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Miroslav Pudlák

MusicOlomouc 2019

Miroslav Beinhauer

Martin Daněk

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Ensemble Modern, Peter Eötvös

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Dear readers,

In this last issue of 2019, you will find an unusual number of interviews – three. As the popular cliché goes, the composer Miroslav Pudlák needs no introduction: he'll introduce himself through the CD attached to this issue. It is the eleventh in our series of Composer Portraits and it's certainly not the last – stay tuned!
The other two interviews introduce two performers of the up-and-coming generation. Oboist Martin Daněk recently triumphed in the Prague Spring competition and he now has a promising international career ahead of him. Miroslav Beinhauer is an excellent performer of (new) music who recently drew attention to himself by learning and making the first recording of Alois Hába's solo pieces for sixth-tone harmonium. Stating that he is a "flexible" pianist (another favourite cliché) would be a severe understatement. This interview also continues in our loosely conceived series of articles with a focus on Hába, which you have recently encountered on these pages.
I would also like to alert you, dear readers, that in addition to the Composer Portraits series, the Czech Music Information Centre has also published a double CD presenting the music of contemporary Czech composers not represented in the monographic series for one reason or another. You can read more on the opposite page. Incidentally, you can use the same email if you are interested in any of the Composer Portraits CDs. Which, you ask? Have a look at www.musica.cz!

All the best in the year 2020,
Petr Bakla

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by Matěj Kratochvíl

Miroslav Pudlák belongs to the generation of composers who came onto the scene just as the old social orders were beginning to fall apart. In the 1980s, he was one of the figures behind the creation of an ensemble, Agon, which continuously applied itself to performances of contemporary music. In the 1990s, Pudlák's path led from Agon to Mondschein Ensemble, later renamed MoEns, where he is still active as a conductor.

COMPONERE = PUTTING TOGETHER

Miroslav Pudlák on his new CD and the transformations of the musical scene

During his studies, Pudlák's music began with experiments with elements of American minimalism and their transfer into a highly personal form. While *Otisky* (*Imprints,* 1985) might be influenced by the methods of American minimalism, it aims for dreamy and colourful planes, not mechanical repetition. From the '90s onwards, his compositions have brought together a contemporary sound and compositional techniques with material referring to musical history, wherein Pudlák's view of the music of the past and its cliches is a mix of admiration and light irony.

In the new millennium, he ventured onto the field of musical theatre twice, once in a chamber form with the opera *Ve stínu klobásy* (*In the Shadow of the Sausage*), and once in a larger format with *Sasíci v Čechách* (*Saxons in Bohemia*). He was part of Why Not Patterns, an ensemble combining composition with improvisation and the energy of jazz. Pudlák has also taught at several institutions in Czechia and published countless articles. For many years, he was the director of the Czech Music Information Centre, this magazine's publisher.

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER 2x

Let's start with a recapitulation, seeing as we're surrounded by "30 years since the Velvet Revolution". Starting in the 1990s, you've operated on the Czech music scene in several roles: composer, co-founder of several ensembles and festivals, pedagogue, director of the Czech Music Information Centre, radio editor, and director of contemporary music programming at the Prague Spring Festival. Perhaps that entitles you to some assessments and generalisations: how has the local contemporary music scene changed in thirty years?

Just yesterday, I was at a concert of works by Iannis Xenakis [5th November 2019, Prague]. It was sold out and hugely successful. I realised that even twenty years ago, a concert like that would go by without notice and with only a few audience members in attendance. That says something about the transformation of the audience. As for performers, there are now more contemporary music specialists on a professional level. These thirty years were spent dealing with the previous decades of cultural isolation. And I always tried to contribute to this with my activities.

I'd say that today, there isn't an essential difference between western and eastern Europe in terms of perception of contemporary music. The difference, however, is in the institutional environment and funding – public institutions give us much less support than in the West. In this, we are better prepared for the future developments that will happen around the world. In some senses, you could say we're up ahead.

In the '90s, it seemed that "everything would work out", that demanding art would always find its support. With the new millennium came disillusionment – the support of the state dwindled and private donors were still nowhere to be seen. Have you noticed any reasons for optimism in the last few years?

We'll never have a donor situation similar to that in, say, the US. Here, it is the state which traditionally has the role of supporting the arts, and for some time at least, it must keep it. Recently, I feel like the people in responsible positions are beginning to understand this.
But the difficult work of a composer can take many shapes and I think it can also live on the independent club scene where funding doesn't play such a big role. Now, this environment is more populated by improvised music, but that can change, giving more space to composition. So my optimism is more connected with an idea of some kind of transformation of musical life, rather than maintaining the old model of supporting music. Those expensive projects with well-paid compositional commissions are certainly the source of interesting and valuable works, but in the future, this sphere will not lead to the creation of anything essentially innovative. This because the institutions producing these scenarios are based on the old model, which only works due to inertia, cut off from social reality.

And how has your music changed during that time?

It's always changing. I'm not a composer who cultivates some personal style, I want to try all kinds of things. But ultimately, in hindsight, the pieces are similar in some ways. Zygmunt Krauze once said that a composer doesn't do what he wants – he does what he can. The way I understand this is that you can learn to use various styles and techniques, but only in some of these do you experience that feeling of certainty, of making the right decision when choosing one of the possible solutions. That's why you learn to hold on to the world you have mastered, which means that the stylistic range is not that broad

.

In an interview with Tereza Havelková in HIS Voice fifteen years ago, you said that you weren't trying to get famous through music, only to "entertain yourself a little". Is personal entertainment still the central motif of your compositional work?

That was a witticism with which I rationalised my outsider position on the Czech music scene. However, it's true that a lack of ambition in one's approach to art is liberating, to an extent. When I write something, it's always the realisation of a dream – a dream which might spend several years with me before it matures. I don't like pulling ideas out of thin air just to make a deadline. The disadvantage is being cut off from top-class performance. This is then reflected back into the work. My music was always naivistic (perhaps naive), based on simple ideas and their counterpositions. I like concise and straightforward utterances. Whenever I embark on working out complex and – in my opinion – superfluous details, I feel awkward.

(Like now, as I needlessly stretch out the answer to your question.) But this naive music is not a challenge for the most virtuosic ensembles, so they don't seek it out. This means it doesn't make it to the festivals where contemporary music is played today.

Do you have an established working method from the first idea to the finished score? Or do you find a new method for each piece?

First, I always try to write as if improvising – from the beginning to the end. As if I were expecting some angel to send down inspiration and dictate the piece to me. But that will never happen. So in the second phase, I move on to the usual method: I work out dozens of material studies and sketches. I throw most of these out. I turn what I found interesting into some form or shape. Then I cut the fragments I want to use out of the manuscript paper. I spread them out on the floor in front of me, changing the order, wondering what can and can't follow what else, gradually building a form. And I always realise again and again why it's always been called *componere* – to put together. Composed music doesn't evolve like a continuous thread – it is composed of ideas which are hung on the thread like beads on a necklace.

In contemporary music, it's almost a cliché that the central weight rests in chamber ensembles which allow for better collaborations between composers and performers. In practice, this is of course also – perhaps predominantly – an economic question. If financial conditions were not an issue, would you prefer working on orchestral music, or is work with smaller instrumentations more interesting for you?

The orchestra is a fascinating instrument and it's every composer's desire to try it out. In practice, however, they discover that they're entering an environment conserved within a 19th century model in which they are entirely unwelcome. There are support programmes, calls, commissions, and grants, all aiming to overcome this conflict. They lead to excellent compositions, but you can still feel the collision of two disparate worlds. With specialised chamber ensembles like MoEns, on the other hand, or with chamber orchestras like Berg, who approach this work with enthusiasm, I feel positive energy, a friendly approach, a sense of captivation – that's more valuable to me than conquering orchestral sounds and playing at today's Mahler.

From time to time, your pieces include non-musical sounds. Sometimes these are mediated through electronics, a few years ago, you used copies of intonarumori, the noise instruments of the Italian futurists. The Opening Performance Orchestra played these replicas in your Intonarumori Concerto. What interests you about noises as a composer?

The Bruitists inaugurated a new era of music working with "non-musical" sounds, which soon migrated into the field of electronics, and continue through a "refinement" of the material of electroacoustic music. However, I always found it more interesting to explore what you can create directly on stage through the use of mechanical toys, rather than in the studio or on a computer. There is a rawness, unpredictability, and a certain musical "dirt" which makes it all the more human. So when I found out there was an ensemble in Prague playing the *intonarumori*, I had one of those dreams which I had to realise. My piece for *intonarumori* and orchestra is a combination of graphic scores for three players on these instruments with sheet music written out in detail for the orchestra. The result is tension between noise and harmony, between randomness and determination.

The Futurists built intonarumori to imitate the noise of the modern world. Today, these instruments have a status similar to that of historical objects – almost like Baroque violins in historically informed performance. Did you use them as "representatives of today's noisy world" in the spirit of the Futurists, or simply as autonomous musical instruments?

For me, they're a nostalgic reminder of a period of revolutionary artistic radicalism. That time is long gone, but it emanates a kind of ethos which still feeds our artistic energy today. And they're also charming sound sources – sources of real, scruffy, unpredictable sound. I let them try and "sing" beautiful melodies against the orchestra's harmonies. They stand out like an ugly duckling among swans, eliciting emotion through their dignified clumsiness.

You have two operas to your name. One of chamber proportions, the other rather grand. But it's been a long time. Is musical theatre still attractive to you? Or any other confluence of music and other arts?

I used to compose quite a lot of music for theatre, but I gradually dropped out of that practice. If I'm interested? Definitely – I'm interested in everything. But my introverted character isn't a good fit with the collective creative process demanded by these scenic forms.

A music of your CD is coming out. Is this format of presenting music today something more than a collection of pieces that could otherwise be posted somewhere online? Is there a thread running through the album from Encore to the Intonarumori Concerto?

Mostly older pieces from the previous decade were selected for the CD (with one exception), because Czech Radio has recordings of these pieces. People say they sound traditional (though I don't see it that way) because I work with harmony. This is because I always wanted to find some new harmonic system. Not to dismiss harmony as such, but to give it its own rules. I tried creating algorithms for harmonic processes and writing chord progressions based on these. This seems more interesting to me than what most composers do today, remaining satisfied with achieving a particular type of sound.
What do the pieces have in common? A kind of irony, perhaps. When I read the English translations of the programme notes with which I furnished the pieces on the CD, I realised that their irony is lost in translation. Perhaps it's the same with the interpretation of music: the composer intends something as a musical joke, but it reaches the listener as a lyrical piece. Well, at least he likes it.

What kind of a listener are you? What paths does new music take to get to you?

I know composers usually don't listen to their colleagues' music – except for concerts where their own pieces are played. I'm an exception to this rule. I'm interested in everything, first as information and then as repeated experience. And I'm continually discovering that it's better to listen to contemporary music live than in recording, so I'm an avid promoter of attending concerts.

You're a pedagogue at the department of musicology. What are the possible imports of this field today?

Musicology, just like all fields in the humanities, are experiencing a huge rise in importance, specifically in these times. The world is becoming more technologically complex, people can no longer understand it. Labour will soon be shifted to robots and people will increasingly become involved in social issues, which means they will turn to the social sciences and the arts. I thus have no fear for the future of any one of my favourite fields.

Miroslav Pudlák (*1961) *studied composition at the Prague Conservatory and musicology at Charles University in Prague and at the Université de Paris. As a composition student, he took parts in compositional courses in Darmstadt, Kazimierz, and Amsterdam. In 1985, he established Agon, an ensemble for contemporary music in which he served as artistic director until 1990. Since 1995, he is the artistic director and conductor of the ensemble MoEns. He was director of the Czech Music Information Centre from 1996 to 2015. He is the director of the Contempuls contemporary music festival. He is a lecturer in musical theory at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University, the Faculty of Music at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, and at New York University Prague. He prepares programmes about contemporary music for Czech Radio.*

by Petr Ferenc

MILAN KNÍŽÁK SUB ROSA

A NEW LP WITH STRING QUARTETS BY CZECH VISUAL ARTIST **MILAN KNÍŽÁK** IS PUBLISHED IN BELGIUM

Brussels-based label Sub Rosa is a name to follow if you wish to complete your elementary knowledge in various areas of the avant-garde in this century and the last. You'll find electronic pioneers next to sound poetry, experiments in noise, forward-looking rock, music of the so-called fourth world, and contemporary composed music. After thirty years of activity, the label has undoubtedly published over a hundred records, but considering their feverish activity in publishing older pieces from the catalogue on their Bandcamp profile (as well as the existence of three sub-labels), it's hard to say exactly how many.

The three discs they have dedicated to the works of Czech artist (visual artist, performer, designer, writer, musician…) Milan Knížák are numbers 400, 409, and 479 in the catalogue. Forget searching for a chronology – we might well add that two of the titles were published in 2015, the third – an LP with three string quartets and one piano quintet written between 1973 and 2009 – came out this year.

Over the last ten years, the discography of this unique artist – now almost eighty years old – has grown faster than ever before, especially due to interest abroad. "I've never gotten any royalties in the Czech Republic," he was once heard stating. But in fact, there is virtually no one in the country who doesn't know who he is. Knížák became universally known not through his life's work but through his public activities after 1989 – first as the rector of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and later as the director of the National Gallery in Prague.

A hard-to-miss character who provoked many with his extravagance and self-confident opinions, he only became visible at the age of fifty, following years of being silenced and working in almost total isolation. There is a very telling anecdote from the preparations of the Berlin concert in 2014: representatives of Czech cultural institutions responded to the name Knížák with genuine panic, so the concert – held in the packed Kunsthalle Hamburger Bahnhof and supported by the leading Berlin gallery owner René Block – successfully took place despite a lack of any support from their side.

This also explains why Knížák's discography is not proportional to his musical output. With few exceptions, publishers of albums featuring Knížák's music are abroad or part of the Czech underground scene, which considers Knížák's group Aktual (which was active at the turn of the 1960s and '70s) a precursor and major inspiration for the work of later groups such as Plastic People of the Universe and DG 307.

The international mark of Knížák's musical output – which is what this text will focus on – carries a completely different spirit than Aktual songs influenced by rock, brass bands, and the noisy outbursts of avant-garde new music (with his intentional primitivism and use of non-musical instruments, Knížák seems to have predicted elements which punk rock and industrial music brought to the table in the 1970s).

Here, I would like to alert the reader to my older texts on Knížák's music (CMQ 2003/2, 2013/4, freely available at czechmusicquarterly.com), and also to the fact that in one part of his musical output, I encounter Milan Knížák on stage as a bandmate, so I participated in both the Berlin concerts I will describe below.

BROKEN MUSIC

Milan Knížák always had a disposition to express himself artistically with extremely varied means. Music and painting were among the earliest, but at the age of twenty-five, he was probably the earliest Czech artist to work with the expressive means of action art, performance, and happening. In the 1960s, with a conviction that art means teaching man how to live, he calls for solidarity, mutuality, and immediate worldwide disarmament, but he also explores the everyday micro-world of real socialism by wearing provocative clothing, organising events for all the senses, subversively calling a house meeting by writing strange letters to tenants in a house he didn't live in, and so on. At the time, he lived in Nový svět, a district of Prague adjacent to the Prague Castle. Its foundations survive from the middle of the 14th century – now, it is an attractive tourist area, but in Knížák's time, it was a remote corner of the city with an almost village-like atmosphere. Due to a lack of space, the artist abandoned painting in favour of immediate installations and interventions in public space (and later, for other reasons, into "inner" spaces, as demonstrated in his *Processes for a Mind*). In a country which considered socialist realism the desirable artistic style, Knížák did not graduate from the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and worked entirely outside the official scene as one of a handful of artists working in inner exile. Under the influence of some information about alternative lifestyles – from hippies in America and the Provos in the Netherlands – he established his own loosely organised movement, Aktual, considering life in the countryside and possibilities of subsistence, education, and spiritual development.

Thanks to the art critic Jindřich Chalupecký, Knížák made some connections with the American art movement known as Fluxus and spent two years in the US at the end of the 1960s. Greater success abroad than at home would follow his entire career, but he did not lose his distinctive way of looking at the world even in the incomparably luxurious conditions he has worked in since the '90s.

Probably Knížák's most significant legacy in the musical field is *broken music*, music composed of fragments of existing works. He discovered this method in 1964 when he began manipulating vinyl records: scratching them, breaking them, glueing them back together, and then playing them back, observing the emergent musical narrative without any attempts at intervention.

The current, third generation of experimental musicians working with record players considers Knížák a founding figure. For proof, we need only look to the recent gramophone marathon at the Akademie der Künste Berlin. Knížák was invited as a headlining act – after two duo sets of broken music, he conducted a final tutti piece to conclude the eleven-hour show.
His broken music is a success in the German metropolis – this year's concert took place five years after the Hamburger Bahnhof concert mentioned above, where Knížák was joined by the Czech conceptual noise ensemble Opening Performance Orchestra (a recording was published under the title *Broken / ReBroken* by Sub Rosa in 2015) and seventeen years after his solo concert at the Kreuzberg alternative stage, Ballhaus, an audio recording of which is available on *Broken Tracks* (Guerilla Records, 2008), and a video will be exhibited until June 2020 as part of the Import / Export / Rock'n'Roll exhibition at the Czech Museum of Music in Prague (see our text in CMQ 1/2019). In addition to this video and several destroyed records, the exhibition also includes the first edition of Knížák's *Broken Music* LP, published forty years ago in Italy. In 2015, Sub Rosa put out the first vinyl reedition of this work.
The triad, completed by this year's *String Quartets* LP – launched in October 2019 at the Czech Museum of Music – demonstrates that with this Belgian label, Milan Knížák has finally found a publisher who is willing to present his musical oeuvre systematically and within the appropriate context.

STRING QUARTETS

Knížák has used the methods of broken music – originally intended for the treatment of records – in other genres, and not only musical. One of these paths involves working with scores, i.e. another form of recording musical information. This new album, *String Quartets*, performed by Prague's FamaQ and recorded, mixed, and mastered at the prestigious Sono and Jámor studios, gives weight to this claim already with the opening quartet: the letters DHK in its title refer to "Dvořák, Hába, Knížák", and the piece brings together Hába's and Dvořák's music into a new entity. This 1973 work was only premiered in 1989 by the Arditti String Quartet – once again in Berlin. Beginning the album with this work had a clear chronological impetus, but it also has humorous potential: after many notes with which we are intimately familiar stream out from under the gramophone needle, the listener subconsciously expects destruction in the form of the record skipping or popping, and only after a few moments do they realise that while a destructive process is taking place, it is not on the surface of the record. "At the beginning, I destroyed the records themselves: hence no notation existed," says Knížák in *A Defiled Tradition*, a text written last year for the LP. "Later on, I had this idea that I could destroy notations, too, and thus create destructions written in notes, which could be performed in the conventional way. The first time I brought to bear this approach was in the piece called *Pznění národních písní (Defilement of National Songs)*, for the band Aktual in 1968, whereby I prescribed off-key, disharmonic errors in generally known folk songs. Then I mainly conceived collages, blending together several notations by different composers and subsequently rewriting key signatures, modifying rhythm and dynamics, or adding extra notes when I deemed that the piece came across as overly classical. (…) I have created numerous destroyed notations, some of them by means of simple deletion, rewriting, and adding of notes and marks – for instance, changing clefs, playing the music backwards, or simply combining different pieces by different composers."
The methods of broken music remained central to Knížák's musical thought throughout the 1980s, when he applied himself to composing in a more traditional manner. Knížák considers the musical and sonic experiments which arose in huge numbers around the middle of the 20th century something which, after a time, should belong in any normal arsenal of expressive means. There is no need to idolise them – instead, we can approach them naturally, thinking of them when we work, without a false sense of exclusivity.
He often enjoys composing string quartets in hotel rooms – as suggested

Milan Knížák and Petr Ferenc (aka Phaerentz) performing Broken Music

PHOTO: PETR FRANCAN

by the three-movement *Dubai, Australia, Tallin,* dated 1992–2009 – when he is tired of "strolling around the city or visiting the local bars," or at home at the piano – however, he rarely plays the piano during the creative process: he composes directly into the sheet music. His quartets are postmodern in the best sense of the world – mixing the most diverse influences and working with a number of media at the same time comes naturally to Knížák. The products try to avoid a carnivalesque, humorous character wherever this is not intentional. Knížák explore his terrain with a curious respect, unafraid of straying to the very edges of attractiveness or irritation. "My music is founded on expression, not on tone," he writes. "I have loved disharmony ever since I was a child, so I often reference it. On the other hand, I enjoy incorporating sweet melodies into my compositions – romantic passages, largely based on my songs, with the result being frequent concurrences of rough and smooth sections. My furniture and glass designs feature the *softhard* principle, a combination of soft and sharp shapes. And something similar can be found in my musical works." However, the *sotfhard* principle is unthinkable without that which is *between* soft and hard – in Knížák's art, this space is uncluttered, providing enough space for tuning in and meditating. His quartets do not try to astonish, tire, or outsmart you.

"One of my friends said that this music of mine is not similar to anything," Knížák concludes in *A Defiled Tradition*. "I would like to add that it is similar to everything. Perhaps both are true."

by Jan Borek

MusicOlomouc 2019

All the Colours of the Piano

In the Autumn, Olomouc, the cultural centre of Moravia, offers its hundred thousand inhabitants and many visitors a number of music festivals of all kinds and genres. This year saw the eleventh edition of the international festival of contemporary music, MusicOlomouc, which took place from the 9th to the 23rd of October on the premises of Palacký University. The carefully prepared programming always emphasises essential works of the musical avant-garde of the 20th and 21st centuries, including several world premieres of new pieces performed by leading ensembles from both the Czech Republic and abroad. This year's topic was the piano in all its shades and colours, i.e. its possibilities and instrumentations within the context of contemporary music – hence this year's title, "Colours of Piano".

The introductory "Piano & Ensemble" concert in the atrium of the Palacký University Arts Centre set the bar high, both in terms of programming and the unwaveringly precise performance by the Slovak **Quasars Ensemble**. Glimpses of subtly shaded timbral planes were heard in the opening *Lachrymae* (2011) by **Tristan Murail**. The French spectralist school was also represented in **Gérard Grisey's** *Vortext Temporum* (1995). The programme was completed by a student-period *String Quartet* (2001–06) by Quasars Ensemble conductor and artistic director **Ivan Buffa** – the four movements offering a synthesis of inspirations in contemporary music – and *Epuecuén*, a piano trio by the ensemble's violist **Daniel Oliver Moser** which included a truly explosive piano part. Four of the festival's eleven world premieres were part of the second programme, "Piano Trio", which featured the **Isha Trio** (**Kristina Vaculová** – flute, **Lucie Rozsnyó** – voice, **Sára Medková** – piano). The opening piece, **Ivo Medek's** *Touches*, was an effective introduction to the programme: the three artists gradually came onto the stage in the dimly lit Baroque space of the Corpus Christi Chapel. The next piece, *Sonnet of Evening*, was **Albert Breier's** setting of *Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves*, a poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844–1889). The vocal part, with its rather cut-up declamation, was thoroughly entwined with the flute and piano parts, but each of the three components seemed more of an individual stream than integral part of the whole. The longest piece of the evening was **Vít Zouhar's** subtle *Prosvítání* (*Shining Through*). Over the course of about fifteen minutes, it builds up from a two-note motif, again and again in a series of long inhalations and exhalations. The minimalist interplay of minute melodies in the piano, flute, and voice finally culminates in a rhythmic stream mostly propelled by a central piano foundation. The programme was completed by **Toru Takemitsu's** *Voice* (1971), *Three Pieces from Chū-u* (1958) by **Kazuo Fukushima,**

PHOTO: PETRA KOŽUŠNÍKOVÁ 4×

Ricardo Descalzo

Sequenza III (1965) by **Luciano Berio**, *Guero* (1970) by **Helmut Lachenmann**, and *To Play?* (2019) by **Sára Medková**. The **Cluster Ensemble** piano duo (**Ivan Šiller** and **Fero Király**) invited the audience to join them in an unusual evening of music for two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart. In addition to solid performances of several sections of **Ivan Wyschnegradsky's** spectacular *Préludes dans tous les tons de l'échelle chromatique diatonisée à 13 sons* (1893–1979) and the entirety of **Charles Ives'** *3 Quarter-tone Pieces* (1924), they also performed two premieres. Broken rhythms shining through dense textures dominated *Speechless Stones*. In this short and detailed work, Želislava **Sojak Subotić** explored the possibility of moving musical materials between the two performers. **Jakub Rataj's** new piece, *Θ*, focused on the parameters of pulsation and resonance.
The 14th of October saw a compositional portrait dedicated to the 70th birthday of composer **Jan Vičar**, mostly presenting the various ways in which he used the piano and the harpsichord. A vaguely Eastern atmosphere was suggested by the opening cycle *Nippon no Shiki (Japanese Seasons)* (1979, 2012) performed by the **Morgenstern Ensemble** (**Terezie** Švarcová – soprano, **Jana Jarkovská** – flute, **Marie Wiesnerová** – piano and haprsichord). This was

ISHA Trio

followed by a selection of short piano pieces, *Phantasms/Preludes* (2000), supported by humorous titles and descriptions for the individual movements. Then came *3+1* for theremin, trumpet, cello, and piano with the excellently coordinated **Lichtzwang**, followed by the pleasantly colourful *Lullabies* (2007) for violin and piano. The three-part cycle *De astris somniamus* (2015, 2018) was most captivating, thanks largely due to Marie Wiesnerová's virtuosic harpsichord playing. The premieres of the evening were two jazz pieces which the composer calls his "musical flings". They were performed by a jazz quintet put together specifically for this occasion. Most remarkable was Ľudovít **Kotlár's** piano and the solos on double bass (**Peter Korman**) and drums (**Kristian Kuruc**). The band was completed by saxophone (**Petr Chadim**) and trumpet (**Jan Přibil**).
A solo recital on prepared piano was presented on the 15th of October by the Belgian pianist **Daan Vandewalle**, well known in the Czech republic thanks to his countless marathons of extremely demanding music at the Ostrava Days festival. In Olomouc, he performed **John Cage's** complete *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946–1948) in a strong, sometimes almost mystical interpretation. Within this year's festival, so rich in terms of varied approaches to the piano, this was the most radical programme as to the breadth of the instrument's sonic possibilities.
The 21st of October brought together the piano (**Ricardo Descalzo**) and electronics (**Michael Cutting**). The traditionally spiritual space of the Corpus Christi Chapel was suddenly a field for connections between music and technology. Breakthroughs in nanotechnology inspired **Thomas Larcher's** piece *Smart Dust* (2015). The newest version of **František Chaloupka's** *Book of Sand* enriches the piano part with an electronic track with a rich palette of carefully processed effects, including deformed sounds of the piano and other instruments, string buzz, and long decays.
In his *Demonic Thesis* (2010) for amplified piano and electronic drum track, **John Psathas** prescribes a difficult and dense jazz piano solo (and a red light evocative of the gates to hell) with strong syncopated rhythms. The evening also featured the premiere of *inner* by **Michael Cutting**, scored for piano, loop pedal, and a tape recorder. The piece is a sonic laboratory creating a "lo-fi" ambient space occupied by the piano and the noises of a gradually decomposing tape on the tape recorder. **Ondřej Štochl's** *Three echoes before the full moon* (2012) displayed slight formalist tendencies within the context of something akin to "furniture music". The final premiere of the festival was a new component of the *Metaludios* by **Gustavo Díaz-Jerey**, titled *Stribog* – this stress test of the piano bears the name of the Slavic god of the wind and storm. Its material is mostly based on thunderous glissandi across the entire range of the keyboard.

Quasars Ensemble

The final fixture of the programme was the "Two Pianos" concert. **Maria Flavia Cerrato** and **Patrick Skrilecz** (both members of the Austrian **Schallfeld Ensemble**) performed two older and two newer pieces. The evening began with *Dove tutto è stato preso (Innerspace II)* (2016) by **Maurizio Azzan**, in which the performers use a glass dragged across the strings of the piano to elicit sharp, sometimes physically unpleasant frequencies. The unusual contrast between this piece and the dreamy rendition of **Morton Feldman's** *Piano Four Hands* (1958) paradoxically created a certain unrest among the audience – perhaps due to the calm and fragility of this piece, in which both pianists play their parts in their own tempo, embodying the essentially unrepeatable version of a uniquely nuanced interplay between the two voices.

Im Lichte II (2017/2018), the solo version of an older concerto for piano and orchestra by **Johannes Staud**, offers an elaborated adaptation of the original orchestral textures and a remarkable effect of a descending motif imitating bells. The last piece was also unambiguously the best – of this festival evening at least: **George Crumb's** iconic cycle, *Zeitgeist* (1988). Fragments of melodies, effective rhythms, and elaborated decays mark out the basic sonic space within which Crumb reaches for the deepest origins of music.

This year's edition of MusicOlomouc offered a wonderfully broad selection of perspectives on the piano and its sonic possibilities in truly top-class performances by leading contemporary music specialists. Together with the unique programme featuring two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart and the recital for well prepared piano, it also made a mark by presenting a number of world premieres including remarkable pieces by composers from both the Czech Republic and abroad. Despite the clear focus on a single instrument, the dramaturgy was very balanced, particularly concerning the possibilities of the chamber ensemble. A tighter thematic focus and linking of the entire programme is a welcome development, supporting the interplay between the individual evenings. The festival is planning to continue in this spirit: next year's edition will focus on the music of Scandinavia and the Baltics.

by Boris Klepal

Sixth-tone Music and Tight Deadlines

Miroslav Beinhauer and premieres of pieces by Alois Hába

"God, what a horrible noise! Give me some beautiful Schönberg…" This is one of the comments on a YouTube video which shows pianist Miroslav Beinhauer performing Alois Hába's ***Six Compositions for Sixth-tone Harmonium.*** These are the only solo works composed for this remarkable instrument, and despite the terrified commenter, they sound more soft than horrible, as Beinhauer emphasises. Hába finished the ***Six Compositions for Sixth-tone Harmonium or String Quartet op. 37*** in 1928, but it was only this spring that the cycle was finally recorded – by Miroslav Beinhauer. In our interview, we spoke about his interest in Hába's music, the difficulties in moving from piano to a sixth-tone instrument, how long it takes to begin hearing mistakes in this unusual system, and the possibilities for the creation of modern compositions.

How did you arrive at an interest in Hába's music, and what's more, in the most difficult part of his oeuvre? And why does a pianist begin learning to play the sixth-tone harmonium?

In 2018, the New Opera Days Ostrava festival was putting together the world premiere of Hába's sixth-tone opera, *Thy Kingdom Come* (see CMQ 2018/2), written almost a hundred years ago. A few weeks before the premiere, the harmonium player cancelled and the production team had to find someone willing to learn to play it as fast as possible, and to understand the system. I decided to try – and it gripped me so much I stayed with the sixth-tone harmonium.

But New Opera Days Ostrava didn't approach you by chance – you already had some experience with contemporary music and the festival team…

Of course. Though I don't want to be exclusively a performer of 20th century music – I'm interested in everything – I had performed at the Ostrava Days festival in the past, which is also organised by the Ostrava Centre for New Music. But this gig deputising at the harmonium was an exceptional and last-minute arrangement.

However, during the performance of *Thy Kingdom Come*, you didn't just play the harmonium – you also used a synthesiser. Did you run out of time to learn all the material on harmonium?

Time was indeed the issue. I only got the score a few weeks before the premiere – fourteen days, perhaps. The sixth-tone harmonium is a crucial instrument in the opera – everything else is written around it. It was certainly outside my possibilities to learn the entire part on the harmonium. In fact, I think it was outside *anyone's* possibilities to do it so fast. First, you have to master the instrument's system, and only then can you begin learning the music. So I agreed with the conductor, Bruno Ferrandis, that I would chiefly focus on the places where the harmonium plays alone or where it's more audible, and the rest would be played on a synthesiser.

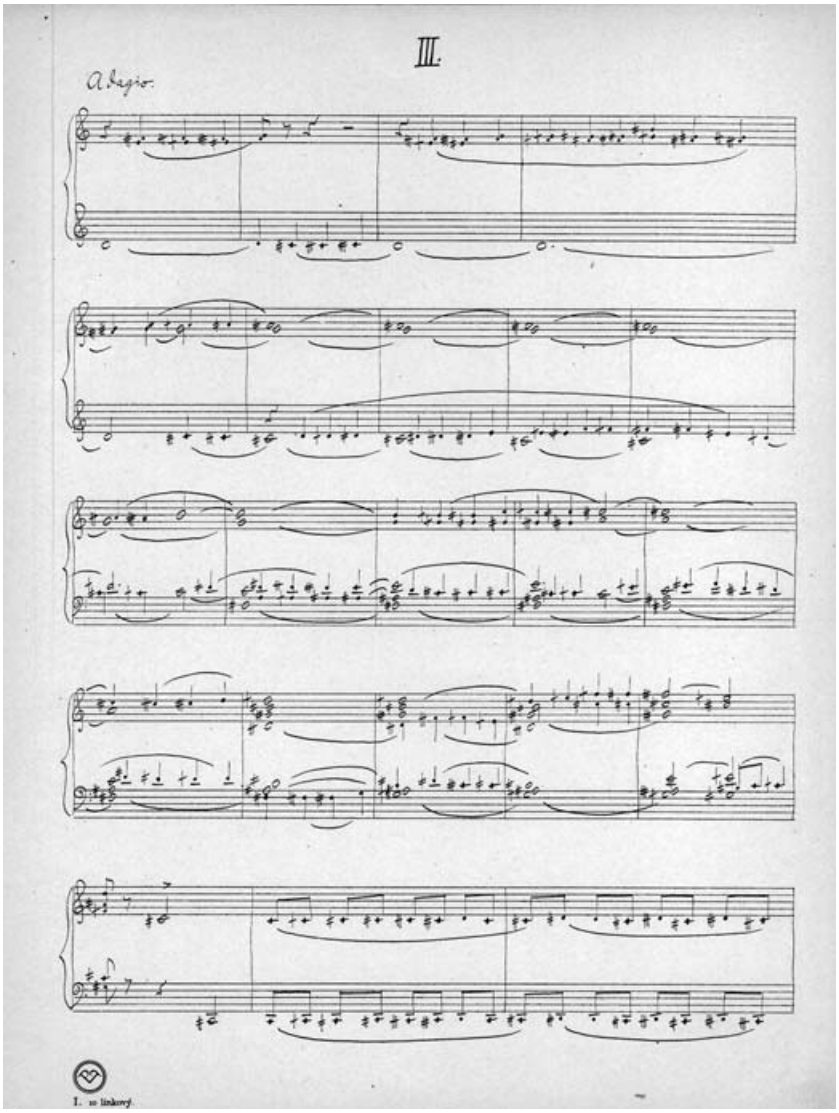
I'm asking about the difficulties in learning the material because I'm interested in what it means for a pianist to learn to play a sixth-tone instrument

with a completely different keyboard layout. Did you have to learn everything from scratch?
Precisely. Of course, it's an advantage if, when you begin to learn playing the sixth-tone harmonium, you have some idea of music in general – you should have a sense for the harmony of music. But it's something completely different from the piano. The harmonium I practiced on has three manuals and their playing system is completely different to the piano. Even just playing a chromatic scale is a daunting task – you have to use at least two manuals.

So that means that you cannot perform things on the sixth-tone harmonium that are utterly banal on the piano – say a chromatic scale in the right hand and a chordal accompaniment in the left?
I can't say it's impossible, but it's much more difficult. I've been playing the piano for about twenty-two years, but it was still impossible to learn to play a completely new instrument in two weeks, especially seeing as it's much more complex than a normal piano – it has three times as many tones!

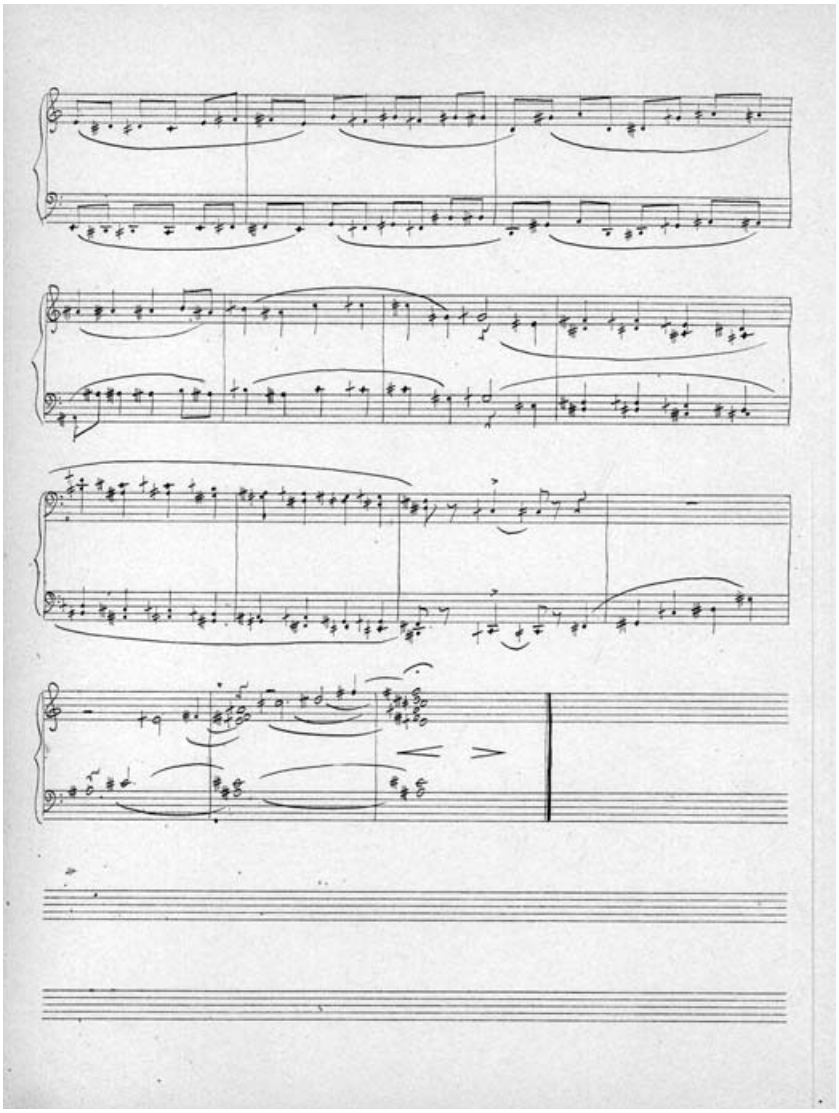
The premiere performance of Thy Kingdom Come is now well behind us and you've evidently become friendly with the instrument since then – you've recorded the solo pieces Alois Hába wrote for the sixth-tone harmonium. How long did it take you to learn to play them well enough to be able to start recording?
First, I had to acquire the score – it was kept at the Czech Museum of Music, just like the harmonium itself. Following a quick glance, I decided I would spend about two or three months learning it and then go into the studio. After all, I had some experience from the year before – it wasn't my first encounter and I already more or less understood the playing system. So I came up with an ambitious plan: I cancelled all my concerts for two months so I could concentrate fully on Hába every day and have a chance at fully capturing the spirit of his music. I started in the middle of March and recorded on the last day of April. It was a tight deadline, but seeing as I had nothing to do in Prague except go to the museum after breakfast and practice until the evening, I managed. I think the recording went well.

Writing my review of *Thy Kingdom Come*, I estimated that to prepare a performance of this opera that would avoid any compromises, an opera company would have to close themselves off for about six months and rehearse nothing else.
Yes, that's quite likely, only it would cost a lot of money. And the opera is also considerably longer. The *Six Compositions for Sixth-tone Harmonium* are only about twelve or thirteen minutes long, and they're for a solo instrument too. The opera was also much more difficult due to the fact that the harmonium

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

No. 3 from Alois Hába's
Six Compositions for Sixth-tone Harmonium
op. 37

part is very chordal and playing chords of three, four, or even more notes in the sixth-tone system is so awfully hard it's difficult to imagine. Sixth-tone chords are a chapter unto themselves – it often happens that their individual tones are played on all three manuals. It's really much easier to play a melody with accompaniment.

So far, we've spoken about how to retune the hands to fit or divide among three sixth-tone manuals…
But that's the most difficult part! As a pianist, you've learnt your positions and fingerings – I know *exactly* where to put my hands on the piano. Learning how to play the harmonium, I had to think before *every* chord – where and how am I going to get my hand there? The keyboard on the sixth-tone harmonium is actually a little similar to the piano, but in fact, it's completely different – I think that's the worst thing about it.

Of course – but what I was referring to is the fact that you also need to retune your *hearing* to the sixth-tone system. Doesn't it happen that at the beginning of the learning process, you don't even hear that you are making mistakes?
I don't have perfect pitch, only well-trained relative pitch, but in my experience, you become accustomed to it after several days or weeks of everyday intensive contact with the instrument. Then I was able to reliably discern whether or not I had made a mistake. I think it's simply a question of training your hearing – anyone could do it.

That's very likely. After all, if we are to believe his own reminiscences, Hába first encountered microtones with folk musicians in Moravian Wallachia, his home. They sung these microtones despite the fact that they didn't have any institutional musical training.
To an extent, it depends on one's musical education. If you haven't had any, learning microtones will take longer. I discovered in myself a fondness for sixth-tones and the music of Alois Hába, which made learning and practicing easier.

But if someone grows up in a musical environment in which microtones are common, they will probably be easier for them than a trained musician who is firmly entrenched in the semi-tonal system.
That's true. People raised in Eastern cultures, which regularly make use of microtones, can operate much better within these systems. I was thinking more of a consuming listener who mostly encounters popular music and has no experience with classical music, let alone Alois Hába.

When we say Alois Hába, people mostly imagine quarter-tones. We're talking about sixth-tones and in his *Treatise on Harmony (Nauka o harmonii)*, he even goes as far as twelfth-tones. As a listener, which do you find more pleasing: quarter-tones or sixth-tones?
The first thing to say is that Hába wrote many more pieces in the quarter-tone system. He only composed these six pieces, *Thy Kingdom Come*, and a few compositions for string instruments in the sixth-tone system – that's pretty much it. But I have to say that personally, the sixth-tone pieces sound a lot more euphonious and rich than the ones in the quarter-tone system. When I was practicing at the Czech Museum of Music, they also had Hába's quarter-tone piano. When you played that, it felt like it was strangely out of tune. Sixth-tones, however, are so specific that they create a completely separate type of music. They seem more natural to me – though this is certainly also given by the fact that I spent such a long time with them.

So it seems as though Ferruccio Busoni was right when he recommended to Hába that he use smaller microtones than quarter-tones. There is probably no longer anyone in the world composing in a thorough quarter-tone or sixth-tone system, but microtones have long been a common feature in contemporary music. Aren't sixth-tones more pleasant to listeners because they are gentle blurrings of the usual semitones, rather than the sharply out-of-tune quarter-tones?
My piano professor had no experiences with microtonal music, and when she tried playing the quarter-tone piano and the sixth-tone harmonium, the sixth-tones seemed much more pleasant to her ears. Perhaps this is also true more generally.

Are there any other pieces for the sixth-tone harmonium, or was Hába the only one to compose for it?
As far as I know, only this piece exists for the sixth-tone harmonium. Hába began a concerto for sixth-tone harmonium and orchestra but didn't finish it. When I put my recording up on YouTube, I was contacted by some microtonal music aficionados who were enormously excited – they didn't even know something like this existed. I also found one piece which featured the sound of the sixth-tone harmonium, but in this case, it was created electronically. I was also contacted by composers who would like to write for the instrument. But there is a problem in how they could gain access to it – there are only a few pieces in the world. They can't simply play it and try out its sonic possibilities.

Are there other sixth-tone harmoniums in the world in addition to the two built following Hába's design?
One harmonium is part of the expositions of the Czech Museum of Music – that's the one I recorded on. The second one, which is older, and for which Hába composed his *Six Compositions*, is in the depository of the National Museum in Litoměřice, where I later discovered two other sixth-tone harmoniums with a completely different system and keyboard. I was able to analyse it with my ear, but I couldn't play it because I had learned something else. Perhaps they will form part of my further work and research.

*MIROSLAV BEINHAUER (*1993) is currently enrolled in the doctoral programme at the Musical Faculty of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno, where he studies with Jindra Bártová. He studied piano at the same academy, under the direction of Helena Weiser. He studied abroad with Jan Jiracek von Arnim at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Vienna and at the School of Arts in Ghent with Daan Vandewalle. His doctoral studies focus on Alois Hába and his keyboard music. In April 2019, he made the world's first recording of Hába's sixth-tone opus 37. Beinhauer mentioned the quartet version of the Six Compositions for Sixth-tone Harmonium or String Quartet in his study for the Opus musicum musicology journal: "Opus 37 was rehearsed and recorded by two string quartets: the Hába Quartett and the Stamitz Quartet. The string quartet transcription was created by Alois Hába and revised by Johannes Kotschy. In this arrangement, the piece often sounds considerably different – the sixth-tones are not adhered to as strictly as in the original score."*

by Dita Hradecká

Martin Daněk:
The Oboe is Still a Great Mystery

Oboist Martin Daněk, now thirty years of age, won this year's Prague Spring competition. The fact that he participated despite previous failures shows a will to keep going and overcoming obstacles. In 2009, Daněk graduated from the musical programme at the prestigious Jan Neruda Grammar School in Prague (now the High School and Music School of the City of Prague). He continued his studies in Berlin, where he earned his master's degree at the Hochschule für Musik "Hanns Eisler". He is currently a resident of Zurich and a member of the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra.

The Prague Spring competition consists of three rounds. It lasts several days and the compulsory repertoire includes many pieces from various stylistic periods. How did you prepare?
It feels like it was yesterday… The period before the competition was very intense. I'm glad I chose a strategy which seems to have worked: I tried to organise my time as best I could and allow as much time as possible for the preparation. It was my last opportunity to participate – the age limit is thirty.

Can you elaborate on your strategy?
For me as an orchestral player, it was mostly about organising my other commitments. I knew there were a lot of pieces to learn and I'd also participated in a different competition not long ago. It's good to be able to estimate how long just learning the compulsory repertoire will take. Another thing is getting into shape to perform. The competition is a good motivator – it forces you to work on yourself.

What place did you see yourself occupying?
Like all the musicians I know, I'm very self-critical, so I didn't count on getting this far up. I wanted to try. In fact, I was looking forward to it as my last chance to compete – most of all, I wanted to enjoy and remember it.

You have experiences from competitions abroad, and yet – it must have been a specific atmosphere to be playing to the "home" crowd…
Competing in Prague was quite a strain – people know me here, but I also spent a lot of time studying abroad. That's also part of why I wanted to play as best I could. Perhaps to prove to myself, to those who believed in me, and to those who didn't that all those years weren't lost. It was a greater responsibility and it was personal. Did you know that in the last Prague Spring oboe competition, I came second before last? They still hung up the points back then, so I found out. I spent a long time wondering whether I should even send a recording.

That must require a lot of courage and determination. What happened between then and now?
I went to dozens of orchestral auditions – forty-six last time I counted. Sometimes what happens is they don't give the orchestral spot to anyone. I realised that neither in auditions nor

PHOTO: NEDA NAVAEE

in competitions is the winner the best and the others are losers. It's not that simple – there are many factors at play during the performance. We're artists, we have good days and worse days, good and bad periods… I was lucky this time – I was in good form.
I think it helped a lot that I went into the competition for myself. I completed my studies and I came to play these pieces in my own interpretation, not as someone's student. I didn't even have lessons or consultations with anyone. For me, that was a breakthrough: doing it how *I* want. Perhaps that's what set me apart from the others – after all, I was more experienced; seasoned.

After winning a place in Lucerne, do you now have your dream position?
I like it there a lot, and if I get the chance to stay, I'll stay. I'm the second oboe, doubling on cor anglais. My contract is for one trial year – and then we'll see. In addition to Lucerne, I also help out in the opera in Zurich, where I live.

How do you like living in Switzerland?
It's a beautiful country where everything works. Life in Zurich is very expensive, particularly when compared to Berlin. But musicians are always an international community, so I'm in pleasant company. The orchestra is a mix of many nationalities. The only other Czech is one of the violists. Switzerland is a smaller country, their mentality is different: they're comfortable, they have a slower tempo. It offers completely different qualities than Berlin, which is throbbing compared to Switzerland.

I assume the competition changed everything.
Quite. Paths opened I didn't even hope could open. I got confirmation that I could believe in myself and that you can aim as high as you want…
With the laureate title came solo concerts, then performances with the Stamitz Quartet, my February recital in the Czech Philharmnoic's chamber society, solo concerts in Olomouc and Košice, a recital in the small hall of the Berlin Konzerthaus… In May,

I'll return to the Prague Spring for a *nocturne* – I want to make that really special, moving between Baroque and modern music, with a lot of my colleagues sitting in.
The period spent with the competition was extremely demanding in all aspects, so I took a month off everything in the summer. That's when I finally had the time to realise what the entire experience had brought me. I'm very happy I won – it holds a lot of value for me. I'd like to confirm the fact that I deserve the award through the responsibility I bring to my future concerts.

You're at an age when you're probably thinking about starting a family. Where would you like your children to grow up?
I was always attracted by the life of the soloist, but now I'm not sure if I could manage. I'd like to call some place home. This is my third year in Zurich. I have a relationship with the place and I can imagine settling down there. But it's important that I can always go home. I'll always be coming back often enough.

When you meet your former schoolmates, do you see any particular values or criteria which your generations share?
A lot of people my age have settled down and started families. I'm taking my time. I wanted to learn as much as I could, study, play…
I travelled a lot for work, including trips to Latvia, Spain, Norway, Malaysia. I spent one year in an Icelandic orchestra. I enjoyed all these places – I don't consider any of that time wasted.
When I observe my contemporaries in the West, I notice they also take their time settling down. Perhaps it's also due to the fact that it's harder than ever for a musician to find a good position. There are only very few orchestral positions and too many applicants: you might get three hundred applications for one audition. So the young spend a lot of time searching for themselves. And they also can't find work. My mind was always made up – I want to be an orchestral player. Making your living purely from solo playing as a woodwind player is a rare exception.

You graduated from a musical grammar school. Apparently, you weren't exactly the most dedicated student…
Looking back, I wish I'd been more diligent with the non-musical subjects. But right from when I noticed I had a certain talent for the oboe, I didn't want to lose any time. I always admired people who managed to study both medicine and music. I couldn't do it – I know the effort it takes. A positive habit I took away from the school is my preparation system. I also got decent general knowledge, or at least an interest in extending this knowledge.
The school makes you realise that the world – that life isn't just about music. I spent eight years there. I was often in the building for twelve hours a day, I passed all the general and specialist subjects, and I also had to practice… You lose all your activities outside of school, but you learn to respect that time too.

Moving to Berlin must have been a shock.
The leap from high school to university was huge. I spent a year at the music academy in Prague and then I took the entrance exam to Berlin. I always wanted to go abroad and Berlin was a good motivation. A new country, a new language. There weren't many Czechs there at the time; it wasn't a community that would take you in. It took me a while to find my bearings.
The Hochschule "Hanns Eisler" is one of the best music schools in Berlin. Many of the students there have already experienced great success – they win competitions, they hold important orchestral positions, they're at the beginning of promising careers. The school is therefore quite tolerant and flexible as for the time management of your studies. I had the excellent fortune to study with professors who are also members of the Berlin Philharmonic: Dominik Wollenweber and Jonathan Kelly. They're among the best in their field and what I learned from them set me up for life.

Your family background must have been a considerable influence on your professional career.
My father is a musicologist. My mother played the piano for a long time – she used to teach music and Czech in high school, now she's a yoga teacher. They didn't force me into music or anything else – they left it up to me. But of course, my environment played an important part in my decisions. Dad used to lead a vocal ensemble, he'd take me to concerts. Even today, whenever I hear renaissance music, I light up… First, when I was six, I opted for the violin. I played it until I was fifteen. But then at the grammar school, there were so many violinists that I went for the oboe – nobody really wanted to play it.

I think it suits you. It matches the colour of your voice, and your physiognomy too.
Perhaps it just so happened that it fits my character. The sound of the oboe comes from within, people often compare it to the human voice… All the effort

PHOTO © PRAGUE SPRING FESTIVAL – IVAN MALÝ

you put in on the way to perfect tone comes from within. That's why every player's tone is completely different.
Anyway, how it all works is a great mystery anyway – I conceive of it more philosophically than mechanically. The reed is definitely at the heart of it all: it's tiny, everyone makes their own, and the resultant tone of the instrument is hugely determined by its quality. It's kind of like a mediator between the sound from the core of the player and what emanates from the instrument. As oboists, we often struggle with the reed – we worry whether what comes out of the instrument will be even remotely close to the dreamt-of sonic ideal.
When it all works out, the oboist is satisfied – he can express all his emotions through that tiny read. That is then manifested in the audience's reaction. And the oboe is really the instrument that can express emotions most clearly.

How do you look after your body?
It's on my daily plan. I go running and swimming regularly. I'm also searching for the right path to breathing – oboe playing stands on this foundation. Physical fitness is very important for oboists – it's a very demanding instrument. But it's not a rule that the best players are in top physical condition. Just like with singers, sound – its volume and colour – is not directly proportional to the body. It's an interesting topic. Again, I believe it all depends on your ideal tone and some kind of resonance of the body with the reed. In this respect, the oboe is in fact quite an unexplored instrument.

What type of support would you have appreciated as a student?
There were no scholarships at the time, but thankfully, I played a lot so I could make enough. But a scholarship that would allow one to concentrate more on school, like some students in the West have, would have been great.
I feel – and I'm not alone – that there is huge potential in the Czech Republic; a lot of talent. If someone is a talented musician, all they have to do is practice a little. In Germany, I met people who weren't that talented, but their school and the entire system led them to success. In Berlin, I started from zero – I mean in playing but in life too. At the time, the city had a lot of gaps, scars, blanks. Every day on my way to school, I'd pass a place where they were taking apart the Palace of the Republic, leaving behind a huge empty area. Now, the original Baroque palace they're rebuilding is almost complete. And I take this as a metaphor of my own life and studies, my development.

by Barbora Vacková

CZECH MUSIC EVERY DAY

EVENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD IN THE AUTUMN OF 2019

The autumn concert of Ensemble Terrible, a group of students and recent graduates of HAMU, was rightly called “Echoes of a November with Too Much Music”. A fitting title to describe a new and exciting situation: contemporary music was heard almost every day, in some cases even running in parallel at several venues. In addition to the Contempuls festival – the leading new music festival in Prague – there were also several concerts of the more locally focused Days of Contemporary Music, presentations by HAMU students, and performances by various ensembles devoted to contemporary music (Ensemble Terrible, MoEns, Trio Helix). The Czech Philharmonic also presented an all-contemporary evening, performing works by the finalists of its composer competition: Adrián Demoč, Matouš Hejl, and the winner, Jana Vöröšová.

There was also much activity beyond the capital city. The MusicOlomouc festival presented an interesting programme with many new pieces (see the text in this issue), as did the Exposition of New Music in Brno and Hudební současnost in Ostrava. Several new pieces were also presented by Ensemble Opera Diversa and the BERG Orchestra, which also continues to supplement its evening programming with premieres of music written for the monthly test of emergency sirens.

14 September 2019, Archa Theatre, Prague. International Shakuhachi Festival Prague. **Lucie Vítková: *Ways of Doing* (world premiere).** Makiko Goto – bass koto, Akihito Obama – shakuhachi, Lucie Vítková – hichiriki, Anna Fliegerová Romanovská – violin, Lukáš Brabec – saxophone, Štěpán Janoušek – percussion.
16 September 2019, Domovina – Grand Hall, Prague. International Shakuhachi Festival Prague. **Jan Rösner: *For Shakuhachi and String Orchestra* (world premiere).** Akihito Obama – shakuhachi, BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel.
19 September 2019, Theater an der Wien, Vienna. **Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka* (premiere of a new production).** Directed by: Amélie Niermeyer, music director: David Afkham. Language: Czech. Following performances: 21, 23, 26, 28, and 30 Sep 2019.
20 September 2019, Johanniskirche, Zittau, Germany. Lípa Musica. **Petr Koronthály: *Magnificat* (world premiere).** Severáček, choirmaster: Silvie Pálková.
21 September 2019, Theater St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland. **Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka* (premiere of a new production).** Directed by: Vera Nemirova, music director: Modestas Pitrenas/Stéphane Fromageot. Language: Czech. Following performances: 29 Sep, 2, 6, 20, and 29 Oct, 2 and 14 Nov, 8, 13, and 17 Dec 2019, 7 Feb 2020.
22 September 2019, Churhc of St Martin, Klenčí pod Čerchovem. **Josef Kuneš: *Agnus Dei,* Josef Jarábek: *Po cestě křížové* (world premieres).** Kamil Jindřich – voice, Josef Stočes – clarinet, Martina Morysková – organ.

22 September 2019, Opernhaus Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland. **Leoš Janáček: *The Makropulos Affair* (premiere of a new production)**. Directed by: Dmitri Tcherniakov, music director: Jakub Hrůša. Language: Czech. Following performances: 25 and 28 Sep, 6, 9, 13, 17 and 22 Oct 2019.
25 September 2019, Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. **Miroslav Srnka: *Milky Way for trumpet and piano* (world premiere).** Simon Höfele – trumpet, Kärt Ruubel – piano.
25 September 2019, BURANTEATR, Brno. ***Grobiáni* (a cycle of three mini-operas in world premieres).** Martin Kux: *The Ring*; Mario Buzzi: *The Promise*; Ondřej Kyas: *Dorotka's Wooing.* Librettists: Vendula Borůvková, Pavel Drábek. Directed by: Lukáš Kopecký, music director: Josef Javora. Cast: Jana Vondrů, Marie Zichová, Aleš Janiga, Pavel Slivka, Ensemble Opera Diversa.
2 October 2019, 11:50, Graphic School Prague Hellichova, Prague. Music for Sirens… micro-concerts with the emergency siren test. ***Graphic Symphony.*** Concept/music: Michal Nejtek, NTS trio (Michal Nejtek, Petr Tichý, Štěpán Smetáček).
6 October 2019, Orlí Street Theatre, Brno. Moravian Autumn. **Ondřej Adámek: *Le Dîner* (Czech premiere).** Directed by: Jiří Adámek, painter: Charlotte Guibé, rapper: Helena Velická. Brno Contemporary Orchestra, conductor: Pavel Šnajdr.
8 October 2019, Corpus Christi Chapel, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **Ivo Medek: *Touches,* Vít Zouhar: *Prosvítání* (world premiere)**. ISHA trio (Kristina Vaculová – flute, Lucie Rozsnyó – voice, Sára Medková – piano).
9 October 2019, Corpus Christi Chapel, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. "Two Pianos Tuned in Quarter-Tone Distance". **Jakub Rataj: *Θ* (world premiere).** Cluster Ensemble (Ivan Šiller, Fero Király – piano).
14 October 2019, Corpus Christi Chapel, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. Piano in works of Jan Vičar – 70th Birthday Composer Portrait. **Jan Vičar: *Remembrance Ž for jazz quintet,* Jan Vičar: *Remembrance M for jazz quintet* (world premieres).** Petr Chadim – whistling/tenor saxophone, Jan Přibil – trumpet, Ludovít Kotlár – piano, Peter Korman – double bass, Kristian Kuruc – percussions.
15 October 2019, Czech Museum of Music, Prague. **Martin Kux: *Un amour mystique et solitaire,* Roman Zabelov: *On various things* (world premiere).** Emilia Kozłowska – soprano, Pražští pěvci, choirmaster: Stanislav Mistr (Kux). BERG Orchestra, conductor: Peter Vrábel
18 October 2019, Opéra National du Rhin, Strasbourg, France. **Antonín Dvořák: *Rusalka* (premiere of a new production in co-production with Opéra de Limoges).** Directed by: Nicola Raab, music director: Antony Hermus. Following performances: 20, 22, 24 and 26 Oct 2019.
20 October 2019, Gallery, Academy of the Performing Arts, Prague. Archaion Kallos. Festival of Orthodox Music. "Hesychasmus – Music from Silence". **Michal Rataj: *sound interventions* (world premiere).** Michal Rataj – live electronics.
21 October 2019, Corpus Christi Chapel, Art Centre of Palacký University, Olomouc. MusicOlomouc. **František Chaloupka: *The Book of Sand* – piano version (world premiere).** Ricardo Descalzo – piano.
22 October 2019, Hall of the Convent of Merciful Brothers, Brno. **Petra Čtveráčková: *Quasi lontano* for recorder, harp and strings (world premiere).** Michaela Koudelková – recorder, Dominika Kvardová – harp, Ensemble Opera Diversa, conductor: Gabriela Tardonová.
30 October 2019, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. The Bridge Prague – Helsinki. **Michaela Augustinová: *Sudoku* (world premiere).** Juulia Pölönen – kantele.
4 November, 2019, Gallery, Academy of the Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Přemysl Kučera: *Interspaces.* 12 small melodramas (world premiere).** Milada Čechová – recitation, Bharata Rajnošek – saxophone, Matouš Přeruška – violin, Kristina Vocetková – violoncello, Štěpán Hon – marimba. **Miroslav Kubička: *Chamber Concerto* for double bass and wind quintet (world premiere).** Adam Honzírek – double bass, Prague Wind Quintet. **Ondřej Kukal: *Saxofoniana, op. 54* for saxophone and string quintet (world premiere).** Roman Fojtíček – saxophone, Ančerl Quartet (Lukáš Novotný, Martin Balda – violins, Ondřej Martinovský – viola, Daniel Petrásek – violoncello), Marek Lustig – double bass.
5 November 2019, Church of St Clement, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Stanislav Jelínek: *Sonata per harpsichord* (world premiere).** Ivana Bažantová – harpsichord. **Vojtěch Mojžíš: *Punctum saliens* (world premiere).** Diana Hladíková – soprano, Věra Kestřánková – bass clarinet. **Jan Fila: *Lumen gentium* for solo organ (world premiere).** Drahoslav Gric – organ. **Jan Bernátek: *Missa festiva* for solos, mixed choir and organ (world premiere).** Stanislava Mihalcová – soprano, Jan Morávek – baritone, Linda Sítková – organ, Bach-Collegium Praha, conductor: Jiří Mátl.

SEPTEMB

PHOTO: KAREL ŠUSTER

Jakub Rataj and Trio Catch

6 November 2019, 11:55, Piazzetta of the Faculty of Architecture, Czech Technical University, Prague. ***Music for Sirens…*** **micro-concerts with emergency siren test.** ***Fanfare*** **(world premiere).** Concept/music: Michal Rataj. Jan Pohořalý, Radek Černý – trumpets, Jan Musil – French horn, Jan Jirucha – trombone.
6 November 2019, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Tomáš Svoboda:** ***Charms for Harp.*** **A selection from a cycle of 40 short pieces (world premiere).** Hedvika Mousa Bacha – harp. **Jaroslav Šaroun:** ***Su la cetra amorosa*** **(world premiere).** Lucie Laubová – soprano, Jaroslav Šaroun – piano. **Ivo Bláha:** ***Levitation for violin solo*** **(world premiere).** Michal Sedláček – violin. **Vít Micka:** ***Preludium and Toccata "Ad honorem Ioanni Sebastiani"*** **for violin and guitar (world premiere).** Ondřej Lébr – violin, Petr Saidl – guitar. **Jitka Koželuhová:** ***Lobgesang*** **(world premiere).** Pavel Hromádka, Jiří Bachtík, Marie Pačesová – trumpets.
7 November 2019, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. 'Premiere Evening'. **Adrián Demoč:** ***Neha,*** **adagio for orchestra, Jana Vörösová:** ***Orpingalik's Songs*** **for Soprano and Orchestra, Matouš Hejl:** ***Crossings*** **(world premiere).** Vanda Šípová – soprano, Czech Philharmonic, conductor: Keith Lockhart.
8 November 2019, Martinů Hall, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Orchestral concert of the composition department. **Juhani Vesikkala Wittmacher:** ***Versa est,*** **Tomáš Borl:** ***Concerto for cimbalom and orchestra,*** **Vratislav Zochr:** ***Concerto for trombone and orchestra,*** **Pavel Šabacký:** ***Piece for orchestra*** **(world premieres).** Barbora Kolafová – trombone, Daniel Skála – cimbalom, Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor: Petr Louženský.
10 November 2019, Philharmonie Köln, Cologne, Germany. **Miroslav Srnka:** ***Milky Way*** **– version for trumpet and marimba (world premiere).** Simon Höfele – trumpet, Simone Rubino – percussion.
10 November 2019, Centrum Konferencyjno-Szkoleniowe Boss, Warsaw, Poland. European Festival of Music Academies. ***The Suite of European Nations*** **(world premiere).** I. Marcin Kopczyński (Poland), II. Victor Vojcik (Belarus), III. Kiryll Volkov (Russia), IV. Jonas Jurkunas (Lithuania), **V. Eliška Cílková (Czech Republic),** VI. Balázs Kecskés D. (Hungary). Witold Kawalec – piano, String Quartet Academia dell'Arco.
12 November 2019, Church of St Clement, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Jaroslav Krček:** ***Mass no. 11*** **(world premiere).** Musica Bohemica. **Zdeněk Zahradník:** ***Requiem*** **for mezzosoprano, narrator, and instrumental ensemble on poetry by Josef Hora (world premiere).** Kristina Kubová – mezzosoprano, Marek Pavlíček – narrator, Dana Šitnerová – gong, Bohdana Tesařová – oboe, Barbora Pudlovská – clarinet, Zdeněk Bělohradský – French horn, Pavla Tesařová – violin, Zbyněk Paďourek – viola, Jitka Vlašánková – violoncello, Eliška Černíková, Jana Eisenhammerová, Anna Kapsová, Karolína Nečasová – recorders, conductor: Zdeněk Zahradník.
13 November 2019, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Karel Mirošník:** ***Saxes in a trance*** **(world premiere).** Czech Saxophone Quartet (Roman Fojtíček, Radim Kvasničan, Otakar Martinovský, Zdenko Kašpar). **Marek Pavlíček:** ***Three Sonnets by William Shakespeare for soprano and piano*** **(world premiere).** Lucie Kaňková – soprano, Stanislav Bogunia – piano.

Edvard Schiffauer: *Maryša.* Monologue from the Mrštík brothers' play for solo voice (world premiere). Simona Mrázová – soprano.
15 November 2019, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. **AIVA (Artificial Intelligence Virtual Artist): *From the Future World* (composed by artificial intelligence inspired by a fragment by Antonín Dvořák).** PKF – Prague Philharmonia, conductor: Emmanuel Villaume.
18 November 2019, Czech Museum of Music, Prague. "Echoes of a November with Too Much Music". **Michal Nejtek: *Insomnia II,* Petr Hora: *Flesh of Mind,* Hanuš Bartoň: *A Rise to the Sphere of Rest* (world premieres).** Ensemble Terrible, conductor: Josef Štefan.
18 November 2019, Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague. **Ondřej Adámek: *The Noon Witch* (2013, Czech premiere).** Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Prague Philharmonic Choir, conductor: Alexander Liebreich.
19 November 2019, Martinů Hall, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Ivan Zelenka: *Concerto for two guitars and chamber orchestra,* Pavel Hrabánek: *Vivat simplicita,* Jan Grossmann: Kavod ve Simcha for piano and string orchestra, Michal Müller: *Concerto no. 2 for violin, strings and percussion* (world premieres).** Vít Dvořáček, Martin Cába – guitars, Elena Letňanová – piano, Jindřich Pazdera – violin, Praga Camerata, conductor: Pavel Hůla.
21 November 2019, Besední dům, Brno. Exposition of New Music. **Peter Graham: *Simple Motives and Simple-Minded Songs* (world premiere).** ISHA trio (Kristina Vaculová – flute, Lucie Rozsnyó – voice, Sára Medková – piano).
21 November 2019, Church of St Martin in the Wall, Prague. Music in Contexts. "Songs of the Mass". **Jaroslav Rybář: *Gloria* (world premiere).** Female choir Bubureza. **Jan Rybář: *Credo* (world premiere).** Ensemble Coccinelle.
21 November 2019, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Milada Červenková: *Preludium and Toccata* for piano, Karel Janovický: *Piano Sonata* (world premieres).** Barbora K. Sejáková – piano. **David Lukáš: *Thyme* (world premiere).** Matouš Pěruška – violin, Miroslav Sekera – piano.
24 November 2019, DOX+, Prague. Contempuls. **Martin Smolka: *Vor dem Gesetz* for 7 speaking musicians with side instruments, based on texts by Franz Kafka (Czech premiere).** Libretto: Jiří Adámek. Ensemble Ascolta.
24 November 2019, DOX+, Prague. Contempuls. **Luboš Mrkvička: *For Piano, Part K* (world premiere).** Satoko Inoue – piano.
25 November 2019, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Vilém Zelenka: *Suite for flute, bass clarinet and piano* (world premiere).** Jana Bošková – flute, Věra Kestřánková – bass clarinet, Eva Doušová – piano. **Eduard Douša: *Sonata for violin and piano* "Tempora mutantur?" (world premiere).** Petr Maceček – violin, Eva Doušová – piano. **Jiří Laburda: *Trio per 2 oboi e pianoforte* (world premiere).** Liběna Séquardtová, Ivan Séquardt – oboe, Yukie Ichimura – piano. **Zdeněk Šesták: *My Heart is Shaking Violently* (world premiere)**. Miroslava Časarová – soprano, Daniel Wiesner – piano.
26 November 2019, Gallery, Academy of the Performing Arts, Prague. **Kamil Doležal: *Rituals, Hanuš Bartoň: Torso,* Miroslav Pudlák: *A Woman and a Snake,* Michal Nejtek: *Quintet* (world premieres).** Daniel Mikolášek – percussion, MoEns (Kamil Doležal – clarinet, Roman Hranička – violin, Balázs Adorján – violoncello, Hanuš Bartoň – piano, Miroslav Pudlák – conductor).
26 Novemeber 2019, Church of St Lawrence, Prague. **Jan Ryant Dřízal: *Me and You* (world premiere).** Trio Helix (Tereza Horáková – violin, Ondřej Štochl – viola, Egli Prifti – piano).
28 November 2019, Gallery, Academy of Performing Arts, Prague. Days of Contemporary Music. **Romana Schuldová: *Dances for Piano* (world premiere).** Petr Novák – piano. **Michaela Augustinová: *Dances from Latin America* (world premiere).** Michaela Augustinová – piano. **Jan Beran: *Esquisses pour piano* (world premiere).** Petr Novák – piano.
28 November 2019, Theatre "12", Ostrava. Musical Present. **Markéta Dvořáková: *Mohelnice & Proud Janek* for male voice and piano on poems by Petr Bezruč (world premiere).** Ivo Hrachovec – bass, Markéta Dvořáková – piano.
29 November 2019, alternative scene of the Puppet Theatre Ostrava, Ostrava. Musical Present. **Daniel Skála: *The Red Nose* (world premiere of a scenic non-opera).** Eva Marie Kořená, Markéta Schaffartzik, Petr Němec, Jurij Galatenko – voice, Jitka Svobodová – clarinet, Daniel Skála – cimbalom, girls' choir led by Lenka Živocká, Anna Jurčíková, Tomáš Volkmer – clowns.
1 December 2019, DOX+, Prague. Contempuls. **Jakub Rataj: *IOI, Interludium – Origin's Ichor* (world premiere).** Trio Catch (Boglárka Pecze – clarinet, Eva Boesch – violoncello, Sun-Young Nam – piano).

SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER

by Lukáš M. Vytlačil

Bohemian Connections in the New Catalogue

of Works by Antonio Vivaldi

The oeuvre of composer Antonio Vivaldi is an iconic part of the musical Baroque, so it comes as no surprise that it is a long-term focus of a number of music historians and musicians. The author of the best-known and also most commonly used catalogue of Vivaldi's compositions is the Danish musicologist Peter Ryom (*1937), one of the leading figures of Vivaldian research and also the reason for the well-known catalogue mark, RV, or "Ryom-Verzeichnis". Updated editions of this catalogue reflect many discoveries and findings provided by research which developed dynamically in this field, fundamentally transforming our current knowledge about this important composer and his work. Ryom prepared his last version of the catalogue in 2007, and it is this edition that provides the basis for the newest revised edition, prepared by the Italian musicologist and flutist Federico Maria Sardelli, designated as Ryom's successor.[1]

The editorial principles of the catalogue – including a categorisation of compositions by instrumentation – remains unchanged. In addition to the standard description (RV catalogue number, name, instrumentation, information on the source, inventories, or catalogues, numbering in older catalogues – Pincherle, Fanna, Malipiero, related literature, etc.), all the catalogue entries include notated incipits wherever possible. The catalogue contains almost a thousand works, with forty-two new works included in Sardelli's revised edition – eighteen in the main part with the basic numbering and twenty-four in the appendices. The new edition also includes four records previously removed from the collection and twelve appendices which were connected to works included already. Another considerable improvement are the many designations of various specific details, particularly the dating of some works.

Although the catalogue is devoted to a leading representative of the Italian musical Baroque, it also contains information which bears a relation to the Czech cultural environment. This is due not only to Vivaldi's popularity, which took his music to almost all corners of Europe, but also thanks to his personal contacts with the Czech lands, which he even visited personally. In addition to Emperor Charles VI and his wife, we also find mention of opera singer and impresario Antonio Denzio and concertmaster and composer

1) Peter Ryom – Federico Maria Sardelli (eds.): *Antonio Vivaldi. Thematisch-systematisches Verzeichnis seiner Werke / Thematic-Systematic Catalogue of His Works* (RV). Peter Ryom. Second, revised edition Federico Maria Sardelli. Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden 2018.

Antonio Bioni, both Italian musicians working with the Venetian operatic *staggiona* in Prague. Czech aristocrats, as patrons of the arts, also make an appearance. Here, however, we also find some mistakes. Count Václav (Wenceslas) Morzin, the owner of a famous ensemble and Vivaldi's patron, is listed under two unmatched entries, once as *Venceslao S. Marzin* (p. 625) and another time as *Marquis de Morzin* (RV 496, p. 222). With Count Jan Josef of Vrtba, the correct form of the predicate is not given, his name presented as *Johann Joseph Wrtby*.

In addition to noble characters, there are also Czech musicians. We encounter Jan Dismas Zelenka several times – he made copies of Vivaldi's compositions for the needs of the Dresden Hofkirche. A mention of violinist František Jiránek contains another imprecision. Jiránek was in the employ of Count Morzin, who sent him to study with Vivaldi in Venice. The name *Gireneck* appears in connection with two manuscripts in the catalogue. In the case of the *Concerto in B flat minor,* RV 371 (p. 166), the copyist bearing this surname is identified – following older research – as *Anton Gireneck*. With the *Concerto in D major*, RV Anh. 8 (p. 565), *František Jiránek* is listed correctly – and as a possible author of the composition. The index, however, connects the two records under the name *Anton Gireneck* (p. 666). This older identification of the surname *Gireneck* has been refuted by newer research, in the favour of Morzin musician František Jiránek.[2]

Within the extensive catalog, these shortcomings are marginal. However, they bring attention to marginal (and thus unexplored) issue – the Czech connections evaluated in this review represent only a small and specific probe into a large book. Even so, the newly revised form of the catalogue is a work of great importance whose richness of information bears an irreplaceable position. What's more, it is still a work of living scholarship today, after several decades – not only given its use in the academic and musical spheres but particularly due to its continuous actualisation with newly discovered findings brought about by the research into the life and work of Antonio Vivaldi.

Antonio Vivaldi, a caricature by Piero Leone Ghezzi

2) For more on František Jiránek, see also Václav KAPSA: *Hudebníci hraběte Morzina. Příspěvek k dějinám šlechtických kapel v Čechách v době baroka [The Musicians of Count Morzin. A Contribution to the History of Count Ensembles in Baroque Bohemia],* Prague 2010.

Prague Philharmonic Choir

The **PRAGUE PHILHARMONIC CHOIR** was founded in 1935 and has evolved into a prominent European choral ensemble. ▬ Since 2007 its **principal choirmaster** has been **Lukáš Vasilek**. ▬ PPC has worked with **leading Czech and international orchestras**, including the Czech Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Israel Philharmonic, St Petersburg Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony and others. ▬ Figuring on the long list of **globally renowned conductors** it has worked with are the names of, among others, Semyon Bychkov, Daniel Barenboim, Christoph Eschenbach, Vladimir Fedoseyev, Manfred Honeck, Jakub Hrůša, Tomáš Netopil, Gianandrea Noseda, Philippe Jordan, Fabio Luisi, Zubin Mehta, Sir Simon Rattle, Allan Gilbert, Kirill Petrenko, Christian Thielemann, Andrey Boreyko or Alexander Vedernikov. ▬ It makes **regular appearances** at Prague's Rudolfinum, Municipal House and National Theatre. ▬ Its **extensive touring schedule** encompasses all major international music centres, including New York, Brussels, Moscow, Tel Aviv, Berlin, Hong Kong, Budapest, Salzburg, Hamburg or Baden-Baden. ▬ It participates in both **domestic and international music festivals**, such as the Dvořák Prague Festival, Prague Spring Festival, Smetana Litomyšl Festival, Beethovenfest, Bregenzer Festspiele, St Galler Festspiele, Salzburg Easter Festival (2020), or Hong Kong Arts Festival (2021). ▬ It has been involved in recording projects of major labels, including Decca Classics, Sony Classical, Supraphon and Deutsche Grammophon. ▬ It has built up an **extensive discography**. ▬ It has to its credit a **number of its own projects**, including the Choral Academy, singing workshops, educational concerts for children, as well as a cappella concert productions. ▬ PPC is the recipient of **prestigious international awards** from both Czech and international music periodicals.

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Belfiato Quintet

Antonín Rejcha: Wind Quintets

Belfiato Quintet
(Oto Reiprich – flute, Jan Souček – oboe, Jiří Javůrek – clarinet, Ondřej Šindelář – bassoon, Kateřina Javůrková – horn).
Text: EN, GE, FR, CZ.
Recorded: 2019. Published: 2019.
TT: 68:04. 1 CD Supraphon SU 4270-2.

"When composing, I always had a propensity to create unusual things. A new idea would electrify me to an almost unimaginable extent and I was always lucky to encounter success when realising a new intention or conception." So we read in the *Notes on Antonín Rejcha* compiled by his daughter. For Rejcha, new things appeared in the fields of harmony, rhythm, colour, and genre. He liked setting himself tasks. And even though the creation of twenty-four wind quintets could have had to do with a keen sense for business, given their composer's character, it is more likely that the challenge was to create music for the unheard of combination of five wind instruments. Five winds that are entirely unlike one another in terms of colour, character, range, and the associations they bring up. We'll find several Rejcha quintets in the Supraphon catalogues, usually in combination with other composers. If we search for a disc devoted purely to the naturalised French composer, we'll find two LPs from the 1960s. It was therefore only a matter of time when a top-quality ensemble would pick Rejcha up again. **Belfiato**, composed of former students at the Prague Conservatory and later HAMU, have been active on the scene for an incredible fourteen years. They are among the Czech ensembles which have asserted themselves on the world stage. After the first-rate Afflatus Quintet de facto ceaced operation, they have been virtually without competition in the Czech Republic. The three works Belfiato chose from the two dozen quintets are sufficiently different in expression that making this a one-composer album bears no risk of boring listener. Although Rejcha's music sounds like a pleasant divertimento (he considered Haydn and Mozart the best composers, and he rarely steps out of the world of their musical language), every wind player knows how difficult it is to tune and dynamically balance the five-instrument harmonies such as are found in the long chords that open the Eb major quintet. Or unifying the phrasing at the breakneck tempo of the first movement of the D major quintet. Or how to bring together a fast unison passage in the flute and horn… Belfiato's interpretation attacts me with its particular nonchalance. They never lose sight of the whole, of the order. Tension and effect are achieved through subtle means, without obstinacy and extremes – these are the heights of virtuosity, of playing in the sense of *play*. The recording belies painstaking work towards sonic balance (director **Jiří Gemrot**, sound engineer **Jan Lžičař**), the sound is pleasantly round with a reverberation that's just right and nothing jutting out. When, we might ask, can we look forward to the second volume? And the volumes that follow?

Dita Hradecká

The Tchaikovsky Project

The Czech Philharmonic, Kirill Gerstein – piano, Semyon Bychkov – conductor.
Text: EN, FR, GE. Recorded: 2015–2019. Published: 2019.
TT: 498:04. 7 CD Decca 483 4942.

After the **Czech Philharmonic** signed with the Decca label, their catalogue came to include recordings of the essential repertoire of Czech music (Janáček, Suk, Dvořák, and Smetana's *Má vlast* from the opening concert of the 2014 Prague Spring). This complete collection of Tchaikovsky's symphonies and piano concerti rounded out by the symphonic fantasy *Francesca da Rimini,* the *Serenade for String Orchestra*, and the overture-fantasy *Romeo and Juliet* is another grand project. We can now entertain the notion that the Czech Philharmonic has entered the Olympus of recorded music. Of course, there were – and still are – many of those who doubt. Can the Czech Philharmonic prove itself among the toughest competitors with this complete set of Tchaikovsky's famous pieces, recorded many times already? Has Decca, whose catalogue is full of reference recordings of the world's repertoire, considered the impact of such a project? An analysis considering the full historical context offers surprising results. While there are, of course, a number of complete sets of Tchaikovsky's symphonies (Svetlanov, Rozhdestvensky, Fedoseyev, Karajan, Muti, and many others). Looking at Decca's catalogue, however, we'll notice it includes only Maazel's set with the Vienna Philharmonic, now over fifty years old. The second surprise is the artistic quality of this new production, which has overcome all expectations. If we compare the available complete sets, we arrive at a generalisation which divides them into two overarching conceptions. The Eastern (Russian) one builds on the emotional core and heightened drama of the pieces, often at the cost of technical perfection, though this is no great loss in these moments of exaltation. If we were to look for an ideal, we could point to Svetlanov or Rozhdestvensky (there is no complete set by Mravinsky; he recorded only the last three symphonies, several times). Western recordings dazzle us with their perfect sound and thorough attention to detail in all components, often at the expense

of emotional expression (a good example is Muti's set with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London). **Semyon Bychkov** cannot hide his Russian roots, but the sound and expression of the Czech Philharmonic is a little different, although still softer than British and, especially, American orchestras. From the very beginning, Bychkov emphasised the fact that this set can became an interesting synthesis of the broad Russian sweeping emotion with the more noble, European, unpretentious, sober sonic image, supported by meticulous technique. Bychkov has truly managed to fulfil this vision. The noble sonic culture and beautiful compact sound of the individual instrumental groups speaks to us from the very first measures. Bychkov has a marvellous ear for dynamics – he often operates at the very edges of audibility – so he doesn't have to race his clever crescendi to the extreme and they still have a monumental feeling (the slow movement of the 1st symphony or the *Serenade*, some passages of the *Manfred Symphony*). The "weeping" lyrical passages have a Russian emotional impulse, but it stays well clear of the borders of the tolerable. Some dramatic passages sound almost aggressive on certain Russian recordings. Here, they do not lose their urgency, but everything remains graceful sonically (see the beginning of the 4th symphony). Sometimes, however, we lack a stronger expressive position, particularly in *Manfred* and partially in the *Serenade*, which seems more like a relaxation piece. **Kirill Gerstein** is an excellent, technically perfect performer, rather pragmatic in the more flowing passages. The six-minute cadence to the first movement of the second concerto is eminently impressive.
In the first concerto, we must commend the choice of the 1879 version, in which we can hear a pure Tchaikovsky, rid of later alterations. For example, the well-known accompanying piano chords to the opening theme are performed as lovely arpeggios. We welcome with similar elation the original versions selected for two other concerti. Perhaps a little regret to end on: if one more CD were added to the set, the producers could also have included the violin concerto and the *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, making this a complete set of the concerti. But in situations like this one, it is often other aspects (non-musical aspects) which decide. Even so, we can breathe a satisfied sigh and look forward to further collaborations between the Czech Philharmonic and Decca (the next one, apparently, should be Mahlerian).

Bohuslav Vítek

Ivo Kahánek Dvořák & Martinů:

Piano Concertos

Ivo Kahánek – piano, Bamberger Symphoniker, Jakub Hrůša – conductor.
Text: CZ, EN, GE, FR. Recorded: Oct. 2017 (Dvořák), live Jan. 2019 (Martinů), Joseph-Keilberth-Saal, Konzerthalle Bamberg.
Published: 2019. TT: 59:34.
1 CD Supraphon SU 4236-2.

Given the star-studded roster of artists, I had some inkling that this would be an exceptional project. But reality surpassed all my expectations. Dvořák's *Piano Concerto in G minor* op. 33 and Bohuslav Martinů's *Piano Concerto no. 4 "Incantation"* (H 358) have probably never sounded this way before. You see, in this interpretation by **Ivo Kahánek, Jakub Hrůša**, and the **Bamberg Symphony**, they are not two piano concerti but two amazingly colourful narratives – exciting and full of suspense, yet also very poetic, full of unexpected turns, fascinating images, and fantastic colours. The first tale – Dvořák's – is more of a fairy-tale (Rusalka came to my mind repeatedly), taking us to times past; times which today seem pleasantly idyllic. The second story also has something of the fairy-tale, but it's a modern fairy-tale for adults, more disturbing than comforting – I'd probably put it in the "fantasy" section at a book store. It is obvious that Jakub Hrůša studied both scores down to the smallest detail and the listener is astonished at how much he discovered therein.
In both works, "his" orchestra sounds unusually colourful and malleable, but it still manages to retain an admirably transparent sound – Hrůša works with the orchestra as if it were a chamber ensemble, providing solo instruments with a lot of space, particularly the winds – and the Bamberg's winds are truly remarkable. Ivo Kahánek's reputation is presently so good that he can allow himself what only few pianists can – he conceived of both concerti not as an exhibition of his technical skill, but as an integral component of the stream of music. He doubtless knows the scores as well as Hrůša: he knows very well when the piano takes the stage and when it is in dialogue with another instrument, but he also knows just as well when the piano is to merge with the orchestra – regardless of the fact that this is often in passages when any other pianist would force their way forward in order to show off their technique. Kahánek's playing is at once technically brilliant and immensely poetic. The pianist found as many surprising details in his part (he performed Dvořák's original version of the concerto) as Hrůša in the orchestral component. The recording makes it clear that both gentlemen found common ground: their perceptions of both concerti are wonderfully congenial. I would say this CD is among the most significant projects ever undertaken by Supraphon and I believe it will be duly appreciated in the international context.

Věroslav Němec

reviews

Pavel Haas Quartet

Dmitri Shostakovich

Pavel Haas Quartet (Veronika Jarůšková, Marek Zwiebel – violins, Jiří Kabát – viola, Peter Jarůšek – cello).
Text: EN, GE, FR, CZ.
Recorded: May 2019.
Published: 2019.
TT: 1:10:53. 1 CD Supraphon SU 4271-2.

The string quartet always provided Dmitri Shostakovich with a much-needed outlet; a space in which he could dress up the often unhappy developments of his life in garments made of tones, relatively hidden from the suspecting eyes of the party. It's fitting that he only began writing the first pages of these innermost confessions relatively late. The first quartet was written in 1938, at a time when Shostakovich had already completed five symphonies. The corpus of fifteen quartets – as many as he had symphonies – intended as a cycle of twenty-four (one for each tonal centre), remained unfinished. But even so, it has become the foundation of the Master's legacy, a monument to his contribution to 20th-century chamber music.
The Pavel Haas quartet also took its time. The Czech and Slovak musicians have long had the respect of the critics – at least since their first CD, featuring the second quartets of both Janáček and Haas (Gramophone Award 2007), which was followed by their second album (Janáček's first and Haas' first and third quartets), their Prokofiev disc (Diapason d'Or 2010), all the way to Dvořák's late quartets. As for Shostakovich, they certainly did not rush into it. Perhaps it was modesty, perhaps some concerns – in any case, it was an excellent decision. As if they knew that daring to enter the complex, many-layered world of Shostakovich's *privatissimo* – fragile, contemplative, sometimes inconsolable, at other times raging with appellative tragedy – is a paramount task. Four mature artists at the peak of their careers encounter this challenge as confident, seasoned musicians – and we cannot emphasise enough how important this is with Shostakovich. This year's project presents their rendition of three quartets: no. 2 in A major op. 68 (1944), no. 7 in F# minor op. 108 (1960) and no. 8 in C minor op. 110 (1960). They had thoroughly tested all these on their journeys across Europe. The fantastic quality of the audio is further proof of how well the project was put together: the recording possesses wonderful plasticity and a live atmosphere, i.e. attributes that are certainly not a matter of course with a studio recording. Another plus is the enlightened accompanying text by **Boris Giltburg**, the renowned Israeli pianist and the author of a remarkable piano transcription of the 8th quartet who also joins the Haas Quartet to form the Dvořák Piano Quintet. Many times now, the quartet has proven their ability to maintain the drive and unmistakeable atmosphere of the longer passages – a quality of supreme importance in Shostakovich. Their renditions of the slow movements, particularly in the A major and C minor quartets, is direct and uncomplicated. It might lack some intellectual ingredients – inner conflict and self-destructive irony as we know them from the Emerson Quartet recordings – but it is a spontaneous, full-blooded, and, if we may call it that, dutiful interpretation. The moving, brutally surging Allegro in the seventh quartet, and particularly the Allegro molto in the most recorded quartet (the 8th) certainly do not lack drive and dramatic power. They seem to have been chiselled from a single block – the music is a unified stream possessing tension and an elementary communication.
The C minor quartet is the one with most competition: since it was written in 1960, it has attracted not only the attention of many quartets around the world – it has also spawned a number of transcriptions. The most hard-working were (and are) the Anglo-Saxon quartets, who were first inspired by the exemplary interpretation – blessed by the author himself – of the legendary Beethoven Quartet, and later the Borodin Quartets (they recorded the complete quartets three times). Only later do more individual approaches appear. For me, the peak comes with the Emerson Quartet's 2001 recording for Deutsche Grammophon. It opens the new millennium, introducing a cosmopolitan understanding of Shostakovich, rid of pseudo-Russian additives and achieving heights as yet unsurpassed (at least technically). It was in the 8th quartet (formally dedicated to All the Victims of Fascism and War) that Shostakovich inscribed a drastic record of his despair, terrified of – and these are his own words – his infinite cowardice (1960 was the year in which he gave in to pressure and joined the Party). I'll admit I often struggle with the work, particularly where the shouted tragedy gets dangerously close to hysteria, but this uncomplicatedly dynamic and honest interpretation by the Pavel Haas Quartet makes them good advocates for this work. The thoughtful structure of the second quartet also catches our ear: it seems reticent, yet also ceaselessly heading for its goal, bringing layers into heightened contrast, oscillating between the pastoral element and a thick, almost orchestral sound. The seventh quartet – dedicated to Shostakovich's wife Nina, who succumbed to her illness some six years before her husband – is another highly private work, but it is also strictly logical and considerably more reticent in expression. In this rendition by the Haas Quartet, it gains new contours and colours, and its interpretation – for me the highlight of the disc – bears the marks of a focused and original approach to the score.

Ivan Žáček

Soirée

**Magdalena Kožená – mezzo-soprano,
Wolfram Brandl,
Rahel Rilling – violins,
Yulia Deyneka – viola,
David Adorjan – cello,
Andrew Marriner – clarinet,
Kaspar Zehnder – flute,
Simon Rattle – piano.**
Text: EN. Recorded: Meistersaal Berlin, July 2017. Published: 2019. TT: 73:24. 1 CD Pentatone PTC 5186 671.

The first time husband and wife sir **Simon Rattle** and **Magdalena Kožená** were on a disc cover was on *Mozart – Arias*. Then it was the DVD recording from Waldbühne 2018. This new recording on Pentatone is thus their third cover art encounter. And I'd say it's also the most interesting recording of the three.
The disc presents the studio version of a chamber project with which a few years ago, this group of friends travelled to several European countries. The title, *Magdalena Kožená & Friends*, is thus entirely appropriate. In its 2015/16 season, the Czech Philharmonic offered our most successful international singer an exceptional residency. The 19th of January was among the best evenings of my life (as far as song recitals in Prague's Rudolfinum are concerned). And it was this programme which was transferred onto CD without any major changes (Chausson: *Chanson Perpetuelle,* Dvořák: a selection of songs, Brahms: *Fünf Ophelia Lieder*, Ravel: *Chansons madecasses,* Janáček: *Říkadla*, Strauss: *Morgen*). Unfortunately, violist Amihai Grosz and especially the fantastic violinist Daishin Kashimoto could not take part in the recording, but this only influences the recording in a few places (the tone quality of Staatskapelle Berlin concertmaster **Wolfram Brandl** is very close to that of the concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic. Not only are they all excellent soloists, they are also highly respected chamber players. And I believe Simon Rattle handled the position of pianist surprisingly well, even in the recording studio. Though he doesn't have as much experience as established pianists and his tone does not reach the "heavenly" heights of Alfred Brendel or Malcolm Martineau (see the Ravel recording made by Kožená and Martineau for Deutsche Grammophon in 2004), nor does he have the conductor–composer ambitions of Daniel Barenboim, his exceptional musicality made him an equal partner to his wife and friends. You will be enchanted by the Czech pieces. Still, I would rather enjoy the selection from Dvořák, which was as brilliant in its empathetic musicianship as all the other pieces on the programme, in the original. I appreciate the inclusion of Janáček's *Říkadla (Nursery Rhymes)*, certainly a difficult task for listeners from abroad – the few bars of male voices were presumably performed by the musicians – and Kožená gives an absolutely excellent performance. She provides further evidence of her musicianship and her capacity to embody any music she chooses in her interpretations of Stravinsky.
It was a different interpretation to Ann Murray's on Deutsche Grammophon but certainly a legitimate one. Even so, I consider the accompaniment provided by Pierre Boulez and his Ensemble InterContemporain of a more suitable colour. The backbone of the album is a dialogue between two contrasting sections – a French and a German one (someone assessing Kožená's artistic development in the future will certainly mention her remarkable feeling for the world of French music). During her long career, the mezzo-soprano has repeatedly proven that she is capable of identifying with both worlds, and whether she was singing Schumann, Brahms, Mahler, and Strauss, or Debussy, Ravel, and Chausson, it was always hers; always personal. Every song thus becomes a world unto itself, connecting into a musical universe. Even so, if you were to ask me what first comes to my mind when I remember the album after some time, it would certainly be the Chausson. I haven't heard another recording of his music sound so good. Magdalena Kožená's collaboration with Pentatone is heading in an interesting direction.

Luboš Stehlík

Katelyn Bouska

The Complete Piano Works of Miloslav Ištvan

Katelyn Bouska – piano.
Text: EN, CZ. Recorded at the Na Orlí Theatre in Brno. Published: 2019. TT: 58:07. Radioservis CR1031-2.

It is something of a paradox that it is artists from abroad and not Czech musicians turning to the legacy of excellent Czech composers of the recent past. American pianist **Katelyn Bouska** has Czech roots: her family emigrated to the United States in the 19th century, though it is a point of interest that she lived in Spillville, a Czech settlement made famous by a visit from Antonín Dvořák. Bouska has a fundamental relationship to Czech music, as attested to by her second album, devoted to the complete piano work of composer Miloslav Ištvan. The recording was made in a studio in Brno – according to the pianist, it was the only place where she could soak up a little of the atmosphere of Ištvan's creative environment.
The composer's piano works are not too expansive. They are spread out over a period of twenty-four years, but more than half the pieces were written in the 1950s. The entire catalogue easily fit onto a single CD. Bouska opted for

a linear ordering, so the pieces follow one another as they were written. The *Piano Sonata no. 1* (1954) surprises us with its juicy post-folkloric invention, clearly betraying the influence of Bohuslav Martinů. A similar sound, with only a bit more definition, permeates the *Impromptus* – a series of six colourful musical pictures revelling in imagination and carelessness. The *Piano Sonata no. 2* (1959) betrays a more personal creative concept that later transformed into an innovative approach to composition by creating montages of isolated musical elements. Ištvan's synthetic form of musical thinking found its climax in the *Piano Sonata no. 3* (1978), his most mature work on the disc, in which the composer also made use of inspirations from pop music, an unusually timeless gesture for its time. His *Odyssea lidického dítěte (Odyssey of the Child from Lidice,* 1963) is a testament to a precious artistic depth – the composer's programmatic commentary on this tragic event. (Lidice was a village near the city of Kladno, some twenty kilometres northwest of Prague. In June 1942, following orders from Adolf Hitler, it was completely destroyed as retribution for the assassination of Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich.) In all the pieces on the recording, Bouska found a way to ideally capture Ištvan's highly personal aesthetic. She has a feeling not only for the exceptional timbral spectrum of his pieces but also for the musical architecture and proportionality of the sections with view of the entire structure. Her interpretation excels in an intuition which is reflected in flexible agogics, dynamics, and other expressive means. In an interpretation like this one, Ištvan's music certainly doesn't come off sounding like a closed off and dusty relic of the past but rather like a musical legacy which has undoubtable attributes that will help it survive the ravages of time. However, more care should have been devoted to the accompanying text in the booklet, which is plagued by needless mistakes. The pianist studied musicology and her exegesis of Ištvan's compositions is full of erudition, but it is also full of a number of grammatical mistakes which belie the fact that it did not go through the appropriate copy-editing process. The photograph on the back could also be better: it is so blurry one cannot even be sure it really is Bouska sitting at the piano. Despite these criticisms, this complete set of piano works – particularly as concerns interpretation – is a valuable warning for us not to lose our musical memory. Not just that: it is a hat thrown in the ring of Czech musicians – they would do well to show similar initiative.

Milan Bátor

Antonín Rejcha

Requiem

Emöke Baráth – soprano, Markéta Cukrová – alto, Krystian Adam – tenor, Tomáš Šelc – bass, Zdeněk Klauda – conductor, L'Armonia Terrena, L'Armonia Vocale.
Text: EN, GE, FR. Recorded: June 2018, St Salvator Church, Prague. Published: 2019. TT: 55:44. 1 CD Nibiru 01662231.

In his time, Antonín Rejcha was among the most notable composers, music theorists, and pedagogues in Europe. His remarkable life journey began in Chudenice – a village near the city of Klatovy in southwest Bohemia – and passed through Vienna before concluding with an excellent pedagogical career in Paris. His students included the most important composers of the day. He taught counterpoint to Ferenc Liszt, harmony to Charles Gounod, and he also inspired César Franck. He has a sizeable vocal and instrumental oeuvre and his spiritual music – which culminated in 1825 with the monumental *Te Deum* – was also highly valued. Rejcha composed his *Requiem* between 1802 and 1808, during his stay in Vienna. He composed over fifty pieces during this time, part of them published with Breitkopf und Härtel in Leipzig. The *Requiem* was long considered lost, only a century later did musicologists (Olga Šotolová's book on Rejcha remains crucial) spread awareness about this composition. Stanislav Ondráček also played an important part: based on the incomplete parts, he created his own instrumentation of the missing measures which precede the final fugue. This new recording of Rejcha's mass for the dead continues on from the innovations introduced by Jakub Jan Ryba's *Stabat Mater* two years ago. The album received the prestigious French Diapason award and presented Ryba's work as a surprisingly timeless affair. Conductor **Zdeněk Klauda** focused that same meticulous attention on the *Requiem*. Performed by the ensembles **L'Armonia Terrena** and **L'Armonia Vocale**, his work sounds truly grandiose. It is emotionally effective, deep, it grips us with its drama, the unconventional elements in its setting of the choral voices, and use of instrumental effects, it astounds us with surprising modulations and progressive harmonies. The orchestral sound is clear and balanced. The players with more markedly melodic parts did an excellent job: their melodies sound dynamically sensitive, consequent, and precisely executed given the context. The L'Armonia Vocale choir was also a pleasant surprise, with its velvety, enveloping sound and balanced voices. The choice of soloists was also lucky: Hungarian soprano **Emöke Baráth** captures one's attention with her silky and fervent voice, and mezzo-soprano **Markéta Cukrová** is also highly convincing – her experiences and musical intuition are unusual in the Czech context. Polish tenor **Krystian Ada**m has ample experience performing early music and he gave an excellent performance here, as did bass-baritone **Tomáš Šelc**, who was – for me personally – the greatest discovery of the disc. Klauda's recording is marked by extraordinary care, and it is a testament to the fact that we cannot narrow sacred music down to a few of the best-known canonic works.

Milan Bátor

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