czech music quarterly

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Yveta Synek Graff

Antonín Dvořák's first opera

Vojtěch Jouza

Národní divadlo

opera

AT THE
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THEATRE

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2014
year of czech music

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Dear readers,

Our magazine has over the long term paid attention to the journeys of Czech music and Czech artists around the world – it is one of its main missions. The present autumn issue is dominated by three texts on such a theme, yet they concern not entirely typical phenomena. It opens with an interview with Yveta Synek Graff, a pioneer in having Czech operas sung in Czech on stages worldwide. Anita Smisek's publishing house is an example of patient and, in the best sense of the word, unambitious work directed to the musical communities beyond the specific universe of high-profile professionals. The third text is a review of a book dealing with the music of Czech settlers in New Zealand, particularly the bagpipe tradition. A counterpoint to such "small musical worlds" is the second and concluding part of Martin Jemelka's exhaustive account of complete recordings of Antonín Dvořák's symphonies of both Czech and foreign provenience.

The Composer Portraits series continues with the third CD, this time featuring a cross section of Michal Rataj's works.

Wishing you pleasant listening and a nice autumn.
Petr Bakla

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cover: Yveta Synek Graff

by Dita Hradecká

WHEN A SINGER ACCEPTS A ROLE IN CZECH, THAT'S THE MARK OF A TRUE PRO

Yveta Synek Graff talks about the difficulties of getting Czech operas on to international stages, her famous father, the diva Jarmila Novotná and behind the scenes of opera productions.

Precious few know the Metropolitan Opera building as well as Yveta Synek Graff. After arriving in the New World, as a young girl she attended rehearsals and premieres there, subsequently received two marriage proposals and worked at the MET as a language coach for some three decades. She shared with us her reminiscences during a visit to the Czech Republic in late August, when she attended the gala concert in Liteň in tribute to the Czech diva Jarmila Novotná, a close friend of hers.

"I was born in Prague. My dad was a renowned writer whose plays were staged at the National Theatre. Mum was an actress, yet after marrying she gave up her career upon her husband's wish. I only know the Švanda and Vinohrady theatres from her tales. Before I was born, my parents had made three world tours. As a journalist, my father wrote articles critical of the Nazis. In 1938 he refused to flee Czechoslovakia and wanted to stay and fight but had to leave for France (he managed to get there as a member of some football team via Hungary). And since he could not fight in France either, he went to England to help the Czech government in exile."

You and your mother stayed in Prague?

Yes. During the war, I was a little girl, so I only remember the atmosphere, people dreading the Gestapo. My life started when Dad returned home on the first plane from London, until which time we did not even know whether he was alive, just as he had no idea whether we were alive. We stayed in Prague for another two years. Dad presaged the development of the post-war situation and if he had stayed

in Prague they could have executed him – or named him a minister. So he devised a "trip" to Paris. We left everything behind in Prague, it is quite possible that Mum did not even anticipate we would never come back. Dad arranged a really beautiful life for us. When, for instance, there were strikes in Paris, he took me out of school and we went to Switzerland…

It would seem that your father played a vital role in your life.

Oh yes, he and my second husband, with whom I spent 40 years and who, unfortunately, died this year. It was he who suggested that instead of parties and entertainment I use my talent for something meaningful. You know, I didn't miss a single premiere, I wore beautiful dresses, my photos were always in the New York Times… After some time though I had become tired of the permanent social whirl, but I didn't immediately know what appropriate I could do. First I tried

to teach French – I even had the opportunity to train Plácido Domingo, when he was preparing to sing in Le Cid. But there were more than enough French native speakers in New York.

Was Domingo at the time really as notorious a lady-killer as is rumoured?

Well, I'll put it this way. I would always have a colleague with me, would never go to see him on my own… I was newly married then.

You studied voice at a conservatory – did you not long for a singing career in America?

My training in Paris was not the best and my voice teacher in New York kicked me out when I told him I was getting married soon. Frankly speaking, I wouldn't have had the nerve for it, to be exposed to stress every single evening. Virtually all singers, including the stars, tremble before they go on stage. Some have a glass of wine, other light up a cigarette… There are precious few who don't feel stage fright but really enjoy it. Even though I only taught them, I was nervous with them.

Then you decided to try and get the MET and other US opera house to give performances in Czech. How long was the path from the idea to its materialisation, and what arguments did you use?

You know, it did take a long time. I had to persuade the MET management for a long time before Czech operas started to be sung in the original. Ultimately, I simply wore down the director, so he waved his hand and said: "Do it then." And I began phonetically transcribing and translating the texts, and coaching soloists and the chorus members.

You were afforded the first chance by Kurt Herbert Adler in San Francisco.

That was Jenufa in 1980. They had previously staged the opera in German and the production was a flop. Then I found soloists and choristers willing to grapple with Janáček's Czech. It was a breakthrough indeed.

A Janáček wave then ensued…

It was somehow in the air, the time was ripe for performing operas in the original. Once I had to prepare eight productions within a single year, each of them at the other end of the US. My husband and I travelled by car, he'd do the driving and I would work with the score in my lap…

How did the singers respond to Czech?

I have never encountered a singer refusing to learn Czech (with the exception of one Russian). Americans, Canadians, French, all of them were pleased to do something different, apart from La bohéme and Tosca. They really loved the roles of Kostelnička, Jenufa and Katya in particular. I have trained three generations of singers, among them Ben Hepner, Renée Fleming, Sondra Radvanovsky… I have the list at home, it's a long one. With Renée Fleming

Yveta Synek Graff with Gabriela Beňačková

I have prepared Rusalka at least 10 times, both in Europe and the USA. The best Kostelnička was Mrs Rysanek. The singers were like my children – my work wasn't over with the premieres, they wanted to have me in the dressing room and polish till the last minute, or just hold their hand. Those were a wonderful 30 years… When someone decides to learn a role in Czech, he/she is a truly professional singer, since it is toilsome and time-consuming. The biggest problem is there are too many consonants in Czech. And do you know what makes me happy? The fact that of late Czech has begun to be one of the requirements at auditions.

After three decades, you decided to leave the MET. Has anyone taken over your job?

I am the one and only Czech to have done this work in New York. The MET has French, German and Italian voice coaches. I have no successor, no one has taken over the job – it is not lucrative employment and it needs a person who can not only speak Czech but sing too.

In 1998 you participated in the making of the legendary Decca recording of Rusalka at the Rudolfinum.

It was an extraordinary experience, for we gathered together all the main singers and spent three weeks here with Charles Mackerras. Hawlata, who sang the Water Sprite, arrived without knowing a single word. I recited from behind one sentence after another, he sang them and it was recorded. But he was a true professional, he learned quickly…

What do you think of modern adaptations of Jenufa and Rusalka?

I used to advise stage directors – some of them listened to reason, but today the director is the absolute master. I once said that in Act 1 Jenufa should be nicely dressed up, and the director almost killed me because the singer liked my proposal and insisted on a different costume.

Yveta Synek Graff with Jiří Bělohrádek

You were a close friend of the diva Jarmila Novotná. When did you meet?

Jarmila came to New York from Vienna after her husband died to return to her children. But her children were not really interested in opera, so she was very grateful when my husband and I took her to all the concerts and premieres. Whenever a performance was given in Czech she wrote me a thank-you letter. We liked each other. Jarmila was extremely interesting, we evaluated singers together. Naturally, we spoke Czech and she, a genuine patriot, cared a lot about the language. We used to visit Vašata's and eat Czech food. I myself deemed it important that she had known my parents before the war (my Dad once wrote an amazing review of her) and told me about them. She was always tidy, well-groomed, a real lady.

What has still to be done in promoting Czech opera?

A lot. When it comes to Dvořák, only Rusalka is performed, and I don't understand why. I have failed to arouse interest in Martinů's operas, no matter how hard I tried. There is plenty of work to be done in continuing to champion Czech opera. I was enthusiastic, young and pretty, so I eventually persuaded everyone…

Yveta Synek Graff

Born in Prague to the intellectual and political activist Emil Synek and the actress Emilie Budlová. After World War II, she lived with her parents in Paris, where she studied voice at the conservatoire. She travelled widely and enjoyed a carefree life as a young celebrity. In 1956 she moved to the USA, soon got married and gave birth to two children. She led a busy social life until she married her second husband, the banker Malcolm Graff, a MET benefactor. At the time, she found her mission in promoting the staging of Czech operas in the original. Since the late 1970s, she has translated and phonetically transcribed all Janáček operas, Dvořák's Rusalka and Smetana's Libuše. She coached renowned singers and choruses, and started the trend of performing Czech operas in Czech throughout the world. Yveta Synek Graff has trained three generations of singers, including such stars as Ben Heppner, Renée Fleming and Plácido Domingo.

by Markéta Kratochvílová

ALFRED: DVOŘÁK'S FIRST OPERA AND ITS FATE

Antonín Dvořák's first opera is a rare bird indeed, only sighted approximately every 70 years or so. Created in 1870, until very recently it had been staged just once: in 1938 and in Czech translation. Although the attempts at reviving the opera in the 1930s, as well as in more recent times, were accompanied by sad and unfortunate circumstances, this autumn saw the first performance of Alfred in the original German version. Its first-ever recording is in the pipeline too.

Antonín Dvořák circa 1870

Dvořák based his debut opera on the drama *Alfred der Große* by Karl Theodor Körner (1791–1813), a German poet who joined the uprising against Napoleon and died of an injury sustained in an exchange of gunfire at the tender age of 21. His short life notwithstanding, Körner left behind an extensive literary legacy, with his patriotic poems and dramas being set to music by, for instance, Carl Maria von Weber and Franz Schubert. *Alfred der Große* is set in southern England in the second half of the 9th century, at the time when the British Isles and the adjacent regions of continental Europe were invaded by the Danish Vikings. The character of Alfred is based on a real historical figure, the English King Alfred the Great (849–899), a successful warrior and educated and enlightened monarch. In the drama, King Alfred stands up to the Viking marauders, with a great buttress to him being his faithfully loving fiancée Alvina, who is also pursued by the Danish Prince Harald. After a number of twists and turns, including battles, a sortie into the enemy's camp disguised as a harpist and repeated rescues of Alvina, England and constant love prevail. The subject of the life of Alfred the Great had been treated in literature and music alike on several occasions. Gaetano Donizetti, for instance, wrote the opera *Alfredo il Grande*, yet he drew upon a different text; prior to Dvořák, Körner's drama had been set by the German composer Johann Philipp Schmidt. The theme of the Britons' victorious struggle against the Danish invaders may have reminded Körner of the Germans' patriotism in the Napoleonic wars; as regards the Czech milieu, a parallel can be seen in *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*. The real reasons why Dvořák set this old German text to music are not known, but they may have been purely pragmatic. At the time, there were precious few high-quality Czech librettos available and, what's more, they had to be

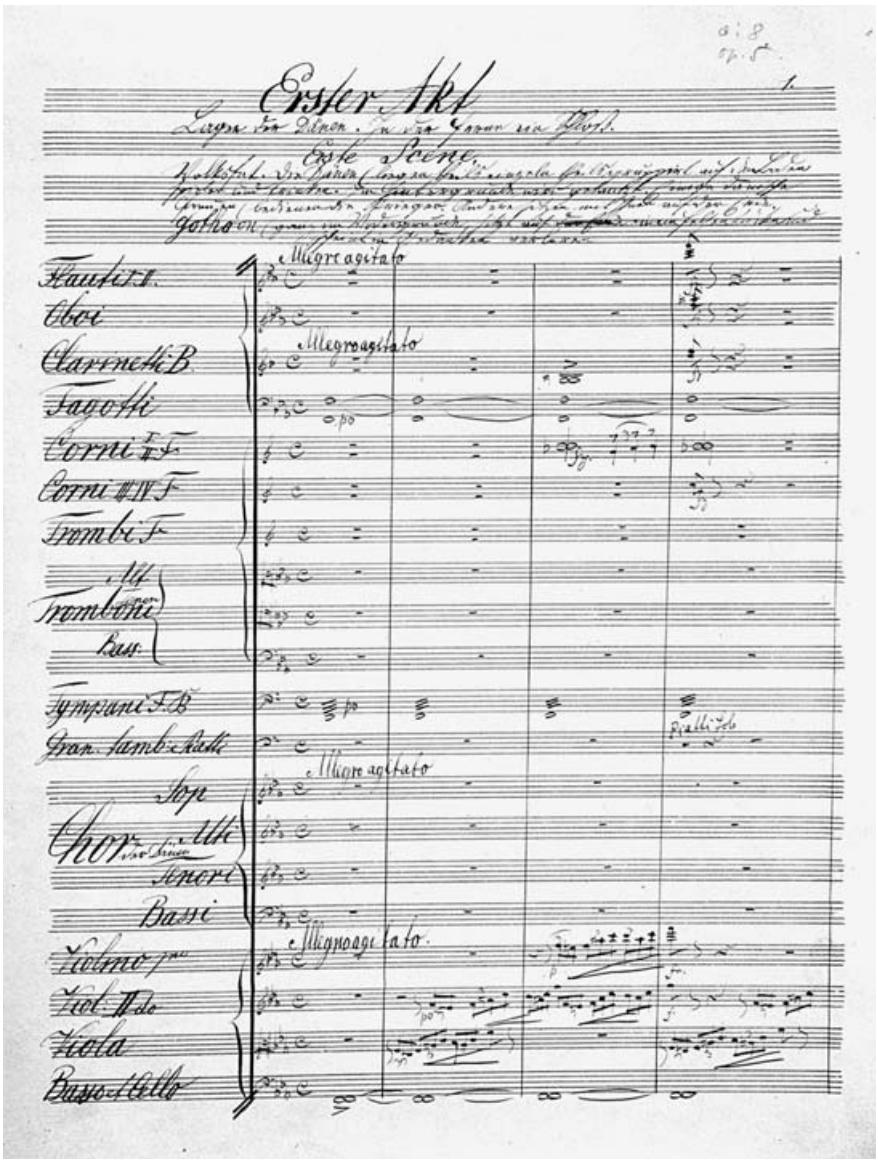
Karl Theodor Körner (1791–1813)
Illustration: Hugo Bürkner

paid for – as a violist of the Provisional Theatre, Dvořák neither had the money nor the renown of a composer. Another argument decisive for the selection of the libretto could have been Dvořák's endeavour to approximate the spirit of Wagner's operas, which he held in great esteem at the time, with a German libretto most conforming to his intention.

In the 1860–1870 period, Dvořák systematically learned to become a composer and in his early chamber and symphonic pieces he wittingly faced up to the style of his great predecessors – Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, etc. The music of *Alfred* does indeed include features that are deemed Wagnerian, such as characteristic motifs, chromaticism, thick orchestration, emancipated orchestra. Yet other parameters are of significance too: in the booklet to the prepared recording of *Alfred,* Jarmila Gabrielová writes that the work's dramaturgical shape corresponds to the style of French grand opera – comprising extensive "tableaux" in which a major role is played by the chorus as a "collective hero" and into which individual solo numbers and various ensembles are inserted; and Körner's libretto is most accordant with the genre of Rettungsoper ("rescue opera"), whose essence is formed by the rescue of a character by the lead protagonist. With the exception of slightly shortening the finale, Dvořák virtually set the text of Körner's drama without modifications, dividing it for his purposes into three Acts. The autograph score of the opera, the sole preserved autograph source for the work, has over six hundred pages and is written clearly and legibly, devoid of revisions and deletions, which bears witness to the fact that it was preceded by sketches and other working manuscripts. Dvořák completed the clean copy of Act 1 on 26 May, Act 2 on 7 July and Act 3 on 28 September 1870. In the end, he drew up the overture, which is dated 19 October 1870.

Alfred the Great (849–899)
Statue in Wantage, Oxfordshire

After managing to write his first opera, Dvořák felt ready to pursue a career as a composer. Consequently, in 1871 he gave notice at the Provisional Theatre and right away embarked upon another operatic opus, *The King and the Charcoal Burner*, which he intended to present actively to the public. He put *Alfred* among his other early works and did not even include it in the lists of his compositions, yet he did not take a complete dislike to it: in 1881 he revised the overture for a planned performance that ultimately failed to materialise. Dating from the time of the revision is the title *Tragic Overture,* under which the work was first performed on 4 January 1905, posthumously, by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under the conductor Oskar Nedbal, without knowing that it was actually the overture to the opera *Alfred*. In 1912, the piece was published by Simrock in Berlin under the title *Dramatische ouverture* and then in 1974 within the complete edition by Supraphon as *Dramatic Overture*. (Dvořák himself denominated the work with both of the titles.) The overture has occasionally appeared in the programmes of symphonic concerts, and it was also performed at this year's Prague Spring festival. The opera was only staged in its entirety in 1938, at the Czech Theatre in Olomouc. An important role in the retrieval of *Alfred* was played by radio: on 6 February 1938, Prague Radio's German section aired extracts from the opera, which were sung in the original German by Walter Windholz, Richard Kubla,

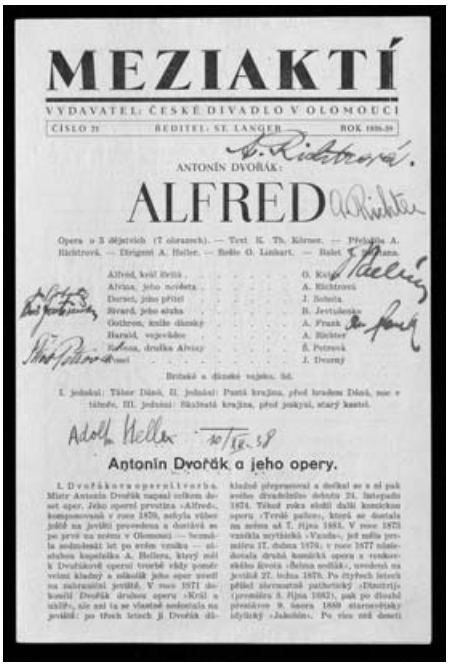


Dvořák's autograph of the opera Alfred, 1870. First page of Act 1

Fine Reich-Dörich, etc., and the radio orchestra was conducted by Georg Singer. The introductory word was given by Paul Nettl, a leading musicologist and senior lecturer at Prague's German University, who from 1933 headed the German section of Prague Radio. We can surmise that Nettl was the main initiator of the resurrection of *Alfred* in the late 1930s, and the broadcast extracts aroused interest on the part of several theatres in staging the whole opera. The answer to the question of why *Alfred* was premiered in Olomouc can be sought in the person of the theatre's chief conductor Adolf Heller (1901–1954), a Prague native of German and Jewish origin, who in the 1920s first served as an assistant to Alexander Zemlinsky at the New German Theatre in Prague and subsequently as an opera conductor in Jablonec nad Nisou and Teplice, where he also performed Dvořák's operas *Rusalka* and *The Jacobin,* as well as Ostrčil's *The Bud,* in his own German translations. The highlight of Heller's career in the Czech lands was his tenure in Olomouc (director of the opera section from 1932 to 1939), where his unusual dramaturgy drew the attention of music critics. During his time in Olomouc, Heller consistently presented works by contemporary Czech composers and he was the first to perform on a Czech stage Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo*, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*,

and two operas by both Zemlinsky and Respighi. He even gave world premieres of some works in Olomouc, for instance, Albert Roussel's *Le testament de la tante Caroline* (in Czech). And the final accomplishment of Heller's was the production of Dvořák's *Alfred*, to date the one and only staged and complete performance of the work. The opera was delivered in a Czech translation by Anna Richtrová, a soloist of the Olomouc Opera, who also sang the lead female role of Alvina. Alfred was portrayed by Otto Kubín and the direction was undertaken by Oskar Linhart. The premiere, which took place on 10 December 1938, met with keen interest and was attended by leading figures of the professional music scene, including Dvořák's biographer Otakar Šourek, and even the composer's daughter Magda and son Antonín. The Olomouc production, however, happened to occur in a fraught period, on the eve of World War II: around Christmas, *Alfred* was performed on another five occasions, yet, owing to his origin, Heller then had to leave the theatre in Olomouc (he emigrated via Palestine to the USA; the aforementioned Paul Nettl and Georg Singer experienced similar fates) and afterwards the opera was no longer staged.

An extraordinary opportunity to hear fragments from *Alfred* was afforded to radio listeners on the anniversary of Dvořák's birth, 8 September 1961, as performed by the Plzeň Radio Orchestra conducted by Josef Blacký and sung by soloists of the Plzeň Opera. At the end of the 1980s, with the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth imminent, there were considerations of performing all Dvořák operas, including *Alfred*, yet these plans failed to materialise in the wake of the political and social changes in Czechoslovakia in 1989. In the early 1990s, specific steps with the aim to revive *Alfred* were taken by Czech Radio employees, particularly Jiří Teml, Jindřich



MEZIAKTÍ

VYDAVATEL: ČESKÉ DIVADLO V OLOMOUCI

ČÍSLO 21 · ŘEDITEL: ST. LANGER · ROK 1938-39

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK:

ALFRED

Antonín Dvořák a jeho opery.

Programme of the 1938 Olomouc production, including the signatures of the cast.

Photograph from the Olomouc production in 1938. From left: Adolf Heller (conductor), Anna Richtrová (Alvina, and translator), Antonín Dvořák Jr. (the composer's son), Otto Kubín (Alfred)

THE AUTOGRAPH, PHOTOGRAPH AND PROGRAMME OF THE OLOMOUC PRODUCTION ARE SCANS FROM THE PROPERTY OF THE ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK MUSEUM, NATIONAL MUSEUM - CZECH MUSEUM OF MUSIC

Concert performance of Alfred at the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, Prague, 17 September 2014

Feld and others, yet negotiations at the time about borrowing or purchasing the performance materials, which in the 1930s had been made and were still owned by Dvořák's family, fell through. Therefore, the decision to prepare new performance materials was taken – yet Dvořák's first opera took everyone by surprise owing to its sheer scale. The amply orchestrated and musically complex score was beyond the possibilities of the copiers, to say nothing of the necessity to transcribe the German text written in Kurrent script in the score. Hence, the copies remained in fragments in the Czech Radio archives. Only 20 years down the line did several institutions manage to join forces, with Czech Radio and the Arco Diva agency having created the conditions for *Alfred*'s first recording and a concert performance at the Dvořák Prague festival, the new music material for which was prepared by the Czech Radio Publisher (the composer and editor Olga Ježková and a team of notographers) in co-operation with the Department of Music History of the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (the editing of the opera's text and stage directions in the score was carried out by the musicologist Jarmila Gabrielová, while other employees of the Department of Music History revised the whole score), and the composer Otomar Kvěch drew up a piano reduction.

The performance was to be helmed by Gerd Albrecht, who was addressed by the recording's producer, Jiří Štilec. It should be noted that Albrecht had done a great deal of superlative work pertaining to Dvořák operas: he reconstructed and performed with the WDR Orchestra and Choir in Cologne the original version of *The King and the Charcoal Burner*, which won the MIDEM Classical Award 2008 for the best opera recording, and between 1989 and 2009 explored and recorded other Dvořák operas too: *The Devil and Kate*, *The Jacobin*, *Vanda*, *Armida*, *Dimitrij*, which earned him numerous accolades. Regrettably, Albrecht, who was already in possession of the performance materials of *Alfred* and had selected the cast for the demanding solo and chorus parts, died this year. Yet the performance and the recording, which have been prepared over several years, have nevertheless come to fruition. Albrecht was replaced by the German conductor Heiko Matthias Förster, a connoisseur of the operatic repertoire with a penchant for Czech music and milieu (this year, he assumed the post of chief conductor of the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra Ostrava). Under Förster's baton, *Alfred* was heard at the Rudolfinum on 17 September 2014 within the Dvořák Prague festival, as performed by the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Brno Czech Philharmonic Choir (chorus master: Petr Fiala) and soloists in the original German version. The lead characters were portrayed by Felix Rumpf (Alfred), Petra Froese (Alvina), Ferdinand von Bottmer (Harald), while the other roles were sung by Jarmila Baxová, Peter Mikuláš, Tilmann Unger and Jörg Sabrowski. A recording of the concert will be released on CD by ArcoDiva. The contemporary audience will thus be able to ascertain whether or not the 1930s critics were correct in claiming that Dvořák's *Alfred* is "more Wagnerian than Wagner".

by Dina Šnajdarová

VOJTĚCH JOUZA
IS A MUSICIAN OF MULTIPLE INTERESTS…

… and a broad heart. He claims to be lazy, yet the sheer range of his activities would suggest the very opposite. He is a Czech Philharmonic oboist, leads two choirs, a chamber orchestra, and also devotes to educational projects. I wonder how it is possible that whenever I speak to him he never appears to be in a rush or agitated. It's as though he has discovered the secret of attaining inner peace, still sought by many people. During the course of his career, he has encountered the leading figures of Czech music, and all his experience has interconnected with that which he gained at home. Therefore, we opened our conversation with his childhood.

You hail from a family of musicians in which everybody except you plays the violin. How did you get to the oboe?
I got to playing the oboe gradually. Originally, I was supposed to become a violinist – just like my dad, sister and brother. The sounds of my childhood are synonymous with the sounds of three violins. It was thus absolutely natural that, at the age of six, I got one too. Yet it turned out to be a bad idea. Several weeks later, I hid under the bed and then ran riot until I was promised I would get to choose another instrument and no one at home would interfere. Those three kept standing above me, laying their heads together, and I could no longer endure it. So I chose the cello.

Why? Did you want to stick with a string instrument?
At the time, it seemed to me that's the way it should be. But I gave preference to listening to music and did not practise much on the instrument, usually just the day before the lesson, and that certainly wasn't enough. As soon as it became clear that I wouldn't be a cellist either, dad took me to a Czech Philharmonic recording session so as to look around for a wind instrument. I was about 13 then, and if I were to devote to music, which I really wanted, it was high time to do something about it. At that time, the first oboe was played by Jiří Mihule, a legend of the Czech oboe school. His charisma and, particularly, the beautiful, noble tone simply overwhelmed me. And so that was that. I also liked the fact that you don't have to toil with the oboe as many hours a day as with the violin. But I continued to play the cello too and completed the first cycle at the music school in due course. I concurrently learned to play the oboe, which I really enjoyed, and after finishing primary school I was accepted at the conservatory.

Your family must have been relieved…
I think so, I remember us soon playing together quartets for oboe and three violins.

At the conservatory you were taught by Professor František Xaver Thuri (b. 1939), a composer and one of the pioneers of early music performance in our country. What did it mean to you?
Prof. Thuri is rightly said to be the "last living Czech Baroque composer". He is a great connoisseur of early music, an amazing person, pedagogue, and besides the oboe he can also play the harpsichord and organ. During the time of my studies, in the 1980s, he was one of the few capable of playing the figured bass according to the numbers. Seeing him every day was extremely beneficial for me. It was he who acquainted me with Jan Dismas Zelenka and drew me towards sacred music. He was also the chorus master of the Czech Madrigalists, an outstanding amateur ensemble singing vocal polyphony very nicely. The other students and I used to accompany them. This actually led me to the idea that that I too could have my own choir.

First you established a chamber orchestra – the Prague Baroque Ensemble.
Yes, it came into being back in 1983, when I was in my third year at the conservatory. My model was Ars rediviva, an ensemble performing both chamber music and grand orchestral works, which I liked very much. My father used to play with them too, so I had easy access to their productions and could observe the work of their artistic director – and founder – Milan Munclinger, another splendid champion of early music in our country. Later on, I even had the honour to perform with them. At the time, everything was played on modern instruments, which was a common practice. Today's trend is the very opposite.

Have the Prague Baroque Ensemble continued in this tradition?
Yes, we still play modern instruments, being aware that it's somewhat anachronistic as regards most Baroque ensembles playing historical instruments. But I don't think that our approach is wrong. We play differently, we sound different, while being inspired by historically informed performance. We don't strive to imitate the sound of old instruments at all costs. I don't really like it since, in my opinion, it would be unnatural vis-à-vis modern instruments. What's more, the people I work with and want to work with play contemporary instruments and cannot pass over to the old ones owing to lack of time. As for myself, I am not a purist, I like both.

You yourself play a copy of a historical instrument.
Yes, I do, but rather recreationally and, frankly speaking, only when someone wants me to.

Is Baroque music the closest to your heart?
I primarily resonate to the music of the first half of the 20th century. When I was an adolescent, I would listen, for instance, to one Janáček opera a day. I like Stravinsky, Bartók, Martinů. And I also like Art Nouveau music very much. But what appeals to me about Baroque music is its inexhaustibility.

Let us return to your teachers. In the beginning, you were enthralled by Jiří Mihule (b. 1937), with whom you actually rounded off your studies at the Academy of Performing Arts. What are your memories of him like?
Jiří Mihule remains my unrivalled model. His requirements are so high that virtually no one can meet them. We, mere mortals, often didn't understand at all what he wanted from us.

Was it depressing?
Pretty much so, initially. Throughout my studies I didn't actually know what to do. For instance, we would work on a single bar for a long time and couldn't move forward. Later on, fortunately, I made sense of it all and experienced something amazing – I could play in the orchestra next to him, be right there, witnessing how his wonderful tone came into being.

Was he as strict on himself too?
Absolutely! At one time, at his own request, at the Czech Philharmonic he even changed from first to second oboe, because he was convinced that the quality of his playing had dropped. But of course he still played brilliantly! Or before a concert beyond the orchestra he took time off so as to be able to prepare one hundred per cent; he was getting his reeds ready half a year in advance. Stuff like that.

Has this passed over to you?
Yes, in the sense that when I remember it and look at what I'm doing, I feel somewhat ashamed. Today's style of work, when you have to do plenty of things in parallel, definitely wouldn't be for him.

You studied at the time of the totalitarian regime in our country. Don't you regret that you couldn't have studied in, let's say, Paris?
Not in the slightest, since I was extremely lucky when it comes to my teachers. Prof. Thuri was fabulous, and Jiří Mihule simply served as a role model for all oboists. I had the great luck to have got to him at all. In addition, I was also given work opportunities and established myself here. First in the Film Symphony Orchestra, then in the Prague Symphony Orchestra. All the same, I did get abroad as well, in 1988, to the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester. It was an immense experience and I learned a lot there.

So you encountered Claudio Abbado's work?
Yes! The most striking encounter was the dynamic scale. We most frequently heard: "Leise! Sehr leise!" Quiet, very quiet! I experienced softening to the maximum pianissimo with the maximum orchestra, when we played with 22 first violins, for instance. Until then we had no inkling it was possible to play this softly.

Is being a member of the Czech Philharmonic a dream come true?
Throughout my childhood I attended Czech Philharmonic concerts and knew very well how they play. It didn't cross my mind that I would perform with them one day. Even while I was studying, it was an orchestra inaccessible to me. It is the coming true of a dream I didn't even dare to dream to the end.

The Czech Philharmonic recently underwent an unpleasantly instable period (2009–2011), with several directors taking turns within a short time. One of them became minister of culture and soon fired the current one. After all, in connection with the political development, ministers of culture have come and gone pretty quickly. The orchestra didn't have peace for work, you even went on strike. At the time, the Czech public even commented on your activity, and various internet debates included remarks whose gist was that the orchestra's existence is good for nothing, that its players don't create any tangible value, and the like. It showed that culture in our country occupies an inferior position. How do you perceive this?
I am very glad that after 20 odd years I can see that the Czech Philharmonic is now managed by true professionals: the director David Mareček and his team, working for the orchestra and its future. I had even lost hope that it would ever happen. The fact that here culture is considered something inferior annoys me a lot, especially when I see the situation of cultured nations in Western Europe or the position of classical music in Japan. Every city, small town even, in Japan has an outstanding concert hall, of the level we will probably never have here. When we look back and realise how in the 19th century culture helped the Czech people not to perish, it is a colossal decline.

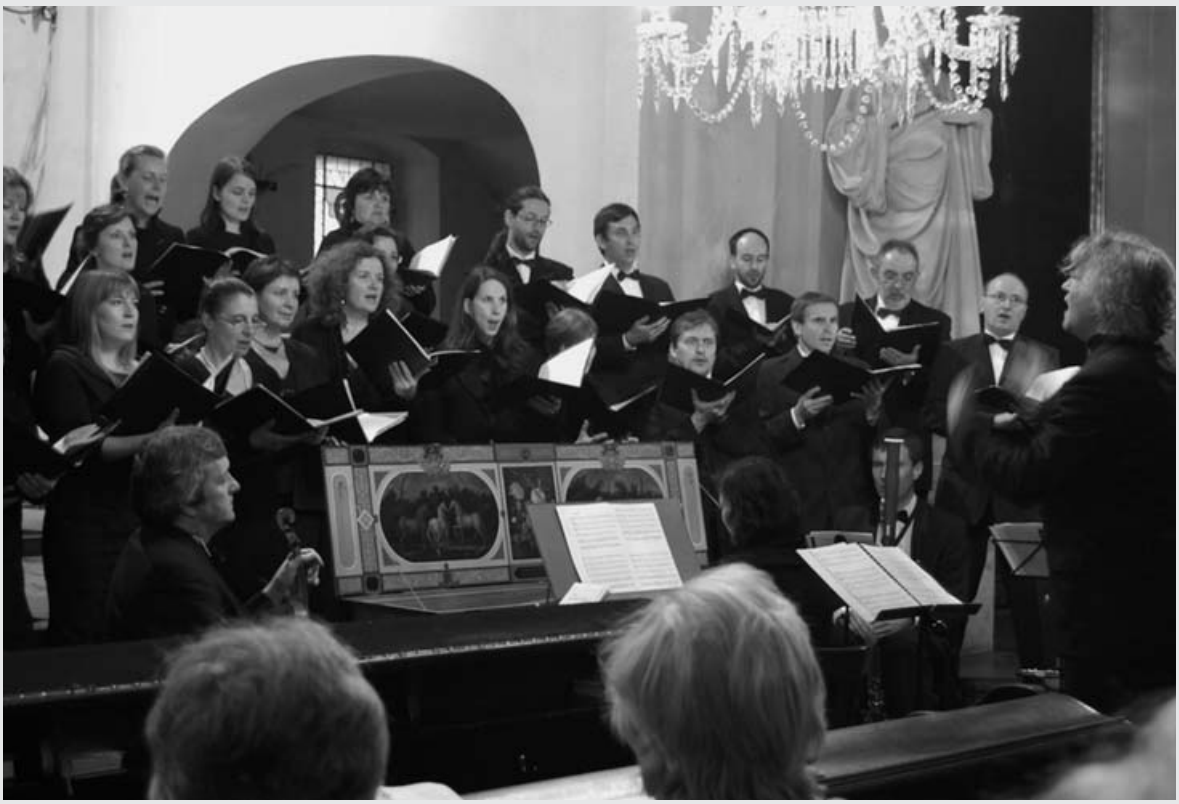
How did you arrive at the decision to become a conductor?
I felt the desire to conduct, yet it took me a long time to muster up the courage to get down to studying.

I assumed that a conductor should be a superlative violinist and pianist. I am neither of those, which I deem a handicap. But I ultimately did give it a try and five years ago completed my conducting studies at the Academy of Performing Arts. I am happy about it.

You founded the amateur chamber choir En Arché, with whom you primarily devote to sacred music. This year you have entered your 20th season. This may be a stupid question, but why "En Arché"?
The name is connected with our repertoire focus. "En archē ēn ho Lógos" are the first words of John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word."

How do you choose the members of the ensemble? I know that you do not overly test anyone. Yet you must also have been approached by people who are not very suitable, do not have a good sense of judgment, and so on.
This has happened of course. But when I sense imminent conflict, I back off and behave in a somewhat cowardly fashion. So I let everyone sing with the ensemble and wait. Such a person either leaves of his/her own volition or simply learns how to sing. And several such choir members really have learnt to sing. One of them even went on to become the buttress of the whole group. Thanks to his sheer diligence. Naturally, the selection could be very strict and rigorous, but I have never done it that way and am not going to change it.

Besides En Arché, you also head the Česká píseň (Czech Song) choir in Plzeň. What kind of choir master are you?
Terribly impatient, choleric, I get furious and sometimes extremely irksome. When my professional colleagues play with us, they say that I am too tough. And I reply that I quite tame my passions when they are around…



Vojtěch Jouza conducting En Arché

So Professor Mihule's perfectionism has left its mark…
Well, I should also take his example as regards patience!

Do you think that choral music can better convey to the listener a certain message owing to the existence of a text delivered by a larger group of people? Does this mean anything to you?
Sung texts carry a great significance. I tell my choir that they are just as, perhaps even more, important than the music! And I always try to make sure that the listeners have translations of the lyrics available. I for myself am glad to be forced to think about the contents and get to the depths when we pass on a certain message.

Vojtěch Jouza (b. 1966) is the youngest of the three children of Vojtěch Jouza, Sr, a former member of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. His brother Jan is a member of the Czech Philharmonic and his sister Vlasta Beranová a member of the Prague Symphony Orchestra. Vojtěch studied the oboe at the Prague Conservatory with Prof. F. X. Thuri and at the Academy of Performing Arts with Prof. Jiří Mihule. In 1988 he performed with the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester, from 1989 to 1991 was solo English horn player of the Prague Symphony Orchestra. Since 1992 he has been a Czech Philharmonic oboist. In 1983 he founded the Prague Baroque Ensemble, in which he plays the oboe, serves as artistic director and occasionally conducts, and with whom he has performed works by Zelenka, Vivaldi and other composers, and in 2007, in collaboration with the Prague Chamber Choir, his own reconstruction of Bach's St Mark Passion. In 1995 he established the En Arché chamber choir, in which he works as chorus master and conductor. He also heads the Plzeň choir Česká píseň. In 2009 he completed his conducting studies at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Vojtěch Jouza has also conducted the Czech Philharmonic, Prague Philharmonia. State Philharmonic Orchestra Košice, Prague Chamber Choir, Kühn Mixed Choir, Martinů Voices, Talich Philharmonia, South Bohemia Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra České Budějovice, Pardubice Chamber Philharmonic, Plzeň Philharmonic and Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra Zlín. He and the Berg chamber orchestra participated in the staging of Martinů's operas Comedy on the Bridge and The Marriage.

by Ondřej Čihák

ALLIANCE PUBLICATIONS, INC.: VIBRANT VOICE OF CZECH MUSIC IN THE USA

Those who decide to popularise Czech music abroad are confronted with a difficult task, one that involves championing a specific musical tradition amidst a plethora of national and international composers and fierce competition, both artistic and, in particular, commercial. And if such a decision is taken by a woman who persists in pursuing the task for a quarter of a century, she deserves double the plaudits. Anita Smíšek, the owner of the US's Alliance Publications, Inc., with Czech roots and a spiritual background (a Dominican Sister), answered our questions, documenting 25 years of relentless, diligent and, above all, fruitful work of those who believe in music's universal power of communication.

How is it that you began researching Czech music?

My graduate school professor at the University of Minnesota, an eminent musicologist who had emigrated from Germany, advised me in 1967 to choose to write on a musical topic from my Czech heritage. His advice launched me on a never-ending quest resulting in the establishment of Alliance Publications, Inc. 22 years later. I researched and published a collection of *19 Czech Christmas Carols* that were being sung in many Czech churches in the USA… a recording followed… and then a search for understanding the spirit of each liturgical season

as was evident in the Czech hymns. Fifteen years later, I was able to publish *Give Glory* – a hymnal of 78 hymns for all seasons with new English words to the Czech tunes. I taught them all to my church choir first in Czech at St. Wenceslaus Church in New Prague, MN, and then in English. Neighboring churches in Veseli, Lonsdale and Montgomery, MN, also used them. My search then focused on learning folksongs from all areas of the country, which was a total delight. I ended up giving performances and presentations at the Czech and Slovak Genealogy Conference on many occasions and have published and recorded three sing-along collections.

Why did you start a publishing house, one with such a specific focus?

While I served the Church of St. Wenceslaus as music director-organist, I became the Artistic Director of the "Nová Praha Vánoční Koncert", which utilized my church choirs as well as being augmented by many other amateur and professional musicians. The music I had collected the previous 20 years suddenly had a venue. The 18th-century pastorales of Línek, Ryba, and Sehling plus the *Česká mše vánoční* by Ryba came to life again in the USA. I hired a professional composer-arranger, Joel Blahník, from Fish Creek, Wisconsin, to assist me in providing good arrangements for the next year. The partnership became so successful that we dreamed of publishing the music we had been performing. The rest is history. Our passion for bringing the music of our common Czech heritage fueled a mission to publish this treasure store of music which simply had never been published in the US before and so was totally unfamiliar to people. It was time to share it and we were willing to become a team to make it happen. Music of the old Czech masters and that of Antonín Dvořák became our first publications, along with our arrangements of the Czech hymnody. The encouragement of the composer Václav Nelhybel, who became a mutual friend, was most affirming. He composed a series of organ preludes based on many of these tunes for our catalog. My sense of industry, love of learning, the advent of desk-top publishing and the Finale music notation software all converged to make it possible to establish a new entity in July 1989. Alliance Publications, Inc. was begun as a desk-top music publisher by Joel Blahnik and I, drawn together by our common Czech heritage and interest in promoting music of the ancestral country. I have served as its president, executive administrator and publisher for 25 years now. As educators, we were interested in promoting quality music for school, church, and community ensembles. Therefore, the catalog of API music is broad – band, orchestra, choir, as well as music for piano, organ, voice plus solo/ensemble music for all instruments. The unique specialty of this publishing house is Czech and Slovak music because it enables API to make this music available to the US as well as world market and gives composers from other countries an opportunity of being published outside of their own country. Since 1992, the company has had its home at Sinsinawa, WI, the Dominican Motherhouse, and has been able to have space to grow and reach out to many musicians.

How successful are Czech composers in the USA?

From API's history of sales of choral music alone, the music of Czech composers has been very successful. Of all choral titles, eight of the top 15 bestsellers are by Czech composers – Dvořák, Mácha, Krček, Lukáš, Hroněk. Of the SSAA choral titles, eight of the top 12 bestselling titles are by Czech composers – Mácha, Lukáš, Uherek, Eben, Smetana and Raichl.

What is your relationship with contemporary classical music, do you publish any? Why, or why not?

It is important to be publishing good contemporary classical music to keep encouraging musicians and audiences to broaden their repertoires and adapt their ears to new combinations of sound. One must be discriminating about this and try to discern what

the market might be able to take, what the company can gamble on producing, and what is important to put out there even if it may not sell well at the present if it is an excellent work.

Any plans for the future? Expansion, transition to digital media?

Future plans to sell digital downloads may happen, but for now we prefer to sell printed sheet music. Our sub-publisher in Prague is Talacko Sheet Music and we look forward to their having more titles prepared from our catalog for sale on the European continent. API wants to continue to be a musical bridge to the world, making Czech music available to more musicians beyond our borders. To introduce music of Czech composers to young students, API inaugurated a "Music Distribution to Schools" project for which the Czech Embassy granted financial support. For two years, selected bands, orchestras and choirs received API music from Czech composers they had never before been introduced to. Hopefully, we can continue such promotions in the future. We aim to continue to support, encourage and publish more works of women composers (we now have 59 women in our catalog), as well as promote contemporary music and young composers. Modern technology is constantly challenging us, as did building a new website launched in August 2014. There is continual updating to do and promotion through a variety of avenues, including social media. I am working to update all music files of Czech composers to provide pdf files for study and research for the Music Information Centre Database.

Alliance Publications' intensive collaboration with the database of music by Czech composers within the Czech Music Information Centre bears witness to the sincere interest in popularising and disseminating works by Czech composers, regardless of the commercial aspect: Anita Smisek has donated free of charge to the database for research purposes almost a hundred scores, which can be viewed at www.musicbase.cz.

The full version of the interview with Anita Smisek, including music and notation extracts from Alliance Publications' production, can be found on www.musicbase.cz/antologie/3-alliance-publications-inc-vibrant-voice-of-czech-music-in-usa

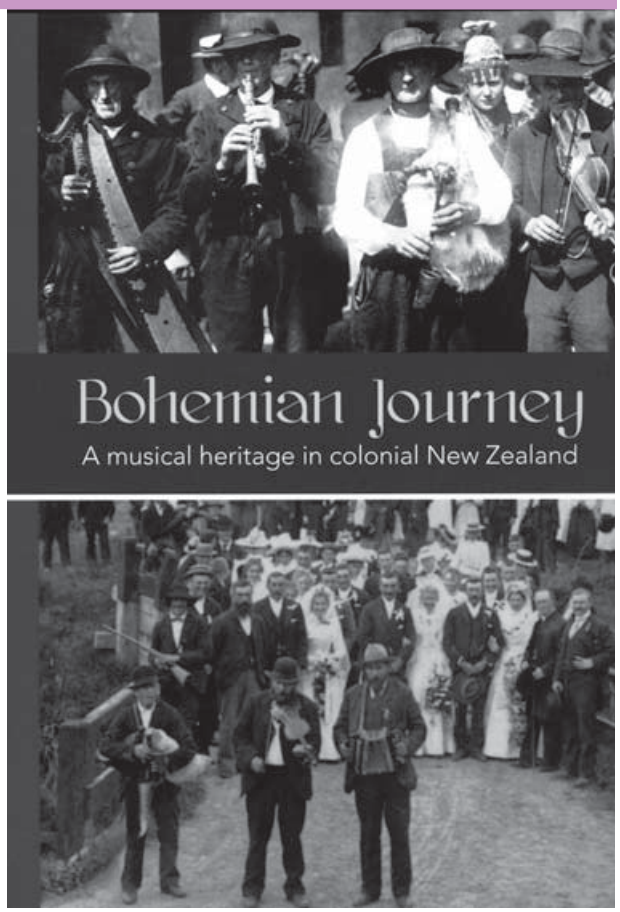
Matěj Kratochvíl

THE BAGPIPES' JOURNEY FROM BOHEMIA TO NEW ZEALAND

Among the groups of emigrants who during the course of history have left the Czech lands to settle in various quarters of the world, the expatriates in New Zealand are a relatively small community, and one less frequently reflected on. Last year marked the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Czech settlers in the village of Puhoi in northern New Zealand. The anniversary was commemorated by a book focused on the music the newcomers brought with them and how their musical tradition transformed and blended with other influences in their new home.

Roger Buckton, the author of the book *Bohemian Journey – A musical heritage in colonial New Zealand*, focuses primarily on early European music and music pedagogy. More than two decades ago, however, fate led him to the village of Puhoi in New Zealand, where he came across a remarkable offshoot of the European tradition. He duly ascertained that the local inhabitants had kept alive music rooted in West Bohemian folklore, with the Czech bagpipes (dudelsack) representing both a musical instrument and a symbol of major significance. The fact that the instrument's symbolic importance occasionally exceeded its musical importance is mentioned in the first chapter of the book, in which Buckton introduces the reader to life in the New Zealand countryside in the 1990s and presents a band made up of a bagpiper, a violinist and several accordionists: "Everyone knew and loved the dudelsack, their own unique instrument. As old local Herbie Paul pointed out, it never really occurred to them that there was another dudelsack – to them it was the only one in the world. It had found its way into the local psyche. (...) Despite this attention, it was almost impossible to hear the dudelsack. Not that it didn't seem to be sounding; its player showed every sign of involvement – fingers moving, foot tapping, face full of concentration. Yet all that could be heard were the accordions skilfully and relentlessly playing their tunes."

The journey thus begins in modern times, with the last generation of Czechs still bearing in their memory the tradition brought from their ancestral homeland, since – as we are told – their children and grandchildren give preference to different types of music. When recording the musicians from Puhoi, it comes to light how music functioned in this community, how awareness of it was handed down from generation to generation, and what has actually been preserved from its original form.



Overflowing with milk and honey

The journey of the music from Czech villages to the opposite end of the world began in 1863, when several dozen people, ranging from the abjectly poor to wealthy farmers, set out from the villages of Stod and Chotěšov in West Bohemia. After travelling by train to Prague (where they were blessed by Cardinal Bedřich Schwarzenberg) and Hamburg, they sailed to England and subsequently along the coast of Africa and across the Indian Ocean before finally reaching the shores of New Zealand. The voyage took one hundred and six days, during which time the Czech sea-farers gave birth to six children and one of them died when he was buried under loosened freight in a heavy storm. Legend has it that Scottish emigrants were travelling on the same ship, so we can only imagine what the joint sessions of Czech and Scottish pipers may have sounded like. After landing in New Zealand, the settlers had to paddle by canoe up the river Puhoi and then do battle with the local nature. The land was fertile yet harsh and its mountainous character made establishing fields complicated. The driving force behind the origination of the settlement was one Martin Krippner, a native of the village of Mantov (Mantau), today part of Chotěšov, near Plzeň. Although the son of a humble smith, he studied law in Prague and later on became an officer. While serving in the military, he married an English woman and they left for New Zealand. In a letter alluring new settlers, he described the living conditions in the new land as follows: "This is a wonderful country, overflowing with milk and honey. A beautiful, in fact, a magnificent climate! Very little rain, yet sufficient in all seasons to allow the farmers to raise their crops. The flowers can be seen in bloom the whole year." As documented by the respective sources, Krippner's formulations included a fair degree of hyperbole. During the initial years in the new place, the emigrants faced plenty of difficulties, in whose overcoming they found encouragement in religion, as well as Czech songs as a connecting link to their old homeland.

The very first settlers in Puhoi included Michael Yesensky (Jesenský), a violinist who gained fame

in the vicinity and was invited to play at social events. The place in which he built his house still bears the name Fiddlers Hill. The first band in Puhoi was headed by the piper Joseph Paul, who together with his brothers John (violin and bagpipes) and Wenzel (accordion) provided musical accompaniment at weddings, whose number grew as the Czech community gradually settled down and got used to the new milieu. The Paul family hailed from the village of Popov, near Plzeň, and was in close contact with the bagpipe tradition, which was extremely vital in 19th-century Bohemia. Joseph Paul was born in 1816, thus being a contemporary of the more famous piper František Kopšík, whose performances were recorded by Otakar Zich in 1909 by means of Edison's phonograph and released in 2001 on CD by Lubomír Tyllner from the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.
The bagpipes played in Puhoi were passed down for over one hundred and thirty years and were steeped in history. Philip Wech, a piper whose artistry was recorded by Roger Buckton, related the story of the bagpipes as told by the instrument itself: "I came to Puhoi from Bohemia approx. 29 June 1863. I was played by John Paul on weddings and dances. At first I was carried in a knapsack and through the bush to the dances. Then horses came to Puhoi and I was carried on horse back for many years. Jim Rauner used to smoke a pipe that nearly choked me. My bag started leaking in 1950. I played in the Puhoi hotel for many years. I have had beer and spirits spilt on me and breathed the smokey air in the hotel." After more than one hundred and thirty years, the bagpipes were shipped back to Bohemia, where they were thoroughly repaired by the instrument-maker Pavel Číp, and

Philip Wech and the dudelsack, 1969

at the present time they are again played by Puhoi musicians.

We are Bohemians

Even though in his book Buckton keeps referring to "Bohemians", the titles of songs indicate that when it comes to the ethnicity of the settlers and the identity of their music the situation is somewhat more complicated: *Hans gaih Huom*, *Naih Aufhaien Walzer*, *Wenn hait Mutter ma huasn G'flickt*.
The first-wave of emigrants came from the German-speaking regions of the Czech lands and spoke the Egerland dialect, akin to the dialects of Bavaria. At the beginning, they did not have any objections to being considered, owing to their dialect, Germans yet upon the outbreak of World War I, when New Zealand Germans started to be interned as potential

enemies of the British Empire, the inhabitants of Puhoi began emphasising the Czech part of their identity. This link has survived up until the present, with the settlers' descendants still taking an active interest in their Czech roots.

Roger Buckton also made in Puhoi a series of recordings released on two CDs featuring the aforementioned last generation of musicians: the accordionists Laurie Rauner, Fred Rauner and Dot Berger, the violinist Ben Bayer and the piper Philip Wech. All the recordings are instrumental, with the rhythmic accuracy and audibly good technique corresponding to the image of a concentrated musician in the quotation at the beginning of this article, including the fact that the bagpipes and the violin struggle to make themselves heard amid the robust sound of the accordions, even though in this case they were somewhat helped by the recording technology.

The repertoire mainly consists of alternating polkas and waltzes, interspersed with an historically older dance, called the "umadum" or "umardum", the German term for the dance known in the Chod region of Bohemia as "do kolečka" ("round and round"). The unusual changing meter can be heard on one of the CDs in the melody designated as *Umadum with haymaker rhythm*. Under various titles – furiant, zelený kousek (green piece) – this type of melody, alternating duple and triple meters, could be encountered in various parts of the Czech lands. And the melody recorded by the New Zealand musicians is also known with the Czech text "Já si tě nevezmu, tys tuze vospalá" (I will not marry you, you are too sleepy). This song is also included in the aforementioned recordings made by František Kopšík in 1909, and the New Zealand musicians retain its rhythmic specificities. Just like the other melodies, this too is merely performed instrumentally; in all likelihood, there wasn't a corresponding text in German dialect, yet it can serve as proof that, to a certain extent, the Czech- and German-speaking bands took up each other's repertoire. With regard to the rhythmic oddities, which have no parallel in, for instance, English folk music, these melodies probably weren't frequently played at dances in New Zealand and have only been preserved as a sort of "exotic" speciality. Later on, however, the melody of *Já si tě nevezmu* was fashioned into an English song titled *I have left my homeland*, nostalgically recalling the old country.

The book *Bohemian Journey* sets the music of immigrants from the Czech lands into a wider context. One of the chapters deals more generally with the music of rural New Zealand, as well as the old folk music of England, since it represented the dominant culture, which smaller groups – including the one from the Czech lands – cohered and more or less blended with. Accordingly, in addition to describing the music of a single community, scope is afforded to how music is transformed when those who play and sing it travel to a new environment. On the occasion of his book's publishing and a celebration of the 150th anniversary of Puhoi's establishment, Roger Buckton visited Prague, where he, the Folkworks ensemble and a choir of enthusiasts from New Zealand gave a concert featuring the music written about in the book.

by Martin Jemelka

COMPLETE RECORDINGS OF ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK'S NINE SYMPHONIES (1963–2014)

(continued from the previous issue)

Dvořák made in Scotland

At the time when Václav Neumann was finishing his second complete recording of the Dvořák symphonies, a remarkable set, the fourth of British provenience, was produced by **Neeme Järvi** and the **Scottish National Orchestra.** The Estonian conductor chose the purist variant of approaching Dvořák's early symphonies, delivering them in their original versions, without shortening and modifications, thus playing a significant role in their rehabilitation in the second generation of complete recordings. Järvi's accounts are characterised by contrastive tempos, both audaciously slow (the first movements of Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3) and virtuoso limber (the first movement of Symphony No. 2, the finale of Symphony No. 3), sonically lucid overlaying of instrumental sections, contrastive dynamics with frequent returns to the lowest level, permanent agogics, which were markedly to the benefit of the early symphonies, and a sense for gradation of extensive wholes, be it the colossal Bruckner-like first movement of Symphony No. 1 (18:52) or the middle movement of Symphony No. 3. Järvi's interpretation does not lose breath in the middle symphonies; for instance, in the tempo-proportional Fifth with a splendid sound of wind harmony, soft gradations and the finale with buoyant brass instruments. The orchestra's transparent sound in an exemplary recording quality, with dynamic apices drifting deeply into the space of the studio, will undoubtedly be appreciated by the listener in the sonically slender Sixth, crowned by the second movement expressing a nocturne atmosphere with a forcible flute solo.
Particularly worthy of mention are the recordings of the two symphonies in D minor, whose

clarity was abetted by the slim sound of the Scottish National Orchestra, the backgrounding of the violin section and the overall acoustic translucence. A non-traditional impression is given by the melancholically expanded first movement of Symphony No. 4 (14:48), with the entry of the brass instruments more fateful than harrowingly aggressive, as well as the thorough articulation and phrasing of discomposing minor motifs in low strings. The finale's mechanical tempo is juxtaposed with an emotional traction of the legato passages of the first two movements. Sonic flexibility and clarity are also present in the recording of Symphony No. 7, with an inaccurate entry of the third movement yet featuring a fabulously gradated finale and well-legible first two movements. Alongside the detail-focused and tempo-monolithic New World Symphony, the recording of Symphony No. 8 is the highlight of the entire set, owing to its spatial dynamics, fast tempos, precise phrasing, sense for nuances, sonically balanced proportions between the orchestral sections, gentle agogics and precise completion of phrases. We would be hard pressed indeed to find as good an account of the Eighth in any other complete recording of Dvořák's symphonies. The ecstatic end of the finale of Symphony No. 8 is just the seal of Järvi's superlative creation.

Scottish National Orchestra, Edwin Paling (leader), Neeme Järvi, Chandos, most recently CHAN 9991(6), DDD, Henry Wood Hall, Glasgow, 1986-1987

A Czech-English set

When Järvi's project was in its second year, a peculiar hybrid set of Dvořák's symphonies began to be implemented, with the recordings made between 1987 and 1996, partly in Prague, with the **Czech Philharmonic**, and partly in England, with the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**, both of them conducted by **Libor Pešek**, in a co-production between Supraphon and Virgin Classics (Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5). Pešek's forte is his sense for spontaneous flowing of music, which served the early symphonies, in particular well in their shortened versions, without retouches, and modernist sonic imagination, akin to his recordings of modern Czech pieces. The recording of Symphony No. 1 is dominated by delicate dynamics, placid tempos, a sense for detail in emphasising the minor instrumental solos and the confident flow of the slow movement. Symphony No. 2, performed by the Czech Philharmonic (surprisingly, with a repetition in the first movement), is borne by supple tempos, atypical for Czech conductors, and concludes in an unusually grandiose finale. Symphony No. 3 was recorded in Liverpool without vide in the second movement, is well dynamically gradated, yet still less brilliant in the finale than older recordings (Suitner). Pešek's recordings of Symphonies Nos. 4-6 with the Czech Philharmonic turned out far better than Neumann's recordings made in the 1980s – with calm tempos, proportionately balanced, albeit not including the attacca connection between the second and third movements, as required by Dvořák. Pešek's project, eclipsing other Czech complete recordings, is rounded off by Dvořák's mature symphonies, whose accounts are characterised by carefulness, a sense for

detail and Suk-like colourfulness (Symphony No. 9, with the RLPO). As though going against the grain of the Czech performance tradition, Pešek's sonically transparent and dynamically unusually gradated recording of Symphony No. 7 is devoid of the cumbrousness of the other Czech recordings. Even though Pešek's Liverpool trumpets would warrant sharper accents, the slow soothing in the finales of the first and second movements of Symphony No. 7 simply cannot fail to enchant the listener. Pešek's set, unique in the Czech environment, is perhaps only marred by the sonic disparity between the two orchestras.

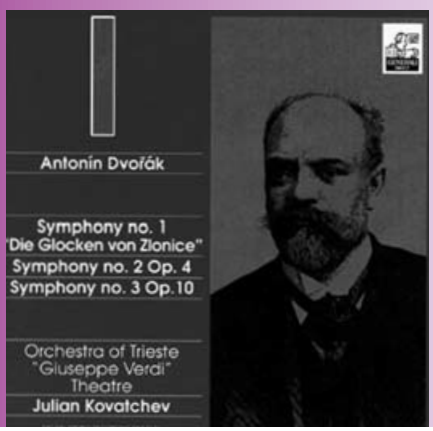
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Libor Pešek, Virgin Classics / Supraphon, most recently 7243 5 61853 2 6, DDD, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall / Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, 1987–1996

A Czech-American set

Concurrently with the project being carried out by Libor Pešek, his peer, the Czech conductor **Zdeněk Mácal**, was materialising a Dvořák set on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. He and the **Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra** were making for Koss Classics studio recordings of Dvořák's symphonies supplemented by other orchestral works. As for the only complete album of American provenience, we can only regret that it did not accrue from the workshops of the Cleveland Orchestra and Christoph von Dohnányi (Decca, Symphonies Nos. 6–9), or the Philadelphia Orchestra and Wolfgang Sawallisch (EMI Classics, Symphonies Nos. 7–9), since the Milwaukee ensemble is merely a regional American orchestra that simply does not possess the qualities of the leading US orchestras.

The technical and performance limitations of the Milwaukee Symphony notwithstanding, Mácal did manage to create a high-quality though not extraordinary album, noteworthy for the agile tempos and the endeavour for precision in completion of phrases (the vigorous Symphony No. 7, 34:12), the emotionally forcible slow movements, and convincingly phrased finales with brusque American brass instruments (Symphony No. 3), as well as the ability of arching slow movements with smooth gradation yet devoid of exaggerated legato (the second movement of Symphony No. 6). I consider problematic, however, Mácal's tendency to opt for monolithic tempos without agogic animation (the first movements of Symphonies Nos. 6 and 8) and the heavy sound of the American orchestra, incapable of transparently lightened performance, for instance, in the finale of Symphony No. 6. Surprisingly unspectacular is the take on Symphony No. 8, markedly lyrically oriented, with its immaturely sounding brass instruments and the monotony of the first movement, destitute of any tempo development, and the non-contrastive, hyper-lyrical finale, discrediting it in comparison with other successful recordings. In my opinion, following Mácal's return to his country, his Dvořák set gained too much attention, which would have been more warranted by his later project with the Czech Philharmonic (see below).

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Zdeněk Mácal, Koss Classics, separately KC 1001-2, 1002-2, 1009-2, 1010-2, 1015-2, 1019-2, 1025-2, 1026-2, DDD, Uihlein Hall, Milwaukee, 1988–1992



Bratislava again

The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s saw the making of an album of complete Dvořák symphonies for Naxos, recorded by the American conductor **Steven Gunzenhauser** and the **Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra**, whose second Dvořák set was repeatedly released separately, as well as within the label's project of a complete recording of Dvořák's orchestral works. Gunzenhauser's creation is of solid standard quality, containing both high-class and downright problematic recordings (Symphony No. 8 with slavish phrasing and articulation, school-boyish reading of tempo markings and zero agogics in non-pointed tempos). The technical and performance shortcomings were laid bare by the recording of Symphony No. 9, in the case of which the conductor strove to comply with Dvořák's score yet its mediocre sound level did not support the monolithic dynamics. Cut of a somewhat finer cloth are the recordings of the middle symphonies (excellent woodwind instruments), be it the forcibly gradated and many a time sonically highly pleasing recordings of Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5 or the proportionally balanced Sixth. While in Symphony No. 1 Gunzenhauser eschews repetition in the first movement, he does employ repetitions in the first movements of other symphonies (2nd, 4th, 5th, 9th), which, particularly in the case of the purist reading of Symphony No. 2 and its crisp tempo, is, in my opinion, to their good (the funeral march of the second movement is rather an extensive lyrical movement than a panachyda in the middle of the pastoral of Symphony No. 2). The set's creditable standard is sealed by the recording of Symphony No. 1, with an unctuous sound of the cello section and an impressive oboe solo in the second movement. Alongside the middle symphonies, the recording of Symphony No. 3 is the apex of Gunzenhauser's complete album, above all when it comes to the middle section of the second movement, which comes across as almost sonically ecstatic.

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, Steven Gunzenhauser, Naxos, most recently 8.506010, DDD, Reduta and the Slovak Philharmonic Hall, Bratislava, 1989–1991

In Verdi's shadow

In the 1990s, the **Orchestra of the Teatro Giuseppe Verdi Trieste** under the Bulgarian conductor **Julian Kovatchev** accomplished the one and only complete Italian album of Dvořák's symphonies. In terms of the recordings' sound quality, the orchestra's technical and performance skills and the conductor's choice of tempi, the set ranks among the mediocre. The studio recording of Symphony No. 1 is marred by blurred tempos, a not overly lucid, dull sound and impure phrasing of the end of the third movement. The keen finale of Symphony No. 1 ushers in the positives of Kovatchev's accounts, that is, the finales of Dvořák's symphonies, operatically dramatic even in his conception. Although crisp finales also crown the recordings of Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4, the conductor's fortes primarily come to the fore in the pieces' slow and lyrical passages, which is clearly evident in the case of Symphony No. 2 (a cogent conclusion of the second movement, the barcarole scherzo), as well as the dwindling away finale of the second movement of Symphony No. 4. Kovatchev's set serves to provide sufficient information (with the exception of his wanton treatment of repetitions) to those interested

in Dvořák's symphonies, yet by no means can it enchant their fans and connoisseurs, owing to, for instance, the lacking attacca connection of the second and third movements of Symphony No. 5. Whereas the proportionately built Symphony No. 6, with an impressive lyrical second movement, can certainly find favourers, the furiant uncomfortably discloses the deficiencies of the conductor's conception and the orchestra alike. Unfortunately, merely mediocre are the recordings of Dvořák's three mature symphonies, which are appended by the oratorio Stabat mater.
Orchestra of the Teatro Giuseppe Verdi Trieste, Julian Kovatchev, Real Sound, 953-0131 (Nos. 1-3), 053-0134 (Nos. 4-6), DDD, Teatro auditorium, Trieste, 1995-1997

Marking a Dvořák anniversary

The first Czech complete recordings of Dvořák's symphonies made by an ensemble other than the Czech Philharmonic – the **Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra**, conducted by **Vladimír Válek** – are best listened to piece by piece. Whereas the individual recordings, partly studio, partly live (Symphonies No. 5 and 7), intrigue owing to the conductor's penchant for vigorous tempos, pregnant rhythm (the breezy first movement of Symphony No. 6) and his ability to point the finale (Symphony No. 6), uninterrupted listening to the whole set reveals that Válek used this selfsame performance key to open and concurrently lock all nine symphonies. But that which works in the Fourth, featuring a fast variation movement, brusque scherzo and ferocious finale, and that which impresses in the almost Toscanini-like, unrestrained New World Symphony, need not function well in Symphony No. 3 (albeit with an elaborate harmonic break in the climax of the second movement), let alone in Symphony No. 5 (to which the conductor often returned, making it the centrepiece of his Dvořák activities). Fast tempos, minimal agogics, a permanent legato, more strident rhythmisation and band-resembling brass instruments are characteristic of Válek's set. Seemingly most convincing is the conductor's interpretation strategy in the first two symphonies, particularly the sharply accentuated first movement of the First with a striking five-bar motif, and the scherzos and the pointed, although rather tempo-monotonous, finales of the First and the Second. By opting for fast tempos and permanent legato in the early symphonies, however, Válek complied with the Czech performance tradition, making use of them so as to disguise the structural problems of Dvořák's early works.
Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Vladimír Válek, Supraphon, SU 3802-2, DDD, Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum / Studio 1 of Czech Radio, 2000-2003

In Neumann's footsteps

At the beginning of the 21st century, Neumann's interpretation legacy was endorsed by his pupil of Bulgarian origin **Ivan Anguélov**, who also followed his teacher's example as regards retouches and shortening of the early symphonies. Even though he invited along to the project the **Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra**, not the Slovak Philharmonic, as one would have expected, his complete recordings represent a solid accomplishment of average quality (if we overlook the immature delivery of Symphony No. 8).

Coming across as more compelling, however, are the recordings of Symphonies Nos. 6 and 7: although exposing the orchestra's technical limitations, the accounts of their first movements demonstrate the conductor's ability to build musical architecture. As regards the early symphonies, Anguélov chose to focus on symphonic lyricism (the second movement of the Fourth) and monolithic tempos devoid of any agogics (the Second). So when agogic nuances appear in the first movement of the New World Symphony, it resembles more the accepted tradition than the conductor's wilful endeavour to enliven the composition's microstructure by means of agogics. The fundamental forte of Anguél's conception is the accentuated symphonic lyricism (the Fifth), yet when we compare his complete recordings with those of Válek's (materialised in parallel), the set produced in Bratislava appears (perhaps surprisingly) more elaborate and more nuanced, at least when it comes to the stylistic differences between symphonies dating from various eras of Dvořák's creation.

Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Ivan Anguélov, Oehms Classics, OC 376, DDD, Slovak Radio Concert Hall, 2001–2004

In the same river twice

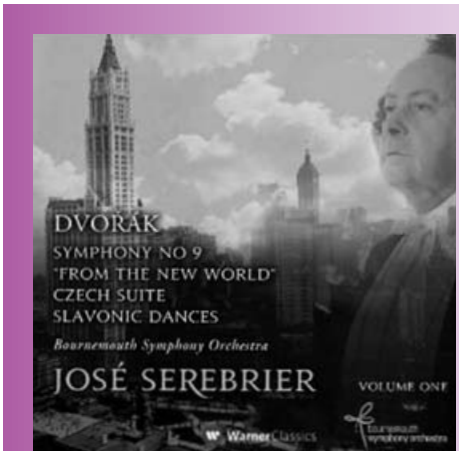
Jiří Bělohlávek, who conducted the most recent complete recording of Dvořák's symphonies, with the **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra**, can take pride in a truly superb Dvořák discography, including recordings of the operas *The Stubborn Lovers* and *Rusalka*, which may only be comparable with that of Neumann. Whereas with the Prague Philharmonia Bělohlávek tended to steer clear of Dvořák's symphonies, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London he recorded in 2006 and 1999 respectively Symphonies Nos. 5 and 6 (Warner Classics). Back in 1992, he and the Czech Philharmonic made a recording of Symphonies Nos. 5–8, supplemented by Dvořák's symphonic poems and other orchestral pieces (Chandos). The longer Bělohlávek had to wait for his Dvořák set, the greater the attention he paid to it when it comes to detail, definitely greater than that of his predecessors Neumann, Pešek and Mácal (a case in point being the thorough leading of the middle parts in the scherzo of Symphony No. 7). The major virtue of Bělohlávek's complete album is the abandonment of his former interpretational academic objectivity in favour of a fervent, Central European approach to Dvořák's scores, and not only in the slow movements. Bělohlávek's creation, combining variable tempos, lyrical expression and sense for surprising details in the middle parts, benefited from the effect of the "first contact" – as the conductor's first encounter with the early symphonies was at the very concerts that were recorded live. His "virginity" with regard to the early symphonic scores also came across with the present Czech Philharmonic, who were particularly open to Bělohlávek's conception in the oldest symphonies. As regards the final three symphonies, Bělohlávek went against the grain of the orchestra's tradition, with its attendant positives and negatives (a robust and unduly fast Symphony No. 8, and the more sturdy than monumental and ferocious New World Symphony): although the first and final movements of the Seventh lack affectation, its slow movement (similarly to the second movement of the Eighth) demonstrates the qualities of the conductor's current Dvořák symphonic lyricism. Also imbued with lyrical emotionality are the entire Eighth

and, to a great degree, the Ninth, which resigns to sharp contrasts. If in the mature symphonies Bělohlávek had to confront or accept the Czech Philharmonic's tradition, his take on the first three symphonies can be deemed revolutionary in the Czech environment, be it the frequent modifications of tempos à la Kubelík, the extremely contrastive dynamics or work with minor detail (the almost solo timpani in the First). Whereas the first three symphonies are performed by Bělohlávek in compliance with the Neumann variant in the Critical Edition, not the composer's original version, in the case of Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5 he surprisingly opted for repetitions, which are unique within the entire set. It is as though Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5 represent the greatest fortes and limits of Bělohlávek's creation – the Fifth has evidently never previously been interpreted with such large-scale tempos and hyper-lyrical expression, which is not abandoned even in the dramatically conceived finale. But if Symphony No. 5 can be deemed the apex of the set, Bělohlávek's applying an identical interpretational approach in the dramatic Fourth failed to come off and is, in my opinion, a misunderstanding of the composer's intention. The recent Hengelbrock recording (Sony Classical) in particular drew attention to the dramatic potential of this "untimely" mature score of Dvořák's. Notwithstanding my objections to the concept of Symphony No. 4 and sighing above the sturdiness of the Czech Philharmonic's tradition vis-à-vis a new reading of the scores of Dvořák's mature symphonies, I consider Bělohrávek's set remarkable, at least in the light of the Czech performance co-ordinates. Time will tell whether it is the most distinguished Czech complete recording to date.

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Jiří Bělohlávek, Decca Classics, 478 6757, DDD, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague, 2012–2013

In place of an epilogue

The complete recordings made by Válek and Anguél were released by the respective labels in 2004, the year marking the centenary of Dvořák's death, at the time when the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum served as the venue for the making of the **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra**'s third set**,** this time under **Zdeněk Mácal.** It is primarily intended for Japanese customers (Octavia Records) and, with the exception of the recording of Symphony No. 1, has already been released. Apart from absent repetitions, in the spirit of the Czech tradition, Válek's and Mácal's sets have in common the tendencies to lively tempos and monolithic legatos, yet in comparison with Válek's complete recording Mácal's second album featuring Dvořák's symphonies is more detail-focused and more brilliant, for instance, when in the first movement of Symphony No. 2 the themes flow over from the strings to wind harmony. A surprising item of Mácal's set is the recoding of Symphony No. 3, using the anachronistic 1912 Simrock edition that ignores Dvořák's final 1889 version and is different from the regularly heard version included in the critical edition of Dvořák's works. Yet already evident in Symphony No. 3 is Mácal's powerful ally, a high-quality audio recording, playing a great role to the benefit of detail and



the commonly backgrounded middle parts, for instance, in the form of the trumpet flourishes in the first movement or the piccolo whimsicalities in the finale. The audio technology also serves Mácal well in the case of the studio recording of Symphony No. 7, in which the overall legato is coupled with the sense of detail (even though I personally have objections to the expressively dance-like scherzo). Undoubtedly exquisite is the recording of Symphony No. 6, whose finale emerges from the silence into which the previous (second) movement vented, with many splendid details in the woodwinds. When it comes to Czech recordings, perhaps only Sir Charles Mackerras and the Prague Symphony Orchestra have recorded the New World Symphony with a repetition in the first movement, as did Mácal in his complete set made with the Czech Philharmonic, in which he managed to accentuate monumentality and melancholia, as well as gravity (Largo).

To date, Warner Classics has released half of the complete recordings of Dvořák's symphonies made by **José Serebrier** and the **Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra**, characterised by the conductor's correct reading of the composer's notation (Symphony No. 3) or archaising return to rubato (the finale of Symphony No. 7). Discophiles will certainly appreciate Serebrier's refreshing approach to the first movement of Symphony No. 6, the chirruping clarinets in the fourth movement, and especially the emotionally charged presentation of Symphony No. 2, with ecstatic first and last movements. The introduction to the first movement already makes it evident that Serebrier (just like Davis, years previously) has established a special relationship with the piece. Performing repeated sections, audacious agogics in the finale and an almost fondling treatment of phrases turns Serebrier's recording of Symphony No. 2 into an early gem among Dvořák's symphonies.

The fact that there is still plenty to discover in Dvořák's symphonies is also demonstrated by the concurrently originating complete recordings of the **Staatsphilharmonie Nürnberg**, conducted by **Markus Bosch**, whose recordings of Symphonies Nos. 3 and 6 have to date not caused as great a sensation as that of Symphony No. 7 in the London premiere version of the second movement (22 April 1885), before the definitive omitting of forty bars (the revision following the 1885 premiere). Bosch's project applies the more attractive SACD format, which, however, mercilessly discloses the Nuremberg orchestra's performance limitations (at least in comparison with the recent Mácal and Serebrier sets).

At the beginning of 2014, a new project was announced by **Karel Mark Chichon** and the **Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern.** The 16 complete recordings of Dvořák's symphonies that are described in this article will thus soon be joined by finished or new projects by Chichon, Serebrier and, perhaps, Mácal. Hopefully, we will also live to see the implementation of a project made in Vienna by the local philharmonic orchestra and Franz Welser-Möst, whose predecessor was an incomplete set created by the **Wiener Philharmoniker** and **Myung-Whung Chung** (Deutsche Grammophon, 1995, 1999, Symphonies Nos. 3, 6, 7, 8).

For some fifty years, labels have produced complete recordings of Dvořák's symphonies. Even though given the number of 16 completed projects they cannot rank alongside the high-profile sets of Brahms or Tchaikovsky symphonies, they do bear witness to the continuous, growing even, interest in Dvořák's symphonies, including the early ones, ever more frequently sought after by concert organisers, as well as the labels themselves (Thomas Helgebrock's recording of the Fourth for Sony Classical). While the majority of the Dvořák projects have been implemented in the UK (Kertész, Rowicki, Davis, Järvi, Pešek) and today's Czech Republic (Neumann, Neumann, Pešek, Válek, Mácal, Bělohlávek), besides another British project, Serebrier's, two sets are now under way in Germany (Bosch, Chichon). I feel obliged to add that purist discophiles seeking Dvořák's symphonies in their original form, without revisions, corrections and the omitted repetitions, have to reach for recordings of other than Czech provenience (Kertész, Rowicki, Järvi), many of them ignoring the composer's instruction not to perform the repetition in the first movement of Symphony No. 6. The London recordings of Dvořák's symphonies in particular reflect the Czech performance tradition, one referring to the Dvořák-Talich roots, yet arbitrarily treating the repetitions in the symphonies and interfering with their structure by means of retouches and secondary modifications and, most markedly, uncritically handing down the allegations that Dvořák's early symphonies are problematic to interpret and inferior. These pieces have only been partially rehabilitated in Czech studios by the latest Bělohlávek set.

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Zdeněk Mácal, Exton / Octavia Records, EXCL-00003 (Nos. 2, 6), OVCL-00280 (Nos. 3, 7), OVCL 00078 (Nos. 4, 8), OVCL 00180 (Nos. 5, 9), DDD, Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, Prague, 2004–2007

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, José Serebrier, Warner Classics 2564 64527-6 (No. 2), 2564 65775-3 (Nos. 3, 6), 2564 66656-2 (No. 7), 2564 66656-3 (No. 9), DDD, Lighthouse, Poole Arts Centre, Poole, 2011–2013

Staatsphilharmonie Nürnberg, Markus Bosch, Coviello COV 31212 (Nos. 3, 7), COV 31316 (No. 6), DDD SACD, Meistersingerhalle, Nuremburg, 2012

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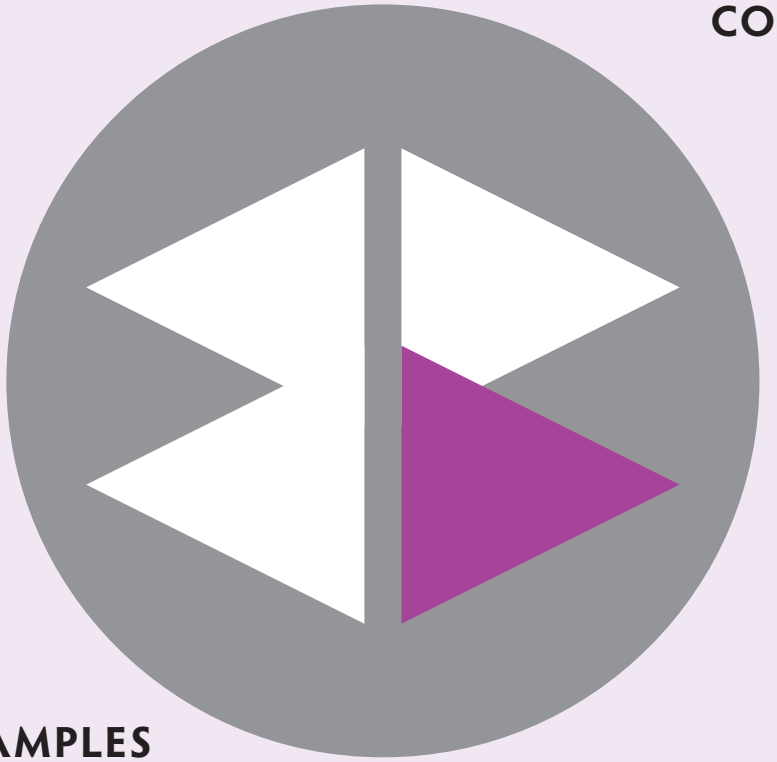

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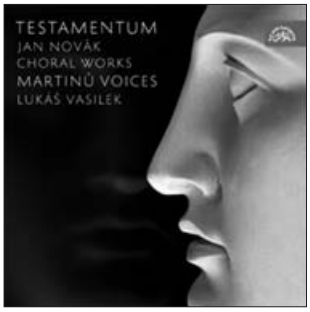

Jaroslav Tůma

Johann Sebastian Bach. Great Organ Works

Jaroslav Tůma – organ.
Text: Czech, English, German. Recorded: Nov. 2013, Church of Saint Peter, Bruchsal. Released: 2014. TT: 73:43, 74:15, 79:02. DDD. 3 CDs Arta 2HP Production 0205.

Releasing a recording of J. S. Bach's great organ works today is a venturous, hazardous even, act. In the infinite ocean of various performances, many of them high-quality, any new recording is exposed to the risk of sinking fast and then – similarly to Bach himself – waiting to be revived by a Mendelssohn. And if someone decides to produce a set of three CDs, he/she should firmly believe that the listeners will be enthralled, and also have at least one ace up the sleeve. In addition to the music by the Leipzig genius, the Arta label has two such aces: the organist **Jaroslav Tůma** and the organ-builder **Vladimír Šlajch**, two masters who would today seem to be inseparable. Inspiring and influencing each other, they gained acclaim with their joint disc J. S. Bach Orgel-Büchlein (Arta F10156), released seven years ago. Little wonder then that Tůma felt the desire to make ring Šlajch's magnificent two-manual organ at the Church of Saint Peter in Bruchsal, Germany, perfectly befitting this type of repertoire. The reasons for the selection of the instrument are discussed in detail in an interview (conducted by Zdeňka Brodová) included in the booklet, providing a clue to comprehending the entire project. When it comes to its genesis, Tůma states that he has succeeded in approaching "clearer outlines" of the ideal interpretation, yet bearing in mind that music is the art of the present moment. As for the arrangement of the compositions, the album takes the form of three recitals, to which the sonic concept, with a minimum of cuts, is accommodated (this was taken care of by the excellent **Aleš Dvořák** and **Tomáš Zikmund**). The interpretation itself should be the result of a process of seeking, deliberation, rumination about the tempo, articulation, registration… While so doing, Tůma points out that he never ceased to keep in view his main objective: the listener.

The first tones of the opening piece, *Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565,* reveal that the organist heads for his objective in a manner different to that we may have expected. Those having a clear notion of how these famous works should sound, those possessing the experience with a certain performance tradition, may deem Tůma's account somewhat confrontational. In the case of these compositions in particular, the organist presents so unequivocal and clear-cut a notion of their semblance, especially as regards their temporal layout (tempos), that it would perhaps be better to view them as a blank sheet or disengage from our own ideas. (Of course, except when the listener immediately embraces Tůma's conception.) If you succeed in doing so, you have in store a powerful, dare I say emotional, experience. Tůma leads us almost to the very core of Bach's perfection, unveiling the nooks that you do not even notice in fast tempos (this mainly applies to *BWV 565* and the works created in Leipzig: the *Prelude and Fugue in B minor, BWV 544, the Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542, the Prelude and Fugue in C minor, BWV 546, the Prelude and Fugue in C major, BWV 547*), and he eschews etudity by fine articulation and agogic nuances (the *Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV 543*), while elsewhere, by means of silence (a brief pause), steering a composition so wittily that it may even make you smile unconsciously (the *Prelude and Fugue in E flat major, BWV 552*). My one and only objection is that some of the minor-key pieces somewhat lose drama as a result of a slower tempo. In terms of the sequencing of compositions, I would above all highlight CD 2, which is a combination of ferocious virtuosity (the *Prelude in A minor, BWV 569*) and formal and sonic diversity (the *Buxtehudean Prelude and Fugue in E major, BWV 566*, the *Prelude and Fugue in A major, BWV 536*). I deem the most challenging listening CD 1, rounded off by the three Leipzig masterpieces (*BWV 544, 542, 546*). To conclude,

I would like to add that Jaroslav Tůma, perhaps without even being aware of it, plays these ethereally heavenly works with a great deal of humility, on the one hand, and considerable self-confidence, on the other, thus, in my opinion, advancing his performance to the Bachian heights.

Dina Šnejdarová

Jan Novák

Testamentum

Martinů Voices, Lukáš Vasilek – chorus master.
Text: English, German, French, Czech, Latin. Recorded: 2013. Released: 2014.
1 CD Supraphon SU 4159-2.

The 30th anniversary of the death of the émigré Czech composer Jan Novák (1921–1984) has been commemorated by the Supraphon label with a CD featuring his choral works dating from the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s. And it is thanks to this very part of his oeuvre that the Czech public has retained a wider awareness of the artist, who fell into disfavour after leaving his country in 1968. Yet every coin has two sides, hence it is not certain whether the frequently amateurish performances of Novák's choral repertoire have actually

served to boost his reputation. In this light, we should welcome the initiative of **Lukáš Vasilek** and the **Martinů Voices** chamber choir, who decided to explore the type of compositions that Czech ensembles usually eschew. First and foremost, these include the 1966 chorus *Testamentum*, a setting of a satirical last will and testament by the composer's contemporary, the German writer and Latin poet Joseph Eberle. There is no doubt that Novák was intrigued by the text owing to its wonderfully imitated medieval form and, in particular, ironic diction. A year later, the composer created the forcible cantata *Dido*, with a very similar poetics and for a similar configuration, so it would almost seem that the two works were written concurrently. The latter, nine-minute piece for mixed chorus and four horns is rather difficult to perform, yet Martinů Voices have mastered it with aplomb, just as, after all, they have all the other works on the CD. The compositions are often tricky when it comes to metre and rhythm (Stravinsky, Novák's model, being palpable in this respect), as well as challenging in terms of intonation, which is, exceptionally, confirmed by, for instance, the male solos in the introductory parts of the cantata *Invitatio pastorum*. The cycle *Fugae Vergilianae* (I-IV) is replete with puns and onomatopoeic effects, which form additional layers above Virgil's masterly set Latin. Praiseworthy is the fact that, in compliance with Novák's wish, the singers adhere to the Classical Latin pronunciation (the booklet contains a brief explanation of the specificities of the "restored" Latin, which is relatively uncommon to the ears of the Czech listener). I would recommend that *Invitatio pastorum* be performed at Christmas instead of J. J. Ryba's famous mass, since it is a composition of equal value. The soloists and the choir singing the pieces are accompanied by the composer's daughter **Clara Nováková**, a flautist of world-renown. The CD ends with the relatively frequently played cycle *Exercitia mythologica* for solo voices and mixed choir a capella. Each of its eight parts is dedicated to a Greek mythological figure and set to Novák's Latin verses. How, then, to sum the album up? Firstly, it fills the gaps in our collective memory (subject to compulsory amnesia) and, secondly, the two cycles written by Novák in exile have been recorded for the first time ever. The CD can thus serve as a model example of squaring up to the residues of the past, as well as a good export article representing Czech culture abroad. At the same time, it familiarises Czech listeners with music that was inaccessible behind the Iron Curtain. The title, Testamentum, is pertinent, yet need not be taken with the utmost seriousness, since Jan Novák himself did not either. To conclude, I would like to quote from the final verses of the eponymous composition, translated into English by Jonathan Foster: "To the young I entrust the hope of a completely new world, which I have long cherished in my heart though vainly. Let the world no longer be such as I have known it, not let man to other man be what wolf to sheep is."

Martin Flašar

Rostropovich Plays Shostakovich

Mstislav Rostropovich – cello, Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Alexandr Gauk, Kirill Kondrashin, Yevgeny Svetlanov – conductors.
Text: English, German, French, Czech.
Recorded: 6 October 1959, Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory; 29 May 1960, Smetana Hall, Municipal House, Prague; 11 December 1967, Smetana Hall, Municipal House, Prague.
Released: 2013. TT: 57:25, 51:58. DDD.
2 CDs Supraphon SU 4101-2.

Supraphon continues to pursue its successful Russian Masters series, within which to date the label has released valuable studio and live recordings of the leading Soviet instrumentalists Kogan, Oistrakh, Richter and Rostropovich, to whom it has dedicated the most recent two-disc album, containing four recordings of Shostakovich's cello pieces. As the author of the accompanying booklet, Antonín Matzner, points out, **Mstislav Rostropovich**, Shostakovich's student in Moscow, had long wished for the composer to write a cello concerto for him, especially with regard to his admiration for Shostakovich's *Cello Sonata in D minor,* Op. 40 (1934), which he had in his repertoire. Impressed by his pupil's international career and also by the masterpiece by his rival Prokofiev, the *Symphony-Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, Op. 125, Shostakovich duly created his *Cello Concerto No. 1.* The sonata is the one and only chamber piece included in the reviewed album, yet one performed authentically, with Shostakovich himself accompanying Rostropovich on the piano. The studio recording made by Moscow Radio at the time of the premiere of the first cello concerto not only bears the hallmark of interpretational authenticity, it also bears witness to the impressive performance, which in all respects eclipses the older Supraphon recording dating from the mid-1990s and featuring Leonid Gorokhov and Alexander Melnikov, even though the latter comes across as more relaxed than the technically objectivist Shostakovich. With the exception of the Cello Sonata, virtuously alternating lyricism with the sarcasm and persiflage of the late second cello concerto, all the recordings have been released by Supraphon for the very first time. The album offers a rare opportunity to compare two recordings of *Cello Concerto No. 1 in E flat major,* Op. 107, written in the summer of 1959 and premiered in Leningrad on 4 October 1959 (Yevgeny Mravinsky) and two days later presented in Moscow

(**Alexandr Gauk**), then in November in Philadelphia (Eugene Ormandy, in Columbia's commercial recording) and first performed in Czechoslovakia at the Prague Spring festival on 29 May 1960 (**Kirill Kondrashin**). The Supraphon double album contains the live recordings made in Moscow and Prague. The older, Moscow, one is characterised by a considerably backgrounded orchestra and ends with the final premiere applause, while the recording of the Prague concert is far better in technical terms and attests to the cogent performance given by the **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra**. In addition to the technical quality and the Czech Philharmonic's more cultivated performance, the Prague recording comes across more favourable primarily owing to Rostropovich's masterly delivery, both when it comes to the more pregnant phrasing (starting right in the opening bars of the first movement) and the torrential and tensely graded cadence of the third movement. In 1967, a live recording of *Cello Concerto No. 2*, Op. 126 (premiered under the baton of Yevgeny Svetlanov in Moscow in September 1966 at a concert celebrating Shostakovich's 60th birthday) was made by the **Prague Symphony Orchestra**, conducted by Svetlanov. The piece, placing relatively high demands both on the players and the listener, is represented on the album by a technically good recording, with Rostropovich giving an outstanding performance. For me in person, this recording, the absence of a stellar conductor and a prominent orchestra notwithstanding, is the album's zenith, just as the concerto itself is one of the zeniths of Shostakovich's late oeuvre. The new Supraphon double album of archival recordings is highly recommended. A minor caveat though to end: the release would have a greater commercial impact had Supraphon furnished the booklet with a Russian translation of the text.

Martin Jemelka

Johannes Brahms

Violin Sonatas Nos. 1 & 3 F.A.E. Sonata

Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78; Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108; F. A. E. Sonata (Brahms, Albert Dietrich and Robert Schumann)

Jana Vonášková-Nováková – violin, Irina Kondratenko – piano.
Producer: Matouš Vlčinský. Text: English, German, French, Czech. Recorded: Martínek Studio, Prague, September and October 2013. Released: 2014. TT: 74:41. DDD. 1 CD Supraphon SU 4170-2.

The inconspicuous, unpretentious yet, in my opinion, finest contemporary Czech female violinist **Jana Vonášková-Nováková** never fails to take one by surprise. She first astonished at the Talent of the Year competition, then at the Prague Spring festival and as a prominent member of the highly acclaimed Smetana Trio. But what has surprised me the most is her most substantial recording project, featuring Johannes Brahms's violin sonatas. Initially I asked about the reason, given that the complete Brahms set recorded by the Smetana Trio was extraordinary in all respects. Well, the CD would not have been materialised without a generous contribution from Mr. Geoffrey Piper of the non-profit MusicEnterprise, Luxembourg. It is only regrettable that there was not enough finance available for another disc, on which the violinist could have performed Brahms's Sonata in A major, Op. 100 (which is, after all, mentioned in the booklet), for in this format the project appears to me as an unfinished book. The formally beautiful *Sonatas in G major* and *D minor* bookend the non-anchored "bastard" composition *F. A. E. Sonata*, whose cryptic title represents the celebrated violinist Joseph Joachim's motto in life: "frei aber einsam" (free but lonely). The individual movements of the sonata were composed by the young Brahms, the generation older Robert Schumann and the today virtually forgotten Albert Dietrich, who dedicated their collective work to Joachim, whom they greatly admired. Despite a number of wonderful moments, compared to Brahms' three later sonatas the piece is heterogeneous, both when it comes to the content and form (Dietrich's long-winded first movement), with Brahms' Scherzo radiating like a gemstone. Vonášková-Nováková did her utmost to make the composition sound compendious, yet it would seem that attaining that feat is simply beyond the powers of anyone (I have never heard a recording that would fully conciliate me with this work). On the other hand, *Sonatas Nos. 1* and *3* are true masterpieces. They often remind me of Carrara marble blocks, or Michelangelo's statues, wedding as they do inner beauty with perfection of form. Even though it may sound like a cliché, I would like to say that Jana Vonášková-Nováková plays the sonatas soulfully, with a great degree of empathy and humility towards the music and score alike. When it comes to tempos, Vonášková-Nováková's are similarly leisurely to those of Anne-Sophie Mutter's (the first movement of Sonata No. 1, for instance, takes Vonášková-Nováková 10:45, Mutter 11:13; whereas the Czech violinist plays the first movement of Sonata No. 3 even more slowly, 8:14 as against Mutter's 7:51). On this recording, Vonášková-Nováková showcases her typically fervent, intoxicating even, timbre, flawless rhythm, with her vivacity flashing through frequently. In my opinion, she should occasionally have paid a bit more attention to modelling of phrases and formal microstructure within a slower tempo, in which she could have been more resolutely supported by the otherwise fabulous pianist **Irina Kondratenko**. (Their interplay is faultless throughout.) If I had to highlight the piece that most impressed me,

it would be the "rainy" Sonata in G major. The sound of the disc (recording director: Milan Puklický, recording engineer: Jan Lžičař) is very good, David Cígler's design is pleasing and well-arranged, while Vlasta Reittererová's sleevenotes provide a sufficient and reliable guide. The album is an original and, after the long interval since Josef Suk's disc, healthy take on Brahms's sonatas and, despite some rather minor question marks, is deserving of high praise indeed. An hour spent listening to this Brahms recording is time well spent.

Luboš Stehlík

Wolfgang Sawallisch in Prague

L. van Beethoven, A. Dvořák, P. Eben, L. Janáček, B. Martinů, F. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, W. A. Mozart

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic Choir (choir master: Josef Veselka), Milan Šlechta (organ), Josef Suk (violin), Annabella Bernard, Jana Jonášová, Renate Frank-Reinecke (soprano), Věra Soukupová (alto), Vojtech Schrenkel, Ivo Žídek (tenor), Jindřich Jindrák (baritone), Eduard Haken (bass), Wolfgang Sawallisch (conductor).
Text: English, German, French, Czech. Recorded: 1970, Smetana Hall, Municipal House; 1972–1987, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague.
Released: 2013. TT: 339:40.
5 CDs Supraphon SU 4140-2.

Two decades will soon have passed since the German conductor **Wolfgang Sawallisch** (1923–2013) last performed with the **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra**, with whom he worked from May 1958 for no fewer than 38 years, at the time when he concurrently led the renowned orchestras in Philadelphia (1993–2003), Munich (1971–1992, Bayerische Staatsoper), Vienna (1960–1970, Wiener Symphoniker) and Geneva (1973–1980, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande). When years ago I read in Harmonie magazine an interview with Sir John Eliot Gardiner, who praised Mackerras for his erudite interpretation of Czech music, I immediately imagined Wolfgang Sawallisch, Sir Charles's older peer, to whose memory shortly after his death last year Supraphon dedicated a five-part anthology of live recordings from the Czech Radio archives. Besides Mackerras, Sawallisch was the only other holder of a "Czech passport". A listener, musician or critic may be an ardent champion of Czech interpretation of Czech music or an intolerant adherent of performance of early music on period instruments, yet they would be hard pressed to find words to reject or raise major objections to Sawallisch's approach to performing music spanning from Classicism to the middle of the 20th century. Perhaps his take on the slow movements of Mozart's and Beethoven's symphonies alone may remind us of the times of absolute dominion of infinite legato, yet otherwise the recordings, most of them released for the first time, are imbued with a noble sound (and in extremely high-quality recording). Now and then I hear criticism voiced of the Czech Philharmonic's interpretational habits during the Neumann era, yet when listening to the CDs I forget about it – so solid and, in places, highly inspired was the orchestra's playing under Sawallisch. With the exception of the recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 made at the Smetana Hall of Prague's Municipal House, all the other tracks came to life at the Rudolfinum, the Czech Philharmonic's home hall, whose acoustic qualities made the anthology even more timeless.
The set is dominated by pieces from the Czech repertoire, as well as Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn. The oldest recording, that of Beethoven's First (6/1970), oscillates between cantability and ceremoniousness, far removed from the bristly provocative performance of "conductors/authenticists". As for Beethoven, the anthology also contains the Pastoral Symphony (10/1975), one of the reviewed album's apices, with repetitions in the first movement, legato in the second, a hymnic finale, precise phrasing, fine dynamics, a recording the Czech Philharmonic can still pride itself on today, one far eclipsing the older recording made under Kletzki (1965). December 1972 saw the coming to light of two live recordings which invite direct comparison with Mackerras's later studio recordings: Janáček's Glagolitic Mass and Martinů's Field Mass. Notwithstanding **Milan Šlechta's** romantically cumbersome organ solo and **Ivo Žídek's** rather wearied voice, Sawallisch's Glagolitic Mass is immensely forcible, alternating pungent modernity and sonically intoxicating solemnity. The gradated dynamics and inventive work with details even make the listener forget about the trumpets' failure in the final Intrada. The recording of the Field Mass, featuring the baritone **Jindřich Jindrák**, is a treasure that simply had to be released, even though Jindrák's solo is, in my opinion, surmounted by that of Václav Zítek in Mackerras's 1984 recording. Backgrounded by the kaleidoscopic text written by the composer and Jiří Mucha, the lyricism and military brassiness transforms into an emotional arch which impressed the audience (the final applause heard on the recording) and will impress today's listener too. The recording of Martinů's Symphony No. 4, made in October 1975, is well known from its frequent broadcasting by Czech Radio and, in spite of the absence of the usual Czech musical idioms, it is right from the introductory tremolo full of promise, symphonically monumental and sonically inebriating (second movement), emotionally engrossing (third movement) and robustly virtuoso (fourth movement). Dating from the same time is the recording of Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 2, "Lobgesang", marking the 400th anniversary of Guttenberg's invention of printing. If I

am not mistaken, the one and only Czech recording is the handiwork of the conductor and the Czech Philharmonic, as well as **Josef Veselka's Czech Philharmonic Choir.** When forbearing the antiquated voice of the tenor **Vojtěch Schrenkel,** it comes across as a well-graded recording with a dramatic first movement, an objective scherzo and wide-breath cantilena of the third movement, followed by an (more two-part than monolithic) elegy with the superlative soprano **Renate Franck-Reinecke**. Another recording ranking among the oldest contained on the five-disc album is that of Dvořák's concert overture In Nature's Realm (12/1972), whose performance enthused the period critics yet is somewhat negatively impacted by the lower technical quality of the recording and the concert's live atmosphere; hence, I was impressed by it less than by Sawallisch's studio recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra (Water Lily, 1999).
The anthology's youngest recording is that of Eben's Prague Nocturne (9/1987), a homage to Mozart (which like a warning finger points to the absence of a profile album of Eben's orchestral works). The greatest surprise for me was the first CD, featuring Mozart's Symphonies in G minor, KV 550, and C major, KV 551, the tremulous Adagio in E major for violin and orchestra, accompanied by the silver tones of **Josef Suk's** instrument. There are precious few Czech Philharmonic Mozart recordings out there, actually none dating from the 1970s and 1980s, and, notwithstanding the absent repetitions in the slow movements, Sawallisch's account of the composer's mature pieces is detailed, transparent in the middle parts, vigorous and rhythmically pregnant, brilliant in both of the finales, with perhaps only the minuet recalling the encumbered interpretations of Mozart's music in the first two-thirds of the 20th century. Well, the true master of the minuet is Harnoncourt, yet otherwise the reviewed set can be praised to the skies. Let us hope that Supraphon and Prague Radio will release another Sawallisch album, featuring at least Dvořák's Spectre's Bride with Gabriela Beňačková.

Martin Jemelka

Magdalena Kožená

Prayer

Magdalena Kožená – mezzo-soprano, Christian Schmitt – organ.
Text: English, German, French.
Recorded: Sept. 2013 Hochschule für katholische Kirchenmusik und Musikpädagogik, Regensburg.
Released: 2014. TT 74:54. 1 CD Deutsche Grammophon 479 2067.

Each new **Magdalena Kožená** disc never fails to surprise us. Often succeeding in putting across non-commercial music, she arouses respect and perhaps even wonder at the freedom she enjoys at her label. And even when she participates in a more ordinary project, she never loses her artistic singularity. The CD titled *Prayer*, referring to music for "voice and organ", may appear to be one of her more commercial outings – aimed at putting on the market something popular, something that clutches at the heart, something with a well-selling name. Yet this is definitely not the case. The intention was almost certainly different – purely artistic. On the album, recorded at the Hochschule für katholische Kirchenmusik und Musikpädagogik in Regensburg, the feted Czech mezzo-soprano is accompanied by the German organist **Christian Schmitt,** who also performed with her in the autumn of 2013 in Brno, when she was singing with the Kantiléna choir. The music on the disc contains songs by Classicists and Romantics, something by Bach, truly spiritual, albeit not liturgical. But these are by no means cheap, attractive, crossover arrangements, nothing exceedingly meditative – they are altogether positive demonstrations of personal devoutness. Some have upbraided Kožená for singing everything overly emotionally. Yet such an approach is fully justified in the case of the Jewish hymn *Kaddish*, as set by Maurice Ravel as part of his *Deux mélodies hébraïques*, and one can hardly imagine a delivery better, more beautiful, with greater empathy. After all, Jewish cantors sing with a similar pathos… As regards Bizet's *Agnus Dei* (the prayer "Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of world, have mercy on us…"), one may imagine a slower tempo and less dramatic delivery than that of Kožená, yet, admittedly, the distinct melody invites an operatic performance, and since we know that she is able to sing both songs and early music in a non-operatic manner, we should acknowledge this case as her willing communication of feeling and conception – as an extremely poignant, not humble, prayer. The disc's repertoire is imbued with a special tone by Hugo Wolf's songs, with Max Reger's organ part. They too mirror more than a silent spiritual contemplation – it is romantic music charged with great emotions, reflecting personal dramas. Wolf's pieces alternate with Bach's and Schubert's songs, Dvořák's *Ave Maria*, one by Henry Purcell… The CD also includes Verdi's *Ave Maria* and *Notre Pére*, as splendidly set by Maurice Duruflé. It is rounded off, joyously, by Bach in F major. An interesting item in the first half of the recording (22 tracks) is Schubert's song *Elens Gesang III (Hymne an die Jungfrau)*, possessing a famous melody, probably the composer's best known, which has been frequently arranged. Yet it is a number with the original lyrics, not the Latin Roman Catholic prayer "Hail Mary". Although the refrain is the exclamation "Ave Maria", it is Schubert's setting of the German translation of Sir Walter Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake.*
Throughout the album, the organ accompaniment is discreet, unobtrusive, altogether borne by more subdued fundamental registers, yet still clearly differentiating between Baroque and Romantic music in nuances. The soloist, especially in Bach's songs from Schemelli's hymn-book (and also in one of Wolf's), retains a simple manner

of singing in lower vibrant dynamics, while attaining considerable dynamic contrasts in others. She lets sound to the full all the interesting timbres of her voice, wonderful and totally balanced in the entire range of two octaves – in the lowest, medium and highest pitch. This is the very first recording Kožená has made with an organist. She is again slightly different, but it is still her – splendidly declaiming, vaulting cantilenas, and with a poignancy in her voice, instantly recognisable.

Petr Veber

Ida Haendel

Prague Recordings 1957–1965

Ida Haendel - violin,
Alfréd Holeček - piano,
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra,
Karel Ančerl - conductor (21 - 25),
Prague Symphony Orchestra,
Václav Smetáček - conductor (26, 27).
Text: English, German, French, Czech. Recorded: live: Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum; Smetana Hall, Municipal House; studio: Domovina, Rudolfinum. Remastering: Jan Ličičař, 2014. Released: 2014. TT: 6:30:34. AAD stereo / mono.
5 CDs Supraphon SU 4162-2.

Two inspired women born between the first and second world wars are still deemed by many specialists the most intriguing 20th-century female violinists. In 1919, France's Ginette Neveau; nine years later, Ida Haendel, a Pole of Jewish origin. Whereas Neveau died at the age of 30, Haendel is still active as a teacher and, occasionally, violinist. (In 2009 and 2011, she gave recitals within the Music at Synagogues of the Plzeň Region festival.) Speculating as to how Neveau's career could have developed is pointless, yet judging by the few recordings that remained after her she would most likely not have lagged behind her somewhat younger contemporary.

Ida Haendel has made several dozen albums. Owing to her not being as high-principled as other artists, she paid a number of short visits to communist Czechoslovakia to appear at concerts, during which she made live, as well as studio, recordings. The reviewed CD pack contains Haendel's accounts of minor pieces with piano, as well as larger opuses (concertos by Wieniawski and Glazunov, Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, Ravel's *Tzigane*). All of them together made up a representative portrait indeed.

In his short yet comprehensive booklet text, **Petr Kadlec** quotes responses to Haendel's performances in Prague by the period critics. If you listen to the recording with an open mind, you will certainly agree with most of the reviews. Some of the recordings still come across as exceptional today – you will marvel at Haendel's vivacity, spontaneity, "fervent cantilena", "rich tonal culture", elegance, pregnant rhythm, and hence have no problem forgiving her occasional minor deficiencies as regards intonation and a few interpretational finesses that strike the contemporary ear as somewhat archaic… If we bear in mind that the majority of the recordings on the CDs are live, our respect is even greater. Over the more than six and a half hours of music I also discovered true pearls which I definitely intend to listen to again and which will perhaps engross others too.

I was surprised by the straightforwardness and nobleness with which Haendel delivered the three Beethoven Sonatas (eclipsing even her otherwise superlative recording of his concerto), Bartók's harsh piece and Stravinsky's filigree Concerto. Truly fabulous is the entire fifth CD, containing Lalo, Glazunov (!) and another Wieniawski piece. Whereas I was not taken unawares by brilliancy in the case of the technically effective crackers like Wieniawski's Scherzo, I was certainly astonished by the profound approach and respect towards Beethoven. On the other hand, I was not as satisfied by the performance of another Beethoven (*Romance*) and compositions by Paganini, Kreisler and Sarasate (6). And with regard to Haendel's nature, I expected her take on both Bartók (8) and Ravel (22) to be benchmark, which is true with the former yet, oddly, not in the case of Ravel's *Tzigane*, which the artist has performed throughout her life. (I deem Neveau's recording more engrossing.) I would also like to praise the two accompanying Czech orchestras, both of them able to keep up with the express train named Ida Haendel, while the excellent work of the pianist **Alfréd Holeček** would warrant a separate review… As usual, the sound engineer **Jan Ličičař** did a great job remastering the archival tapes. I hope that abroad too the set will be perceived as a valuable addition to the global violin discography, especially given that some 11 recordings are appearing on CD for the very first time!

Luboš Stehlík

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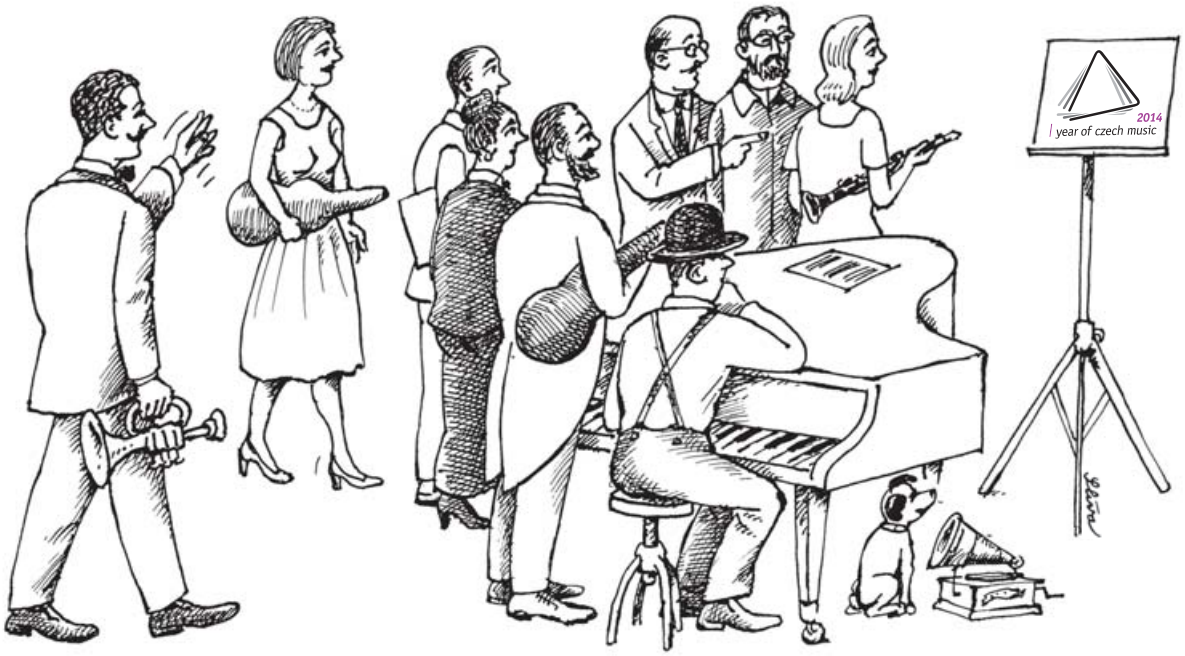

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