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Czech Music in North Texas

Ian Mikyska

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DEAR READERS,

In this issue, you will once again find Czech music stretched taut between the past and the present: from our discussion of historical repertoire and the Czech conducting tradition with Jakub Hrůša, and further translations from *Hidden on Tape*, a seminal book on the history of Czechoslovak electronic music, we move to the cutting edge of electronic music in an article on this year's *Musica nova* competition and another on Czech musicians' recent activities in Texas. Finally, in our second profile, Celeste Pepitone-Nahas introduces the musical world of our deputy editor-in-chief, composer Ian Mikyska.

Wishing you a pleasant spring,
Petr Bakla,
editor-in-chief

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Tradition as a Conversation with the Past

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAKUB HRŮŠA

Jakub Hruša is, without a doubt, the leading Czech conductor today. He is the principal conductor of the Bamberg Symphony and principal guest conductor of the Czech Philharmonic and the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome. In addition to performing the well-known works of Czech composers like Dvořák and Smetana, he is also a faithful interpreter of the music of Josef Suk, as well conducting the international repertoire and contemporary music. This interview is based on an episode of Philharmonious, the podcast of the Czech Philharmonic, which is also available for streaming

We just met up at the Václav Neumann Salon, which is right next door to the Václav Talich Salon. Then there is Rafael Kubelík, Karel Ančerl, Jiří Bělohlávek – what is your relationship to the Czech conducting tradition?

Subconsciously – immense. And consciously, I'm always trying to balance my constant inner conversation with them, especially when I perform pieces that were typical for that generation of Czech conductors, and particularly pieces that they premiered, like Talich in the case of Josef Suk. At the same time, it is not my task to imitate anyone, so when I am on stage, be it in rehearsals or in concerts, I don't think about them anymore. But in the process of preparation, in reading, listening to the recordings and so on, of course, it's a complex dialogue with previous generations. In fact, that's what I think tradition is: not an imitation but a conversation with what was important for previous generations, and potentially carrying forward those timeless values, which matter in any time to the public, orchestras, and the music-loving community.

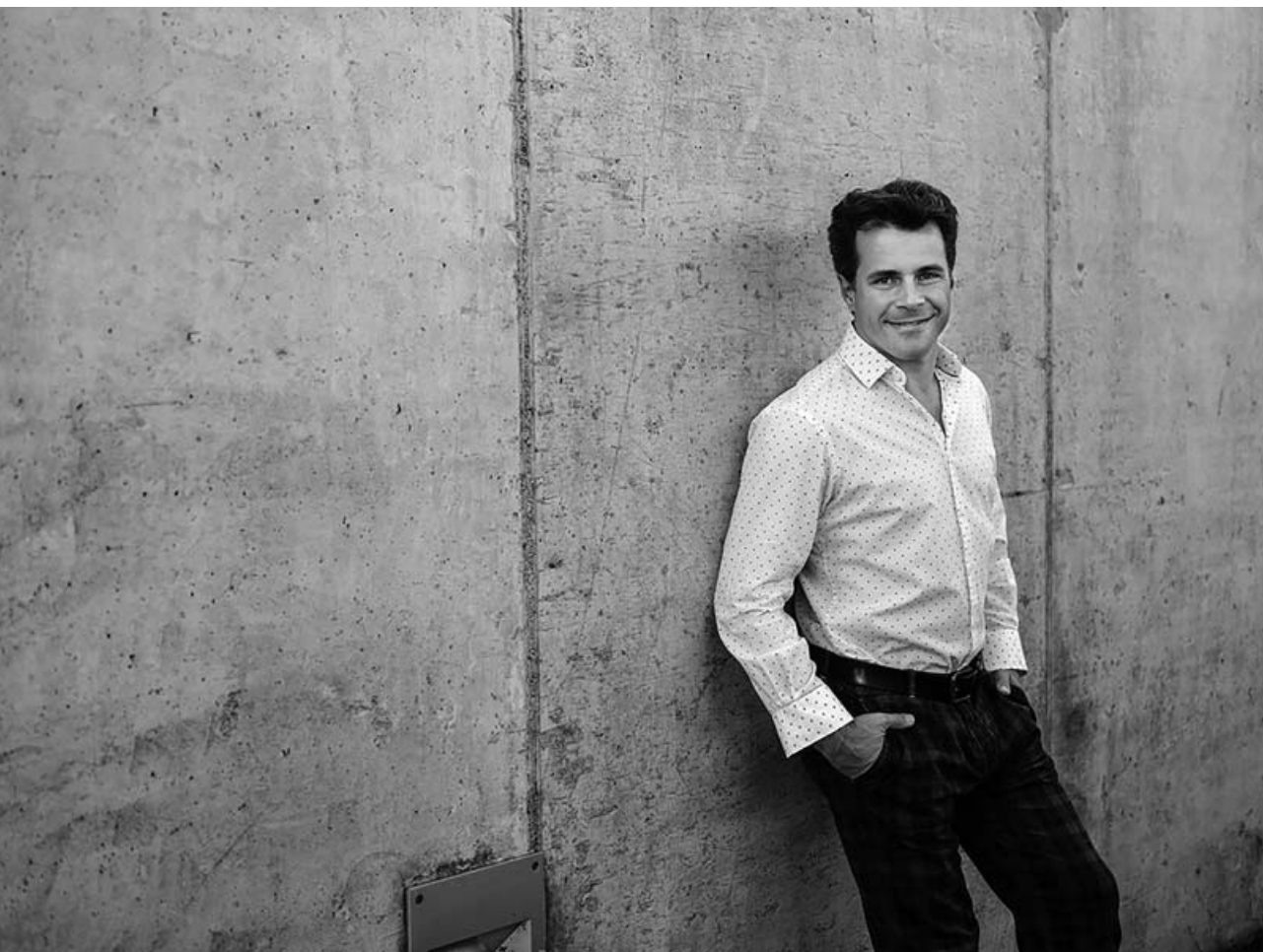


PHOTO: IAN EHM

Did you ever feel the need – perhaps during your studies, or earlier in your career – to consciously depart from that tradition, to study conductors from the German, Italian, or French traditions and find your own way through this terrain?

I understand your question, but this has never been a theme or topic to me. I am certain that if one does something with conviction and with a personal voice, with full involvement of body, mind, soul, and everything that belongs to it, there is no danger of imitation. Imitation, or the need to detach oneself from something strong and powerful, only comes in when you are insecure in some way. That's not to say that I have never been insecure. Of course, all of us are at times in a process of searching for the right answers and finding one's own voice – that's normal. But I think that with people who occupy themselves too much with these things, it can become a bigger problem than it necessarily needs to be. Both the public and the orchestra – which is, in fact, the first recipient of my ideas and feelings – want an independent voice. They want someone authentic and not someone who is there to represent something from

the past. At the same time, to be totally ignorant of what was great in the past is stupid. So I'm trying, once again, to find the right balance.

The situation is different in regards to repertoire, however. There, I admit that I sometimes need to say, quite consciously: okay, maybe with this orchestra, or in this city, I've already done so much Czech music, because that's very much wanted from me, that this time I should insist on doing something else. And in fact, I've never had any problems with that either. It's only the first, almost subconscious choice, one made without thinking, that leads the presenter abroad to say, okay, an important Czech conductor, so it would be great to have a Czech programme with Czech pieces. And I love it, because you very often discover something which is not so well known to those people and become an ambassador to your own culture. At the same time, it's good for our profession to communicate constantly with the mainstream repertoire or to make discoveries of other kinds. For example, I love doing contemporary music written by composers from the country where I am performing. Not even necessarily contemporary, either – generally speaking, if I'm going to Britain, say, it's great to challenge myself to do not just Czech music or the mainstream German repertoire that everyone does everywhere in the world, but maybe the local music – British music. I remember at Glyndebourne, the summer opera festival, one of the nicest experiences I had – for a peculiar reason, but beautifully peculiar – was as I was conducting Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and I realised I was literally the only one in the whole cast who wasn't British. That was a challenge, you know, not only the language and the tradition, but generally this subconscious reception of the previous traditions and previous generations was something I didn't have, but it was beautiful for me to learn from those knowledgeable people and for them to have a fresh point of view. That's why also in the field of Czech music, it's great if foreign conductors and performers perform it, because we here with our subconsciously received traditions can learn from this freshness, I think.

You've partly answered my second question, which is how you feel as a "Czech conductor". It feels as though it's a balance that you're constantly working out – you might get invited because of this, but then you can change the conversation and present other music. So it sounds this isn't a problem for you; it's not a label you're stuck with.

At least not in the last ten years, I'd say. At the beginning of your career, you have to think about it a little bit more, with the intention of balancing it well. But I think I've developed into someone who is welcome at all institutions to present Czech music because it's something extraordinary for them, and they feel – rightly, I hope – that they are getting an authentic, truthful, and meaningful way of presenting this music. Then there is the other half of my activities, the mainstream repertoire. And it has developed into something of a pattern, when I am visiting some orchestras regularly, like the Berlin Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, or the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, I usually go from one programme emphasising Czech or Slavic music, let's say, to another programme that is independent of it.

What I cannot get rid of – nor do I want to – is my general feeling at home in the Central European region. I admit that I am much more at home not only in the Czech repertoire, but also German, Austrian, Hungarian, Polish music – Bartók, Kodály, Lutosławski, and also composers from previous times, when nationalities were not considered as important. It's a slightly different story when one speaks about principally and primarily, say, *French* musical culture.

Of course, I love doing that as well because I think the boundaries or borders should not really exist. As I said about other people doing Czech music, I think when I do

French music, it's equally relevant. But I feel I need to work harder to get closer to that language. Not only working hard in my own idiom and habits, but also on my understanding. So I have to provoke myself to do more research and listen to other recordings and compare other pieces of music and maybe read literature that is connected to those cultures and so on. I still do it, but I am aware of a little more of a distance between that culture and my own. It's natural, and it's also geographical.

We've been talking so far about conducting, about the artistry of interpretation, but I would also like to talk about orchestras. There's a lot of talk about the Bohemian sound and the Bohemian strings and so on. Is this something you believe in? Or is it something that you can achieve playing Dvořák whether you're in London, Rome, or Bamberg?

There is no way to achieve a sound typical for the Czech Philharmonic, say, in the United States or even in Great Britain, and it doesn't make sense to try either. I think that's not what's interesting. I believe there is an a relevant option to cultivate and keep that local tradition alive. And in fact, I'm very proud and happy that the Czech Philharmonic has a local tradition that is still relevant. I guess artists from abroad can recognise it even more palpably than I can, because for me, that kind of playing is like mother's milk – we hear it constantly. And I think it's something which is missing more and more in our world, so I think there's a good reason to be positively proud of it and cultivate it.

At the same time, I don't think it should become some kind of overwhelming motto which is more important than anything else. In fact, I think what is important to do is to get trustworthily – or simply authentically – as close as possible to the language of the composers we play. And I think composers of all times expected various ways of people understanding and feeling their own music. Janáček, for instance, would actually be – and was, in fact! – very tolerant and curious about what his music would sound like in Berlin, or Vienna, or elsewhere. He didn't want to conserve one option of his music's life forever. That's a little more typical of our time – the conservation of some product in one way or another.

All of that is the sound, but what I think is much more relevant is the spirit. Even more than the letter; than the text – of course, the text must be taken seriously, but the spirit, the understanding, the personal style, and maybe a local style if that person is very important for the local music – like Janáček, for example, or Josef Suk as a student of Dvořák and a representative of a particular kind of musicality of the first half of the 20th century here in Prague – to understand that with all your efforts is, I think, crucial.

It seems that some orchestras are a little more fit to fulfil expectations of this or that music, but I think all orchestras, if they approach great music with great intentions, will also achieve great results. I'm absolutely sure of that. In Bamberg, for example, where I am the chief conductor, there's a lot of talk about this Bohemian sound because of the orchestra originally came from Prague – they were the German Philharmonic in Prague and later went to Germany and founded the Bamberg Symphony. I'm always a little hesitant to speak about that too much in words, but when other people discuss that phenomenon, I intuitively know exactly what they mean, but it's not something I could consciously work on – you know, I have never yet stood in front of the orchestra and said, "Okay guys, let's work on the Bohemian sound now". That wouldn't make sense. But I aim for certain results – not just in Czech music, but in other music as well – and suddenly, this sound that is called Bohemian appears. It's important to say that this term is used in the German context – for us Czechs, the notion of the Bamberg Symphony



PHOTO: ANDREAS HERZAU

having a Bohemian sound is a little strange. But in the context of other German orchestras, Bamberg is linked to the musical culture that is typical for Bohemia. And suddenly I'm doing Schubert or Bruckner or Mahler, and people point out that passage really sounded like Bohemian music. But I'm not doing it because I *want it* that way. Similarly, take the example of Rafael Kubelík's Mahler. His Mahler clearly sounds closer to our local traditions here, because that was his life, his roots, his education – he was surrounded by that culture. So why should one ignore it?

In the end, I think knowledge, study, and hard work are important. But ultimately, the freedom of the spontaneous decision is the most relevant thing. Without study, it has no roots and perhaps turns into anarchy. But if it's based in study, then I'm very happy to allow myself simply to express who I am, because every person is unique and the public is interested in the uniqueness of every performer.

There's a lot of pressure towards uniformity – once we have recordings and the internet and you know how every orchestra in the world sounds, it's much easier to achieve a standardised sound. You, however, seem much more interested in the specific sounds of every orchestra in every country.

You are right. And as with all things, the line is very thin. You don't want to standardise anything, but let's admit it – there is, in our world, so much pressure to make everyone into some kind of mould of what is expected. And recently much more than in the past, I'm afraid. You know, that there's so much pressure on what you *should* say and you *shouldn't* say and what kind of humour is to be appreciated, what kind of humour isn't, and what kind of sensitivity you should have to all endless kinds of minorities and so on. It's all very relevant and important, but sometimes I feel like now I can't really be myself. Or – unless I change myself, I don't have really have the right to express myself fully. Humour is often the most relevant field where one can see it. And when it gets ill, that is a very dangerous signal. Certain countries, certain regions have a very specific kind of humour – the Czech Philharmonic, for example, has a very particular sense of humour that is also present in their communication with the conductor.

What is that humour like?

There's a lot of irony, perhaps it's even a little cynical. It's interesting, I've learned to read differently what, for someone who is not used to it, sounds almost like an offence to the artistic work. Today, for example, I was working on something very serious. And I tried my best to deliver that message about the serious contents of the music we were

rehearsing. And I did that, maybe also with a little grain of “Sorry, now it’s going to be very serious”, because you know, it’s very strange – it’s a bit like school, all teachers know that if you get too serious, the students will suddenly not accept what you’re saying. You should be on top of it. So I tried that. I think I delivered the message. I saw that many people took it really beautifully. And then there are some who *need* to add some cynical comment. But I’ve learned not to mind, because I think to change the mind of the orchestra too much, to want to change who they are is exactly the zone I don’t want to go to, because these are particular people. Every orchestra is *people*. It’s not an institution made up of machines, or at least it shouldn’t be. And if there’s too much of a unified, engine-like reaction in the orchestra – when the conductor says A and B, the orchestra should do A and B and never C and D – I’m not interested in that. It’s *boring*. What is beautiful is to have a real partner who might sometimes be a little bit difficult, to win that partner over for a beautiful common goal, to really find a connection with such a partner and then go on that journey together, which then unifies those two – this is one of the most charming aspects of my job, in fact.

So I am much more interested in otherness than in some kind of simplification or unification. I always try to advise young people when they ask me what to do and what not to do. I tell them: work hard, but don’t have overly specific expectations. If you want just this, and nothing else, you can only be disappointed, because you will never get it. But if you if you aim to connect to other people in order to find the most beautiful result together, there’s a very good chance the work will always be satisfactory, because there’s no result which you are fixed to, but only this general desire to discover something new. And you discover something new only in dialogue with other people. You cannot discover anything entirely new on your own. It’s basically impossible. So the openness in my work is everything, in fact. You have to be really very alert, present, open, and spontaneously yourself.

You once mentioned in an interview that you decided a long time ago that you wouldn’t shout at the orchestra, and it seems like you haven’t had a reason to doubt that decision at any point.

Even that has its downside. Recently, I realised it’s not so bad – if you really feel that you have to shout, and there’s no other way to solve the situation, and if you are not lost in your temper, if you’re on top of it, at least partially, it’s okay. I think it’s humanity that interests me, so if there is a good intention behind the shouting, people sometimes take it even more positively than pretension; when you pretend that you are in a state of Zen-like calm and nothing can disturb you, and it’s not true. No one buys that. It’s not to be followed by anyone.

And going back to the idea of uniqueness, perhaps there are orchestras that simply play better when they are shouted at than when they are faced with calm.

That’s right. In fact, the healthier the collective of musicians is, the less need there is for any apparent power to be applied. However, every orchestra, because it’s a huge group of people, needs guidance. The recipe of letting everyone contribute as they please sounds very alluring, very beautiful, but it doesn’t work. But the feeling that it’s *almost* like that is a good thing to try and achieve. And for that, there needs to be a leading voice. By nature, orchestras contain members who are a little more independent-minded, but also a greater amount of people who feel good being part of a group of people, and those people actually feel comfortable if they’re given clear instructions. That’s the charm of leadership, isn’t it? Those who need the freedom to be happy in the collective need to get it and those who need stronger leadership or guidance also need to have that feeling. So the truth is somewhere in between.

Thriving Texas-Czechia Partnerships: The Fifth International Festival of Czech Music at the University of North Texas

There are many regions in North America with a significant Czech immigrant history: Nebraska, Iowa, Chicago, and Toronto to name a few. The one we will be focusing on today is Texas and its connections with Czech music, as introduced in this text by Benjamin Graf, principal lecturer at the University of North Texas and coordinator of the College of Music's Czech Music Initiative. Graf introduces the various activities of several artists and lecturers from Brno and Olomouc who recently travelled to the second-largest state in the union.

As of the 2020 U.S. census, there are more Czech-Americans living in Texas than any other state in the Union. The rich and deep history of Czech music and culture in Texas surfaces today in many forms, including the Czech Center Museum Houston, the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center in LaGrange, and – most pertinent here – the remarkable impact of the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas (CEFT). A registered non-profit organization currently under the direction of Chair Ray Lenart, CEFT strives to preserve Czech language, music, and culture in Texas through various endowed programs (www.ceft.us).

The University of North Texas (UNT) has a particularly rich history of bringing distinguished

Czech musicians to the United States. UNT has hosted and coordinated five international festivals of Czech music and culture at its flagship campus in Denton over the last twenty years. In fact, in 2004, several important individuals came together within CEFT to create the foundation for a strong future of well-supported music and cultural collaboration that is still thriving today. For example, the generosity of Frank J. and Hermine Hurta Kostohryz led to funding for the endowed Residency in Czech music and culture. Furthermore, Dr. Jim J. and Rose A. Bezdek funded a second endowment for the celebration of Czech music and culture. Several Czech-Texans would argue that the metaphorical “father” of the UNT Czech music initiatives is Dr. Thomas Sovik (see



Ivo Medek at the UNT College of Music

our interview in CMQ 3/2018). Dr. Sovik worked tirelessly to coordinate the launch of several cultural exchange programs, forge innovative University partnerships, and host four international festivals of Czech music and culture. Without Dr. Sovik's leadership, care, and dedication, the Czech initiatives at UNT would not be where they are to date – remarkable histories of student and faculty successes including world premieres, Fulbright scholars, academic conferences, and recording projects.

Last fall, from November 8 to 12, 2023, the fifth incarnation of the International Festival of Czech Music came to fruition in Denton, thereby reviving a musical tradition and partnership that was, like many other international festivals, put on hold during the pandemic.

Under the creative stage direction of Rocc, the visiting group of distinguished Czech musicians included Hana Hána, Sára Medková, Ivo Medek, Vít Zouhar, and Lukáš Medek. Known to several Czechs as the iSHA trio, the combination of Hana Hána (flute and voice), Sára Medková (piano), and Lucie Rozsnyo (soprano) ranks among the top small ensembles both in both Czechia and abroad. Unfortunately, the Texas audience could not experience the beauty of Lucie Rozsnyo's soprano voice, as she was ill and had to return to Czechia before the performances in Denton. Subsequently, American vocalist Dr. Bree Nichols, Fulbright award recipient whose interest in Czech music and culture was sparked by trips and studies funded by the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas,

joined the group for the last portion of their North Texas residency. Ivo Medek and Vít Zouhar not only serve in administrative positions at UNT's partner institutions – the Janáček Academy of Music (Brno) and Palacký University (Olomouc), respectively – they are also brilliant and innovative composers and collaborators. Lukáš Medek is a creative digital artist with extensive experience in computer game design, advertising, and cultural and artistic imaging.

The Fifth International Festival of Czech Music began with a series of private lessons and one-on-one study sessions for both undergraduate and graduate students at the UNT College of Music. The lessons focused on the production and editing of digital imaging and design in computer games, individualised feedback on student compositions for both small and large ensembles, as well as private flute lessons on both solo repertoire and orchestral excerpts. Following the conclusion of the festival, several students expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to study with Czech professionals. For example, after her lesson with Hana Hána, flute instructor at the Brno Conservatory, Alison Parker, a graduate flutist from the UNT Symphony Orchestra remarked, "The lesson was great. Not only was she [Hana Hána] super sweet and kind, but she really helped me work through several issues that I have been struggling with". Furthermore, the students in UNT's composition division, who will soon celebrate the 60th Anniversary of its Center for Experimental Music and Intermedia (CEMI) initiative with Professor



Joseph Klein, Sára Medková, Lukáš Medek, Rocc, Ivo Medek, and Benjamin Graf



Sára Medková rehearsing Sara's smile



Benjamin Graf presenting the final evening of the festival

learned new techniques and breathing strategies targeted towards wind and brass players, but salient for many music professionals. Zouhar and Medek offered insightful compositional masterclasses, enabling students to peek behind the metaphorical curtain at the ideas behind their Texas premieres and some of their other recent compositions. Impressed with Lukáš Medek's fifteen years of experience in the video-game industry, students in the games design masterclass not only came from the College of Music, but also the College of Engineering, and from the Denton community at large. At the conclusion of the lecture-demonstration, several students mentioned to the festival coordinator how they could envision the steps required to take more nebulous and ambitious design ideas and trace them back to the more basic and practical starting point(s). However, a testament to the success and level of interest sparked by the festival was one resident of Corinth, Texas. He did not have a car to drive to the masterclasses, so he decided to ride his bike over fifteen miles to attend Lukáš Medek's game design presentation.

Joe Klein, remarked positively on their lessons with Vice-Rectors Vít Zouhar and Ivo Medek, respectively. One promising young composer in the North Texas Terry Scholars program, Michael Casiano, wrote, "The Czech professors really helped me envision the structure and design of my pieces in new ways. I now have much more clarity for the next steps in developing my pieces." Other students, Beige Cowell and Peter J. Mooney, expressed their interest in hearing more compositions by both Zouhar and Medek – suggesting and inspiring another potential trans-Atlantic artistic collaboration.

Following the lessons, over a hundred students benefited from masterclasses at the festival. Hana Hána offered insightful remarks to chamber ensembles and soloists in the flute studios of Professors Terri Sundberg and Mary Karen Clardy. She also revealed her new approaches to yoga and relaxation, in which several students

The pinnacle of the Fifth International Festival of Czech Music, however, was the two American premieres of two Czech operas – *TiAmo* and *SARA'smile*. Both were composed, performed, directed, and produced by the entire team of artists. Sára Medková, pianist, vocalist, and librettist, transcended the bounds of a typical concert pianist – she not only captured the audience's ears, but also their minds, and most importantly – their hearts. The clever placement of the props, the use of graphics against a textured projection background, and the expression from the auxiliary percussion came together to create much more



Stephen Dubberly and Bree Nichols at the UNT College of Music Recital Hall

than just a musical experience. By turning the focus of the opera subject matter inward as a glimpse into the artist-mother Sára's mind and her self-reflection (both at home and at the concert halls) – the artistic team created an experience that resonated with the core humanity of all audience members in attendance.

The plans for the American premiere of the second opera, *TiAmo*, had to be adapted due to illness, and as a result, a video recording of the opera took the place of a live performance. The ways in which the iconography and the musical lines were intertwined created a tangible sense of the multi-tiered roles of the “modern” woman. Indeed, the video could not truly touch the audience in the same manner as a live performance from this remarkable team. However, the addition of the traditional Czech vocal music of Leoš Janáček, sung by Dr. Bree Nichols, added a change of flavor that not only symbolised the institutional partnership between the Czech and American artists, but also contributed an impromptu and nonetheless fitting addition to the culminating event of the residency.

Since Hana Hána was fit to perform in the realm of both flute and voice, she united with a student from Czechia, currently enrolled in UNT's Jazz studies program, Tomáš Zelený. Despite the fact that they had only met that day at the festival, members of the audience thought they had been playing together for years after indulging in their musical “dessert” for the southern-U.S. audience – an improvised take on the spiritual Amazing Grace. The vocal fireworks on display in Hana's improvisations were unlike any rendition one could recall. Zelený not only intuited where Hána was



Screening of the opera TiAmo at the Recital Hall



Left to right: Benjamin Graf, Lukáš Medek, Vít Žouhar, Sára Medková, Ivo Medek, Jackson Dillard, and Rocc after the American premiere of Sara's smile

going musically, but how she was going to get there. Several audience members were moved to tears as they witnessed the phenomenon on stage in the magnificently-renovated UNT Recital Hall.

In sum, the Fifth International Festival of Czech Music was a warm, welcome rekindling of an artistic partnership and collaboration that has a rich and deep history. Without question, the presence of Czech music and culture is still alive and well in Texas, thanks largely due to the efforts of Dr. Thomas Sovik and the dedicated and generous membership of the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas (CEFT). Ultimately, we hope that the Fifth International Festival of Czech Music is only a stepping stone for the future work and collaborations at the UNT College of Music. Even those without a deeply rooted history of Texas Czech-American heritage left the festival with Czech music and culture embedded within their hearts.

I Still Want Music To Move Me

The Musical Universe of Ian Mikyska

Ian Mikyska, while primarily a composer, is also active in several other fields – visual art, theatre, literature. In this extended profile based on several online and in-person interviews, American writer Celeste Pepitone-Nahas primarily explores the compositional portion of his work, though the text also examines broader issues in philosophy, language, music, and life, as well as some of the more notable influences on Mikyska’s work: his teacher James Weeks, John Cage, and the Wandelweiser collective.

Walking

Three young men are walking through a wheat field, to a pond. It is 2015. They are somewhere in southwestern Bohemia. One walks in front, holding up a score. Behind him, a musician carries a guitar by the neck, adjusting the angle of the guitar so that it hits the wheat, making a soft hissing sound and occasionally changing chords. The third man

follows behind; he is the “recordist”, but he is also the composer of this work, Ian Mikyska. He carries a recording device.

Ian Mikyska is a serious, focused – and seriously focused – composer. His website catalogues one decade of compositions, averaging about seven major works per year, and he is the co-founder of the improvising ensemble Stratocluster and the Prague Quiet Music Collective. He has written for Bachtrack.com and HIS Voice, and since 2018 has served as deputy editor-in-chief of Czech Music Quarterly. He moves with the presence of one embedded in deep interior worlds, yet his communitarian ethos allows him to teach the artist’s way of life by example. When I met with him on a cold December night in his Malá Strana apartment for an interview, he poured us tea so imperceptibly that often during our conversation I would have just finished my cup only to look down and see it full again.

The composer notes that the early composition described above, accurately titled *through a wheat field; to a pond* (2015) belongs to the genre of animated score-study videos. “The piece approaches playfully the entire genre of the score video on YouTube, which was something that was hugely important for me,” he said. I could almost imagine a younger Ian paging through YouTube, watching the notes flashing across the screen like a scroll being unfurled.

The video-score for *wheat field* opens with extremely specific instructions as to how to play the piece:



PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

Ian Mikyska performing Michal Wróblewski's "Variability" with the Prague Quiet Music Collective, Stone Bell House, Prague City Gallery

The temperature should be over 33 Celsius in the shade, the humidity at least 73%, the ozone concentration beneath 240 Dobson units, and the date "somewhere between the end of the roe deer hunting season and the portion of the mating cycle of crickets which connects the mating and triumphal songs". Reading these instructions as they appeared on my screen, first blurry and then cleared up, as though the video-maker finally granted the viewer the correct prescription, really made me laugh.

Thinking about how hot 33 Celsius is, I wondered if the piece referenced climate collapse, while also sensing that overt politics might be an imprecise framework for analysing his music – at least at the start. While Ian does place the piece within the tradition of 20th century Czech nature poetry, for him it was more about turning expectations upside-down. "One of the things about writing a piece of music is that it can be performed again," he said, "but the conditions are so specific in this piece that it can't really be performed more than once. That unrepeatable moment is the focus of the piece, but it exists in a score, a video, and a private performance/recording; not in a concert hall as a repeatable work – it exists for the listener looking at their screen only. Really, it's an audiovisual piece, and the gallery is YouTube".

wheat field pokes fun at the very idea of replication in the context of music performance, where the temporal world is fleeting and a concert experience touches us precisely because of that

impermanence. Although a few years old, the piece is classic Mikyska for its strangeness and surrealism, for the way the surprise poetic ending (which I won't reveal here) knocks you from the most routine ways of thinking and brings heat to the thin line between art and life. The composer of ephemerality and the everyday smiled. My teacup was full again. I realised that in taking the piece at face-value, I had almost missed the joke.

Beginnings

When I asked him how he initially got into music, the composer replied that at age two or three, he was given a "small green plastic guitar", and that from there, it was mostly intuition. The son of two diplomats, he was exposed to foreign cultures from a young age, briefly living in Cuba as a baby, and then at age four, moving with his parents to Peru. His first languages were Spanish and Czech, though both were quickly overtaken by English, which he acquired at anglophone schools in both Lima and Prague. Even today, though translation from Czech to English is a large part of his professional life, he claims to fight gaps in his linguistic fluidity.

As we spoke, I noted his slight English accent, picked up at his English high school in Prague and solidified when he studied in London, and mentioned that his voice makes it difficult to place his origins. "I think for many people language at an early age is natural and self-explanatory. You have a feeling: 'this is me, and this is my language that

I speak and I'm comfortable with the persona that I have within that language.' I've kind of lost that with a lot of the languages I speak," he said.

Music offered up a singular language – a reprieve from the varied linguistic landscape of his childhood, and a place where he could be himself. At age twelve, he focused on jazz and guitar, quickly realising the importance of disciplined practice. He knew from a young age that music would be his primary mode of expression, and he earned his bachelor's in composition from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, where he studied with composer James Weeks. Earlier interests in literature and philosophy did not dissipate, and he later studied directing of alternative and puppet theatre at DAMU in Prague, and pursued academic exchanges at the Universität der Künste, Berlin and at CAS, the Center for Audio-Visual Studies at FAMU, which he affectionately described as “a department for a lot of things that don't fit in anywhere else”.

His website is organised to highlight the diversity of his interests and artistic capacities: a sliding bar allows visitors to select for his role in each project (composer, writer, video-maker, etc.), the type of media used (image, text, voice, etc.), and even his degree of involvement. Another page on the website leads to the “Game” – a series of clickable prompts reminiscent of “Choose Your Own Adventure” games from the '90s, which eventually guides users to the piece from his oeuvre that resonates most with them.

“I'd like something that isn't”, the first prompt reads, providing the clickable choices “Too serious”, “Too playful”, “I don't care”, or “Start again”. If you start over, the first prompt will be different the next time round. Do you enjoy the sound of a classically trained singing voice, does it “repulse you physically”, or is it “OK if it's not Wagner”? It's refreshing to find a composer who is not afraid to poke fun at “the greats”. As John Cage once said, “Music does not have to be serious.” Mikyska might amend the statement: Music does not have to be serious all the time.

Facing the Greats

By his first years at university, Mikyska came to one of his most prolonged obsessions: the frustrating reality that music can express but cannot speak.

His literature studies inspired him to use language in conjunction with music, so that the words might expand the abstractions of sound, giving sound meaning. This ideology resulted in high-theory, intertextual pieces now within his early works, such as *Metamorphoses for Two Clarinets*, based on a Poulenc Sonata and the opening of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, *Hemiplegia for Singer*, *Two Narrators and Ensemble*, based on five stories from *Dubliners* by James Joyce and poems by Seamus Heaney (both from 2012), and his later *Recrudescences*, connected to a 13th-century poem by Petrarch (2016).

While today Mikyska has an entire wall in his home library devoted to John Cage, at university, his relationship with the American composer was both fruitful and “kind of antagonistic”. Cage believed that a composer should not think about “purpose” and instead focus solely on sound. Mikyska felt annoyed. “I was a little infuriated by Cage's refusal to explain things,” he said over an email interview, “I disagreed with his insistence that music doesn't mean anything.” Yet the more he read interpretations of Cage, and especially as he saw him through the eyes of James Weeks, Ian began to understand that “what Cage was staying was prescriptive rather than descriptive,” – that he was “trying to point to what can happen when you take the perspective that things don't (need to) mean anything.”

Mikyska was drawn to the way that both Weeks and Cage, in everyday life and within artistic projects, lived out certain embodied ideals. Both believed in and adhered to a “paradoxical combination of absolute openness and freedom, but also a real focus on honesty and discipline”. Yet at the same time, he was bothered that Cage spoke about Zen for almost forty years without ever doing seated meditation. In reaction – and from genuine curiosity – Ian began to explore Buddhism and Zen by reading texts and attending retreats. Though he has not woken up before dawn to meditate since the last lockdown, his recent works reflect the influence of such practices on his life and work. He has moved further away from analytical, concept-heavy music – though that has remained part of his process – and towards a musicality centred on experience and physicality.

In February 2024, the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra in Ostrava premiered *Drops; mist; rain* on

senza tempo, senza vibrato

Alto Recorder

2nd 4th 2nd 3rd 5th 2nd

4th mp 6th 3rd emb. mp 7th 2nd mf 4th 4th

mp 2nd emb. 3rd mp 2nd 5th (senza vib.) 1,5th 3rd 2,5th 7th

mp (senza vib.) 5th mf 4th 1st 3rd 3rd 5th

mf 3rd 4th 1st 3rd p 1,5th 5th p 2,5th 1,5th

♩ = 64 ppp p mf p pp emb.

pp mp f mp

mf p (senza) mf mp

3 7:4 6 3 3 3 4

5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4

senza tempo 7th 4th mp 3rd mf 6-7th mp

2nd 2nd 3,5th p 7-9th

Prague, 22. II. 2024

"and not to think of any misery in the sound of the wind" for alto recorder

a standard subscriber programme sitting right next to the Berg violin concerto and Brahms's second symphony. For this work, Mikyska rearranged the orchestra to act as a physical, visual field, dividing string players into individual parts rather than grouping them into traditional orchestral sections. Seen from above, the piece is not about what note is being played, but where the notes are coming from – how the drops fall and ricochet. “I’m making an orchestra do something that they normally don’t do, which is always just a bad idea in principle,” he noted in our interview, prior to the concert. Yet under the direction of French conductor Lucie Leguay, the piece came to life full of colour, and in an Instagram post after one of the rehearsals, Ian wrote: “It’s always magical when sounds go from moving across a few centimetres of paper to moving among real people on a real stage...where the few centimetres suddenly become twelve metres.” In emphasising the spatial element of music, he created a new playing field altogether.

Water on Stones

Mikyska’s pieces interweave ideas from the nature world, the artistic process, and everyday life, strands which cannot be extricated from the braid. Several works relate to his studies of Zen and calligraphy, such as *Shan shui* (2022), which was inspired by the Chinese word for landscape painting. “I began thinking about the relationship between a brushstroke and a bow stroke”, he said. “The main difference is that the sound doesn’t leave a trace, whereas the brush does. The composition becomes an idealised version of making a calligraphic painting without leaving any traces.” He then suggested the imagery of a person using water to paint on stones. At times the sound of *Shan shui* mimics hairpin turns, building to peaks of intensity and then dissolving again – from a flurry of noise erupting from Slovak overtone flutes submerged into buckets of water, back to a trickle of cold rain.

Whether he is exploring themes of emptiness and boundlessness (*In which things are neither the same nor different*) or impermanence and ending (*All Ending, fading at unequal rates, fading into*), his work marks the visual, almost palpable obsession with duality that has taken root in his musical psyche.

“One image that’s strongest for me is mountains coming out of the mist, but the mist is actually just the paper,” he said, “You’re covering most of what you’re showing. Through that absence comes presence. It makes an impact.” Ian’s exploration of Zen extends to his leadership within a niche sub-genre of contemporary music – that of quiet music, or music based on stillness, silencing, and slowing down.

Approaching Quietude

The composer was first influenced by the Wandelweiser collective, a loose-knit yet united group of musicians founded in the 1990s who serve as a central constellation in the quiet music universe, when he studied in London. In a 2009 essay, “Wandelweiser,” composer and collective member Michael Pisaro writes that the name of the group can be understood as a combination of *Wandel* with *Wegweiser*, meaning “change signpost” or “change wisely” – but he is quick to note that the name was probably something composer Burkhard Scholthauer gave to the fledgling Edition Wandelweiser in 1992 without a great deal of philosophical weight.

Mikyska reflects on Wandelweiser: “It’s very diverse. What the different composers are doing – the ways that they work and the ways the music ends up coming out. It’s very broad, and I find some of them more inspiring, some less inspiring.” The diversity of approaches within the group can be seen in countless examples of their output, including an early album, *Stones* (Wandelweiser Editions, 1995), in which artists made individual realisations of sound using stones, such as intertwining pebbles along the strings of a violin (Thomas Stiegler) or simply rubbing two stones together for half an hour until their body was covered in fine white dust (Jürg Frey). What unites the pieces on the album is a focused, yet playful interest in listening and appreciating sound in all its (very) slight variations. Here again we find ourselves approaching that strange terrain embodied by Mikyska re: Weeks re: Cage – seriousness combined with levity, a dedicated approach to music and composition coupled with an unselfconscious openness.

Ian recalls the first piece he wrote that would classify as quiet. He was assigned to write a wind



PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

Miroslav Beinhauer performing "In" for sixth-tone harmonium and electronics, Strings of Autumn Festival, Convent of St. Agnes, Prague

quintet at university and happened to pick up a book from the shelf of a friend he was visiting: *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers* by Leonard Koren. It was a random find – something he would not have borrowed from a library or purchased for himself. Yet here, “it all kind of came together – the experiential and meditative aspect, the focus on materiality and detail and imperfection and the ravages of time and so on, all within an aesthetic context that made huge intuitive sense to me”, In a few days, he had written what he considers his first Buddhist piece, or his first piece concerned with the idea of impermanence: *breath; dying* (2016).

Today, Mikyska is the founder and director of the Prague Quiet Music Collective, a group of four musicians that have been performing together for almost three years and who host an annual Quiet Music Festival in Prague. Last year’s festival in September 2023 featured compositions by several quiet music composers, a sold-out meditative tea workshop, an improvised set by Marcel Bárta and Oskar Török, the first appearance in the Czech Republic of Jürg Frey, a true Wandelweiser icon, and a solo piano recital by American pianist Ashlee Mack.

While reviewing PQMC’s 2023 culminating concert in late November 2023, *Fragile Dreaming*, I spoke with two listeners, Michal and Evita, who were lying down on pillows arranged before the stage. Above them hung a construction of white cloth, part of the light and object installation by artist and set designer Tereza Bartůňková, who Mikyska frequently collaborates with. “I want to hear everything,” said Michal, who enjoys drone music and plays the hurdy-gurdy. “I want to hear direct sound from the instruments.” He added that he’d like to recommend this type of music to others: “It’s the opposite of loud music, which you can hear everywhere. It’s a special experience to hear such quiet music from time to time.” At that moment Eva leaned in and exclaimed: “It’s like breathing!”

Anything Goes?

In January 2024, Mikyska released two albums: *Music for Sixth-tone Harmonium* from Warm Winters, a double CD that pairs Mikyska's composition *In* with Berlin-based Norwegian composer and guitarist Fredrik Rasten's work *Concord*, and *Tracings*, a collaboration between Heerlen, Netherlands-based composer of ephemerality and serendipity, Germaine Sijstermans, and PQMC, out on Sawyer Editions. Pitchfork editor Philip Sherburne responded in late January, writing about the uncanny sounds of the sixth-tone harmonium, an early microtonal portable organ, commissioned by Czech composer Alois Hába in 1927, and recently mastered by Czech pianist Miroslav Beinhauer (who plays on both sides of the Warm Winters album). Sherburne said of *In*: "It's powerfully acoustic and weirdly tactile; at times you can almost feel your ears growing warmer from all the friction. Extended immersion in its waters is at once rapturous and completely disorienting."

In was the first piece I ever listened to by Mikyska after I stumbled upon a YouTube video of a live recording made in the Convent of St. Agnes in 2021. I was not sure what to expect at all – I thought that perhaps since the music was "quiet" I would multitask while the 41-minute long video played in the background. This proved impossible. The harmonium coupled with field recordings of insects and birdsong estranged me from the familiar patterns of my day.

The composer is also wary that quiet music, with its prolonged tones, repetitions, and well, *quietness*, might strike some listeners as music where "anything goes." "Anything goes," said Ian, paraphrasing James Weeks, "so you have to think that much harder about what you're going to do and work on it even harder." A piece doesn't have to take four months to compose (though sometimes it does), nor does it have to be filled with earth-shattering innovation (though of course he leaves room for that). The music must ask questions. It must challenge notions previously taken for granted. "The amount of times that I've heard things like: 'it needs a loud part' – sometimes that's true, but this music really asks: 'what if there *doesn't* need to be a loud part? What if we *don't* need contrast?' You know, what if we really do away with a lot of these expectations, and just bring it down to the bare minimum of sound?"

In time, the composer hopes to decouple what he sees as an arbitrary "work versus result" relationship within the world of composition – a mission his Wandelweiser forefathers would approve of. "I think we've been coming to realise that some of this music is extremely technically difficult, even though it looks really simple. These pieces require things like balance, tuning, rhythmical precision. And you need to have those things – not *as* precise as in any new music – but *more* precise." He can spend a long time writing a complicated through-composed piece and then whip out a piece for PQMC with one page of text instructions in only a few afternoons. Listening to the two recordings, he finds that the latter is often a much better piece.

It was a few years after they began working together that Weeks told Mikyska: "I guess I still want music to *move* me." For Ian, the sentence resonated like a clear glass bell.

Siren Song

A trademark feature of Mikyska's work is the use of field recordings, or sound recordings from the "real world" which he then intersperses with live playing. *Spaces, Drones and Melodies* (2016) contains field recordings made in Armenia, the United Kingdom, Slovakia and the Czech Republic; *Currents/Points* (2016) was developed using a video recording of water droplets; *Nehybnost (Malostranská ticha)* or *Motionless (Malá Strana Silences)*, commissioned by the Berg Orchestra in 2019, uses "field recording silence, digital silence, electromagnetic, concert, conducted, and motionless silences" – an amalgam of various silences that put into question what silence really is.

Mikyska's *Sled několika zvuků a tich* (*A Succession of Several Sounds and Silences*), also written in 2019 for the Berg Orchestra, pairs electric guitar, percussion, and clarinets, with the monthly siren tests that ring out across Czechia. In a video recording, musicians sit high above their audience on an elevated structure in a park under Bastion XXXI, part of the remainder of Prague's Baroque fortification. At first one hears birdsong and wind, but soon the piece transitions into a medley of blaring sirens, spoken announcements, and instrumental tones. It's captivating and strange, rupturing the expectations of "everyday life". The piece asks: if we get too

accustomed to our circumstances, what might we miss? Once you experience one of his compositions, it is difficult to walk through your daily routine unchanged. Cage again: “A composer knows his work as a woodsman knows a path he has traced and retraced, while a listener is confronted by the same work as one is in the woods by a plant he has never seen before.”

“Field recorded silence” and “motionless silences” necessitate both movement and stillness, and Mikyska spends a lot of time walking. Walking opens up space to think, to move, and to dream – to explore the visual world. Many of his pieces begin during long walks on Petřín Hill near his flat, and he often uses the sounds of walking directly in his pieces, such as in *wheat field* and *Nehybnost* (*Malostranská ticha*). The latter piece contains two field recordings made while walking, both starting on Malostranské náměstí. Again we can imagine the composer-as-recorder carrying a recording device, first walking from the starting point to Kampa Island, and then in the second recording, walking towards the foot of Petřín Hill. Music becomes a map the composer sketches with his footsteps and his breath, drawing as though with ink the passage from city noise to quietude.

Freedom within Structure

Quiet music does not always mean a quiet mind. Time constraints can disrupt his otherwise centred character, and speaking of a recent composition which was complimented by many as engaging and magical, he relates: “The process was nothing like that. It was really anxious, I didn’t have enough time, I was increasingly nervous and I drank quite a lot of beer to get through it. That final part of the compositional process – there wasn’t much Zen in that.” Mikyska alternates between two modes: working and resting. Rest is crucial, but his devotion to his craft means he has little time for anything else.

To move from a place of busyness and chaos to one of clear-as-glass compositions, the composer imposes obsessive structures on his compositional process. He will compose one or two lines intuitively before going back to rationalise and justify his every move. Although his compositions have transformed over time, his old way of thinking – the hypertextual,

philosophical, intellectual – still has a hold on his process. “Virtually all the pieces that I make have a lot of very obsessive thinking behind them. I make a lot of notes in text, and then a lot of diagrams and little systems.” In *road patterns in decay*, 2016, musicians riding a Student Agency “Fun&Relax” bus going from London to Prague turn the radio up by 0.5 MHz based on a different road rule in each movement, such as tuning the radio “every time you become mobile after being stationary” or “every time you see a lorry/truck”. In *Three Oddly-shaped Pieces of Tinder for Laurence Crane*, 2015, the chords and the preconceived grid they exist in are fixed, yet the duration of passages is flexible. When musicians add wood between movements, one cannot predict exactly what crackling sounds will emerge from the fire.

Thinking about Steve Reich’s essay *Music as a Gradual Process*, Mikyska reflected that although he uses numerous constraints, his overall goal is for his music to be transparent. Legibility is important for the composer – a self-declared populist – whose music is intended to draw people in. I was happy to meet his partner, a social worker who gives support to un-housed people in Prague and whose generous presence immediately set me at ease. Rather to my surprise she said she didn’t know much about music, and yet I felt the two of them shared an understanding on how to live. Their cluttered yet tidy home is full of books and art. A beautiful set of brushes hangs from the wall, which the composer uses to dabble in Japanese calligraphy – something he enjoys from the position of an amateur.

When I finally took the tram home, Prague was shrouded in a wintry mist, and I had a curious book of journal entries by Erik Satie in my pocket – a gift on loan from the composer’s shelf. I walked the last few blocks, my mind circling round the varied, paradoxical, and wide-reaching emotional landscapes that define Mikyska’s work. His voice is peculiar and mystical and explores the place where the artistic project (the written score) and the otherwise “outside” world collide.

Here is the landscape and here is the hand holding the brush // Here is the animated video and here is the guitar brushing the grass // Welcome to Ian’s universe, the miraculous place we are living in.

MUSICA NOVA 2023

THE MUSICA NOVA COMPETITION RECENTLY
WENT THROUGH CONSIDERABLE CHANGES.
IN THIS ARTICLE, LENKA DOHNALOVÁ
PROVIDES DETAIL ON THIS TRANSITIONAL
PERIOD, AS WELL AS SUMMARISING
THIS YEAR'S EDITION, THE NEW
CHALLENGES FACING COMPETITIONS
OF ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC MUSIC, AND
THE EVENT'S OUTLOOK
FOR THE FUTURE.

2023 saw the return of the Musica Nova international electronic music competition after a year-long hiatus. Composer Rudolf Růžička, born 1941, who founded the Society for Electro-acoustic Music and spent years as its director, died in 2022. This, however, was not the reason for the hiatus. Rather, this transformation reflects a long-term decision by the society to make the competition bi-annual. A planned restructuring of the jury also took place, responding to the interest of numerous international composers to be part of this jury on the one hand and to criticism from the community of experts, even though Musica nova has long been valued for its stylistic openness and flexibility. We would therefore like to welcome new members of the jury, composers Daniel Blinkhorn (Australia), Clara Maïda (France/Germany), João Pedro Oliveira (Portugal/United States), Louise Rossiter (Great Britain), and Adam Stanović (Great Britain). Lenka Dohnalová (Czechia) and Juraj Ďuriš (Slovakia) remain from the previous line-up of the jury. The competition retains its two categories, one for work created entirely in the studio and another for electronic music with a live performance component (voices and/or instruments). We believe in the deep meaning of this category, as it reflects, directly in the compositional realisation, upon the relationship between humans

and technologies, whether by extending our natural disposition or by scaling or contrasting these. Of course, the category becomes blurry with the increased use of MIDI ring controllers in real time. Another traditional category is the so-called Czech Round. We have newly added a Wild Card category for composers who are unsure about the category their piece would fit in. This new category is partially a response to the fact that several composers asked, during the preparatory phase, how they should proceed if their compositions made use of artificial intelligence (AI), which ultimately did not take place (or was not acknowledged).

This was the first time such queries arose, probably partly due to the fact that AI is generally more discussed in the context of composition, and its first musical products have begun appearing. In Czechia, the greatest attention was garnered by the *From the Future World*, "composed" using AIVA, an artificial intelligence system. It was inspired by an unfinished fragment by Antonín Dvořák. The "composition" was performed by pianist Ivo Kahánek in 2019.

In relation to electro-acoustic music, important venues of discussion include the board focused on the development of MAX/MSP plug-ins on the Cycling '74 forums, the HPA online community, the platform

Brontosaurus Honking Cries Bellow
Panayiotis Kokoras

♩ = 108

4 Master Switch

Keys
 Bellows
 Buttons
 Sound
 Electronics

0:00

resembles train horns

0:08

0:13

0:23

0:30

close bellows to full stop until a thumping sound is produced; open up to get ready for the next one

resembles train horns

echo horns

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Panayiotis Kokoras: Bellow (excerpt)

around FluCoMa, and articles by individual experts on AI: Mike Thornton, Yotam Mann, Jan Hajič Jr. in Czechia). Advantages are mostly confined to the pre- and post-production phases, especially in the case of a multimedia format (e.g. looking up music that is adequate in duration and expression for videos, films, effects, etc.).

In this regard, we should mention that Rudolf Růžička was one of the first in Czechia to take an interest in the creative use of computers and stochastics in music. This led to his becoming a member of the jury

at the International NEWCOMP Computer Music Competition in 1986. As early as 1966, he asked the Laboratory of Computing Machines at the Czech Technical University to collaborate with him on musical compositions. Along with Jiří Kopriva, he created the a piece of software known as CCOMP (ComputerCOMposition). The name only caught on in 1988, when the programme was presented at the summer courses in Darmstadt. He later used computer-generated pseudo-random numbers and a transfer of outputs into MIDI. One of the most

successful pieces to make use of CCOMP software is his piece of sacred music *Crucifixion I*, which was awarded a prize at the Mariazzell '93 competition. Rudolf Růžicka was also progressive in regards to another important trend in electroacoustic music: spatialisation. In 1968, his quadrophonic piece *Gurges*, which featured a whirlwind of spatial sound received an award at the Musica nova competition. Today, the use of stochastic methods in electro-acoustic music (in the form of spatialisation or the distribution of granulated sound, for instance) is commonplace and highly sophisticated. The methods of implementing machine learning in interactive compositions or partial steps in the compositional process have come as a gradual advancement rather than a crucial turning point. On the other hand, this singles out from the field of electro-acoustic music sound design of an atmospheric nature, often of applied uses, frequently exhibiting stylistic correlates with minimalism. This space is already being occupied by AI, creating a threat of the overall degradation of taste through "compilations of compilations". An illustration: the popular music-recognition app, Shazam, does not distinguish Anna von Hauswolff's *All Thoughts Fly*, a sonically colourful, inventive, and interpretively difficult organ piece, from the much more banal electronic piece *Himmelfahrt* by Mark Allen Shepherd, and it seems that with the younger generation, which grew up on techno and electronic music, this difference is also beyond their recognition capacities. On the other hand, the academic lineage, marked by the influence of structuralism, which is plentifully represented in Musica nova, usually creates complex sonic compositions that are demanding for the listener and often seem more like a laboratory for listening or for applied music and sound design (video; film; theatre; computer games).

Electro-acoustic music is gradually losing even the interest of radio, to which it was originally tied, principally due to the financial demands of such productions. In recent years, it has also lost significant ground in higher education in the countries that were, traditionally, more active. As far as listeners are concerned, it is certainly a minority genre, although it is our experience that many "random" listeners of Musica nova concerts are pleasantly surprised by the pieces they hear, so long as they are given a "key" to an approach, that is, an explanation of the compositional (and thereby listening) strategies. Another interesting experience is that it is precisely the demanding and unpredictable nature of these pieces that provides schizophrenic patients relief from insistent states of mind – for several years, we provided a selection of pieces to a colleague of ours who is a music therapist

at a closed psychiatric ward in Prague. I still consider this field of music to contain great potential. As far as the implementation of AI is concerned, perhaps it will be problematic for the competition in the short term, positing an explicit demand for composers to provide statements acknowledging its use (or lack thereof) in the technical description of the piece, similarly to the practice used for university theses. We realise that art has always been full of convention, plagiarism, self-stylisation, or else an ideological "denial of convention", which also fails to yield good results. In sound, there is a great risk that the "compositions" become *sui generis* testing suites for new software; the sound and methodology of these compositions clearly tied to the equipment at particular studios; there are seemingly inaudible compilations of original and found material that demand a great deal of listening experience to identify. Many composers train what is more akin to a "language" (*langue*) than creating individual musical "utterances" (*parole* – to use the language of semiotics). There is still a large gap, however, between what AI compiles without revision and what passes through the filter of the final artistic revision, reflecting the composer's intentions. Current AIs can replicate moods and typical stylistic gestures, or promptly find them in a database, but the most frequent criticism of products created through the use of AI is the absent foundation of art production: an overall coherent style and effectively composed "ideas". For the jury of Musica nova, too, there is still space for a complex appraisal of the compositions. AI can empower banal, commercial production just as well as processes leading to self-knowledge and generally to uncovering the import of true creativity. Another Musica nova trend on the rise in recent years concerns the content of the pieces. This year, to an even greater extent than in the preceding two editions, the pieces concern themes such as fears, concerns, dark visions, with titles such as *Desolation*, *Voice in the Dark*, *Ideological Distortion*, *Cruelty and Obedience*, *Fobia*, *Exkurze do pekla* (*Excursion to Hell*), *Car ride to hell*, *Après, les cendres* (*Then, Ashes*), as well as themes relating to humanisation and a change of perspective (*Inner Child*, *Refuted Melancholy*, *I am not an Island*). This was even more apparent in the complementary competition for children, České ucho (Czech Ear). In previous years, we already saw a trend for the expression of an unclear fear and the themes of battle and destruction, and this was also manifested this year in compositions by children as young as nine years old, expressing fear of assault and other, more uncertain concerns. Particularly in the case of boys, there is a significant relation to action-based computer games. The pieces we call "bonsai" were well made, thanks to the efforts

of the instructor, Jaroslav Raušer, but here are some of the children's comments: "Hostile beings threaten the Earth", "Evil spirits try to set the forest on fire", "There is a strange sound in the cave, and weird beings live there", "Stars talk to each other, but we don't understand them at all". Add to this the concern of the parents about their children's names being published online.

The submissions for Musica nova 2023 included a hundred and three pieces by composers from twenty-six countries. The interest, then, is still there. Given that members of the jury are now spread around the world, the jury convened online. The presiding juror was the eminently experienced João Pedro Oliveira. A selection of the award-winning pieces was presented at a concert at the Inspirace Theatre at the Music and Dance Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague on December 15th, 2023. The award-winning pieces can also be heard on the competition's YouTube channel.

The first prize in the studio category went to Canadian composer Martin Bédard (born 1970) for his piece *Honey – Architectures from Silence No 1*. The composer is also a theorist exploring the foundations of possible "grammars" of sound and their audibility, comparative studies of the expressive means of various art forms, as well as possible similarities, mappings, and transfers. He described his piece as a metaphor for the production of honey. It is highly transformative and complex with many layers and accents that evoke the movement of bees. Honourable mentions in the studio category went to Kramer Elwell from the United States, Stéphane Roy from Canada, and Clemens von Reusner from Germany. Elwell (born 1990) was also a finalist in Musica nova 2021 with *What Sleeps Beneath*. This year, he participated with *OWN.k*, a piece that forms part of a triptych: *Chaos, Constraint, Catharsis*. The piece was originally developed in 2017 with choreographer Hillary Richardson, and is another that explores themes of anxiety, mental health, and the function of art. The title, *OWN.k*, refers to the material of the piece (the composer's own voice). Kramer's pieces are sonically colourful, surreal, and artistically fascinating. In *Après, les cendres*, a piece inspired by a poem by the Québécoise poet Paul-Marie Lapointe (born 1959), composer Stéphane Roy (born 1958) approached a similar theme. The piece is acoustically narrative, dramatic, and spatially inventive. Once again, we encounter the theme of humanity's false sense of security; the hidden tensions that burst out into open crises with the perspective of being liberated from the gravity of the Earth. Clemens von Reusner (born 1957) is a long-term participant in the competition. He might not say much, but he consistently produces work that is gesturally complex,

poetic, and internally spatial (he often discusses "spatial counterpoint"). His ambisonic composition *REEHD* refers to the words "read" and "reed". Further award-winners in the studio category were Alex Buck from Brazil, Irvin Kinnersley and Adrian Moore, both from the United Kingdom, Annete Vande Gorne from Belgium, and Berk Yagli from Cyprus. Each of these pieces is unique in its own way. You can listen to them in the final protocol on the Musica nova website before we process all the finalists' pieces for publication on our YouTube channel.

Applications for the category for live performance pieces with an electronic component were much smaller in number. The first prize went to British composer John Young for his piece *Soundplay*, with honourable mentions going to Panayiotis Kokoras (Greece) and Przemyslaw Scheller (Poland).

In *Soundplay*, John Young (born 1962) establishes a dialogue between the tuning of a grand piano and sounds from digital samples of an out-of-tune piano. Panayiotis Kokoras (born 1974) has been successful in the competition on several occasions. His piece *Bellow*, scored for accordion and electronics, was commissioned by accordionist Krassimir Sterev and Klangforum Wien. The piece humorously mines the instrument for sonic and articulatory potential. Przemyslaw Scheller (1990) is the youngest of the award-winners. His piece for violin and electronics *KOAN II* is a game of layers and their interrelationship. Rounding out the list of finalists were Rainer Burck, a former member of the jury, and Kyong Mee Choi.

Interesting entries in the Wild Card category were Eduardo Prudente (born 1982, Brazil) with his piece *Calcaire*, inspired by the symbolic sonification of the process of the formation and disintegration of limestone cliffs, and Berk Yagli from Cyprus with *The Cycle of Life and Decay*. The work of this young composer has an attractive drive that is more the exception than the rule in this type of composition. The special Czech awards went to Tobiáš Horváth for his ambient, minimalist composition commissioned by the National Gallery to accompany a Baroque painting by Petr Brandl, *The History of Joseph of Egypt*, and Tomáš Pernický with his composition *Postcard from Neo Tokyo*, a soundscape piece.

It is our hope that the next edition of Musica nova will take place in 2025. The competition will adapt to developments in the field. For the last few years, we have been intensively discussing the conditions of composers of this kind of music, which is, on the one hand, demanding, and on the other represents a spawning ground for numerous other branches of sonic and audiovisual production.

CZECH MUSIC EVERYDAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

IN THE WINTER OF 2023–2024

DECEMBER–MARCH

The winter of 2023 and 2024 offered not only premieres of new symphonic, chamber, and choral works but also a stage premiere. Shortly before Christmas, the Brno-based Ensemble Opera Diversa presented a new two-act opera by Ondřej Kyas. *Druhé město* (*The Other City*) is based on the 1993 eponymous novel by Michal Ajvaz, in which the protagonist comes across a mysterious book written in an unknown script in a second-hand bookshop in Prague. The book gradually unveils to him the mystery of a “second city” that exists in parallel to our reality. Kyas’s work brings traditional instruments together with synthesizers, spoken word, video art, and light design.

It must be said that a considerable number of events took place in Moravia and Silesia, and not just in the cultural centres of Brno, Ostrava, and Olomouc – new works were also premiered in Bruntál, Frýdek-Místek, and Boskovice.

Orchestras in Prague premiered several new symphonic works. Two were by Jana Vöröšová: *Pražský kapr* (*Prague Christmas Carp*), presented by the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra at their advent concert, and *Chlapeček a Dálka* (*The Boy and Distance*) for symphony orchestra and children’s choir, performed by the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra. PKF Prague Philharmonia and the Prague Philharmonic Choir premiered Jan Ryant Dřížal’s *Vánoční kantáta* (*Christmas Cantata*), which combines over thirty carols, hymns, and melodies from all corners of Europe.

28 November 2023, PLATO Bauhaus, Ostrava. Hudební současnost (Musical Present). **Franciszek Humel: *Espuma marina*; Pavel Nesit: *Listopad 2018 (November 2018)*; Edvard Šiffauer: *Pohlazení (Caress)* (world premieres).** VientoMarero (Jiří Meca – guitar, Michaela Meca – flute). **Edvard Šiffauer: *Tři polky pro čtyři kytary (Three Polkas for Four Guitars)*, world premiere.** Jiří Meca, Kristýna Hoňková, Pavel Marek, Alena Mecová – guitars.

28 November 2023, Löw-Beer Villa, Brno. **Omar Rojas: *Urban son*; Josef Klíč: *Malinconia invernale* (world premieres).** Ensemble Frizzante, Trio Aperto.

29 November 2023, Church of St Lawrence below Petřín, Prague. Konvergence: fragile-sky. **Tomáš Pálka: *space-silence-spirit* (world premiere).** David Danel – violin, Ondřej Štochl – viola, Egli Prifti – piano. **Michaela Pálka Plachká: *Sky, clouds, mountains* (world premiere).** Egli Prifti – piano.

1 December 2023, Bruntál Elementary Arts School, Bruntál. **Marek Keprt: *Traumeswirren no. 3* (world premiere).** Marek Keprt – piano.

4 December 2023, Venuše ve Švehlovce, Prague. Hudba v souvislostech (Music in Contexts): Coccinelle’s Premieres. **Martin Klusák: *Schovka (Hide-and-Seek)*; Jan Rybář: *6 příběhů pro 5 ženských hlasů a 2 nástroje (6 Stories for 5 female voices and 2 instruments)*; Petra Šuško: *Hudba vzorné domácnosti (The Music of the Exemplary Household)* (world premieres).** Ensemble Coccinelle, Jaroslav Škuta – clarinet, Štěpán Drtina – violoncello.



PHOTO: MAREK OLBRYNIEK

Ondřej Kyas: The Other City

5 December 2023, Church of St Lawrence below Petřín, Prague. Quartet for the End of Time...

Jan Jonáš Starý: Quartet (world premiere). Anna Paulová – clarinet, Tereza Horáková – violin, Dora Hájková – violoncello, Matouš Zukal – piano.

6 and 7 December 2023, Municipal House – Smetana Hall, Prague. Christmas Concert for UNICEF.

Jana Vöröšová: Pražský kapr (Prague Christmas Carp) (world premiere). Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK, conductor: Tomáš Brauner.

7 December 2023, Evangelical Church, Frýdek-Místek. Souznění: Laudamus Te. **Daniel Skála: Rorate coeli desuper (world premiere).** Eva Dřízgová, Veronika Rovná – soprano, AEREA Ensemble, artistic director Vojtěch Zajíc.

9 December 2023, Church of the Holy Spirit, Ostrava-Zábřeh. Hudební současnost: Final Christmas Concert. **Michal Janošik: Credo (world premiere).** Mixed choir of students from Ostrava art schools, choirmaster: Tomáš Stanček.

11 December 2023, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague. COMMUNICATIO | ... musical freedom and collaboration. **Jan Jirucha: For Morton; Lucie Páchová: RUN; Michal Wróblewski: In Unison; Štěpán Janoušek: The Unconsoled; Jan Jirucha: (vibrace nepřítomnosti) / (vibration of absence) (world premieres).** Lucie Páchová – voice, Štěpán Janoušek, Jan Jirucha – trombone, Michal Wróblewski – saxophone, BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábek.

12 December 2023, Grand Café Orient, Prague. Sadness: Čapek & Scheinpflugová. **Kateřina Horká: Vyrovnání for alto and piano (world premiere).** Monika Jägerová – alto, Vojtěch Červenka – piano.

16 December 2023, Co.Labs socialspace, Brno. **Ondřej Kyas: The Other City (world premiere).** Libretto: Ondřej Kyas based on Michal Ajvaz's eponymous novel. Directed by: Kateřina Křivánková, conductor: Gabriela Tardonová. Aleš Janiga, Jana Vondru, Libor Skokan, Alžběta Symerská, Aneta Podracká Bendová, Michael Robotka, Tomáš Chloupek, Pavel Slivka, Lukáš Rieger, Ensemble Opera Diversa.

16 December 2023, Boulder Adventist Church, Boulder, Colorado, USA. **Sylvie Bodorová: Concerto di Transflautato (premiere of an orchestral version).** Cobus du Toit – flute, Boulder Chamber Orchestra, conductor: Bahman Saless.

17 December 2023, Evangelical Church, Boskovice, 18 December 2023, Church of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Brno-Tuřany. **Mario Buzzi: iARBOR? (world premiere).** Brno Contemporary Orchestra, conductor: Pavel Šnajdr

18 December 2023, Conference and Social Center "House for Professed", Prague. PKF – Prague Philharmonia: Chamber Series K. **Jaroslav Pelikán: Confessiones II (world premiere).** Lucie Hilscherová – mezzo-soprano, Jindřich Pavliš – clarinet, Ondřej Martinovský – viola, Miroslav Sekera – piano.

20 and 21 December 2023, Žofín Palace, Prague. Advent Concert. **Jan Ryant Dřízal: Christmas Cantata (world premiere).** Karolína Levková – soprano, Aleš Briscein – tenor, Roman Hoza –

baritone, Prague Philharmonic Choir, PKF – Prague Philharmonia, conductor: Lukáš Vasilek.

16 January 2024, Rudolfinum – Suk Hall, Prague. Czech Chamber Music Society. **Ondřej Štochl: Anticlimax for String Quartet (world premiere)**. Doležal Quartet (Václav Dvořák, Alexej Rosík – violin, Martin Adamovič – viola, Vojtěch Urban – violoncello).

20 January 2024, Stadttheater, Bern, Switzerland. Bühnen Bern. **Leoš Janáček: Jenůfa (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Eva-Maria Höckmayr, music director: Nicholas Carter. Following performances: 28 Jan, 4 and 27 Feb, and 3 and 26 Mar 2024.

29 January 2024, New Town Hall, Prague. EKSTASE 2.0. **Martin Hybler: Five Sonnets on Shakespeare (world premiere)**. Alžběta Poláčková – soprano, Vilém Veverka – oboe, Kateřina Englichová – harp. **Petr Wajsar: Kraftveverk (world premiere)**. Vilém Veverka – oboe, Kateřina Englichová – harp.

10 February 2024, Stadttheater, Bielefeld, Germany. Theater Bielefeld. **Leoš Janáček: Katja Kabanowa (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Georg Zlabinger, music director: Gregor Rot. Following performances: 14 Feb, 1 and 17 Mar, 5 Apr, and 3 May 2024.

15 February 2024, Vesmír Cinema, Ostrava. **Ian Mikyska: Drops; mist; rain (world premiere commissioned by the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava to celebrate its 70th anniversary)**. Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, conductor: Lucie Leguay.

24 February 2024, Spanish Synagogue, Prague. Everlasting Hope. **Ari Dvořák: Petríchor (world premiere of the winning piece of the festival's composition competition)**. Bennewitz Quartet.

26 February 2024, former headquarters of the district committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, now the seat of the Public Defender of Rights, Brno. Ministry of Truth. **Jiří Austerlitz Adámek: WE ARE THE POWER (exorcism of the dictator by Pussy Riot) – world premiere**. Boca Loca Lab / Jiří Austerlitz Adámek, Jana Vondrů, Vojtěch Šembera – voice, Kateřina Čisarová, Vendula Holíčková, Bára Mišíková – vocals, Brno Contemporary Orchestra, conductor: Pavel Šnajdr.

29 February 2024, Bethlehem Chapel, Prague. **Jana Vöröšová: Chlapeček a Dálka (The Boy and Distance) for children's choir and orchestra (world premiere)**. Czech Radio Children's Choir, choirmaster: Věra Hrdinková, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Alena Hron.

5 March 2024, Atrium Žižkov, Prague. New Music in the Atrium. **Peter Graham: Trio; Luboš Mrkvíčka: Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano (world premieres)**. Neues Klaviertrio Dresden.

5 March 2024, House of Music – Pilsen Conservatory, Pilsen. Šumava Musical Perspectives. **Jiří Bezděk: Pár kapek z Boží lékárny (A Few Drops from God's Pharmacy) on texts by Romana Schuldová (world premiere)**. Veronika Kaiserová – soprano, Natálie Šmausová – mezzosoprano, NeoKlasik orchestr, conductor: Václav Dlask.

5 March 2024, Bohuslav Martinů Hall, Prague. Anna Paulová's Doctoral Concert. **Kateřina Horká: Three Miniatures for Solo Clarinet (world premiere)**. Anna Paulová – clarinet.

11 March 2024, Rudolfinum, Prague. **Lukáš Hurník: Radio, a symphonic documentary for the 100th anniversary of Czech Radio (world premiere)**. Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Olari Elts.

12 March 2024, Korunní Chapel, Prague-Vinohrady. **Jan Holý: Jen Tam, Kde Chybuje Kdo (world premiere of the winning piece of the "Platform for Singing" composition competition)**. Kühn Mixed Choir, conductor: Jakub Píkla.

18 March 2024, City Campus, University of Ostrava, 19 March 2024, Studio Koncertowe Polskiego Radia Katowice, Poland, 20 March 2024, New Synagogue, Žilina, Slovakia. Sounds of Diversity.

Markéta Dvořáková: For 14; Petra Šuško: Ex-press-sure?; Daniel Skála: Conjunctions of Intangibility (world premieres). Sounds of Diversity Ensemble, conductor: Matej Sloboda / Daniel Skála.

24 March 2024, 6pm, Prague. Prague Music Performance: Six Premieres. **Jan Dobiáš: Dividing the Same (world premiere)**. PMP Ensemble, Doodles choir.

27 March 2024, Church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary, Brno. TENEBRAE I. **Lukáš Hurník – the first nine responsories; Zdeněk Klauda – the first three Lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah and Miserere (world premieres)**.

28 March 2024, Church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary, Brno. TENEBRAE II. **Tomáš Krejčí – the second nine responsories; Jaroslav Pelikán – the second three Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah and Miserere (world premieres)**.

29 March 2024, Church of the Assumption of Virgin Mary, Brno. TENEBRAE III. **Ondřej Můčka – the third nine responsories; Jiří Miroslav Procházka – the third three Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah and Miserere (world premieres)**. Kristýna Filová, Zuzana Čurmová, Alžběta Symerská, Ondřej Holub, Jiří Miroslav Procházka – voice, Zdeněk Klauda, Tomáš Krejčí, Ondřej Můčka – organ.

Hidden on Tape

Part 3

In this third installment of a series of selected translations from Hidden on Tape (Ukryto v pásech), an anthology of new texts on the history of Czech and Czechoslovak electronic music, composer and researcher Miloš Haase explores two areas that, while not the principal focus, remain integral to the field: academic reflections of electronic music from the 1950s until today, and the role of notation in electronic music.

Academic Studies of Electroacoustic Music

There are only a few rigorous journal articles by Czech researchers dedicated exclusively to electroacoustic music (or, in the language of the time, *concrete music*, *electronic music*, and *music for magnetic tape*), and just two book-length monographs, one by Vladimír Lébl (1966) and another by Lenka Dohnalová (2001). All of these publications, however, are of comparable quality to similar publications abroad. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the fundamental source for all relevant information on the theory, methods, and compositions of electroacoustic music around the world (divided into concrete music and electronic music) was the German encyclopedia *Klangstruktur der Musik (The Sonic Structure of Music)*, published in 1955.

The first reflection of electroacoustic music in the academic journal *Hudební rozhledy (Musical Perspectives)* was published in 1955: *Poznámka o*

elektronické a konkrétní hudbě (A Note on Electronic and Concrete Music), complemented by a sample from a score to an electroacoustic piece. The author, Jan Matějček (born 1926), a composer, translator, and one-time director of the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra, admits to never having heard neither electronic nor concrete music, yet has no qualms about judging it to consist of “soulless sonic combinations without any imagination that even go as far as to abandon the existing musical system”. As a bonus, he offers an erroneously labelled extract from the score to Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Studie I* (not *Studie II*, as he states in the caption), and in order to appropriately impress his readers with the impression of a knowledgeable expert, he appended a broad selection of literature generally unavailable in Czechoslovakia at the time, which he himself had probably never laid eyes on.

*Quo vadis, musica?*¹ an informative study by Jaromír Pačt (1927–1994) published in *Kultura*, expresses the learned musicologist's fear of a “dehumanisation of music”, as did many cultural periodicals from the “free world”. It is clear that he studied *Klangstruktur der Musik* in detail, as he used two illustrations from the encyclopedia: Oskar Sala, shown next to a mixtur traultonium (a synthesiser invented in Berlin in 1930) and a page from the score to Stockhausen's *Studie II*. Pačt's position on electroacoustic music is skeptical, in accordance with the deep-rooted division of sound into tones and noises and the persisting concept of the linear development of art, within which the new, the “progressive”, overcomes and displaces “the old, outdated by development”. He therefore considers it necessary to “protect the values under attack”. The text makes it clear that its author finds it difficult, to say the least, to come to terms with the “emancipation of dissonance and noise”, but at least he makes an effort to understand the issue and avoids vulgar ideological argumentation.

Electronic fatalism? Very well, let us concede that there is something positive and useful in electronic music and concrete music. And what of us? Let us wait a little with experiments of this kind. And let us not be ashamed to have been left behind. Our musical tradition and musical present do not rush us. And new music from Cologne and Paris is not such an indispensable discovery as to deprive us and slow us down. Quo vadis, musica? Czech Music, frightened for a moment by unknown noises coming from the deep forests of Šumava, whispers: “Further: To man. To his heart...”

In 1958, *Hudební rozhledy* published an informative article by Milan Novotný, a sound engineer at the Barrandov film studios, titled *Hudba očima techniky*² (*Music Through the Eyes of Technology*), presenting the first serious factual information about electroacoustic music on the pages of *Hudební rozhledy*. Nevertheless, the editors felt it necessary to introduce the text with a comment that alerted the reader to the fact that in the case of concrete and electronic music, “it is not quite right to speak of ‘music’, as these are, essentially, broadly conceived experimental acoustic-sonic tests of electronic technology”, going on to explain why it was even printed at all: “We cannot

do without timely information,” the editors claim, “in order to examine the use of [these technologies] and fight against all Western attempts at their decadent use in the service of the further formalist dehumanisation of music”. Today, the number of scare quotes added by the editors seem amusing, but their aim at the time was to make it clear that however rigorous and seriously-minded the text it, readers must take it with a (rather large) pinch of salt.

In the same year as Novotný's study was first published, *Věda a život* (*Science and Life*) put out an elementary, informative text by musicologist Ivan Poledňák, *Elektronická a konkrétní hudba* (*Electronic and Concrete Music*), aimed at a broader expert audience,³ and Vladimír Lébl presented his rigorous and comprehensive overview of electroacoustic and concrete music.⁴ A number of texts, mostly containing partial and personal information, were written as reports from Expo Bruxelles 1958 (composers Ilja Hurník and Josef Páleníček, scriptwriter for the Czechoslovak exhibition Jindřich Santar, and others).

Most of the articles concerning electroacoustic music or new musical trends (and not only ones from the West) published in *Hudební rozhledy* are not even worth mentioning, as their authors present critical assessments on the basis of second-hand information, basing their misleading deductions either on ideology, their own ignorance, or personal bias. An exemplary ideological pamphlet is *Poučenie z hudobného futurizmu a z „konkrétnej hudby“ pre postoj k experimentu*⁵ (*Lessons from Musical Futurism and “Concrete Music” for our Stance Towards Experimentation*) by the Slovak music theorist Eugen Šimúnek, which attests only to a tenacious and blind devotion to the official ideology.

Starting in the early 1960s, *Hudební rozhledy* also published a number of remarkable studies (by Jan Rychlík, Miloslav Kabeláč, Vladimír Lébl, Václav Kučera, and Jaroslav Volek, and also, surprisingly at the time, Antonín Sychra) reflecting on the theme from various perspectives with minimal yet easy to spot interventions by the watchful eye of the editors, who knew what could be printed and what could only be discussed behind closed doors.

Hudební věda (Musicology), an academic journal, was first published in 1964, as was *Opus musicum* in Brno, which occasionally published articles and studies on electroacoustic music (Daniel Forró) in relation to new music. In 1989, *Opus musicum* published a remarkable critical study by Jarmila Doubravová, *Bílé místo muzikologie*⁶ (*The Blank Space of Musicology*), which, after years of silence, presented a critical outline of the first comprehensive perspective on electroacoustic music in Czechoslovakia, with the aim of alerting experts to the existence of an important field of musical creation, which, while not directly prohibited, was constantly being shunted to the margins of the musical life of society.

The first book to include information on electroacoustic music was published in 1962: Ctírad Kohoutek's (1929–2011) *Novodobé skladebné teorie západoevropské hudby*,⁷ (*Modern Compositional Techniques in Western European Music*), published in its second edition, revised and supplemented, under the title *Novodobé skladebné směry v hudbě*⁸ (*Modern Compositional Styles in Music*), which also contained an extensive chapter on all contemporary forms of electroacoustic music, for which Kohoutek proposes the umbrella term *technical music*. The same term was also used by composer and theorist Jan Kapr (1914–1988) in his book *Konstanty*⁹ (*Constants*) and later theoretical works. A chapter by composer Vladimír Šrámek about contemporary musical trends in Václav Holzknecht's popular *Kniha o hudbě*¹⁰ (*A Book About Music*) also comprehensively presents basic information about electroacoustic music.

The authors of both monographs summarised information about electroacoustic music whilst also trying to place Czech autonomous electroacoustic music in the international context. The first of these monographs, published in 1966, was by musicologist Vladimír Lébl (1928–1987): *Elektronická hudba* (*Electronic Music*).¹¹ Accompanied by an eponymous LP record with audio examples, the book transparently presents comprehensive and relevant information about electroacoustic music and studio work in the analogue context internationally, including computer music, and it also mentions developing possibilities for such production in Czechoslovakia, which he later summarised in more accessible form in the serialised *Malá*

fonopraktika (*A Brief Introduction to Sonic Practice*). Lébl uses the terminology of the period – concrete music, electronic music, and music for magnetic tape – but he also defines his own umbrella term, *electronic music*, which was in use in Czechoslovakia until 1989, when it was replaced by the generally accepted term *electroacoustic music*.

The second publication of comparable quality only came out in 2001: Lenka Dohnalová's *Estetické modely evropské elektroakustické hudby a elektroakustická hudba v ČR*¹² (*Aesthetic Models of European Electroacoustic Music and Electroacoustic Music in the Czech Republic*). With the advantage of hindsight at the beginning of the digital age, Dohnalová managed to methodologically refine her perspective on the material under examination, which belonged to the already concluded analogue era, summarising it all under a comprehensive perspective that had been lacking in Czech musicology whilst also outlining the terminology and taxonomy of electroacoustic music with a high degree of precision. The first half of the book is dedicated to the principal figures of European electroacoustic music, the second to major Czech proponents, grouping them into well-arranged sectors, critically assessing these, and adding her own findings. She also included her own study of a particular poetics of electroacoustic music (Miroslav Hlaváč's *Fontana cantans*), a remarkable analytical perspective on the compositional theory of Czech composers Alois Piňos and Zbyněk Vostřák, and, in conclusion, an index of autonomous electroacoustic compositions created in Czech studios. A valuable part of this work is a CD-R database of Czech electroacoustic music.¹³ Unlike Lébl's *Electronic Music*, Dohnalová's work did not receive the appropriate editorial care, meaning the form of the book is pitiful, and not only in regards to the graphic design.

Musicologist Miroslav Kaduch (1938–2005) put together an index of names of composers, programmers, technicians, musicologists, music critics, and music journalists with links to electroacoustic music in the Czech and Slovak context,¹⁴ using a questionnaire sent by post as a source of information. He published his index twice, the second edition (corrected and extended) contains a hundred and sixty three versions and is also available in digital form.¹⁵

Electroacoustic music was always considered part of new music, the new compositional techniques and movements that appeared internationally within contemporary music. A comprehensive perspective on these techniques was presented in a study by Vladimír Lébl and Ladislav Mokřý in the 1965 anthology *Nové cesty hudby I* (*New Paths of Music I*).¹⁶ An important contribution to the use of computers formed part of the same volume: Antonín Sychra's *Hudba a kybernetika* (*Music and Cybernetics*). The author considered a computer analysis of a sample of folk songs the beginning of a process of much greater complexity, with the computer fulfilling both roles, analytic and synthetic. In Sychra's conception, the application of cybernetics to music was to improve both our understanding of the laws behind the elementary principles of musical structure and also its retroactive algorithmic modelling and synthesis. Sychra knew the work of his teacher, the linguist and literary theorist Jan Mukařovský, and had already spent some time studying Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* as well as publications by D. A. Bell, Colin Cherry, and Abraham A. Moles. He attended the Lejaren A. Hiller's private lecture in Prague in 1960, as well as further lectures (*Information Theory and Musical Analysis*) at the Polish Radio studios in Warsaw in 1961. Those interested in computer-operated electroacoustic music studios had at their disposal a Czech translation of Hiller's study *Electronic Music*.¹⁷ In his 1967 book *Francouzská moderní hudba* (*Modern French Music*), musicologist and diplomat Vladimír Štěpánek (1921–1997) included an interview with Olivier Messiaen in which the composer mentions working at the GRMC studio on *Timbres-durées*, and also his own translation of Pierre Schaeffer's study *Towards an Experimental Music*.¹⁸ The 1970 anthology *Nové cesty hudby II*¹⁹ (*New Paths of Music II*) included a translation of Stockhausen's essay *Moment Form*. 1971 saw the publication of a Czech translation of Pierre Schaeffer's 1967 *La musique concrète*,²⁰ intended primarily for electroacoustic music seminars at the Paris Conservatory.

A collaboration between composer and theorist Vladimír Godár and Juraj Ďuriš from the Experimental Studio of the Slovak Radio in Bratislava resulted in a monographic double issue of *Slovenská hudba* (*Slovak Music*)

titled *Slovenská elektroakustická hudba* (*Slovak Electroacoustic Music*),²¹ presenting a comprehensive and well-documented overview of activities in Slovakia beginning with the pioneering autonomous compositions by Roman Berger, Ilja Zeljenka, and Pavol Šimai all the way to 1996. There are other publications about electroacoustic music in Czechoslovakia that have not been included in this overview. They are either unavailable, like Jan Novotný's oft-cited but unpublished study *Studia elektroakustické hudby v ČSSR – přehled a vývoj do roku 1980*²² (*Electroacoustic Music Studios in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic – An Overview and Developments Up to 1980*), which seems to have been a historically rigorous work, or studies illustrating documents selected ad hoc through personal opinions from a narrow sample of respondents gathered through oral research, like Libor Zajíček's work.²³

Today, classical electroacoustic music is a completed history. The terminology has changed too. The original experimental and pioneering form of classical electroacoustic music is continued today by acousmatic music and radio art. The preceding "focus on sound" has been replaced by a "visual turn", in practice as well as theory, under the weight of visuality.

Notating Electronic Music

The nature of electroacoustic music production demands the existence of neither a score nor any other notation, and if it does exist, it generally serves primarily as a preliminary set of instructions for technical realisation in an electroacoustic music studio. After the piece is realised, another score is usually developed, whose purposes include documentation, presentation by the composer, archiving, and study.

The fact that notation is superfluous in electronic music is part of the reason why many theorists refused to even call it music at first, as music, along with literature, dance, and – partially – architecture is an art that makes use of notation. Musical notation, in the European sense of the word, is not only a message about the existence of a work that can be realised more or less precisely with the aid of this score – rather, it unambiguously identifies such a work and also supplies a referential foundation for its appraisal and the appraisal of all its interpretations. The absence of notation, then, the division of the “concrete” from the “abstract”, was a considerable and often insurmountable problem in establishing electroacoustic music as a new musical form from the perspective of music theory and aesthetics.

Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, founders of the *musique concrète* tradition in Paris, first used notation ad hoc according to their needs, but always with reference to the nature of the piece. Their scores were not systematic and served only as documentation. They mostly focused on listening (*solfège*), aural skills, and work with sound through recordings of sound objects in their audible form. The examples of notation often cited in the literature are mostly academic examples used in expert discussions about how *musique concrète* can be notated with greater or

lesser precision, or examples of sonic parameters in two or three dimensions. Mostly, though, these examples present notation intended for the production of a recording of sound objects performed on classical musical instruments, or else supplementary technical schemas.

In time, the Elektronische Musik studio, established in 1951 at the West German Radio in Cologne (Werner Meyer-Eppeler, Herbert Eimert, Fritz Winckel, Karlheinz Stockhausen), would come to develop a methodology for notating electroacoustic music by expressing the development of the sound through a frequency and dynamics table with a shared timeline, or else by marking sections in the corresponding lengths of magnetic tape, depending on the speed of rotation. The principles of a demonstrative analytic representation of a musical progression, only used in academic musicology before then, correspond immediately to the principles of European writing systems and of classical musical notation, which is why the notational approaches of the Cologne school developed mostly through contributions by the Universal Edition publishing company, which put out a print version of a sample score for Stockhausen’s *Studie II* in 1956.²⁴ Miroslav Hlaváč (1923–2008) was one of the Czech composers who consistently used this approach for all of his electroacoustic compositions. Still in 1956, Franco Evangelisti (1926–1980) improved upon Stockhausen’s notation of *Studie II* by adding a clear expression of sonic bands in his piece *Incontri di fasce sonore*.²⁵ This style of notation bore a great influence on Polish composers – in 1960s Poland, scores for electroacoustic pieces were frequently published along with an EP that contained both the resultant piece and the initial material. These records were also available in Czechoslovakia. Gottfried Michael Koenig,

who would go on to establish the electroacoustic studio in Utrecht, went in the opposite direction and gave up trying to depict pieces visually, and, in his piece *Essay*,²⁶ provided a detailed verbal description of the realisation process, including precisely defined parameters. Using these instructions, the piece can be performed repeatedly, presuming that one has access to identical equipment to that found in Koenig's studio at the time of realisation.

In contrast to the academic precision found in the work of the Cologne school, Italian composers including Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono, and Bruno Maderna working at the Fonologia musicale studio in Milan created music directly, without the use of precise notation that researchers could use to study or document, nor did they spend time theoretically justifying their methods or explaining their poetics, yet their contribution to establishing electroacoustic music as a form of art was crucial, even inspiring philosophical reflections on the nature of contemporary art.²⁷ The only documentation is the piece itself, existing as a recording on magnetic tape and then multiplied by copying. At most, there is notation for recording the starting material, if this was to be performed by a vocal or instrumental group or soloist. In its early days, American tape music worked along similar principles, being the first to present an unlimited, pluralistic perspective on recorded sonic structures, contrasting sharply to the European attempts with their focus on unification and precision.

Computer music, which arose from the application of information theory to music, and which makes use of the established conventions of the formalisation and numerical expression of various elements. It is independent of musical style and does not create a new style in itself. The application of information theory to music, however, can open up entirely new creative possibilities or allow artists to work with elements of all known and analysed compositional systems to create new music through the use of specialised software.

For his 1964 composition *Mixtur für Orchester, Sinusgeneratoren und Rigmulatoren*, Karlheinz Stockhausen created remarkable notation by connecting the syntactic characters of seemingly

incongruous notational systems (classical, proportional, and framework-based) to relay instructions for live electronics in real time, also capable of including other media. Its utterly clear form also influenced other composers – in Czechoslovakia, for instance, Zbyněk Vostřák (1920–1985) used elements of Stockhausen's notation in several pieces.

In Czechoslovak electroacoustic studios, notation took three principal forms: verbal, symbolic, and graphic. When working with synthesisers, standard notation with additional notes was used. In the late 1980s, the computer programme became another form of notation.

Verbal notation expresses the work using words, defining it through explanations ranging in form from metaphors to exact definitions of the production process, including a description of the technical parameters of various apparatuses. Symbolic notation represents the horizontal and vertical organisation of various symbols that are defined in the legend and are most reminiscent of graphic scores. Graphic notation represents an even more precise form, transcribing the piece's progression in all the basic parameters through Cartesian coordinates, usually on graph paper, synchronously combining several layers. "Those are the two extreme situations," says Čestmír Kadlec, sound engineer at the studio in Plzeň, "one is that the composer has an idea in his head and he tells me that's good, that's not, and the second is a project that has been worked out in great detail, but it might not end up sounding as nice as the composer had imagined".²⁸

Václav Kašlík (1917–1989) uses an interesting form of verbal description to notate the electroacoustic components of his opera based on Karel Čapek's novel *Krakatit* (1957–1960). In the section titled "Performance Notes", he writes:

I complement a standard chamber orchestra with electrophonic sounds and various tones, sounds, and noises processed by electro-acoustic means. These are played back by two record players located behind the stage and connected by a metronome, or else making use of a televised conductor, and a number of speakers located, if possible, throughout the auditorium and the corridors. As no precise system of notation exists for electrophonic sounds yet, I describe these sounds in terms of colour and dramatic content, and, of course, I notate the rhythms precisely. Their precise pitch

and colour, however, will be determined by the conductor. This is a modern variation on Baroque or jazz practice, with the interpreting artist taking part, to a certain degree, in the compositional completion of the work.

And, as an eminently practical man of the theatre, he adds an *ossia*: “If the electrophonic sounds cannot be produced with the aid of electrophonic devices, they can be replaced by electroacoustically processed sounds of various origins, as long as their dramatic content is maintained.”²⁹ Let us add that in 1961, shortly after the opera *Krakatit* was broadcast on television, Václav Kašlík directed the premiere of Luigi Nono’s *Intolleranza 1960* at the La Fenice theatre in Venice. His experiences in staging this multimedia performance led him to make his own version of the electroacoustic episodes of *Krakatit* at the VÚRT studios. These were then used for the stage premiere in Ostrava in May 1961.

The workflow of studio work on an electroacoustic music composition in an analogue environment can be expressed as follows (following considerable simplification): based on the intention of the piece they wish to create, the composer either selects archival sound elements or records new ones. If they use pure electronics, they prepare and record tones using generators. The remainder of the process is then more or less identical. The sonic possibilities of the material are verified in the studio and the composer’s idea is further specified (and often transformed) with the aid of the realiser (sound engineer), gradually creating an aggregate temporal sketch divided into tracks – this will serve as an *aide-memoire* during the final mixing process. After the composition is finished, the sketch with this recording will either be archived or discarded, as the work already exists as a recording; an immutable original. In some cases, it is the realiser who creates the montage sketch. Some composers develop a documentation score or graphic score upon completion of the piece, intended for archiving, study purposes, or simply listening – the *Hörpartitur* (literally listening score) is the second point of contact with the “graphic scores” of the 1960s and ’70s.

Pieces that include instruments make different demands on the precision of synchronisation among the two layers. In such cases, a simplified

score for the electroacoustic component of the piece with added temporal information is practically a necessity for the preparation and performance of such a piece.

Traditional notation is inappropriate for electroacoustic music, and, in most cases, outright useless. There are, however, also justified exceptions. For his 1965 piece *Šifry* (*Cyphers*) for piano, percussion, and electronic sounds,³⁰ Jan Kapr intentionally used traditional notation with only a few modifications, as the concept of the piece is based on the idea of a dialogue between the living performers on the stage and their artificial “partners”. This partner can take the place of both instrumentalists – a sonic version of the principle of the *Laterna magika* by Alfréd Radok and Josef Svoboda. This was further highlighted by the composer’s use of purely electronic material, both tonal (which corresponded to the piano) and non-tonal (corresponding to the percussion part). A similar approach is used in Alois Piňos’s 1964 *Concerto for Orchestra and Magnetic Tape*,³¹ a piece that involves two orchestras, one real and the other imaginary, with the latter playing its processed part from a recording. In the published score, the notation of this electronic orchestra is printed in red. The manuscript to Kapr’s *Šifry* has the electronic part in blue, but when the piece was published, the publisher simply ignored the composer’s colour scheme.

The situation in Czechoslovakia changed after 1970. Plans had to be presented for consideration in advance if one wished to work in a studio: a “prescriptive score” would be developed for orientation, that is, a relatively precise project for the whole of the piece. It might take the form of a synoptic graphic depiction accompanied by a description of the intended sonic material and its processing, perhaps also detailing other parameters, such as the movement of sound in space. A necessary components of such scores was an aptly formulated verbal description of the compositional intention. When using pure electronics, composers would mostly use synoptic visualisations on graph paper in two systems, with the top system determining the pitch in Hertz and the bottom the dynamics in decibels. Composers working with computers would simply present the entire programme.

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Benjamin Britten**Te Deum in C, A Ceremony of Carols, Hymn to St Cecilia****Martinů Voices, Lukáš Vaselek - choirmaster.**

Production: Petr Ostrouchov. Text: EN, CZ. Recorded: 2023, Bohuslav Martinů Hall, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Published: 2023.

TT: 42:09. DDD. 1 CD Animal Music ANI 124-2.

A publishing miracle has occurred: a small Czech label has put out an album essential for Britten enthusiasts around the world. The central *Ceremony of Carols* is complemented by other works of Britten's that are somewhat unjustly sidelined – in fact, they are compositional gems, particularly the *Té Deum in C*. Nevertheless, the attention of most listeners will probably be directed towards *A Ceremony of Carols*, a piece that has made its way deep into many repertoires. Hearing this music performed live was captivating, but the benefits of a recording and high-quality playback equipment is that one feels as if one were in the midst of the choir, singing along with them. **Martinů Voices** is an excellent group, more than a match for the best chamber groups in Europe and beyond, and I must emphasise that while this is partly due to the vocal talents of all thirteen members, it is also greatly down to **Lukáš Vaselek**, undoubtedly the best Czech choirmaster today, an artist with strong leadership and charisma who has reached a level at which he can rehearse and perform virtually any large-scale vocal orchestral



work, as attested to last year by two performances of Britten's *War Requiem*. (Perhaps there is a personal fascination with the legacy of this most significant British composer?) Interpretively, there is nothing to criticise on this disk. The recording is filled with imagination, every detail of all three scores is chiseled to perfection, the works are proportionally balanced, the homogeneity of the vocal sound is unbelievable, the solos are pleasant. Also excellent are the contributions of harpist **Kateřina Englichová** (*A Ceremony of Carols*) and organist **Daniela Valtová Kosinová** (*Té Deum*). I could write numerous paragraphs about the many beautiful details, but that would be bringing owls to Athens. Listening to the Martinů Voices is pure joy, especially if the quality of the audio is at an international level. This is another gem in Animal Music's already highly valuable catalogue, one that certainly does not stick to the beaten track. The album also has extra-musical qualities: subtle design by Studio Najbrt and an erudite commentary by Lucy Walker. If we are currently debating whether the Czech Philharmonic is part of the world class or not, then we can be sure that Martinů Voices are already attained Parnassus... It might make sense to criticise the recording's duration, which is closer to that of an LP disc, but any disturbance to this concept would have been a mistake. We could also discuss the quality and registral options of the organ in the Martinů Hall, but where else should a group bearing the composer's name record? Maximum results were achieved under the given technical conditions, and the result is the best Czech vocal recording of 2023.

Luboš Stehlík

**Jan Novák****Concertos****Concentus biugis for piano four hands and string orchestra
Chorae vernaes for solo flute, string orchestra, harp, and celeste
Concerto for two pianos and orchestra****Dora Novak-Wilmington, Karel Košárek - piano, Clara Nováková - flute, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Tomáš Netopil - conductor.**

Text: CZ, EN, GE, FR. Recorded: 2022, Studio 1, Czech Radio, Prague.

Published: 2023. TT: 71:46. 1 CD Supraphon SU4331-2.

Composer Jan Novák (1921–1984), a native of Brno, was an excellent pianist, as was his wife, Eliška, a professional pianist and sought-after teacher. As they frequently performed together as concert pianists, it comes as no surprise that Novák's compositional oeuvre contains numerous pieces for piano duo. This album presents two of the most interesting and appealing works in this area: the *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra* and *Concentus biugis for Piano Four Hands and String Orchestra*. The three-movement *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra* was premiered by the Nováks on April 14th, 1955 in Brno. The audience reception was favourable, but the party critics were merciless, their recommendation being that the composer should devote more time to the ideas of party ideologues of socialist realism: Andrei Zhdanov in the Soviet Union and Zdeněk

Nejedlý in Czechoslovakia. *Concentus biiugis* – also in three movements – is twenty years younger than the concerto for two pianos, composed when Novák and his family were already living in exile. The word “biiugis” in the title is Latin for a two-horse cart, a reference to the two players at a single keyboard. Novák also included a quote on the final page of his score that refers to a cart drawn by two lions, as mentioned in the tenth book of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. The virtuosically conceived piano parts in both concertos clearly show that they were written by an experienced pianist. The soloists in both works are the composer’s daughter, **Dora Novák-Wilmington** (who studied with Rudolf Firkušný, among others) and **Karel Košárek**. Both are excellent pianists with virtuosic technique and their coordination is perfect even in the most demanding sections. In the outer movements of both concertos, we appreciate not only the technical brilliance of both performers but also their excellent rhythmic feeling (the entertaining hints of jazz in the final movement of the two-piano concerto, the Bartókian opening of the final movement of the piano four hands concerto). No less effective are the slow middle movements. The subtly coloured free movement of the concerto for two pianos often invites us to dream, the *Lento* of the four hands concerto surprises us with reminiscences of Moravian folklore. Furthermore, both these slow movements seem to suggest some extra-musical content hiding behind them, and thus inadvertently remind the listener that before 1968, when he emigrated, Novák was one of the most successful composers of film music in Czechoslovakia. Nestled among these two concertos for two pianists,

the publisher included Novák’s flute concerto, *Choreae vernaes* (Spring Dances). Novák composed the work in 1977 for his daughter, flautist Clara, in a chamber version for flute and guitar. A flute and piano version was created a little later, and finally, in 1980, a version for flute, string orchestra, harp, and celeste. Following their departure from Czechoslovakia, the Novák family spent many years in Italy, so it comes as no surprise that there are considerable Italian influences in this piece, occasionally even seasoned with more exotic sounds. The recording has a mark of authenticity, as the solo part is performed by Clara Nováková, for whom the work was written. And it is no exaggeration to say that she is an ideal performer. Her flute has a beautiful, soft, honey-like sound. She presents the concerto as if singing, lightly, her playing seeming almost carefree at times, as if playing the flute was the easiest thing in the world. It is truly a joy to listen to her. The **Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra** and **Tomáš Netopil** are excellent partners to all three soloists. The orchestral component is considerably limited in the piano four-hands concerto and *Choreae vernaes* – only the strings play in the former piece, joined by the harp and celeste in the second – but even with such limited opportunities, the musicians managed to get the most out of the score. The concerto for two pianos features a full orchestra (including an extended percussion section) and both the orchestra and conductor appear in the best possible light. All three of Novák’s composition on this CD are very approachable for listeners. As with other works by Novák, we cannot miss the strong influence of his teacher, Bohuslav Martinů (particularly marked in the closing movements of the two

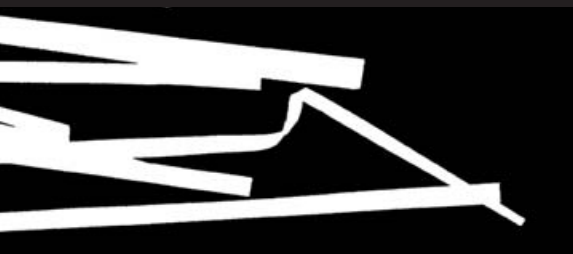
piano concertos). However, we must also admire the composer’s remarkable ear for colour in orchestration, his melodic invention, and especially his optimism regarding life, which is so clear in all three pieces that we will enjoy returning to this recording. The high standard of the recording is maintained by the booklet, which contains an erudite and well-crafted text by Martin Flašar and many remarkable photographs. The striking cover is adorned by a reproduction of a silver ancient relief – as we look closer, we see a golden cart drawn by two lions.

Věroslav Němec

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