared with literally hundreds of others. And it is these many spaces beyond – beyond limits, beyond restrictions, beyond time – that Ostrava Days is so unique at creating, and why we all keep coming back.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE: CZECH MUSIC AND MUSICIANS AT OSTRAVA DAYS

by Ian Mikyska

ONO orchestra conducted by Johannes Kalitzke during the Orchestra Opening concert

The first two words in the title of this article are taken from an improvisation piece by composer Pauline Oliveros often used by Thomas Buckner in his improvisation workshops at Ostrava Days, asking players to follow either impulses coming from inside or from outside. The following text explores the ways in which the Ostrava Days festival does both – changing the Czech music scene and being changed by it; developing with it and adapting to it whilst also exerting its own influence.

The Ostrava Days festival is, without a doubt, an event of international importance. Even just looking at this year's line-up of guest composers, there simply isn't another event where one can meet legends like Phill Niblock, Zygmunt Krauze, Amina Claudine Myers, Peter Ablinger, Alvin Curran, and Roscoe Mitchell all at once. The breadth, depth, and quality of the programming is also unparalleled. From the opposite perspective, it is also unquestionably the most important contemporary music event in the Czech Republic. Every two years, Czech audiences, musicians, and composers get a considerable dose of works that are generally missing not only from the repertoires of orchestras and traditional chamber ensembles but from contemporary music programming too.

The relationship between the festival and the musical scene in the country where it takes place, however, is certainly not straightforward and unproblematic. The festival's founder, composer Petr Kotík, emigrated to the United States following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and he has

Franz Hautzinger in Peter Graham's "ORGAOS"

Petr Kotík, Pavel Šnajdr, Bruno Ferrandis, Zygmunt Krauze and Gareth Davis playing anvils in Frederic Rzewski's "A Long Time Man"

called New York City home for most of the time that has elapsed since. In fact, his decision to base the festival in Ostrava didn't have its foundation in any kind of personal or familial link, despite the fact that many imagine that it was Kotík's desire to come back to his home city and build something new there. Rather, it was the work of chance, perhaps fitting for someone who has done more to promote the music of John Cage than most: Kotík wanted to organise a concert with three orchestras for a festival titled "Music of Extraordinary Durations" in Prague, and none of the more renowned orchestras in Prague and Brno were willing to join him on this adventure. Thus began the collaboration between the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava and what was to become the Ostrava Center for New Music, a relationship that lasted almost twenty years and came to an end only in 2017.

Of course, as soon as the festival began putting down roots, relationships with Ostrava and the Czech music scene began developing fast: the festival's executive director since the first edition in 2001 is Renáta Spisarová, who also works as a music editor at Czech Radio Vltava, the public broadcaster's classical music and culture station, where she tirelessly promotes contemporary music (and much else besides). Other important partners in Ostrava include the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre, whose artistic director Jiří Nekvasil was also behind the idea to establish NODO, New Opera Days Ostrava, which takes place on alternating years with Ostrava Days. He also regularly serves as stage director for operas produced at the festival, including this year's Playing Trump by Austrian composer Bernhard Lang. Another important collaborator is conductor Jurij Galatenko and his Canticum Ostrava choir, tasked with performing most of the vocal music at every edition of the festival. There are also more recent yet important collaborations, such as with the PLATO Gallery of contemporary art, and, beginning this year, the University of Ostrava, whose newly opened City Campus provided the festival with highly professional facilities (though of course, the Janáček Conservatory, the previous home venue, had its charm too).

COMPOSERS, COMPOSERS, COMPOSERS

When asked about the development of the relationship between Ostrava Days and the Czech new music scene, Renáta Spisarová spoke of three layers: the first involves younger composers – institute residents, the second composers of the so-called middle generation, and finally older and sometimes forgotten Czech composers.

"Twenty years ago, we were really having to search for resident composers ourselves, and the few that came were mostly from Brno," Spisarová explains. She quickly adds that it was always the intention of artistic director Petr Kotík to have more composers from the Czech Republic than other countries. "Our aim was always to serve the local environment; to provide encouragement for the future."

The second layer concerns composers of the so-called middle generation. Here, too, the festival aimed to support local efforts. Twenty years ago, collaborators from this sphere included Martin Smolka and Peter Graham (Jaroslav Šťastný), who are still close to the festival today, but as time goes by, the middle generation has shifted and is now represented by names such as Michal Rataj, Miroslav Srnka, Petr Bakla, and Petr Cígler. Finally, there was another debt that Kotík was looking to honour: that of avant-garde

Hana Kotková performing with Ostravská banda

Roscoe Mitchell improvising at Klub Parník

Czech composers, both those who left the country and who stayed at home. This included Rudolf Komorous, who settled in Canada, and Kotík's own teacher Jan Rychlík. Who becomes a regular fixture at the festival is generally guided by a simple self-selection procedure: those who came and contributed to the energy and atmosphere of the event and seemed to enjoy themselves while doing so were invited back.

WHO CHANGES WHO

It is clear from this introduction that if there has been a rise in the involvement between Ostrava Days and the Czech new music scene, this is certainly not due to any change in attitude from the festival. This position was echoed by composer and university lecturer Michal Rataj: "I first heard about the festival when I was still a student – and now I'm the oldest teacher at our department. I remember that it seemed like something far away, too expensive – I knew nothing about it, so I simply ignored it. I was then invited to participate in 2009, and since then, I've tried to convince all my students to go. And still, not many of them do."

Rataj believes part of the problem lies in the fact that Czechia is a highly centralised country: "I think it was really crucial for a general awareness of the activities of the Ostrava Center for New Music when they began putting on concerts in Prague. This was a highly influential step that really drew these endeavours into the new music world of Prague, and, by extension, the entire Czech Republic."

Rataj and Spisarová both agree that a large part of this change is driven by development in the Czech musical scene itself, which, according to Rataj, "has become more lively, more open, more collaborative, more international, with many events taking place that simply did not exist ten years ago". Importantly, this has also increased a sensitivity to relationships between the local and global scenes, which, Rataj believes, generates a particular type of artistic curiosity.

Spisarová is even more particular about developments in Prague, discussing the gradual transformation of the composition department at the Music and Dance Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (HAMU), where Rataj teaches, the "amazing growth" of the Berg Orchestra, who have done "a mountain of work for Czech composers", more recently the Prague Spring, too, with their contemporary music programming, or the activities of pianist Jan Bartoš and his Prague Music Performance. All of these (and many others, too) have contributed to a complete transformation of the new music scene in Prague.

In addition to some of the composers mentioned above – Graham, Bakla, Cígler, Srnka, Rataj – this year's edition of Ostrava Days also included new pieces by Jan Dobiáš (another lecturer at HAMU), Miro Tóth (a doctoral student there), and František Chaloupka (who lives in Brno). All of these were high profile commissions, many of them for orchestra, which is remarkable considering they were all composed pro bono. Spisarová explains: "I wish we could provide adequate commission fees, but it's simply not within our possibilities – we can keep asking for more funding, but we'll still always get what we got last time." Yet the quality of the performance and presentation, as well as a knowledge of who will be sitting in the audience, means that this is still a worthwhile pursuit for these – often highly in-demand – composers.

The soloist in Bernhard Lang´s "Playing Trump" Donatienne Michel-Dansac with members of Ostravská banda, the composer, conductor Johannes Kalitzke, stage director Jiří Nekvasil and sound designer Matthias Schneider-Hollek

MUSICIANS FROM BRNO TO PARIS

Spisarová admits that at the beginning, engaging Czech (and also Slovak, Polish, and Hungarian) musicians was a matter of necessity – the original pool of players was mostly geared around the New York-based S.E.M. Ensemble, and bringing them all over from the U.S. was an expensive affair. "At the time, it was really only a few people playing this music in Czechia, and finding them was hard," she explains. "But now, the situation is excellent. We are no longer doing this for economic reasons – we have to find accommodation for these musicians whether they come from Brno or Paris, anyway – but for reasons of quality, too. I think something must have happened at the art universities, because the new generation is somewhere else."

A shining example of this is Martin Opršál, head of the percussion department at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno. Opršál and his students have been providing much of the percussion sections for the Ostrava New Orchestra (ONO) for years, and Opršál himself often performs with Ostravská banda. Given the lack of repertoire before the 20th century, percussionists are generally more open than most of the traditional instrumentalists at any conservatory, but the performers graduating from JAMU in recent years demonstrate not only mastery as performers, but also highly innovative approaches as performer-composers (e.g. Kristýna Švihálková), improvisers (e.g. Martin Švec), or participants in multimedia projects.

Again, Spisarová also highlights the importance of the Berg Orchestra in finding and maintaining a group of performers interested in performing contemporary music and allowing them to grow as players. Many of them have also become stable fixtures at events organised by the Ostrava Center for New Music, such as Anna Romanovská, concert master of ONO this year.

Of course, this influence goes both ways: six years ago, the Ostrava Center decided to conclude its partnership with the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava and establish its own orchestra: ONO. Since then, ONO has given dozens of young musicians (mostly from Europe; many from Czechia) the opportunity to experience daring and contemporary

ONO orchestra with the conductor Jiří Rožeň during the closing concert at Triple Hall Karolina

orchestral music at a high lever (and performed to highly appreciative audiences at representative events). It is only a matter of time before the fruits of these experiences begin seeping through into Czech musical life.

FROM LISTENER TO CURATOR

Another highly particular example of OD's influence on the Czech musical scene is that of Martin Režný. Martin began attending the festival some twenty years ago. Shocked by what he heard, he was nevertheless intrigued enough to keep coming back, and he says today that this was his "university education in music". He even used to take time off work to be able to process all the concerts fully. Martin is also active as a performer on the underground, improvised, and noise scenes, and – crucially – an organiser: his name is known to virtually anyone who has ever tried to set up a DIY concert in the east of the Czech Republic.

This year, Martin took part in the festival as the curator of the Minimarathon of Electronic Music. The event, which ran from half past three in the afternoon to three in the morning at a trio of venues, included classics of the Czech noise scene, innovative international audiovisual productions, a blisteringly loud set by organologist Milan Guštar on arcane Czechoslovak synthesisers, and much else besides, demonstrating Martin's broad outlook, which brought together more academic forms of electronic music with the "underground" in which Martin feels at home.

Andrej Gál

IN CONCLUSION

Despite everything written above, there is still an element of mistrust present from the Czech scene towards activities in Ostrava. Rataj confirmed my own feelings on this topic: "For whatever mysterious reason, there is still a general feeling that Ostrava Days is only 'for some', even though this is patently not true. I have no idea why this is, but I've come across it time and time again – 'it's not for us'. But in fact, after fifteen years of experience with the festival, I can honestly say I don't know any other environment as open as this one – any other environment where everything is possible. Even mistakes are possible, because they are part of a discourse." It all seems to be driven by Petr Kotík's deep-seated and humble belief in the fact that the work simply must be done, and only then, in time, will we be able to tell what is good. And we can only hope that this is a position adopted by more and more individuals involved with new music in the Czech Republic.

by Kurt Gottschalk

UNSUNG WORDS

In our final text on this year's Ostrava Days, Kurt Gottschalk, a journalist and radio DJ based in New York, presents his perspective on some of the pieces at this year's festival that made use of text but outside the context of singing: text that was spoken, shouted, whispered, or projected.

Music fascinates me in many ways but maybe above all as an abstract language. I am a writer of journalism and fiction, have been a writer of poetry and songs, and am responsible for the occasional amusing social media post. My brain is pretty well wired for words. When music can stir a feeling as strong as a powerful passage in a novel or a particularly moving movie scene without use of words – the sadness of Schubert, the yearning of Coltrane, the joie de vivre of the Ventures – it fairly well amazes me. The interpretive ouroboros can be perfected with the artful use of text (not lyrics, not poetry, but prose, or nonverbal syllables) in unexpected ways, such as Robert Ashley's stream-of-consciousness operas, Jennifer Walshe's manic monologues, or the Velvet Underground's schizoid "Murder Mystery". The text fires my imagination, synapses start connecting.

Certainly one of the greatest crafters of abstract impressionist prose the world has known was Gertrude Stein and arguably nobody (Virgil Thomson included) has better set her text to music than the composer and conductor Petr Kotík. His monumental *Many, Many Women* – composed between 1975 and 1978 with subsequent revisions – is a transfixing work which, in its six-hour performance time, eclipses the clock with slow repetitions. Kotík subsequently set Stein's 1936 lecture "What Are Masterpieces and Why Are There So Few of Them" as an oddly moving, self-reflective monodrama on art and the ordinary: *Master-Pieces (Almost a Lecture)* (2014).

Kotík is also, of course, the co-founder and artistic director of the Ostrava Center for New Music, the organisation behind the Ostrava Days and New Opera Days Ostrava festivals. It would be a mistake to hold Kotík the composer up as a model for the music presented at the festivals. Little common denominator other than "contemporary" could really be suggested for the eclectic programming. But in ten challenging, stimulating, and packed days of concerts at this year's edition, there were a few works that employed text enough to tickle my logophilic fancy.

The festival began, in fact, with what could have been a dramatisation of my jetlagged brain trying to reacquaint itself with this place far away from my New York City home. František Chaloupka's *Rozlučka se svobodou* (*Bachelor Party*, 2022) put two singers and four saxophonists on scooters and roller skates, spinning around the plaza outside a shopping mall, with two more wheeled figures pushing shopping carts loaded with speakers broadcasting the singer's voices. The carts didn't follow the singers and the singers didn't roll in tandem so the natural and amplified voices cross-faded independently in and out of my

Daan Vandewalle performing Annesley Black´s "a piece that is a size that is recognised as not a size but a piece"

field of hearing. It was engagingly dizzying, made all the more disorienting by my not speaking the language being sung. Chaloupka later provided me with a translation of his libretto, which read in part:

> *Weaned from the battery of optimism*
> *A lifetime on an e-scooter!*
> *Apostles of techno-optimism*
> *Priestesses of Acceleration*
> *Techno-Optimist's Witness*
> *Priestesses of Acceleration*
> *Even kestrels of techno-optimism*
> *Analogue defenestration*

Then, later:

> *Believe? Believe! Do you believe? Oh I believe! Believe? Believe! Do you believe? Oh*
> *I believe!*
> *Reading from the electric book of revelations of the techno-apostle Ampere:*
> *Velocité nobles the psyche*
> *Deceleration is always (bad)*

It remains almost as gloriously indecipherable to me in English as it was in Czech.

Text can be alluringly obscure even when the language is familiar. I had heard Eric Wubbels's 2014 work *Auditory Scene Analysis (I)* some years ago in New York, where Wubbels lived at the time. It was performed by the composer/performer collective Wet Ink Ensemble, of which he is a longtime member, at a church in the Chelsea section of Manhattan. The piece draws its text from, and shares its title with, a technical book on how sound is perceived and understood. In particular, the book examines (and I'm quoting from Wubbels's composition notes here) how we are able to "take the single, summed pressure wave that reaches the ear at any instant and filter, group, and parse it into patterns that accurately reconstruct the sources of its component sounds". It was particularly interesting to me when I first heard the piece because I have a form of low-level hearing loss which leaves me unable to filter incoming sounds. I can't pay attention with my ears the way I do with my eyes. I am doomed to a lifetime of involuntary eavesdropping.

Wubbels's composition begins with a quick series of instrumental solos that seem nearly impossible to execute, soon followed by readings from the dense text. But the key element to the work is the blasts of electronic static that make it impossible to follow either the text or the musical lines. Those disruptions were delivered by way of a small sound system when

I first heard it but at Ostrava they were amped and pumped enough to fill the cavernous, retrofitted industrial space of the Karolina Triple Hall, loud enough to be painful, if not to the ears then to the psyche. The accented speech of Aneta Podracká Bendová (also one of the singing skaters in Chaloupka's operetta) made the experience seem, to me, strangely clinical. Both performances of the piece left me thinking about the Kurt Vonnegut short story *Harrison Bergeron*, which depicts a society where people of above average intelligence are forced to wear earphones through which blasts of noise are transmitted in one of several imposed handicaps to ensure that all people are truly equal, regardless of intellect, physical ability, or attractiveness.

It was interesting, then, to hear a work by Anna Heflin, a composer resident in the concomitant Ostrava Days Institute. I had heard some of her work before and hadn't thought of it in parallel to Wubbels, with whom she studied composition. Her *ZBYHOŇ//Mythopoeia* (2023) uses two manuscripts discovered in the Czech National Museum in the early 19th Century and thought to be keys to the Old Czech language as a setting for a debate between two academics about the documents and about the composition itself. Heflin portrayed one role, speaking in English, and the other was delivered by Wubbels in German. There were no bursts of noise to disrupt the workings of the listener's mind, but the dialogue was sometimes, and quite satisfactorily, buried in the music.

Miroslav Tóth's *Nulanus* at the 2022 New Opera Days festival was an utter, mind-bending surprise, a horror-show at an off-season ski slope that made me feel about as at home as was the police investigator in *The Wicker Man*. I was excited for another performance of his work with the 2021 *Bliky* (*Flashes*) on this year's program and it came as a shock of a very different sort. The score didn't seem to correspond with the text in any way I could sort out. It rather reminded me of the sentiment, silliness, and occasional outright beauty in Nino Rota's scores for the films of Federico Fellini. The text by filmmaker and politician Fedor Gál, recorded on his phone during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, was played at intervals and rather loudly, interspersed with the orchestration. The lo-fi narration played against amplified cello and trombone made for a rawness that could have been amusing when up against the mood swings of the soundtrack had I not read the text beforehand. (There were no supertitles but the text was printed in Czech and English in the programme. The performance can be viewed, with subtitles, on Tóth's YouTube channel.) The narrative didn't just carry the sense of doom that circled the globe, but also suggested an elderly man who feels out of place in the world. This was a different kind of rawness, a frank testimonial that recalled the protagonist in Margaret Atwood's brilliant novel *The Blind Assassin*, out of date and out of step with the things in the world said to matter. Fortunately, I enjoy the feeling of being perplexed by art. I feel no closer, however, to understanding what makes Tóth tick.

Equally perplexing, and my happiest discovery of the festival, was *A piece that is a size that is recognised as not a size but a piece*, composed by Annesley Black in 2013 with a title taken from Gertrude Stein. The text was neither spoken nor sung but projected in frames scribbled onto calendar pages alongside appointments and other reminders. It wasn't, of course, as simple as that. The texts repeated and the pages repeated, changing shape and content sometimes slightly, sometimes more significantly. The text blocks that seemed to be part of the work (the more artistic fragments, if such adjudication is relevant) were odd little aphorisms, like broken haiku, or really, it seemed to me, like lyrics from the early albums of the punk band Wire. The music, for solo piano, was played feverishly (although not terribly punk) by the wondrous Daan Vanderwalle. It was intoxicating in just the way my brain thrills from being throttled and teased.

Within my transfixation, I wanted Black's calendar pages to study later. I wanted a nice, perfect-bound book of them with an elegant sleeve in the back holding a CD of the work. What I managed, though, was a few photos on my phone of the projections, one of which reads:

> *A page to a corner means that the shame is not greater when the table is longer. A glass is of any height, it is higher, it is simple and if it were placed there would not be any doubt.*

By some stroke of fortune – good or bad, I'm not sure which – the other photos I took turned out to quote Stein's original text.

Here, for the sake of argument, are the lyrics to Wire's song *Three Girl Rhumba*, printed in running text on the album's lyric sheet.

> Think of a number, divide it by two, something is nothing, nothing is nothing. Open a box, tear off the lid, then think of a number, don't think of an answer. Open your eyes, think of a number, don't get swept under, a number's a number. A chance encounter you want to avoid, the inevitable, so you do, the impossible. Now, you ain't got a number. You just wanna rhumba, and there ain't no way, you're gonna go under, go under, go under.

Anna Heflin performing in her "ZBYHOŇ//Mythopoeia"

I never would have conceived of a connection between Wire and Gertrude Stein, but with Black as intermediary it couldn't be more apparent. Black writes that "the time structures and the material in the piece were inspired by the text *Rooms* by Gertrude Stein from her collection *Tender Buttons*, a text which deals with the relationship of material to the space in which it finds itself, as well as themes of presence and absence".

Rooms is the third and final section of *Tender Buttons*, following *Objects* and *Food*. The passage that gave Black her title reads:

> If comparing a piece that is a size that is recognised as not a size but a piece, comparing a piece with what is not recognised but what is used as it is held by holding, comparing these two comes to be repeated. Suppose they are put together, suppose that there is an interruption, supposing that beginning again they are not changed as to position, suppose all this and suppose that any five two of whom are not separating, suppose that the five are not consumed. Is there an exchange, is there a resemblance to the sky which is admitted to be there and the stars which can be seen. Is there. That was a question.

Language doesn't need music to become an abstraction, and music doesn't need language to make it make sense. But when they meet in the subconscious, as they did several times at this year's Ostrava Days festival, the synergy can be electric. As the Velvet Underground's Lou Reed once sang, Between thought and expression, lies a lifetime.

Correction

We are reprinting here a correction from Nikola Komatović concerning his article *Hába's Legacy: The Impact of the Prague Conservatory Avant-garde on Serbian Composition Students,* published in CMQ 2023/2:

Preparing multiple articles and conference papers in a short time span, I made an unexpected oversight, which I became aware of only while working on other texts. In an article dedicated to the "left wing" of Serbian students in Prague, I stated that Milan Ristić (1908–1982) was the music editor of Radio Belgrade from 1937 to 1940. This information is incorrect. The program editor was another Prague student, a member of the "right wing," Mihailo Vukdragović (1900–1967). Ristić was indeed engaged as a collaborator at Radio-Television Belgrade in the post-war period, but not as an editor. The information that Vojislav Vučković (1910–1942) was the deputy editor is accurate. I apologize to the readers for any possible confusion and hope that this will contribute to the seriousness of my article. N. K.

CZECH MUSIC EVERYDAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD IN THE SUMMER OF 2023

JUNE-SEPTEMBER

In addition to the most significant event in the field of new music, the Ostrava Days festival, new pieces by Czech composers were also performed at other festivals in Czechia. The popular – and more traditionally-minded – composer Jan Kučera had three commissions for the Za Poklady Broumovska (Treasures of the Broumov Region) festival, Dvořák's Prague presented new works by Jan Ryant Dřízal and Jiří Gemrot, and the more experimentally focused Prague Quiet Music Festival also included a new composition by Ian Mikyska performed by successful American new music pianist Ashlee Mack.

The most interesting premieres in September included *Lullaby for Terezín* by Marios Christou, a Prague-based composer of Cyprian origin. The piece is scored for soprano, clarinet, and chamber orchestra, inspired by Henryk Górecki's famous third symphony; the "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs", which was also performed in Terezín. The concert was dedicated to the memory of a transport that took five thousand prisoners from the Terezín ghetto to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

21 July 2023, Theatro São Pedro, São Paulo, Brazil. **Leoš Janáček: *The Cunning Little Vixen* (premiere of a new production).** Directed by: André Heller-Lopes, music director: Ira Levin. Following performances: 23, 26, 28, and 30 Jul, 2, 4, and 6 Aug 2023.

2 August 2023, Church of St. Michael, Vernéřovice. Treasures of the Broumov Region. **Jan Kučera: *Three Tunes* for French horn ensemble (world premiere).** Participants of the Summer Horn Courses Broumov.

8 August 2023, Zámek Valeč Hotel, Valeč. Peter Dvorský International Music Festival. **Martin Hybler: *Three Sonnets by William Shakespeare* for soprano, harp, and oboe (world premiere).** Alžběta Poláčková – soprano, Kateřina Englichová – harp, Vilém Veverka – oboe.

12 August 2023, Church of Sts. George and Martin, Martínkovice. Treasures of the Broumov region. **Jan Kučera: *Patient Songs*; *Monk's Rule* (world premieres).** Daniel Klánský – bass-baritone, Lukáš Klánský – piano.

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

SAME OLD STORY

24 August 2023, St. Wenceslas Church, Ostrava. Ostrava Days. **Milan Guštar: *36 views on* Edo; *Ian* Mikyska: *Not the same, not different* (world premieres).** Miroslav Beinhauer – sixth-tone harmonium.

27 August 2023, Triple Hall Karolina, Ostrava. Ostrava Days. **František Chaloupka: *Allegory Of The Cave II* (world premiere).** ONO – Ostrava New Orchestra, conductor: Jiří Rožeň.

28 August 2023, Triple Hall Karolina, Ostrava. Ostrava Days. **Marie Nečasová: *Over*; Petr Bakla: *Diptych* (world premieres).** Ostravská banda, conductors: Jiří Rožeň, Bruno Ferrandis.

29 August 2023, Cathedral of the Divine Saviour, Ostrava. Ostrava Days. **Michal Rataj: *Načálo polunóščnici* (world premiere).** Tereza Böhmová – soprano, Kamila Mazalová – alto**,** Ahmad Hammad – organ, Michal Rataj – electronics**,** Canticum Ostrava (choirmaster Jurij Galatenko), Ostravská banda**,** conductor: Bruno Ferrandis**. Jan Dobiáš: *Time Shakes* (world premiere).** Canticum Ostrava (choirmaster Jurij Galatenko). **Peter Graham: *ORGAOS* (world premiere).** Ivan Palacký – electronics, Franz Hautzinger – trumpet, Klaus Lang – organ.

31 August 2023, Triple Hall Karolina, Ostrava. Ostrava Days. **Petr Cígler: *Echolocations* (world premiere).** Martin Opršál – percussion, members of Ostravská banda, conductor: Bruno Ferrandis. **Michal Wróblewski: *Rhythms no. 3 – Glissando* (world premiere).** Ostravská banda.

1 September 2023, PLATO Ostrava, Ostrava. Ostrava Days. **Rudolf Komorous: *Solo* (world premiere).** Martin Petrák – bassoon.

2 September 2023, Triple Hall Karolina, Ostrava. Ostrava Days. **Petr Kotík: *Outline* (world premiere).** ONO – Ostrava New Orchestra, conductor: Petr Kotík.

5 Sep 2023, PONEC Theatre, Prague. **SAME OLD STORY | … Inuit legend in movement & sound (world premiere of a new performance in sound and movement for adults and children age six and up).** Music: Jana Vörösová, choreography: Mirka Eliášová. Jazmína Piktorová, Radim Klásek, Jana Vörösová, Jana Kubánková, Radek Doležal. Following performances: 6 Sep and 20 Nov 2023.

PHOTO: MARTIN POPELÁŘ

Petr Kotík taking bow after the premiere of his "Outline"

9 September 2023, Fortna, Prague. Prague Quiet Music Festival**. Ian Mikyska: *Distant bells; mist; stopping* (world premiere).** Ashlee Mack – piano.

10 September 2023, Terezín Riding Hall, Terezín. In memoriam Terezín-Osvětim. **Marios Christou: *Lullaby for Terezín* (world premiere).** Karel Dohnal – clarinet, Tamara Morozová – soprano, NeoKlasik orchestr, conductor: Václav Dlask.

10 September 2023, Church of St. John the Baptist, Dvůr Králové nad Labem. **Martin Hybler: *Domus Mea* for mixed choir and organ (world premiere).** Dvůr Králové Church Choir (choirmaster Vít Havlíček), Daniela Valtová Kosinová – organ.

12 September 2023, Church of St. Clement, Prague. Echofluxx. **Lucie Vítková: *Cock* for bassoon and strings (world premiere).** Prague Modern.

12 September 2023, Convent of St. Agnes, Prague. Dvořák's Prague. **Jan Ryant Dřízal: *Forest Scenes*, piano quintet (world premiere).** Sedláček Quartet, Matouš Zukal – piano.

17 September 2023, Rudolfinum, Dvořák Hall, Prague. Dvořák's Prague. **Jiří Gemrot: *Ďábelský rozmar* (*Diabolical Whim*) for Cello, Wind Instruments, and Percussion (world premiere).** Tomáš Jamník – cello, Czech Chamber Music Academy.

24 September 2023, Valtice Castle Theatre. Lednice-Valtice Music Festival**. Indi Stivín: *Valtice Fantasy "Hommage à J. M. Sperger"* (world premiere).** Barocco sempre giovane.

25 September 2023, Conference and Social Center "House of the Professed", Prague. **Jaroslav Pelikán: *Wind Quintet No. 2 "Concerto da Camera"* (world premiere).** Belfiato Quintet.

Czech music information centre

Profile recordings of Czech composers

Composer Portraits series available in full online on Bandcamp

www.czmic.bandcamp.com

www.musica.cz

Hidden on Tape
Part 1

In 2022, the National Museum published a book presenting the results of an extensive research project into Czechoslovak electroacoustic music. The book, titled Ukryto v pásech: Vybrané kapitoly z české elektroakustické hudební tvorby do roku 1989 (Hidden on Tape: Selected Chapters from Czech Electroacoustic Music Before 1989), *is truly exceptional, providing much new information that was unknown even to Czech experts in the field, as well as introducing the broader context of Czech thinking about electroacoustic music and its history. Beginning with this issue of Czech Music Quarterly, we have decided to publish a series of translated selections from the volume in order to bring these findings to an international audience. We begin with two introductory texts, one by editor Petr Ferenc and another by Miloš Haase, one of the book's most prolific contributors.*

Electroacustic Composition at the Czech Museum of Music

PETR FERENC

The collection of one hundred and sixty magnetic tapes containing over forty-five hours of recordings of electroacoustic music, which initiated a research programme at the Czech Museum of Music focusing on this branch of contemporary composition, made its way to the museum's sound archive on May 15th, 2006. It was donated by an organisation at home in both Brno and Prague, the Society for Electroacoustic Music (Společnost pro elektroakustickou hudbu; SEAH). The origin of the tapes was in the personal archive of the founder of this organisation, the composer Rudolf Růžička (born 1941 in Brno).

The tapes were digitised in 2018 and 2019 at the Czech Museum of Music's digitisation centre. A Struder B 67 tape recorder was used (calibrated repeatedly throughout the process in order to ensure no deviations of speed and a balance between the two channels in stereo) along with Wavelab Pro software. Entire tapes were digitised at the time, usually divided into individual compositions. If the tape contained several clearly indicated pieces, usually divided by blanks, the digital recording was made separately for each piece. The exceptions to this process were a tape containing *Chariots of Fire*, a commonly available

album by the Greek composer Vangelis, and 1-inch magnetic tape, for whose playback the Czech Museum of Music currently lacks the equipment.

The most frequently used material were tapes by BASF and various forms of Agfa tape (Agfa, Agfa Gewaert, Agfa Magneton-Band), with rare appearances of materials by ORWO, Kodak, and VEB Filmfabrik. Most of the tapes are wound onto a metal cylinder. There are few plastic reels and in many cases, their use suggests that this was a copy intended for exchanges with other artists or home recordings of radio broadcasts and the like.

With the exception of six 1-inch tapes, most of the tapes are on 1/4-inch tape in either full-track (monophonic) or half-track (stereophonic) configurations. The quarter-track (double stereo) configuration is virtually anomalous. The 1-inch tapes contain quarter-track (quadrophonic) as well as full-track (mono) recordings. The recording speed is divided about half and half between 38 cm/s (15 ins – inches per second) and 19 cm/s (7½ ins), with one exception in the form of a 9.5 cm/s (3¾ ins) tape.

The collection contains works by a hundred and three artists. Alphabetically, they are: Adamík, Josef; Arel, Bülent; Arthuys, Philippe; Badings, Henk; Bach, Johann Sebastian[1]; Bayle, FrançoisBerio; Luciano; Bláha, Ivo; Brown, Earle; Bucchi, Valentino; Burlas, Martin; Cage, John; Carson, Philippe; Castiglioni, Niccolo; Ciardi, Fabio Cifariello; Clementi, Aldo; Csont, István; Černovská, Zoja; dal Farra, Ricardo; Dandara, Liviu; Decsényi, János; Devčić, Natko; Dobrev, Tsvetan; Dobrovolski, Andrzej; Donatoni, Franco; Dubrovay, László; Dziadzio Černovská, Zoja; El-Dabh, Halim; Eötvös, Peter; Górski,?; Haase, Miloš; Hanuš, Jan; Henry, Pierre; Hlaváč, Miroslav; Horký, Karel; Ištvan, Miloslav; Jiráčková, Marta; Jirásek, Ondřej; Kabeláč, Miloslav; Kalčić, Josip; Kalman, P.; Katmeridu, Afrodita; Kopecký, Pavel; Kubička, Víťazoslav; Kučera, Václav; Laske, Otto; Lazarov, Simo; Lukáš, Zdeněk; Maderna, Bruno; Machajdík, Peter; Mâche, François-Bernard; Málek, Jan; Malovec, Jozef; Marinuzzi, Gino; Máté, Péter; Matičič, Janez; Mayudzumi, Toshiro; Meester, Louis de; Milhaud, Darius[2]; Mintchev, Georgi; Mojžíš, Vojtěch; Morrill, Dexter; Nono, Luigi; Odstrčil, Karel; Paccagnini, Angelo; Papathanassiou, Vangelis; Parmegiani, Bernard; Parsch, Arnošt; Patachich, Iván; Peška, Vlastimil; Petersen, Tracy L.; Pignon, Paul; Piňos, Alois; Pongrácz, Zoltán; Rais, Mark; Rautavaara, Einojuhani; Reibel, Guy; Rejšek, Radek; Roads, Curtis; Rožek, Oliver; Růžička, Rudolf; Salbert, Dieter; Schaeffer, Pierre; Sifonia, Liberato Firmino; Silná, Ingrid; Spáčil, Eduard; Stockhausen, Karlheinz; Šrámek, Vladimír; Štědroň, Miloš; Tamba, Akira; Team Brno; Togni, Camillo; Uljanič, Viktor; Ussachevsky, Vladimir; Vandele, Romuald; Viktor, Winkler; Viskup, Anton; Vjachi, P.; Vlad, Roman; Vostřák, Zbyněk; Vrkoč, Jan; Wilding-White, Raymond; Xenakis, Iannis.

The most significantly represented composer is Rudolf Růžička, who assembled the collection more or less as a private archive, not differentiating between completed pieces and works in progress – the collection also contains the most sonic sketches and preparatory recordings by Růžička. The table below shows the order of artists represented in the collection with more than one composition – of the hundred and three composers, these are twenty-seven individuals, one duo, one group,

and one overarching category for recordings whose authorship is unknown. There are two hundred and eighty four tracks in the archive all together.

Composer / Number of pieces in the sound archive of the Czech Museum of Music

1	Růžička, Rudolf	74
2	unlisted[3]	18
3	Patachich, Iván	11
4	Odstrčil, Karel	10
5	Schaeffer, Pierre	9
6	Hlaváč, Miroslav	7
7	Lazarov, Simo	6
8	Parsch, Arnošt	6
9	Team Brno[4]	6
10	dal Farra, Ricardo	5
11	Kučera, Václav	5
12	Lukáš, Zdeněk	5
13	Katmeridu, Afrodita	4
14	Kopecký, Pavel	4
15	Laske, Otto	3
16	Maderna, Bruno	3
17	Pongrácz, Zoltán	3
18	Salbert, Dieter	3
19	Silná, Ingrid	3
20	Stockhausen, Karlheinz	3
21	Vostřák, Zbyněk	3
22	Badinks, Henk	2
23	Ciardi, Fabio Cifariello	2
24	Haase, Miloš	2
25	Henry, Pierre	2
26	Henry Pierre / Schaffer, Pierre[5]	2
27	Málek, Jan	2
28	Nono, Luigi	2
29	Rais, Mark	2
30	Štědron, Miloš	2

According to SEAH co-founder and secretary, musicologist Lenka Dohnalová[6], Růžička mostly acquired the recordings produced abroad through exchanges with other composers, though we also find the characteristic crackle and pop of vinyl records on several tapes, which must have been taken from LPs for personal use.

The digitisation process would not have been possible without the help of Ing. Pavel Petřík, former sound engineer at Czechoslovak and (later) Czech Radio. Without his experience with reel-to-reel tape, the labour of bringing these tapes to life could not have taken place. He has a perfect command of tasks that are no longer commonplace in studios, such as the cleaning of the tape heads, the insertion of tapes, the reconstruction of decomposing splices, the careful handling of material from which the emulsion is peeling off, the reeling up of dozens of metres of tangled tape that has come loose off the reel, and so on. Just as valuable was his input as a contemporary witness who was present at the creation of several of the digitised works, knew several of the composers as well as the sound engineers they worked with, felt the atmosphere of the studios in which Czechoslovak electroacoustic music was created, is able to identify an unlisted composer or technician on the basis of the kind of tape used or the handwriting on the cover, and so on. Finally, his own research in the Czech Radio archives allowed us to specify and resolve many ambiguities that arose from a lack of unified parameters for the description of the individual reels.

In the future, the reels that have been processed will be made available to researchers through the Kramerius digital library and a dedicated website.

1) A recording of the LP *Switched on Bach* (Columbia MS 7149) with the music of Bach as performed by Wendy Carlos (previously known as Walter Carlos) – one of the pioneers of the use of modular synthesisers.
2) he musical collage *Stvoření světa* (*The Creation of the World*) is listed as a work by Darius Milhaud and Rudolf Růžička.
3) In addition to cases in which the author of the recording is unknown, the "unlisted" category also includes instructional recordings and unidentifiable recordings, such as reversed speech (perhaps remainders of the original recordings before the tape was to be reused) and the like.
4) Created under the heading of "Team Brno" were collective compositions that often used electroacoustic means in combination with humour and mystification, made by composers Arnošt Parsch, Alois Piňos, Miloš Štědroň, and Rudolf Růžička
5) Joint works by both "fathers" of *musique concrète*.
6) The recording of a public discussion with Lenka Dohnalová and Miloš Haase, *Electroacoustic Music from the SEAH Circles,* which took place on October 30th, 2017 in Prague, can be found in the Czech Museum of Music sound archives..

Electroacustic Composition at the Czech Museum of Music

MILOŠ HAASE

Art-forms are the more lasting, the more closely they adhere to the nature of their individual species of art, the purer they keep their essential means and ends.
Ferruccio Busoni – *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*

Music is a sonic art, an art primarily intended for the human ear and based in the creative imagination. In order to gain knowledge of music and identify it in the sonic universe, aural perception is primary, irreplaceable, and definitive. It is a remarkable fact that for music theory, common musical practice, and the popularisation of music, human hearing is such an untrustworthy, imperfect, and unstable sense that experienced musical reality must be sufficiently supported by literary, graphic, and other similar supportive means, or else by considering the world of music with the aid of statistics or measuring devices whose precise information says nothing about music or musical language.

The idea of electroacoustic music as it was first discovered and generally formulated by Pierre Schaeffer (1910–1995) in the concept of *musique concrète* consists in the creation of music from recorded sound. Through sound recordings, it connects two previously individual, mutually separate aesthetic domains, music and sound, and works consistently from the listening experience, rehabilitating it from the bottom up through the use of electroacoustic devices. In his later book *Traité des objets musicaux* (*Treatise on Musical Objects*, 1966), Schaffer established the term "acousmatique" (acousmatic) and formulated four generally applicable standpoints for the reception of sound:

1. *écouter* – indicative listening; hearing signals from one's surroundings
2. *ouïr* – to be able to listen; to hear/register the sound of one's surroundings
3. *entendre* – selective listening; to perceive sound sui generis, regardless of its source
4. *comprendre* – identity listening; to understand the full meaning of the sonic percept.

Schaeffer delineates these four categories according to two axes: concrete–abstract and objective–subjective. The diagram below shows their mutual relations:

	concrete	abstract
objective	1. *écouter*	4. *comprendre*
subjective	2. *ouïr*	3. *entendre*

I listen (*j'écoute*) to what interests me and is important for me. If I am not deaf, I hear (*j'ouïs*) the sounds around me, but they do not interest me. I listen (*j'entends*) to what interests me, to what I try to understand (*comprendre*). If I listen in (*que j'entends*), I understand (*je comprends*) what I tried to understand and why I listened (*j'écoutais*)."
The same basic analysis can be applied to any form of active perception. There are analogies on offer between observing and listening; seeing and hearing; noticing and listening in. Proceeding in a similar manner, we can also discover common features in the relationships between as yet isolated musical disciplines that create the unity of the musical arts as an irreplaceable tool of human and social communication. It is remarkable that in 1948, the same year that Schaeffer introduced to the public the general contours of his acousmatically defined conception of *musique concrète*, a similar position towards the natural and social sciences was assumed by cybernetics, a thematically open interdisciplinary science whose central principles were expounded by mathematician and philosopher Norbert Weiner (1894–1964) in his book *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, published in Paris.

The Realisation of the Idea of Electroacoustic Music

The realisation of the idea of a music formulated in these terms was only made possible by the invention of sound recording, which allows for the immediate creation and dissemination of music through the recording medium and electroacoustic technology. Classical electroacoustic music, both autonomous and "applied" (used in conjunction with other media), is, in its essence, always acousmatic, intended purely for aural perception. Does such acousmatically defined idea of EAM, tied so closely to the recording of sound, have its direct predecessors?

In the 20th century, one such predecessor, somewhat forgotten, lies in the vision of a "poetry for hearing", inspired by "radiophony"; radio broadcasts,

a "new art of sounds and noises, just as distant from literature and recitation as it is from music". This vision was proposed by theorist Karel Teige in his 1928 *Manifest poetismu* (*Poetism Manifesto;* poetism was a Czech avant-garde literary movement most active in the 1920s, emphasising lived experience, modern life, optimism, and technology). Five years later, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti made similar claims in his ideologically problematic manifesto *La Radia* (1933).

Sonic perception requiring an intense degree of concentration has a long history in European civilisation, described already in connection with the Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras of Samos (ca. 570 – ca. 495 BC). Only his most talented students, the *mathematikoi*, were allowed to listen nearby. The remaining students were seated behind a curtain, relying only on careful listening. These were the *aukusmatikoi*, the source of Pierre Schaeffer's *musique acousmatique*, with which he later replaced the term *musique concrète* to describe music that severs the aural percept from the source of the sound. Later, François Bayle and INA (Institut national de l'audiovisuel) developed a new form of sound system involving the spacial projection of sound, called an acousmonium.

The acousmatically formulated idea of the sound of an immediately created music lies primarily in the creative imagination. Although the term electroacoustic music relates exclusively to music mediated through the use of electroacoustic devices, the possibilities that these technologies provided music with had been imagined in detail in philosophy, the natural sciences, and the arts long before they could begin to be explored by musicians and inventors at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The philosopher, scientist, and politician Francis Bacon (1561–1625), the father of the Scientific Revolution, is one of many examples of such creative imagination. His *New Atlantis*, written in 1624 and published in 1626, is a utopian narrative involving a model civilisation that arrived at a harmonic combination of spirituality and science. In addition to many other fields of human knowledge and experience, he also explores sound:

> *We have also sound-houses, where we practice and demonstrate all sounds and their generation. We have harmonies, which you have not, of quarter-sounds and lesser slides of sounds. Divers instruments of music likewise to you unknown, some sweeter than any you have, together with bells and rings that are dainty and sweet. We represent small sounds as great and deep, likewise great sounds extenuate and sharp; we make divers tremblings and warblings of sounds, which in their original are entire. We represent and imitate all articulate sounds and letters, and the voices and notes of beasts and birds. We have certain helps which set to the ear do further the hearing greatly. We also have divers strange and artificial echoes, reflecting the voice many times, and as it were tossing it, and some that give back the voice louder than it came, some shriller and some deeper; yea, some rendering the voice differing in the letters or articulate sound from that they receive. We have also means to convey sounds in trunks and pipes, in strange lines and distances.*

In fact, Bacon's description of imaginary musical technologies of the "sound-houses" goes much further. It expresses not only the desire to broaden musical language beyond the framework used in instrumental music, already the subject of lively discussion at the time, but it also suggests the possible processing of (probably recorded) sound, new tones, microtonal tunings, sound amplification, recording, and spatial processing, technology we know from electroacoustic music, and also the existence of new musical instruments unknown to us. Bacon's laboratory also, of course, refers to applied research – the material idea of *Elektronische Musik*, music created by purely electronic means, was born as a byproduct during research into speech synthesis undertaken by physicist Werner Meyer-Eppler (1913–1960) at the speech-language pathology lab at Bonn University – his aim was to develop an electrolarynx, an electronic replacement for the vocal chords following tracheotomies. The historical Cyrano de Bergerac (Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac, 1619–1655) also imagined a recorded sound, though one kept secret. From his adventurous quest for knowledge, he left record of the remarkable, incomprehensible, and miraculous things he encountered:

> *(…) and when I opened the box, I found inside something metallic, of the manner of our pocket watch, full of all manner of springs and minute parts: In reality, it was a book, one with no pages or letters, but it is a miraculous book nevertheless, and to understand it, we need not sight but hearing. If someone wants to read, they tie numerous threads around this machine, then spins the hand to the chapter they wish to read, and it emits – as if it were a human mouth or a musical instrument – various clear tones which the Moon's inhabitants use as speech (…), and so you are eternally surrounded by all those wise people, living and deceased, who speak to you out loud.*

Karlheinz Stockhausen rehearsing his "Hymnen" at the Rudolfinum Hall, Prague, in April 1968

Cyrano was very taken with the fact that the Moon's inhabitants "can read as soon as they learn to speak". Is this not reminiscent of the direct path from the concrete (reading, speaking) to the abstract (thinking and understanding) through writing? After all, Cyrano had to name the inhabitants of the Moon in his book, so he was left with no other option than to express their names in musical notation as he heard and remembered them.

In 1907, Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924) published a significant work of music theory, a sometimes poetically formulated collection of essays titled *Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (*Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*). He refused for music to be bound by various rules, as "music was born free; and to win freedom is its destiny". Busoni wrote of microtonal music, which caught the attention of Alois Hába (1893–1973), who already knew microtonality from folk music. Based on news of Thaddeus Cahill's dynamophone, he predicted the brisk development of electrophones. Busoni's ideas deeply influenced his students and friends, most notably Edgard Varèse (1883–1965), whose aim was to expand the musical universe to include new sonic and expressive means in the spirit of a statement by the Polish physicist and philosopher Józef Maria Hoene-Wroński (1776–1853): "Music is the embodiment of intelligence in sounds." Busoni recognises the continuity of musical development over the course of centuries, and he does not deny its results – quite the opposite, he emphasises the obligation to continue. He sometimes expressed his notions in poetic metaphors:

"Who has not dreamt that he could float on air? and firmly believed his dream to be reality?—Let us take thought, how music may be restored to its primitive, natural essence; let us free it from architectonic, acoustic and esthetic dogmas; let it be pure invention and sentiment, in harmonies, in forms, in tone-colors (for invention and sentiment are not the prerogative of melody alone); let it follow the line of the rainbow and vie with the clouds in breaking sunbeams; let Music be naught else than Nature mirrored by and reflected from the human breast; for it is sounding air and floats above and beyond the air; within Man himself as universally and absolutely as in Creation entire; for it can gather together and disperse without losing in intensity."

In conclusion, let us bring to mind an interview that has been forgotten, and this despite the fact that it is cited in virtually every Czech work on electroacoustic music. As early as the late 1950s, Dr. Ing. Antonín Svoboda (1907–1980) had a project prepared in detail that only remained unrealised due to the lack of interest from officials and resistance from the ruling ideologists. This project was already mentioned by composer Svatopluk Havelka (1925–2009) in his contribution to Jiří Pilka's book *Tajemství filmové hudby* (*The Secrets of Film Music*, 1960), and a year later (1961), Svoboda himself introduced it in a panel discussion printed in *Literární noviny* (*Literary Newspaper)* called "Music Born in the Laboratory":

I have been considering for a long time now a new system of musical composition which I believe to represent a qualitatively higher form of work to that found in the sound laboratories in the West. All those who are now making electronics in Cologne or Paris are laboriously cutting magnetic tape, splicing it together, montaging sounds – and, in most cases, they are the slaves of the material. My project's aims are different, and higher: I want the composer to be the sovereign lord of the sonic material, to have absolute freedom in creating it. The realisation of the project would allow the composer to let his musical imagination run completely free. The aim is to develop a device that would translate the composer's notions, encoded in appropriate symbols and based on terms in general use into a resultant sonic output. I can say that the project is real and well thought through – all it needs is appropriate realisation.

In his *Opus majus,* Roger Bacon (1214–1294) first defined sound on the basis of experiments in physics as vibration, and Francis Bacon realistically described a utopian sonic, musical, and research laboratory of the future, while Savinien de Cyrano added the recording device he spotted on his trip to the Moon, reminding us of the idea of knowledge not mediated by writing. Cyrano's vision continues to Dr. Svoboda's vocoder and synthesiser, which were already prepared for realisation at the time when Dr. Robert Moog first began developing his revolutionary synthesiser.

Predecessors of Electroacoustic Music

Many precursors of electroacoustic music are usually listed, but they are generally not direct forerunners of acousmatically defined electroacoustic music, only that their development, began earlier, ran in parallel to various forms of electroacoustic music. They broaden the sonic palette to include new possibilities, but they do not study, categorise, edit, or record sound. Most often, the Italian Futurists are listed as forerunners of electroacoustic music, but their attempts to emancipate noise and the construction of new instruments actually have their foundation deep in Baroque theatre practice with their scenic and sonic machineries operated in real time. Their *intonarumor*i (some operated through the use of electricity) are not qualitatively different from the wind machines, anvils, and instruments imitating the forces of nature that were used extensively in Romantic scores and the opera, as they merely imitate different sound sources than the previous machines, and are essentially used as musical instruments *sui generis*, which they truly are, and Futurist compositions are even written down in notation.

Electrophones, i.e. electric and electroacoustic instruments, had the same importance for electronic music (until the aggressive entry of keyboard-based synthesisers into popular music, gradually inverting the essential paradigm of this style) as any other acoustic instrument or any natural or artificial sound source, while in popular and concert music, they were a true novelty, contributing to the enrichment of the traditional instrumentarium and significantly influencing composers such as Varèse, Jolivet, and Messiaen. Most importantly, however, they utterly transformed the popular music scene.

In its time, significant contributions to the dissemination of music through unconventional means were made by the new service of sound transmission via the telephone, predecessors of radio broadcasts, and "radio by wire" in Czechoslovakia. Beginning in 1881 in Paris, Clément Ader's "Théâtrophone" transmitted music and theatre until 1931. Beginning in 1895 in London, the Electrophone service distributed entertainment music and concert music to subscribers live – sound recording in sufficient quality was not yet possible.

The development of mechanical playing machines, barrel organs, orchestrions, and other similar music machines culminated in the pianola, a replacement for live performance in the salon, artistically explored only in the 1910s by Ferruccio Busoni and Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) and later in the research into the relationship between rhythm and speed undertaken by Conlon Nancarrow (1912–1997). These machines, however, had nothing to do with the idea of recording sound and manipulating it.

The idea of manipulating the sound medium was only born later, in the 1920s and '30s, with the emergence of the record player and the vinyl record. The simultaneous reproduction of a recording was first used by Carl Orff (1895–1982) in his 1914 piece *Treibhauslieder* on poems by Maurice Maeterlinck, followed in 1924 by Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) in the finale of the third movement of *Pini di Roma*; *I pini di Gianicolo*, which features a recording of nightingale song. More interesting results were achieved by direct manipulation of records in the style of DJs and turntablists, e.g. *Grammophonmusik* by Paul Hindemith and Ernst Toch, first performed in 1930, and John Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1939), which features two record

players and a recording of a reference tone played back at two different speeds. Orff simply presumed an unspecified "cicada recording", but Resphighi's and Cage's scores list the precise sound source, including the catalogue numbers of the records, which seems almost touching today: Respighi's score (Ricordi P. R. 439) asks for nightingale no. R 6105 from the catalogue of sound effects published by Concert Record Gramophone, and Cage is even more meticulous, asking for a standard recording (78 RPM) of the *Victor Constant Note Record no. 24* (84519B) for the first record player, while the second is to perform with the EP *Victor Frequency Record* (84522A) with the speed changing between 33 1/3 RPM to 78 RPM and back.

The results of work with optical sound recording were much more interesting, a lot more laborious, and closer to the idea of electroacoustic music. The sound was usually drawn oversize onto long strips of paper, photographed, reduced multiple times and copied as a sound track onto film. In the 1930s, artists who successfully explored this technique included Rudolf Pfenniger (1899–1976). Zdeněk Pešánek (1896–1965), Czech pioneer of kineticism and light design, mentions his collaboration with Pfennniger in his book *Kinetismus* (*Kineticism*, first published in English translation in 2023). Hollywood used this technique to create short sound effects mixed into the music to animated films. The Russians developed the ANS synthesiser (the name is simply the initials of Alexander Nikolayevich Skriabin). This photoelectric musical instrument was invented and constructed by the Russian engineer Yevgeny Murzin (1914–1970) between 1937 and 1957. The technological foundation of the invention is a form of sound production using graphics similarly to the use in cinema (developed in Russia in parallel to American developments). It allows both for the creation of a visual representation of a sound wave and for sound synthesis from a drawn spectrogram. The ANS synthesiser, the only functional prototype of which was located in the Scriabin Museum in Moscow (and is now housed at Lomonosov Moscow State University), was used by numerous composers in the 1960s, mostly during the creation of film music, including Sofia Gubaidulina, Alfred Schnittke, and Andrei Volkonsky. With the use of this device, the composer could realise sounds of any timbral composition and work with them in a live, sounding manner. They recorded these sounds with a scraper onto a glass board covered in an opaque, non-drying paint. The optical code created in this way could be immediately listened to and changed. The board could also record real voices and noises from the magnetic memory of the synthesiser. All the sounds were synthesised from pure sine waves with a chosen degree of intensity and filtration, with the result recorded onto magnetic tape. Composer Václav Kučera (1929–2017), who stied composition in Moscow and had the chance to test the machine, participated in the international promotion of ANS during his tenure at the International Society for Contemporary Music (1978–1983), but the Soviets did not place much importance on this matter, not even selling the patent to the United States. And, due to the lack of interest from Czechoslovak officials, the pre-arranged production of two prototypes in Czechoslovakia also did not materialise. Of the autonomous pieces of music created on the ANS synthesiser in Moscow, only one became more generally known, thanks to a recording on the Melodija label: Sofia Gubaidulina's 1970 piece *Vivente-non vivente* (*Living-non-living*). The symbolic title suggests the idea behind the work and the manner in which it is expressed in sounds arising from two contrasting places: real sounds ("living") and artificially generated sounds ("non-living"). During the course of the piece, they meet, intersect, and come apart again – there is no synthesis; both sides retain autonomy.

In his book *In Search of a Concrete Music*, Pierre Schaeffer lists three of his contemporaries as predecessors of this music: Edgard Varèse, John Cage, and Olivier Messiaen. Varèse revitalised the character of musical language and then went on to discover a new, different music, as did the more philosophically minded Cage. Messiaen did the same as the two of them, equally, almost without changing his means of expression and doubtless in a deeper sense.

> *And let the public not be too hasty in judgment, either for or against. First, they must listen again. Once is not enough. For us it is not so much a matter of expressing ourselves in front of an audience as of persuading them to consider the object. It is perhaps the object that has something to say to us.*[1]

If we return to the acousmatically defined idea of sound created directly from recorded sound and acousmatically perception, we will find that it is still alive, still topical and inspirational, whether in the form of radio art, sonic ecology, or as a permanent foundation of the term ars acustica.

1) Schaeffer, Pierre. *In Search of a Concrete Music*. Trans. Christine North and John Dack. University of Clafornia Press, 2012, p. 63.

reviews

Prague Spring Blue Edition Vol. 2

Klangforum Wien, Bas Wiegers – conductor, Gerald Preinfalk – baritone saxophone.
Recorded: 27 and 28 May 2022, DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague. Published: 2023. Text: EN, CZ. TT: 69:46. 1 CD Radioservis CR1176-2

Last November, in a review of *Blue Edition Vol. 1*, I wrote that "[w]e will look forward to the next contribution to this promising series, which will probably include this Prague Spring residency by the excellent Klangforum Wien". However, I did not expect that we could await the second instalment in the blue "contemporary" edition – featuring **Klangforum Wien** – as early as this spring. This red album in the blue edition presents recordings of all six world premieres on last year's first Prague Offspring programme, as well as a piece by last year's resident composer, **Olga Neuwirth**. Unlike the festival's Gold Edition, the Blue Edition is not archival (though the first album, composed of a selection of pieces presented at the three preceding editions of the festival, was, in a sense). This is current music; the finger on the pulse of the times, *de facto* documentation of contemporary developments. Only few items are missing from the complete programme of last year's weekend – three pieces by Olga Neuwirth, Petr Hájek and Martin Janíček's "sounding architecture", and, most notably, the remarkable *a stir among the stars, a making way* by Clara Iannotta. But the CD presents a full perspective on the truly remarkable aspect of the first Prague Offspring: the festival commissions. **Jakub Rataj**, who was already represented on the first Blue Edition album with his *æther* for theremin and orchestra from 2019, opens *Vol. 2* with his piece *Fade No More*. In a manner similar to *æther* – but more intense, focused, and dense – we encounter original musical gestures of quick inhalations and exhalations and short rhythmic sections in a constantly and roguishly flittering multi-coloured arrangement. The following piece, **Lucie Vítková's** *Dream of Others*, takes its name from a quote by Gilles Deleuze, "Each of us is more or less a victim of other people's dreams", which she develops further: "The victims of dreams are not victims here; instead, they debate the dreamer by working with musical material." On the basis of various interactions between the musicians, instructions in headphones, and graphic scores, the result captured here presents a trembling surface of sounds that – given the definition of the piece as an *action* more than a codified *composition* – contain more content for the performers than the listeners. Even so, it is a relatively interesting piece. A contrast in mood following this sometimes playful piece is the serious yet highly impressive *peripety – dissolution* by German composer **Konstantin Heuer**. "I was looking for an ambivalent atmosphere that's terrifying and frenetic, for complementary materials, one turning away from paradise and the other headed towards it," the composer stated, and he truly teased out the harrowing atmosphere of distorted harmonies, terrifying shadows, and exhumed melodies. **Ian Mikyska's** *Dissolving; Settling* is guided by a clear concept – the idea of impermanence and decay. Without any unnecessary delay, the introductory musical material begins to fall apart; diluting – it dissolves and disappears. The five-minute duration is borderline in terms of achieving an appropriate effect, and so, just like after last year's premiere, I believe that this piece would deserve being worked out on a much larger time scale. Tied to Mikyska's piece through discreet dynamics and subtle musical gestures was **Adrián Demoč's** *Chord and Trembling*. During the course of eight minutes, the characteristic series of subtle harmonies with gentle vibrato in various instruments creates a pleasant, meditative sense of timelessness. The resident composer of the first edition of Prague Offspring is represented on this disc by a virtuosic piece (almost a feat of technical exhibitionism, in fact): *Spleen III* for solo baritone saxophone (**Gerald Preinfalk**). Just like in last year's concert, this solo exhibition of instrumental techniques in the middle of a series of ensemble pieces seems like a brave dramaturgical choice on this CD, perhaps partially influenced by the manageable running time. The album concludes with the main premiere of last year's Offspring – **Martin Smolka's** *Angel Steps*. The half-hour piece in five parts presents both fragile and brisk microtonal lines, delicate melodies strung around in space, and layered, fragmented motifs from fascinating combinations of wind and strings instruments, which interact further and create bubbling minimalist passages. This piece, particularly thanks to its detailed timbral component, was among the highlights of the first Prague Offspring. Let us hope that this year's pieces from the event will also make it onto a Blue Edition disc.

Jan Borek

Anna Paulová Music for Clarinet Karel Husa, Bohuslav Martinů

Anna Paulová – clarinet, Ivo Kahánek – piano, Jan Fišer – violin, Kristina Fialová – viola, Vilém Vlček – cello, Otto Reiprich – flute, Jan Hudeček – bassoon.
Text: EN, FR, GE. Recorded: 2023, Martinů Hall, Prague. Published: 2023. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 4327-2.

I first had the chance to appreciate the talent of clarinettist **Anna Paulová** (born 1993) at the Prague Spring competition in 2015, where she was awarded the second prize – in my opinion, she should have won. Since then, she has undergone a process of considerable artistic and human development and I am convinced that she can now rival any Czech clarinettist and will certainly be included within the international elite – if, of course, she has that proverbial bit of good luck, capable people around her, and a leading international agency. She is not a fan of easy paths. Her recording attests not only to an existential relationship to modern music, but also of a clear opinion on music as such. The music of Bohuslav Martinů is often recorded, by musicians of various levels of quality. But only few pieces by Karel Husa are performed regularly in Czechia. Anna Paulová's recording is, in fact, a *laudatio* to Karel Husa, and perhaps a symbolic homage to all Czech musical exiles of the second half of the 20th century. The more famous exile, Martinů, is represented by his *Sonatina for Clarinet and Piano* H. 356, written in 1956, when he had long lost hope not only of ever returning, but even of visiting his home country. The nostalgia is then audible even in this structurally uncomplicated and melodically magical music. I have never heard it played with such believable empathy and beautiful tone. The Karel Husa block opens with *Évocations de Slovaquie* (*Slovak Evocations*) for clarinet, viola, and cello from 1951. The work of a young thirty-year-old full of energy and desire, taking in varied inspirations from both America and Europe. Studies of folk music connected both these distant composers, but Husa's path was vastly different, and folklore was merely an inspiration to him, not an existential need, as was the case with Martinů. As the piece was successful in the United States, he reworked it in 1963 under the title *Serenade for Wind Quintet, Xylophone, Harp and Strings*. At the beginning of the "educational" *Four Bohemian Sketches for Oboe and Piano* from 2010 were the *Eight Bohemian Duets for Piano Four Hands*, written in 1955. As they can also be played on clarinet or soprano saxophone and the pieces are technically effective, it is no surprise they form part of this project. The performance of the second and fourth pieces, *Chanson mélancolique* and *Rondeau*, respectively, is breathtaking. The most compositionally daring pieces, with sees Husa present a sharp criticism of humanity, are the *Deux préludes* for flute, clarinet, and bassoon from 1965 and the *Sonata à tre* for violin, clarinet, and piano (1981). This is remarkable music that demands repeated and intense concentration from the listener. But it is well worth it. Also remarkable is the end piece on the album – the 2007 *Three Studies for Solo Clarinet*, dedicated to Jiří Hlaváč, Anna Paulová's teacher, and the mandatory piece for the 2008 Prague Spring competition. I had no idea what the clarinet is capable of, and I will certainly be returning to the first movement, *Mountain Bird*, with its echoes of Messiaen. It must be added that the performances of all the musicians are excellent – in addition to Paulová herself, I'd like to highlight the work of pianist **Ivo Kahánek** and violinist **Jan Fišer**. Perhaps a time will come when pieces other than *Music for Prague 1968* are performed and Czech musicians and directors will notice that Karel Husa created many hours of remarkable music. And of course, this is also true of other Czech composers – Miloslav Kabeláč, Vladimír Sommer, Luboš Fišer…

Luboš Stehlík

La Vita. Leonie Karatas plays Vítězslava Kaprálová.

Leonie Karatas – piano.
Published: June 2022. TT: 70:00.
1 CD EuroArts 8024269107

An entire universe of feelings, colour changes, thematic changes, polyphony, intertwined sub-parts and deeply moving main parts comes into being on a topographical map whose exploration is never boring."–**Leonie Karatas** on Kaprálová's piano music. The piano works of **Vítězslava Kaprálová** (1915–1940) offer an ideal introduction into the Czech composer's musical world. Bold, confident, unpredictable – yet also polished and remarkably mature – Kaprálová's piano pieces are alive with beautiful melodies, timbres, and textures, and conceived with great skill and confidence. They include some of Kaprálová's most significant and representative compositions: the *Sonata Appassionata*, written in 1933 during her student years at the Brno Conservatory, the well-known *April Preludes* (1937), which by now have been recorded dozens of times, and a set of *Variations sur le Carillon* (1938), a work that crystallises Kaprálová's piano-writing style. Taken as a whole, Kaprálová's piano works fit comfortably onto one CD, and in her debut recording, pianist Leonie Karatas has chosen to record them under the apropos title of "La Vita". Kaprálová's nickname was 'Vita' (her first name appears as such in some of her published works), and of course the word itself translates as 'life'. Thus in that title we are also reminded of the brevity of Kaprálová's own existence. The programming order is not chronologically arranged, and instead opens unusually with the three pieces of ppus 9. This lesser-known trio of works was composed under the guidance of Vítězslav Novák at the Prague Conservatory, where Kaprálová had moved from Brno in 1935 at age twenty in order to continue her studies. Each of the three pieces is a free-standing musical work, resulting from different compositional assignments. The opening "Prelude" is a chiefly post-impressionist work, frequently drifting in the direction of a more modern, dissonant style reminiscent of Prokofiev. The somber opening melody provides a basis for recurring variations, complemented not only by a lyrical secondary theme, but also little cadenza-like digressions of differing character. Karatas handles these disparate elements beautifully in a rich performance that immediately engages the listener with her luminous, elegant tone and impeccably-judged voicing. Her flawless interpretation of this small but wonderful score establishes a high musical standard at the outset of Karatas' programme. In contrast with the prelude, the "Crab Canon" that follows has an atypical austerity, with the melodic lines performed simultaneously backwards and forwards (as one can observe in the score, but hardly detect during listening). Karatas makes the most of this brief, stark and dissonant work, her playing remaining steady and unperturbed even as the music becomes increasingly chaotic. It's the only convincing performance of this work that I've encountered. The final piece in op. 9, "Scherzo Passacaglia", was actually the first to be composed. Like the crab canon, the work is a modernist take on a Baroque compositional technique, and actually exists in several different versions. Karatas is perfect here in bringing to life the grotesque musical elements, which surprised even Novák, of this virtuosic

work (another version of the piece has the title *Grotesque Passacaglia*). It's a piece that codifies this recurring and significant aspect of Kaprálová's musical personality. Karatas delivers a knockout performance of this inspired work, with all of the details perfectly judged. Next on the programme are the four *April Preludes*, Kaprálová's best known work for solo piano and an excellent representative of her mature style. They were written for Czech pianist Rudolf Firkušný and partially inspired by his interpretation of Martinů's Second Piano Concerto. Of the many recordings of this work, Karatas' is among the best. Although there are some issues with the published score, which contains several notational errors, Karatas navigates these well. Yet her performance contains odd departures from the score, for example in the rhythms at the end of both the first and second preludes, which are altered, possibly for dramatic effect. In the second prelude, the specified *Andante* tempo comes across more as an *Adagio* in Karatas' unusually slow rendition, stretching the music at times uncomfortably and requiring patience to engage with the musical line. Fortunately, the tempi in the remaining preludes seem perfectly judged.

The polka-like finale inspires a particularly strong reading from Karatas – a definitive performance that brings out the full character of the music, and concludes Kaprálová's most popular piano work on a note of perfection. After a charming rendition of the brief *Little Song*, Karatas proves equally persuasive in Kaprálová's early but remarkably effective *Five Piano Compositions*. All are played exquisitely, but the fourth movement *Tempo di menuetto* stands out as especially superb. It's a memorable little gem and Karatas gives a flawless and moving performance.

Here, as elsewhere on the program, one senses a true bond between the composer and the artist, as Karatas comes fully prepared and engaged with the music she is playing, bringing to life Kaprálová's musical personality, even in her earliest compositional efforts. The musical depth of the final funeral march movement, for example, is astonishing, and Karatas' slow tempo here contributes to the dark mood of this emotionally mature, sorrowful work. After the five piano compositions, the program fast-forwards to two of Kaprálová's final piano works, the *Dance* from 1940, completed and first recorded by pianist Giorgio Koukl, and the 1938 set of *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St.-Etienne-du-Mont*. Koukl performed a wonderful service by completing and recording the unfinished *Dance*, but it is also valuable to have Karatas' excellent rendition of this polka-like piece, which will only encourage other artists to take up this unknown score. The *Dance's* folk stylization shows an unmistakable kinship with Martinů who composed works of similar character (see his *Three Czech Dances* for solo piano from 1927, for example). It turns out that Karatas' performance of this delightful work is more smiling and nuanced compared with Koukl's, offering a greater variety of articulations and tone colours, along with a much better sound quality.

The 1938 set of variations that follows isn't as well-known as the *April Preludes*, but certainly deserves to be. This is a comparatively more difficult piece to interpret, and the short length and small number of variations results in a work that is highly concentrated, yet constantly changing and musically diverse. The theme itself must be among the shortest in the history of musical variations – only eight notes long, it is based on a church carillon tune that Kaprálová could apparently hear chiming from her flat in Paris. Martinů considered the work a masterpiece and wrote an affectionate "review" of the piece in a letter to Kaprálová that is a must-read (Erik Entwistle, "Kaprálová's Piano Works," in *The Kaprálová Companion*, edited by Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle – Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011, pp. 27-68).

This score is more elusive than other piano works by Kaprálová, as one discovers when studying the music or listening to the available recordings. From the most basic level of tempo choice to minute details of voicing and pedalling, interpreters have sought strikingly different solutions. Karatas delivers a strong performance that stands out among the alternatives for the same reasons as do the rest of her recordings on this disc: beauty of tone, imaginative voicing, and fully realised musical characterisations. I did find myself not fully convinced by the tempo choices early on, with the second and third variations seeming a bit rushed, and wished for more generous pedalling in the first variation with its resonant, bell-like sounds and strikingly colouristic dissonance. Nonetheless, this is undoubtedly a praiseworthy interpretation. Variation 4 (*Quasi etude, vivo*) is played with a breathtaking precision, and the fifth variation, *Choral,* is perfectly realised. The final variation has echoes of the last *April Prelude*, in that both are grotesquely stylised polkas with similar rhythmic motifs. Here Karatas projects the music with an appropriate exuberance and flair. In the climactic coda that follows, the carillon theme is heard in thunderous *fff* octaves, with Martinů musing in his letter to Kaprálová that is sounds as if the piano is being sacrificed. As it turns out, the recording engineers couldn't quite handle the decibel levels during this passage, which unfortunately sounds congested. Karatas saves her performance of the *Sonata Appassionata* for the end of the program, which proves to be another wise choice. This two-movement work is Kaprálová's only large canvas for piano solo, and it is an extraordinarily effective one, despite being an early work written during her student years at the Brno Conservatory. The Sonata is a summary of the Romantic and impressionistic styles that Kaprálová was exposed to and assimilated, coupled with a more forward-looking modernism that would become increasingly prominent in future compositions. Karatas plays this ambitious work of youthful genius with a great sense of authority and commitment, bringing out all the winning aspects of this score and delivering a thrilling musical experience. The dramatic first movement is delivered with perfection and makes me long to hear Karatas interpreting Rachmaninoff and Chopin. A great performance such as this reveals the music in the best possible light and reveals the extent of Kaprálová's compositional mastery even at this early stage of her career. The second movement is a set of variations, based on one of Kaprálová's most beguiling themes, and it is instructive to compare Kaprálová's stylistic approach to writing variations in this piece with that of the Carillon variations written five years later. Both works contain six variations, but those in the Sonata are longer in length and more romantically conceived. The final variation, beginning as a *fugato* and unfolding developmentally, is the longest of all, taking up as much time as the earlier variations combined. In this final variation the music suddenly turns more modernistic, adopting a grotesque character that foreshadows what we hear in subsequent works. Karatas takes the opening theme at a leisurely tempo, allowing the music to unfold gradually and for details to emerge that illuminate the beauty and intricacy of Kaprálová's piano writing. As the difficulties increase, Karatas handles the diverse musical demands of this sprawling movement with ease. This is a triumphant performance of an ambitious, impactful work that should be heard in recitals more often.

The programme ends with a beautiful little coda – the two 'bouquets' from 1935. These intimate miniatures are played superbly, and conclude Karatas' recital in a mode of reflection. The success of this recording hinges on the fact that Karatas is obviously fully immersed in Kaprálová's music, and possesses the artistry, imagination, and vision to truly bring it to life. We hear an accomplished performer bringing new insights into the interpretation of Kaprálová's piano music, and in this way Karatas performs a great service to Kaprálová's legacy.

The beauty of these scores is that every thoughtful performance brings new revelations, and new ways of advocating for Kaprálová's music. As Karatas concludes in her liner notes, "What her music brings about in the listener is nothing less than astonishment and speechlessness at the thunderbolt her music strikes in you". One could say the same about the performances on this exceptional disc.

Erik Entwistle

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