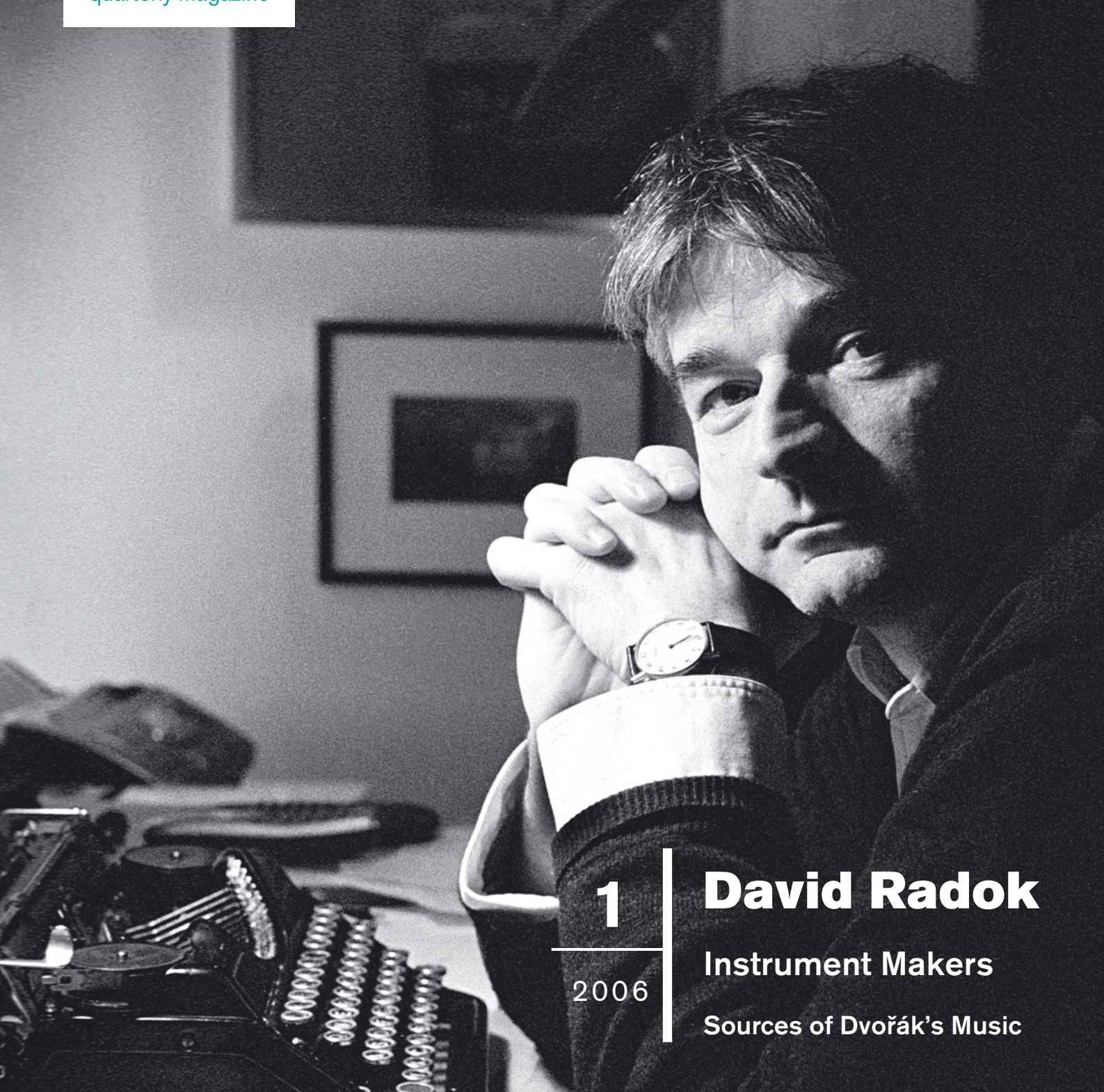


czech music

quarterly magazine



1

2006

David Radok

Instrument Makers

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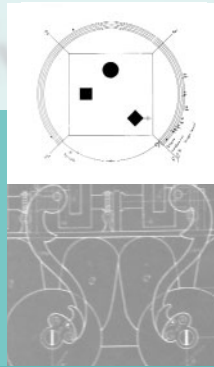
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czech music

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editorial



Dear Reading

A major theme in this issue of Czech Music is the manufacture of musical instruments in the Czech Republic. When we look back on the history of instrument-making here, it is hard not to feel a certain nostalgia and a certain bitterness. In the Austro-Hungarian period and in the inter-war period under the First Czechoslovak Republic this was a country with literally hundreds of instrument makers of all kinds, from the smallest to world famous firms. The communist nationalisation programme after 1948 and replacement of private enterprise by central planning had devastating consequences for the music instrument industry, just as it had for the rest of the economy. There were, it is true, a few exceptions that remained capable of competing on world markets in terms of quality, but these were truly exceptions and – above all – they cannot be used as arguments for the theory that is still heard too often, that “actually nothing so very terrible happened”. Since the revolution of 1989 things have changed and there are reasons for optimism, but the threat posed by cheap Asian manufactures is becoming ever more real.

The interview with the opera and theatre director David Radok gives me great pleasure. Not just because this remarkable and versatile artist tends to avoid publicity and only rarely agrees to interviews, but because of the nice interview itself. Starting with this issue you will no longer find the Profiles supplement, but we shall be continuing to publish material of the kind that has appeared in the supplement over the last years, and simply putting it in the magazine, which will therefore be somewhat thicker. Finally I would like to draw your attention to the fact that you can order older numbers of Czech Music – if they are still available, we shall be happy to send them to you. You will find a list of contents of the magazine in past years at our new web pages www.czech-music.net. Our new e-mail is info@czech-music.net.

See you again in May

PETR BAKLA
EDITOR

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David Radok

Is the electric guitar a memento of your rocker beginnings?

I bought it from a guitarist in New York.

Do you play it when you want to relax from opera?

Something like that. Only in this quiet Vinohrady house I can't really go at it at full blast or the neighbours would complain. In Koloděje it's not a problem.

What do you play?

Just for myself, I'm not very good at it. When I was a small boy I learned to play the guitar, but I didn't stick at it long. Later, when I was already in Sweden, I played the trombone for three years. I even did the entrance exams for the conservatory, but they didn't take me. Luckily.

You mean luckily because you would have missed a career as an opera director?

No, I mean it was lucky for the orchestra I would have had to play in.

Why did you learn the trombone, specifically?

My dad was very worried about my future. Unlike my sisters I didn't do well at school and nothing much interested me, and so dad was naturally worried about how I was going to make a living so as not to end up sweeping the streets. Music was the only thing that I enjoyed. So the conductor Martin Turnovský advised dad to have me learn trombone.

Okay, but why trombone?

Because traditionally the least number of applicants to the conservatory were in trombone or harp. I ruled out harp straight away, but I had always liked trombone from Dixieland. And as it turned out there really were only four

trombone applications to the conservatory.

Three got in and the fourth was me.

So your dad's dream of a safe livelihood for his son as trombonist evaporated. Didn't your father try and get you a job in theatre on the side? You were an extra in his production of *Trovatore*.

Back then it was just a chance for me and my friends for school to make a little extra money, but as far as opening up a direct path to opera was concerned, no, it was nothing like that.

Later I discovered from Dad's letters to Czechoslovakia that he had wondered if I had a talent for theatre, but at the time I hadn't shown much sign of it – I tended just to get bad marks at school. Dad knew he was ill, and he had a painful sense of the problems of an exile's life, and on top of that he was worried what would become of me.

When you and your parents and sister left Czechoslovakia, you were fourteen. It's a sensitive age, but at the same time an age when kids easily adapt to a new environment...

Emigration is a complicated thing, but I didn't have any trauma or complex about it either at the time or later. Still, entering a world where you don't have the language and you don't know anyone is difficult in any circumstances. When you are fourteen you cope with it better than the adults. I managed to master Swedish and English relatively quickly and so I found friends and today I'm actually grateful to fate for the experience, which forced me to become independent and find my bearings in the world faster.

You left Czechoslovakia just at the cul-

minating point of the sixties, a period that is today almost glorified for its culture and theatrical life. Did all that leave any trace in you at that age?

Unfortunately not. I was a child and interested in things completely different from culture or political events.

When did the theatre start to attract you?

I couldn't avoid the theatrical environment, since my father was involved in it, and I liked it, because it was full of strange, eccentric people. But I came to be a director by a circuitous route, a set of coincidences, and it absolutely wasn't a goal I consciously set myself. I was an extra in the theatre, and I worked as a stage hand and assistant for the orchestra. I enjoyed carrying the piano in, building benches, straightening the music parts – it was a life free of any responsibility or worries about the future and it suited me pretty well. One day I was asked to become assistant director and I thought, why not? But in fact I had no idea what it involved.

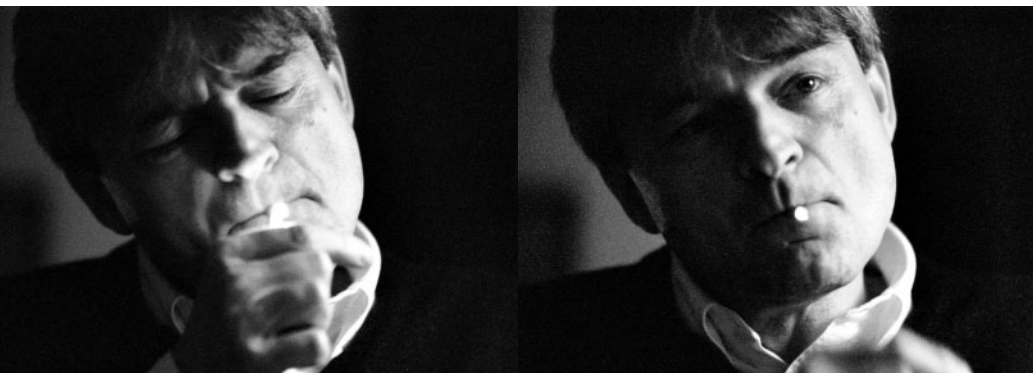
I was supposed to assist Elijah Moshinsky and he was a very thorough kind of director, and so to my surprise I soon discovered that the job of assistant meant a lot more than just making coffee. I was a completely unreliable director's assistant. When he asked what we had done at the last rehearsal, I would just answer that I didn't know. It was a tough but good school.

When you had got the hang of things as an assistant, did you ever think you would like to try directing for yourself?

I was assistant to many directors, some of them good but more of them worse, so of

in opera direction a generalising approach means the absolute end

If David Radok happens not to be directing in Sweden, Denmark, France or somewhere else, or not to be staying in his father Alfréd Radok's house in Koloděje in South Bohemia, you will find him in his pleasant attic flat in an old house in the Vinohrady district of Prague. The room, full of old furniture, is personalised by the objects David Radok likes to make out of driftwood, smoothed stones and other materials bearing the traces of time. The director's book of Verdi's *La Traviata* lies on his desk, half-worked at the beginning of the year, and a red, pearl inlaid electric guitar is propped against the wall.



course I couldn't help thinking I would like to have a go, but I didn't make any particular efforts in that direction. In the end, yet again, it was mere chance that got me into directing. When the director of Menotti's opera *The Medium*, happened to drop out, a few people from the company who had more belief in me than I had myself, wanted me to direct. And because it wasn't a major stage production but just a chamber title, the management was prepared to take the risk. Naturally I enjoyed it. I had absolutely no idea about direction or dramatic theory, and so I was constantly discovering things that other people had discovered long before me. I can no longer remember what my first production was like, but it had to be pretty terrible, because I was experimenting with all kinds of things I believed were my own discoveries. With great enthusiasm I forced the choir to slow-motion movements or stopping altogether (stoptime) and so the singers used to shout "Freeze again?" at me. I kept indulging in this kind of idiocy. I had first to teach myself every craft and after the first ten productions I was still learning. After every premiere I was thinking about what had worked, what hadn't and why. And just by having to ask these questions by myself, with every production I took a little step forward.

I looked for enlightenment outside the theatre. I used to go to galleries and look at the paintings and from the groupings of figures on the canvases of the great masters I learned how to work with the choir, and from their chiaroscuro I learned about lighting. I don't know if it's a good thing to have to discover and test out these things for oneself, but for someone like me it was better than if I had got there by learning theory.

Your first "major" production was *La Bohème* in Göteborg. What was it like having such a large set of musicians and singers in front of you?

It was terrifying! Especially when you remember that the people I was standing up in front of as director were used to seeing me as the orchestra's assistant. But I had spent a lot of time preparing myself very thoroughly for my first major directing assignment. For every page of piano excerpt my director's book had ten densely written pages of director's notes. The choir was divided into its individual members, and all their individual actions and the blocking were described in the book in detail. Of course you can't always work like that, but on the first occasion it helped me a lot. It gave me a sense of security at moments when I really needed it.

After twenty-five years in theatre I suppose that you prepare your productions with less anxiety, although you are known for the great thoroughness and sense of responsibility with which you approach each title...

My director's books are of course briefer these days. The older I am the more I concentrate on trying to get to the heart of whatever it is that a work is about. Young people have a great deal of energy and most of all they are convinced they have a lot to say. As they get older and acquire experience they learn a craft that they didn't know before, but at a certain stage it's important to take care that the craft doesn't crush all the other elements. After twenty-five years directing I spend a lot of time making sure that I don't slide into approaches that I know will work, but which just don't get to the essence of the work in question. In my view

the biggest problem in directing is that directors often don't know what the work they are staging is really about. And that means that their concept is based on showy effects or around a directorial idea that may not capture the essence of a work at all.

I go along with the excellent words of the director Jan Grossman: "Theatre is an eclectic form, who constantly borrows from all the areas and genres that harmonise best with the sensitivity and intelligence of their time." In my view this is the most accurate formulation of the foundation of theatre. And in this spirit what is always important for me is to realise what the story is about, how it is narrated in music and libretto and how it harmonises with the intelligence and above all the sensitivity of its time.

Today theatre – and not just opera – has a tendency towards visualisation and external effects. Here we could certainly find connections with the Czech boom in musicals since 1989, and the effect of computers, advertising spots and clips and so on, on our perception. But at this same time there is a trend towards superficiality here...

You are probably right. But there is something going on here that I don't understand. I entirely understand that in the 1960s or 1970s theatre was done in a certain way, but I find it sad when in 2005 I see productions that are based on the style or way of thinking of the 1970s. Frankly it's boring to watch the twenty-fifth rehash of something that started thirty years ago. When the stage designer Josef Svoboda came up with a staircase and back lighting, it was a marvellous idea, but when singers are all crowded onto a "Svoboda-esque" staircase in *Tosca*, for example, where there's absolutely no reason for it, you have to ask whether this enthusiasm for Svoboda really has to be ventilated in this unfortunate way.

What in your view is behind these "rehashes" – it is enchantment with a famous example, insecurity, a lack of courage to think up an approach of one's own?

In my view it's a complete lack of interest in submerging oneself in the theme of the work to be staged, in whatever it is the thing is really about, and the way the story can be told. There are directors who base their whole approach on being shocking. I heard of a production of Berg's *Wozzek* in which all the singers were naked, but what does that communicate about the essence of *Wozzek* as a story? And what's more it is highly unfair to Berg and Büchner, because there are not many people who could really overtrump a message as strong as theirs. Maybe in the next production everyone will masturbate, and it will be irrelevant whether it is *Wozzek*, *Carmen* or some other opera, because it will be all about the director's own sensational brand name, and not about the work itself at all.

This kind of production offends me as a member of the audience and I rarely man-

age to stay to the end of the performance. Why should I pay good money to spend three hours watching a piece of bad provocation which inspires me to nothing more than a wish to leave and go to a cafe. I've got nothing against any kind of new conception, so long as it's a way of narrating the story. But it really annoys me when – to quote Jan Grossman again – my intelligence and sensitivity is bombarded with insults. It's a different situation when a director manages to persuade you of the value of his conception, succeeds in engaging you. I saw Pountney's production of Julietta and I was enchanted, ravished. But Pountney is a director who – even though he doesn't necessarily succeed in every aspect – goes after the real meaning of a thing in an incredible honest way.

Nonetheless, his productions, especially of Czech opera classics, are received here in this country with a certain distaste and inability to get beyond conventional ideas of how a "national" opera should be staged...

That's a pity, of course, because then the public is outraged that for example they don't find their own image of the mill in Jenůfa, and then they stop paying attention and lose any ability to read the director's ideas and purpose.

And it is interesting that it is above all foreigners who are discovering Janáček for Czechs – Pountney, Mackerras and others who are not weighed down by "tradition". Things become traditions by sheer repetition, even when they don't belong to the works concerned at all. Just think of the alterations in the score and approaches that had nothing to do with Janáček. And it's not just Janáček, since I'm encountering the same problem now with preparations for La Traviata. When I compare acclaimed recordings with Verdi's original, I find that the singers are often singing completely different notes to those the composer wrote, but the audience expects it of them because these alterations have become tradition. And so invoking tradition can be a very deceptive thing.

What is your view of so-called "post-modernism" in opera directing?

It bothers me a great deal, because it mixes everything together without any kind of thought about style. If you want to go against a style, then you have to know how to create your own style and not just recklessly ignore the whole thing. Every little detail presented on stage, whether decoration, prop, arrangement or character means something, speaks to the spectator, creates certain associations in his mind, and you have to reckon with that. I don't believe that opera direction is fundamentally changing. It has all happened before. But in the last twenty years it has become a kind of tilt-yard in the style of "who's getting the upper hand", with directors less interested in the work itself than in how to do something that hasn't been done before and will cause the biggest sensation. The concepts often involve the greatest pos-

sible simplification of the theme. And I really don't like productions that try to hit me between the eyes with a poster-style directorial conception. When I watch a production I don't want to be bothered with the director's concept, just as when I watch a good actor I don't want to think about how well he is acting, I want to be absorbed by his presentation of the role.

As a member of the audience can you ever free yourself from thinking about how this or that production has been done, and just respond immediately to the performance as it is, or even let it enchant you?

Yes, rarely but it does happen. My last great experience was from a production of Mozart's opera *Così fan tutte*, directed by Patrice Chéreau in Aix-en-Provence. It was a fantastic production, very simple, without tricks or any kind of nudging or pointing at meanings, simply good. But the critics ripped it apart because it wasn't sufficiently upfront "revolutionary". But thank God for every honestly produced piece of theatre of the kind.

On occasions like that don't you feel just a hint of professional envy?

Not at all. On the contrary I am delighted when I see a production that I myself wouldn't have managed to do so well. Of course I feel a little bit put down, but that's a very useful feeling, because it forces me to do the best I can and according to my own lights. You see I am very well aware that in a year I could do ten productions with my eyes shut that would be very interesting and receive peons from the critics. I could do one production with naked singers, another in a swimming pool maybe, in the third seat the audience on the stage and let the cast sing in the auditorium, and for safety have the fourth staged outside the theatre and so on – thinking up ten superficial ideas like that really isn't a problem. But what I want is to get through to what a work is really about, with the best conscience I can. I don't always manage it, but productions like Chéreau's confirm my belief that it is worthwhile.

And what about when it really doesn't work? How do you feel in cases like that?

When I know that something hasn't worked because I've just been operating on automatic, as it were, then it's a bad feeling, but when I am sure that I've given it all I've got and it still hasn't worked I feel disappointed, but at least I can still say, "Yes, I tried but it didn't work out." The time you spend working on a production and the energy you invest in it is extremely important for you.

Even so – doesn't it make you angry when the critics swallow the bait with those superficially showy productions and dismiss honest but less ostentatious productions with a wave of the hand?

Of course you feel bitter when the critics or audience reject something that you've spent half a year working on. But that's just the first reaction, because the work is important

not just in terms of the results achieved, but for me as a person. But of course that's the same for every profession, and not just for opera directors...

I find what you say very sympathetic, but as a critic I must say that unfortunately most of the productions I see (leaving aside the hopelessly uninteresting) fall into the category of superficially effect-mongering...

Of course, because this is an easier and pleasanter path from the point of view of getting "fame". As time goes by every director finds that at fifty he doesn't have the energy that he had at twenty, but when working on a large stage, with lots of people and equipment, the director is the one who is expected to give the whole apparatus energy. And when you have a simplified concept, it is all much easier and you can also rely on the prospect of most of the audience and critics being impressed.

But how does this relate to the director's internal conscience?

Naturally it has nothing to do with it at all. **You are preparing a production of Verdi's *La Traviata*. It is an opera that singers know very well and have sung many times. How do you convince them of your own, perhaps very different conception of the parts?**

Singers who know their parts well are capable of adapting to another conception with me and the conductor without any problems. Recently in Aix-en-Provence I was rehearsing the Barber of Seville, which is an opera every one of the singers knew backwards, but they were still open to a completely different conception. The overwhelming majority of people who do opera really seriously are willing to meet you halfway. And it is usually the case that the better and more experienced a singer is, the easier it is to come to an understanding with him or her. I admire the readiness to look for and discover something different in a character that a singer has sung throughout his life, and to agree to a completely new approach to a role played for the nth time. I don't know if I would be capable of it myself.

Of course it always takes a bit of time for both of you to discover what the other is really about. The singer needs to get the feeling that he or she will not be abused in some hare-brained production, especially when he or she cannot be sure about it practically until the dress rehearsal. But after a certain amount of rehearsal the singer finds out whether the director is requiring things that could have a certain point in the course of creating the production. At this point singers become far more open and when reassured will agree to more or less anything. But the initial uncertainty is natural. As a director I feel it too, and during the first rehearsals I am trying to find out about singers I have never worked with before, to discover who they are, how their minds work, how they feel, how they react and so on. And often I let myself be influenced by their per-

sonalities to the extent that I change my conception of their characters, at least partially. Of course this has to be a change that fits with the general direction of my ideas, and doesn't go against it. I am very grateful and pleased at any inspiration like this. In rehearsals for an opera production there is a great need for mutual understanding. You are all venturing together onto very thin ice. And when personal disputes are added to the uncertainty about how things will turn out, then the situation can get very complicated.

And what if there's an insuperable conflict?

That happens, of course. And when it does – if the contract makes it possible – the best solution is for the one or other person concerned to leave. If that's not possible it usually ends badly. When I hit a brick wall, I try to achieve my ideas by other routes, for example by working around the person concerned, but of course this is a fall-back solution. After all, it is the singer that has to provide the impulse for the actions and the singing of his or her character from inside, and so if he or she lacks the will or ability, you can't cover it up with any side actions.

You have staged operas in a wide range of genres and from a wide range of periods – from Baroque to the present. Do you have particular likes and dislikes as regards periods and composers? Do you feel more at home in certain opera styles?

I like change, and trying different genres. I enjoy it when I can follow a stage play, version of *Description of a Struggle* in Prague with Rossini's *Cinderella* in Copenhagen, and then put on the *Barber of Seville* in the open-air in Aix-en-Provence and finally get back to Göteborg for the *Description of a Struggle* as a completely new opera by Jan Sandström. Change is a challenge for me. There are some periods that don't specially appeal to me. For example French Romanticism, which I have tried, but the degree of stylisation of extreme Romanticism engages me much less than Baroque opera, for example or 20th-century works where the channel of communication between music and listener is much more direct. Handel's *Julius Caesar* or Berg's *Wozzek*, where nothing is covered up just for the sake of it, is for me very sincere music. Over the twenty-five years of my career in opera my taste in composers has changed. My admiration for Puccini has given way to a taste for Verdi. I have learned to understand Rossini, whom I originally considered a kind of superior "music to put on when washing the dishes". But his *Barber of Seville*, or *The Journey to Rheims* are works of incredible serenity, wit and at the same time pure communication with the audience. Even so, in the future I should like to encounter an opera that doesn't immediately appeal to me, because staging a work like that provokes you into something. This was an experience I had in the case of Baroque opera, which I approached with a strong

sense of helplessness about how to cope with such huge expanses of music. And I discovered another time, another feeling for life, very different from our hectic modern era. And the need to communicate this remoteness to today's public, which no longer comes to the opera in carriages, but in cars. To master the rhythm and dynamics of a production like that is extremely interesting and exciting work. If it succeeds, it gives you the energy you need to put on an opera for the third time that doesn't give you the same feeling.

But repeating operas is the lot of opera directors...

It's natural and even in a certain sense necessary. But I'm not speaking now about the limited repertoire of certain opera companies, but about the fact that when you put all your energy for three years into producing a new work like *The Description of a Struggle*... you can't immediately throw yourself into another project that makes the same demands. And in that case doing a new production of *Cinderella* or *La Traviata* is a necessary means of regeneration, a recharging of batteries.

How does a director recharge his batteries?

For me it's a long and essential process. I go through quite a complicated process for every production, I need time, and I need to achieve a certain relaxation. Every director has a different kind of energy bank, which changes with age. When I look back today on how I used to do five new productions each year, I feel a chill up my spine. The profession of director means that you are constantly telling stories about human relationships. And when you get caught up in the machine, and move from one production to the next, you stop registering the reality of life and you can no longer transform it into artistic reality, because you are not receiving enough impulses from the world around you. And so when I don't go to concerts, or exhibitions or read a good book, I get a fit of cramp. Of course in situations like that I can write a director's book in a fortnight, but it won't be any good.

When you are twenty-five, you have so many impulses and great truths that you want to communicate to everybody else! They are naive and stupid, but you have a need to get them off your chest. When you are fifty, you feel much less of an interior charge. And when as a director I keep returning to basic human problems and relationships, I really have to beware of fall into a certain routine, and a generalising tendency, which means the absolute end in any kind of art. When that happens your expression sinks to the level of the idiom of a television serial, where love means that people embrace each other and hate that they frown at each other. Universality is terrible, but it dominates eighty percent of all the art around us. It doesn't force you to think, or be engaged, and instead of reality it offers you superficial stereotypes. And when you descend to that

as a director, then you're finished.

You won over the Prague public first with your Mozart productions and then with your productions of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mten-sk* and Berg's *Wozzek*. Since then three years have gone by. Last year you presented the stage play *Description of a Struggle* based on Kafka themes at the *Divadlo Na zábradlí* in Prague. Are you going to return to Prague as an opera director as well?

That's a difficult question to answer, because it doesn't depend just on me. But I hope that I will. I am very fond of the stage at the National Theatre, which in height and depth is a unique theatre space. I have received several offers from the National Theatre, and I am on very good terms with the head of the opera Jiří Nekvasil, but to be honest, it's not a simple decision for me. In order to be able to work somewhere, I need to feel good there. I am not a dictator, or a conflictual person, I am just who I am, but when I come into the canteen in the Copenhagen Theatre, I immediately have the feeling that I belong there, that people have a relationship with me and I with them. And when you have a positive relationship with people and respect them professionally, then together you can handle even a difficult production. But embarking on that kind of thing in a situation that isn't entirely favourable is something I find unbelievable difficult. When I was thirty, I was prepared to fight my corner for anything I wanted. Today I don't have the energy for it. I don't want to waste time with things I can't change. I want to devote myself to things that interest me and not to waste energy convincing people of things that ought to be self-evident. I need a certain personal calm and frame of mind for my work, and if it isn't there, I lose my taste for work. And that doesn't apply just to the National Theatre, but to other big – national, royal, state – opera houses that offer me work. I appreciate the offers from the National Theatre, the Prague State Opera or the Slovak National Theatre, but I have just finished demanding work on *Description of a Struggle* and I need time for regeneration and to think about what I want to do next, and under what conditions.

At the moment I have *Traviata* on the table for the Copenhagen and then the Göteborg Theatre, and then I shall be preparing for Verdi's *Macbeth*, which I'm looking forward to. The premiere won't be for another two years, but the long production schedules force me to think about how to approach it now. I shall certainly be looking for other projects, but I am slightly shy of taking on commissions with major or unknown opera houses where this or that aspect doesn't work and where you can't guarantee that the work you invest in a production will lead to the desired result. I want to do what I really enjoy.

DAVID RADOK (*1954)

son of the important Czech director Alfred Radok. In 1968 after the occupation of Czechoslovakia he emigrated with his parents to Sweden, where he attended secondary school. He started in the theatre in Göteborg as an extra, stage hand and orchestra assistant. He made his debut as a director at the Göteborg Opera in 1980 with a production of Menotti's opera *the Medium*, and today he is the leading director in Göteborg and also a consultant in finding new directors, singers and artists for the company there. His fifty opera productions have spanned a repertoire from the Early Baroque to the present. Apart from his work in Göteborg he has worked with and continues to work with theatres in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, Helsinki, Berlin, Dresden, Tel Aviv and Tokyo.

In 1991 he staged Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with the Prague National Theatre company for the re-opening of the Estates Theatre, and two years later *The Magic Flute*. His staging of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk* in the historic building of the Prague National Theatre, a production that he shifted from the 19th century to the period of Stalinist terror, won him the Alfred Radok Prize (named after his famous father) for the best production of 2000. A year later he won the same prize for his production of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* at the Prague National Theatre. Transferred to the Göteborg Opera, this production also won first place in a critics' survey of the "Event of the Season" and the Theatre News Prize. Together with Josef Kroutvor he wrote a libretto for an opera on Franz Kafka, and presented the text as a stage play last year in the Prague Divadlo Na zábradlí and as an opera with music by Jan Sandström in Göteborg. He is also active in visual art, and has exhibited his art objects in the Navrátil Gallery in Prague. In October 2003 he was awarded the Czech Ministry of Culture Award for services to theatre. Since 1993 he has lived in Prague and worked in Göteborg, Copenhagen and other European theatres.



If we look around for important instrument makers in Czech history, we shall not find a greater figure in the field than Václav František Červený (27th July 1819–19th January 1896). His work and inventions were not only highly rated in the Austro-Hungarian empire as it then was, but were acclaimed throughout Europe from Russia to France and even won him respect overseas. With his ingenuity, inventions, designs, organisational abilities, theoretical conclusions and demonstration and reputation abroad Červený contributed to the overall development of European musical culture, and this is just one of many good reasons for recalling the most impor-



václav františek červený

master of his craft

„Červený is always inventing something. He has already been inventing for more than thirty years, he is always at it. It is to do with a kind of obstinacy, which is also expressed in the fact that he cannot and will not endure having something better beside him. In Vienna he had to be better than Vienna, in Paris he beat Paris, and wherever there was some exhibition in Europe, Červený took the first place in it.“ Jan Neruda: *V. F. Červený, to je ten, co tvrdí muziku*. In.: *Humory* (1878)

tant dates and events of his life and some of his most significant “contributions” to the development of brass instruments that spread through the world.

In January we also commemorated the 110th anniversary of his death.

Family History, or the First Steps towards Fame

Jan Červený, Václav František’s grandfather, was a farmer and serf in Krupá near Kostelec nad Černými lesy. When he died in 1788 at the age of 31 as a result of injuries caused by a falling waggon-load of wood, he left a wife Barbara and a five-year-old son, Jan. The very next year, 1789, the widow found a new husband in the farmer Jan Klíma of Prusice, where Jan grew into a strong and able young man. When he reached the age of military call-up, his stepfather hid him in a parish priest’s service in Štolmíř, because he knew that farmhands belonging to a prince or priest were not taken into the army. The priest Sadil took a great fancy to Jan and taught him the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, which he had never acquired in childhood because of a lack of money and time.

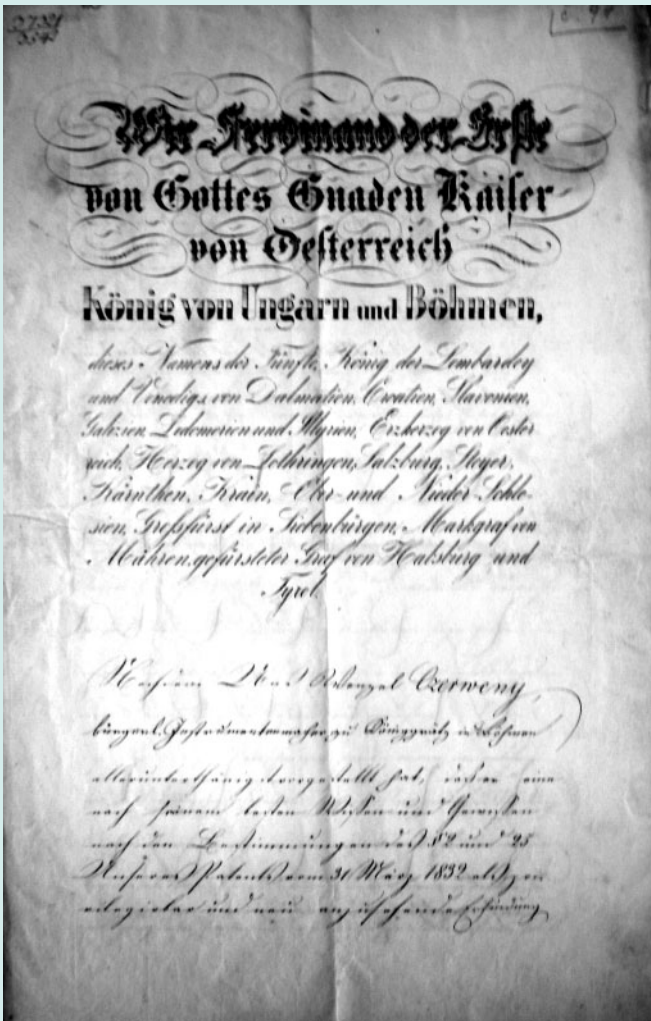
When his stepfather died in 1808, Jan returned to his inheritance, the farm in Prusice, after six years spent at the parsonage, years that were to have a decisive effect on

his life. The next spring he married Anna Beranová of Dobročovice, who bore him a first son Jan (2nd June 1811) and two years later a daughter Anna. In 1815 the whole family moved to a new, larger farm in Dubeč near Běchovice not far from Prague, where Jan sometimes used to go on a “Czech expedition” to Václav Matěj Kramerius’ bookshop for books and magazines. After the birth of a second son Václav (27th of September 1819), Jan’s wife set about persuading him to move elsewhere for the sake of the children, and so in 1823 the family took over a farm in Březany near Český Brod. It was here that Václav started to learn to play the horn and bugle with the church teacher Stehlík, but above all the clarinet, which apparently the boy played with miraculous skill.

In 1833 Václav left for Prague to take up an apprenticeship with Jan Adam Bauer, with whom he learned to make mainly brass instruments, “the French horn, bugle and trombone”, and where he had his first ideas for improving and simplifying the instruments. Starting in the autumn of 1836 he spent two years with Master Anton Klepsch in Vienna, where he got to know military janissary music. He then moved from the imperial city to Master Franz Schöllnast in Prešpurk (today Bratislava), but did not stay long, and after a short period in Pest at the Beregtzasi firm, he went back to the Bohemian Lands, to

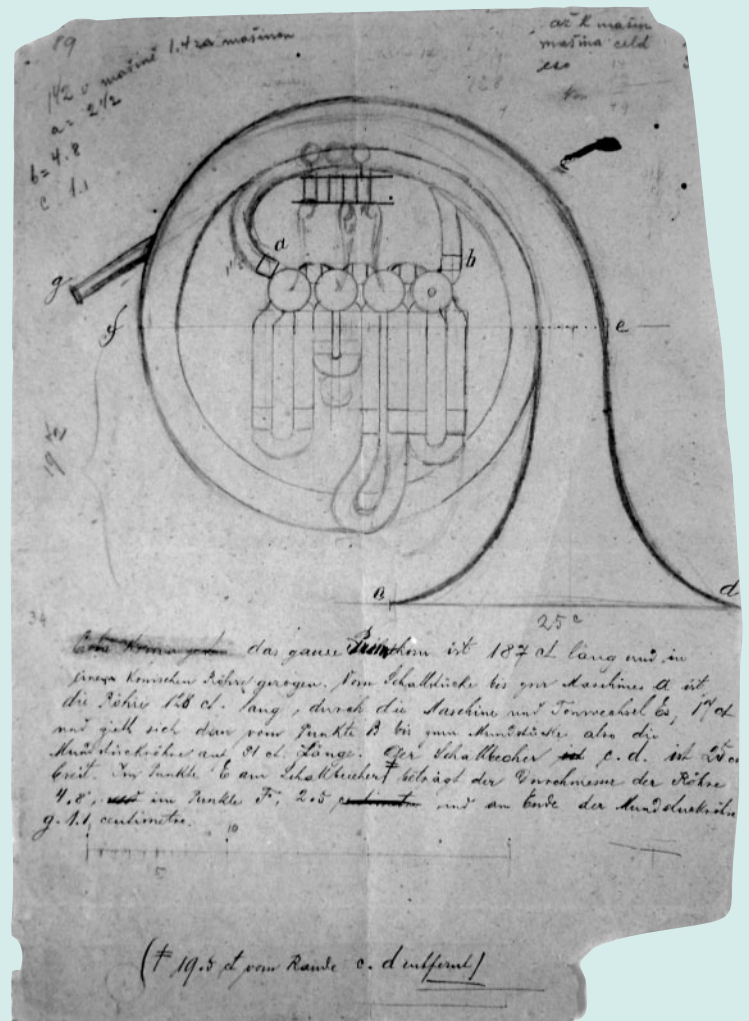


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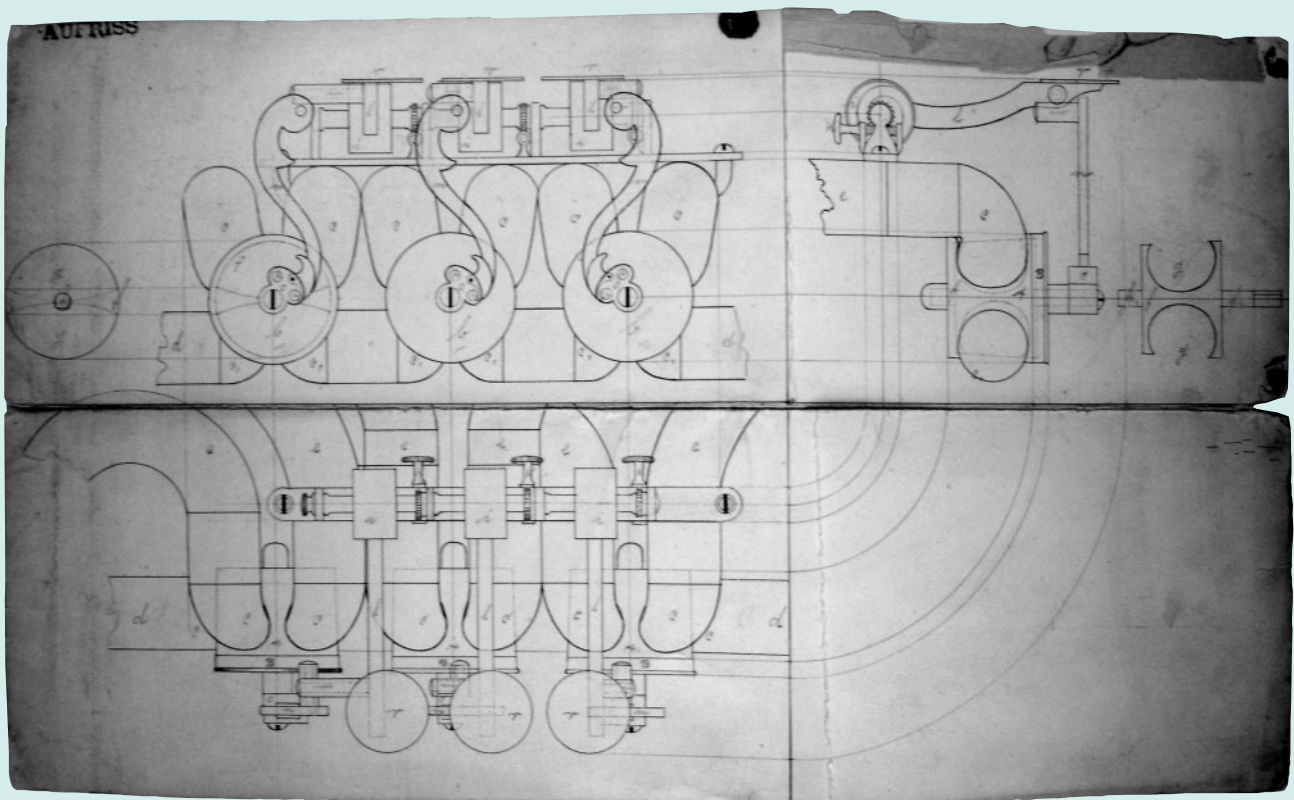
Privilege for production of the Cornon, granted by the emperor Ferdinand I in 1844

left: Tritonikon (1856-1875)



Construction plan of the French Horn

Construction plan of chamber cylinders (1878)





Euphonium



Army Trombone (Bass)



Kaiser (Tzar) Tuba



Alto Cornet



French Horn



Bass Sokolovka

Brno. Here he worked in 1840 as a journeyman with Jakob Zidrich and a year later with Josef Hallas.

He thus returned home after five years experienced at his craft, but he was soon gone again, leaving in the spring of 1842 for Prague to join his first master J.A. Bauer. Evidently on Bauer's advice, the young instrument-maker then settled in Hradec Králové, where he opened his own workshop with four workmen on the Great Square. This was the birth of the firm "V. F. Červený", later to acquire world fame, with its product label and inscription "Výroba hudebních nástrojů / manufacture of musical instruments Václav F. Červený".

From the start Červený was overwhelmed with orders, above all from the military garrisons near and far that often had gaps in the equipment of their bands. More or less throughout his life Červený was producing instruments primarily for military music, and would supply instruments in complete sets, always for the whole band. This meant he could take responsibility for the resulting overall sound of the ensemble, which would then be distinctive for its unity and compact character. Červený was particularly sought after because he sold first-class instruments at very acceptable prices. He was one of the few independent craftsmen from the interior who were still capable of competing with the factory production of wind instruments in Kraslice or the Brno firm of Josef Lidl (1864-1946) – the second biggest wind instrument factory in the Czech Lands, founded in 1892, which launched production of wind aerophones in 1895 –, and Červený managed it above all by his consistent quality and unremitting modernisation.

V. F. Červený – Father, Entrepreneur and Respected Citizen of the Town of Hradec Králové

In 1843 Červený married Josefa Angelina Šípková and less than a year later their first son was born, Jan (5th November 1844). Over the next 20 years they had another 12 children, nine sons and three daughters, but in the difficult conditions of the time some of them died very young. Only four of his sons (Jaroslav, Stanislav, Otakar a Bohumil) and one daughter (Marie) survived their father.

The year 1848 brought political upheavals for the empire, and also a turning point in the life of Červený's brother, younger by six years, who for a short time worked as an instrument maker in the family firm. In mid-June, when Prague capitulated, many warrants were issued for the arrest of revolutionaries, and young František Červený was on the wanted list. After a few weeks he fled to Western Europe and from there to America. Nearly three years went by before the long awaited letter from František arrived in Hradec Králové, with the surprising news that he had started to produce musical instruments in New York.

In the next two decades Červený's family life revolved above all around the births, and also alas the premature deaths, of his children. Most of those children who lived to school age were involved in music and played a musical instrument. It should be admitted that his children often added to his cares, as well as giving Červený pleasure. His son Bohumil, for example, trained as a shopkeeper but did not enjoy the trade, and his shop finally went bankrupt. Although his father paid all his debts and expected complete obedience in return, Bohumil defied the will of the "head of the family" and decided to go into puppet theatre. He turned out a great success, but never won any acknowledgment from his father.

Červený was not just a leading instrument-maker who clearly devoted more time to his business than to anything else, but also a respected citizen of the town. This is evident from his appointment to the head of several clubs and associations founded in the 1860s as part of the national revival (increasing patriotic consciousness) among ethnic Czechs. Červený eventually chaired the Hradec Záložna – Czech Trustee Savings Bank (1862), and the Sokol physical training society established in Hradec Králové in 1865 on the Prague model. He was also elected a senior member in 1869 by the local Union of Amateur Theatrical Enthusiasts. His son Jaroslav won the respect of the local citizens as an agent of the Ústřední matice školská (the National School Foundation) struggling against the suppression of Czech schooling.

At the beginning of the 1870s the young Jaroslav (1851-1928) and Stanislav (1854-1911) trained in their father's firm and also started work there on the shop floor. Červený gave them no privileges of any kind. Above all, like all his apprentices they had to know how to play all the musical instruments produced there. He evidently greatly respected his sons and their skill, since as early as 1876 he made them his partners. The firm then bore the title "Václav Červený & Sons".

Another important and alas very sad event both for Hradec Králové in general and for the Červený family in particular, was the major fire in the local sugar refinery in 1875, in which the youngest son Václav died. On hearing of the death of her beloved youngest son Josefka had a stroke and remained paralysed on one side and permanently bedridden until she died four years later. The death of his wife was a huge blow to Červený, causing him to concentrate all the more frenetically on his work, his inventions and the management of the firm.

V. F. Červený – Master of his Craft

Červený's instrumental output was based above all on the needs of military bands, which were also his largest customer. At the time, every regiment had a right to its own band, and in the Austrian infantry every com-

pany had its own trumpeter, so the demand for wind instruments was considerable. From the mid-19th century, therefore, instrument-makers throughout Europe were thinking up new musical instruments or making major improvements to existing instruments in order to meet the booming market of wind bands and orchestras. As an instrument maker who never stopped musing on new possibilities and improvements, and a true professional Červený could hardly have been born into a more fortunate period. Without these good historical conditions he might not have been able to put so many of his inventions into practice. Conversely, of course, without Červený the history of some of our brass aerophones would have been very different, or never even have happened.

In the construction of brass instruments, Červený was the main representative of what was known as the Austro-Czech School, which stood in opposition to the French School represented by Adolph Sax (1814-1894) and finding almost no adherents on Bohemian soil. The main difference between the two schools is the measure of the tubes, i.e. its length in a ratio to a changing width, particularly manifest in the mellophones and cornets (invented in the 1830s). In the case of the old trumpets and trombones the instrument tube was cylindrical, except where it opened out to the bell at the end. The tube of the new group of instruments that we know today under the name of the bugle, bass bugle, euphonium or helicon gradually broadened from mouth piece to end, and was therefore conical, which influenced the sound potential especially in terms of colour and quality of tone. The Austrian-Czech school preferred a tube with the largest possible measure which helped to give a lighter intonation and a softer, finer tone. The instruments of the French school had a narrower measure, which means that their tone is more blaring, brighter and overall more sonorous. Another important difference is that the Austrian-Czech School used exclusively chamber cylinders, while the French used piston cylinders. The truth is that Central European taste was for a less obtrusive sound and so musicians chose locally made instruments, i.e. above all those made by Červený.

The first invention that secured Červený immediate international success was the "Cornon", for production of which he was granted a privilege license in 1844. A series of other improvements and designs for new instruments followed in quick succession, and were associated with his first greater or lesser successes at work exhibitions. Červený's instruments gradually spread throughout the world. They were played not only in Southern Germany, Italy, Spain, Norway and Russia, but also in North America and Brazil. A collection of instruments even journeyed from Hradec Králové as far as a Peruvian military band. Červený came up with another major invention in 1856, presenting to the world his



Key Horn, ca. 1842-1860

"Tritonicon" or brass double bassoon, i.e. a double bassoon with its length reduced by a half and equipped with valve mechanism.

In 1859 Červený's firm employed almost 80 people and was producing around 400 musical instruments every year. Červený directed everything himself, personally checking and assessing every instrument from the cutting stage to dispatch. He was one of the very few instrument makers to make all the parts for his instruments himself, from the smallest rivet. He procured all the necessary materials for the workshop, and did the business correspondence and accounting. He immediately invested his profits back in the firm, constantly improved the equipment and even bought reserve materials for stocks because the times were uncertain and orders were usually for large amounts of instruments.

One of the first honours that Červený received was to be made a "Knight of the Order of Christ" in 1866 by the King of Portugal Dom Luis in person. When news of this reached the imperial court in Vienna, the Habsburg emperor did not wish to be upstaged and the very next year awarded Červený the "Imperial and Royal Chivalric Cross of the Order of Franz Josef" and Gold Medal for Science and Art".

The year 1867 was important not just because of the imperial decoration, but because the firm now expanded east, into Russia, where Červený opened his first subsidiary in Kiev. Initially it was run by the local

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bandmaster, but later it was taken over by Červený's son Otakar who was to head it for 35 years. The new branch was immediately honoured by a huge order for musical instruments for a Russian hulan guard regiment and also for the Groden Personal Hussars in Warsaw.

Červený also presented some more inventions and improvements in this year. One was an improved military trombone that could be played with only one arm. This was greeted with great acclaim throughout the musical world abroad, where the prototype was copied and sold under new names. Červený himself supplied it to military bands in Austria, Germany, Holland, Spain, Bulgaria, Russia and America. The firm also made a few pieces for the orchestra of the National Theatre in Prague and for an Austrian symphony orchestra. Červený reaped notable success with an instrument he called the Sokolovka, the signalling trumpet for the Czech patriotic Sokol physical education units; it was at made in all versions from low to high register, with six trumpets making a complete band set.

In Moscow at the polytechnical exhibition in 1872 Červený was awarded the Grand Gold Medal "For successes in the perfect production of musical instruments, suitable above others for military musical corps, outstanding for their full, superb and pure sound and for the invention of transposition rotary valve. At this point Červený was also entrusted with putting together sets of musical instruments for the whole Russian infantry. A very substantial order came from the other side of the border as well, when Prussia requested 66 complete sets of brass instruments.

1876 proved to be another particularly fertile year in terms of successes and new orders. The Russian Tsar honoured Červený's work with a gold medal of the Order of St Anna and diploma "for zealous efforts to elevate wind instruments to highest degree of perfection", and the Czech master became the exclusive supplier for brass instruments for all the Tsar's regimental bands. Once again this aroused competitive feelings to the western neighbour – the Prussian Kaiser Wilhelm I awarded Červený the knightly cross of the Crown Order. Decoration came from overseas, as well in the form of a First Medal of Honour with the legend "Inasmuch as all the instruments exhibited were distinguished for peerless excellence in construction, superlative work, grand sound and superb playability, and acknowledged as instruments first-class in every respect."

Červený did not, however, "rest on his laurels" and he presented more of his new inventions, this time a quartet of cornets. He had found inspiration in simple source – the four basic registers of a vocal ensemble. For the soprano he used the "primovka" of 1873, and added another three deeper instruments, i.e. three lower cornets made on the same principle as the "primovka". According to

contemporary reactions this new quartet of cornets was an advance on all its predecessors in terms of the equilibrium of the tone colours, and certainly in other respects as well.

Over his lifetime Červený was awarded a total of 11 imperial or royal decorations (orders) for services to industry (Austria-Hungary, Prussia, Russia, Portugal, Bulgaria and the Papal See) and 15 medals, including two honours at world exhibitions (New York, Munich, Paris, London, Oporto, Philadelphia, the Vatican, Chicago and Barcelona). His unique talent is attested, for example, by the fact that when after long drawn out negotiations the pitch of the reference a was internationally fixed at 435 Hz in 1891, Červený allowed the flicker of a smile to pass his face. With his perfect pitch, he himself had been already been using the frequency for six years.

One of the last honours that he received, but certainly one that must have meant a great deal to him personally, was to be made a citizen of honour of the Town of Hradec Králové, above all for his services to the development of the town and its culture, but also for making it famous abroad.

Finally we should not forget an anecdote of 1884 which vividly captures Červený's character. One day Václav received a letter from the supreme imperial office in Vienna. It formally announced that by the decision of his Majesty the factory-owner Václav František Červený was to be raised to the noble estate for his services to industry. He was asked to kindly present himself for an audience with the emperor on such and such a day. The imperial master of ceremonies, at that time Prince Lobkowitz drew his attention he was naturally required to wear dinner dress to the audience and that in his present clothes, unfortunately, not even the master factory owner could be admitted. The prince tactfully indicated that for these situations a hire shop for dinner dress was available and the situation could easily be remedied. But he didn't know Červený and his short-temper. Václav flew off the handle and refused to calm down even when the last of the freshly belted noblemen had left the audience chamber. At home the whole family was waiting for him, almost with a triumphal arch. After the whole day's train journey Václav had recovered his dry humour. "You and your descendants were almost called von Červený, von Červená. It depended just on a dusty dinner suit from a hire shop. I for my part am satisfied with my name: Červený."

When Červený died in 1896, it was a huge loss not just for his family and friends but also for the whole music world. The family tradition was carried on by Červený's sons, and for many years co-owners of the firm Jaroslav and Stanislav. They too succeeded with a few patents, clearly winning most fame with a bugle with special key setting that was supplied to a total of 61 battalions of the Austrian military

land defence music bands. At the end of the 1920s after the death of Jaroslav the firm passed into the hands of the instrument maker Karel Šámal because there were no more family heirs. He had to struggle with the serious problems of the inter-war period, the political situation and the world economic crisis.

After the Second World War the famous firm of "Červený" met the same fate as all private companies – it was nationalised, and placed under the National Amati Concern. 1948 meant the final end of a more than 100-year tradition.

Conclusion – Summary

Červený continually sought through his inventions to discover new sounds, new colours, and new ranges for musical instruments and to make them easier to play and handle. He improved the old horn into a cornon, created the rotary valve, double bass tuba, a special kind of horn "zvukoroh", cornet, baroxyton (the pride of all Austrian military bands with a range right down to contra E flat), and tritonicon, simplified many others and improved the contrabass bassoon, alto horn, sokolovka, contrabass sokolovka, the trompet "harcovka" (the signal bugle for all units of the imperial army), a set of army trombones (the basis of the unique sound of Austrian military music), a sub contrabass trombone, kettle drums, bells, a cornet quartet from descant to bass. The "kaiser musical instrument" is still known today – in Italy they still produce the Contrabasso ad anchia, i.e. Červený's tritonicon.

Because the legal and above all licence system including patent law was in his time not valid throughout the world but only in a given country, Červený's inventions were copied and renamed, even patented under other names by clever foreign instrument-makers and then manufactured in many different countries. One example might be Červený's first invention the rotary valve, which the Parisian instrument-maker Gautrot immediately "borrowed" in 1846 and used as a basis for an international reputation. Červený's contrabass tuba, which supplies the deep tones without which the sound of the symphony orchestra would be unimaginable, was manufactured by the Vienna firm Stourasse under the name Helikon, the Milan instrument-maker Pelitti renamed it as his own Pelittone, and another borrower was Červený's lifelong rival and competitor Ad. Sax, who presented it as the Saxhorn-contre-basse. And many more Červený's inventions, so important for the subsequent development of brass instruments, could not have been even mentioned in this article.

organ building in the czech lands

PETR KOUKAL

Pipe organs have always been and remain one of the most impressive and also complicated musical instruments. As with violins, the making of organs has always been wreathed in a certain amount of mystery. Organ builders have guarded their knowledge and handed it down only to their successors in the workshop. This is something evident enough from the fact that our historical sources and literature are all with few exceptions silent on certain matters – specifically on the technology of the making of organ pipes, the scaling of the pipes and the way the organ is tuned (tempered). It is a tradition confirmed by a nearly anecdotal story of 1804, although one that might send a chill down the spines of lovers of the music of Leoš Janáček. Janáček's grandfather met with an unpleasant accident that almost ended in tragedy – while trying to cast the tin plate for organ pipes he and his friend suffered such severe burns that they spent a long time recovering. The secret of the correct approach was revealed to them later, in exchange for a bag of potatoes, by the widow of a certain organ builder.

One reason we tell this story is that it is testimony to the fact that organs were a matter of fascination in all classes of our society. On the other hand, it was never easy to make a living as an organ builder, because as the famous philosopher and sociologist Max Weber observed, organ building was only a good prospect in economically prosperous places and regions. The same remains true to day. It was the reason why organs first appeared in metropolitan cathedrals and monastery churches. It is no accident that the oldest reports of organs in this country come from Prague and Olomouc, and that it was clerics who took up organ building. But as towns grew and flourished organ building became more widespread and became a recognised trade. Reports on organs in the Czech Lands in sources from the 14th century show that the trade was doing well here. Indeed, the oldest known Austrian organ

builder, who built the organ in St. Steven's in Vienna, was probably Czech because, in documents of around 1400, he is named as Jörg Behaim (Behem, Pehen, Böhm). The organ builder Jan Behaim, a friend of the celebrated organist Paul Hofhaimer (1459 – 1537), was also Czech, a native of the village of Dobrá near Prachaticce.

The second half of the 16th century was a particularly favourable period for Bohemian organ building. At this time the Bohemian lands were arguably one of the trend-setting areas of Europe, as represented by their crowning creation, the so called Ferdinand Organ in the Cathedral of St Vitus in Prague. This was also a golden age in burgher musical culture. One positive factor was the fact that a substantial number of churches in the larger towns came under the patronage and administration of Protestant town administrations, which in line with musical traditions of this religion considered organs and organ music an important part of the spiritual life of their town populations. Rudolf Walter on the territory of the former Prussian Silesia noticed that the co-existence of two faiths inspired a spirit of competition in the construction of organs. The result was that two- and three-manual organs were much more numerous there than in the predominantly Catholic lands. The same trend was gradually evident in the Bohemian Lands too. The situation changed abruptly in the post- White Mountain period after the defeat of the Protestants and with the beginning of the Thirty Years War, however, allowing us to speak about the first great crisis of the organ-builders' trade. A land in economic and religious turmoil was not a promising place for the construction of new organs. Only later, in the second half of the 17th century, do we see renewed signs of development in organ building, especially after the end of the Turkish wars.

The results of re-catholicisation after the Thirty Years War routed the development of home organ-building to the style of the so called Habsburg organ building region.



1

Towards the end of the 17th century foreign organ builders such as Petr Dotte from Westphalia or Theodor Agadoni (coming from Italy) spent time in the country and significantly influenced the form of domestic organ construction. Both of them contributed in their own distinctive ways to the local colour range of organ stops by patterns taken from the German and Italian organ building areas. At the same period we find the famous Johann Heinrich Mundt here, a native of Cologne, nevertheless a pupil of Jeroným Artmann of Prague. That is the ground why his importance results more from his excellent standard of craftsmanship than from any stylistic innovations. Thanks to German sponsorship his most important instrument in the Church of Our Lady before Týn in Prague (1673) has recently been the subject of first-rate restoration. His other surviving instruments are still waiting for conservation and restoration rescue.

In the following period, however, it was domestic organ-makers who came into their own and exercised the greatest influence, particularly the members of the so called Loket and Brno schools. The most important figures here were the founders of the schools. In Loket (Elbogen) it was Abraham Starck (1659–1709). A number of his instruments are still in existence and attract the interest of every expert and laymen as well (Zlatá Koruna, Plasy, Sněžné (fig.1) and others). Other masters ranked to the Loket School are Leopold Burghardt, author of the wonderful organs in the monastery church in Kladruba and in Manětín (fig.2), Johann F. Fassmann, and Johann Ignaz Schmidt (fig.3).

The origin of the Brno Organ Building School is dated to the arrival of Johann David Sieber (1670? – 1723) in Brno. Sieber created many excellent organs (1708 Polná (fig.4); 1723 Žďár nad Sázavou – monastery (fig.5) and others.). He also managed to get commissions in cities further away, for example for a large three-

manual organ in the Prussian (today Polish) town of Svídnice (1705) and in Vienna (1714). His work was continued by his son Franz Sieber, Anton Richter and Jan Výmola. The last named organ builder ultimately achieved an exceptional standard, as we can see in his surviving organs, for example in Doubravník (1760) (fig. 6) and in Dub na Moravě (1768).

These two organ schools were the most important ones, but by no means the only ones. Another remarkable example is the Králíky School, residing in the small town of Králíky (Grulich) on the northern borderland between Bohemia and Moravia. Several organ-building workshops existed there side by side in the later 18th century – for example four to five of them in the years 1769 – 1807. To this day it is unclear whether the relationship between them was competitive or co-operative.

What do we know today is that in the period 1600–1850 a large number of organ-making workshops existed on the relatively small territory of the historic Bohemian Lands. For example in Moravia and Austrian Silesia there demonstrably existed more than 170 workshops in seventy localities, and at least as many may be assumed to have existed in Bohemia. It must be stressed that here we are talking about organ-building workshops, places in which often only one to three people were making organs. This form of production went on deep into the 19th century. The handmade approach usually resulted in relatively high quality instruments. In these circumstances some of the builders could be autodidacts, some of whom turned fully professional and soon achieved excellent results. One example might be František Svítíl senior from Nové Město na Moravě, who founded a three-generation firm and himself constructed more than fifty instruments not just in the surrounding region but also in South Bohemia, South Moravia and Lower Austria (fig. 7).

Starting in the 1860s the situation changed again – workshops were turning into factories. This was the period that witnessed the foundation (1873) of the well-known firm of Rieger in Krnov (Jägerndorf). One factor that made for the accelerated decline and disappearance of small workshops and the rise of factory firms was the transformation of the musical aesthetic ideal of the organ associated with the rapid implementation of what was known as the Caecilian reform of church music. This had its effects in the Czech Lands as well. Nonetheless, the smaller centres of production – more workshops than factories – , clung on up to the end of the century, and in significant numbers; it documents the list of organ-making firms throughout the former Austro-Hungarian state published in 1898. It lists a total of 141 firms, of which 45, i.e. almost a third, were in the Czech Lands. For

purposes of comparison we should note that at the same time there were “bare” 13 organ-making firms in Switzerland. Among the 45 organ-makers listed in the Bohemian Lands, six were based in Prague and the others scattered throughout the whole territory of Bohemia, Moravia and Austrian Silesia. They were not located only in the larger centres, but could be found in small towns such as Polička (Bedřich Čápek) or Lomnice nad Popelkou (Josef Koblre), and even in tiny villages like Hraničné Petrovice (Josef Mader), Nová Říše (Ludvík Nix) or Staré Město pod Landštejnem (Franz M. Stangl). Some produced organs of traditional type with slider windchest, but most were gradually moving over to cone windchest and later equipping their instruments with pneumatic action.

The consequences of the First World War were all too evident in organ-making – many firms went out of business. The economic crisis of later years compounded the damage. Nonetheless the number of organ builders remained relatively high, as was confirmed by *Československá vlastivěda* encyclopedia in 1935 with the following information:

“Among numerous domestic organ-building firms, some of which no longer exist, we should list: V. Brauner in Uničov in Moravia, K. Čápek in Polička, Friedl (heir of Petr) in Prague, Lad. Hauser in Teplice, V. Hubený in Protivín, Jos. Hubička in Prague, Vojtěch Kaš in Brno, Langenauer in Podbořany, J. Mádl in Prague, Medřický in Kutná Hora, J. Mölzer in Kutná Hora (new organ for St Vítus’s in Prague), J. Mudroch in Tišnov, the Paštika Brothers in Prague (they built the wonderful instrument in Emauze in Prague), Boh. Paštika in Stará Boleslav, G. Paštika in Čestín, L. Petřík in Brno, E. S. Petr in Prague (the organ in Karlin and many others), V. Poláček in Rychnov n. Kn., J. Rejma & Černý in Prague, the Rieger Brothers in Krnov in Silesia (many outstanding instruments throughout the republic and abroad), Jindřich Schiffner in Prague (took over the workshop of the famous Gartner organ builders), this traditional firm is now directed by Jos. Růžička in Prague, Schönhoffer in Bratislava, Schusser in Teplá near Mar. Lázně, V. Skopek in Tábor, M. Strmiska in Uher. Hradiště, F. Surat in Čes. Budějovice, M. Svítíl in Nové Město in Moravia, J. Tuček in Kutná Hora (the big organ in the Municipal House in Prague), K. Urban in Prague, Ot. Vazanský in Nitra, Veselý in Kutná Hora, Votruba in Počátky, J. M. Wünsch in Sušice, Fr. Zachystal in Třebíč and others.”

If we leave aside the Slovak towns, we reach a figure of 31 firms, which once again testifies to the character and staying power of the Czech organ-building in the inter-war period. Once again we should stress the significant fact that organ-makers were

based not just in cities like Prague and Brno but could be found in small towns like Počátky (Josef Votruba), Protivín (Eduard Hubený) or Nové Město in Moravia (Metoděj Svítíl). The one with the best reputation was Rieger Brothers (Gebrüder Rieger) of Krnov, who in the inter-war years 1925–1939 produced more than 700 new organs, half of which were exported from the then Czechoslovakia to other European countries, Asia, South America and Africa. In this respect the firm overtook all the other domestic producers of organs include otherwise excellent firms such as Emanuel Š. Petr (fig. 8)

This development was once again halted by world war; after 1945 the organ companies scarcely had time to recover before the communist take-over in 1948 struck a final blow to their development. The production of organs was henceforth to be state planned within the monopoly nationalised firm of Rieger in Krnov, newly operating under the name of *Továrna na varhany – Organ Factory*. The new secondary title Rieger-Kloss signified the merger of the two previous organ companies after their nationalisation. This single state enterprise, producing and repairing organs, at the same time became the sole, i.e. state monopoly exporter of organs. A few local co-operatives, most of them former organ-building firms, were allowed to meet the domestic demand for new organs and repairs to older instruments. The most important of these was *Organa Kutná Hora*, created by the nationalisation and merger of the two earlier local firms of Tuček and Melzer.

These changes meant that the natural development of Czech organ-building was frozen, since with the political-ideological restrictions and the new iron curtain it lost contact for many years with the best European and world developmental trends in the organ construction. Particularly hard hit was the important artistic and technical area of organ restoration.

The development of organ building within the Czech Lands was thus to be essentially planned and determined by a single producer. The application of socialist industrial methods in so sensitive field as organ-building inevitably had effects precisely opposite to the planned demands for increase in quality – the Krnov concern produced instruments of very uneven standard. Over the years 1948 – 1989 almost six hundred instruments were built in Krnov. Among them there are some good enough to merit attention and protection in my view. They cannot be listed here in full, but we might here mention at random at least the following: Velehrad (1964), Cheb – St. Clare (1974), Olomouc – St Michael (1975) and Uničov (1987).

As in the other post-communist countries of Central Europe, 1990 was another major turning point. At the time in the Czech

Lands, three other enterprises were building organs apart from the Rieger – Kloss Organ Factory: Organa Kutná Hora as a smaller producer of organs with pneumatic action often inserted into old organ cases; the organ division of the toy factory Igra Praha, which was mainly devoted to repairs but in the seventies was already managing to build new organs with mechanical action and slide wind-chest (1976 Nové Město in Moravia); and finally the organ workshop of the Dřevopodnik Brno (City of Brno Wood Concern), which produced below-average pneumatic instruments that replaced older, often historically very valuable organs in South Moravia.

Apart from these official producers, however, there existed some “independent” essentially only semi-legal organ makers, some of whom were capable of building new smaller instruments. Among the most promising at that time were Vladimír Šlajch, Bohumil Žloutek & Jan Kubát and Pavel Doubek & Dalibor Michek.

The situation after 1990 can be briefly described in terms of the following basic features:

- The privatisation of all existing organ making and repairing facilities
- Rapid growth in the number of licensed organ-makers and repairers as a result of extremely liberal legislation
- A decline in the traditional organ-making and repairing facilities as a result of tough competition on domestic and foreign markets associated with the changed economic situation
- Improvement in the production qualities of a few organ firms as a result of liberal and concurrently tough market conditions
- How have these changes affected the established organ builders? In relation to the most important, the Rieger-Kloss firm, we may sum up as follows:
 - The loss of monopoly position on the Czech market, resulting in the gradual cut-back of production and reduction of the workforce
 - The loss of traditional export areas (The Soviet Union and other former communist countries)
 - Privatisation involving a new owner and new management
 - Gradual orientation to “combined” instruments with pipe and digital registers, associated with the attempt to break into the American market
 - Continuing neglect of modern restoration approaches with older instruments

The overview of the firm’s production confirms the features identified above (see chart).

A typical example of the recent production of Rieger-Kloss firm might be the organ op. 3724 for a Presbyterian church in Savannah



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Overview of the Output of Rieger-Kloss Krnov since 1990

Year	No. of organs	Destination
1990	13	7 Czechoslovakia, 3 USSR, 1 Italy, 1 Cuba, 1 Germany
1991	14	9 Czechoslovakia, 1 USSR, 1 Slovenia, 1 Austria, 1 Italy, 1 S. Korea
1992	14	5 Czechoslovakia, 3 Germany, 3 USA, 1 Norway, 1 Portugal, 1 Austria
1993	8	3 Czech Republic, 1 Slovakia, 1 Italy, 1 Austria, 1 Norway, 1 S. Korea
1994	11	5 Germany, 2 S. Korea, 1 USA, 1 France, 1 Slovakia, 1 Ukraine
1995	10	6 Germany, 2 China, 1 S. Korea, 1 Denmark
1996	12	5 S. Korea, 2 USA, 2 Germany, 1 Austria, 1 Slovakia, 1 Czech Republic
1997	3	1 S. Korea, 1 USA, 1 Czech Republic
1998	2	1 Germany, 1 Slovakia
1999	2	1 USA, 1 Japan
2000	2	1 Poland, 1 Great Britain
2001	4	2 USA, 1 S. Korea, 1 Japan
2002	4	3 USA, 1 Slovakia
2003	0	
2004	1	1 Czech Republic
2005	1	1 USA

(USA, Georgia) in 2005, which has up to three manuals and pedal 45 pipe and 21 digital registers.

Unlike in the case of Rieger-Kloss the privatisation of Organa Kutná Hora did not mean the change in the firm management, which consisted simply of the organ-makers themselves. Production of new organs with pneumatic action was halted, for the management quickly grasped the changed situation. Now the firm is orientating itself more to modern methods of restoration and renovation of organs with pneumatic and mechanical systems.

The activity of the organ-makers at Igra Praha was terminated and some of its former employees went independent as private entrepreneurs focused mostly for organ repairs. Dřevopodnik Brno ended in much the same way, with the new firm Varhany Ostopovice, being formed in its place; Organ Ostopovice is moving from pneumatic action to the production of organs with mechanical action and slide windchest.

With the help of his son Dušan, Pavel Doubek enlarged his earlier workshop and turned it into a modern firm, newly founded in 1992 in Čížov. During the 1990s he made several interesting organs, for example the two-manual mechanical instrument made in 1992 for the Blahoslavův dům (an evangelic Church) in Brno (fig.9). This firm also restored Baroque organs, for example Burghardt's organ in Kladruby and the Starck organ in Prague at St. Francis's. Towards the end of the 1990s the firm's activities were halted as a result of poor management decisions and business plans.

Bohumil Žloutek worked most often with the pewterer Jan Kubát. The new conditions allowed him to set up his own firm in the town of Zásada, where his son also assists him. They have revived the family, pre-Communist tradition. Among organs recently made by the firm we might mention organs in Bystřice nad Pernštejnem (2000), Křenovice

(2002) and Křoví (2005). Most are smaller instruments designed to meet the liturgical needs of rural churches.

In the 1990s Dalibor Michek founded a new firm in Puklice and then in Studénky near Jihlava. At first he continued working with Vladimír Šlajch and with the Doubeks, but then he became a sought-after producer of wood pipes, which today he is still manufacturing for many foreign firms. His customers include Georg and Thomas Jann – Allkofen, Peter Vier – Oberweier, Hans-Georg Vleugels – Hardheim, Kristian Wegscheider – Dresden, Yves Koenig – Sare Union, Gaston Kern – Hattmat, Friedrich Hartig – Seewalchen am Atterssee and others. In the last two years he has been going back partly to restoration, using his own effective methods of conserving and petrifying the wood parts of organs.

His former colleague Vladimír Šlajch has emerged as one of the most talented of Czech organ makers. In 1992 he founded his own firm and in Borovany he started from scratch to build a modern organ-making and restoration workshop. Since then he has made a number of remarkable organs. While still working with Dalibor Michek he created the organs in Růžená (1989, I/7) and in Třešť (1990, II/24) (fig.10). The two concert organ positives for the organists Jaroslav Tůma and Vladimír Rusó are also from this period. In his new workshop in Borovany he has built organs for Ebreichsdorf (1996, Austria, II/14), Feldafing (1997 SRN, II/14), České Budějovice (1999, II/20), Traun-Oedt (1999, Austria, II/16), Prague – St Bartholomew's (2000, II/18), Prague – St. Ignatius (2001 I/6) and Bruchsal (2004, Germany, II/30).

Vladimír Šlajch is perhaps the purest example of the handful of Czech organ makers who have not stagnated and slept on their laurels. He has been constantly improving and developing his work. Just a comparison of his chronologically succes-

sive organs Traun – České Budějovice – Bruchsal makes this very clear. His last organ for Bruchsal, indeed, shows that his work is in the European first rank. His huge experience and historical knowledge of organs, the like of which we shall find win no other Czech organ maker, makes him not only an outstanding domestic restorer of historical organs, and one almost without competition, but is manifest in his approach to the building of new instruments.

As has been noted above, after 1990 (and in some cases earlier) a number of organ-builders left the firm Rieger Kloss Krnov. Most of them then founded their own organ trades, but to a greater or lesser extent they have all continued to show the influence of the original "mother firm", the "Rieger-Kloss" method for building organs and their acoustic and visual aesthetic. This entitles us to use the term of *Krnov Organ-Building School* in the same sense that the terms Locket or Brno School are used. The following firms and organ-makers are among the most important representatives of this Krnov School:

Václav Smolka (Krnov) produces smaller and larger instruments, applying his own technical improvements and ideas. So far his most important organs have been for the Cathedral in Ostrava (1998, op. 3, III/43) and for the Church of the Holy Spirit in Opava (2003, op. 5, III/34).

The firm Kánský and Brachtl (Krnov) was founded in 1997. It produces new organs using historical inspirations and approaches, especially Baroque organ-building. The firm's most important organs include 1999 Odry (III/44) 2001, Nový Hradec Králové (II/23), 2003 Banská Bystrica (Slovakia, III/35), and 2004 Humpolec (II/25) (fig.11). It is a firm that has achieved surprisingly well thought out and high quality results, making it one of the leading representatives of contemporary Czech organ-building. It is gradually creating its own aesthetic idea of sound and visual form, emancipating itself from the earlier influence of the Riegerian traditions.

Vladimír Grygar left the Krnov organ firm long before 1990, but officially founded his firm in Prostějov in 1992. He is the author of a number of organs, largely conceived and executed in the Riegerian tradition of universal instruments for all organ styles. We shall find them for example at St. Anne's Hill near Opole (1998, Poland, III/34), in Litomyšl at the Holy Cross (2000, IV/50) (fig.12), and in Česká Třebová (2005, III/38).

Other firms producing smaller instruments should also be considered a part of the Krnov Organ School: Jiří Vaculín (Vsetín), Robert Ponča (Krnov) and Jan Stavinoha (Valašská Bystřice). Their activities have not so far risen above the level of ordinary organs for liturgical needs.

We can summarise the present state and prospects of Czech organ making today as follows: The new legislative conditions after 1992 meant the “unfreezing” of the unnatural arrested state that had lasted for forty years. A large number of people have since acquired trade licenses in the field, but only a few firms are actually capable of producing new instruments, and these mainly belonging to the so-called Krnov organ school with its more conservative character of production and sound aesthetics. Only a very few firms have achieved high quality new organs enabling them to break into foreign markets, especially Germany. Unfortunately what was hitherto the largest Czech organ producer, Rieger-Kloss, has been dropping out of this progressive group. Vladimír Šlajch, on the other hand, deserves to be taken very seriously, as does the firm Kánský a Brachtl. The typical feature of both is strong inspiration from historic instruments, but this makes their products almost unacceptable for some

Czech organists and customers who want “modern” organs of the Rieger-Kloss or Grygar type.

This fact reflects the two main developmental trends in contemporary Czech organ-making:

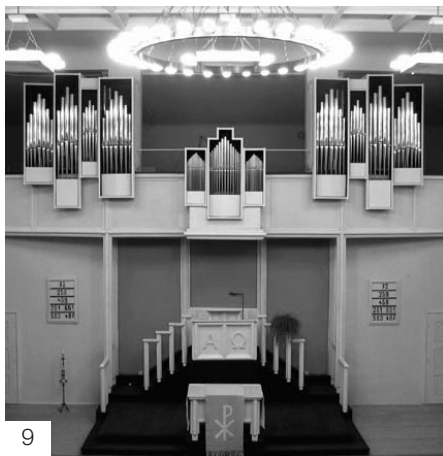
1) the established, i.e. traditional style based on Krnov organ-making, representing the so-called “modern” organ with a wide range of technical possibilities.

2) the historicizing style, based on detailed, precise craftsmanship using historical organs as models.

If we look at the question from the point of view of the wider Europe, and European Union, for the moment the only firms capable of competing are in the second group. Only time will tell which path Czech organ-making as a whole is more likely to take.



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Titles for the Photographs:

- 1) Sněžné (1691 Abraham Starck)
- 2) Manětín (1716 Leopold Burghardt)
- 3) Peruc (1763 Ignaz Schmidt)
- 4) Polná (1708 Johann David Sieber)
- 5) Žďár nad Sázavou – monastery (1723 6) Johann David Sieber)
- 6) Doubravník (1760 Jan Výmola)
- 7) Batelov (1841 František Svítal sen.)
- 8) Nové Město na Moravě – Protestant church (1897 Emanuel Š. Petr)
- 9) Brno – Blahoslavův dům (1992 Dousek and son)
- 10) Třešť (1990 Vladimír Šlajch and Dalibor Míček)
- 11) Humpolec (2004 Kánský and Brachtl)
- 12) Litomyšl – The Holy Cross (2000 Vladimír Grygar in a modified case by Josef Kobrl)



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12

manufacture of pianos in the czech republic: yesterday and today

TEREZA KRAMPLOVÁ

Pianos were made in Bohemia and Moravia from as early as the end of the 18th century and the number of manufactories and small workshops producing and repairing pianos gradually increased to the order of hundreds. The first grand piano builders at the end of the 18th century included for example Jan Zelinka from 1796 in Prague or Jacob Weimes from 1798, while in Brno the important Buchta family business was established from 1770 and the Ignatz Spitzka firm in 1785. Czech instrument makers were also strongly represented in Vienna.

The nineteenth century, especially the latter half, brought a real “boom” in the foundation of new firms producing grand and upright pianos. Many small workshops were opened which gradually expanded production and by the end of the 19th century there was a settled stratification of producers by size. There were small workshops composed of just the owners and a few assistants, who apart from making instruments mainly provided service – tuning and repairs; then there were medium-sized entrepreneurs operating on the basis of a license for the production and repair of grand and upright pianos and finally quite large producers, whose factories were nationalised by the communists in 1948 and placed under the single state concern *Továrny na píana [Piano Factories]*, later *Československé hudební nástroje [Czechoslovak Musical Instruments]*.

The Origins and Development of Production

To get a better understanding of situation, context and starting points of today’s manufacturers, let us take a brief look at the history of some of them.

The firm **Rösler** started production in the later 19th century, although the sources differ on the actual year, which was either 1868 or 1878. (For comparison: the piano

The production of pianos, upright and grand, has a relatively long tradition in the Czech Lands. Together let us look back to the 18th century and the origins and development of a field that is today a significant part of the Czech music industry. Let us compare the joys and woes of piano makers of the past with those of present-day manufacturers, and briefly consider at least some of the difficulties faced by current Czech producers especially as a result of the uncontrollable boom in Asian competition which abides by absolutely none of the traditional trading and manufacturing rules.

works of the most famous and to this day the largest Czech manufacturer Antonín Petrof dates from 1864.) After a number of moves, it settled in Česká Lípa and already made a name for itself in the 1870s in expert circles by using English mechanics. On the death of the firm’s founder Gustav Rösler, the works were inherited by his wife, who in 1897 entrusted the running of the firm to her brother Ludvík Gatter. At the beginning of the new century Gatter successfully expanded production and built up public awareness of the trademark by taking part in world exhibitions (The firm won the highest award in the form of a medal at the World Exhibition in Paris, for example). By 1911 the firm had a hundred workers and employed another fifteen externally. Production was characterised by a high level of modernisation and self-sufficiency. Apart from Austria-Hungary, which was the destination for most of the output (25-35 % to Vienna alone) the firm exported to Great Britain and even to South Africa, for example. The output in numbers of instruments continued to rise and from an original hundred pieces annually at the turn of the century had risen to as high as 1000 instruments in 1935. Then however, with the effects of the Great Economic Crisis the output of the firm dropped back again to only a hundred instruments a year. Up to the end of the Second World War the firm remained in the family, with ownership taken over by Ludvík Gatter’s sons, Reiner and Walter.

In 1876 **Franz Scholze** started production in the Liberec region. He had success-

fully repaired his neighbour’s piano and the work so inspired him that he shelved his original profession as a mill repairer and devoted himself entirely to constructing pianos. In 1891 he started production in Varnsdorf and expanded it substantially. Scholze had all four of his sons trained as piano makers and in 1914 opened yet another branch in Jiříkov. (Since 1894 Jiříkov had also been the home of a **key-board manufactory** managed by Hermann **Stamnitz**, which supplied keyboards to the firms Petrof, Rösler and then the local producer Scholze.) In 1921, two of Scholze’s sons, together with the merchant Heřman Svoboda, formed a public company under the name “Scholze & Sohne” but in 1935 it went bankrupt. It was auctioned and purchased by another of the brothers Franz, who founded the Scholze Piano House in Ústí nad Labem. At this point the firm was producing 8 types of upright piano and 5 types of grand piano. After the war it was nationalised like so many others.

In Liberec itself, the **A. Proksch** firm was founded in 1864 and subsequently provided work for fifty workmen. After twenty years of existence it boasted a subsidiary in Vienna and exported to Germany, England, France, America and the Balkans. Another important Liberec firm engaged in production of upright pianos was **Wawrisch**, established just before the end of the 19th century by the Wawrisch brothers who drew on their experience of Germany and France.

In the 1890s the ranks of the Liberec



Josef Bělohlávek's workshop, Jihlava (Now Bohemia Piano)



Petrof op 1611 (cca 1875)

© Petrof

manufacturers were swelled by **Koch & Korselt**. Thanks to major success at the world exhibition in Paris the fame of the trademark spread rapidly. Apart from whole instruments, it supplied clavichords and mechanics. By the end of the 1940s the firm was producing eight models of upright piano and five models of grand piano, employed around eighty people and its average annual output was 400 uprights and 150 grand pianos. In 1940 Rudolf Klinger became company secretary and then owner; under his management the firm was forced to shift to war production and the manufacture of pianos de facto ceased.

August Riemer of Chrastava supplied mainly electrical pianos and orchestrions. Within fifteen years of the founding of the firm in 1845 he was able to employ around twenty people. After 1896 the firm was renamed Gebrüder Riemer. The family tradition was carried on with the building of organs under the trademark Jos. Riemer and Söhne.

In his time the German producer **August Förster** was a pioneer in the introduction of new technologies. He installed electricity to power the machines in his factory, enabling him to increase weekly production from eight instruments to sixteen, and he also patented a cast iron frame. Apart from Lóbbau, where the firm was founded at the turn of the 1850s/60s (sources differ, with some stating 1859 and others 1862), he set up branches in Budyšín (1893), and Žitava (1896), and to avoid a duty imposed on

German products imported into Austria Hungary he set up a firm – now under the management of Franz Čáslar Förster, assembling instruments in Jiřkov as well (1900). The instruments produced in the Jiřkov branch of the firm were not subject to duty and were supplied to all parts of the monarchy on favourable terms. Production doubled in the first five years of the firm's existence and operations in Bohemia were soon expanded, in 1909. The 1910 catalogue lists production in both countries: 2,200 upright and grand pianos with a workforce of 500 employees. In 1919 direction of the plant in Bohemia was taken over by the founder's grandson Gerhard Förster. Under his management the firm built the legendary quarter-tone piano at the suggestion of the composer Alois Hába (see Czech Music 3/2005) and was involved in the development of sound in the field of electro-acoustics. Experts enhanced the properties of the soundboard with an amplifier and reproducer and the result was the instrument known as the Elektrochord. The firm also devoted attention to the development of new low upright piano models known as the Pianetto.

In Zákolany near Prague a workshop initially concerned just with repairing old instruments was founded in 1905, but by 1913 it had grown so substantially that it was producing its own grand pianos and upright pianos under the trade name **Dalibor**. Modernisation of the equipment enabled it to keep on expanding production, as is also clear from the growing number of

employees (originally the firm had around eighteen employees, but in the 1920s around fifty). In 1925 it already had its own a warehouse and shop in Prague.

The originally small Prague manufactory founded in 1872 by **Josef Brož**, flourished and expanded under the direction of his sons and in 1921 opened another branch in Velim. Apart from its own models, the factory manufactured instruments of the German firm Förster Leipzig under licence. In roughly the mid-1920s the firm employed more than a hundred workers and in addition to classical models was producing electropianos. The concern kept on expanding and diversifying and as well as a wood drying plant, its own keyboard production centre and its production of all metal parts, it provided employees with accommodation in newly built flats for workers. Had it not been overtaken by international political and economic events, this firm might well have carved out one of the leading positions on the market.

In Jihlava, apart from the small piano works belonging to Josef Bělohlávek, the workshop of **Josef Breitner** was founded in 1924. Under the patronage of the Viennese firm of Hofmann & Czerny it flourished and employed around fifty workers. Thanks to Austrian capital, in 1927 Breitner formed the joint-stock company "Jihlavská továrna pian, a.s. – Iglauer Klavierfabrik AG" and manufactured **Hofmann & Czerny** instruments under license. Starting in 1930 the factory underwent modernisation and expansion, acquiring a varnishing shop with electrically powered spray, drying room and

water turbine. In 1939 racial laws forced a number of changes in personnel, in 1945 the company secretary and director of the works fled to Austria, and the firm was placed under national administration. In 1948 the factory was nationalised and incorporated into the state concern "Piano and Organ Factory" in Hradec Králové.

Lidl and Velik were among Moravian producers. The owners moved production to Moravský Krumlov from Boskovice in 1921 and started to manufacture several models of grand piano and upright piano there. The firm prospered and within a few years were producing 14 types of upright and 6 types of grand. When hit by the economic crisis, however, it had to move over to production of button and piano accordions, which saved the firm from cutbacks in production and layoffs.

The Decline in Production from the Beginning of the 20th Century 1945

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a great deal to choose from, but firms were struggling with problems of various kinds. The field was negatively affected, for example, by the enormous hike in customs duties between Austria-Hungary and Germany, which put the brakes on trade, while electrification was as yet inadequate, capacity in heavy industry was insufficient and inflexible in its response to the demands of new customers. The small producers were also facing tough competition from the instruments made by foreign firms (The trademarks Streicher, Bösendorfer, Steinway or Ehrbar were already making headway in Czech markets.)

The First World War, which caused a loss of workforce and overall stagnation of piano production was a painful blow to most of the Czech manufacturers. Co-operation with specialised producers of piano parts – mechanics, keys, keyboards and so on was temporarily interrupted and the circle of experts seriously narrowed. After the war, however, the situation improved year by year, trade relations were re-established and after 1925 an influx of new skilled craftsmen and the use of high quality materials and half-finished elements meant that production reached a very high standard. Then, however, came the Great Economic Crisis, which devastated the industry. In 1929 more than 90% of all the small, mainly family firms that provided their owners and a few journeymen with a livelihood went out of business. All producers experienced a drop in demand, production was cut back and employees laid off. Many factories had to make as much as half their workforce redundant, massively reducing production and sometimes introducing three-day weeks.

After the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia under the Nazis there was further decline in the manufacture of musical instruments, because the

Nazi occupation authorities forced firms to give priority to the production of wooden parts for aeroplanes and munitions chests for the Wehrmacht. With reduction in the number of skilled expert workers production in some places entirely ceased, while other firms continued to make instruments only as a sideline.

Development after 1945

After the Second World War almost all private enterprise was nationalised and incorporated into national concerns. The owners of firms were deprived of their rights and from 1945 national administrators delegated by district national committees were installed instead of owners and original directors. These administrators were chosen either from the ranks of former employees, often heads of workshops and production, accountants and so on, or were experts from other towns.

In 1948 following the Communist putsch some of the larger plants were incorporated into the newly founded state concern *Továrny na piana a varhany – Piano and Organ Factories* based in Hradec Králové. The following firms were transferred into the assets of this state concern by a decree of the Minister of Industry in 1948: Antonín Petrof, Hradec Králové; Koch & Korselt, Liberec; Dalibor, Zákolany; Brothers Rieger, Krnov; Josef Kloss, Krnov; Gustav Rösler, Česká Lípa; H. Stannitz, Jiříkov; August Förster, Jiříkov; Scholze & Söhne, Varnsdorf. Others were later added to the list.

At the end of the 1950s the whole of the Czechoslovak music industry was reorganised and the state concern renamed from *Továrny na piana* to *Československé hudební nástroje – Czechoslovak Musical Instruments* (ČSHN, established by a Decree of the Ministry of Industry of the 1st of April 1958). Until the end of the socialist era this concern incorporated not just producers of pianos, but all Czech and Slovak producers of musical instruments. Production was divided into several plants, and in 1962 a separate plant for the manufacture of pianos was established in Hradec Králové (*Odštěpný závod Piana*).

This socialist unification of production in the field was a tragedy not just because of the appropriation of the rights of the original owners, often families who had been producing pianos for generations, but also because the many self-sufficient firms that had been making their own instruments became mere suppliers of parts. The distinctive character of their instruments was lost. Furthermore, the lack of motivation among employees and those owners who often stayed on as employees led to stagnation of production. It can of course be argued from the other side, that only by the unification of production (and not only in the communist period) could Czech producers

succeed in the face of global competition. The operation of all elements and co-ordination of the firms was the task of a unified management (at the time the General Directorate of ČSHN), which supervised and supported the development of instruments, monitored foreign competition, expanded production and in its separate specialised plants created self-sufficient departments supplying all the parts necessary for the final product.

Czech Manufacturers of Upright and Grand Piano Today

Currently four domestic firms producing and selling pianos figure on the Czech market. The main producer is **Petrof Ltd.** of Hradec Králové, which is largest in turnover and historically the most famous maker and retailer of instruments in the CR. Another is the middle-sized firm **Bohemia Piano Ltd.** based in Hradec Králové and Jihlava, and the last two are the smaller **KLIMA-PIANO, Ltd.** and **HSBF.**

Thanks to a history of unbroken production since its founding, Petrof is today the biggest firm on the Czech market. Like the other Czech firms it exports around 95 % of its overall production, and abroad Petrof is the best known brand and a synonym for Czech piano. The other firms have been catching up, especially through participation in world fairs and exhibitions, and Bohemia, for example, today has representatives in 35 countries. Petrof and Bohemia Piano in particular have also been building up their image in the Czech Republic by sponsoring music festivals and organising their own concerts and other events.

The combined turnover of all four firms is more than 960 million crowns (32 million EUR approx.), making it a substantial item in the framework of the Czech music industry. One interesting trend is that while the production of uprights by the two larger firms has been gradually diminishing, the number of grands has remained the same or risen. Be that as it may, in recent years there have been major cuts in the number of employees and branches particularly in the case of Petrof. Of the four factories operated by the firm as of mid-2004 practically only one remains and the workforce has been progressively cut from 1300 in 2003 to somewhere around 700. Recently, however Petrof has become majority shareholder in a piano case factory in Týniště and plans to become the biggest European supplier of semi-finished parts for the production of upright and grand pianos.

The Pressure of Asian Producers and other Problems Facing Manufacturers

Let us for a moment turn our eyes from purely Czech conditions and try to identify the causes of the present fragile stability of traditional

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European producers, for whom one of the greatest current threats is the boom in Asian production. The main motto of the new firms that have been established in China and have been making headway on European and US markets is above all low prices, mass production and digitalisation of instruments. The huge upsurge in piano manufacture in China is a phenomenon of the last decade. Frequently these firms copy European models almost perfectly, and this is happening, unfortunately, with the help of European and American experts who are founding firms in Asia and providing the know-how to make up for the lack of local traditional experience in the field. Thus with each year that passes we witness a perceptible improvement in the quality of the Asian instruments presented there. Given the incomparably cheaper work force and the materials used (less expensive, but with properties that approach the traditional), Asian producers can set prices that are extraordinarily low compared to instruments of American or European manufacture. (The prices of Asian products at the Musikmesse in Frankfurt am Main in 2004 were around 800 USD for a classical model upright, compared to a European price at a minimum of 2600 – 10 000 EUR.) In a period when clients give priority to price over quality world markets are naturally opening up to these instruments and the traditional instruments are being progressively squeezed out.

At present, collaboration with Asia is taking many forms. European and American firms are co-operating with their Asian counterparts by using cheap Asian parts for their own instruments. The situation is far from transparent, because some firms admit this kind of co-operation while others do not. Instruments are also often produced in Asia under a traditional European or American trade name. European and Asian firms are often fused, and sometimes factories are being moved entirely to Asia.

History seems to be repeating itself. Today's producers are struggling with the same problems as their predecessors at the turn of the 19th/20th century. The USA has imposed high duties on goods from the EU and producers are thinking up various strategies for getting round it. An unfavourable world economic situation and specific difficulties facing home industry are affecting the production of musical instruments here, just as in the past. And then there are the new problems of cheap Asian production and local falls in demand caused by many factors (9/11, the threat of terrorist attacks, SARS). The instability of the dollar exchange rate is also not helping trade.

The current trend, with which world producers are falling into line, is to merge all activities into one whole and try to offer the customer a wide spectrum of products and prices from which to choose. Thus for example Steinway is now a part of the large concern Steinway Musical Instruments, which brings together producers in many fields, has manufacturing branches in 13 locations in the



Petrol factory

© Petrof

August Förester's quarter-tone piano



USA and Europe and co-operates with Asia. Many producers have been shifting production to Asia, collaborating with local firms or directly purchasing cheap Asian instruments and moving over from production to distribution in their own countries.

In addition to all these world trends, the Czech situation has specific features that mean that if the largest firm Petrof gets into further serious difficulties, the other Czech firms will suffer as well. This is because the supplier base of all the Czech firms is the

same, and Petrof is still the main domestic customer. Today Czech producers have to decide which path to choose. Either to succumb to cheap Asian production and take the path of producing low price instruments, or to stick to their traditional standards and even in the face of high manufacturing costs to maintain the existing quality that attracts customers with the same demands. Another alternative is a merger between all the producers or to find a strong partner in a foreign company. All we can do is wish them every success.

four generations of špidlens

the legendary czech violin makers

LIBUŠE HUBIČKOVÁ

When it comes to violin makers, the Czechs, like the Italians, Germans, French and English, are among the handful of nations that can boast not simply a number of individual solitaire masters, but entire celebrated dynasties. In the Czech case, distinguished lines or schools emerged not only in large urban centres, but also (and in this respect we may be unique), in remote villages of the Kingdom of Bohemia where especially in the 18th and 19th century men as well as women (for example Johanna Metelková (1843–1866) in Podkrkonoší region) engaged in violin making. It is from these rural roots that one of the most illustrious of Czech violin-making dynasties has sprung; today the fourth generation of Špidlens still produces violins.

FRANTIŠEK ŠPIDLEN

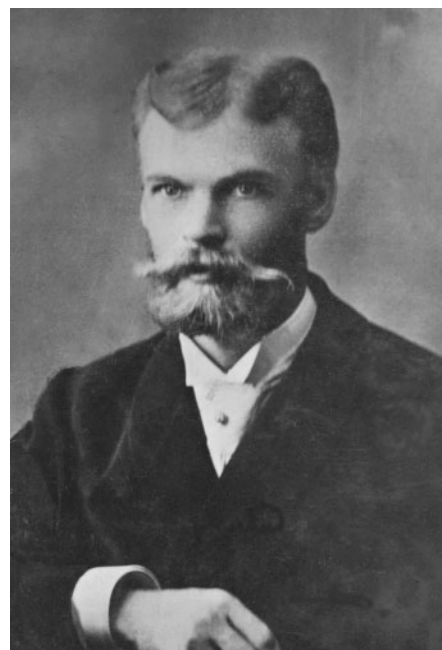
The first of them was **František Špidlen** (1867–1916), born under the Krkonoše Mountains in Sklenařice, a small place where he made his early instruments. He learnt the craft with local masters as a livelihood, just as other boys trained to be a baker, weaver or carpenter. Only František Špidlen was lucky, and found a way to a world where music lived a much more sophisticated life than in his native village. This was Kiev, and later Tsarist Moscow, a city where in the late 19th century music was still considered the essential daily bread of aristocratic and patrician society. Otakar Ševčík told František Špidlen about a competition announced by the conservatory in Moscow to fill the position left by the deceased French violinmaker Ernest André Salzard. Špidlen won it, and at the age of thirty became violinmaker to the prestigious conservatory in the Russian metropolis. At the time he was already the father of a nine-month-old boy, born in 1896 in Kiev and



František Špidlen, 1890 – the style of the Krkonoše School is clear, the instrument very carefully constructed and finished

named Otakar František, who was to grow up to be the second violinmaker of the Špidlen dynasty.

As violin maker to the Tsarist Conservatory, Špidlen's duties consisted of mending and collecting old instruments, but otherwise he was free to ply his own trade, including selling. František initially made a name for himself as an outstanding restorer and repairer of old instruments, and while he did not have much time to make new instruments, he learned a great deal from dismantling the old instruments before repairing them, since here he had a chance to work with some of the most valuable violins of the day. As time went by he was able to devote more time to creating his own instruments. He was already producing exquisite violins as far as form, proportions and choice of the best wood was concerned. He still did not know much about



František Špidlen during his time in Moscow at the end of the 19th century

Frant. Špidlen

sound, however, and at the beginning did not worry too much about varnishes either, buying them readymade.

One of his violins from his Moscow period remains in the family collection to this day. It shows how much he had already learned from repairing classical instruments and how he kept seeking to improve his skills. It is a beautiful violin modelled on the Guarneri of 1740 that Eugène Ysaye has used for his concerts in Moscow. František Špidlen's instruments of this period are excellent in terms of craft and aesthetic appearance, but as far as sound was concerned they were sometimes problematic. He had almost no knowledge of soundboard tuning or acoustics.

Some of the first ideas on how to tune the violin soundboards came from another native of Sklenařice, František's nephew **Jindřich Vitáček** (1880–1946), whom

František had taken on as assistant in the Kiev period. At that time neither of them guessed that the fifteen-year-old lad would grow into a very talented violinmaker, one with a tremendous enthusiasm for uncovering the unknown techniques of the old masters and at the same time a scientific passion for making his own experiments and discoveries in the field of varnishes, acoustics and soundboard tuning. In Moscow a large quantity of old instruments that he repaired with his uncle had passed through his hands. He obsessively studied them in disassembled form, exploring every detail of their construction and the individual wooden parts, as well as all the techniques then used to finish them. Working with physicists and chemists (which was unusual for violin makers of the time) he sought to establish the basis of the strength and colour of the sound. He then told František that both soundboards – the top and bottom of the violin – needed to be tuned in a certain interval (according to Vitáček, a perfect fourth), and later told Otakar and his son Přemysl, with guidelines as to how this could be achieved. Vitáček kept detailed records of every item of his research, experiment and result. In Russia, the boy from the Krkonoše foothills who had never even finished his weaving apprenticeship became the saviour of hundreds of precious stringed instruments, which after the Russian Revolution became the basis for the Tsarist Collection of Musical Instruments (today the world famous Glinka Museum in Moscow, the largest of its kind).

As far as design of the instruments was concerned, the Czech violinmakers of the Fr. Špidlen's era were traditionally linked to the German school and so preferred thicker soundboards. When repairing old instruments, however, they found the soundboards unusually thin. Their only explanation was that the wood must have dried out and so "thinned" considerably. Thus when violinmakers had dismantled a Stradivarius, for example, which had a top soundboard 2.5 millimetres thick, they believed that the two-hundred-year-old instrument's soundboard might originally – before the supposed drying out – have been about 3 millimetres thick, and so supplied soundboards of this thickness for the instruments. In doing so, however, they ruined the instrument, because in fact the soundboards had originally been only 2.5 millimetres and had not subsequently altered or thinned (Logically, if the thickness of the soundboards had diminished, then drying should have affected their breadth and length as well and the violin would have completely changed in shape, which it had not... The theory was simply wrong. Stradivari had made his violins in just the form that we know them today...)

František Špidlen made an excellent name for himself in Russia and elsewhere in the world, where his instruments were successful against tough competition at exhibi-

tions and in contests. He made a total of around 400 violins, among other awards winning a silver medal in Frankfurt, a Diploma of Honour and Exhibition Medal in Prague (1895), a Grand Silver Medal in Kiev (1897), an Exhibition Medal in Paris (1900), First Prize and Grand Gold Medal in Peterburg (1906–7), and the Grand Silver Medal in Lille (1909).

In 1907, however, poor health forced him to return to Bohemia. After a short period in the country he was able to open a shop and workshop in Prague in Křížovnická Street not far from the conservatory. For a while he also had a shop on hired premises in what is today Karlova Street. As a violinmaker almost unknown in Prague, however, he could not establish himself there until after the death of the established Prague violinmaker and instrument dealer **Karel B. Dvořák**, whose unassailable position had deterred competition. Once the eldest Špidlen had settled in Prague and hung a sign with his name over the new workshop in Křížovnická in the Old Town, all the other bearers of his name and inheritors of his craft – his son, grandson and great-grandson – were to be domiciled in Prague, despite the origins of the dynasty in the Krkonoše School of violin making. At the beginning František and Otakar had simply to establish a place among the existing local violinmakers, but soon they would be considered equal partners with the others, and as stalwart supports of the Prague Violinmakers Guild. Finally the name of Špidlen would become the first, the most frequently pronounced, the most famous. The name that attracted celebrated string virtuosos from Bohemia and abroad.

OTAKAR FRANTIŠEK ŠPIDLEN

The founder's son **Otakar František Špidlen** (1896 – 1958) was a talented and clever entrepreneur. He could do business just as well as he could make new instruments and repair the old, and he was extraordinarily hard-working. Despite this, his first independent steps in Prague were difficult. The violinmakers makers organised in the Prague Association of Musical Instrument Makers already had the city strategically "occupied". While for some time they had grudgingly accepted the existence of competition from the Špidlens as represented by the doyen of the family František, when the young Otakar František conjoined the guild after his father's death as a mere nineteen-year-old lad (and what was worse a lad born in Russia), his determination to make his way struck the established Prague masters as impudence. Their resistance was considerable.

He would repair instruments all night, on holidays and Sundays, and produce new ones during the day. But mainly he looked after the shop. Twenty hours a day. Fortunately the times themselves smiled on him. This was the era of the first free Czechoslo-



Otakar František Špidlen, 1935 – instrument made for President T.G. Masaryk for the 17th anniversary of the declaration of an independent Czechoslovakia

vak Republic, which at least as far back as the nation could recall was the most favourable period ever for Czech business and businessmen.

"My father," his son Přemysl recalls "lived for the business. He enjoyed it. He was lord and master in that shop. He loved standing behind the counter and he loved the way it kept him in continual contact with people from the world of music... He had a lot of outstanding, rare instruments there and a tremendously interesting clientele. Naturally the people who came to us included esteemed figures like František Ondříček, Josef Suk, Jan Kubelík, Váša Přihoda, and later David Oistrakh and a whole range of other important violinists. Simply the elite..."

Otakar F. Špidlen managed to create an enthralling environment for instruments and their admirers. He took part in exhibitions in Bohemia and a number of competitions at the conservatories in Prague's Emauz and the Rudolfinum and usually won first prize (in most cases) or second prize. He made a violin for the president T. G. Masaryk in 1936, and on its bottom had a painter from the neighbourhood Dblílk paint a large version of the state emblem and the initials T.G.M. Today it is the depository of the Prague Music Conservatory. (The newspapers reported it on the 12th of January 1936 under the headline "Rare Violin. Who

PŘEMYSL OTAKAR ŠPIDLEN

After the death of Otakar František Špidlen, the shop with its windows facing the busy Jungmannova Street remained open, but soon after the Communist putsch **Přemysl Špidlen** (*1920), now himself a master and the third of the violin-making dynasty, was forced to close the shop that had been his father's pride and joy. Only the workshop for repair and production of new instruments was allowed to remain in operation.

"From my father I inherited ingenuity and dexterity in the craft" says Přemysl Špidlen. "Without that I couldn't have become a violinmaker. It wasn't just family, but the omnipresence of violins, the music created by all those original people who belonged to us – for me that was an everyday inspiration with a taste of a kind of mystery that I never experienced anywhere else in the families of my friends. All that basically predestined me to my future career. At home it was usual for us to talk about some rare violin that would be coming in for repair... The doors didn't bang in our shop and they would open (especially the doors to the workshop) to admit great figures who gave an extra respect and dignity to our whole house – something that of course I was to realise fully only later, in the course of the following years. That was all part and parcel of my father's life."

His childhood provided Přemysl Špidlen a perfect understanding of wood and the physical laws that determine how it should be treated, and he subsequently kept up with all the new expert findings of the modern age. He knew everything that was to be known about the several ways of tuning the violin soundboards – something about which his grandfather had known very little at all and his father only slightly more. From modern physics and chemistry he soon acquired a great deal of knowledge necessary for the correct varnishing a violin, and he enlarged this body of knowledge with findings of his own. As an active violinist he could try out an instruments himself in any phase of its construction. Heir to a respected workshop, he soon won a reputation in his own right and became versed in all aspects of his craft.

Throughout his life he has had a passionate interest and pioneering desire to decipher the secret formula of varnishes on the instruments of Stradivarius and the effects of varnishes on the acoustics of violins. He tested all the recipes so far known, and added hundreds of his own. He still keeps up with all the new experiments in physical, chemical and mechanical research and takes his passion to absurd lengths – he will only travel to countries where he can find violins or violinmakers. One of the people who has influenced Přemysl Špidlen's views on the soundboards tuning since the 1980s is the American physicist C. M. Hutchins, who was the first to conduct research on acoustics using modes pro-



Přemysl Otakar Špidlen, 1961 – copy of the Campo Selice Stradivarius

Přemysl Špidlen

Přemysl Otakar Špidlen with a finished instrument in his workshop in Jungmannova Street, Prague, 1980s



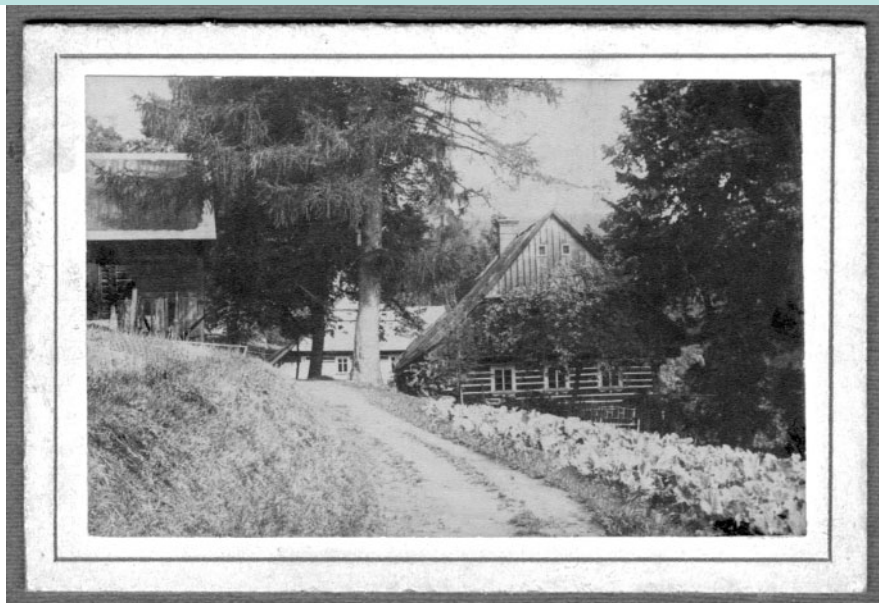
Otakar

Otakar František Špidlen, 1920s

will play on it?" The press wrote that "The violin the master violinmaker Otakar Špidlen has presented to the President T.G.Masaryk. (...) a copy of a famous violin by Ant. Stradivari, is one of the most beautiful works of modern Czech violinmaking, and in craftsmanship and sound is the equal of the very valuable instruments of the Old Italian School."

Other instruments by Otakar František also testify to his outstanding skills as a master violinmaker. He always used the same models, Stradivari and Guarneri, and used an orange oil varnish that he purchased readymade abroad. Like František Špidlen, he tended to leave the soundboards thicker than in the Italian models. His best era was around the year 1930, a time when he made very fine fiddles, and was still quite young and under the influence of his father. As he got older he concentrated more and more on business.

For his knowledge of theory Otakar F. Špidlen was indebted above all to the untiring assistance of his cousin Vitáček, who in letters from Russia and on visits to Prague systematically passed on all the conclusions he had drawn from his own researches and study of theory in the many countries he visited for the purpose. Otakar F. Špidlen made around 150 instruments. He was the initiator and co-founder of the Circle of Fine Violin-Makers.



Sklenařice under the Krkonoše Mountains, Špidlen family cottage, today no longer in existence

Jan Baptista Špidlen – finishing the varnishing of an instrument, 2003

duced by a tone generator and loudspeaker.

When he inherited his father's workshop as a young man, Přemysl had no idea that one day he would take his own art and inheritance to the topmost summit of world violin making. *"It is the rediscovery of Stradivari!"* Etienne Vatelot, the top French expert on the violin was to exclaim many years later, when hearing an instrument created by Přemysl Otakar Špidlen, and the great expert and at the time the biggest German dealer in musical instrument Walter Hamma pronounced Přemysl Špidlen to be the only violinmaker to have succeeded in penetrating the mystery of Stradivari's instruments. *"The art of Czech violinmaking has been developed to the very highest standards by Přemysl Otakar Špidlen"* – declared a television documentary on the Špidlens... But of course, such tributes had been earned by huge, untiring efforts. Hours and hours at the workbench as the graceful forms of instruments emerged slowly, almost in slow motion, from the slices of wood. Hundreds and hundreds of experiments and tests with the composition and then the application of varnishes to the surface of "white" violins. Hours and hours poring over the pages of expert journals on the qualities of sound, the resonance of wood and so on. Years waiting for the acoustic result of mature and "played in" violins. Constant comparison of disassembled instruments of the Old Baroque violin masters with later instruments. Innumerable consultations and discussions with violin virtuosos. An extraordinary career on the field of international violinmaker competitions, resulting in a whole range of very prestigious awards...

Přemysl Otakar Špidlen made his first violin in 1937, when he was 17 years old. A record of the violin exists, written by his mother Marie who kept notes on his instru-

ments including important technical information. As the years went by the records grew longer, although no longer in his mother's hand. Přemysl Špidlen's development as a violinmaker was many sided to a degree almost unparalleled among his contemporaries.

He places special emphasis on the quality of the wood and the quality of the varnish. *"Varnish has become his life problem and hobby, he has conducted innumerable varnish tests and believes that he is getting close to his dream of recreating Cremona varnish. His work is truly outstanding. Distinctive for its absolutely unerringly cut soundboards, perfect inlay, profiled cut scrolls. Beautiful spruce and maple wood, browned by natural sunlight, is exploited to full aesthetic effect. The colour composition of the instrument created by the base and his own special varnish enhances the merits of the workmanship and the wood, and so his instruments give the impression of having been composed and imbued with feeling like paintings. There are few violinmakers as knowledgeable about acoustics and the physics of violins. Přemysl Otakar Špidlen is one of the most exceptional figures in the whole history of violinmaking in our country. Almost all the world virtuosos who come to play in our capital eventually arrive in his atelier."* (Extract from the Czech encyclopedia *The Art Of Violin-Makers.*)

Přemysl Špidlen has so far made around 250 violins, violas and cellos, which had served many top performers (Menuhin, Suk, the Smetana Quartet...). Of his many awards we might mention Best Czech Violin-Maker in the Hague (1947), The Gold Medal in Liège (1960), 1st and 3rd Prize and Gold Medal in Poznan (1962), and 2nd Prize and Gold Medal in Poznan (1967).

JAN BAPTISTA ŠPIDLEN

The Špidlen dynasty can now boast a violinmaker of the fourth generation in the shape of **Jan Špidlen** (*1967). Today he is already an acclaimed Master violinmaker. The author of a series of beautiful and successful violins, several violas and as yet one cello. Jan has of course inherited a tremendous amount of experience and a well-equipped workshop, which he is modernising in line with technical advance, but of course these advantages are balanced by the enormous challenge he has faced in living up to the standards of his three predecessors and the exceptionally high quality of their instruments. He has risen to it, and today he too has produced excellent instruments – one of his first violins is the property of Josef Suk, he is a privileged supplier of instruments to Pavel Šporcl and two recent violins won him phenomenal success at the 10th Violinmaking Triennale in Cremona in 2003 – 1st and 2nd Prize and three other awards. Cremona has ensured his membership of the prestigious international association of violinmakers and stringed instrument makers ENTENTE and has opened his path to the elite of his profession.

Today he is master on equal terms with the most distinguished of the world's violin makers. As such he had the chance to attend a congress in Tuscany with a very interesting theme: would it be possible today to create an entirely new model violin that would be equal in quality to the still respected Baroque type, but in allowable respects would introduce new avant-garde elements – form, colour, other proportions, new material...? It is a question to which no one has yet found an answer, despite many often picturesque experiments.

The young master has a very difficult task in his own family of violinmakers. Per-

Špidlen



Jan Baptista Špidlen, 1988 – instrument based on Stradivari's Hellier inlaid violin of 1679



Jan Baptista Špidlen

haps a task more difficult than those that faced any of his predecessors. As he makes his violins he cannot comfort himself, as perhaps his great-grandfather did when he first arrived in Russia, that if he succeeds it will be fine but if he fails it won't be the end of the world. He is the guarantor of the successes of all preceding Špidlens, and faces the challenge of equalling them. From his forbears he has inherited, apart from much else, the responsibility for the name and quality of Špidlen instruments, which is now a famous international brand name.

In his childhood he learned from his father about wood, its properties and refined ways of treating. Then he went away to develop his talent at school and in the wider world. He studied Applied Arts School in Prague in Žižkov. There, specialising in wood carving and modelling he learnt to work with this material in a way different from his father's workshop. Studies at the international violinmaking school in Mittenwald in Germany and a placement in London with the famous violinmaking firm J. & A. Beare, which specialises in repairing and restoring the most expensive stringed instruments, raised his qualifications and broadened his outlook still further, and allowed Jan Špidlen to compare different ways of constructing violins and approaching other tasks associated with the production of master instruments and modern restoration. He returned home with knowledge that has hugely enriched the legacy of the firm of Špidlen.

A word of conclusion: Recently a notable book (in Czech) was published entitled "Špidlenovi, čeští Mistři houslaří" [The Špidlens, Czech Master Violin-Makers]. It is the first book of its kind, offering readers not only an insight into the secret chambers where violins are born, but also taking them back to the time and circumstances in which this royal instrument first saw the light of day. It recalls the glorious epoch of the geniuses of Cremona – Amati, Stradivari and Guarneri. And last but not least it explores what have often been neglected aspects of the inheritance of the master art of violinmaking.



Cremona 2003 – a walk through the centre of Cremona on the occasion of the 10th Violin-Making Triennale in Cremona, where Jan won 1st and 2nd Prize for his instruments as well as three other awards and became the absolute winner of this international competition.



Two Masters – father and son – with their instruments



Cremona 2003 – Přemysl and Jan Špidlen at the tomb of the most famous violin-maker of all time, Antonio Stradivari



RENÁTA SPISAROVÁ

In the 1960s the composer Rudolf Komorous shone as one of the most radical and interesting members of the avant-garde in Czechoslovakia. After 1968 like many others he seemed to vanish off the face of the earth – at least from Czechoslovak barbed-wire fenced in perspective. In 2005 he was 74 let, and celebrated his birthday in Victoria in Canada, near the shores of the Pacific Ocean, where he has lived and successfully worked since 1971.

He was born on the 8th of December 1931 in Prague in Žižkov, and his father, first clarinet in the National Theatre Orchestra, influenced his choice of career as professional musician. In the grade school at Amerling Teacher Training Institute he was in the same class as Prince Lobkowicz, whose chauffeur used to let him get out of the Rolls Royce a couple of streets away so he could walk to school with the other children. Rudolf became best friends with the Prince's desk-mate, Josef Podaný the son of a tram driver. The small boys here were imbued with a thorough spirit of Masarykian democracy, learnt the importance of education and love of country, even if these ideas sound rather naive in our milieu.

He studied at a modern gymnasium (grammar school), and from the fifth form also studied bassoon at the Prague Conservatory on the wishes of his father (1946–52). Komorous left the conservatory to take up a place at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (1952–59), continuing his bassoon

the composer rudolf komorous

studies, and then started to study composition in Pavel Bořkovec's class.

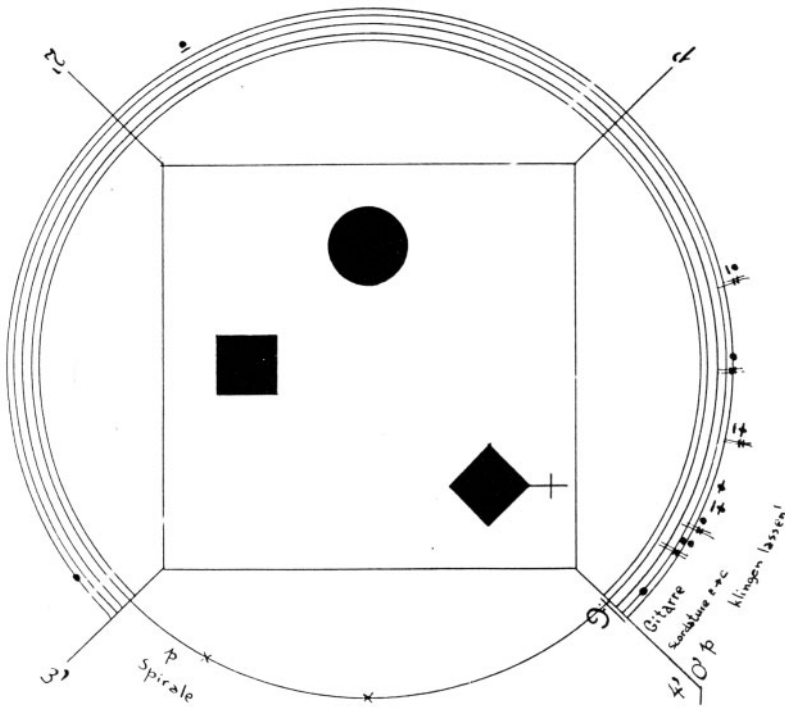
In 1955 Komorous co-founded the art group known as the *Šmidrové* (the others were the artists Bedřich Dlouhý, Jan Koblasa, Karel Nepraš, and Jaroslav Vožniak). They declared their allegiance to an *aesthetics of strangeness* and played a very important role in the history of Czech art under communism. The *Šmidrs* aesthetics, which despite a period favouring abstraction emphasised the importance of the *concrete* and had a somewhat Dada-esque ethos, was to have a fundamental influence on Rudolf Komorous's lifelong output.

In 1957 Komorous won first prize in an international bassoon competition in Geneva (Concours International d'Execution Musicale; it was the very first time a Czechoslovak had won such an award). As a result Komorous was able to go for two years at the Conservatory in Beijing in China (1959 – 1961), where he taught bassoon and chamber play. In 1961, after his return from China, Komorous accepted an invitation from the flautist and composer Petr Kotík, founder of the ensemble *Musica Viva Pragensis* (MVP), to join the ensemble, and he was also engaged as first bassoonist in the opera orchestra of the State Theatre in Prague. Thanks to Komorous there were changes in the composition of the MVP ensemble, which became highly professionalised with the involvement of professors at the conservatory and members of the Czech Philharmonic.

The MVP became one of the best ensembles in the world for the performance of modern music, and its members gave concerts and made recordings in radio studios all over Europe up to 1968. From the very beginning of the 1960s they had contacts with American avant-garde musicians; at the Warsaw Spring festival in 1964, for example, they performed in the group around John Cage.

"We in MVP were invited to the Warsaw Autumn. We played there with John Cage and David Tudor for the Merce Cunningham

Dance Group and we gave a concert of our own. We played my Olympia there, and it was the official premiere. (We had played it first at the opening of an exhibition of work by Jaroslav Vožniak; people thought it was very interesting but that it was the sort of music you could play at a gallery opening but not in the concert hall. But later they had to change their minds, because we did play it in a concert hall.) (...) Olympia was very successful, and we had to repeat it, and we also played Petr Kotík's Trio dedicated to [composer and theorist] Jan Rychlík, who had died shortly before. That was a longer piece, perhaps around 12 minutes. (Back then people were writing just short pieces, especially the composers of the New Music at the Warsaw Autumn. That was the influence of Webern.) (...) After our appearance, an important article came out about us in Rudé právo [the main communist daily], which damned us and presented us as an irresponsible ensemble out to destroy the reputation of Czech music. It turned the performance into an affair, especially Petr Kotík's piece. It was not true that his Trio was badly received; most of the people in the audience applauded and liked it. Back then it was a kind of fashion for a couple of people to whistle, because a New Music concert wouldn't be a New Music concert without a bit of whistling, would it? When they whistled at Petr's piece, our officials concluded that it was a dreadful failure and shamed Czech music. And then they started a hue and cry after us! The MVP was de facto banned, we had been supposed to be going to Zagreb for the Biennale, but we weren't allowed to and they sent the Czech Noneto instead of us. The audience somehow got to know why we weren't there – there was more freedom in Yugoslavia than at home, and they said publicly that our visit had been prohibited and they had sent the Czech Noneto instead. The noneto, of course, had pieces by composers from the Union [of Czechoslovak Composers and



Concert Artists] in their programme. People in the audience got up and left... (...) After Warsaw they banned us by artificially creating a scandal. The concert hadn't been any kind of scandal, not even the slightest, but on the contrary it had clearly been the most successful concert of the whole Warsaw Autumn."

After the "scandal" the activities of the ensemble were gradually revived, but without Petr Kotík, who was studying in Vienna. Two composers, Marek Kopelent as musical director and Zbyněk Vostřák (see CM 1/2005) as conductor, came to the MVP and the ensemble started to orientate itself to more standard currents in the New Music that were at least a little more acceptable in the Czech political context. The MVP's activities were to cease definitively only with the Soviet Occupation.

As Rudolf Komorous says he was lucky that he never saw Russian tanks in our country. When they arrived he was recording Wagner's Ring in Nuremberg with Hans Swarovsky for the English gramophone company Westminster. Just by chance his wife Hana was travelling with him and they managed to get their daughter Klára out of the occupied country into Germany after a time. All three said goodbye to Europe in 1969, emigrated to Canada and never regretted the decision.

The first place where Rudolf Komorous taught was in fact MacAllester College in Minneapolis, in the USA (1970 – 1971), where he was recommended by John Cage.

His family, however, remained in Canada and although he was very happy at MacAllester College he accepted the offer of a job at the University of Victoria. In 1971 the Komorous family moved to Victoria, one of the islands of British Columbia. Here Komorous worked as a professor of composition and theory, strengthened the position of the music department, founded an electronic music studio, expanded the range of musical disciplines taught, and later reorganised the department as director. He became an acclaimed and sought after teacher of composition, and today many of his former students figure in the Canada composing elite (for example Allison Cameron, Owen Underhill, Chris Butterfield, Linda Catlin Smith). In the years 1989–1994 he was director of the school of contemporary arts at The Simon Fraser University in nearby Vancouver.

Rudolf Komorous divides his mature work into three periods: the minimalist period, the abstract period, and the period of new melody and new harmony.

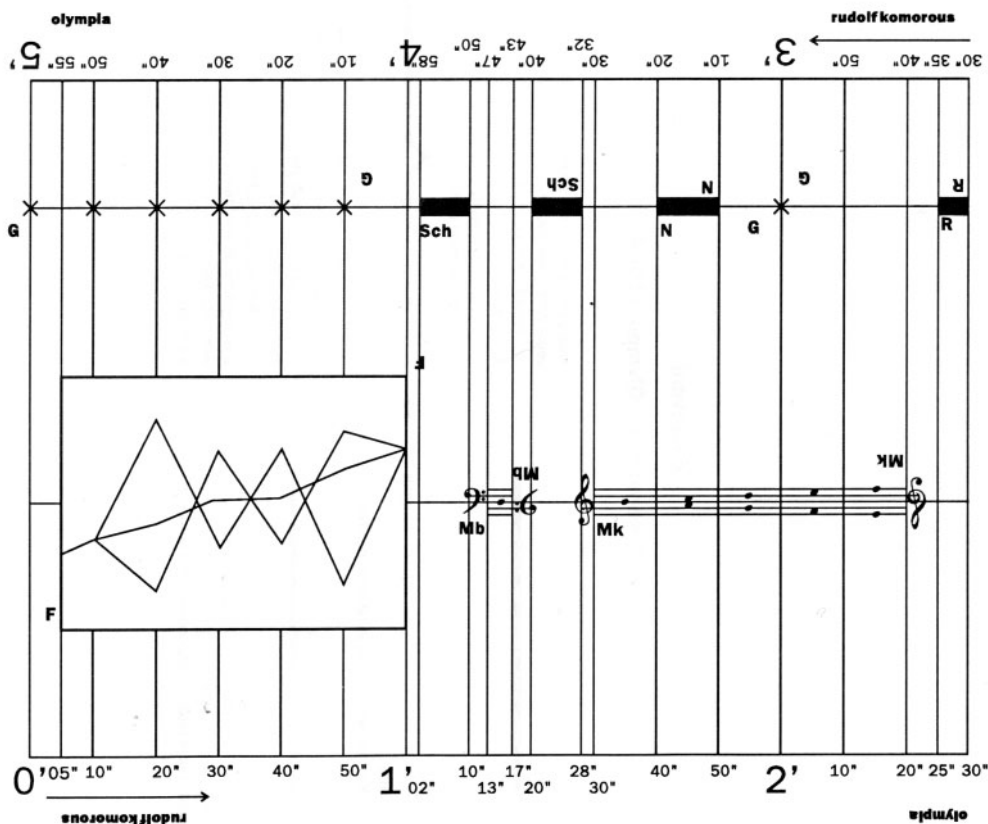
The Prague compositions written around the mid-1960s fall into the first period, without the author having any idea of the existence of Minimalist art at the time. (He knew the music of Morton Feldman, however, and at the time Komorous did in fact have more affinity with American new music than with the German). He wrote pieces in which, apart from the use of bizarre sound sources, the most striking characteristic is the emptied out nature of musical time. Here his Chinese experience with Zen played a part. The

pieces concerned are *Sladká královna* [Sweet Queen], *Chanson*, *Olympia*, *Mignon* and *Náhrobek Malevičův* [Malevic's Tombstone]. The last mentioned composition, of 1965, was the first electronic piece publicly presented in Czechoslovakia, and also the first electronic piece released by Supraphon on gramophone record. The first three pieces have been recorded by the Agon Orchestra on the CD *Česká nová hudba 60. Let* [Czech New Music of the Sixties; Arta Records 1994].

Rudolf Komorous's abstract period consisted of six pieces from the first half of the 1970s entitled *Bez názvu* [Untitled], based on principles of permutation. The second of them, written in 1973 for trumpet, is often played, but Komorous himself comments that "I recognised that it wasn't what I was looking for."

The third period of new melodies and new harmonies had a prologue in an earlier piece, *York* of 1967. His opera of 1964–66, *Lady Blancarosa* also falls into this earlier period. A solo opera without accompaniment, it was later performed in Buffalo, New York, Montreal, and Victoria. The opera *No no miya* of 1988, produced in Vancouver, Victoria and Toronto met with unexpected success.

"Many young composers in my country, Bohemia, regard my last work as a kind of "return to something" and believe that this music is suddenly too traditional. My view, and I'm quite sure of it (someone ought to start to teach it) is that there exists a certain progress in music, and that what was produced in 1950 is now historical music half a century old. There is no point in composing like Webern or Stockhausen, just as our generation realised that we ought not to write like Stravinsky. But it seems to me that this present new generation keeps on thinking that to write like Boulez is real modernism, courage, avant-garde and so on. Although actually today Boulez is the equivalent of Brahms, it's the same thing, historical music, no longer living music, it doesn't exist. Some of these pieces from the past are still amazing, some are just about tolerable and some are pathetic, and that probably includes even the defied Mozart. Art goes on, and today the New Music is a historical term. Music has had to keep on moving in some direction and in my view the path forward is that we need to discover how to compose and invent melodies that are not pre-New Music but post-New Music. (And de facto – even it seems like prising myself, but no, I consider it a fact – I have been the first to take this path from so-called New Music in genuinely new and contemporary directions.). We also have to start from our knowledge of harmony. (...) Today I wouldn't say we know everything about harmony but we know a lot more than anyone in the whole history of music, whether geniuses or normal composer, anyone, because for whole centuries, long centuries, harmony was unusually limited. Now I repeat – once more – new melodies and all the knowledge



Olympia (1964)

that we now have about harmony needs to be exploited to enable us to write music that genuinely expresses the situation of today's world. (...)

People often talk about a crisis over the question of whether there is still anything to be done in composition that has not been done before.

I would say that is the task of composers today. It relates to the wave that is returning to melody and harmony. Now almost everyone writes this music and only a few backward composers still think that Boulez is modern, which he used to be and he wrote amazing music, but to write like Boulez today is completely pointless. As I always say: art has to come from life. But not through studying music and saying to ourselves – ah nobody's ever yet done this, so I'll bend it back and forth like this in this direction, and if they used to go up then I'll go down. That kind of originality is artificial. It's dreadfully easy to be original in that kind of way, in the sense of just looking at what has been done and doing it differently and hey presto you're original. Anyone can do that. But the point is whether it's right. Whether the originality comes from the fact that something used to go down and now goes up, or whether it comes from the reality of life today. (...)

You know the trends well, you are in contact with a lot of people and have travelled a great deal in your life. What are the features of composition in Europe? Where is composition going in America, and Canada? Is there a difference between the two continents?

It differs from place to place, I would say. I don't believe that Europe is at one in a cer-

tain opinion, but if you look at European music especially from outside, you can see that it's still bogged down in music that has its basis in the music of fifty years ago, and that it hasn't moved on very far. That is also why Penderecki writes a violin concerto that sounds like Romantic music. But the problem lies precisely in recognising, whether the pieces have proper harmony or proper melody, whether they are **pre-New Music** or **post-New Music**! Lots of people who write obsolete music, because they have never been capable of thinking up anything else (they write in the spirit of the modernism of the earlier 20th century) are now latching onto what is emerging today and what is being fought for and approached experimentally. (...) As I say: there are plenty of composers who have breathed a sigh of relief, because they were destroyed by the New Music and always battled against it and said it was nonsense and thought they were right! And now, when melodies are being written again, and harmony, it really looks as if they were right. But they were not right!!! We had to get rid of what they were doing and are doing even now. That's my great bugbear! We have to do something absolutely new, something that will work for the future. But it has to be done on the basis of whole centuries of European music and some impulses that we can take from other cultures (Asian, South American and so on), why not? But at bottom our tradition is European. Or to put it in other words, we have to take that tradition, cross over through the modernism of the first half of the 20th century, and properly, thoroughly and deeply study New Music, because without that there is no way out and no way forward. In every con-

servatory, every academy, everywhere – in Berlin, Prague, Paris – there needs to be a proper course on Webern's music, and it should explain in detail what he actually did, although few people actually know it. (I have spent a great deal of time on Webern and feel a sense of responsibility about it. The study of Webern is a fundamental thing!) Then other directions in new music need to be tackled, in relation to orchestration, forms and with all of that, from Perotin to Boulez, we should look for the music of the present day. That's a terrible term, I know...

Rudolf Komorous has retired, but he still composes and his music is being published on CD by leading record companies. As he says himself, finally for the first time in his life he can devote himself to composing full time. The most frequent performers of his pieces are the orchestras Arraymusic, Esprit Orchestra, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and the Vancouver Symphony, CBC Radio Orchestra. His piano pieces have been performed, for example by Cornelius Cardew, Eve Egoyan, and Frederic Rzewski, and one of the most recent pieces was dedicated to the harpsichordist Colin Tilney. He enjoys strong support for his composing activities from the Canadian Music Centre.

Since his emigration in 1968 Rudolf Komorous has never returned to the Czech Republic.

(The passages quoted have been adapted from interviews held by the author with R. Komorous in November 2005 in Victoria.)

the musica nova competition



LENKA DOHNALOVA

Electro-acoustic (EA) music* developed in Czechoslovakia from the end of the 1950s, initially in close association with the poetics of Neosurrealism in fine art and literature (the composers R. Komorous, V. Šrámek, L. Simon, L. Novák, P. Kotík). In the years 1964–70 the Union of Czechoslovak Composers and Concert Artists organised specialist seminars on EA music that were attended by a number of Czech composers. Possibilities for studio work appeared, in the television studio in Bratislava and in the Barandov film studios from the beginning of the 1960s, from 1964 in the radio studio in Brno, from 1965 in the newly founded Radio and Television Research Institute, in the sound laboratory of the Institute of Musical Sciences of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, from 1967 in the new radio studio in Plzeň and later in Prague as well. Personal contacts were established with composers abroad: in 1961 L. A. Hiller visited Czechoslovakia, L. Nono came first to Bratislava and then in 1969 to Prague, regular contacts were maintained with Jozef Patkowski who had founded the Experimental Radio Studio in Poland in 1957. In 1966 the Groupe de Recherche Musicale visited Prague, in 1968 K. Stockhausen came to Smolenice, and in the following year the Union of Composers invited staff from the Sonological Institute in Utrecht to their seminar. Composers attended the festival in Warsaw and the Darmstadt courses. Thanks to seminars for composers this type of music was linked primarily with

composition and art music, and the situation was similar in film music.

EA music was also known as “technical music” and in the atmosphere of the 1960s, dominated as it was by faith in the connection between culture and technological progress, it seemed a very progressive phenomenon. It brought new material, inspirations and themes into music. The largest number of pieces were created precisely in the years 1969–1973, and later at the beginning of the 1990s.

The foundation of the competition at the end of the 1960s therefore seemed a natural step forward. The first year with the title MUSICA NOVA took place directly in the Plzeň Radio Studio in 1969. At this point it was mainly Czech composers who were involved. Prize-winners included the founders of the field in this country – Rudolf Růžička with the composition and spatial projection *Gurges*, Karel Odstrčil with the composition *Ghandí* from the cycle *Cabinet of Wax Figures*, Miroslav Hlaváč with the composition *Biochronos* and Arnošt Parsch with *Trasposizioni II*. Miloš Haase obtained an Honourable Mention for his piece *Per aspera ad astra*.

In the 1970s with the “normalisation” of politics and culture the contest was discontinued, probably because it was associated with risk contact with the avant-garde abroad. Nonetheless EA music continued to be created especially at the radio studios and at the Music Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. And as it happened, the secretary of the then Union of Czechoslovak Composers Václav Kučera was an active and acknowledged composer in the field.

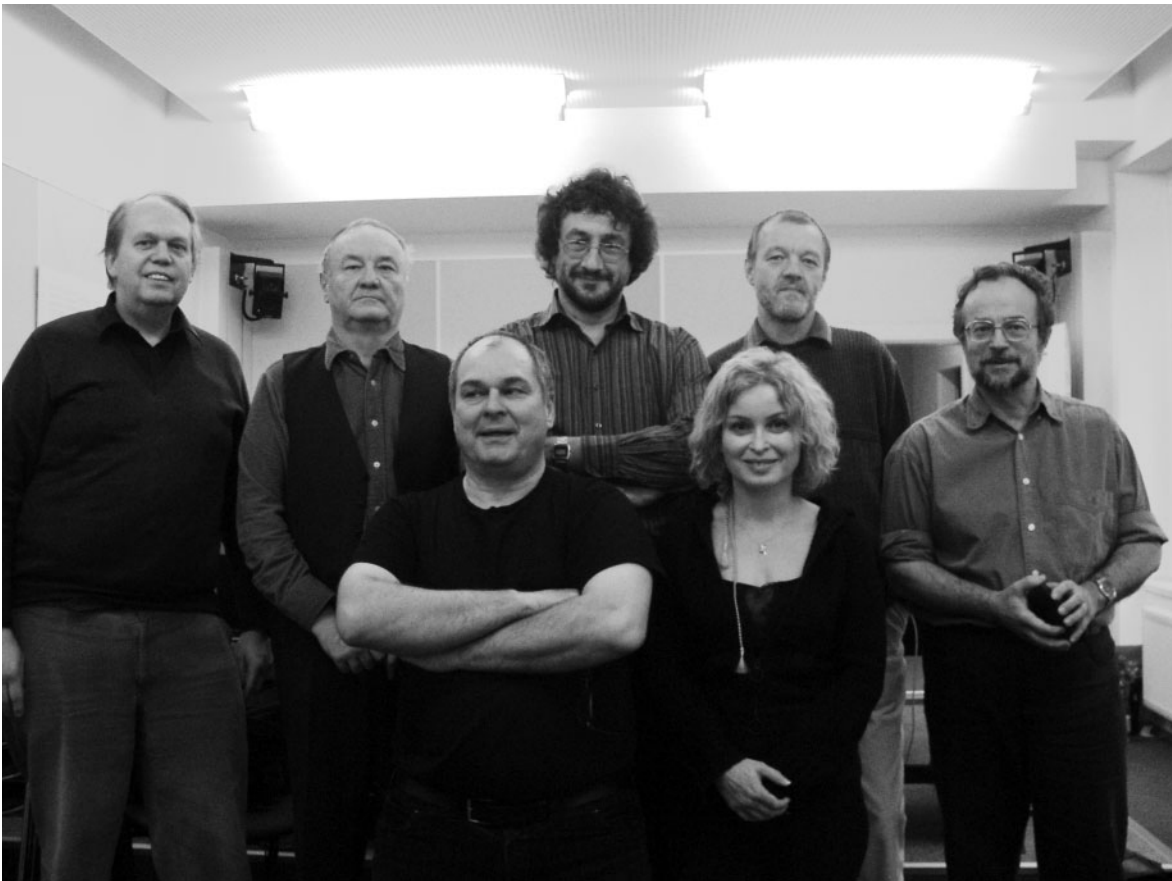
After 1990, when the Society for EA Music was formed under the presidency of Karel Odstrčil, the competition was revived. The first public playback of EA music took place in the Theatre of Music in March 1990. The second year of the competition took place in 1993. The competition was inspired by NEWCOMP contest in Boston, with which Rudolf Růžička had kept in contact. MUSICA NOVA did not, however, wish to focus on what is known as computer music only, because the local traditions and conditions in the studios were closer to the older phenomenon of French musique concrete

and German electronic music. The idea was to cover all variants of EA that were actual and of good quality. A category was also created for young composers. Well-known composers and musicologists were nominated for the jury. The honorary chairman in 1993 was Eduard Herzog, the only living member of the original jury of 1969.

From the outset the competition has been orientated to art music, because this represented the organic symbiosis of the latest innovative technology with imagination and fully thought out form. Of course, the boundary between art and “non” art is not a sharp one. Each piece was and is judged from several points of view: acoustic inventiveness, skill in craftsmanship, the correspondence between the material and treatment, formal consistence and logic, non-musical intentions and their realisation, overall impression. Clumsy or kitschy pieces are excluded from the first stage. In 1993 the first prize went to Jacques Lejeune, and also Radek Rejšek and Fabio Ciardi, with special prizes for Helmut Decker and the emigrant Bohdan Mikolášek. From the outset the competition has also involved a presentation in the form of a public concert by the winners and a radio programme, and more recently (since 1997) a CD and CD-R has also been produced to accompany it. From 1993 the competition has had an international dimension that it lacked in its earlier phase.

In 1994 two basic categories were established and these exist to this day. The first is the category for autonomous EA music and the second the category for live instrument (or voice) with electronics. In this year the competition attracted 66 composers from 17 countries. The prizes went mainly to what is known as the school of acousmatic music following on from the French tradition (Mathew Adkins, Jonty Harrison). Established figures like Charles Bestor from the USA, John Levack Drever from Scotland, and Jean-Claude Risset from France took part. Most of them have remained faithful to MUSICA NOVA, and the content genuinely showcases top EA composers from all over the world (they win prizes in other prestigious competitions as well and are involved in important projects). MUSICA NOVA is also praised abroad for the fact that the finalists include

*Musica Nova 2005
Jury: Milan Slavický,
Rudolf Růžička, Reiner
Buerck, Pavel Kopecký,
Juraj Ďuriš, Lenka
Dohnalová*



music in different styles from acousmatic music ("cinema for the ear") drawing mainly on the French tradition, to autonomously structural music (the tradition of German electronic music), to intuitive life electronic music and so on.

For several years now the number of pieces sent into the competition has stabilised at around 120–140 from about 35 countries. The largest number come from the traditional countries for EA music – the USA, Italy, France, Germany, England, Japan, but recently there has been a stronger input from South Korea, China and the South American countries and also entries from Australia, Turkey, Greece, Portugal and Spain. Poland, Hungary, Ukraine and Russia have become sources of entries again. In the last three years or so the average age of the entrants has dropped significantly, and so the category for young composers is losing point. It is usually now given to the youngest successful participant in the competition. The competition has a Czech round that is meant to stimulate the composition of EA music here.

The pace of technological progress is very fast. An increasing number of pieces are created by authors who are sure that they sound "generally good" because current already widely available software can evoke this "impression" by standard procedures described in the manual, sound library and suchlike. In prestigious competitions including MUSICA NOVA what is judged, however, is a level 'in advance of' and 'above' the given standard at a particular time, i.e. the criteria

are acoustic inventiveness in details and combination, the structural flexibility of the "montage", virtual spatiality, i.e. the ability to create levels that simulate back-front, surface-shape-point and motion in this virtual space, inventiveness in real multichannel sound projection, and ability to identify the potential of the material chosen in terms of form and content. Nearly all the composers who as winners were asked to express a view on work in EA agreed that the huge possibilities for expression and freedom offered by EA may also be a trap.

In the category for live instrument / voice and EA there has been a great shift in expression and style. Given the technical possibilities, at the beginning it tended to be conceived in terms of instrumental concerto. The EA played the role of "orchestra", whose sound was fixed. Sometimes it can also happen that someone appears who genuinely simulates an ordinary orchestra and instrument using EA as a way of avoiding the financial and organisational demands of using live performers. But this is not what the competition is about. In this category what is crucial is the interaction of the flexibility of live play or singing with technological music. Since the development of life electronic music (above all thanks to Max/MSP) the style possibilities have opened up, from pieces for one instrument enhanced by software techniques to various combinations in which the boundary between live play or song and artificial arrangement is blurred and challenged.

What is the situation at the moment? In

2005 the competition attracted 111 pieces from 32 countries. The first prize went to the husband and wife team Petra Bachratá, originally from Slovakia in the pure EA category, and the Portuguese composer Joao Pedro Oliveira in the EA with live instrument category. The second prize went to Robert Szadov from Australia. In the Czech round the winner was a student from the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno, Jana Bařinková, with Michal Rataj in second place. As always the concert took place in the presence of the prizewinners, this time in the Czech Museum of Fine Arts in Prague.

www.musica.cz/musnova

* Electro-acoustic music is a blanket term for music making major use of electric sources and electronic means in the production or realisation of a composition. Without these means (unlike in the case of merely reproduced or amplified music) the composition could not be played at all. It also includes music that combines an electronic element with acoustic sound sources. The term originated in France. In Germany and the USA the term "electronic music", respectively "music for tape" has a longer tradition.



Josef Horák

the paganini of the bass clarinet is dead...

On the 23rd of November the Czech bass clarinetist Josef Horák died in Biberach-Riss in Germany. I cannot and do not wish to write his obituary, but I have a need to respond with at least a few words to the death of a Czech musical personality par excellence.

I first met Josef Horák at the beginning of 1960 in Brno, where he was already known as an outstanding clarinetist who was raising the status and broadening the possibilities of play on the bass clarinet. Horák had also had a spell with Gustav Brom's orchestra, the hatchery of European jazz instrumentalist, whether saxophonists, trumpet players or trombonists.

When I got to know Horák he was just creating the chamber ensemble, *Musica nova* with the aim of cultivating contemporary music. Despite the Communist regime's suspicion of modernist trends, the ensemble started to give concerts from 1961 in Brno (with flute – Oldřiška Vaňharová, bass clarinet – Josef Horák, piano – Branko Čuberka and percussion – Jan Novák or Bohuslav Krška). Over three seasons in roughly ten concerts *Musica nova* brought to life original work by the composers Pavel Blatný, Zdeněk Pololáník, Bohuslav Řehoř, Václav Řehák, Alois Piňos (see CM 4/05), and Leoš Faltus. The group played music of the inter-war avant garde work – by E. F. Burian (see CM 4/04) I. Stravinsky and B. Martinů – and examples of the then New Music – Horák obtained Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel*, and Branko Čuberka gave the first performance in Czechoslovakia of Pierrre Boulez's *3rd Piano Sonata*. In addition there were premieres of work by Messiaen, Hindemith, J. P. Thilman and others. It was a small miracle and

above all the birth of what was later to become a tradition.

At this time Josef Horák already had one foot in Prague. From 1963 he established himself there as an outstanding instrumentalist, first in the theatre in Vinohrady, where concerts with philosophical dialogues (Garaudy etc.) were held in the mid-1960s in an atmosphere of relaxation. His chamber duo with pianist Emma Kovárnová *Due Boemi* was soon well-known, and was ever more often invited to play at prestigious concerts. For example in the spring of 1968 the two musicians formed the backbone of the concert of Prague Madrigalists "on the steps". They achieved international success at the end of the 1960s, when for the first time Horák was called "the Paganini of the Bass Clarinet", in a German review. *Due Boemi* played at the Biennale in Zagreb, in London, Paris and a succession of festivals in Germany especially Darmstadt, where Stockhausen invited them to join his project. Their moves between Biberach in south-west Germany and Prague went one for many years and were reminiscent of the musical migrations of earlier centuries.

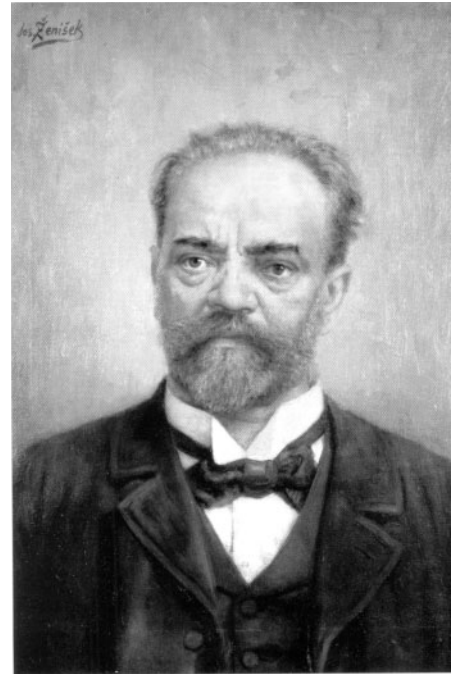
While the two musicians committed themselves to the cause of post-serial and timbre music like few others, as these trends waned and faded in the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s they sought a different level of music. And their natural spontaneity led them to create a "second" repertoire from the melody of tablatures, the profane and forgotten music of the 16th-18th centuries. I took a share in the choice and realisation of this repertoire, and can see in it a compensation for the modernist vacuum that had inevitably occurred in the 1970s. The German scene sought to over-

come it with a new simplicity, and from the 1960s minimalism and reductionism was emerging, although of course in Europe the process was different and less apparent. The striving for a new kind of melodic character led Josef Horák and Emma Kovárnová to an interesting ambivalent position unique in the European context. It was one that generated impulses and inspirations to which musicians can return in the future.

Horák was an apolitical man. His one, lifelong obsession was music and the bass clarinet, and he divided the world accordingly. At the end of 2005 there were already 600 pieces that he had conjured into life, performed, recorded, published and otherwise established in repertoire. In Rotterdam at a world meeting of bass clarinetists he was presented as the father founder of the branch; the organisers saw his concert in the mid-1950 (in 1955 Horák had given the first ever bass clarinet recital in history) as the beginning of the instrument's subsequent rise as a serious concert instrument. Here the Paganini of the bass clarinet played for the last time, and at least lived to enjoy international acclaim and gratitude for his share in making the bass clarinet what it is today.

Josef Horák and Emma Kovárnová used to come to Brno every year for Christmas, for Horák was keen on maintaining family tradition. For more than twenty years *Due Boemi* would spend Christmas Eve afternoon with us. We would discuss everything to do with composition, technical and organisational matters, and we would reminisce... Last Christmas Josef was no longer with us. We shall never forget him!

the sources of antonín dvořák's music



Antonín Dvořák (8th of September 1841 – 1st of May 1904), one of the most world-famous, admired and also beloved of Czech composers, was born 165 years ago in the village of Nelahozeves in Central Bohemia. Dvořák's biography and his importance for the music culture of his homeland and the whole world at large is well known. We shall not therefore go over it, or list all the composer's achievements. Instead, let us pose a question to which the numerous and often otherwise thorough works on his life and work have offered only unsystematic and partial answers. What were the sources, the musical wellsprings of Dvořák's work?

After all, no composer – not even the greatest master – composes and refines his music just *ex nihilo* and from nothing more than the inner resources of his own imagination. Each composer starts out against a background of music in the sense of whatever works by predecessors or contemporaries surround him. Moreover, the most important creative talents have often been precisely those who reacted the most sensitively to the stylistic, formal technical and imaginative stimuli of the music they have grown up with or get to know later. Creativity always involves a tension between the remoulding of inspirations taken from outside – whether consciously or unconsciously – and the composer's own imagination.

Leoš Janáček put it beautifully in his study *Modern Harmonic Music (Hudebně teoretické dílo 2, Prague 1974, 7–14)*: “What primeval images are lodged in the storehouse of our souls! No single outstanding work of music has escaped the composer's attention. He has discerned everything and willingly or unwillingly stored it well in his soul. Musical material of this kind, inher-

ited to some degree and then replenished, is the germ of our own motifs: our soul is bound by it as we compose. Whether we ponderously adhere to clear models or distance ourselves from them, as from pictures in a mist floating in the mind, like it or not our faces are always turned to what we once have heard...” It is interesting that Janáček immediately illustrates this idea with a reference to Dvořák: “Dvořák is reforging Liszt's *Elizabeth with his Saint Ludmila*, Berlioz's *Requiem with his own Requiem: quartets are built on quartets, a sonata on a sonata, choral pieces on choral pieces. The weak talent sticks to the inherited forms, the intense talent shatters them.*”

It is no accident that Janáček's reflections led him to remark on different degrees of composing talent. What really defines sovereign talent is the individuality with which a master synthesises external impulses with his own imagination, producing a picture that is full of originality, and the prerequisite for any distinctive new and unique style. This is the hallmark of a genius we recognise in only a few dozen of the most important composers in the entire history of classical music. And we know that Antonín Dvořák is one of them. Let us try and trace all the elements that contributed to the individuality of his musical expression, and the way in which he made external inspirations his own and reforged them.

He came to the musical profession as an extraordinary talent from a Central Bohemian village. Behind the broad face and stocky figure of a village butcher (the trade for which he had once been destined), he hid the sensitive soul of a musician of genius, one of the most imaginative creators of 19th-century Romantic music. Nonetheless, evident in his face is the stubborn perseverance with which, after graduating from organ school,

he set himself to master the techniques of composition. He studied the works of Schubert and Beethoven, and these studies were reflected in the ambitious structure of the *1st Symphony in C minor “The Bells of Zlonice”* and the emotional depth of the song cycle *Cypress Trees*. He embraced the national sentiments of Smetana and enriched them with the lyricism of the patriotic *Hymn on Vítězslav Hálek's Poem, The Heirs of the White Mountain* and the earthy humanity of his early operas; affinity with Smetana bore further fruit with the ardent Czech sentiments of the *Symphony no. 8 in G major, The Jacobin, and Amid Nature*. He made the archaic charm of folk modality his own in *Moravian Duets and Symphonic Variations*, and the other Slav cultures provided him with powerful inspirations for *Slavonic Rhapsodies, Slavonic Dances, The Dumkas*, and his opera *Dimitrij*. He managed to infuse even works without programmatic titles with folk inspirations of the same kind, as in *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in A minor, Symphony no. 6 in D major and no. 7 “The Great”*, and various chamber works. In America he became interested in the musical cultures of the ethnic groups on the continent, and he infused *Symphony no. 9 “From the New World”, Biblical Songs* and other works with melodic inspirations from African-American and Indian sources. Closest to his heart, however, was the poetry of Czech fairytales, which he made his own and recast in profound form in the symphonic poems based on Erben's ballads and the operas *Kate and the Devil, and Rusalka*.

Even such a cursory view of his creative life and best known compositions provides a sense of the complexity of Antonín Dvořák's artistic development and the range of important impulses from the world of music and other aspects of culture that influenced his direction as a composer. Let us first look at

those successive influences that may be considered milestones marking out phases in his career, and that allow us to divide Dvořák's output chronologically into a number of basic periods.

His serious and systematic career as composer was, of course, preceded by his elementary experience of musical life in Zlonice, especially in the choir and with dance music. He obtained a more systematic education at the organ school in Prague, where he mastered harmony, counterpoint and fugue and musical forms, and an advanced standard of play on the organ including improvisation. It is quite possible that he wrote some of the polkas preserved under his name in the repertoire of the bands of rural Central Bohemia while still in Zlonice. His studies in Prague, however, led him to systematic composition, in which he had to observe the rules, form and structure of pieces longer than dance genres and governed by different conventions. Deep study of the scores of the old masters, which were the models for his first serious pieces, was essential for the knowledge of these rules and conventions. First and foremost he explored and mastered the music of the Vienna classics, especially Ludwig van Beethoven, and the early romantic Franz Schubert. In Dvořák's day this was an unusually fortunate choice for a young composer starting his career. The entire preceding development of treatment of theme and motif was concentrated in Beethoven's work, structurally adapted to ensure that the overall architectonics of a piece were tight and compact, with effective use of gradations and falls in the compositional line, contrast and antithesis. The mature Schubert was also a distinguished architect when it came to large musical forms, but his contribution to the young Dvořák's development was rather different, and lay in his genius as a musical poet, a melodist with an inexhaustible imagination and feeling for the lyrical potential of highly charged emotional images. The study of the Vienna classics led Dvořák to compose his first major instrumental works: string quartets and string quintet, the first two symphonies, the early (unfortunately never orchestrated) *Cello Concerto in A major*. Schubert's example led to the first mature flowering of Dvořák's imagination as a songwriter, with the cycle *Cypress Trees*. Beethoven and Schubert were indeed to influence all Dvořák's subsequent work: throughout his life he was to strive for tight and thoroughly worked structure in his compositions, and a unique melodic imagination, lyrical and otherwise, fired by and comparable with the genius of Schubert, was to be his right up to his final works. While still in America, and when he was long past fifty, he made his only published comment on the work of another composer; it was an article on Schubert which praised precisely his qualities as a unique melodist and creator of vivid harmonies. Dvořák dwelt particularly on the way Schubert alternated between major and minor without intermediate modulation

(not only between parallel keys, but especially between major and minor), believing this to be a typical expression of Slav identity, even in the case of a purely Viennese composer with only remote ancestors from Moravia. It is hard to agree with these rather rash views on musical genetics, but they are important authentic testimony to the elements Dvořák had taken from Franz Schubert, made his own and used as a foundation. The polarity of the same key in major and minor, and alternation between the two in brief passages, is one of the basic characteristics of Dvořák's own Slav-influenced works.

While short, Dvořák's second developmental phase, – his **Neo-Romantic** orientation at the turn of the 1860s and 70s – was nonetheless important. It was associated with his first encounter with the works of Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner, which were performed in Prague at the time and which he played as an orchestral viola player. It is very probable that he was playing at all three events that brought Neo-Romantic music to Prague and were considered sensational as revelations of the new possibilities of music. They were Smetana's Prague premiere of Berlioz's dramatic symphony, *Romeo and Juliet*, presented as part of the celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the birth of William Shakespeare in the 1864–65 season, Liszt's Oratorio *St Elizabeth* and a Žofín Academy concert with a programme of vocal and orchestral excerpts from the operas of Richard Wagner. It was clear to Dvořák that this music was the expression of his time, the most recent and supreme contribution to the development of composition. It seems to have made him aware that his models were increasingly slipping into the category of legacy of the past as compared with the new movements. While not abandoning the principles by which his masters had enriched European music, he no longer stuck to their particular musical idioms. He began to cultivate opera, a typical neo-Romantic genre, and to project the innovations of the new style not only into his operas *Alfred* and the first version of *The King and the Charcoal Burner*, but into quartets and other chamber pieces as well. Interestingly, however, he showed absolutely no sign of taking up the main new feature introduced by the Neo-Romantics, that is to say programme music, not even in the sense of the programme recasting of established genres, such as the programme symphony and programme overture (when he presented the overture to his first opera *Alfred* as an independent concert piece he simply called it *Dramatic Overture* and for the purposes of non-theatrical performance did not explicitly connect it with the title or plot of the opera or any related story), and nor was he yet moved to write a single work in the new programme genre known as the symphonic poem. Yet this influence had a deep effect on Antonín Dvořák, although insofar as it found expression at this time or even earlier, it did so in latent form. The title *Symphony no. 1 in C minor*, "*The Bells of Zlonice*" suggests a markedly depictive ele-

ment of the piece drawing on Dvořák's experiences from his youth, including a stylisation of the actual sound of the bells, even though Dvořák did not convey such experiences by means of any stylised literary programme. Since this was a work that the composer never heard played and wrote off after losing it, we know little about it, of course, but certainly the title provided a general situating context, an indication of general character in the same way as such titles as Beethoven's *Eroica*, or *Destiny*, Mendelssohn's *Scottish, Italian, Reformation*, of Schumann's *Spring or Rhine*. The influence of the Neo-Romantic discovery of programme music therefore only came to the fore in Dvořák's work after a considerable time lag, not until the 1890s. It is well known that his symphonic poems met with general surprise in their time, but if today we recognise how important the music of the Neo-Romantics was for the composer's development, we can more easily understand this sudden change in Dvořák's musical poetics.

At the beginning of the 1870s Antonín Dvořák was literally carried away by a movement that went far beyond music. Czech society experienced a wave of ardent, militant patriotism after the Habsburg emperor denied Czechs the promised, "constitutional settlement" having granted it to the Hungarians. The party known as the Young Czechs organised huge protest demonstrations celebrating the writer Karel Havlíček Borovský as a national martyr, while Bedřich Smetana worked feverishly on the patriotic opera *Libuše*. In 1872, the year in which *Libuše* was completed, Antonín Dvořák started another major phase in his career with the cantata *Hymn on a Poem by Vítězslav Hálek: Heirs of the White Mountain*. It was a phase dominated by a sense of **discipleship to Bedřich Smetana**. This was a very powerful influence, which not only affected Dvořák's choice of subjects (the first cantata and then the *Six Songs on the Králův Dvůr Manuscript* of October 1872 and later the comic operas *Tvrď palice [The Stubborn Lovers]* and *Šelma sedlák [The Cunning Peasant]* with their themes from rural life, following on from the style of the Bartered Bride), but also led him to adopt some of Smetana's musical idioms, so that Smetana's influence becomes manifest in Dvořák in a deeper and broader sense, and not simply in pieces with patriotic subjects using Czech rural themes. Dvořák's music becomes warmer as it takes on Smetana's lyricism, as is clear not only in the *Hymn* mentioned above, but also in purely instrumental works like the *String Quintet with Double Bass in G major*, the *Serenade in E major* for string orchestra, the next two symphonies, *No. 3 in E flat major* and *No. 4 in D minor* (sometimes known as the "small symphony") and other pieces. We also find the patriotically celebratory intonations of the march and the fanfare entering Dvořák's music, and an energetic flow of fast music with very pronounced dynamics. These elements are not only strikingly employed in the *Hymn* but had a major impact, for example,

on the tectonic conception and form of the *Symphony no. 3 in E flat major*. Alone among Dvořák's nine symphonies this has three movements (the others have four) and it is a symphony of strongly finale type (whereas with the others it is the first movement that is the most important, longest and structurally the most complex and full of conflict, and the finale is at most a secondary and lower kind of climax, which may perceptibly raise the tectonic line of the cycle but not to the level of the 1st movement, as for example in the *No. 8 in G major* or in the *No. 9 in E minor "From the New World"*). In the *Third* the emphasis is very strikingly on the march (or if you prefer the "processionary" – ceremonial finale, which as interpreted by listeners of the period was a symphonically generalised image of undaunted ascent, and can be considered a musical stylisation of mass demonstration for sacred national goals. It was no coincidence that the work was introduced and the premiere conducted by Bedřich Smetana himself, in the year before he went deaf. This Smetanian, and in the narrower sense of the term Smetanian *nationalist* developmental phase was something that left permanent traces on the work of Antonín Dvořák and would later from time to time lead to a powerfully Smetanian eruption, for example in the *Hussite*, *The Jacobin* and other pieces or passages.

In the mid-1870s, Dvořák's creative world was expanding. Of course, at this stage he wrote music that still referred back to one or more of the sources and earlier phases already mentioned, for example in the essentially Beethovenian stylisation of the solo part in the *Piano Concerto in G minor*, although the musical ideas are entirely distinctive and Dvořákian. It was also at this stage that he composed the *Stabat mater*, a piece that drew on sources other than those that we have mentioned (see below), and can seem like a jewel from a different world entirely. Nevertheless, in 1879 Dvořák found a new source which he rapidly employed and developed and applied on a broad front, and which for two years entirely dominated his work. Here Dvořák is entering his "**Moravian Period**". The impulse behind it is sometimes considered to have been sheer accident. The merchant Neff, whose family Dvořák used to visit to accompany singing on the piano, gave him a chance to look at Sušil's collection of Moravian folk songs, with a view to arranging some of them for vocal duet and piano. Dvořák was very taken with the songs, some of them based on material known as "church modes" and some on other modes that can be considered combinations of different church modes or modulate – melodically – from one to the other. He submerged himself in the material and finally brought the Neffs two-part songs that were not just arrangements but independent compositions, sometimes employing modal approaches and sometimes peculiar and unconventional modulations that drew on folk modality, lively rhythms, and ingeniously declaimed folk texts, but above all

melodically and harmonically original and fresh. Neff was enchanted and wanted to have the *Moravian Duets* printed immediately. Encouraged, Dvořák added the cycle to the major compositions that he was submitting with his application for a state stipend. Johannes Brahms, who was sitting on the Vienna commission assessing the applications, was enthusiastic and recommended the *Moravian Duets* to his own publishers, Simrock in Berlin, and Simrock agreed to print them as publicity for the young composer, without offering a fee. Especially after an excellent review from Louis Ehlert, the work was a tremendous success with critics and on the market, and opened Dvořák's path to the catalogue of an important music publisher and European fame.

Dvořák sensed that the new style to which folk modal melodies had led him need not be just a chance excursion in his music. In any case he soon felt at home in it, since he had affinities with the world of folk music, even if earlier this had been mainly the differently structured Bohemian folk music based on classical tonality and periodic melodic construction. He had grown up with folk music, lived its original life in village conditions and very often in Prague, where there was still a nationalist vogue for it. Nor was the old modality based on the so-called church modes entirely new to him. Back in organ school he had taken a course called *Harmonisation in Church Modes*. Organists who graduated from the school and were hired to play in Roman Catholic services had to learn to accompany Gregorian chant, which had a primarily modal structure. Some techniques, for example the phrygian cadence with which he several times enlivens and varies the two-part song *Zajatá [Captive]*, had been well-known to him since his youth, and now, with his experience in composition, he could employ it in different musical contexts.

He therefore did not leave *Moravian Duets* as an isolated episode in his work but found other opportunities to work with modal material, employing it in choral works on Moravian folk texts that he also took from the Sušil collection, and for poetry written in artificial folk style of the Adolf Hejduk kind. All these the composer brought together in cycles for four mixed and four male choirs. The most impressive and most successful was the song for male choir *Já jsem huslař [I am a fiddler]* with its strikingly lyrically graduated chant at the beginning. In its melody he soon recognised an idea with such potential that he made it the theme of a new orchestral work, *Symphonic Variations in C major*. In my view, in this piece together with the *Symphony no. 5 in F major* that he wrote shortly before, what we see here is Dvořák emerging as a mature symphonist of genius for the first time. With 27 variations on this theme, culminating in a grandly expansive fugue, he brilliantly combines a solid structure with an apparently inexhaustible imagination in terms of style, mood and

instrumentation: here an exquisite and exciting theme acquires ever new forms, and is illuminated from every new angle, while the vivid mosaic thus created is also structurally a superb, monumental musical unity. It is precisely here in the context of the influence of Moravian folk music, that Dvořák the musical architect of genius is born.

Viewed in a longer perspective, the use and development of melodic and harmonic impulses from Moravian folk music was in fact the beginning of a much more vital and longer-lasting tendency in Dvořák's work, one which had a strong intellectual motivation from outside music itself but involved distinctive aspects of musical expression. In 1878, the idea of Slav solidarity revived as a subject of ardent interest in Czech society. Russia had just liberated Bulgaria from Turkish rule, and Czech political passions were also stirred up by the emperor's refusal grant the Bohemian part of the monarchy more constitutional autonomy when the success of the Hungarians was enshrined in the change of the state's official name to Austria-Hungary. There was renewed talk of Austro-Slavism, i.e. the solidarity of Slav nations living in the empire. The Old Czech politicians, whose leading figure František Ladislav Rieger was trying to win Antonín Dvořák over to his side, were once again considering putting their hopes in Russia, a strategy that had earlier been emphatically rejected by Karel Havlíček Borovský on the grounds of the tyrannical nature of the Russian Tsarist regime. As citizen and patriot Antonín Dvořák was intensely interested in these developments, and it is not surprising that a **Slav orientation** soon became manifest in his music we well, all the more so when stimulated by Simrock's commission for *Slavonic Dances*. Musically, for pieces with Slav themes as well as in non-programme works that had a Slav orientation, Dvořák drew on three sources. The first was the folk music of the other Slavonic peoples. This often had common roots with Moravian folk music, since for example some of the South and East Slavs used melodies based on modal tonal material, but Dvořák was also inspired by the differences, nationally characteristic genre and dance types. Modality, or at least hints of modality, an affinity to modality, appears in some passages of his pieces of the period, but above all his work now bubbled over with the genre or intonational characteristics of the music of the other Slav nations. At this point Dvořák became particularly interested in the Ukrainian lyrical genre known as the *dumka*. First he took it up in isolated cases, for example as a piano piece of the slow movement of what is known as the *Slavonic String Quartet in E flat major*, but later, in 1890 he created a whole six-movement cycle for piano trio under the title *Dumkas*. The Polish *Mazurek* inspired him to create a virtuoso piece for violin with orchestra or piano, and he used several dance types of different Slav nations in the 2nd series of *Slavonic Dances* of 1886, including a fiercely

spectacular Serbian Kolo (wheel dance). For Dvořák it was of course self-evident that his own nation, the Czechs, were part of the great Slav family, and so at this point he made much more frequent use of impulses from Czech musical folklore. This was the source of seven out of the eight *Slavonic Dances* of the 1st series. In 1879, when his enthusiasm for all things Slav was at its height, he composed the *Czech Suite*, and a year later the *Symphony no. 6 in D major*, which has a distinctively Czech character crowned by the *furiant* instead of the scherzo movement – the first such substitution for the traditional scherzo or minuet from the abundant legacy of national dances in major world classical music. At this period he also employed *furiant*-style movement in the finale of the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in A minor*, and we find strongly Czech folk moments in such entirely non-programme and pure, uncharacterised music as the *String Quartet in C major* and others. The third musical source behind Dvořák's Slavism was not derived from any folklore but was more intellectual. Pan-Slav identity of the Romantic epoch was conceived – just like Wagner's Germanism, the national awareness of the Scandinavian countries as Bedřich Smetana had encountered it in Sweden, and *mutatis mutandis* of all European countries – as having its roots in a supposed ancient common origin of all Slavs and a historical-mythical background, eagerly elaborated in authentic or less authentic tales of heroes, epic battles and erotic episodes sung by bards and rhapsodists and entering the historical memory of nations. Naturally Dvořák had plenty of models and material for this kind of concept of Slavhood, and relating them as closely as he did to his Czech patriotism, Smetana's Vyšehrad was clearly the closest. Dvořák's first creative work of this kind consisted of the three *Slavonic Rhapsodies*, and the context to which we have just alluded makes sense of the way Dvořák draws on the symphonic poem Vyšehrad in the harp introduction of the Slavonic Rhapsody no. 2 in A flat major, although unfortunately this reference annoyed Bedřich Smetana. The source of inspiration for the *Legends* lay in the generalisation of similar ideas. These were not legends in the original sense of the term, i.e. stories from the lives of saints, but a matter of the epic atmosphere of deeds from the Slavonic past. Dvořák employed Slavonic historicism in his own way in an opera on an episode from Russian history, *Dimitrij*, and a few years later he produced an even more distinctive, striking vision of Slav pagan deities and their defeat by Christianity in the oratorio *St Ludmila*.

In this context, in his non-programme music, the 1st movement of his *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in A minor* is particularly remarkable; here repeated quasi cadence passages of the solo violin over a sequence of D minor – E major triads sound like archaic phrygian cadences (although in the framework of the overall



Nelahozeves (by Vilém Randler, mid-19th century)

harmonic plan they may also be related to the key of A minor as a sequence of sub-dominants and dominants, with the tonic not uttered for a long time); together with the predominance of “rhapsodic” scoring this music likewise creates an image that can be taken as mythic narration.

It is no accident that when looking at the techniques adopted by Dvořák in his first flush of Slavonic enthusiasm I have often mentioned pieces actually written in the following decade. This is because the composer's Slavism soon flowed, via numerous richly inventive works, into the **broad current of his output of the 1880s**. These were compositions that drew on the whole range of inspirations mentioned above including Slavism, Czech national ideology and folk culture, but they also present some distinctively new approaches and situations in whole groups of pieces. One instance is the striking episode in the years 1883–85, when Dvořák mainly wrote music full of struggle and tragic exaltation. The episode begins with the *Piano Trio in F minor*, and a recently discovered sketch for the piece shows the composer's strenuous efforts to achieve dramatic uplift of this kind. It then continues in the darkly combative symphonic image of the *Hussite* dramatic overture and the *Symphony No. 7 in D minor*, known as “The Great”, which is structured around conflict and contrast to a greater extent than any other Dvořák symphony. The longest piece that Dvořák wrote during this episode is the balladic cantata the *The Spectre's Bride*, based on the poem by Karel Jaromír Erben.

Another comparably compact developmental episode in the 1880s was the wave of folk-based and sometimes Smetanian Czech sentiment in his output of roughly 1887–91. This had been prefigured in the earlier 1880s by the orchestral prelude *Můj domov* [My Homeland] – music commissioned for Josef Kajetán Tyl's play, but at this

point it was an isolated instance. Now the interest burgeoned in the song cycle *V národním tónu* [In a Folk Tone], which integrated entire folksongs into larger wholes and was thus a highly individual development of the approach taken by Pavel Josef Křížkovský in his choral works. Perhaps the most beautiful crystallisation of this particular lyrical sensibility, inspired by Czech folk culture but also distinctively personal, is the *Symphony no. 8 in G major* where, in the first movement Dvořák makes space for the full exploitation of a broadly conceived introductory lyrical theme by choosing an unusual formal design for the whole work. We hardly need emphasise that the composer himself did not write the subtitle *English* on the score, and that it refers not to the musical content of the piece but to the circumstances in which it was performed. Another important work in this phase was the opera, *The Jacobin* where the story set in a small Czech town lends itself to a Smetana-style Czech folk treatment, and in *V Přírodě* [Amid Nature], from the free cycle of symphonic overtures *Příroda, život a láska* [Nature, Life and Love]. Just one major piece, the dark and inwardly contemplative *Requiem* of 1890, deviates from the overall mood of tranquillity and ease.

This generally radiantly melodious mood was interrupted – or perhaps more accurately complicated, since it was to reappear in subsequent works – by Dvořák's preparations for travel and his period in America in 1892 to 95. Dvořák was compelled to sideline his earlier creative plans and focus on cantatas for the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America. The Americans were late sending the texts and so Dvořák began to work on a neutral celebratory *Te Deum*, but Joseph Rodman Drake's words for the cantata *The American Flag* arrived before the *Te Deum* had taken even fragmentary form. In the end

Dvořák was to finish both pieces, but only the *Te Deum* was ready in time for the celebrations. It was a piece based on the style of his earlier sacred works, while the text on the symbolism of the American Flag and panegyric on the individual weapons of the American army failed to engage him at any deep level. The music he wrote for it bears all the external marks of his techniques as a composer, but is lifeless: it has rarely been played and arouses no enthusiasm. Dvořák's imaginative genius depended on his interior feelings, and needed the heat of passionate engagement to ignite it. In America, it was not until Antonín Dvořák discovered the music of the ethnic minorities through his black students, and identified with the problems of the African Americans and Native Americans because they reminded him of the troubles of his own people, that this imaginative fire blazed up to the full. The inspiration that he took from negro spiritual and native American melody in pieces from the *Symphony No. 9 in E minor "From the New World"* to the *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in B minor* is very well known. On the other hand, today we are often reminded that Dvořák refused the honour of being declared the founder of American national music and considered the Americanisms in his music to be simply the fruits of a Czech composer's view of America. In any case, however, what is perceptible and easily analytically demonstrated is that the symbiosis and interplay of Czech and American impulses in these works represents real synthesis, not just charming juxtaposition. The famous melody at the beginning and end of the *Largo* in the *New World Symphony* is undoubtedly based on negro spiritual pentatonics, as has been pointed out many times, but in the middle section, the radiant climax is conspicuously and movingly Czech (using a melodic progression VIII-VII-VI on a subdominant harmony – a device we find in numerous Czech folksongs). The Scherzo movement has a distinctively Red Indian dance at the beginning and end, but the trio shines with a recollection of the homeland, Czech intonation and a trill passage associated with tradition with Dvořák's beloved doves at Vysoká. And to take a third example: the secondary theme of the 1st Movement of the *Concerto in B minor*, carried in the orchestral exposition by the French horn and in the second, solo exposition by the cello, is structured almost entirely out of the material of Gospel pentatonic, but the line in the basic melodic segments corresponds to the melodic types of Czech lyrical folksongs. Furthermore, the nostalgic charge of the music is literally raised by a striking deviation from pentatonic: the chromatic passing note of raised dominant fifth evokes the harmonic nexus of the "Smetana dominant", particularly familiar from Smetana's patriotic and nature lyrics. This duality in the handling of American and Czech musical inspirations and their synthesis can also be found in *Biblical Songs*, *The Sonatina for Violin and Piano in G major*, *The String Quartet in F major* known as the

"American" and other pieces. The last piece that Dvořák composed in America, the *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in B minor* already has predominantly Czech intonation, and includes a quotation and variations of the melody of the song *Kěž duch můj sám* from his own cycle *Cypress Trees*. Dvořák used the quotation in the 2nd and 3rd movements of the work as a memory of his own first – unrequited – love, later his sister-in-law Josefina Kounicová née Čermáková, whose own life was drawing to a close; this of course was a source of inspiration relating entirely to home.

The two longest and most famous works of Dvořák's American creative phase also represented a significant moment in terms of the composer's relationship to the concept of programme music, as mentioned earlier. These two pieces are not in fact programme music in the true sense of the word. The characterising subtitle *From the New World* was one that the composer did not add to his symphony until shortly before the premiere, and it simply indicates the important role played in the piece by the composer's experiences and impressions from America. Dvořák never offered a literary commentary on his works, and for preceding and subsequent pieces linked to non-musical themes or inspirations chose titles informative enough to forestall the need for any further explanation (*Můj domov [My Homeland]*, *Husitská [The Hussite]*, *V přírodě [Amid Nature]*, *Othello*, *Karneval [Carnival]* and then *Symphonic Poems on Ballads from Erben's Bouquet*). Here the situation was different in the sense even less specific information was provided, and the composer never offered any additional explanation even when the work became exceptionally famous (as Smetana did in the case of *My Homeland*, subsequently producing a "Short Sketch of the Content of the Symphonic Poems"). In the circumstances, traditions emanating from people close to Dvořák, and musicological scholarship based partly on knowledge of sketches and other sources, soon linked a number of passages with particular experiences that the composer had in America, or with the specific themes of the pieces for which parts of the music had originally been destined before being incorporated into the symphony. The public and a broad circle of experts and lovers of Dvořák's music then came to accept these associations as authentic. This endowed the work with a kind of programme character, indirect and relating only to certain parts. However unconventional, this was not completely unknown in musical history, i.e. programmatic elements not declared authentic by the composer, but generally considered to be genuine. First and foremost, the introduction to the 1st Movement of the work, where the principal theme appears first in hints and then emerges out of the swelling current of the music to be fully expressed and developed at the beginning of the exposition, is held to depict Dvořák's impressions at the end of his passage across the Atlantic. This means the way the first out-

lines of the city of New York take shape against the twilight and mist, and the real America comes into view, to be celebrated in the rest of the movement. The composer took the second and third movement of the symphony from a sketch he had written for an opera on a Native American theme with a libretto based on Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*. In the end he abandoned the idea of composing the opera and used his sketch for two scenes as a basis for the middle movements of the symphony. The *Largo* had initially been conceived for a scene of an Indian burial, and the first and last sections of the Scherzo movement *Molto vivace* for an Indian ceremonial dance. Lastly, as has been indicated, the passage with trills of strings and woodwinds is often associated with Dvořák's recollection of the cooing of the doves he had left at home in Vysoká.

In the *Cello Concerto*, to which the composer did not give even the vaguest characterising title, we have also already mentioned passages linked to the memory of Josefina. From the point of view of programme interpretation, we might attach a certain subliminal meaning, a characterisation of expressive purpose, to Dvořák's words in a letter to the publisher Simrock of the 3rd of October 1895: "*The finale ends gradually with a diminuendo like breath – with reminiscences of the first and last movement, the solo part drops as far as pp – then a dynamic surge and the orchestra takes up the last bars and produces a stormy finish.*"

After his return from America Dvořák embarked on the last creative phase of his career. In the *string quartets in A flat Major* and *G Major* he seems to be returning to his pre-American predominantly Czech musical poetics, which he then takes further in works on rural folk themes, sometimes of a fairytale kind. He wrote four symphonic poems on ballads from Karel Jaromír Erben's collection *Kytice – Bouquet*. Here he approached the relationship between the music and the literary programme in quite an unusual way. The inventor of the symphonic poem, Franz Liszt, had seen it primarily as a matter of general reflections on the theme (before he chose the technical term *symphonic poem*, he had called such pieces philosophical epics). Bedřich Smetana in *My Country* had looked for the kind of subject that could be clearly and effectively expressed in music, and this was why he adopted an existing story as the programme subject for only one of his six symphonic poems (*Šárka*) and invented his own programme for the five others. In contrast to both, Dvořák's approach was precisely to follow and musically depict the actions and situations evoked in the poems in the order described by the poems, and this naturally involved the risk that the music would be too dependent on the literary model, and would lack sufficient cohesive structure of its own. In many passages he formulated the musical idea directly to correspond with the declamation of some of Erben's verses or extracts from them: for example in the *Vodník [Water Goblin]*: "*sviř, sviř, sviř, ať mi*

šije nit" ["shine, shine, shine, to sew me my thread"], "půjdu matičko k jezeru, šátečky sobě vyperu" ["I'll go to the lake, mother, to launder my clothes"] and "Nevesely truchlivý jsou ty vodní kraje, kde si v trávě pod leknínem rybka s rybkou hraje" [Cheerless, mournful are these watery regions, where fish plays with fish in the green under the lilies"]. *Polednice* [The Noon Witch] has a repeated menacing motif based on the emphatic declamation "polednice", and *Zlatý kolovrat* [The Golden Spinning Wheel] starts with a theme based on the verses "Okolo lesa pole lán, hoj jede, jede z lesa pán" ["Around the woods the fields, look there rides a lord out of the wood"] and so on. Some critics and writers on Dvořák have noted the disadvantage of this approach and seen shortcomings in the work, but the symphonic poems live on, and especially in Bohemia they remain very popular as ingenious and instructive musical translations of what are very well-known poems by Erben.

Dvořák went further and deeper in this direction in his fairytale operas *Kate and the Devil* and *Rusalka*. Here we see the climactic outpouring of his Czech folk-inspired musical poetics and feeling for rural settings, but also his highly developed imagination when it came to striking musical characterisation of all kinds of dramatic situations and human types. Recent attempts to revive Dvořák's early operas have really only confirmed that in his youth he lacked dramatic

nerve, but his perseverance bore fruit and *Dimotrij*, which he several times reworked, represented significant progress, and the upward curve continued with *The Jacobine* and beyond it. The two fairytale operas from the turn of the century, in which he was also working with excellent and dramatically effective librettos, are perfect as theatre as well as music. Unfortunately this cannot be said of his last opera *Armida*, where he failed to overcome the drawbacks of Jaroslav Vrchlický's romantically schematic libretto. It was an opera for which he created superb choral scenes and individual arias, and it shows an interesting conception of the oriental colour of the setting, but overall it is not persuasive musical drama.

In his last years Dvořák suffered from an affliction previously unknown to him – a shortage of ideas and perhaps even a distaste for composing. This was why some major creative plans, for example for two full-length biblical oratorios, were never realised. Another reason for his lack of drive may have been insecurity and dissatisfaction with some of the new trends in world composition. He was particularly unnerved by some of Richard Strauss's pieces and spoke of them pessimistically, saying that it was the end of music and that music was going to perish in misery. No doubt a certain depression at his own approaching end coloured his opinions, but it was a very peculiar attitude, at odds with Dvořák's own lifelong

search for new musical worlds and creative capacity to make them his own.

In conclusion we should mention some sources of Dvořák's music that are not a matter of chronological stages but informed his whole output. In first place we should emphasise his innovative spirit as a composer, and his determination to enrich his work stylistically with impulses from elsewhere that he often sought out on his own initiative. The major example here is the **modality** already mentioned. It was something that he used with explicit reference to the musical idiom of the distant past, especially in quotations from as it were "musical historical monuments", such as the chorales *Kdož jste boží bojovníci* [For that we are God's Warriors] in the *Hussite Overture* or *Hospodine pomiluj ny* [Lord Have Mercy upon Us] in *St Ludmila*, but in his Moravian and Slav period it had the beneficial effect of allowing him to break out of the closed circle of Baroque-Classical-Romantic tonality. As early as the 1980s some of his pieces use other techniques that also clearly go beyond the traditional circle of melodic and harmonic imagination. Thus the **expanded tonality** in the orchestral introduction to *St Ludmila* appears not as a folklore element, but as a way of achieving unusual musical situations with the effect of notably weakening of tonality. And at the climax of the scene of pagan idolatry in the first part, in the double choral fugue *Vše láme se a bortí* [Everything is

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breaking and Collapsing], the harmonic progression is already unclassifiable in terms of tonality. The fugue develops in the harmony of concurrently expounded themes out of a harmonic progression that corresponds to Smetana's leitmotif for Rarach in the *Devil's Wall*, i.e. from a perfectly non-tonal sequence of three different augmented triads. Probably we will never know whether this borrowing was deliberate or unconscious, but it shows that Dvořák was well acquainted with the innovative direction of Smetana's last works. Another example of this kind of peculiar, tonality-undermining approach is the introductory theme to the *Requiem*, based on surrounding the first tone by minor seconds from above and below. In the 1890s such harmonic or melodic devices, which correspond to the efforts of contemporary composers seeking to expand tonality and weaken tone centrality, became more frequent in Dvořák's music. They include the tonally ambiguous modulation in the introduction to the *Largo* in the *Symphony no. 9 "From the New World"*, variations on which continue to permeate the movement with one variation returning in the finale. Other instances may be found in the evocative depiction of the creeping deathly spectre in *The Noon Witch* and the passage using an incomplete whole-tone scale (i.e. whole-tone pentatonic) in the hell scene from *The Devil and Kate*, the sequences of major triads in a tritone relation (we find an isolated use of these much earlier in the cantata *Psalms 149* from the end of the 1870s) and the techniques close to what is known as Tristan chord in *Rusalka*.

All these techniques enlivened Dvořák's musical idiom and gave a peculiar character to some key passages in the compositions mentioned. They are not frequent enough, however, to have fundamentally changed the basis of Dvořák's style. It was only modality of folklore or historical origin, and nothing more recent, that can be said to have done so. And of course in Dvořák's music up to his last pieces all this worked alongside or in direct symbiosis with romantic tonal structures including techniques as overworked by his immediate predecessors and contemporaries as diminished sevenths or their sequences. Emancipation from such ties to the musical language of the past, the systematic use of a significantly expanded tonality or even a challenge to tonality as the main element in the structure of composition was to be achieved only in the mature work of the most important innovators of the generation of Dvořák's pupils.

Dvořák's **sacred music** forms a separate chapter in his output. Surprisingly it was not based on the older tradition of church music and neither was it indebted to the newer trends marked out in Roman Catholic liturgical music by the "Witt Reform" or Cecilianism. Dvořák addressed and glorified his God freely, in the musical idiom peculiar to him. To the techniques characteristic of the different stages of his development as a secular composer he added a few **italianisms in melodies**, most frequently akin to Verdi – particularly in the *Stabat mater*, but also in the *Requiem* and the *Te Deum*, but no longer when it came to the *Mass in D major* and not

at all in the *Biblical Songs*, which in musical idiom belong in full to the American period and the broader framework of Dvořák's highly individual lyrical musical language. We find a certain Italianism outside his sacred music in *Rusalka*: some prominent vocal parts and most strikingly the heroine aria *Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém* [*Moon in the Deep Sky*], including stylisation and the instrumentation of the orchestral accompaniment, have affinities with the contemporary idiom of Italian verism. This is something that sets Dvořák – like the isolated examples of expanded and weakened tonality – in the wider context of the Secession.

We have, it seems, covered all the most important sources of Dvořák's music. They were many, and show Antonín Dvořák to have been an extremely sensitive and receptive composer, closely following various trends in music, and open to all kinds of stimuli and new discoveries. This is not, however, the most important point, since what is so admirable is how he managed not just to absorb it all, but perfectly and unerringly to recast it into his own consistently individual and marvellously poetic and imaginatively rich musical language.

announcement

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young blood

nejtek
srnka
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štědroň
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ivanovič

VOICE
sampler 3

YOUNG BLOOD

The Music of Young Czech Composers

Michal Nejtek: Nuberg 05, **Miroslav Srnka:** String Quartet no. 3, **Ondřej Adámeček:** Strange Night in Daylight, **Miloš Orson Štědroň:** Prosper and Gamble, **Markéta Dvořáková:** Waters, **Petr Bakla:** Wind Quintet, **Martin Hybler:** Echoes of Trees and Rocks, **Marko Ivanovič:** Rock's Goin' On?

The Czech Music Information Centre has just published the CD *Young Blood* as a representative sampler of the work of the young generation of Czech composers. We are offering this CD **free of charge to all existing and new subscribers** to the magazine *Czech Music*. If you are interested in the CD, please send us your request at info@czech-music.net or at the postal address HIS o.p.s., Besední 3, 118 00 Prague 1 Czech Republic, and we shall be pleased to send you the CD. It comes with a booklet in English.

This CD of the legendary duo bass clarinetist Josef Horák and pianist Emma Kovárnová, focuses on pieces written specially for them over the almost forty years of the partnership. Although the choice of composers has been further narrowed down to figures linked to Brno, Miloš Štědroň, Arnošt Parsch and Pavel Blatný, the range of compositional perspectives is very wide and colourful. Štědroň's timbre *Meditation* (1963) for solo bass clarinet is paradoxically more modern than *Intrada e Sarabande triste* (1999) which reflects the composer's long term interest in inspiration from Renaissance and Baroque music. But be that as it may, both pieces have the stamp of originality. The first is a gift to the art of the "Paganini of the bass clarinet" and the second combines the historical approach with the contemporary (there are several later versions and arrangements of this piece including an orchestral version – see for example the composer's profile CD *Malý koncert pro ovci – A Little Concert for Sheep*). Arnošt Parsch offers a different view of the combination of bass clarinet and piano in *For Josef Horák*. Here a tape is added to the two acoustic instruments, in places creating minimalist passages – entirely in the spirit of the time (1969). Parsch exploits various folksong phenomena in "...*ausufernd*" as does Štědroň (*Aksaky*). Pavel Blatný's pieces involve another two different angles. His trio of "hits" *In E, In A, In D* is built on the traditional melodic-harmonic system, which in his text commentary he defines as a matter of the "post-modern" spirit of the 1980s and 1990s. His *Uno pezzo per Due (Boemi)* is a fusion of jazz and classical (the so called Third Current). Blatný's pieces give the CD a notable shot of melodic relief. It is pleasant to see melody still being used in contemporary music, and in a way that doesn't sound hackneyed. The choice of pieces for *Due Boemi di Praga* here may be small in terms of quantity, but it is nonetheless a varied genre cross-section of the compositions written specially for the duo or inspired by them over the years.

TOMÁŠ KUČERA



Due Boemi di Praga

Due Boemi di Praga Yesterday and Today

(Štědroň, Parsch, Blatný)

Due Boemi di Praga: Josef Horák – bass clarinet, Emma Kovárnová – piano; Václav Kunt – flute, Rudolf Štastný and Jiří Beneš – viola, Bedřich Havlík – violoncello, František Vlk – percussion, The Jazz Orchestra of Czechoslovak Radio Prague, Lubomír Mátl, Pavel Blatný – conductors. Production: not stated. Text: Czech, Eng., Ger. Recorded: Czech Radio Prague, Czech Radio Brno. Released: 2005. TT: 62:38. 1 CD 2000 Forza, s.r.o., Brno 859406296002.

The decision to record one of the most important works in international repertoire always involves a certain risk. Dvořák's second *Cello Concerto in B minor op. 104* already exists in a number of grand recordings from the Czech Philharmonic (for example with Georg Szell, Václav Talich or Václav Neumann), making it very difficult for anyone to come up with a different interpretation that bears comparison. And the danger is even greater when orchestra and soloist belong to the young generation that may not yet be mature enough to understand the full spiritual depth of one of Dvořák's crowning works. It is essential to be aware that the composer wrote his *Concerto in B minor* at a time when he was greatly looking forward to returning home after his long stay in America, but also realised that he would never return to the country in which he had lived for three years. Moreover, in Bohemia his first love Josefina Dušková née Čermáková was dying, and the overtones of the funeral march and adaptation and melodic quotation of Josefina's favourite song "*Kěž duch můj sám*" are definitely not just imaginative elements designed to put an extra emotive stamp on the piece.

The Prague Chamber Philharmonic with Jiří Bělohlávek plays the work with great precision and polish, and reliably partners the subtle and chiselled performance by the French cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras. There is no doubt that the soloist understands Dvořák and offers a very persuasive interpretation in the emotionally highly charged passages (and elsewhere). I am not, however, completely sure if the two partners used the same note edition. Keeping my eye on the score edition published in 1955 by SNKLHU there seemed to me to be definite divergences between orchestral parts and the solo in the area of dynamics.

For the *Piano Trio Dumkas op. 90* on this recording, on the other hand, I have only words of praise. The Russian pianist Alexander Melnikov has a wonderful talent for listening and using this ability to draw from the instrument phrases that do not just sound, but really speak. Together with the brilliant violinist Isabelle Faust all three performers unerringly capture Dvořák's wit, energy and sparkle and also the melancholy that is an inseparable part of this opus. Their approach shows perfect professionalism and a luminous artistic concept.

TEREZA KIBICOVÁ



Antonín Dvořák

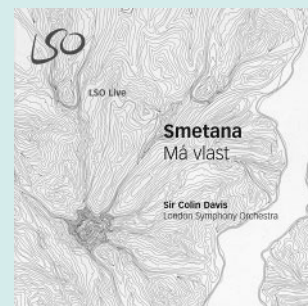
Concerto in B minor for Cello and Orchestra op. 104

Dumkas op. 90

Jean-Guihen Queyras – cello, Isabelle Faust – violin, Alexander Melnikov – piano, The Prague Chamber Philharmonic, Jiří Bělohlávek. Production: Martin Sauer, Philipp Knop. Text: Fr., Eng., Ger. Recorded: 8,12/2004. Released: 2005. TT: 69:43. 1 CD Harmonia mundi HMC 901867 (distribution Classic).

Last year the London Symphony Orchestra made a major dent in the Prague Spring Festival budget when it opened the festival with Smetana's *My Homeland*. If you heard the performance in Prague you now have the chance to compare your feelings at the time with a recording released under the orchestra's own label. (Incidentally, from the details it emerges that the LSO had performed the cycle in London, which means that it "worked the piece up" in London, "flew it over" to Prague, and then probably remedied problematic passages back at home). The Londoners coped with the difficult and for them unaccustomed score, and coped at a top world professional level. In rehearsal Sir Colin Davis was less interested in the composer's literary commentary on the pieces than Harmoncourt, for example, and saw the mythological connotations as a mere starting point. The fundamental matters for Davis are musical relationships, and what might with a touch of exaggeration be called music as an absolute phenomenon. I even get the feeling that with all respect he regarded the legendary Czech model, Rafael Kubelík, as an anti-model. But of course as a great musician nearing the end of his career he has a complete right to do so. The result is a technically quite exceptional project (and remember that for the most part this is a live recording!) with full-blown, Berliozian colour, a wonderfully refined sound culture but at the same time the capacity to astonish in places with its phrasing, dynamics, articulation and tectonics. For our conservative ears it is a genuinely hard test. But thank you, Sir Colin, for recording *My Country*!

The interest shown by famous orchestras abroad is a good index of the international standing of our composers, and which of their works are in world repertoire. One leading repertoire direction told me some time ago that in his view the last world composer from Bohemia or Moravia was Martinů and in that sense we were today worse off than Lithuania, Estonia or Hungary. But thanks among others to Davis, at least Smetana's world reputation has been



Bedřich Smetana

Má vlast – My Country

London Symphony Orchestra, Sir Colin Davis.
Production: James Mallinson. Text: Eng., Fr., Ger.
Recorded: 10. – 15. 5. 2005, Barbican, London.
Released: 2005. TT: 75:15. DDD. 1 CD LSO Live
LS00061 (distribution Euromusica).

strengthened. And just as an afterthought: do read the CD details at the top of this review carefully, especially the catalogue number. At this moment the Czech Philharmonic is losing 61 points to the LSO. Having wasted the chance to establish its own label, the Czech Philharmonic is never going to catch up on that sort of lead.

LUBOŠ STEHLÍK



Bedřich Smetana

Piano Works

(*Macbeth a čarodějnice [Macbeth and the Witches], Zvědavý [Curious], Vidění na plesu [Vision at the Ball], Bettina polka [Betty's Polka], Concert Etude in C major, Concorso Étude in G sharp minor op. 17 "On the Seashore", Vzpomínky na Čechy ve formě polek [Memories of Bohemia in the form of polkas] op. 12 and 13, Fantazie na české národní písně [Fantasia on the Czech National Songs]*)

Jitka Čechová – piano. Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Czech. Recorded: 6/2005, Rudolfinum Prague. Released: 2005. TT: 57:58. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3841-2.

So far only three Czech pianists have managed to record Smetana's complete piano works. They are Věra Řepková, Jan Novotný and more recently Ivan Klánský. The symbolic baton passed between generations is now being taken up by Jitka Čechová, one of the most important contemporary interpreters of Smetana. The first CD in the Supraphon Complete Piano Works of Smetana offers us Smetana's work of the years 1858 – 1862, i.e. the Swedish period and the period immediately following it. Here we have the chance to appreciate the pianistic art of Jitka Čechová in supreme form. Her brilliant Lisztian technique adds an unusual lustre to Smetana's virtuoso pieces and her mastery of sound colour gives them the potency of great romantic paintings. Jitka Čechová's treatment of agogics is fascinating. All the time shifts from the most subtle tremors to the great swelling waves sound entirely natural and self-evident. And underneath all her rubatos we feel a firm rhythm that never allows the music to lose strong contours. In the dance pieces the ravishing rhythmic pulse often almost lifts us out of our chairs (*Polka in E flat major from the Memories of Bohemia, op. 13*), but on the other hand we have a chance to hear the metro-rhythmic shifts performed with unexpected audacity (*Polka in A minor from Memories of Bohemia op. 12*). Dominating everything, however, is a unique feeling for structure and gradation. The architecture of each individual work is so clear and strong that it sounds – if feminists will forgive me – as if formed by a masculine hand. The solid and transparent structure is never lost even in technically difficult passages, or places where the music flows in several concurrent layers, and even at points where the heavy charge of emotion can seduce pianists into a diffuse outpouring. Smetana was excellent in his feel for tectonics and in Jitka Čechová he has found a kindred spirit. And Jitka Čechová and Bedřich Smetana have something else in common: an admirable vitality, which literally radiates from this recording. The high quality of the CD is enhanced by the erudite accompanying text from Olga Mojžíšová and David Port's distinctive photographs. If this Smetana project continues as successfully as it has started, we have a lot to look forward to.

VĚROSLAV NĚMEC



Bohuslav Matěj Černohorský

Laudetur Jesus Christus (selection from the work)

Pavel Černý – organ, Hipocondria Ensemble, Jan Hádek – Art. Dir. Societas Incognitorum, Eduard Tomašík – Art. Dir. Production: Vítězslav Janda.

Recorded: 3/2004, 6/2005, Church of the Holy Trinity, Smečno, 7/2005, Parish Church of the Czech Brethren, Nymburk. Released: 2005. TT: 49:10. DDD. 1 CD Arta F10139 (distribution 2HP Production).

Bohuslav Matěj Černohorský (1684 – 1742) is mentioned in nearly every book on the history of Czech music but we need to ask ourselves if we really know him well enough. This new recording with its erudite but readable biographical sketch in the CD booklet and the fresh musical interpretation offers answers. Perhaps the most Baroque of Czech composers, persecuted and pampered by fate, evidently an excellent organ improviser, teacher, a Minorite much more acclaimed abroad than at home, the author of the famous motet *Laudetur Jesus Christus*, the only one of his works to be printed in his lifetime, and so forth, and so on – even in the few surviving works by Černohorský this multiplicity is there to be found and appreciated.

The design of the CD sets the emotionally heightened offertorium *Quare Domine irasceris*, full of dissonance and Baroque grandeur, and performed with great subjective engagement, at the very centre of the project. This is the most inward part of the album, which contrasts with the preceding Marian pieces and the "small" vespers as well as with the following virtuoso *Regina coeli laetere* for soprano, cello and basso continuo (solo Jana Chocholatá), which is like scintillating fireworks, and with the final solemn *Laudetur Jesus Christus*. The two ensembles, the instrumental Hipocondria Ensemble and the vocal Societas Incognitorum, are not working together here for the first time and are drawing very effectively on their existing experience with the music of Bohemian masters of the 17th and 18th century. They can derive strength from their commitment to obtaining a compact sound, unclichéd, full of inner strength and pleasant despite some excessively authentic cacophonies. The organ pieces were recorded by Pavel Černý on the valuable organ in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Smečno, which has acoustic possibilities that evoke the atmosphere of Černohorský's own improvisations and closest followers.

DAGMAR ŠTEFANCOVÁ

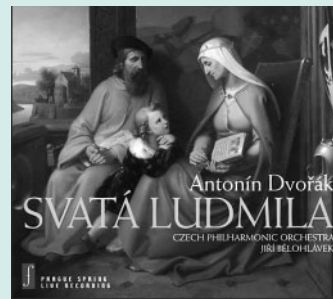
Although Dvořák called *St Ludmila* an oratorio, many listeners cannot help feeling that it is a peculiar sacred opera or musical epic. It is most certainly one of the most beautiful and with its strong message one of the most powerful of 19th-century works of sacred music. The last recording of the work came out in the 1960s (with the famous and to this day unsurpassed Beno Blachut). After forty years the time was ripe for a new project that would reflect a contemporary view on this spiritually patriotic subject, in which the period known as pagan mingles with the advent of Christianity. A suitable moment came at the Prague Spring, where the work was performed twice, financial support was found from the state project Czech Music 2004 with help from the Czech Savings Bank as the general partner of the Prague Spring, the conductor Jiří Bělohávek lent his great authority to the project as conductor and an interesting group of soloists came together.

How did it all turn out? First, I shall begin at the end. The recording company, which has invested a remarkable amount of work in the project, deserves all praise, and so in particular does the special recording team, for whom it must have been far from easy to make the live recording and then edit it in the studio. (This is the first released Czech

recording in SACD.) The choice of cover picture is witty: it is a painting showing St Ludmila teaching the young St Wenceslas in Tetín, and the artist was Josef Václav Hellich, who has given his name to the street in the Lesser Town where the Prague Spring management, a co-initiator of the project, has its offices.

Jiří Bělohlávek devoted a great deal of time and energy to the performance and this is evident both in the details and the macrotectonic musical lines of force. The huge work is as it were carved out of a single block, while there is also a mass of beautiful details both in the choral parts, which are the leading element of the work, and in the solo parts. After quite a long interval we have a chance with this CD to judge the current quality of the Czech Philharmonic in a recording on the domestic field, and to judge by the sound it is very good (I definitely had a better feeling about it than at the Prague Spring concert in the hall). The Prague Philharmonic Choir is clearly the best and deserves the seal of complete approval apart from one or two unimportant details. One way to recognise the very best soloists is by the way that their live recordings are just as good as their studio recordings. From this point of view the two female fingers acquitted themselves particularly well. Eva Urbanová is an ideal Ludmila, and in the case of the Bernarda Fink with her celebrated voice we can only regret that Dvořák was so stingy with the part of Svatava. Peter Mikuláš sings the part of Ivan beautifully, very tenderly and appropriately sonorously, but I cannot help thinking that a profounder bass would have been ideal here. As far as the tenors are concerned, Aleš Briscein sings pleasantly, did what he could and the result is acceptable. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of Stanislav Matis, who has problems with intonation, rhythm and consistency of enunciation, and sometimes struggles with colour. Given that this was an exceptional project unlikely to be repeated again soon, and with the prospect of a re-recording, it is doubly a pity that an entirely balanced solo ensemble was not put together. Nonetheless, the recording as a whole radiates a strong emotional charge and at the final *Hospodine, pomiluj ny* [Lord Have Mercy on Us] you catch your breath.

LUBOŠ STEHLÍK



Antonín Dvořák

Svatá Ludmila – St Ludmila op. 71 B 144

Eva Urbanová, Bernarda Fink, Stanislav Matis, Aleš Briscein, Peter Mikuláš, The Prague Philharmonic Choir, Bambini di Praga, The Czech Philharmonic, Jiří Bělohlávek. Production: Jiří Štílec. Text: Eng., Czech, Ger., Fr. Recorded: live, 15. and 16. 5. 2004, IMF Prague Spring, Smetana Hall in the Municipal House. Released: 2005. 2 SACD/DSD Arco Diva UP 0078-2 232 (distribution Classic).

In terms of numbers of recordings, Dvořák's *New World Symphony* must be near the top of any list of world classics. This means we rightly expect any new recording to be in some way exceptional and to have some specific distinctive features. Thanks to its title Dvořák's *Ninth Symphony* is very popular with orchestras across the Atlantic, but it cannot be said that this new recording fulfils our expectations. The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra has excellent qualities and in terms of sound – the individual groups and the whole – fully lives up to the reputation of American orchestras for the highest technical standards. It is not, however, in the top league, despite being headed by the charismatic Paavo Järvi. Real punch in the strings is something that is more the domain of European orchestras, of course, but here we honestly would have liked more of it. The orchestral sound is dense rather than lucid – perhaps partly due to the views of the sound masters. Whatever the reason, it reduces our opportunity to savour the details and the internal structure of the score, which is precisely the most interesting thing when it comes to Dvořák. Clearly very experienced with the piece, the orchestra plays it with ease, and the concept is on the traditional side. With just a few pronounced differences (more or perhaps on the whole less interesting), it offers no surprises. Listening to the *1st Movement* one cannot but remember some of the ravishing creations of other orchestras including ours. The beautiful opposite pole to the principal theme of the *1st Movement* – the final theme – is presented extremely slowly, which means that instead of melodiousness we develop a feeling of uncertainty! As it is well known, the repetition of the exposition does not usually contribute much to the music, unless of course the interpretation is vigorous and full-blooded, which is not the case here. The *Largo* on the other hand comes out better and stresses the Dvořák's superb lyrical passages in an almost ideal way, but we would have expected a little more cantilena from the cor anglais solo. Pleasant moments await us in the central section: the theme supported by the famous pizzicato of the double basses has a very beautiful free leisurely tempo (in this respect Järvi shows affinity with Talich's recording at the end of the 1940s!). The *3rd Movement* is pleasantly light and airy, and the wind instruments solos emerge well. The central part with its purely Czech temperament is delightful in sound, although the casting of the second section of the theme in legato detracts from the folk ease clearly intended by Dvořák. The main theme of the *4th movement* has a very elegant accompaniment. One positive element is the attempt to get rid of a certain pose that has crept into performance of some of these passages. In places where the listener is unambiguously appreciating the melodic line, the conductor also draws attention to interesting subtleties in the accompaniment. The orchestra's approach is deeply serious, and it plays with care and precision, but even here there is a problem in a kind of inhibition of expression to the point of deliberate asceticism. The construction of the brilliant Dvořákian climaxes before the end is only partially successful.

The best thing about this CD is the recording of Bohuslav Martinů's *2nd Symphony*. It is not just a happy pairing (both the pieces on the album were written in America) but of a thoughtful artistic rendering of this lesser known score. It is remarkable how well the orchestra and conductor have understood the composer's world, his modern musical idiom in which there is no lack of distinctive lyrical passages, presented here without sentimentality but definitely not abruptly (*2nd Movement*), and distinctive Czech melody, here emphasised with a fidelity full of admiration! The technically excellent orchestra masters the typically Martinůian passages in a way that is rhythmically pregnant and with masterly overall grasp!

BOHUSLAV VÍTEK



Antonín Dvořák

Symphony no. 9 in E minor op. 95 "From the New World"

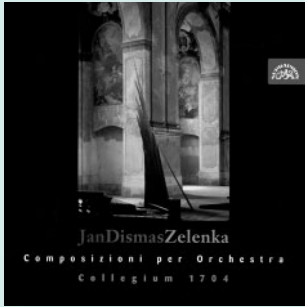
Bohuslav Martinů

Symphony no. 2

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Paavo Järvi. Production Robert Woods. Text: English. Recorded: 2005. Released: 2005. TT: 68:16. DSD. 1 CD Telarc CD-80616 (distribution Classic).

On this re-edition of a recording by Collegium 1704, a Czech group specialising in the performance of Bohemian, Moravian, Saxon, Bavarian and Austrian Baroque music, we find compositions written for the celebration of the coronation of the Habsburg emperor Charles VI as King of Bohemia in Prague in 1723: *Overture a 7 concertanti ZWV 188* and *Hipocondrie a 7 concertanti ZWV 187*. It also includes *Concerto a 8 concertanti ZWV 186* and *Simphonie a 8 concertanti*, compositions written for the orchestra of the Prague Count Hartig. In addition to four orchestral pieces by Jan Dismas Zelenka, the title *Composizioni per Orchestra* also surprisingly hides the third of his set of chamber sonatas, *Sonate a due Hautbois et Basson con due bassi obligati ZWV 181*.

Zelenka's musical idiom combined the influences of German, Italian, French and Czech musical traditions. Presented here by the Collegium 1704 Ensemble under the direction of the harpsichordist Václav Luks, it speaks to listeners in bright musical colours that are not broken up even by the long reverberation that detracts from the concrete



Jan Dismas Zelenka

Composizioni per Orchestra

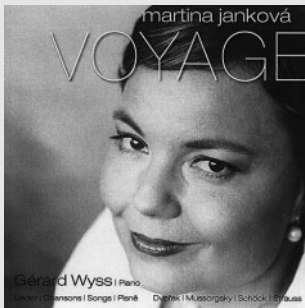
Collegium 1704: Václav Luks - harpsichord, Xaver Julien Laferriere - solo violin, Helena Zemanová, Markéta Zemanová - 1st violins, David Plantier, Olivia Centurioni - 2nd violins, Marie-Liesse Barau, Vasilios Tsotsolis - viola, Petr Skalka - cello, Luděk Branný - contrabass, Ann-Kathrin Brüggemann, - solo oboist, Elsa Frank - oboe, Eckhard Lenzing - bassoon, Igor Paro - theorbo, Přemysl Vacek - archlute. Production: not stated. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Czech, Recorded: 9 - 10/1994 studio Motorlet, Prague. Published: 2005. TT: 67:45. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3858 - 2. Alternativa: Paul Dombrecht/Passacaille Pas 9524, Nikolaus Harnoncourt/Teldec 6.42415.

quality of the expression of individual instruments in the cause of enhancing the "churchiness" of the sound. As is the custom with most ensembles specialising in Baroque music in our country, the continuo instruments, the theorbo and archlute, sound very cautious, especially in the fast passages. There just isn't that proper "drive" on theorbos in tutti, which anyone used to listening to recording of Baroque groups especially from Italy expects. But the situation is different in the slow movements and especially in parts of the *Aria* from the Overture a 7 concertanti ZWV 188. The lute and viol instruments together in the continuo create a soft quilt for the melodic instruments, embroidered with the colourful thread of the spread chords; the final *Folie* from the Overture a 7 concertanti is truly madly ravishing in its tempo and energy.

In the interpretation of the ensemble Concertus musicus Wien under the direction of Nikolaus Harnoncourt, the Overture a 7 concertanti abounds in a playful lightness more definable masculine. The dotted rhythm in the opening *Grave* is heavy but not protracted, while the articulations and dynamic contrasts are taken to extremes, unlike Luks's bubbling loftiness. Like that of Luks, Harnoncourt's recording is stirring, but the individual details and nuances are easier to make out in the overall sound. The listener can compare this CD with another recording by the ensemble Fondamento under the direction of Paul Dombrecht, which among its other qualities has a precision of articulation. Its interpretation of all the pieces including Overture a 7 concertanti, Hipocondrie a 7 concertanti a Simphonia a 8 concertanti is charmingly elegant, but here the conception of play on the basso continuo lute instruments cannot compare with the performance of the archlute and theorbo players of Collegium 1704.

The booklet for the CD is thin, and leaves the listener searching for information about which instruments the soloists are playing. Some people may even find it but of a puzzle to make out the real key of some of the pieces in the confusion of different systems for indicating keys. But despite inconsistencies in the booklet the recording is a worthy and good quality interpretation of the brilliant musical ideas of Zelenka and is definitely worth listening to.

ONDŘEJ JALŮVKA



Martina Janková
Voyage

(Mussorgsky, R. Strauss, Schoeck, Dvořák)

Martina Janková – soprano. Production: Martina Janková, Malgorzata Albinska-Frank, Daniel Goodwin. Text: Ger., French, Czech. Recorded: Radio Studio DRS Zürich, 9/2004. Released: 2005. TT: 70:03. DDD. 1 CD Philips 476 301-9 Universal Music Switzerland.

The Czech soprano Martina Janková has been living and working for a decade in Switzerland where she has developed her talent and is making significant solo appearances on the international music scene. The cult of stars apart, the young soprano has a very pleasant and very well controlled voice and her singing can be judged according to the highest standards. If she has now decided to make a song recording, it is at a moment when she has achieved a maturity that allows her to do so with complete persuasiveness. What is more to the point and more interesting, however, is that she has done so not with the primary aim of presenting her virtuosity, but above all to convey specific spiritual values, her view of the world and reasons for the making this particular selection of music – it is something straight from the soul. She has called the project "Voyage". The songs are chosen and set in an order that in terms of theme and expression creates a series from childhood to the search for maturity to the finding of meaning in life. Janková is outstanding from the beginning, in the first song, Mussorgsky's *The Children's Room*: smiles, indignation, obstinacy, sighs, secrecy and tearfulness follow each other in a pure uncomplicated register, and in a very realistic style the singer employs hints of declamation, and an agogic and emotional mutability explored in minute detail. The little prayer is delightful and so if the very accurately represented earnestness and sincere naivete of the child in the next song cycles. Fine cantilenas are developed suggestively underscored by the piano in the nostalgic songs of Richard Strauss (*Mädchenblumen*), and the listener is struck by the interesting darker timbre in Dvořák's calm love poetry (*Milostné písně – Love Songs*). If some limits are perceptible in her lucid and stylistically appropriate rendering, then this is only in a few places with the highest tones, which sound thinner than the listener would expect, but this is not irritating. The three songs by Othmar Schoeck are sung with a slightly melancholy seriousness and great empathy. Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* – at least some of them – in this version for high voice come across as more dynamic and tense, not so obviously inward, but still soulful, concentrated and with full awareness of their content. This album captures Janková at a moment when she finds herself able to complement what has hitherto been mainly an operatic profile in a striking way. The interpretation of lieder is something for which she is clearly predestined by the character and dimensions of her voice, chamber discipline and internal emotional wealth.

PETR VEBER



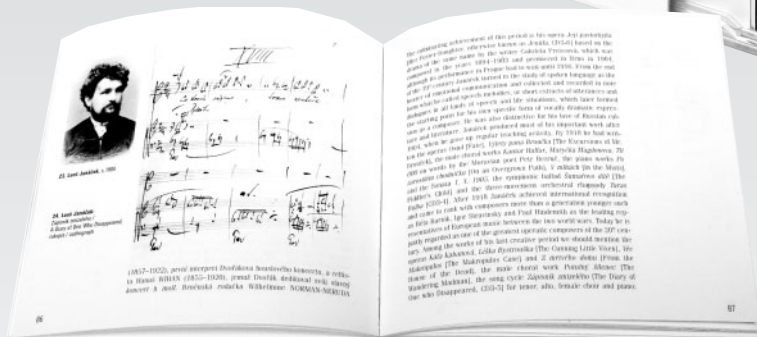
Josef Suk, Rudolf Firkušný

(Dvořák, Janáček, Brahms, Beethoven)

Josef Suk – violin, Rudolf Firkušný – piano. Production: Petr Vít. Text: Eng., Ger., Fr., Czech. Recorded, IMF Prague Spring, Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, 18. 5. 1992. Released: 2005. TT: 70:24. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 3857-2.

The recital bringing together two legends – Rudolf Firkušný after decades of exile and rejection, and the truly national figure Josef Suk, was one of the main magnets of the Prague Spring festival in 1992. Both musicians were in top form, and with all the experience of their long careers behind them they had no interest in pretension or false sentiment and simply wanted to share the beauty of music with the people in the audience. From the Czech repertoire they naturally chose the pair Dvořák – Janáček (*Sonatina for Violin and Piano in G major op. 100 B 183* and *Sonata for Violin and Piano*), and from the wider European repertoire Beethoven – Brahms (*Violin Sonata no. 10 in G major and Violin Sonata no. 3 in D minor op. 108*), to which they gave romantic wings. The Suk conception is impressive, clearly chiselled, yet broad and sweeping, and it arouses great respect. The Rudolfinum Steinway literally sung under the fingers of Rudolf Firkušný. The absolute foundation of the recording is the melodic line, whether inward in the *Sonatina* or expressive in the *Janáček*. For me it is the latter's *Sonata* that is the high point of the recording, which by lucky chance has been taken from the original video recording thanks to the firm BVA International. It is to the firm's credit that we have a record of an important moment in the history of the Prague Spring Festival since 1989.

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