czech music *quarterly*

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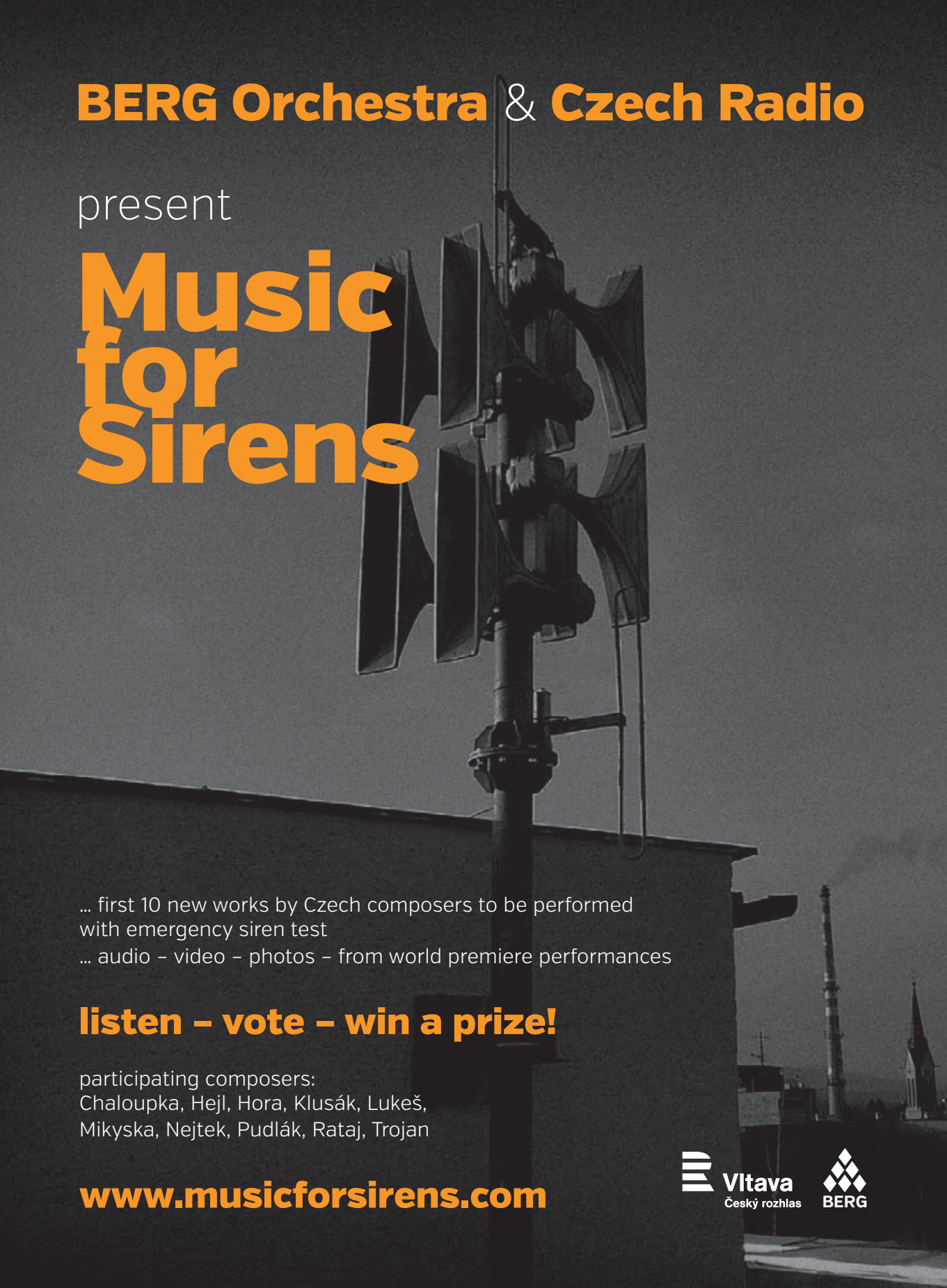
Jozef Cseres

S.E.M. Ensemble @ 50

Opening Performance Orchestra

Humanists in Renaissance Bohemia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DEAR READERS,

I am happy to draw your attention to a new addition to our Composer Portraits CD series, which you'll find attached to this issue. The twelfth instalment presents the music of Petr Cígler and comes with a new design. We usually present a profile interview with the composer whose music comes attached, but we interviewed Petr Cígler not long ago – to find the text, you only have to visit www.czechmusicquarterly.com and type "Cígler" into the search bar. The point I am aiming at is that for some time now, all our older issues are freely available on our website. I would venture to say that over the magazine's existence, its archive has come to represent a unique reservoir of exclusive materials on Czech music from its earliest history to the present. In our articles, we often provide references to earlier pieces on the same topics or artists. But we certainly don't reference everything – if we did, some texts would contain more references than content! Allow me to invite you again into our archive: when you read, say, our interview with Jozef Cseres, try "John Cage" in the search bar. You might be surprised by the Cage's legacy in Czech music. And when you learn about the fifty-year history of the S.E.M. Ensemble, try "Rudolf Komorous", "Musica viva pragensis", "Ostrava Days", "Petr Kotík"… As you uncover the unique approach of the Opening Performance Orchestra, you can see what the archive contains on artists like "Milan Knížák" or "Milan Guštar", and when perusing the historical section of our magazine, you might be interested to discover what musicologist Petr Daněk has contributed to the Czech Music Quarterly over the years. And so on. There's heaps of it and we're glad.

Wishing you a beautiful summer,
Petr Bakla

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cover: Members of the S.E.M. Ensemble (Chris Nappi, Petr Kotík, Joseph Kubera) performing Morton Feldman's For Philip Guston (Ostrava Days 2019). PHOTO: MARTIN POPELÁŘ

by Matěj Kratochvíl

"I REVEL IN MY OWN SHADOW"

Aesthetician **JOZEF CSERES** on the impact of PR strategies on art, John Cage, and Central European identity

When we first met in person, Jozef Cseres explained to me that whenever he likes a piece he hears in a concert, he prefers to leave immediately after it finishes so as not to ruin his experience with the other pieces. This anecdotal observation is a compressed version of Cseres's conception of art: a conception critical of uninventive imitation, pandering to current trends, and over-production. In contrast to characteristics that might at first seem elitist, Cseres is in fact exceedingly open, willing to invest time and energy into seemingly marginal projects, to connect disparate musical communities, to notice artists whom the world overlooks. It is no coincidence that the titles of his activities often refer to the god Hermes, whom he understands as a symbol of variability, of the capacity to move between various spheres and identities. Under the heading Hermovo ucho (Hermes' Ear), he organises exhibitions, writes texts about music, and publishes recordings. With Hermean flexibility, he operates across classical music, noise experiments, free improvisation, intermedia art, and academic work. Jozef Cseres is an inconspicuous but tireless agent connecting Czech (or, rather, central European) art with the international scene, whether it is through his involvement in the Exposition of New Music festival in Brno, recordings that he publishes, or exhibitions he curates that bring together Czech and international art.

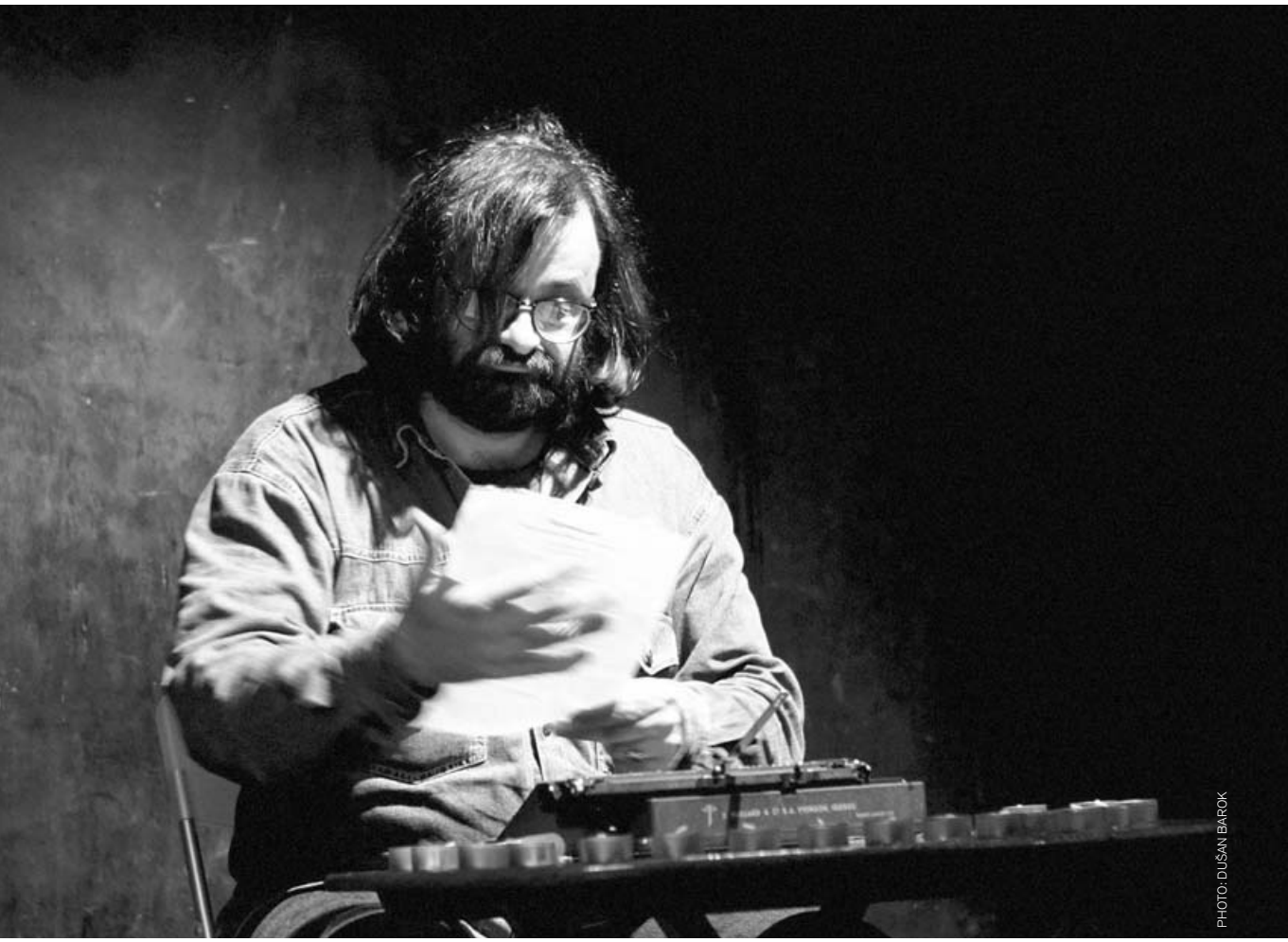


PHOTO: DUŠAN BAROK

How did you come to music? Could you identify the milestones that led you to the broad interests you have today?

It was nothing particularly exceptional. It started towards the end of elementary school. At night, I would listen to rock music on the radio stations you could tune on a transistor radio in southern Slovakia – Radio Luxembourg, Ö3, and the Hungarian stations Kossuth and Petőfi. When I was about eleven, I signed up for a classical guitar school which I attended for four years. I wasn't very good, though, and when I later discovered Jimi Hendrix and Steve Howe, I stopped for good. In high school, I listened to jazz-rock and Frank Zappa. Then I got into jazz through Miles Davis and started collecting jazz records. Throughout the 1980s, I travelled to jazz concerts, mostly to Budapest, Debrecen, and Győr, but I also attended the Jazz Jamboree in Warsaw a few times, as well as a few concerts in Kraków and Katowice.

As a listener, I was most influenced by three musicians – my high school idol Frank Zappa, John Cage, whom I saw in 1986 is Szombathelyu, Hungary, and Anthony Braxton, whom I heard in Debrecen and Warsaw. I remember one occasion in particular: I was at the festival in Debrecen drinking at the hotel bar when Braxton appeared. As soon as he heard the local gipsy cimbalom band, he ran upstairs to his room to grab his horn and

jam with them. That was a very inspiring experience – I was fascinated by his spontaneity and openness. Around 1987, while I was studying at the faculty of the arts in Bratislava, I met Milan Adamčiak (a Slovak composer and conceptual artist), who broadened my horizons to include marginal musical genres and intermedia art. In 1989, Milan established the Society for Unconventional Music (Společnosť pre nekonvenčnú hudbu, SNEH) and included me in its activities. He also inspired me to focus the gallery which I had opened in the early 1990s in Nové Zámky towards points of contact between visual art and music, particularly graphic scores. He also took me with him to Linz to the Ars Electronica festival, where I first saw and experienced interactive art in its most developed forms. These were my amateur's beginnings, before my interest in contemporary art became professional.

We are having this conversation at a time when the situation is (for now at least) loosening up following the "suspension of public life" brought about by the pandemic. For the sphere of the arts, this meant a stop to most activities and a rise in existential doubt, but also a wave of attempts at how we might "do things differently", as in the case of online concerts. Do you think there is anything truly new here? Any crucial transformation towards which the virus has nudged the art world?

I can't be the judge of that as I never made my living through art. But I think artists haven't suffered that much – certainly not as much as other professions. I was quite unpleasantly surprised when, after only a few weeks of suspensions or limitations of cultural life, the art world began clamouring for immediate support and financial compensation from the state – which at the time had entirely different, unprecedented problems. The liberal professions were always uncertain – freedom as a choice has its advantages and disadvantages and one has to take the risk factors into account.

Now, however, we are facing a historically new situation. And I'm not just talking about professions in the arts – it seems to me like it's a universally generational problem. Many young university-educated people choose to live from day to day and opt for unqualified professions, not due to insufficient work opportunities but because of greater comfort, higher earnings, fewer responsibilities, or more free time. They do not think of potential crises and when one comes along, they demand help and support. I know many graduates who, in place of doing work that corresponds to their education, prefer running small clubs, rentals, e-shops, tourist attractions, etc. For years, they make more than, say, university lecturers, and when it suddenly stops working according to their high standards, as happened this year, they are incapable of admitting that crises and losses are a natural part of entrepreneurship. The demand generation, which has lived in relative affluence for years, cannot imagine doing business with the risk of loss or a fiscal year in the red, and it has no thoughts of making investments or crisis reserves when the going is good.

Live art is now being forced to move into the online domain, but this is not new – it has been happening naturally for over two decades. First, it was electronic formats that threatened live music, now it's the internet. As for artists, I divide them sociologically into two groups: 1. those that create from a fundamental need, regardless of current demands and trends. As they usually make their living in other ways and art is for them a necessity and a matter of conviction, they will continue creating in periods of crisis – after all, many of them live in a permanent state of crisis; 2. those who will simply stop making art in the absence of grants, subsidies, residencies, and favourable contracts.

In my own experience, I can say that the first group produces the most interesting, convincing, and authentic art. The rest is industry, and it doesn't matter whether we call it a trend, a grant agency, or the planned satisfaction of the higher spiritual needs of humanity. I'm already "looking forward" to the flood of "topical coronavirus art" that will erupt this autumn once the invoices for grants dedicated to this topic start coming

in. They will be written by the same artists, curators, and dramaturgs who only a year ago "did" refugees, and the Roma community before that, and earlier still domestic violence, the Holocaust, ecology, motherhood, multiculturalism, feminism, and all the other themes for which it was possible to receive a grant at the time. External impulses and inspirations are doubtless important for a reflective artistic mind, but artists should primarily be guided by internal impulses and a compulsive will to create, i.e. mechanisms all of us carry inside. I was recently amused by a passage from a book by Patrik Ouředník, who wrote that some political scientist came up with a theory about the end of history, but many people did not read the theory and continue making history as if nothing were the matter. That's about all I have to say. Art has survived considerably greater crises than this one – it was here long before the internet and will still be here long after it's gone.

I feel in your response a certain skepticism towards state support of the arts. Is it not the foundation of a certain "social cohesion", with state institutions giving money from the taxes of all the citizens to support (ideally) something of artistic value? After all, historically, we can trace such connections between the state and art far into the past.

State support of culture and art is correct and indispensable – after all, the state divides up our money. On the other hand, the state effects this support through institutions whose delegates decide what is socially beneficial, aesthetically adequate, and artistically valuable, none of which cannot be objectively assessed and fairly decided. The allocation of state or foundation resources is a power struggle and generally, it is the best informed, the most powerful, rich, fierce, foresighted, clever, and trendy candidates who succeed. Cultural politics is still just politics and today, the art of writing and getting grants represents a highly lucrative sector.

Many of your activities, including journalism or lecturing, could be placed under the "popularisation" heading. How can we meaningfully promote art today, especially, let's say, more marginal art?

For years, I supplemented my income with journalism because my main job, teaching, was not enough to pay the bills. At first, I even enjoyed it. Then, for a long time, I wrote out of some sort of inertia – to keep boredom at bay. However, I never approached this activity primarily with the aim of promoting art. I generally wrote on commission and only about things that interested me. Today, art's PR is so massive that it destroys art's philosophical and aesthetic foundations. It is not about spontaneously and intimately experiencing something, it is about consuming in the appropriate manner and being seen doing it. Today, even conceptual art uses PR strategies. The orthodox conceptualist Joseph Kosuth is publishing his works in limited edition runs of coffee cups with a stylish design. Kosuth, who spent years fighting against the appearance of the work of art! Museums and galleries have become leisure-time activity centres. Philharmonics, concert houses, and music festivals are all making demeaning and comical dramaturgical compromises and tricks just to bring in new audiences. All this devalues the aesthetic values of art and degenerates and infantilises its consumers.

At arts faculties, there are now many more students taking cultural management or digital culture courses than there are studying aesthetics, art history, or art theory. And in place of systematic study, they're just chasing credits, making progressively greater demands, and sometimes literally extorting their resigned lecturers. It is not their fault – they are victims of a technocratic system which only simulates an interest in education and art. Of course, you'll still find a handful of excellent and hardworking students, but their voices are drowned out in the noise of the pragmatic majority.

When I first began teaching at the faculty of arts some twenty-five years ago, I had about twelve students every year. Two or three were excellent and the rest adapted to their level

after a few weeks because they felt awkward sitting in silence. They began working hard. Today, I face around a hundred students – a group size that is practically impossible to teach. You cannot have seminars or tutorial groups with so many students, lectures are voluntary, and I refuse to teach university as if it were high school, as many of my colleagues do.
I believe that even today, some ten or twelve first-rate students can be found among that mass, but generally, they are afraid or embarrassed to display their level of knowledge, which is sad and frustrating. Advertising art through massive campaigns or its egalitarian support do not lead to anything – except perhaps lower unemployment rates. Woody Vasulka used to say that good art cannot cost more than twenty dollars, and it is only today that I understood what he meant by that.

It is certainly true that the dominance of PR strategies can lead to a situation in which artists who don't know how to make use of them (and don't want to) can find themselves deprived of the attention of audiences. What strategy would you recommend to a listener who wants to discover music without PR pressure? More specifically: what strategies do you use? And have you recently discovered any interesting music "in the shadows"?
I've never had a strategy – I've always followed my intuition and the options available. I was mostly driven by my interests and my collector's passion. In the pre-information age, and what's more, at a time when all information was censored and ideologically manipulated, you had to meet the options halfway and discover them.
I had the good fortune of being close to Hungary, where the regime was more moderate and did not persecute its citizens for contact with emigrants. On the contrary, it was perhaps the only people's democracy which did not cut off all contact with its emigrants and allowed them to return home periodically. This also manifested itself in the culture, in the options provided by stores selling books and records, in concert programming, etc. Today, when we face an information overload and those Interested in authentic art unconsciously make use of manipulative selection mechanisms, separating the chaff from the wheat is perhaps more difficult. Social networks are killing individuality and supporting a "trending" mindset. I'm sure there are many things "in the shadows", but simulated and virtual shadows are thicker and last longer, which complicates our finding this music. I don't search much any more, nor do I listen, and when I do, it's things I've verified through my own experience. I revel in my own shadow. I occasionally come across something interesting in Indonesia, but I'm usually incapable of assessing how authentic it is.

You've always operated on the edge of curating and active art-making. What have you been up to recently?
I made use of the unplanned time off to finish some books. I've just finished writing some material for a monograph about Jan Steklík[1] that Host will publish in the autumn. I'm currently working a book with Milan Grygar[2] that we'd like to finish in the summer. As for curating, I am preparing a larger exhibition, "Microcosmos", with Antonio Trimani and Monica Di Gregorio, which should open next year at the Brno House of Arts.

Could you tell us a little about the exhibition?
Aesthetically and stylistically, it is a highly varied exhibition based on the broadly conceivable topic of the microcosm. Most of the exhibiting artists are visual artists, but

1) Jan Steklík (1938–2017): artist, performer, maker of graphic scores.
2) Milan Grygar (born 1926): an artist who often uses sound in a central role.
His so-called acoustic drawings were made as visual works of art and also as magnetic tape recordings of the sonic component of the creative process (see also CMQ 2006/3).

we've also included musicians or intermedia artists such as Alvin Curran, Jon Rose, Hollis Taylor, Michael Snow, and Angelo Maria Farro. Last year, we installed the exhibition in a museum in the Palazzo Doria-Pamphilj in Valmontone near Rome. The reinstallation in Brno will be partly reduced and partly extended by the participation of other artists.

The HEyeRMEarS label, on which you published a number of interesting recordings, seems to be in hibernation. Is it temporary or permanent?

Temporary. After all, my publishing activities were never marked by excessive regularity. But this year, I am planning to bring out three titles: a vinyl with early acoustic drawings by Milan Grygar, a CD recording of Eddie Prévost and Keith Rowe's performance at the Exposition of New Music festival two years ago, where they performed several pages from Cornelius Cardew's graphic score *Treatise*, and the long-awaited macrobiotic cookbook, *Cooking with Cage*, along with a CD supplement, featuring the English Sonic Catering Band cooking some of Cage's recipes.

As you've mentioned John Cage, I'll say that it seems to me that in certain new music circles, it is considered good manners to claim allegiance to him, but these references are generally made on the level of general ideas rather than specific musical approaches. What do you think is Cage's influence on Czech (or Czechoslovak) music?

I don't know if Cage had a significant influence on any of our musicians except Petr Kotík, Milan Adamčiak, and Peter Graham. Composers never really took on his ideas, but that's true around the world. He was too esoteric. And his naive indeterminism disconcerted many academics and avant-gardists whilst also revealing their measure of tolerance. He generally had a much greater influence on visual and intermedia artists. In these fields, artists overstepped and erased boundaries with much greater intensity, which has to do with attempts to dismantle static modes of representation and integrate temporality within them. After all, Cage wasn't just a musician.

I visited the website of your employer, the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University, and I learned that you are taking part in projects exploring musical culture in Moravia. Do you think there is something like a Moravian musical identity (if we go beyond folk music, that is)?

That's a project by my musicologist colleagues – I only participate sporadically and peripherally. As for a Moravian element in music, I share Jaroslav Střítecký's[3] position on Czech-ness. Whoever wants to *will* find these elements, phrase them in the appropriate manner, and amplify them whenever necessary. I think it's a myth, generated and sustained by historians, ethnologists, or ethnomusicologists, or the devout wish of certain nationalists. Střítecký explained this with clarity and erudition years ago in a wonderful study, "Czech-ness Old and New", which has just been published as part of a selection of his texts by the university publishing house.

And if I extend this to the broader perspective of central Europe (which is perhaps more adequate given that your life extends over the territories of Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic), is there a link? Perhaps in the field of marginal musical (or intermedia) productions?

I never searched for any links in art on the basis of ethnicity or nationality. On the contrary, the mixed central-European identity suits me. I had the good fortune of being born in a time that saw not only revolutions of ideology and information, but also a startling

3) Jaroslav Střítecký (born 1941): philosopher and sociologist, currently a lecturer at the Masaryk University in Brno.

change of paradigm (from a paradigm of knowledge to a paradigm of communication), which only occurs very rarely in history. The historical possibility to be present for this is a unique experience whose significance and influence tops any crossover. I am interested in marginal artists because they are usually more authentic than official art. They have nothing to lose, so they can afford to take risks and experiment. As for intermediality, I always saw it as a natural form of expression. It's naturalness is brought about by the time-space nature of human experience. We live, perceive, and think in space and time and these elements can only be divided in theory.

As a lecturer, you introduce your students – among other things – to various aspects of electronic musical technology. What is the most important thing you try to impart to your students?

This year, together with my younger colleagues at the Department of Musicology of Masaryk University, we accredited a new course of study: Sound Design and Multimedia Technology. It will start next year. For years, our department has offered a course in Theory of Interactive Media, so the students' knowledge of electronic media and technology is well above standard – and much better than mine, as I teach them subjects with an aesthetic and philosophical focus. From my perspective, the most important thing is for students to learn to meaningfully articulate the plurality of the information age and to realise that the only thing that remains of *humanitas* and that cannot be replaced by technology is experience. They have to live that – they can't google it.

And as for aesthetics – a field that's hard to grasp. What do you think is it's role? What questions should it ask?

Aesthetics, as a boundary discipline, should not try to search for and advance universal terms, categories, or definitions, instead bringing forward and describing the topical inter-states and inter-situations in which our experiences and experiencing often find themselves, and we resist or deny including them among our existing value preferences. Of course it would be impossible to do aesthetics without creating a certain number of terms, but these terms have to be open to the extent to which they can reflect and accept those phenomena and states that might today seem extreme or marginal, but which can once become useful or even crucial for the formation of personal and cultural identities. In this, we can take our example from artists, who constantly doubt, break, and remake the rules. It is artists who warn us against all-pervasive aesthetisation that dominates today's world and that is incorrectly substituted for aesthetics.

Jozef Cseres (*1961)
is a native of Nové Zámky in southwestern Slovakia. He lives in Brno, Czechia. As a pedagogue, he worked at the Komenský University in Bratislava, the Musical Academy in Banská Bystrica, and the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno. He is currently a lecturer at the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University in Brno. He has published several books on music and multimedia art (*Musical Simulacra*, 2001; *Hermes' Ear*, 2009; *LENGOW & HEyeRMEarS: Gambling with Arts*, 2010). He founded the Rosenberg Muzeum in Violín and the publishing company HEyeRMEarS/Discorbie. As a curator, Cseres has prepared a number of exhibitions operating on the borders of sonic and visual art, including: Uwe Bressnik – Keith Rowe: The Music Before and Behind the Object (Jihlava 2017, 2019), Milan Adamčiak – Milan Grygar: Spaces of Sound and Movement (Jihlava 2018), Steklík and Guests: 80 – Homages and Drawings (Ústí nad Orlicí, 2018), Membra Disjecta for John Cage: Wanting to Say Something About John (Prague, Vienna, Ostrava, 2012), Concepto Grosso (Budapest 2010).

by Ian Mikyska

SOMETHING WHICH SEEMS UNIMPORTANT PROVES TO BE QUITE INTERESTING IN TIME

THE S.E.M. ENSEMBLE AT 50

The year 2020 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the S.E.M. Ensemble, the oldest continuously operating ensemble for new music in the United States. It was established by the Czech-American flutist and composer Petr Kotík almost immediately upon his arrival to the US in 1969. As Kotík says, the global COVID-19 pandemic is a good time to look back, as it has become impossible to look forward. But in the case of the S.E.M. Ensemble, we would no doubt be looking back over an eventful fifty years in adventurous music making even if no such reason were forced upon us.

It is impossible to discuss the S.E.M. Ensemble without discussing in detail the life and work of Petr Kotík, its founder and director for over fifty years, who also composes for SEM, conducts, and performs on the flute.

Historically, composers were also performers, instrumentalists, vocalists, and conductors. From Vivaldi and Bach through Mozart and Haydn to Liszt and Chopin, composers were intimately involved in the entire process of making music. However, the 20th-century process of professionalisation initiated by the establishment of the European conservatoires in the 19th century led to a gradual division of the roles of performers and composers.

This process culminated after the Second World War, finding two differing institutional frameworks in the main geographic centres of contemporary music – Western Europe and the United States. In Europe, composers were supported by commissions from public access radio stations, often also working in the electronic music studios operated by these stations. In America, where no comparable publicly-funded broadcasting existed, composers found their new home in academia, teaching composition and music theory in universities and colleges across the country.

John Cage once famously remarked that composing, performing, and listening to music were three entirely different activities that have nothing to do with each other. Petr Kotík, however, received training in flute playing as well as composition, and performance and composition have remained intricately connected in his artistic mentality over the last sixty years: “I look at myself first and foremost as a musician. As a musician, I compose music and I perform music. Both are equally important. I cannot imagine composing without performing, and I cannot imagine performing something other than what I am truly interested in doing – which is

my music, music by those I associate with, and music by composers who have some kind of significance, for me or for music."

1959–1970: Before America – Musica viva pragensis

The first of the two groups which Petr Kotík founded in Prague was Musica viva pragensis. This is how the composer described the establishment of the ensemble: "I started Musica viva pragensis while I was in my last year at the Prague Conservatory. During a break in our orchestral teaching, we went to the conservatory canteen to eat something. We were completely disgusted by what went on in the orchestra class. Šrámek was there –" Vladimír Šrámek was a composer and Kotík's mentor at the time, "– and we said: why don't we start an ensemble? Šrámek was excited and came up with the name Musica viva, and then we added pragensis. It was him who inspired me to compose. When we started the ensemble, I was a total beginner, so to suggest that we perform my music was out of question. But I was connected to Šrámek and also to Jan Rychlík, another important composer with whom I began studying. Rychlík was a close friend of my parents. In fact, it was my father who suggested that I start taking composition lessons with him. So, when I decided, together with my friends, to form an ensemble, Rychlík and Šrámek started to compose pieces for the first concert."

Another key player in the early years of Musica viva pragensis was the composer Rudolf Komorous, who later emigrated to Canada just a year before Kotík's move to America. Komorous settled in the west of Canada, taking up a position at the University of Victoria, where he fostered many generations of experimental Canadian composers. What is less well known, however, is that he was a bassoon virtuoso first. In 1957, he was Czechoslovakia's representative at the Concours International d'Exécution Musicale in Geneva, and to everyone's surprise, he won the competition.

Based on his Geneva Gold medal, he was invited to teach bassoon at the Beijing Conservatory, which he did from 1959 to 1961. Immediately after his return, he joined Kotík in planning their new ensemble – Komorous main interest was, after all, the newest and most adventurous music. His star status, however, made possible that MVP stopped using conservatory players – "we wouldn't get anywhere that way," Komorous told Kotík right at the start. "He brought the best players from the Czech Philharmonic and other leading Prague musicians." Things started moving quite fast and soon, even Kotík's flute professor from the conservatory, the first chair at the Czech Philharmonic, František Čech, joined the group, conducting a performance of Cornelius Cardew's *Autumn '60* – "imagine that," Kotík remembers.

Kotík also has some rather surprising things to say about Czechoslovakia in the 1960s: "People's essential needs were more or less taken care of. Money wasn't very important – it didn't have much value and there wasn't much you could buy with it anyway. I don't remember ever worrying about how to pay these musicians, and these were the Prague's leading players. There wasn't all that much to do, everyone's employment was guaranteed, so intelligent people welcomed the chance to do something interesting and entirely different from what they were used to."

When you look up Musica viva pragensis, you will find the dates of the ensemble listed as 1961–1973. By then, Kotík had already been in the US for several years, and the concert programmes seem to suggest that he had left Musica viva pragensis while he studied in Vienna (1963–1966). When asked about his departure, Kotík shared the following story:

"My compositions never belonged anywhere. And the music, especially with a new piece, caused more confusion than any other reaction. This has never been easy – most musicians (along with everyone else) scratched their heads and had no idea what to make of it. When MVP performed my piece *Kontrapunkt II* in Vienna, in the autumn of 1963, no one liked it – *no one*. Komorous thought that I still have to work on it – mainly to cut it down. Then, we were invited to the Warsaw Autumn festival and the question was: which composition of mine should the ensemble perform there? The musicians did not want to perform *Kontrapunkt II*. When they learned that I was composing a new piece, everyone was relived. But the piece, *Music for 3 in Memoriam Jan Rychlík*, was even longer than *Kontrapunkt II* and the performance in Warsaw caused a big scandal. About a third of the audience left the hall in protest. The official delegation of the Czechoslovak Composers Union led by the composer Ctirad Kohoutek stormed the backstage and assaulted the musicians as they came off the stage, screaming 'What was this supposed to mean! How dare you!' In Prague, the Composer's Union didn't leave it without repercussions. And of course, it was unthinkable for the musicians to stand up for the music, so I left the group. The composer Marek Kopelent was chosen to smooth things over and he then took over the ensemble."

Kotík recalls that almost no one spoke to him for some time afterwards. There was another detail, he remembers: "The night before, Xenakis had a large

The S.E.M. Ensemble in Buffalo in 1972 (Julius Eastman, Roberto Leneri, Jan Williams, Petr Kotík)

orchestra piece performed at the philharmonic hall. Part of the audience booed and whistled, another part applauded. Xenakis was a striking figure, athletic and elegant, impeccably dressed. He went to take a bow in front of the booing and whistling audience. And all the time, he had one hand in his pocket. This made a huge impression on me. So the next day, when I went to take a bow – of course, many people in the hall cheered and applauded – I stuck *both* of my hands in my pockets. And that really made a lot of people angry."

Xenakis also influenced the young composer in other ways. Kotík sent a recording of his *Kontrapunkt II* (the piece no one in the ensemble liked) to Xenakis' address in Paris. And suddenly a letter back came from Paris. "I still have the Xenakis letter," Kotík remembers, "he sort of congratulated me, wrote 'you crossed the Rubicon' and that I should keep him up to date with what I was doing. That was the first important encouragement – a very important moment for me."

The QUaX Ensemble

Soon after Musica viva pragensis was taken away from him, Kotík left to study music at the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. After concluding his studies in Austria and returning to Prague, Kotík immediately started a new group, the QUaX Ensemble. This was a very different type of ensemble, heavily influenced by the ideas of experimental music that Kotík had been pursuing for several years by then (as opposed to the Darmstadt-influenced avant-garde). His time in Vienna was important in this, as well as all the connections he was able to establish during the Warsaw Autumn festivals, which he attended every year from '61 to '64.

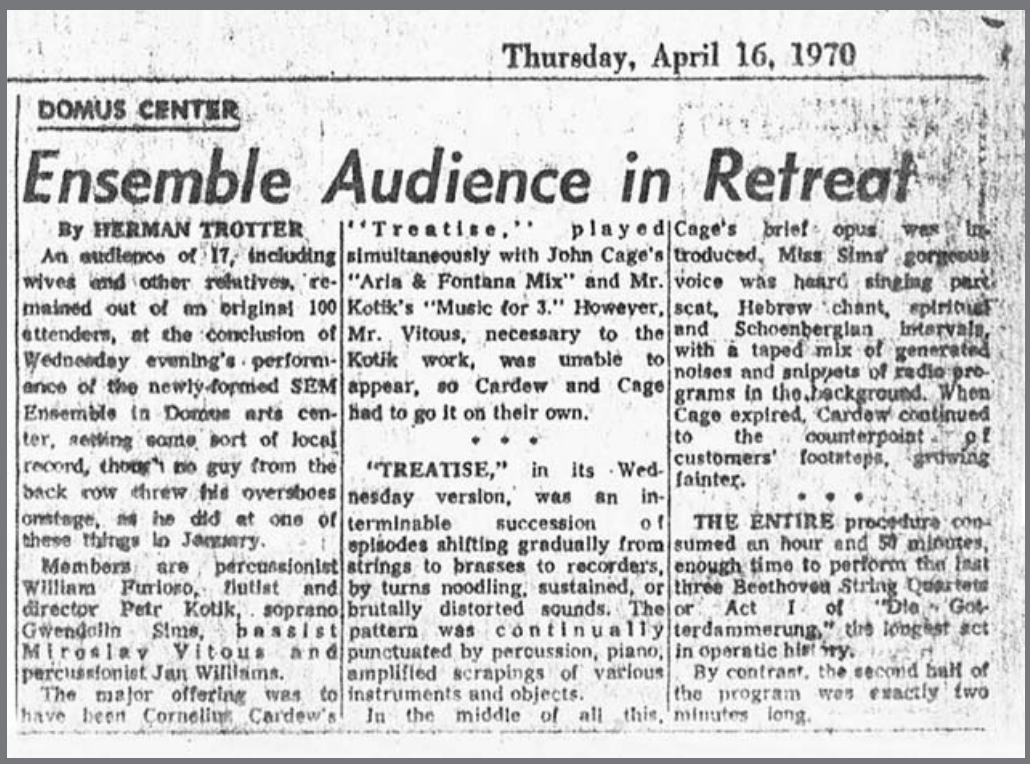
"Composers and musicians of my generation in Europe, meaning those who started in the late '50s and early '60s, they were all very attached to what had happened in Darmstadt from the early '50s onwards. Darmstadt represented this new wave of… everything – composition as well as music-making. Stockhausen, Boulez, Nono, Pousseur, etc. As I was performing this music more and more, something happened that started to turn us away from it. By the mid '60s, I was studying at the academy in Vienna and my closest friend there was Kurt Schwertsik. He would say 'Ich hasse das' [I hate it] – I wouldn't be as harsh, I didn't hate anything, but I was becoming more and more sceptical about this whole scene. And something else happened at that time: the arrival of John Cage. And I don't mean as a personality – he certainly wasn't a star at the time. It was John Cage's ideas that made a huge impact on me, and on the scene in Prague around me at that time."
QuAX began improvising and performing graphic scores or text-based pieces, including by composers such as Cage, Cornelius Cardew, and Frederic Rzewski. The line-up was no longer composed of top classical players from the leading orchestras. Instead, it included big-band leaders like Václav Zahradník and jazz musicians like Josef Vejvoda and Jan Hynčica.

Darmstadt vs. Cage?

The turn from avant-garde to experimental was slow and gradual, coming from various sources, one of them rather wonderfully coincidental. Kotík reminisces: "In September 1960, Luigi Nono drove his Volkswagen Beetle from Venice to the Warsaw Autumn festival with his friend, the composer Giacomo Manzoni. Nono was always very interested

"At the start, in America, in 1970, the founding of the S.E.M. Ensemble was sort of a bridge between all the activities I did in Europe, going back to early 1960s. This is important to realise: I came to the U.S. from Prague, Czechoslovakia, which at the time was a tightly controlled society – things were either allowed or not; things were supported or they simply didn't happen. Gradually, during the '60s, this regime started to liberalise and open up, which in the case of Czechoslovakia evolved into a very open society in 1968. Open to such a degree that the leading power of that political block, the Soviet Union, could not to tolerate it anymore and came in with its army to stop it. Fortunately for me and many others, the changes happened gradually. For some time, everyone pretended that things would continue as they were before. Why I say it's good for me is because I was able to leave Czechoslovakia more than a year after the Soviet invasion. It's important to realise is that I did not come over to USA from this restricted regime to 'finally' be able to do new and interesting things. In fact, the change for me from working in Prague and then in New York was practically seamless."

in visual art, so when they came to Prague, he visited some galleries and was disgusted by what he saw. In Warsaw, his Polish friends told him that if he wanted to see interesting art, he had to go artists' studios, not the galleries. They gave him a list of names and addresses. At the top of the list was the name of my father, the artist Jan Kotík. When he stopped in Prague on the way back, he rang the bell at my father's studio. It so happened that he was still there (it was late at night) and they met. My father called our home phone. I remember it like it was yesterday – I picked up the receiver and he said: 'Guess who's here? Luigi Nono. Come over.' So I came over and he gave me the Darmstadter Beiträge – a Darmstadt publication that contained lecture transcripts. It must've been the 1958 edition, the first year that Stockhausen and Boulez couldn't make it. They recommended to the director, Wolfgang Steinecke, that he invite John Cage. This was the 'American year' at Darmstadt and it caused a lot of upheaval: Edgard Varése, Christian Wolff, David Tudor, and Cage were all there. And the publication included transcripts of lectures by Cage and others. When I first leafed through it, I was looking for texts



Thursday, April 16, 1970

DOMUS CENTER

Ensemble Audience in Retreat

By HERMAN TROTTER

An audience of 17, including wives and other relatives, remained out of an original 100 attenders, at the conclusion of Wednesday evening's performance of the newly-formed SEM Ensemble in Domus arts center, setting some sort of local record, though no guy from the back row threw his overshoes onstage, as he did at one of these things in January.

Members are percussionist William Furioso, flutist and director Petr Kotik, soprano Gwendolin Sims, bassist Miroslav Vitous and percussionist Jan Williams.

The major offering was to have been Cornelius Cardew's "Treatise," played simultaneously with John Cage's "Aria & Fontana Mix" and Mr. Kotik's "Music for 3." However, Mr. Vitous, necessary to the Kotik work, was unable to appear, so Cardew and Cage had to go it on their own.

• • •

"TREATISE," in its Wednesday version, was an interminable succession of episodes shifting gradually from strings to brasses to recorders, by turns noodling, sustained, or brutally distorted sounds. The pattern was continually punctuated by percussion, piano, amplified scrapings of various instruments and objects.

In the middle of all this, Cage's brief opus was introduced. Miss Sims' gorgeous voice was heard singing part scat, Hebrew chant, spiritual and Schoenbergian intervals, with a taped mix of generated noises and snippets of radio programs in the background. When Cage expired, Cardew continued to the counterpoint of customers' footsteps, growing fainter.

• • •

THE ENTIRE procedure consumed an hour and 50 minutes, enough time to perform the last three Beethoven String Quartets or Act I of "Die Gotterdammerung," the longest act in operatic history.

By contrast, the second half of the program was exactly two minutes long.

Many Many Women recording session, 1980

by Boulez and Stockhausen – my heroes. And there were some. But suddenly, out of the blue, the most interesting ideas were in the texts by Cage. And that was his emergence on my scene. *Silence* was published shortly afterwards… The combination of going away from Darmstadt-style music and the encounter with ideas coming from America – not just Cage, but this whole American way of looking at music – influenced me very much. And so when I came over to Buffalo, which was more or less still based in a Darmstadt-style avant-garde, I didn't feel very comfortable – not in terms of the environment but just because of the concert programming. I felt I should be doing something else. And this was the impetus to start the S.E.M. Ensemble."

We might be tempted to see Kotík's position in an ideological context, but this is not the case: he continued performing composers of the Darmstadt avant-garde periodically. His criteria for the music he chooses to program are simple: the music has to be authentic and there has to be a reason to perform it. In his own words: "Why would I do something that twenty other ensembles are already doing and doing well? If there were a lot of good performances of music by Cage on the same level as people perform Boulez or Nono, I would never play it. Why should I?"

The Move to America

Petr Kotík did not come to the United States as a political refugee. He was invited by the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts at the State University of New York at Buffalo. This institution was established by Lukas Foss and Allen Sapp with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and existed from 1964 until 1980. A document put out by the university informs us of the following:

"The creation of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts was the result of fortuitous timing that brought together Allen Sapp [the chairman of the University's Department of music] and Lukas Foss [the chief conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic], at a time when funding was available to support their plans. Allen Sapp (1922–1999) came to Buffalo in 1961 to chair the Music Department just as the University of Buffalo was about to become part of the State University of New York system. The completed merger in 1962 resulted in funding from New York State that had not been available when the University was still a private institution. (…) The Center survived until 1980. Approximately 120 musicians came to Buffalo as Creative Associates from 1964 until its close. They presented about 700 musical works on 124 Creative Associate recitals and

The Orchestra of the S.E.M Ensemble performing John Cage's Atlas Eclipticalis and Winter Music (David Tudor - piano), Carnegie Hall, 1992

more than 400 works on 173 Evenings for New Music concerts."

Petr Kotík was invited to become one of the Creative Associates. Preparations had already begun in 1968, and the process took more than a year, because at the time, Kotík was drafted to serve in the Czechoslovak army (from 1968 to 1969). To arrange all the formalities, Kotík could legally travel to the United States as early as the fall of 1969. Like many others, he benefited from the fact that the process known as "normalisation" – which reversed the liberal policies of the Dubček era of socialism and marked the end of Prague Spring politics in favour of a more restricted and Moscow-approved programme – only took hold gradually. Had he made his request to travel to America a year later, it would certainly not have been allowed.

It is perhaps a little surprising how smooth this transition was for Kotík, almost as if it could not have gone any other way. "If I had been invited for a fellowship in Germany or France, I would have come back to Prague," he says. "But this was America: you get off the plane and you're automatically an American. I can't imagine living somewhere as a guest; as a second-class citizen."

When Kotík got on the plane over the Atlantic, however, there was no certainty that he was travelling to the country he would call home for the next fifty years – in fact, the issue wasn't even on his mind. As he says, he only thinks about things once these thoughts are practically applicable, and in this case, that was when his then-wife, Charlotta Kotíková (curator and great-granddaughter of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of independent Czechoslovakia) and their first son Tomáš finally made it over the pond. If they had remained in Prague, Kotík would have returned.

The Creative Associates programme generally consisted of scholarships extending a period of one or two semesters, but Kotík's fellowship was extended to two years, after which he held a part-time teaching position for another two years. "The university in Buffalo defined two of the most important moments in my life: first, allowing me to relocate from Prague to America, and then, firing me. If they had offered me a full-time position, I would never have been able to do all the work I did. Since then, I have made my living as an independent musician and composer."

Beginnings of the S.E.M. Ensemble

The first concert of the S.E.M. Ensemble took place on the 15th of April 1970, produced by the Center for Creative and Performing Arts. More concerts followed shortly afterwards and soon, the ensemble settled on a quartet of core members – Julius Eastman, Roberto Laneri, Jan Williams, and Petr Kotík.

Even this first concert in April 1970 belies the brazen, uncompromising nature of Kotík's programming – and the first review reflects this. The evening included a short piece by Rudolf Komorous, Kotík's *Music for*

Three, and John Cage's *Aria* and *Fontana Mix*, but the centre-piece of the event was a two-hour version of Cornelius Cardew's *Treatise*, which Kotík had previously performed in Prague with QUaX. At the SEM concert, it was performed simultaneously with some of the other music on the programme. In the words of a review published in a local paper: "The entire procedure consumed an hour and fifty minutes, enough time to perform the last three Beethoven String Quartets. By contrast, the second half of the program was exactly two minutes long. There were a hundred audience members in attendance at the start of the concert, but only seventeen remained at the end."

If you visit the S.E.M. Ensemble's website, you will find in the "Reviews" section a collection of early reviews and extracts. Not only are they humorous, but they also attest to the perseverance and tenacity with which Petr Kotík champions the music he finds worthwhile. It also further supports his claim that he makes music (as both composer and performer) that "doesn't really have a home anywhere" – and in the fifty years that followed this first, rather controversial outing, the S.E.M. Ensemble has provided a home for a great deal of exploratory, original and often strange music.

Is There an S.E.M. Ensemble?

Generally, the S.E.M. Ensemble works on a project-by-project basis, meaning that there isn't a stable instrumental line-up and performers are invited based on the repertoire selected for any given concert. This might suggest that musicians are considered replaceable, but the opposite is true. Petr Kotík explains: "Every time I compose a piece of music, every time I put notes down on paper to be played by somebody, I always imagine a particular musician playing them. It may change and in the end, someone else might perform the piece, but that is not important. In the act of creating the music, I simply have to have a vision of a particular musician. I simply cannot compose – just like that, in the air, here is my piece, somebody please take it and perform it."

One such musician to influence Kotík was one of the founding members of SEM, the composer Julius Eastman, also a fellow at the Center in Buffalo. Up until the mid-70s, Eastman was Kotík's very close collaborator. A great personality, Eastman was a singer, pianist (graduate of Curtis Institute of Music), dancer, and actor. He died in near obscurity in 1990, but in recent years, his music has received a much deserved reappraisal, with revived or discovered pieces appearing with greater and greater regularity. Naturally, the S.E.M. Ensemble plays an important part in this Eastman revival, notably through the 2016 CD release featuring SEM's original recording of Eastman's *Feminine* or the inclusion of *Joy Boy* in the SEM 50th anniversary concert.

Back in the 1970s, however, Julius Eastman inspired Kotík to begin composing for voice. He maintained this interest even after Eastman's departure from the ensemble and continued working with other vocalists. This ultimately led to many major compositions for voices that Kotík composed during the '70s. One of them, *Many Many Women*, is a six-hour colossus of a piece for six singers and six instrumentalists setting a novella by Gertrude Stein. Recently, Kotík returned to Gertrude Stein, using her writings for his first opera *Master-pieces*, which has been performed in Ostrava, Prague, and New York.

For Philip Guston

One of the S.E.M. Ensemble's signature pieces is Morton Feldman's monumental *For Philip Guston*. Indeed, the rather unusual line-up – flute, piano, and percussion – has recently become one of the SEM's most recognisable chamber formations, featuring musicians that have been working with Kotík for several decades: Joseph Kubera at the keyboard and percussionist Chris Nappi on various tuned and untuned instruments. It was this same trio that recorded the piece for its 2000 4-CD release, produced by the Paula Cooper Gallery (New York) on its label Dog W/A Bone.

The story of how *For Philip Guston* came into the SEM's repertoire is rather remarkable. First, in the 1970s, both Kotík and Feldman lived and worked in Buffalo at the same time (in 1971, Feldman became a professor at the university there, a position he held for the rest of his life). In 1973, Feldman composed *Instruments I* as a commission for SEM. When Kotík and SEM relocated to New York City, there was a pause in their relationship, until about 1985, when Kotík asked Feldman to compose a new piece for the group. Feldman agreed and the new piece was announced as part of SEM's 1986/87 New York season. However, Feldman died before he had the opportunity to compose the work, so Kotík searched in his catalogue for a replacement piece to perform. There were three trios that would fit the ensemble's instrumentation and Kotík chose *For Philip Guston*, because out of the three pieces, it was the only one that did not require the bass flute, an instrument Kotík did not possess at that time. Only when the music arrived did he realise the scale of the composition – performing *For Philip Guston* takes five hours.

And so the group played it at their concert series at the Paula Cooper Gallery in February, 1987. This is

how Kotík remembers the event, a rather fitting and rewarding comparison to that first concert in 1970: "The hall was full. When performing pieces of this duration, we tell the audience it's okay to leave and come back. The piece doesn't really have a beginning or ending anyway. Spatially, we sit in a triangular position so that we can clearly see and cue each other. I always sit with my back to the audience. When we finished the performance, I thought that perhaps half of the audience would be gone. But imagine my surprise when I turned around and saw that *everyone* was there. And Alex Ross, who wrote the review for the New York Times, was sitting in the third row, holding the score."

Orchestra of the S.E.M. Ensemble

Another breaking point came in 1992, more than thirty years after Kotík had begun his professional concert career in 1961. Throughout all of this time, his interest in the orchestra was negligible: "I had serious doubts about orchestras. The pretentious vibrato and the conductors, most of them writhing like worms in front of the musicians. As a performer, I know exactly how easy it is to fake all these emotions. The self-serving mindless vibrato playing always repulsed me, particularly in the string section. I never had the least bit of interest in the orchestra."

This was true until Kotík began putting together a performance of John Cage's seminal work *Atlas Eclipticalis* as a tribute to Cage's eightieth birthday. This piece doesn't follow the idea of a conventionally synchronised orchestra. Instead, it is a combination of eighty six solos that are to be performed independently. The only ensemble element is time, followed by everyone and determined by the conductor. The preparations took the form of individual rehearsals involving Kotík and each of the orchestra musicians. After two months of rehearsing, the Orchestra of the S.E.M. Ensemble performed the piece at Carnegie Hall in a premiere of the complete two-hour version, with the pianist David Tudor simultaneously performing the solo piece *Winter Music*. Tudor had been a close collaborator of Cage since the early 1950s and all the pieces Cage composed from that time up until about 1970 were written either directly for Tudor or with Tudor in mind. "Throughout the 1950s and '60s, Tudor was perhaps the greatest and certainly the most famous virtuoso in the world of new music," says Kotík.

Kotík describes the transformative event in these words: "So, all of a sudden, I am standing on the stage of Carnegie Hall, conducting this huge orchestra for the first time in my life, two hours and eighty-six musicians. The orchestra has three (!) sets of timpani, nine large percussion setups, three harps, and so on. We could barely fit on the large stage of Carnegie Hall. And this did something to me. When we finished, I thought to myself: 'There is nothing more important than working with an orchestra. This is what I should be doing.' It changed my life."

Kotík continues: "We did not sell out the hall, but it was quite full and there was quite an elite audience. Right after the concert, I had to pay all the musicians, so it took some time for me to leave. When I was finally on my way out and the elevator door opened on the ground floor, Rudolf Firkušný was standing there with his wife Tatiana – they had waited all that time to congratulate me. I'll never forget this; I was very touched. There was an after-concert party at the Paula Cooper Gallery. When I arrived, David Tudor said to me: 'There was one problem with this performance.' What was it? I asked. 'No mistakes,' he replied."

This was the start of The Orchestra of the S.E.M. Ensemble – Kotík himself admits this is "a rather absurd name, but all names are absurd until one gets used to them." After all, the name S.E.M. Ensemble contains a Duchamp-like absurdity itself: the three-letter acronym, rather than representing the first letters of any three significant words, is merely the "middle part" of the word enSEMble.

An invitation to a festival in Berlin followed the Carnegie Hall concert. Petr Kotík's response to the organisers' invitation is typical of his negotiation style: he replied that he is not really interested in repeating the same programme, but if a *second* programme were organised, say one that would include the New York school composers plus Edgard Varése, perhaps he would be amenable – and he requested a solo concert for David Tudor, too.

Here is Kotík again: "Pieces of art – true artworks – are all created intuitively, not with the slightest calculating intention. Many times – perhaps almost always – artists really do not know what they're doing. It is only discovered *ex post*. We are now, or perhaps for the past hundred years, going through a substantial change – a change that began in the 1920s and '30s. In the theatre, for example, it was Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in the early '50s that ended the era of the Shakespearian dramatic narrative (in music, we might consider the concept of the classical sonata form a certain type of dramatic narrative). The focus has turned from drama to situation: it's about nothing, it does not go anywhere, but it is *something*. Perhaps this partially explains why I have always been attracted to music of the Baroque and earlier periods: the artistic content is, in fact, similar to what is going on today. It is

PHOTO: MARTIN POPELÁŘ

Petr Kotík performing with Roscoe Mitchell, Thomas Buckner and Ostravská banda, 2017

contemplation, focus, getting deeper into the thing one is doing. This is what I have been aiming for throughout my life as artist."

Involvement with the AACM

Both the S.E.M. Ensemble and Kotík personally have a long-standing association with the composers and musicians of the AACM – the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. This group was founded in 1965 in Chicago to help African American avant-garde jazz musicians who were struggling to find support and audiences for their courageous and experimental music making, which was steeped in jazz but reached out to free improvisation, graphic scores, avant-garde techniques in both playing and composing, and influences from various ethnic musical traditions.

Particularly in relation to recent developments surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, one might be tempted to frame these activities of Kotík's ideologically, especially as the musicians of the AACM often have closer links with the jazz and improvised music scenes and are rarely represented on orchestral podiums or within the contexts of new composed music. However, Kotík is quick to dispel any such interpretations:

"One of the attributes of what I strive to do in Ostrava or in New York, what I've been doing my entire life, is a complete absence of ideology – not promoting a particular aesthetic. In fact, I completely reject any sign of 'aesthetics.' For me, the idea of aesthetics equals ideology. The criteria I have for deciding to do something are straightforward and follow a simple set of questions: Is it for real, or is it fake? Is it trying to position itself somewhere? Is the work authentic or is it trying to impress someone; striving to succeed? This is what I ask myself first and it opens, unpredictably, to a lot of things for me. I don't really plan things much in advance – things have to develop organically. In the mid-'90s, the AACM, led by Muhal Richard Abrams, received a grant to commission its members to compose orchestral music. So, they needed an orchestra, and someone recommended the S.E.M. Ensemble. And after the first concert we did together, they all became very enthusiastic about continuing the collaboration. That was the beginning of my work with AACM. The relationship developed organically and once again flowed back into what we do in Ostrava."

One of the manifestations of this collaboration were repeated visits by Muhal Richard Abrams and Roscoe Mitchell to Ostrava Days Institute and Festival. They worked with the students there and had pieces performed (including orchestra compositions), performed a concert improvisation (billed as the AACM Trio with trombonist George Lewis), and also took part in the festival's improvising ensemble, led by vocalist Thomas Buckner.

George Lewis, a composer and improviser who has become the AACM's chronicler, published a history of the group, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, with the University of Chicago Press in 2015. Lewis, who is also a frequent guest at the Ostrava Days festival and whose opera about the history of the AACM, *Afterword*, was premiered at Ostrava's National Moravian-Silesian Theatre in 2015, contributed the following comment to the 50-year anniversary concert – which, given the coronavirus pandemic, had to take place online:

"What is it that's so special about the S.E.M. Ensemble? First, the S.E.M. Ensemble is a long-standing community of practice that has brought the most extraordinary diversity of music to life. Second, there's a familial aspect about the S.E.M. Ensemble – everyone is in it together, and even if the music director can be a bit irascible at times, that's because of his tenacity and deep love of music, performance, and the people who make it. Finally, when a vision like SEM lasts for that long, what you get is a kind of feedback loop, where the power of new music comes not so much from any external force but from new music itself."

Extension into Ostrava Days

In 2001, Petr Kotík organised the first edition of the Ostrava Days of New Music, a biennial festival that soon became the most important event for new music in the Czech Republic, but also a remarkable occasion in the context of Europe and the world. The Ostrava Center for New Music was established and later came to include not only this festival, but also the New Opera Days Ostrava festival (NODO), another biennial, which alternates with Ostrava Days. The S.E.M. Ensemble often performs at both festivals, and the resident large chamber ensemble, Ostravská banda, is composed of a mix of players from Europe and the U.S., with many members overlapping with the S.E.M. Ensemble.

There is a remarkable continuity in Kotík's activity, accompanied by a certainty of intention: there is, in his mind, not a great deal of difference between his motivations and activities in 1960s Prague, 1980s New York, or 2000s Ostrava. The aim is always the same: to find a home for music that otherwise wouldn't have one, and to find musicians who are heavily invested in approaching this music as responsibly as possible. Everything else – the musicians, the venues, the festivals, the pieces – seem to flow around Petr Kotík, reaching a point at which, as George Lewis put it, "the power of new music comes not so much from any external force but from new music itself".

The New York School

The New York School was a group of experimental composers active in New York from the early 1950s that included John Cage, Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, and Christian Wolff. To a certain extent, these composers followed in the footsteps of Charles Ives in creating music that was less dependent on European conceptions of history whilst also focusing much more directly on the materials of sound, providing a counterweight to the over-intellectualised approach of much of the "Darmstadt school" – the terms avant-garde (Darmstadt) and experimental (New York) are often used to describe these two approaches. SEM is one of the few ensembles that have a direct historical link with the New York school and continues championing its music.
Here is New York music journalist Kurt Gottschalk:
"Just as the New York School doesn't get the recognition it deserves, SEM doesn't get the recognition it deserves. The ensemble manages a high profile concert every two or three years, due in very large part (it seems to me) to Petr Kotík's tireless work. A big part of that has to do with the fundraising he does in order to present concerts free of charge. The S.E.M. Ensemble performing those important works, and doing so free of charge, is what keeps Brown and Wolf in particular on the city's cultural landscape. (…) Is the New York School connection as distinct as it once was? No, I don't think it is. Part of SEM's significance lies in how few orchestras in the city focus on contemporary work, or even work from the latter half of the 20th century. When I speak of the importance of the New York School connection, my comments in no small part reflect my own interests. I can easily imagine Kotík saying, 'This is not important, we simply play what is needed at the time'."

Economy and Beauty

"Beauty is economy. A piece of beauty does not have a trace of redundancy – there is nothing unnecessary or superfluous. It does not have a simple, smallest portion that is not needed. This is why, in every creative process, the ultimate struggle is to avoid superfluous redundancies – the redundant nature of imitation is the reason for its failure. A failure to economise turns the work into kitsch. Kitsch is an ornament, full of redundant parts. It is often regarded as beautiful, and it is this kind of 'beautiful kitsch' that, initially, makes a true piece of art look 'ugly'."

Petr Kotík, March 30, 2020

by Petr Ferenc

The world of fragments according to the OPENING PERFORMANCE ORCHESTRA

"The World is just an endless multitude of fragments: some already present and some not yet born,"

says the Prague-based ensemble Opening Performance Orchestra, which operate with certainty on the fields of digital noise music and avant-garde music of the 20th century. In recent years, the ensemble has also secured its position internationally. This article by Petr Ferenc considers the various aspects of the ensemble based on the author's personal experiences and an extensive e-mail interview.

In their music, a distinctive compositional approach meets awareness of their own identity, with the addition of patience and a distaste for ad hoc "side projects", flippant levity, and improvisation. All their enterprises are carefully thought out to the last detail, precisely defined, and executed with gravity and belief in the result. If the consensus is imperfect, the project is postponed. CDs are only published once the situation and form are perfect, including the graphic design and booklet texts. "I don't like irony," said the recently deceased poet Jaroslav Erik Frič, "because people should stand firmly behind what they say and do." The Opening Performance Orchestra (OPO for short), whom he knew as an organiser of underground music, consistently follow this maxim.

They first began performing in 2006, but the foundation of the group is not that easy to establish. "We are not a group created for a particular occasion. We all know each other from long before the Opening Performance Orchestra was established," explain the members – while their identities are not especially secret, in interviews or album covers, we find only the members' initials, if there is any indication of personal authorship at all.

"Our group's members are linked by a friendship that started in the mid '80s. A feeling of togetherness and solidarity is important. Even as we participate in more and more public activities, we still put on a number of private events and rituals – for example, our yearly celebration of spring, which we first organised in 2005, a year before OPO was born. Later, the *Spring Series* recording series became a tangible result of these events, along with the field recordings we make, which then serve as material for future performances." This is how the Opening Performance Orchestra summarised their musical position in the e-mail interview that is the source of all the quotations in this text unless stated otherwise.

Despite the frequency and prominence with which the group has attracted public attention, it still retains the life-giving secrecy of private events. We only learn of the existence of such events as *První akce s pátým MacBookem* (*First Event With Fifth MacBook*), *Rozloučení se sklepním studiem* (*Farewell to the Basement Studio*), or the mysterious *12 pro 2* (*12 for 2*) retrospectively from their website.

FRACTION OPENING

During performances, members of the Opening Performance Orchestra stand on stage, barely moving behind a row of computers, while their uncompromising sound walls are accompanied by video projections. OPO approach their central topic – broadening the musical field to include concrete noises – as children of the digital age, in which "it is unnecessary to construct physical instruments or undertake complex operations on computers that take up entire rooms – instead, small and efficient laptops can be used to achieve the desired result. This is our starting point, and it is from here that we undertake various journeys – into recent and more distant musical history, to a time when the musical avant-garde wasn't set in stone, when it was new and alive instead."

The group has self-published thirteen albums in a series of visually unified CDRs. On most of these, they present themselves in their most uncompromising form as architects of seemingly completely compact digital monoliths of sound whose multi-layered nature is only revealed gradually. I admit that it is because of these recordings that for a time, I considered the group a bunch of malicious conceptualists.

OPO attempted to push the boundaries of noise music with what they call fraction music. In short, it is a strict application of the maxim *no melody no rhythm no harmony*. "We leave the rest intentionally open to the fantasy and courage of the listeners. We act as a mirror for the recipients, providing them with a space in which they can resolve the situation in their own way, either accepting the extreme sonic material and giving themselves over to it, or walking off having been entirely untouched by it. In theory, any sound or continuous sound recording can serve as material for our pieces. Most often, these are field recordings from various environments made during our events. We recorded a lot of material during our concert stay in Tokyo. But silence, seeing as it is never absolute, can also serve as material. Every place – natural or urban – has its unique sonic characteristic and typical sonic properties. Nevertheless, we emphasise the fact that such a recording is never a final result for us – it is only the first step; material for further processing. We use various software and hardware instruments to decompose the original material. There is no set method – it is always a matter of feeling, intuition, and our idea about the resultant form. The transformation itself – of sound material to fraction music – takes place in several phases: from the collection of the sonic material, through its deconstruction/decomposition, to the reconstruction, i.e. the creation of new sonic material."

An interesting manifestation of fraction music is the group's latest self-released album, *Fifty Experiences*, which presents a continuous block of sound featuring one minute from every live performance that took place between 2006 and 2015.

AVANT-GARDE PERFORMANCE

Since 2015, the ensemble's discography has expanded considerably in collaboration with labels based abroad. The most frequent partner is the Belgian publisher Sub Rosa, which has consistently published both new and archival recordings of avant-garde, experimental, ethnical, and other marginal musics since the mid-'80s. It is a mark of the congeniality of this collaboration that although at present, vinyl is the fashionable format for experimental music, the publishers respect the group's wish to put everything out on CD – "We are digital people," claim the group.

On the 13th of June 2020, Sub Rosa published OPO's latest outing: a seventy-two-minute piece titled *Radio Music Extended*, inspired by John Cage's *Radio Music* (1956), in which the composer instructs the performers – who operate radio receivers – on when to tune to fifty-six frequencies from 55 kHz to 156 kHz. The original usually allows for snippets of voices and music, but this new version is much more abstract and noisy, composed of highly amplified interferences and hums. The radiophonic origins, however, are unmistakeable. "Over the past 60 years or so, the content of the broadcast band of the airwaves has changed significantly, yet the acoustic environment has remained highly variegated, providing a novel quality of sound."

Radio Music Extended was recorded during a private live performance in the Tesla Museum in the small Moravian city of Třešť. The group used thirteen receivers constructed between the 1930s and '60s. While this is one of the most direct inspirations the group has picked up from Cage, it is certainly not the first time they have approached the composer's legacy.

There is no record of the chess game played on the 5th of March 1968 in Toronto between Cage and Marcel Duchamp. The chess board was modified so that whenever a piece was moved, the square it was set down on activated a different electronic sound source – the resultant piece, *Reunion*, was thus composed in real time following the rules of the game of chess.

PHOTO: ANNA BASTYROVÁ

Performing BROKEN RE/BROKEN, 2020

In 2012, the year of the Cage centenary, the Opening Performance Orchestra used a different match to reconstruct this famous encounter on the space of sixty-four minutes. Each of the sixty-four minutes represents a time field in which recordings of Cage's works are triggered by an algorithm. OPO premiered this piece, titled *Chess Show*, at DOX, a private gallery in Prague, on the 24th of May 2012 as part of the opening of an exhibition dedicated to Cage's legacy, *Membra Disjecta*.

Five years later, the group put together a new concert version for the Ostrava Days festival, this time featuring pianist Reinhold Friedl. Around the same time, the group joined Friedl's ensemble zeitkratzer in the studio to record another version of the piece. If these recordings are ever published, listeners can look forward to two sets of eight-times-eight minute sonic "landscape" populated by more or less random encounters amongst the most varied of sounds, noises, voices, and musical motifs. The borders between the live and the played back are erased (zeitkratzer perform on acoustic instruments using various extended techniques); there is no accompaniment or foreground.

It is through projects like this one – less static and anonymous, more collaborative, sonically appealing, and connected to the living past of the musical avant-garde – that the Opening Performance Orchestra has attracted the most attention in recent years.

The Czech scene only really took notice of them after their realisations of pieces for the *intonarumori* – instruments invented early in the 20th century by the Italian futurist Luigi Russolo, who wished to hear an entirely new music made of the noises and roars that so fascinated him. The mechanistic acceleration and aural laceration of the end of the Belle Époque, which was followed by the progressive and noisy symphony of the First World War – all this fit into Russolo's wooden boxes. They remind one of a barrel organ, but as soon as the handle turns, they begin emitting screeches, squeaks, and other noises caused by various taut strings inside the box whose sound can be regulated by the speed at which the handle is turned.
The Opening Performance Orchestra thus took its place among the few artists to develop the potential of the *intonarumori* in this century. They commissioned replicas of three of Russolo's eight instruments

OPO – Inspirium Primum (self-release, 2006)

OPO – Spring Ceremony (self release, 2006)

Milan Knizak & OPO – BROKEN RE/BROKEN (Sub Rosa, 2015)

and began building a repertoire. This part of their activities culminated last year with the premiere of *Trio No. 1* at the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karslruhe. In November 2017, OPO joined forces with the Italian Cultural Institute in Prague, Czech Radio, the National Gallery, and other institutions to organise a "Futurist Week", which included concerts, lectures, and special radio broadcasts.

The group also performed in Miroslav Pudlák's *Intonarumori Concerto* for the howler, scraper, and crackler (ululatore, stropicciatore, crepitatore) and ensemble, premiered in 2018 by the Berg Orchestra and published last year on Pudlák's CD in the Composer Portraits series (attached to CMQ 2019/4). Pudlák also took part in the making of OPO's album *The Noise of Art*, this time as a pianist. The album, published as an eighty-minute CD and also, unusually, as a double LP (it was not created on a computer – it was born in concert performances and in the studio and includes acoustic instruments and human voices), contains only music for the intonarumori. In addition to the ensemble's own music, there are also pieces by the Berlin-based poet and electronic composer Fred Möpert or music by Luciano Chessa and Blixa Bargeld. These last two also appear on the album as narrators.

While Chessa has been working with futurism as an artist, musician, and theorist for years (he published *Luigi Russolo, Futurist: Noise, Visual Arts, and the Occult* in 2012), Bargeld has been the leader of Einstürzende Neubauten for four decades – a group whose remarkable sound, often placed under the "industrial" label, was built in large part on original musical instruments built from various found materials ranging from metal and plastic through construction materials to the turbine of a small jet plane.

Some of the seven pieces on *The Noise of Art* were featured in various concerts. The one to receive the most performances is the twenty-minute *Futurist Soirée* (the version on the recording is the one recorded during the Futurist Week), which features the intonarumori, violin, piano, and two narrators reading extracts from the *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the *Manifesto of Futurist Musicians* (1910) by Francesco Balilla Pratella.

The author of this text is often tasked with reading Pratella's text, while Marinetti's is read on the album by Luciano Chessa. One of the previous narrators was Pavel Zajíček, a Czech poet and leader of the utterly original underground music group DG 307, which, in its first creative period in the mid-1970s, operated on the field of noise music made using non-musical instruments, not unlike Einstürzende Neubauten.

Unlike other pieces by OPO, the music for intonarumori allows for the possibility of "unplugged" performances – the least amplified version of this piece was performed in June 2016 at the opening of *Enrico Prampolini, Futurism, Stage Design, and the Polish Avant-Garde Theatre* in the Museum of Art in Łódź, while one of the most opulent versions was recorded by Czech Radio.

At a certain point, OPO decided that everyone who was meant to see and hear the intonarumori had already done so. They put them away to focus on new projects and develop their idea of fraction music – they certainly do not wish to be labelled a historical instrument ensemble. The photogenic

OPO & Merzbow – MERZOPO (2 CD, Sub Rosa, 2018)

OPO & Blixa Bargeld & Luciano Chessa & Fred Möpert – The Noise of Art (2 CD, Sub Rosa 2019)

nature of the commissioned instruments (which were even exhibited as part of the *Sounds, Codes, Images* exhibition at Prague City Gallery) was so striking that this danger turned out to be very real. Audience reactions, which focused on the "curious" nature of the instrument at least as often as the music itself, only confirms popular notions that visual elements often stand in the way of sonic ones.

There will clearly be more encounters between the Opening Performance Orchestra and various protagonists of the avant-garde scene both at home and internationally. Last summer at the Ostrava Days festival – in contrast to their previous outing at the event, which was in the spirit of Cageian intentional irregularity – they performed a progressively denser and strictly linear interpretation of the works of New York composer and multimedia artist Phill Niblock. Their piece was scored for computers and video, which was prepared by the Czech multimedia artist, composer, and organologist Milan Guštar, another of their frequent collaborators.

As for collaborators at home, Pavel Zajíček, already mentioned above, is one of the most important. Thanks to the Opening Performance Orchestra, his characteristic, slow reciting style extended beyond the generally rock-based framework of late-period DG 307. With OPO, as with DG 307, Zajíček plays the part of the reciting or reading soloist, a frontman whose charisma lies in his very presence on the stage. He does not, however, read his own texts. *Acid Lands* was a piece prepared in 2014 for the Pohyb – Zvuk – Prostor (Movement – Sound – Space) festival in Ostrava to mark the occasion of the centenary of William S. Burroughs. In this piece, Zajíček reads from Burroughs' *Western Lands*, while the composition *Vteřina a věčnost* (*The Second and the Eternity*) is based on texts by the Czech philosopher Ladislav Klíma (1878–1928).

Finally, there are OPO's collaborations with the versatile artist Milan Knížák. *BROKEN RE/BROKEN*, which maps a sonic journey from Knížák's destroyed vinyl records to digital destructions of the already destroyed, received five live performances, the latest at the Czech Museum of Music. The March 2014 performance at the MaerzMusik festival in Berlin was published on CD a year later. Another joint project is *Aktuální univerzita* (*The Aktuál University*), a setting of a text by Knížák from the 1960s, when he was highly involved in possibilities for communitarian and otherwise "alternative" arrangements of social life. OPO's setting draws on the aesthetic of musique concrète and the text is read by its author. Finally, part of the Opening Performance Orchestra also took part in recording, producing, and publishing Knížák's string quartets. For more on the quartets and *BROKEN RE/BROKEN,* see my text in CMQ 4/2019.

NOISE ORCHESTRA

The Opening Performance Orchestra proposes that the common denominator of the musical avant-gardists and underground noise performers is an attempt to emancipate all the sounds and noises that wind their way through the music of the 20th century and "continue inspiring artists today. The first to approach this topic radically were the Italian futurists – not only musically, but also theoretically in their manifestos, particularly Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noise*. The avant-garde music

PHOTO © ZKM KARLSRUHE, SERGIY PTUSHKIN

Performing Trio No. 1, 2019

of John Cage, French musique concrète, the Fluxus movement, the beginnings of industrial music in the 1970s, and early-'90s Japanese noise – all these are striking contributions to the debate."

In the quoted enumeration, Russolo and Cage, who have long since found their place in the textbooks of 20th-century art, meet the only recently "academicised" scene of Japanese noise, which represents probably the most extreme form of electronic music. Thanks to projects like Hijokaidan, C.C.C.C., and Merzbow, its roots stretch back to the early 1980s. In the '90s, "Japanoise" was considerably invigorated by the arrival of digital technology.

And although for a brief period at the turn of the millennium, noise became a relatively popular genre that considerably enriched the vocabularies of free improvisation and rock-oriented spontaneity, key figures in Japanese music have maintained an aura of inaccessibility and severity, either in spite of or due to their extensive discographies and legendary status. The noises which they structure in blocks or spread out into drones are often harrowing and/or painful for listeners. The music's total expressivity is frequently accompanied by a shocking visual accompaniment, including various combinations of sex and violence (although Merzbow, whose covers and booklet texts once focused on themes such as bondage, has now given all these means over to veganism and the struggle for animal rights). Humour and aloofness are neither present nor appropriate.

OPO engages in creative collaborations with noise musicians, including with the stars and co-founders of the Japanese noise scene, Masami Akita (Merzbow) and Hiroshi Hasegawa (Astro, C.C.C.C.). Although both albums revealed the unforeseen openness of OPO's seemingly impenetrable fraction music, the collaboration mostly took place on a conceptual level – the individual protagonists made their own pieces on the basis of a shared idea.

Live on stage, the Opening Performance Orchestra's collaborations have included the Czech power electronics duo Magadan or the solo project Instinct Primal. Many performances take place within OPO's concert series NOISE ZONE, an open project mapping the extreme electronic scene with the aim of introducing various methods and results of experiments with sound material. Since 2010, there have been eighteen instalments. In addition to artists such as Merzbow, Astro, and Milan Knížák, who were mentioned above, the series has also featured noise artists including Napalmed, Einleitungszeit, and Schloss Tegal.

We should also add that the visual layer of OPO – album covers, videos used in concert performances, and photographs – is "created through the principles of *fraction music* and also give rise to opaque visual structures (both static and moving) that may be difficult to comprehend. They also yield connections with the apparently trustworthy known world and with another world altogether. Sound and images are two distinct means of expressing a single originating thought." One can peruse the Opening Performance Orchestra's photographic oeuvre through their regularly published calendar, though there were also two exhibitions at Kávovarna, a café in Prague: *Tremors of Music* (2012) and *Reflections of Time* (2016).

by Barbora Vacková

CZECH MUSIC EVERY DAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD DURING THE SPRING OF 2020

Forced closure of concert halls and theatres, cancellation of all cultural and social events, compulsory quarantine – that was the spring of 2020 in the Czech Republic. The COVID-19 pandemic was a hard blow for (not only) musical life and the far-reaching impacts are still difficult to assess. Individuals could support their favourite ensembles and venues, who suddenly found themselves without any income, by purchasing what became known as a "Ticket to Nothing", i.e. a voucher for a non-existent cultural event, or by refusing to ask for their money back when a performance was cancelled. In return, they could liven up their days spent at home in isolation by at least consuming culture online, whether in the form of the older recordings that many institutions made available in response to the situation, or entirely new projects created during the pandemic (and despite it).

In the field of contemporary music, the latter trend began with the Brno Contemporary Orchestra, who prepared a three-day online festival, QUARANTA(E)NA, that included sound recordings of the "New My Country" project from 2018 (a cycle of six modern variations on the individual movements of Smetana's opus magnum), complemented for this occasion by a visual component – video of the depopulated world from six different windows. The festival concluded with a live stream from an empty Na Orlí Theatre, where a handful of musicians spread across several rooms performed five contemporary pieces including a premiere, *Avšak, hudba pro rozprášený orchestr* (*Nevertheless, music for scattered orchestra*) by the composer, saxophonist, and clarinettist Pavel Zlámal.

The Ostrava Center for New Music created a project titled "The World: Ostravská banda Solos", publishing audiovisual recordings every Wednesday starting on May 1st featuring new solo pieces performed by members of Ostravská banda. The recordings were made in twelve different countries and often feature world premieres. The very first of these, by Petr Kotík, included the first performance of a piece for solo alto flute performed by the composer in New York. In early June, Miroslav Beinhauer performed – and became the first to record – a piano piece by Alois Hába.

MARCH-JUNE

The Prague Spring also prepared a rich programme, considerably adapted to the online world and mostly featuring chamber music. It is encouraging that the new piece which the festival commissioned from Jan Ryant Dřízal was still performed. *Zběsilost v srdci* (*Wild at Heart*) was inspired by a dream the composer had in which he was possessed by an animal or demon. The theme of dreams runs through the entire composition: the word dream is repeated in thirty-one languages and the ritualistic and mystical character of the piece is bolstered by the use of a shamanic rattle.

By the deadline for this issue of Czech Music Quarterly (mid-June), musical life is slowly returning to normal. Cultural events for up to five hundred people are now allowed if security measures are adhered to (distancing; face masks; disinfectant) and we can only hope there won't be a second wave of the pandemic, which would surely mark a return to the old and strict regulations. Fans of new music can begin looking forward to the NODO festival of contemporary opera, which was moved from June to late August, when it is to take place in full, as it was originally planned. Let us wish them luck.

Pavel Šnajdr conducting the Brno Contemporary Orchestra

MARCH-JUNE

1 April 2020, Czech Radio Vltava – online broadcast. Music for Sirens… micro-concerts with the emergency siren test. ***Attention* (world premiere). Concept / music: Jakub Rataj.** Roman Fojtíček, Michael Jermář, Pavel Zlámal – saxophones, Shahab Tolouie.

19 April 2020, 7 pm, online. Quarant(a)ena. **New "My Country" and a View from the Window.** Brno Contemporary Orchestra, conductor: Pavel Šnajdr.

21 April 2020, 7pm, live stream from the Na Orlí Theatre, Brno. Quarant(a)ena. **Pavel Zlámal: *Nevertheless – music for scattered orchestra* (world premiere).** Brno Contemporary Orchestra, conductor: Pavel Šnajdr

1 May 2020, online. The World: Ostravská banda Solos. **Petr Kotík: *No Agency* (world premiere**). Petr Kotík – alto flute.

20 May 2020, 8pm, live stream from the Janáček Theatre, Prague Spring festival. Prague Spring. **Jan Ryant Dřízal: *Wild at Heart* (world premiere of a Prague Spring commission)**. Brno Contemporary Orchestra, conductor: Pavel Šnajdr.

22 May 2020, live stream from the Academy of Performing Arts. "Young Talents at Prague Spring Festival". Prague Spring. **Lukáš Hurník: *Martirium* (world premiere).** Eduard Kollert – violin, Jiří Kollert – piano.

3 June 2020, 11:50am, Podolí Swimming Pool, Prague. Music for Sirens… micro-concerts with the emergency siren test. ***The Sirens of Titan* (world premiere). Concept / music: Jan Ryant Dřízal.** Pavla Radostová, Sylva Sasková – voice, Suboto Choir, choirmaster: Michaela Králová.

3 June 2020, online. The World: Ostravská banda Solos. **Alois Hába: *Three Fugues for piano, 1918* (world premiere).** Miroslav Beinhauer – piano.

by Lukáš M. Vytlačil

Andreas Hammerschmidt and His Sacred Concertos

Andreas Hammerschmidt:
Kirchen- und Tafelmusik.
Bert Siegmund, editor.
Edition Michaelsteiner Musik-Archiv,
Band 4. ortus musikverlag, Beeskow 2019.

Andreas Hammerschmidt is not among our most famous composers and his works are only rarely featured within concerts of Baroque music. However, this is an important figure in the Czech musical culture of the 17th century, one whose fate reflects the particular history of Bohemia following the Battle of White Mountain and the forceful process of recatholisation under Habsburg rule.

Andreas Hammerschmidt in 1646

From Northern Bohemia to Saxony
Hammerschmidt was born in Most, a city in northern Bohemia, either in 1611 or 1612. His precise date of birth is uncertain – the parish record books of the local Protestant church between 1609 and 1622 have not survived. Hammerschidt's father Hans (1581–1636) hailed from the town of Carthaus near Zittau in Saxony, but he worked as a saddler in the north of Bohemia, first in Žatec and then (from 1610 onwards) in Most. His family left for Saxony between March and August 1626 to avoid recatholisation, and in 1629, Hans became a free citizen of the city of Freiberg. We know nothing about Andreas' activities during this time – not even who taught him music, as there is no mention of him in the records of the Freiberg gymnasium. There were many excellent musicians active in Freiberg at the time, such as Christoph Demantius, who was a cantor there from 1604 to 1643, or the organists Balthasar Springer, Christoph Schreiber, and Stephan Otto. We can only prove Hammerschmidt's ties to the latter: he and Otto maintained a friendly relationship, as attested to by Otto's poem *Kronen Krönlein*, written in 1648. Schreiber is a likely candidate for Andreas' teacher, as Hammerschmidt later assumed two positions previously held by Schreiber.

In July 1633, Hammerschmidt took up a position as organist at the court of Count Rudolf von Bünau at Schloss Weesenstein in Saxony, where Hammerschmidt's friend Stephan Otto was employed as cantor. The following year, however, a position became available at Freiberg's Petrikirche when Christoph Schreiber left to Zittau, and Hammerschmidt's request from the 9th of October 1634 was granted on the 8th of December. Nevertheless, he only officially assumed the position in July 1635, as he still had obligations in his previous position.

Even though with this new post, he was the principal organist of the city of Freiberg, his wages were very low.

The city of Zittau, an egraving by Matthäus Merian from 1647

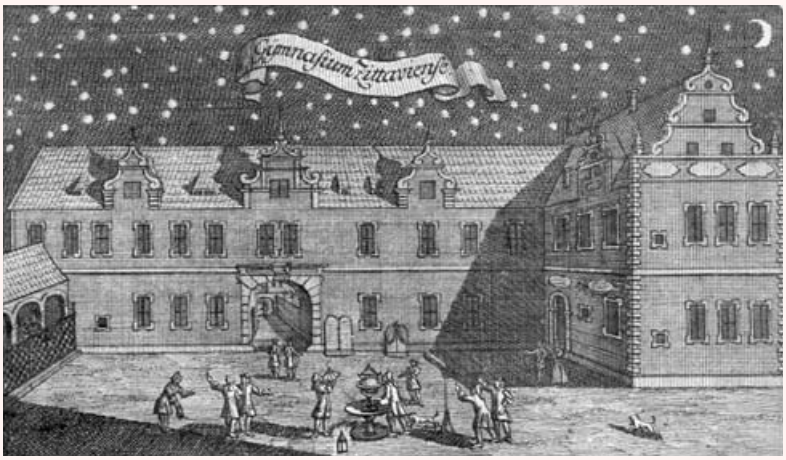
It was at this time that he published his first collection, *Erster Fleiss* (1636), dedicated to the mayor and the city council. He probably also composed the first part of his *Musikalische Andachten* (1639) for liturgical use in the Petrikirche. On the 22nd of August 1637, this church also witnessed his marriage to Ursula Teufel, daughter of Prague merchant Martin Teufel, with whom he had six children.

Organist in Lusatian Zittau

When Schreiber died in 1639, Hammerschmidt became his successor in the position of organist in Zittau's Johanniskirche. He said goodbye to the Freiberg municipal council with a letter of gratitude sent on the 18th of September 1639 and spent the remaining thirty-six years of his life in the Lusatian city of Zittau, which is located near the contemporary tri-point border between Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic. At the time, Lusatia had only recently become a hereditary part of Saxony, as the Peace of Prague (1635) had excluded it from the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. It was here that Hammerschmidt truly developed his creative activities. These, however, are poorly documented, as all records were burnt during a fire in 1757. His colleagues there were Simon Crusius, cantor and teacher at the Johanneum gymnasium, and Christian Keimann, the rector of the same school.

The organist's duties included composing and directing liturgical music, working with the soloists in the school choir (which was led by the cantor), and with the instrumentalists. As Hammerschmidt was the only musician in the city who could provide education in the performance of keyboard instruments, he also had a number of pupils. His compositions became very popular, as attested to by a number of publications, and to this day, Hammerschmidt is considered one of the leading composers of Protestant sacred music. In 1655, Johann Rist called him "Mr Hammerschmidt of world-wide renown". Thanks to his knowledge of the organ, he was often invited to test instruments. In 1642, he travelled to nearby Bautzen, and he tested the organ in Freiberg in 1659 and 1672. Although Hammerschmidt remained in Zittau for the rest of his life, there are records of his journeys to other Saxon and Lusatian cities – in addition to Bautzen and Freiberg, he also travelled to Dresden, Leipzig, and Görlitz.

For proof of the importance of his position, we need only consider that the city council named him the general and forest superintendent in Waltersdorf an der Lauscha. All this led to much greater financial stability. In 1656, he bought a house in Webergasse street, just across from the church, later also adding a garden, and in 1659, he also acquired property outside the city on which he built a summer house.



Zittau gymnasium at the beginning of the 18th century

His funeral, which took place on the 3rd of November 1675, was attended by large crowds. His tombstone bore the inscription "The Orpheus of Zittau".

Prologues to his collections and the surviving letters prove that Hammerschmidt was very well educated. He published over four hundred works in fourteen collection, most of them works of sacred music. In addition to masses, they include cantatas, motets, chorales, and concertos. His musical language was based in the modern concertante style, which he enriched with his distinctive instrumentation and remarkable melodic invention. His preferred forms were the motet, the sacred concerto, and the aria. A specific type of composition are the dialogues in which the composer set biblical texts, e.g. in the collections *Musikalische Andachten* (*Musical Devotions*, 1639–1653) and *Gespräche über die Evangelia* (*Discussion of the Gospels*, 1655, 1656). However, he did not entirely avoid secular genres, particularly songs and dances, which were published in several collections.

Kirchen- und Tafelmusik

The most recent contribution to the modern reception of Hammerschmidt's music is a selection from his collection *Kirchen- und Tafelmusik* (*Church and Table Music*). This collection of twenty-two sacred concertos was printed in 1662. It is one of Hammerschmidt's paramount works. He presents himself as one of the most significant representatives of evangelical musical culture in Saxony in the early Baroque, along with Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672), whose musical footsteps he followed. The concertante works have varied instrumentations, from solo soprano voice accompanied by strings and basso continuo to five-voice vocal writing accompanied by Baroque trumpets and trombones. As was common in Lutheran music since the 16th century, the main emphasis is on the text and its modelling in the music.

This new critical edition represents the fourth volume in the Michaelsteiner Musik-Archiv series, published in Germany by ortus musikverlag, editor Bert Siegmund (ISMN 979-0-502340-93-3, catalogue number om231/1). The edited selection is comprised of nine concertos: 1. *Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren*, 2. *Herr, unser Herrscher*, 3. *Herr, ich habe lieb die Stätte deines Hauses*, 4. *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, 5. *Nun danket alle Gott*, 6. *Herzlich lieb hab ich dich*, 7. *Ein jegliches hat seine Zeit*, 8. *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her*, 9. *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*. The compositions are based on evangelical songs which were already cornerstones of the repertoire that confirmed the confessional identity of the churches of the Wittenberg reformation. There is plenty of the instrumental diversity mentioned above: the individual pieces are scored for one to five voices and instrumental accompaniment from ranging from two to six instrumental parts. The excellent edition is in large score format with a hard cover. The notation is eminently clear and legible. The necessary editorial notes are inscribed in the usual manner (text in cursive, legati with dotted lines), the few other corrections are explained in the critical note. For practical use, it is very useful to have abbreviations of the instruments used in every system – particularly with first readings, this helps one navigate the score with more certainty, especially given the variable instrumentation of the individual sacred concertos. There is also an opening commentary in German and English, bilingual versions of all the texts, several facsimile extracts, and a description of the source. We can only hope that this high-quality edition contributes to greater knowledge and dissemination of Hammerschmidt's works in our region.

by Marta Vaculínová [1]
and Petr Daněk [2]

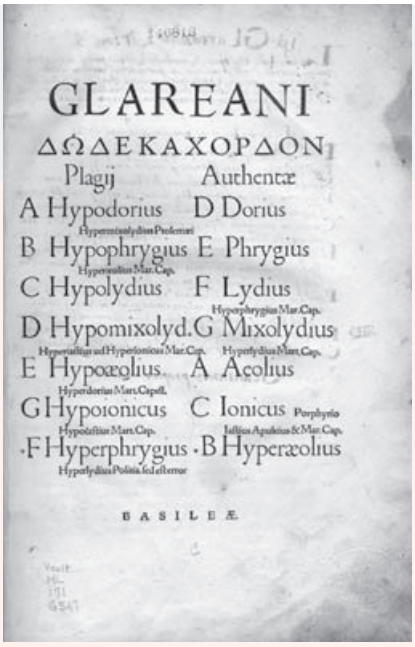
HUMANISTS IN RENAISSANCE BOHEMIA AND MUSIC

In the age of Petrarch, when Bohemia was ruled over by Charles IV, a spiritual movement was born in Italy. It was marked by a strong interest in ancient thinkers and their ideas, and also by a return to classical Roman Latin. Medieval verse forms in poems and songs gradually gave way to the ancient system of syllable weight; medieval corruptions and neologisms from various national languages were dispensed with. And Italian writers weren't just inspired by the forms used by their ancient forebears – they also took on their ideas, focused on the improvement of man, on his actions benefitting all of society (humanism), and on the creation of a functional system of scholarship. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, Italy was flooded by Greek scholars. They brought with them the heritage of Ancient Greek thought – mostly philosophy but poetry too. The first translations of Plato and Homer into Latin soon followed and were received enthusiastically. Intellectuals were also fascinated by Greco-Roman mythology and its interpretation. It was put to use in the arts, specifically in the decorations of renaissance palaces and municipal administrative centres.

The arrival of humanism and the Renaissance in the Czech lands was inhibited by the Hussite wars – this series of conflicts between Christian Hussite reformists and the Holy Roman Church lasted from 1419 to 1434, but Hussitism defined the history of the entire 15th century in Bohemia. After George of Poděbrady (Jiří z Poděbrad) ascended the throne, however, in the 1460s and '70s, Italian influences slowly infiltrated the Czech lands, particularly in the works of diplomats who had travelled to Italy. During Jagiellonian rule (1471–1526), Italian influences were fortified by an intermediary: Hungarian humanism as expounded by the intellectuals of the court at Buda. Members of the court office in Prague also entertained humanist pastimes. Some of them had the advantage of having studied in Italy, but the Utraquists – a moderate faction of the Hussites that constituted a majority of the Bohemian population until the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War – overcame their shortcomings in Latin by focusing on literature written in Czech. It is to this period that we date the first Czech translations of the authors of antiquity, though they are smaller in number than renderings of works by the Italian humanists and Erasmus of Rotterdam – some of the earliest surviving Czech translations. Humanist scholarship was cultivated in the courts of Catholic noblemen and bishops – for a long time, the university in Prague took a rather reserved stance towards these new impulses. It was thus the regions in the west and northwest of Bohemia, falling under the sphere of influence of the universities in Leipzig and Frankfurt an der Oder, that become the centres of humanism, along with the city of Olomouc and its troupe of humanists gathered around the bishop Thurzo.

The dissemination of humanist education was hastened by the invention of the printing press. In Utraquist Bohemia, printing developed

1) Centre for Classical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences
2) Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences


GLAREANI
ΔΩΔΕΚΑΧΟΡΔΟΝ
Plagij Authentæ
A Hypodorius D Dorius
B Hypophrygius E Phrygius
C Hypolydius F Lydius
D Hypomixolyd. G Mixolydius
E Hypoæolius A Æolius
G Hypoionicus C Ionicus Porphyrio
·F Hyperphrygius ·B Hyperæolius
BASILEÆ

Heinrich Glareanus (1488–1563): *Dodecachordon* printed by Heinrich Petri, Basel, 1547
Categorisation of the modes

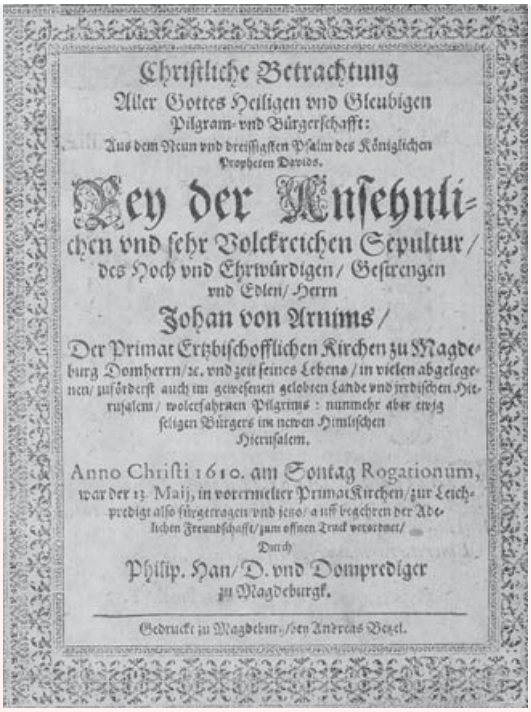
slowly, but book traders supplied intellectuals with high-quality editions of the ancient classics and the humanists of Basel and Nuremberg. Many handbooks were published with the aim of improving common communication in Latin – conversational handbooks, collections of letters, etc. The rise of Lutheranism and the related influence of the university in Wittenberg were crucial for Czech intellectuals. Martin Luther claimed allegiance to the legacy of Jan Hus, thus symbolically freeing the Czech Utraquists from their isolation in central Europe. Wittenberg became the second most popular university for Czech students, after the university in Prague. The universities brought back the art of composing occasional poetry, an interest in natural phenomena and their theological interpretation, and finally also a liking for spiritual poetry and music.

In addition to the spiritual compositions used for school teaching or sung by literary brotherhoods (choir groups composed mostly of citizen and craftsmen) as part of church services, this period also saw the creation of the first secular compositions in the Czech lands, written on the occasion of weddings or graduations. Another welcome occasion for musical performances were various celebrations, for instance those connected with the coronation of a new ruler.

Thanks to travel aimed at study and learning, but also given developments on the book market, the most advanced music from the developed cultural regions in western Europe made its way to Bohemia. Humanist scholarship is also present in Catholic circles; clerics and monastery superiors supported Latin authors and applied themselves to collecting printed books and manuscripts. Ancient authors became the cornerstone of poetics and rhetoric at Jesuit schools. Nevertheless, there are only a few Catholic intellectuals amongst the non-Catholic majority.

Of course, humanist education partially infiltrated the Latin city schools, whose principles and teaching were inspired by Philip Melanchthon. In the second half of the 16th century, the Czech lands boasted a dense network of Utraquist city schools, overseen by the university in Prague, which also provided teachers – recent graduates. At the time, university lecturers were models for their students in cultivating occasional poetry, which gradually made its way to the cities of the Czech lands. This led to the creation of a relatively significant class of benefactors of urban culture, often hailing from Prague's university environment. However, a large part of Moravia and the more remote cities in northwest and western Bohemia were outside of the influence of the university in Prague. The schools in these regions – often first-rate – summoned their teachers from Wittenberg and other German universities on the other side of the border.

Another important moment is the relocation of the imperial court of Rudolf II to Prague at the turn of the 1570s and '80s. Prague, before then a rather provincial town which had still not washed away all the marks of the Hussite wars, became an important hub in central Europe and a travel destination for intellectuals from around the continent. The educated emperor surrounded himself with scientists and artists. The court



Christliche Betrachtung
Aller Gottes Heiligen vnd Gleubigen
Pilgram- vnd Bürgerschafft:
Aus dem Neun vnd dreissigsten Psalm des Königlichen
Propheten Davids.
Bey der Ansehnlichen vnd sehr Volckreichen Sepultur/
des Hoch vnd Ehrwürdigen/ Gestrengen
vnd Edlen/ Herrn
Johan von Arnims/
Der Primat Ertzbischofflichen Kirchen zu Magdeburg Domherrn/ &c. vnd zeit seines Lebens/ in vielen abgelegenen/ zuförderst auch im gewesenen gelobten Lande vnd irrdischen Hierusalem/ wolerfahrnen Pilgrims: nunmehr aber ewig seligen Bürgers im newen Himlischen Hierusalem.
Anno Christi 1610. am Sontag Rogationum, war der 13. Maij, in vorermelter Primat Kirchen/ zur Leichpredigt also fürgetragen vnd jetzo/ auff begehren der Adelichen Freundschafft/ zum offenen Druck verordnet/
Durch
Philip. Han/ D. vnd Dompredigern zu Magdeburgk.
Gedruckt zu Magdeburg/ durch Andreas Betzel.

Philipp Hahn: funeral sermon for Johann von Arnim
Christliche Betrachtung aller Gottes Heiligen und Gleubigen
printed by Andreas Betzel, Magdeburg, 1610; title page

intellectuals brought along an interest in new genres, which soon made their way into the urban classes. The end of non-Catholic culture in the Czech lands was marked by the defeat of the rebellious estates and crowned by the Battle of White Mountain. A rigorous process of counter-reformation followed. It led to an exodus of non-Catholic intellectuals, the destruction of a number of libraries and collections, and the closure of the university in Prague. Education was taken over by Catholic institutions led by the Jesuit order. Under their influence, the selection of literary genres changed and counter-reformation ideology gradually took control of both the social and the natural sciences.

The series we present to the readers in several instalments will introduce several crucial figures in Czech Rudolfinian and pre-White Mountain humanism, figures that played an important role in shaping the musical and literary culture of Bohemia. Our aim is to situate their work in the European context and show their true import without nationalist misinterpretations or embellishments.

Jiří Cropatius of Teplice, The Travelling Composer: Teplice – Wittenberg – Prague – – Padua – Venice – Jerusalem and back.

It is remarkable how many times Jiří Cropatius (Georgius Cropatius or Cropacius, Georg Kropácz or Kropáčž, Jorgius Cropatius) is mentioned in the musicological literature. The frequency of citations is all the more strange as very little is known about the life or work of Cropatius. He is mostly referenced in connection to his 1578 publication of a collection of masses with Angelo Gardano, a leading European publisher specialising in sheet music. No copies of this volume survive (or are still awaiting discovery). However, the mere fact that this author – who came from a family of Protestant city dwellers and tried to make his name in several Czech cities – published a collection of polyphonic settings of the Mass ordinary in 1570s Venice is so historically exceptional that it deserves our attention.

Jiří Cropatius' Origins

Information about the origin, life, and activities of Jiří Cropatius were thus far deduced primarily from his few published volumes of occasional poetry. We, however, have managed to discover some details that have remarkably extended his brief biography. Cropatius was born around the year 1550 in Teplice. We have no specifics on how he began his education – he tells us himself that he was interested in languages from an early age; in addition to Latin and Greek, he also displayed an affinity for Hebrew, with which he might have come into contact thanks to Teplice's sizeable Jewish community. He also used Czech in his publications and we can assume he later learnt German and Italian.

Cropatius doubtless extended his language skills while studying at the university in Wittenberg, where he was inscribed on the 4th of December 1569 as Georgius Cropacius Vandalus. He left for Prague in 1574, where he was active as a writer until 1575. For some time, Cropatius was the preceptor (tutor; teacher) of Balthasar, son of the vice-chancellor of the Kingdom of Bohemia, Jiří Mehl of Střelice. It seems that he left no particular mark on the Czech lands, where we lose any trace of him. He appears again in 1578: in Italy and on his way to the Holy Land.

Cropatius in Italy and On His Way to the Holy Land

Before setting off on his pilgrimage, Cropatius allegedly studied in Padua. Claims that he stayed

Jost Amman (1539–1591): *Procession of the Doge to the Bucintoro on Ascension Day, with a View of Venice,* ca. 1565

in this city are supported by a piece of literary evidence. A manuscript by the eminent Italian humanist Bernardino Baldi of Urbino (1553–1617) includes a transcription of a Greek poem written in Sapphic stanza signed by Cropatius. Beginning in 1573, Baldi studied Greek in Padua, having already mastered Hebrew and Chaldean.

It is possible that it was during his studies in Padua that Baldi met Cropatius and received his poem. Baldi included it in a section of his manuscript which grouped together Greek and Italian poems dedicated to Gioseffo Zarlino (1517–1590), an important Italian composer and music theorist.

In the style of the humanist eulogy, Cropatius' poem celebrates music as a great gift from the heavens, addressing its beneficial effect on people and acknowledging Zarlino's contributions to music in general and to the art of singing in particular.

We know of Cropatius' journey to Jerusalem thanks to the surviving travel diaries of the aristocratic adventurers, mercenaries, and travellers Leopold von Wedel (1544–1615) and Jost Fögelli (1554–1607). Both mention Jiří Cropatius as a Czech student and musician. He probably joined the expedition in May 1578 in Venice. The Dutch doctor Bernardus Paludanus (1550–1633) also took part in the expedition. His diary survives, giving us precise information on the course of the journey. The travellers set off from Venice by ship on the 22nd of July 1578, headed for Cyprus, and then on via Tripolis to Jaffa, where they landed on the 4th of August. Forty-eight days after setting off from Venice, on the 8th of August 1578, they arrived in Jerusalem, where they undertook a week-long tour of the holy sites, the usual programme for all visitors and pilgrims.

On the 16th of August, the nobles and their guides then continued in their journey, while Cropatius (along with three Jesuits) remained in Jerusalem in order to apply himself to music and compose for the brothers in the monastery of Saint Saviour. Twenty years later, Kryštof Harant of Polžice and Bezdružice (1564–1621), a Czech Protestant nobleman, humanist, and composer, also stayed at – and composed in – this monastery.

It is of interest that travel notices from Jerusalem describe Cropatius as a Catholic who did not refuse confession in a Franciscan church. The other members of the group, who were Lutherans, understandably denied confession. We can thus assume that Cropatius converted during his stay in Italy. In Jerusalem, he met Meletius Pegas, later

Cesare Vecellio (ca. 1521– ca. 1601): a veduta with a view of the Palazzo Ducale, ca. 1590

Jiří Cropatius of Teplice (1550–?): *Carmen ad filium Dei,* printed by Jiří Nigrin, Prague, 1575

the Greek Patriarch of Alexandria, who celebrated him in a Latin poem as an excellent musician and a connoisseur of languages.
From this point on, our knowledge of Cropatius' fate runs thin. We do not when and how he returned to Europe (or whether he ever returned to Bohemia). It remains uncertain whether we can identify him with a student of the same name who was expelled from the seminary in Olomouc in 1580.

Cropatius as a Poet
In literature, Cropatius presented himself as a poet. In addition to the standard Latin, he wrote poems in Greek since he was a student, and he is also important for being the first Bohemian pre-White-Mountain humanist to publish his own poems written in Hebrew. His surviving poems are all in the genres of occasional and religious poetry. As for the Latin works, we can note a highly developed craft of verse technique and a mastery of the basic rules of the genres. He used virtually only two metric devices: the elegiac couplet and the Sapphic stanza. Cropatius' Greek and Hebrew verse is still awaiting its appraisal. Though both these languages appear as variants in his publications, Greek was often prioritised and the poet was appreciated throughout Europe for his knowledge of the Hellenic language.

Cropatius' Wittenberg education is apparent in his choice of subject matter and form – after all, their Wittenberg education had already marked an older generation of Czech humanists including Matouš Collinus and Tomáš Mitis. Here, music was often a close companion of poetry. It is highly likely that Cropatius himself did not consider the composition of poetry his principal talent, and we must thus consider his poetic experiments in the context of his life as minor works which served to support his search for positions and new friends. For our exploration of his contacts abroad, we have the remarkable source of occasional poems found in manuscripts throughout Europe – and there's nothing to say that more will not be discovered in time.

Cropatius and Music
The volume of polyphonic masses that Cropatius – entirely out of style for Czech intellectuals of the time – published in Venice with Angelo Gardano in 1591 has not survived. We thus have very little information on Cropatius' compositional activities. The only notation that survives from this

period is a manuscript originally written in Wrocław at the close of the 16th century, now stored in Berlin.

This manuscript includes one mass for five voices attributed to Jiří Cropatius. The entire volume is proof to the closeness and connectedness of musical life in Wrocław and Bohemian cities at the end of the 16th century. It includes pieces by composers who lived and worked in Prague, particularly at the imperial court, and also by a distinctive generation of composers from northern Bohemia. Cropatius' mass is the last to be included. It is listed simply as "Missa", without a reference to a model, as is the case in most of the other settings of the mass ordinary included in the edition. This leads us to conclude that this was not a parodic mass.

In a notation of the singing voice in the Quinta vox collection, the mass is listed a *Missa a 5 Georgio Cropatio Authore, Cantus Secundus*. As is made apparent by notes appended to the mass, it was generally written for five voices, though the Pleni sunt coeli was set for only three voices and the Agnus Dei added a sixth. Although only two of the five voices survive, making it difficult for us to assess the true compositional qualities of the piece, we can use the extant voices to determine the mode of Cropatius' mass. It is written in the Dorian mode, i.e. the very same that was used to compose one of the masses of the Venetian print.

Cropatius' mass in the Wrocław manuscript does not include a Credo. We do not know why this part of the ordinary was left out, but it is nothing too far from the norm in this source. The copying was done meticulously, as attested to by the fact that the mass includes a number of signs which unambiguously connect the text with the notated segments. This was not all that common in the practice of central-European collections of the repertoire of vocal polyphony. It is often a sign that the original was printed rather than copied out by hand. Whatever model was used by the scribe who penned the Wrocław manuscript, it is provable that Cropatius' mass was used (or at least known) in Silesia around the year 1600.

The Venetian Publication of Masses by Jiří Cropatius

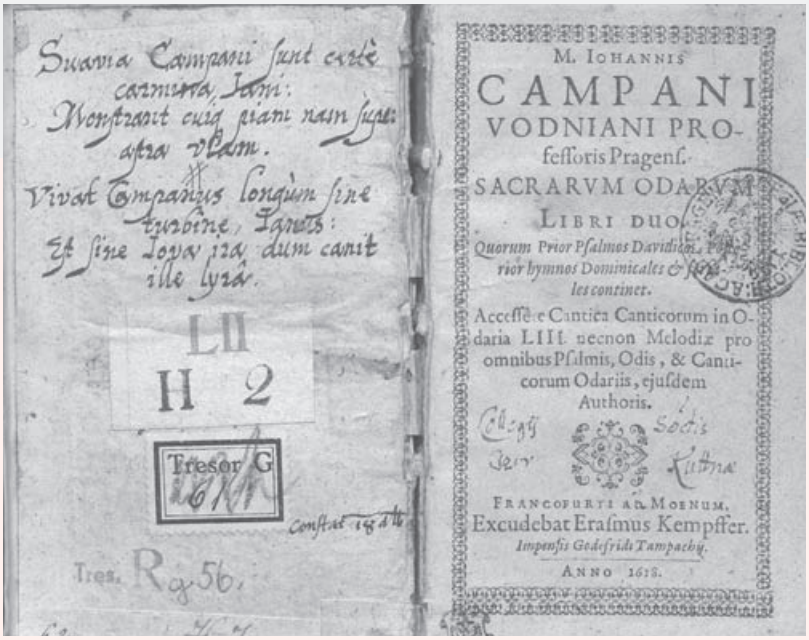
Seeing as Cropatius' Venetian volume has not survived, we have to limit ourselves to hypotheses when discussing its creation, form, and content, just as when discussing the entire oeuvre of this composer. The title was probably *Missarum tomus primus quinque vocum iuxta dodecachordi modos, dorii scilicet, hypodorii et lydii accurate compositus, recensque in luce editus (The First Volume of Masses for Five Voices in Modes Following the Dodecachordon, Composed Carefully in the Dorian, Hypodorian, and Lyrian Modes and Recently Brought to Light)*. We can infer from this that it formed the first part of five-voice settings of the mass ordinary following what was known as the Dodecachordon, a classification of twelve modes newly defined in the third volume of the *Dodecachordon* (ΔΩΔΕΚΑΧΟΡΔΟΝ) by Heinrich Glareanus (1488–1563), published in 1547. Cropatius' publication contained masses in the Dorian, Hypodorian, and Lydian modes.


ALTVS
CONSTANTII ANTEGNATI
LIBER PRIMVS MISSARVM,
SEX ET OCTO VOCVM.
Nuperrimè impressum.
Venetijs apud Angelum Gardanum.

Constantin Antegnati (?): *Liber primus missarum,* title page of an edition printed by Angelo Gardano, 1578

We know not whether Cropatius had composed masses in the other modes or if he had merely made plans to. But even given this bare minimum, we must appreciate the suggested modernity of his thinking. Glarean's conception of the twelve modes was only slowly establishing itself in Europe in the second half of the 16th century, and we have no references to its theoretical acceptance or practical use in the Czech lands in the 1580s. Cropatius' "new" modal thinking, based on a humanist conception of music, is also unique when compared to the greatest compositional authority figures of the 1580s: Orlande de Lassus and Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, both of whom still used the traditional system of eight modes. Even in Italian musical culture, where Glareanus' concept was adapted and developed primarily by Gioseffo Zarlino, the new modal system was only adopted gradually.

However, we must be realistic when considering the Venetian publication of Cropatius' masses.



Johannes Campanus (1572–1622): *Odarum sacrarum libri duo* printed by Erasmus Kempfer, Frankfurt am Main, 1618; title page and a manuscript poem dedicated to Campanus

Gardano did not print Cropatius' masses because the latter was an exceptional composer, but doubtless because Cropatius came to him and paid for the printing. We can thus assume the print run was not too large and neither was the expenditure on preparations. Publication was not followed by a clearly conceived plan for distribution and dissemination. This explains why it is absent among the surviving European collections of music published in the 16th century. Its author was probably also its principal distributor.

Even so, Jiří Cropatius *was* a composer. This is attested to not only by mentions of his Gardano volume and by the copied-out extracts from his mass in the Wrocław manuscript but also by the testimony of his fellow travellers to the Holy Land and his decision to remain and compose in the monastery of Saint Saviour in Jerusalem. It remains unclear where he learned to compose. It was probably during his studies abroad, as if he had followed the path of Czech composers working in the context of literary brotherhoods and preparatory Latin schools, we would now be able to find his compositions in the surviving repertoire of these institutions.

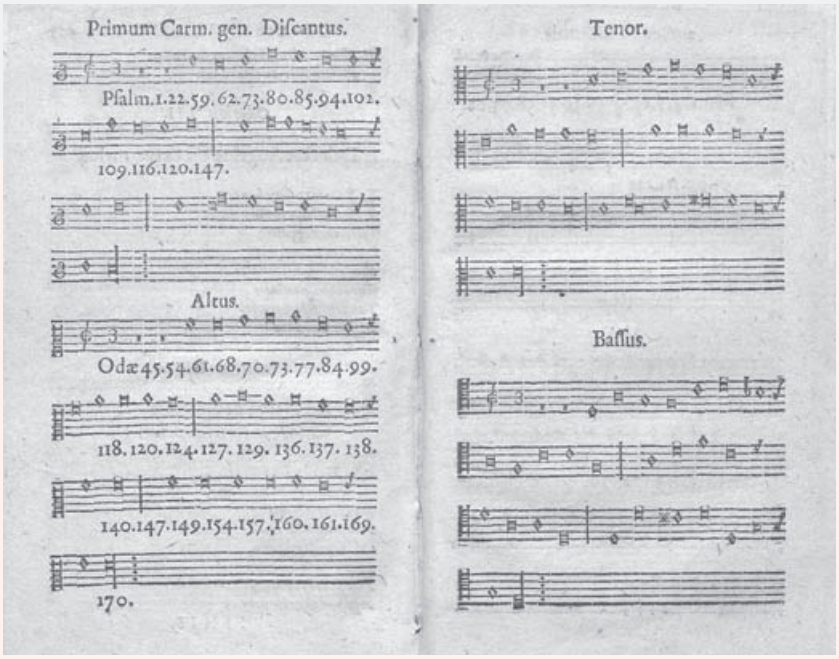
This topic will be discussed in more detail in the study "Musicus et poeta trilinguis. New Findings on the Life and Work of Jiří Cropatius of Teplice", which will be published in Musicalia 2020, the periodical of the Czech Museum of Music, published by the National Museum in Prague.

Johannes Campanus (1572–1622). The Composer Who Composed Nothing

At the beginning of the 17th century, Latin versions of psalms were among the best known (and best selling) works of Jan Campanus of Vodňany, poet and professor at the university in Prague. The first volume of his odes, which contained poetic psalm translations, was published in Prague in 1611 with the printer Jonata Bohutský. The second volume followed two years later and included songs for all the holy days and Sundays in a year, and the third volume was published in 1616: a paraphrase of the Song of Songs.

The popular edition was soon published abroad: the first volume came out in 1613 in Amberg, printed by Johann Schönfeld. All three volumes were collected into a single tome and published in Frankfurt in 1618 in an edition that remains the most famous today, which included a notated appendix. It was on the basis of this edition that Campanus was long considered a composer – even today, pieces from the Frankfurt edition are presented at concerts and on recordings under his name.

How Jan Campanus Became a Composer
Perhaps the first to introduce Campanus to the fellowship of composers and musicians was Robert Eitner, who included the entry *Campanus Johannes* in his 19th-century lexicon. In addition to a short description of the author, Eitner also

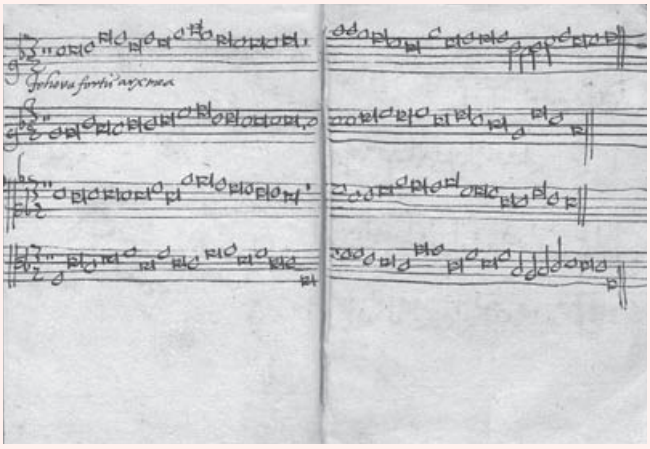


Johannes Campanus:
Odarum sacrarum libri duo (1618)
Sample of the notation

included a reference to the Frankfurt edition of Campanus' odes. The popular interwar volume, Pazdírek's Musical Dictionary, picks up where Eitner left off, providing an entry on Campanus of considerable length but without labelling him a composer, merely stating that "in addition to many humanist volumes, he also made metro-rhythmic translations of the psalms (…) and published the *Sacrarum odarum libri duo* (Frankfurt, 1618)".

The breaking point in the general perception of Campanus as a composer came with Jan Branberger's *Kampanovy harmonie poetické* (*The Poetic Harmonies of Campanus*), written to accompany a bibliophile edition of a translation of Campanus' psalms and odes published in 1942. As it was written during the war, Branberger's text betrays a certain nationalist pathos. Its aim was to display another of the remarkable artistic skills possessed by the well-known pre-White-Mountain man of letters. In the conclusion of his text, Branberger writes that he discovered Campanus as a composer as early as the spring of 1937, after which he handed the music over to musicians. Branberger thus created Campanus the composer, and the times, defined by a need to discover the glorious past of Czech culture, accepted his proposition without a shadow of a doubt.

It was Jitka Snížková who picked up the baton of Branberger's suggestive text, publishing an anthology – highly inspirational in its time – of *Czech*



Notation of a four-part setting of Campanus' text *Jehova fortis arx mea*

Polyphonic Music: A Selection of Polyphonic Works of Czech Origin of the 16th and 17th Centuries, Prague 1958. She describes Campanus directly as a poet and composer and includes transcriptions of three pieces attributed to him. *Rorando coeli* from Campanus' Frankfurt collection was also included in the popular and widely used anthology of Czech music published by Jaroslav Pohanka that same year.

A few years later, the *Czechoslovak Musical Dictionary of People and Institutions* was published, in which Campanus was described as a Czech humanist and composer, his musical oeuvre characterised by "being grounded in the old Renaissance style, but

through a propensity towards homophony arriving at the outer edges of early Baroque monody". This description was worked out in detail in Milan Poštolka's analytical study, published in 1970, which was written in German and published in the renowned university anthology Miscellanea musicologica.

Campanus the composer was thus grounded in international musicology, particularly through a comparative study of his relation to the important central European Lutheran poet and hymnographer Jiří Třanovský (Georgius Tranoscius, 1592–1637). Jitka Snížková returned to editing Campanus' collection of odes and notations once again at the close of the 1970s, when she published a transcription of all the melodies contained in the Frankfurt publication within the *Musica Antiqua Bohemica* edition. This edition fortified the general conviction in Campanus' original compositional activities.

Milan Poštolka is also the author and editor of the Campanus entry in the latest edition of Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, the seminal German musical dictionary. Here too, he assumes that Campanus is not only the author of the poetry in the 1618 Frankfurt edition but also the composer of the appended musical settings. However, in the final sentence of his text, he admits that this cannot be definitively confirmed. The latest edition of the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians was also published around this time, where the Campanus entry was prepared by Jan Kouba, who also describes Campanus as a composer. He has revised his opinion over time, however, and in the recently published Dictionary of Old Czech Hymnographers (2017), he casts doubt on Campanus' authorship.

What We Can Learn from the Prologue to the Amberg Edition (1618)

The legitimacy of these doubts was confirmed by the recent discovery of the collected edition of the *Odarum sacrarum libri duo*, printed by Schönfeld in Amberg in the same year as the famous Frankfurt edition – 1618. It survives in two specimens, one held in the State Library in Regensburg, the other in the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel. The Amberg edition is identical to the Frankfurt edition in the texts of all three collections of poetry, but it differs in the number of accompanying poems and, most importantly, in that it contains a foreword by the author.

The content of the foreword to the 1618 Amberg edition differs considerably from those found in older editions, helping us specify our ideas about Campanus as a poet and about how his odes were set to music. The author casts his mind back to the first edition, published by Jonata Bohutský, and his initial fears about how it would be received, partly due to the fact that he dared set the psalms using a form popular in the Middle Ages. Campanus then evokes his Czech forebears in the genre (namely Matouš Collin and Václav Nicolaides Vodňanský) and names all the supporters and friends who helped him with his work (teachers Lukáš Ezechiel, Jochaim Golzius, Mikuláš Novaský, and Václav Nizenius; supporters Adam Rosacius and his brother Sofoniáš, Jan Benicius, and Jan Kralovický).

Towards the end of the foreword, the author moves from rhetoric back to the circumstances of the publication. He writes that after two years, he was told by numerous individuals to publish both parts of the odes in a single volume. He also added a paraphrase of the Song of Songs. Apparently, when he tried to rework the original odes, he discovered he was only deforming them, which is why he decided it would be better to write new ones.

The foreword concludes with the following passage: "My advisor wished me also to add Czech melodies, that is (as he himself explained) sweet ones; I hoped that I would acquire these melodies from the gentlemen Jan Strejc and Pavel Spongopeus, composers of practical music. However, both were too busy with their activities in the municipal council in Kutná Hora and elsewhere and could not help me. This is why I appended those that had already been sent to me by the school inspector in Kouřim, Tobiáš Adalbert, relying on another's ears. The rest, dear reader, I leave (so that I might finally stop providing arguments in my defence) to your kind judgement."

What the Newly Discovered Foreword Tells Us

The final words of Campanus' foreword make it clear that the Frankfurt edition contains a collection of pieces most likely written by various authors of diverse origin, which were then collected (and perhaps partly composed) by Tobiáš Adalbert. This practice is not all that surprising. We find a similar approach in the Wittenberg publication *Harmonie univocae in odas Horatianas*, prepared by Matouš Collinus following a commission by Jan Hodějovský. Collinus

probably composed some of the monophonic melodies intended for the singing of odes by Horace, but his work mostly consisted of collecting these from various sources. The third edition of Matouš Collins' school book follows in this tradition, published in 1569 by Jan Nicolaides Brněnský as *Libellus elementarius* and printed in Prague by Jan Jičínský. In this edition, we find twenty-nine notated melodies which are taken from the German tradition of setting humanist odes, and from anonymous, indigenous, and archaic polyphony. And we must also add that in 1618, Prague saw the publication of a new version, in a costly edition printed by Daniel Karolides' press, of the four-voice metrical psalm settings by Claude Goudimel (known as the *Genevan Psalter*), popular throughout Europe, here provided with Czech rhymed translations by Jiří Strejc, who proceeded from the German version by Andreas Lobwasser. This edition is further proof of the period's propensity for settings of psalmic poetry.

Who Was Tobiáš Adalbert?

Tobiáš Adalbert, who provided Campanus with the melodies for his odes, was a native of Vodňany (like Campanus himself). It was under the tutelage of Campanus that Adalbert graduated from the university in Prague. He was active as a rector at schools in Prague and elsewhere. In 1617, he became the pastor at St Clement's Church in the New Town of Prague, and was later exiled to Pirna in Saxony. His bachelor's thesis focused on the question of whether human beings were given anything more pleasant than music.

We know little of the specifics of Adalbert's compositional activities. From a mention by another of Campanus' pupils and successors in the tradition of metro-rhythmic spiritual poetry, Tobiáš Hauschkonius, we know that Tobiáš Adalbert wanted to provide Campanus' songs with new melodies for four voices. Hauschkonius and Campanus had a good relationship and the former also wrote the introductory poem for a published version of Adalbert's bachelor's thesis, and in 1618, Campanus dedicated his elegy on the birth of the Lord to Adalbert and several other non-Catholic clergymen.
However, the Amberg edition, in whose foreword Campanus mentions the melodies appended to the odes, contains no notation. We can perhaps assume that the foreword was originally intended for the Frankfurt edition, ultimately rejected due to its controversial nature. The most likely situation is that the Amberg printer chose to omit the notation due to technical or financial reasons.

Maintaining Our Respect for Jan Campanus

The discovery that Jan Campanus is not the author of the melodies printed in the Frankfurt edition of his *Odes* is no loss for Czech musical culture, nor does it call into question his extraordinary literary qualities or significance of Campanus himself.
It remains a question where Tobiáš Adalbert found the melodies he used. No definite source has been found and it is most likely that it was a selection of anonymous music which was used in Czech schools to teach metre, singing, and, presumably, composition.

In most of these four-part pieces, we can hardly speak of originality or authorship. They are generally short sections of homorhythmic counterpoint that could have been composed by a musically educated man of letters or university graduate. It is thus highly likely that for every metre used by the humanists, several monophonic and polyphonic melodies were available and could be paired with texts of the same metre.

These melodies probably did not have a single author. They were contrafacts of a kind, transmitted anonymously through the culture of the time.
As in the case of Campanus' Frankfurt edition, these were minor compositions in the form of mensural songs with the melody in the descant or tenor voice, or else humanist odes. In order to determine their origin, we would have to scour the extensive and generally anonymous repertoire of European secular music: canzonas, instrumental music, humanist ode, and song.

This theme was treated extensively in the study "Amicus Immusicus. A Study on the Tradition of the Idea of Jan Campanus as a Composer", published in Hudební věda LVI – 2/2019, pp. 165–185.

reviews

Musica Florea

Antonín Dvořák: Symphony No. 5

Musica Florea,
Marek Štryncl – conductor.
Text: CZ, EN. Recorded: 2019.
Published: Dec. 2019. TT: 59:03.
1 CD Arta F10245.

In 2009, the music publisher Arta put out a double CD featuring live recordings of Dvořák's seventh and eighth symphonies, accompanied by further orchestra works written by the composer between 1877 and 1880. The group performing on this album – certainly a revolution in the Czech context in 2009 – was the period instrument ensemble **Musica Florea** led by its artistic director **Marek Štryncl**. This first recording of Dvořák's symphonic and orchestral works with period instruments of Czech origin seemed like a provocation, a curiosity, and an anomaly all at once. Ten years have since passed, Dvořák has now been performed on period instruments by Collegium 1704 with Václav Luks, and at the close of 2019, Štryncl's orchestra put out their seventh album, which includes Dvořák's Symphony no. 5 in F major (1875) and the programmatic overture *Othello* from the *Příroda, Život a Láska* (*Nature, Life, and Love*, 1892) concert overture. One can hardly miss how much Štryncl has grown as performer. So much so that the artists might perhaps ask themselves whether it would not be better to record the 7th and 8th symphonies, which they did in 2009, a second time. After high-quality recordings of the *New World Symphony* and the 4th symphony, this latest album is for me the pinnacle of Štryncl's journey to discover Dvořák for the world of historically informed performance. Štryncl is inimitable already in his extreme and generally sweeping tempi – this is the longest recording of the 5th ever, clocking in at 44:08. Štryncl contrasts the languid stream of Dvořák's themes with nervous agogics and constantly transforming tempi. The bucolic 5th symphony, which conductors often rush through and which cannot conceal its inspiration in symphonies by Schumann and Mendelssohn, suddenly strikes us with its branchy and proportionally balanced structure. I am, however, a little shocked that the recording does not follow the composer's instruction to have the 3rd movement follow the 2nd *attaca*. The *Othello* overture – the last orchestral piece Dvořák completed before departing for America – is an even greater listening experience. Štryncl has diligently renewed the practice of individual bowings and glissandi in Dvořák, which will make a more sensitive listener's stomach clench as soon as they arrive at the second measure. If I were to compress Štryncl's artistic development on the field of Dvořák interpretation, I would place in close proximity the *Symphonic Variations* of 2004 and *Othello*, which is not missing its opulent sound and the appropriate restlessness which make this one of the composer's most interesting compositions. I am disappointed that the dramaturgy of this Dvořák endeavour does not bring together temporally related works, nor does it fully make use of the possibilities of the digital medium. But if the intention was for the cycle (which is now missing only the 3rd and 6th symphonies) to display the stylistic and expressive contrasts of Dvořák's compositions from various periods, then the authors could hardly have done a better job of it than by pairing the Schumann- and Mendelssohn-inspired symphony in F major and the Liszt-like brilliance of *Othello*. I am genuinely looking forward to the conclusion of the cycle. I hope it will be complemented by Dvořák's instrumental concerti, serenades, and suites, and especially his symphonic poems, whose novel sound world is wonderfully evoked on period instruments by this excellent rendition of *Othello*. And I sincerely hope that the conclusion of Štryncl's project does not have to rely on self-financing and the uncertainties of crowdfunding. After all, the Dvořák presented by Musica Florea and Marek Štryncl is certainly among the most interesting recordings of the Czech classical music canon of the 19th century.

Martin Jemelka

Josef Antonín Štěpán

Concertos for Harpsichord

Edita Keglerová – harpsichord,
Hipocondria Ensemble.
Text: CZ, EN. Recorded: Oct. 2018,
Jílové u Prahy Protestant church.
Published: 2019. TT: 79:21.
1 CD ArcoDiva UP 0211-2131.

During his lifetime, Josef Antonín Štěpán (born 1726 in Kopidlno, died 1797 in Vienna) was among the most significant Viennese musicians of Czech origin. Not only was he renowned as an excellent harpsichordist and pianist – he was particularly valued as a composer. Of his works, the most popular were those written for the harpsichord and piano, especially the concerti. In this field, Štěpán is even considered one of the most remarkable forerunners of Mozart. Even though Štěpán lived to enjoy considerable social recognition (including the favour of the imperial court), he died practically forgotten. Today, we rarely come across his music in the standard concert repertoire. This disc presents a rare opportunity to acquaint ourselves with world premiere recordings of four of Štěpán's cembalo concerti: D major 121a, C major Š 101, G major Š 109, and D major Š 116. In all of these, the harpsichord is accompanied by a small (usually five-piece) string ensemble, with two horns added in the first and last concert. The performers – harpsichordist **Edita Keglerová** and the **Hipocondria Ensemble** led by their artistic director **Jan Hádek** – made use of their wealth

of experience in historically informed interpretation of the music of the early Classical period. Though it takes a little while to get used to the fact that the sound of the harpsichord is much more subtle than the accompanying instruments, and that the natural horns (played by **Jana Švadlenková** and **Hana Šuková**) sound a little more rustic than today's valve horns, a few minutes are enough for us to get used to this rather unusual sonic constellation and fully enjoy all that is offered to us by the composer and performers. In Štěpán's harpsichord concertos, the Rococo comes to life as we, 21st-century listeners, like to imagine it: graceful, playful, amusing, and careless. And all the performers clearly feel an affinity for this world. Edita Keglerová has excellent technique that we can appreciate not only in the fast runs but also in her rich ornamentation, which sparkles in so many colours and is so fragile that it evokes the flight of a butterfly. Particularly deserving of praise is how she plays decorations – however complicated they might be – with such an excellent sense of rhythm and control that she does not even slightly upset the pulsating metre. In the slow movement, Keglerová allows herself slightly more conspicuous rubati, but even these are more subtle than we are used to with the harpsichord. It is also in the cantilenas of these movements that we can best enjoy the sound of the harpsichord, which originates from František Vyhnálek's workshop and which – particularly in the soprano register – truly sings. Furthermore, listeners will surely appreciate that Edita Keglerová performs her own cadenzas in all of the concertos. They are full of invention and agreeably short. The Hipocondria Ensemble is an excellent partner to the soloist in all respects, perfectly in sync and absolutely convincing in sound and expression. If Edita Keglerová continues charting a map to the territory of Štěpán's harpsichord concerti, we have much to look forward to.

Věroslav Němec

Jan Dismas Zelenka

Missa 1724

Lucía Caihuela, Jeanne Mendoche, Aldona Bartink – sopranos, Kamila Mazalová, Aneta Petrasová – altos, Václav Čížek, Benjamin Glaubitz – tenors, Tomáš Šelc – bass, Collegium 1704, Collegium Vocale 1704, Václav Luks – artistic director.
Text: EN, FR, GE, CZ. Recorded: Church of St Anne / Prague Crossroads, 2018. Published: 2020. TT: 54:20. 1 CD Accent ACC 24363.

The hour-long *Missa 1724* begins with a fierce, urgent, and passionate *Kyrie eleison* sung by the entire choir. It is an imaginary mass composed of separate sections of the mass ordinary which Jan Dismas Zelenka composed in 1724 and 1725. And with the exception of a few moments of gorgeous resolutions of dissonances, this music will only grudgingly let you rest before it reaches the final *Dona nobis pacem*. Not with its formal demands – we are still safely in the Baroque period, relatively comprehensible to listeners – but with its electrifying intensity. This is dramatic, harmonically adventurous music. In the sleeve-note, **Václav Luks** introduces the individual parts of the mass in detail, including dates of composition and first performance, a formal description, and further logical reasons to connect these into a cyclical form: "Although all these works were certainly not composed as a single piece of music and their performances had nothing to do with each other, constructing an imaginary mass which introduces this gorgeous music under a single arch seems to me a unique opportunity to introduce this part of Zelenka's oeuvre to today's audiences." Luks and his **Collegium 1704** and **Collegium Vocale 1704** make excellent use of this self-created opportunity. The musicians tenaciously imbibe every phrase with a new motive force, attentively observing the bass line with conviction. They are rhythmically explosive. If I am sometimes critical of Luks' over-dramatic conception of early Baroque music, this is not the case – with Zelenka's hot blood, competition for Collegium 1704 is not easy to come by (in intensity, we might compare the Czech ensemble to Zelenka recordings by the Belgian group Il Fondamento or the Barockorchester Stuttgart). Among the particularly striking moments, we might list practically all the choral passages (one of many examples: the mutually responsive dialogue of the individual voice groups in *Gloria. Et in terra, in terra*, as if Zelenka were beating the ground with his fists and calling out: *Heaven is far away, I need You here on Earth!* – Zelenka's proprietary, physically experienced church music as an antithesis to the universe of Bach). Bass **Tomáš Šelc** in particular gave a masterful and charismatic solo performance. On the other hand, it is a pity about the botched beginning of *Laudamus te,* in which the tenor only reaches an open and resonant vocal texture during the course of the aria. *The Missa 1724* might be imaginary, but it will offer you more than enough real musical experiences.

Michaela Vostřelová

Jaroslav Tůma

A Portrait of the Clavichord

Jaroslav Tůma – clavichord.
Text: CZ, EN. Recorded: Jul. 2019, Dorfkirche Görne. Published: 2019. TT: 126:17. 2 CD Arta Music F10241.

The golden age of the clavichord – one of the most significant precursors of the modern piano – took place between the 15th and 18th centuries. With his latest project, **Jaroslav Tůma** presents a colourful

selection of pieces written (with one exception) in the 18th century, in the last part of the clavichord's "life". On this double CD, composers are arranged chronologically according to the year of their birth. The first disc opens with three movements from the *Partita in C major* by Christoph Graupner, which are followed by Johann Sebastian Bach's *French Suite no. 6 in E major* BWV 817. Tůma chose to follow the suite with two exceptionally interesting compositions by Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel: the *Rondo II in C minor* Wq 59/4 and the *Fantasia I in F major* Wq 59/5. The first disc closes with Josef Antonín Štěpán's *Sonata in E flat major*. On the second disc, we first hear Mozart's famous *Variations on "Ah vous dirai-je, Maman" KV 265/300e*, which are followed by a true rarity: *Lambert's Clavichord*, a cycle of pieces by the English composer Herbert Howells. This collection of pieces was written in 1926–27 (!) and its author was inspired by the English virginalists of the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. Tůma then closes off the disc with his own transcription of Bach's famous Chaconne from the Partita no. 2 in D minor BWV 1004. In the booklet, the performer informs us that the clavichord "offers emotional intimacy and soothing kindness" – and we can do nothing but agree. From the very first arpeggio of Graupner's *Overture* to the C major Partita, I was imbued with a pleasantly old-world feeling, and it returned again and again as I listened. The sound of the clavichord decays quickly and is much quieter than the modern piano. And what's more, it has a touchingly breathless character, which is only supported by the grand, often extreme rubati. As if a sweet old man were telling us stories about the good old times – he might be running out of breath, but he still has enough energy to captivate and entertain us with his tales of the old world. Tůma made his recording on a clavichord built by Johann Christoph Georg Schiedmayer in 1787, renovated in 2018 by Martin Kather in Hamburg. The instrument sounds wonderful – Tůma has clearly mastered it and listening to him is a joy. The booklet includes a pleasantly stylised text by Tůma about the history, construction, and characteristics of the clavichord, black and white photographs of Schiedmayer's clavichord, and photographs of the performer and renovator. It is a shame there was no space left for a text about the compositions – the names Graupner, Štěpán, and Howells aren't exactly steady fixtures on concert programmes. Despite this minor shortcoming, this is a project which should not be missed by any lover of historical instruments.

Věroslav Němec

Josef Suk

Asrael

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Jakub Hrůša – conductor.
Text: GE, EN. Recorded: 2018.
Published: 2020. TT: 62:44.
1 CD BR Klassik 900188.

Sixteen years ago, Suk's *Asrael* was performed at a graduation concert at AMU in Prague. The young Jakub Hrůša took to the podium to conduct the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra. All doubts as to whether he would be able to bring this weighty colossus to life dissipated during the opening movement. The concert was recorded, and those who heard this recording without knowing who was conducting celebrated that there was now another captivating rendition of Suk's masterpiece, and one which also captures the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra in top form. On the present recording, Hrůša is not conducting the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra – which he leads – but the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, even more valued artistically. Many of us born in earlier years feel another historical connection: thirty-nine years ago, the same orchestra recorded Suk's *Asrael* under the baton of Rafael Kubelík, its principal conductor at the time. It is certainly a victory on the part of the composer (and conductor) if they can pull us in to a strange state which it is impossible to exit, only returning us to the real world once the work reaches its conclusion. Václav Talich's legendary recording made in 1952 has this quality – even despite being recorded monophonically, it still has the ability to speak to today's listener. Suk's *Asrael* has the good fortune that after Talich, other conductors also recorded highly suggestive renditions with the Czech Philharmonic: Václav Neumann, Sir Charles Mackerras, and Jiří Bělohlávek (who did so twice, in 1991 for Chandos and 2014 for Decca). And as for *Asrael's* presence on the stages of the world, we should mention excellent versions such as Libor Pešek's with the Liverpool Philharmonic, Jiří Bělohlávek's with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, or Kirill Petrenko with the Orchestra of the Komische Oper Berlin. Some of these are live recordings. This newest version by Hrůša is further proof that with a top orchestra whose interpretation does not require edits (except for a few imperceptible adjustments), what results is a recording ideal in its seamless and continuous oration. The Bavarian radio symphonists deserve our admiration for completely taking on the composer's unusual offering, adequately transmitted through the conductor's elaborated conception. From the very opening measures – barely audible – the orchestra draws attention to its superlative artistic standards, both in the overall shape of the ensemble and in the individual sections and instrumentalists. We need only notice the captivating pianissimo of a trio of horns at the very beginning, the hopeless sadness in the perfectly tuned unison between the flute and trumpet that occurs during a quotation from Dvořák's *Requiem* in the second movement, the gorgeously interpreted

violin solos, the noble dialogue between between the oboe and cello over a tremolo of three groups of violas and a rhythmical harp accompaniment in the middle section of the third movement, the painful strikes on the bass drum, or the sonically and dynamically perfect fugue in the fourth movement. We could list many more examples. On this recording, the score is fulfilled in all respects. The sound directors and sound engineers also deserve our praise. The booklet text (by **Matthias Corvin**) provides crucial information on the composer and places him in the context of other (particularly Czech) music. However, it is a shame that this otherwise erudite analysis of the piece does not emphasise the central point of the work: that it is, first and foremost, Suk's intimate confession. The text also fails to draw the reader's attention to two crucial quotations: the death motif from *Radúz and Mahulena*, which is brought back and modified repeatedly throughout the work (and it was even the basis for the main motif of fate!), and the motif from Dvořák's *Requiem* used in the second movement to commemorate the older composer.

Bohuslav Vítek

Antonín Dvořák

Requiem / Biblical Songs / Te Deum

Ailyn Pérez, Kateřina Kněžíková – sopranos, Christianne Stotijn – mezzosoprano, Michael Spyres – tenor, Svatopluk Sem – baritone, Jan Martiník – bass, Prague Philharmonic Choir, Lukáš Vasilek – choirmaster, Czech Philharmonic, Jiří Bělohlávek, Jakub Hrůša – conductors.
Recorded: Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, 2017–2018. Published: 2020. Text: EN, FR, GE, LA, CZ. TT: 73:44, 67:58. 2 CD Decca 485 0509

The **Czech Philharmonic's** new album has only one crucial imperfection. It should have been divided among three (or even four) separate discs, thus forcing the listener to approach each of the three pieces separately, without the possibility of consecutive listening. The pieces in question are three paramount spiritual compositions by Antonín Dvořák written in 1890 (*Requiem*), 1892 (*Te Deum*), and 1894/1895 (*Biblical Songs*). The marketing department has naturally focused on the recording of the *Biblical Songs*, which has, through the actions of Providence, become the last published recording of **Jiří Bělohlávek** (so far). The conductor's name will always be linked to his championing of the legacy of Bohuslav Martinů and Josef Suk. However, Bělohlávek also relentlessly championed lesser known works by Dvořák – primarily the piano concerto, which he recorded on six occasions, and the *Biblical Songs*. Bělohlávek's recording with Dagmar Pecková, made at the hundredth anniversary concert of the Czech Philharmonic (1996) is no longer commercially available. If Bělohlávek fans wanted to listen to the conductor's take on this work, they had to make do with DVD recordings made with Bernarda Fink (1991) or Eva Randová (1993). This new version features bass **Jan Martiník** and represents the conductor's first recording of all ten *Biblical Songs* with orchestral accompaniment. Dvořák orchestrated the first five songs. The disillusionment that followed the festive premiere in 1896 probably put him off orchestrating the entire cycle, leading him to proclaim that he wishes to hear this work only with a deeper female voice. The CD under review is a testament to an encounter between a conductor with a wealth of experience and a bass who has performed the *Biblical Songs* on numerous occasions and devoted the requisite number of hours to detailed study of the score. The result shows all this, especially when we compare the recording to Adam Plachetka's (2014) with its problematic declamation. Even so, in comparison to Plachetka's more dramatic rendition, what I miss in Martiník's interpretation is an expressive contrast between the individual songs. It is not so much a problem of this recording as a result of Martiník's long-term accentuation of the lyrical side of the songs, which I believe to be one-dimensional and which ultimately creates a homogeneity of tempo and expression. What seems an "appendix" to the double CD under review is a lively rendition of the *Te Deum* conducted by **Jakub Hrůša**, which was bookended at the end of the second CD as the culmination of a Decca project bringing together Dvořák's late period spiritual works (*Stabat Mater* with Jiří Bělohlávek, 2 CD 483 1510). Even if Decca had only put out a twenty-minute album with Hrůša's *Te Deum*, it would merit repeated listening. Hrůša managed to capture the concise theme of this festive composition, which is stylistically divided between Händel and Janáček. We can hardly find a recording of this work that could be called ideal (perhaps Smetáček's or Neumann's versions from 1970 and 1982?). Most recordings suffer from grandiose expressiveness and false pomp and circumstance. Hrůša's matter-of-fact recording currently serves as a point of reference for me, which is in large part due to the engagement of Dvořák specialist soprano **Kateřina Kněžíková** and her colleague, baritone **Svatopluk Sem**. However, in the case of the double CD under review, attention should rightly focus on the most extensive composition – Dvořák's *Requiem*, conducted by Jakub Hrůša for the 2017 Dvořák's Prague festival. It is one of the paradoxes of Bělohlávek's artistic career that unlike *Stabat Mater*, which he recorded on three occasions (1991, 1997, and 2016), he made no recordings of Dvořák's *Requiem*. This task was symbolically taken up by the conductor's pupil, Jakub Hrůša, which is not to suggest to the reader some kind of symbolic baton-passing. Hrůša has been a mature artist for some years now, his interpretations of Dvořák are, at present,

models of diligence, and one can only hope that Decca or Supraphon will publish the remarkable recording of *Saint Ludmila* that he made in 2018. Hrůša's approach to recording Dvořák is systematic: it began with the minor pieces (Supraphon) and continued with the overtures with the Prague Philharmonic (Pentatone), then the symphonies with the Bamberg Symphony (Tudor), now culminating with a live recording of the *Requiem*. This work deserves a separate review, but in the limited space available to me here, I must settle for stating that Hrůša's generous work with time and detail makes listening an exceptional experience. The participation of choirmaster **Lukáš Vasilek** and his **Prague Philharmonic Choir** is essential and deserves much admiration. Discophiles and Dvořákophiles can be glad that Dvořák's spiritual masterpieces have received such detailed attention on this double CD. Now, it's the listeners' turn.

Martin Jemelka

Franz Xaver Richter

Super flumina babylonis / Miserere

Markéta Böhmová, Pavla Radostová – sopranos, Piotr Olech, Kamila Mazalová – altos, Jaroslav Březina, Jakub Kubín – tenors, Jiří Miroslav Procházka – bass, Czech Ensemble Baroque Choir, Tereza Válková – choirmaster, Czech Ensemble Baroque, Roman Válek – conductor.
Text: EN, GE, FR, CZ. Recorded: 2019. Published: 2019. TT: 67:56.
1 CD Supraphon SU 4177-2.

The **Czech Ensemble Baroque**, led by conductor **Roman Válek**, has a long-standing interest in the work of Franz Xaver Richter (1709–1789), as attested to by recordings of the *Messa de Requiem*, *De profundis*, and the *Sinfona con fuga in g moll* (Supraphon, 2014), the oratorio *La deposizione dalla croce di Gesú Cristo*, *Salvator nostro* (*The Descent from the Cross of Our Saviour Jesus Christ*, Supraphon, 2014), and also the oboe concerto, *Te Deum 1781*, and the *Sinfonia no. 52 in D major* (Supraphon, 2018), all realised by the Czech Ensemble Baroque in the last five years. At present, Richter is considered one of the foremost representatives of what is known as the Mannheim school: a group of composers active at the court of the prince elector Karl Theodor in the southwestern German city of Mannheim. Richter's music represents a synthesis of polyphonic thinking with clear elements of the classical style. It is stylistically diverse and contains appealing melodies and virtuosic compositional craft. This new recording by the Czech Ensemble Baroque includes three works by the composer. The three-movement *Sinfonia in G minor*, which opens the album, is brisk and dramatically heightened, with the bass-line constantly in motion and with typical "Mannheim" elements in the second movement. Richter intended this *Sinfonia* as an overture to his motet *Super flumina Babylonis*, which is the second piece on the recording. This grandiose composition for soloists, choirs, and orchestra is an example of the composer's diverse contrapuntal work and excellent craft. But even here, it holds true that Richter is primarily an inventive melodist with a great gift for sweet cantilenas as well as suggestive musical drama. The composer's late-period choral work is represented by another psalmic composition, the *Miserere in F major*. We should note the use of a quotation from Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* and the occasional flashes of pessimism which bring Richter's oeuvre closer to that of the master of the late Baroque, Jan Dismas Zelenka. The Czech Ensemble Baroque has proved once again that their interpretation of Richter's music is based on complete understanding. Throughout the recording, we hear the orchestra's wonderful tuning. The brilliantly arched phrases as well as the solo entries are certain; full of feeling and control. The individual soloists also proved to be excellent choices. Sopranos **Markéta Böhmová** and **Pavla Radostová** gave wonderful performances and their voices blend well with the alto of **Kamila Mazalová**, tenor **Jaroslav Březina**, the silky and flexible voice of tenor **Jakub Kubín**, and the pliable bass of **Jiří Miroslav Procházka**. The choir, rehearsed by **Tereza Válková**, managed the numerous contrapuntal passages without any problems. The intonation of alto **Piotr Olech** was a little more problematic, and the aria *Ne projicias me* was not his strongest moment. The producers could have spent a little more time playing around with the acoustics and microphone placement: the conclusion of some passages is a little unclear, while at other times, the dynamics between the individual solo voices are not ideal. Even so, the recording is an experience of discovery and certainly provides further valuable testimony on the life and work of a composer who should be counted among the leading musical artists of his time.

Milan Bátor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