

THE BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ FOUNDATION  
THE BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ INSTITUTE  
THE INTERNATIONAL MARTINŮ CIRCLE

# martinůrevue

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INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN ISSERLIS

OPERA JULIETTE IN LONDON

CZECH CELLIST MILOŠ SÁDLO  
AND BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ

SPECIAL ISSUE —  
MARTINŮ CALENDAR 2013!

EVENTS / NEWS



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Bohuslav Martinů Foundation, 2012, PROMO NBM 15



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Vladimir Jurowski (Conductor), London Philharmonic Orchestra

# OLDŘICH FRANTIŠEK KORTE

/ ALEŠ BŘEZINA

**OLDŘICH FRANTIŠEK KORTE** is a man of immense paradoxes. Infinitely kind-hearted and at the same time uncompromisingly critical. He was jailed by the Nazis and, twice, by the Communists (the first time for attempting to leave the republic to go to study composition with Bohuslav Martinů), yet he has never grown embittered. Perhaps the hardest struggle he has waged (besides the struggle with himself and with his stubborn ossiveness that in hindsight, according to his own words, has often worsened his karma) was that with his father, whom he loved and admired deeply. Of all his artistic activities (writing books, intensive creative and performance work for theatre, film and, above all, *Laterna magika*), he has devoted the least time and effort to the one that has gained him the greatest and most enduring fame: composing concert music. Oldřich F. Korte often, and with pleasure, says that there are too many bad or average works out there, that it is better that he only write a few yet be particular about them. And this he has truly succeeded in – virtually all of his compositions rank among the very finest written in Europe in the second half of the 20th century. He is proud of all the works of his that have been published, but he has done practically nothing to get them performed. Instead, he has tried to help other artists. The time it has taken him to complete pieces is simply astonishing – the *Concerto grosso* for trumpets, flutes, piano and strings, for instance, originated between 1954 and 1985 – yet not one of them shows a seam, discontinuity, interruption, a suggestion of change in style and creative concentration. He considers the highest value to be friendship, the spiritual life and continuous intellectual development.

I vividly recall the first time we met. It was in the summer of 1990, at a conference marking the centenary of Bohuslav Martinů's birth. Oldřich read an enthusiastic letter Bohuslav Martinů had written to Miloš Šafránek, in which the composer lauds Korte's peerless analysis of his works. Martinů writes that to date no one has made so accurate an analysis of his music and its sources. Korte deeply regretted that owing to the closed borders the greatest dream of his life couldn't come true – to go and study composition with Martinů in the USA. Resigned to remaining behind the Iron Curtain, he passionately and fully devoted himself to championing the music of Bohuslav Martinů, who at the time was considered by the official critics a traitor, renegade and capitalist lackey. Korte's polemics against the regime's intellectually far less mature critics of Martinů are legendary and would warrant publishing alongside the texts they so rigorously and uncompromisingly contradict. After he had given his speech, all the musicologists and musicians in the hall were overwhelmed. I still regret that no conference proceedings were issued and hence this seminal, largely improvised lecture has never been published. Korte and I became rapt in conversation and he, a fervent debater, drove me back to my doorstep, yet I only entered the house



following several more hours of inspiring conversation on the front seats of his car. My neck was strained for a whole week, yet it was well worth it.

We didn't start seeing each other regularly until 1995, when, upon the initiative of Viktor Kalabis and the Board of Trustees of the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation, of which Oldřich was a member, I established the Bohuslav Martinů Institute. The main topic of our conversations was always, naturally, our beloved composer and seeking ways to raise awareness of his music in a lucid manner and among as many people as possible. The most tangible result of these frenzied debates was the release of the 4-CD set *Martinů – Selected Masterpieces* in 2001, for which we together had the unenviable task of selecting from among Martinů's gargantuan oeuvre 20 seminal compositions spanning all the genres of his creation in the best available recordings. Oldřich's introductory essay is one of the finest texts ever written about Martinů. So as to make it accessible to music-lovers the world over, we published an abridged version in English in the *Bohuslav Martinů Newsletter* No. 1, January–April 2002, pp 10–16.

Korte's love of Martinů's music is absolute and anchored in a perfect balance between an analytical mind and widely open feeling. His spirited analytical texts on Martinů's works are a pleasure

for all perceptive readers (and a translator's nightmare). I cannot resist taking the opportunity to quote at least two short examples of his singular style. Both of them are from the analysis of the first movement of the *Concerto for Oboe and Small Orchestra* in Korte's extensive unpublished essay (16 pages).

*The soloist, by the time fully warmed up, has become so enamoured of his instrument that over the twenty-two-bar area of the next strophe (95–116) he revels in playing for playing's sake and the sheer joy of technique, as though only now discovered in the form of entirely simple figurative passages of predominantly triplet semiquaver motion (for the sake of whose smooth execution the composer allowed for a small, strategic slowing down of the tempo).*

At a later junction, he describes his analytical method, whose starting premise is "a type of (possibly subjective) view that would above all not take issue with the composer's intentions but would strive optimally to approximate the form and character of the composition within the bounds of the given treatise."

*Yet that which in this movement compels continual absorption and a deep response on the part of the audience is the immensely powerful and concentrated emotional charge, the inner content of the composition, its human message (should we still be so bold as to apply a notion that has been profaned so many times). Yes, at that moment, we find ourselves on the slippery and precarious ground of utmost subjectivism, artificial structures, exegetic mystifications and verbal cliché. And even if we do our best to talk about the matter truthfully and in a novel manner, now and then we audaciously identify our own feelings about the composition with the assumed feelings and intentions of the composer, which we do not actually know. We can especially never be cautious enough when it comes to our approach to the works of Bohuslav Martinů, who had dealt with this issue in particular and tortured himself over it throughout his life.*

*That premise and all the mentioned risks notwithstanding, I would still like to attempt a personal form of "sensation-based" interpretation or description, which, under repeated strong impression, I do not want to avoid in principle. I believe that it is possible to talk about personal impressions and reflections a given piece of music evokes in us, without having to absolutise the validity of our description, and without feeling entitled to convey the ideas, impressions and reflections the composer felt when writing the composition.*

At the present time, it saddens me to say, Oldřich F. Korte (b. 1926) is not in the best of health. His works, however, are still being performed by leading Czech orchestras. The world-famous pianist Garrick Ohlsson added the *Sonata for Piano* (1951–53) to his repertoire in 2009 and since that time has performed it at dozens of concerts all over the world. The same work has also been embraced by the outstanding Brazilian pianist Patricia Bretas, who has also recorded it on a CD and is currently writing a thesis on the composer and his oeuvre. I personally am delighted that the music world has started repaying Oldřich F. Korte for that which he has given to others, Bohuslav Martinů in particular. ■



Jakub Hruša,  
President of IMC

Magdalena Kožená,  
IMC Patron

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Bohuslav Martinů: **Juliette, H. 253**,  
from English National Opera.  
Emelie Renard, Clare Presland, Samantha  
Price (Gentlemen), Peter Hoare (Michel)  
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THE PREVIOUS ISSUE



**THE BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ CENTER  
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offers an interesting, inter-actively conceived exhibition on the composer's life and work. The modern display of Bohuslav Martinů's life and work is located in the historical building of the former council school, which Martinů attended as a child. Consequently, the project also comprises a reproduction of Martinů's classroom, complete with period painting and furniture. The centre also contains an audio-visual hall and study room.

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**INCIRCLE NEWS**

**DEAR MEMBERS...**

WE OFFER CONGRATULATIONS TO **JIŘÍ BĚLOHLÁVEK** (one of our founding members), whose recording of the six Martinů symphonies with the BBC Symphony Orchestra (Onyx 4061) continues to be critically acclaimed. It was nominated for a Grammy award (U.S.) and won the Gramophone award in the Orchestral category. I personally feel they are the finest recordings of these magnificent works. For an interview with the conductor see page 12 in this issue.

Reviewers of the album also remarked on the excellent accompanying notes by **Michael Crump**. I will take time to remind members of his thorough study: *Martinů and the Symphony* (Toccata Press, 2009).

The English National Opera performed a very well-received production of **Juliette**, in David Pountney's English translation, directed by Richard Jones and conducted by Edward Gardner. You can read reviews of the opera on page 6-8.

We look forward to the **Bohuslav Martinů Days 2012** (2-21 Dec.) in Prague and the **18th Martinů Festtage** (17-30 Nov.) in Basel – look for reviews in the next Revue.

Please remember we are always looking for new members and appreciate your support!

Robert Simon, chairman

**OBITUARY**



ON 12 OCTOBER 2012, the composer **Geraldine Muchová**, one of the founding members of the International Martinů Circle, died in Prague at the age of 95. She was the wife of the writer Jiří Mucha and daughter-in-law of the painter Alfons Mucha. Jiří Mucha was a long-time friend of Bohuslav Martinů. Gregory Terian's biographical article about Geraldine Muchová was published in Martinů Revue No. 2, May-August 2011, page 15.

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Members who pay their subscriptions via the Dvořák Society should continue to do so. Those wishing to pay in Czech currency or by cash should contact us at incircle@martinu.cz. ■

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The IMC is supported by the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation and Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague.

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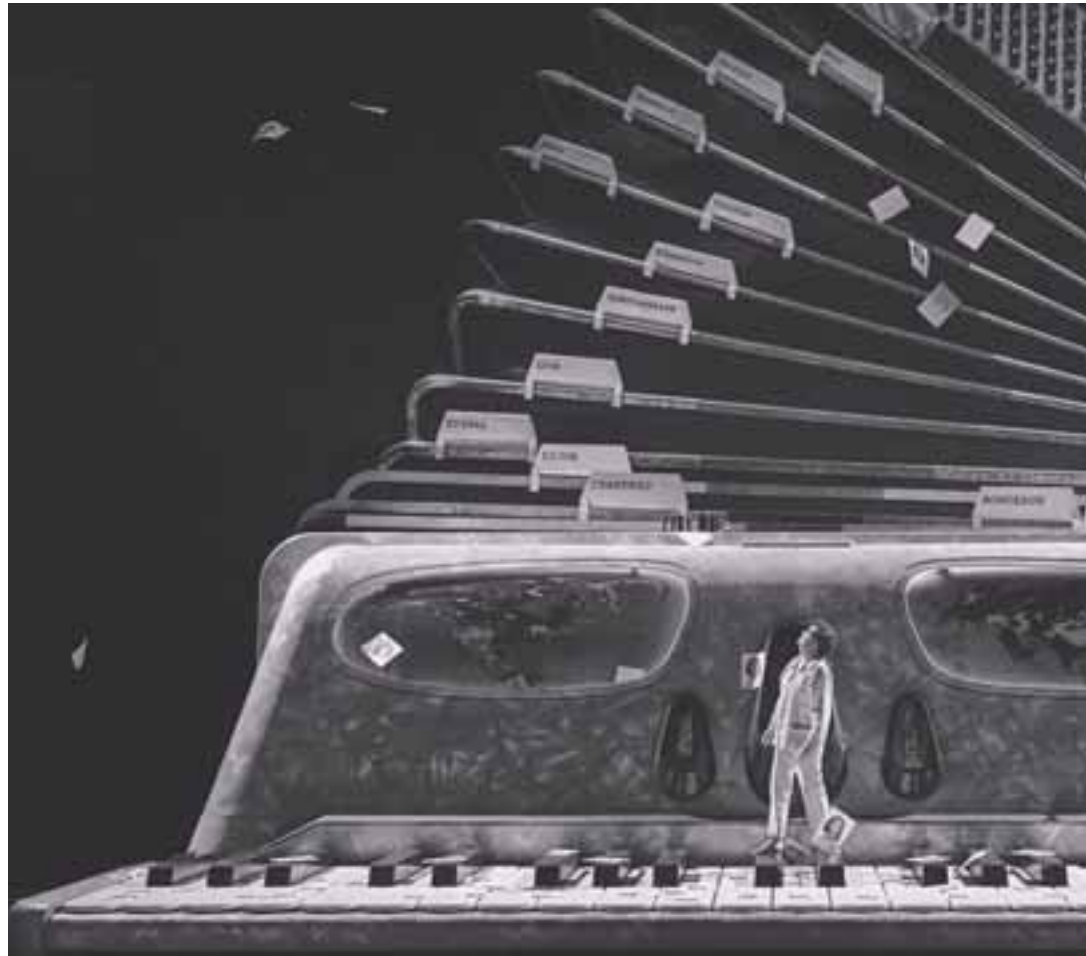


# JULIETTE / THE KEY TO DREAMS /

## JULIETTE – A MERE DREAM AT THE ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA?

/ PATRICK LAMBERT

*JULIETTE* received its UK premiere at the London Coliseum back in 1978 when it was conducted by Charles Mackerras, produced by Anthony Besch and sung in the English translation by Brian Large. Like the characters in the opera itself, I have only vague memories, but I do recall that during the Orient Express episode the image of Julietta (Sally Burgess), captured on film, was projected overhead. Now, after a gap of more than 30 years, *Juliette* makes a welcome reappearance at the ENO in what is billed as a “new production”, sung in David Pountney’s idiomatic, though rather free translation (made for Opera North’s much praised production in 1997) and with Martinů’s exhilarating locomotive rhythms excised, which is a pity. This is in fact an adaptation of the Paris National Opera’s production premiered at the Palais Garnier in 2002 conducted by Marc Albrecht and revived in 2006, when it was given with Martinů’s newly discovered French text at the Opéra Bastille under the baton of Jiří Bělohlávek – I was lucky enough to have caught the last performance. The production team for this ENO staging is the same, notably the director Richard Jones and designer Antony McDonald, as are the visually striking sets based on a giant accordion. The new ENO cast, headed by the tenor Peter Hoare as Michel with the Swedish soprano Julia Sporsén in the title role, entered admirably into the spirit of Martinů’s strange twilight world of forgetting and won high praise from the critics, as did the playing of the ENO Orchestra conducted with commitment and conviction by Edward Gardner, Music Director of ENO since 2007. All in all, they worked together to create an excellent evening of entertainment. But was it sufficiently thought-provoking, as this masterpiece of doubt and uncertainty really should be? To be sure, Martinů’s score was presented in all its



luminosity and brilliance, but where was the disturbing undertow of tragedy?

After seeing the Paris production, my main reservation had been that by showing Michel emerge at the very outset from a group of slumbering figures, it established far too obviously that the entire play is only a dream, thereby undermining the essential ambiguity of the first act, during which Michel becomes increasingly disorientated in a world that “balances on the fine edge of reality and illusion” (Martinů’s own description). This has the effect of distancing the audience from the action, hindering its identification with the plight of the helpless bookseller slowly succumbing to his dream.

Perhaps in an attempt to freshen up the ten-year-old staging and justify the description “new production”, ENO has made several further modifications, not all of them, in my view, improvements. The passive townsfolk

swaying to the sound of the accordion like zombies trapped in a kind of limbo is perfectly effective, but to have the two main protagonists involuntarily shaking their arms as if being manipulated by the invisible hand of some master puppeteer is a mere distraction, as is the conceit of having the irascible Old Woman, who answers Michel’s knocking at the door towards the end of second act, appear in an identical dress to Juliette’s – something Michel does not seem to notice. And did it really add anything to have the Seller of Memories arrive Tardis-like in a bedroom cupboard announcing himself through a letter-box? During the magical scene in which a piano solo accompanies the reminiscences of the elderly couple in the forest, an apparition of Juliette seated at a grand piano glides across the back of the stage.

Perhaps the most questionable aspect of ENO’s production is the re-interpretation of the ending of the opera. With his dream officially

# LYRIC OPERA IN 3 ACTS / H.253



Emelie Renard, Clare Presland, Samantha Price (Gentlemen)



PHOTOS: RICHARD HUBERT SMITH

over, but still hearing the siren voice of his *femme fatale*, Michel takes his pillow and forms the final 'a' of "Julietta" scrawled on the curtain in spidery white lettering created by other sleeping figures – as also in the original Paris production, except the letter is 'é' for the French spelling of the name. But then, as his dream begins all over again, instead of the Old Arab confirming the existence of the hotel he is looking for "C'est ici!", Michel, suitcase in hand, sleepwalks into the renewal of his dream and is told "There's no such place". At this he joins the ranks of the zombieified townsfolk. In my view, this is a misconceived alteration to the ending envisaged by Martinů, who himself had deliberately changed Georges Neveux's original ending – with the author's approval. Rather than waking to a grey existence in the real world, Michel, risking madness, chooses consciously not to abandon the girl of his dreams, and having the Old Arab reply immediately in the

affirmative to Michel's enquiry provides a glimmer of hope that this time round, in his 'new reality', he may be more successful in his quest.

ENO's promotional blurb in their booklet for the new season poses the question: "Is he the only sane man in the world where everyone else has lost their memory, or a mad man trapped in a recurring dream from which there is no escape?" We do not have to wait until the end for an answer: it is shown to be a dream from the very outset. While many of the reviews were highly positive and full of praise, the flaws in the production, which in my opinion have undermined the power of the piece (the reviewer in my local paper described it as "very much an opera for the age of dementia"), might explain the very grumpy reception given to it by the *Telegraph* critic Rupert Christiansen, which cannot simply be dismissed with the thought that he had probably got out of bed on the wrong side that day: "There's only one problem

with this highly imaginative production and musically immaculate performance of Martinů's *Juliette*, but unfortunately, it is a crippling one. The opera itself is really not very good... It is based on that tiresome premise 'it's all a dream' ... How can one take any interest in a dream, if one is given no anchor in the reality which it relates to? ... "

Perhaps the moral to be drawn from this is that producers of *Juliette* should be wary of tampering with what Martinů himself called "the most secret core of art – poesy, that fragile thing that can bear the touch only of those who seek it and need it for their life, who approach it as the most beautiful thing that human life can bestow and who *do not wish to transform it* [my italics], but accept it just as it is in its pure form of intangible and absolute beauty...". (Letter of thanks to Václav Talich, 27 March, 1938 after the Prague premiere).

The interpretation of dreams is a risky business, their re-interpretation even riskier. ■

## JULIETTE AT ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA

22 SEPTEMBER 2012

/ MAREK PECHAČ

JULIETTE, an opera based on a play by the French dramatist Georges Neveux, is, alongside *The Greek Passion*, often considered to be the apex of Bohuslav Martinů's operatic oeuvre. In spite of this, every new performance of the work is a feast. Hence, *Juliette's* return to the stage of English National Opera (ENO) was an eagerly awaited event. It is worth recalling that the opera's British premiere only took place at the London Coliseum in 1978, some four decades after its very first performance. The next UK production was prepared by Opera North in Leeds in 1997, and twelve years later the work was presented to London audiences in Jiří Bělohlávek's concert version at the Barbican Centre. In recent years, the seldom performed opera has been staged in Europe on a number of occasions in Richard Jones's production,

which ten years ago celebrated success in Paris and this February made its way to Geneva. In September, when this production was staged by English National Opera, Juliette reappeared at the London Coliseum after more than three decades.

As customary with ENO, the work was staged in English, which, however, by no means reduced its impact and comprehensibility. After all, the quality of David Pountney's translation was also witnessed by visitors to the National Theatre in Prague in 2000. What's more, the emphasis ENO places on the linguistic aspect positively manifests itself (and not only in the case of Juliette) in the immaculate pronunciation of all the singers.

Just as in the previous two productions, the spectacular yet simple and playful sets designed by Antony McDonald are dominated by a giant piano accordion, with different parts of it coming forth in each Act: the stretching bellows in Act 1 representing a town are replaced in Act 2 by buttons symbolising a forest, with the horizontally laid keyboard dominating the Central Bureau of Dreams in Act 3. The creation of surreal sets on the basis of the accordion's transformations is highly justified. The instrument is assigned a special significance in Martinů's score: its plaintive sound would seem to offer solace to those deprived of their memories, thus the accordion can actually be interpreted as a symbol of the arts. Naturally, in the new milieu the production underwent a number of minor changes, for instance in the scene where in the Paris staging, after Michel shoots at Juliette, the men "in blue and in grey" follow the protagonist with blood on their hands. In London, however, they crossed the stage several times, gradually turning into a crocodile, the animal to which Juliette has shortly before mockingly likened Michel.

The only weak point of Jones's production can be considered the opening scene, in which we see Michel asleep. The audience is explicitly shown that it's all about a dream, thus being denied the pleasure of gradually seeking on their own the clue to the opera's interpretation, which is not supposed to be the only one possible. On the other hand, it is true that some



PHOTOS: RICHARD HUBERT SMITH



Peter Hoare (Michel)

spectators do get lost in a world in which the borders between reality, fantasy and dream merge, and this time it was no different, as confirmed by some of the visitors' responses after the London performance.

Laudable was the performance of the orchestra conducted by Edward Gardner, who was able to present the music employing various expressive means, emotions and styles with lightness and as a coherent whole. Owing to the outstanding musical exploration, built upon suitably chosen tempos, elaborate dynamics and colour scheme, the orchestra sensitively underlined that which was happening on the stage, thereby affording the singers scope to excel, yet in due course was also able to captivate the audience itself.

The tenor Peter Hoare dazzled both as singer and actor in the demanding lead role of Michel, who hardly ever leaves the stage. He portrayed the character with a breathtaking certainty, freshness and technical precision, and, owing to the wide scale of his expressive abilities, succeeded in depicting perfectly the hero's various inner traits. His performance was natural, and we would be hard pressed indeed to imagine a more visually fitting Michel, the shy book-seller. On the other hand, Julia Sporsén unfortunately was not an ideal Juliette. Although the Swedish singer captivated with her singular singing, her portrayal of the character lacked the required lightness and charm. Her Juliette wasn't the ethereal creature and embodiment of the male and, for that matter, universal human desire for love, as Martinů himself described the character in his Notes on Juliette in 1938: "Juliette herself is a symbol of desire; all the girls in the play are called Juliette, and all the characters seek this one and only name." The casting of the minor roles was faultless, with the young singer Emilie Renard excelling as the Little Arab, First Gentleman and Bell Boy.

To sum up: despite minor imperfections, the old-new production of Juliette has garnered acclaim in another major European city. Notably, the majority of the ENO audience was afforded the great opportunity to get to know a Bohuslav Martinů opera for the first time. And given the brilliant delivery of the music, the high-quality cast and impressive sets, the work simply could not but make a good impression. ■



## MILOŠ SÁDLO AND MARTINŮ

an invitation to meet him and Miloš Šafránek. Besides discussing music, their conversations often focused on that which was happening in Czechoslovakia, with the homesick Martinů asking about the situation there, as well as their mutual friends. During one of these visits, Martinů showed Sádlo the recently completed score of the third (and only “valid”) version of **Concerto No. 1 for Cello and Orchestra, H. 196 III**, and, as the cellist recalled, also suggested that he undertake the work’s premiere.

(The piece was, however, first performed by Pierre Fournier, on 5 December 1955 with the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra under Victor Desarzens.) Miloš Sádlo first played the third version of the cello concerto on 6 March 1956 in Helsinki, accompanied by the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra with Paavo Berglund conducting. He gave Martinů an account of this performance in a letter dated 10 September 1956: “As I have written to you, in March I played your concerto, the new version, in Helsinki. Unfortunately, the concert was given no publicity since there was a nationwide general strike!

I think that the audience liked the concerto though, albeit performing your piece was rather a tough nut to crack for an orchestra who are not used to similar rhythmic problems. As you know, their national bard Sibelius doesn’t present such problems to them.” Miloš Sádlo would subsequently perform Martinů’s first cello concerto many more times, one of the noteworthy performances being that with the Prague Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Václav Smetáček, in March 1957. He said he adored it and was convinced that it was “the most inspired modern cello concerto”, lauding in particular the second movement, whose emotional charge he did not hesitate to compare with that of Dvořák’s Concerto in B minor.

Miloš Sádlo was also keenly interested in **Concerto No. 2 for Cello and Orchestra, H. 304**, which Martinů allegedly even intended to dedicate to him. Yet after completing it in February 1945 in New York, the composer put the score aside and left it in the USA before returning to Europe. What’s more, Martinů wanted to re-write the entire concerto, but unfortunately he never got around to it. The piece was premiered by Saša Večtomov and the Prague Symphony



Two pages of the blueprint of *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra No. 2*, H. 304

Orchestra on 25 May 1965 in České Budějovice, after it had been printed by Associated Music Publishers. Sádlo, however, had aspired to deliver the premiere much earlier, as documented by his letters from September 1956 and February 1957, in which he tried to persuade Martinů to modify the piece and send it to him, since the Prague Spring festival organisers had already preliminarily included it in the programme of the 1957 edition. He again reminded Martinů of his pledge to revise the concerto in a letter dated 1 January 1958, after he had negotiated that

the work might be premiered in Paris. By the time he finally got to perform the concerto, Sádlo had attempted to modify it himself: he above all made a number of cuts in the first two movements, as evidenced by his blueprint copy of the autograph, discovered last year.

Besides the two cello concertos, Miloš Sádlo performed numerous other Martinů compositions. The music of “the genius of Czech music”, as he himself branded Martinů later on, was introduced to him by their mutual friend Karel Šebánek, who back before World War II had provided Sádlo with Martinů’s first minor pieces, including, for example, the **Pastorales, H. 190**. The Czech Trio, of which he was a member together with the violinist Alexandr Plocek and the pianist Josef Páleníček, frequently included in their programme Martinů’s **Piano Trio No. 1 (Cinq pièces brèves), H. 193**. Sádlo’s repertoire also contained all three sonatas for cello and piano, the **Variations on a Theme by Rossini, H. 290**, and **Variations on a Slovak Folksong, H. 378**, which he and Páleníček played on 27 August 1979 at the ceremony accompanying the interment of Bohuslav Martinů’s remains in the family tomb in Polička. In the interview with Aleš Březina, he gave a succinct personal evaluation of the sonatas: “The best of the three sonatas, also when it comes to conception and potency, is undoubtedly the second. It is simply perfect in formal terms. The first sonata is immensely dramatic yet, unfortunately, the timbral possibilities and the combination of the two instruments are not overly well balanced. The third sonata is the simplest and also the most Czech.” Sádlo also recalled the period following the 1948 Communist coup d’état in Czechoslovakia, when, until approximately the middle of the 1950s, it was extremely difficult, many a time impossible even, to get Martinů’s music performed on concert stages in the composer’s homeland: “I could perform it when playing together with the piano, no one could prevent me from doing so. But when it came to the orchestra, there was always the question of approval, and everyone steered clear of it, more out of cowardice than by reason of having a different opinion.”

A significant imprint in Miloš Sádlo’s life was left not only by the music but also, and to a great extent, the personality of the Polička native. A few decades later, the cellist warmly recalled his brief friendship with Bohuslav Martinů: “There isn’t another Martinů out there. He was an immensely tender, intelligent and humble person. I could talk with him openly and humanly... I adored him. And I was happy that he considered me his friend.” ■

# LIST OF MARTINŮ'S WORKS XI



CATEGORY/

## VOCAL MUSIC

SUBCATEGORY/

### CHOIR A CAPPELLA

### CHOIR WITH INSTRUMENTAL ACCOMPANIMENT

ON THIS PAGE of the Revue we continue with our publishing of the complete list of Bohuslav Martinů's works. In this issue we will start the Vocal music category and the subcategory Choir a cappella and Choir with instruments (listed in alphabetical order). The basic data on the works listed here have been taken from the online catalogue of Martinů's œuvre at <http://database.martinu.cz>

#### Commentary/

"Archive" – gives the information as to where the autograph score is deposited. Premiere: Day / Month / Year. Only accessible information is stated. If data on the publisher are missing, the work has yet to be published and is available as material that can be lent.

S Soprano  
A Alto  
T Tenor  
B Bass  
pf piano  
tr trumpet  
vl violin

#### CHOIR A CAPPELLA

##### BRIGAND SONGS I, II

(ZBOJNICKÉ PÍSNĚ I, II) H. 361

*Durata:* 26'35"

*Place of composition:* Rome

*Date of composition:* 1957

*Performing forces:* men's choir (TTBB)

*Dedication:* Cycle I: Pěvecké sdružení

pražských učitelů (The Choral Society of Prague Teachers) / Cycle II: Pěvecké sdružení moravských učitelů (The Choral Society of Moravian Teachers)

*Performers of premiere:* Pěvecké sdružení pražských učitelů (I) Pěvecké sdružení moravských učitelů (II)

*Premiere:* Prague, 11.4.1957 (I);

Brno, 19.10.1957 (II)

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Publisher:* Státní hudební vydavatelství (SHV), Prague 1959 (H. 2880).

*Copyright:* Editio Bärenreiter, Prague

##### CZECH MADRIGALS

(ČESKÉ MADRIGALY)

FOR MIXED VOICES H. 278

*Durata:* 18'05"

*Place of composition:* Vieux-Moulin

*Date of composition:* 1939

*Performing forces:* SSATB (1, 2, 6), SSA (3, 5), SSATTB (4, 8), SAT (7)

*Dedication:* Pražští madrigalisté (Prague Madrigalists), Miroslav Venhoda (cond.)

*Performers of premiere:* Pražští madrigalisté, Miroslav Venhoda (cond.)

*Premiere:* Prague, 14. 9. 1965

*Archive:* Schott, Mainz

*Publisher:* Schott, Mainz 1968.

*Copyright:* Schott Music, Mainz

##### CZECH NURSERY RHYMES

(ČESKÁ ŘÍKADLA) H. 209

*Durata:* 17'

*Place of composition:* Paris

*Date of composition:* 1931

*Performing forces:* female choir

*Dedication:* Pěvecké sdružení pražských učitelek (The Choral Society of Prague Teachers)

*Performers of premiere:* Pěvecké sdružení pražských učitelek, Metod Vymetal (cond.)

*Premiere:* Prague, 4.4.1933

*Archive:* autograph is missing

*Publisher:* Panton, Prague 1977, 1984 (P 1684)

*Copyright:* Schott Music Panton

##### FIVE CZECH MADRIGALS

(PĚT ČESKÝCH MADRIGALŮ) H. 321

*Durata:* 6'

*Place of composition:* New York

*Date of composition:* 1948

*Performing forces:* mixed choir (SATB)

*Performers of premiere:* Schola cantorum New York, Hugh Ross (cond.)

*Premiere:* New York, 13.3.1950

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Publisher:* Boosey & Hawkes, London-New York 1949 (B & H 16618-22)

*Copyright:* Boosey & Hawkes, London-New York

##### FOUR MARIAN SONGS

(ČTYŘI PÍSNĚ O MARII) H. 235

*Durata:* 11'

*Place of composition:* Paris

*Date of composition:* 1934

*Performing forces:* mixed choir (SATB)

*Dedication:* Vinohradský Hlahol Choir

*Performers of premiere:* Vinohradský Hlahol Choir

*Premiere:* Prague, 12.4.1935

*Archive:* Brno, private property

*Publisher:* Tempo, Prague 1993 (T 008)

*Copyright:* Boosey & Hawkes, London-New York

##### A GREETING (ZDRAVICE)

H. 384

*Place of composition:* Schönenberg-Pratteln

*Date of composition:* 1959

*Performing forces:* children's choir

*Dedication:* to the pupils of the Bohuslav Martinů Music School in Polička

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Copyright:* Bärenreiter, Kassel

##### LITTLE SONGS FOR CHILDREN'S CHOIR

(PÍSNÍČKY PRO DĚTSKÝ SBOR) H. 373

*Durata:* 5'

*Place of composition:* Schönenberg-Pratteln (Switzerland)

*Date of composition:* 1959

*Performing forces:* children's choir (SSA)

*Dedication:* Dětský sbor Domu pionýrů a mládeže v Brně (Brno Youth Choir)

*Performers of premiere:* Dětský sbor Domu pionýrů a mládeže v Brně

*Premiere:* Brno, 17.4.1960

*Archive:* Brno, private property

*Publisher:* Panton, Prague 1977 (P 1710)

*Copyright:* Schott Music Panton

##### MADRIGALS

(PART-SONG BOOK) H. 380

*Durata:* 9'30"

*Place of composition:* Schönenberg-Pratteln, (Switzerland)

*Date of composition:* 1959

*Performing forces:* mixed choir (SSATB, No. 3: SATB)

*Dedication:* Maruška Pražanová

*Performers of premiere:* Pražští madrigalisté (Prague Madrigalists), Miroslav Venhoda (cond.)

*Premiere:* Prague, 15.6.1959

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Publisher:* Bärenreiter-Verlag, Kassel 1960, 1988 (B. A. 3755-3758)

*Copyright:* Bärenreiter, Kassel

##### THREE PART-SONGS

(TROJHLASÉ PÍSNĚ) H. 338

*Durata:* 9'

*Place of composition:* New York

*Date of composition:* 1952

*Performing forces:* female choir (SSSSAA)

*Performers of premiere:* Female choir OPUS, Zdeněk Zouhar (cond.)

*Premiere:* Brno, 8.4.1956

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Publisher:* Boosey & Hawkes, London-New York 1953 (B & H 17153-55)

*Copyright:* Boosey & Hawkes, London-New York

##### TWO MALE CHORUSES

H. 121

*Place of composition:* Prague

*Date of composition:* 1919

*Performing forces:* male choir

*Performers of premiere:* Jihočeské pěvecké sdružení (South Bohemian Choral Society), Josef Masopust (cond.)

*Premiere:* Prague, 2. 3. 1919

*Archive:* autograph is missing

*Copyright:* Schott Music Panton

*The existence of this work has not been verified.*

##### CHOIR WITH INSTRUMENTAL ACCOMPANIMENT

##### THE BIRD FEAST (PTAČÍ HODY) H. 379

*Durata:* 2'30"

*Place of composition:* Schönenberg-Pratteln

*Date of composition:* 1959

*Performing forces:* children's choir (SSAA), tr

*Dedication:* Brněnský dětský sbor (Brno Children's Choir)

*Performers of premiere:* Brněnský dětský sbor, František Lýsek (cond.), J. Šlabák (tr)

*Premiere:* Brno, 12.4.1960

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Publisher:* In: Písníčky pro dětský sbor, Panton, Prag 1977 (P 1710)

*Copyright:* Schott Music Panton

##### PRIMROSE (PETRKLÍČ) H. 348

*Durata:* 7'

*Place of composition:* Nice

*Date of composition:* 1954

*Performing forces:* SA vl pf

*Dedication:* Jan Novák (1), Zdeněk Zouhar (2), Anna Wurmová (3), female choir OPUS, Brno, cond. Zdeněk Zouhar (4, 5)

*Performers of premiere:* female choir OPUS, Zdeněk Zouhar (cond.)

*Premiere:* Brno, 25.4.1955

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Publisher:* Panton, Prague 1960 (P004)

*Copyright:* Schott Music Panton

##### THREE SACRED SONGS (THREE LEGENDS) (TŘI PÍSNĚ POSVÁTNÉ – TŘI LEGENDY) H. 339

*Durata:* 11'

*Place of composition:* New York

*Date of composition:* 1952

*Performing forces:* female choir (SSSSAA), vl

*Performers of premiere:* Female choir OPUS, Zdeněk Zouhar (cond.)

*Premiere:* Polička, 7.1.1956

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Publisher:* Boosey & Hawkes, London-New York 1953 (B & H 17156-58)

*Copyright:* Boosey & Hawkes, London-New York

##### VIRGIN MARY WALKED AROUND

THE WORLD (PANENKA MARIA PO SVĚTĚ CHODILA) H. 339 A

*Durata:* 2'15"

*Place of composition:* New York

*Date of composition:* 1952

*Performing forces:* female choir (SSA), vl

*Archive:* The Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

*Copyright:* Bärenreiter, Kassel

# JIŘÍ BĚLOHLÁVEK A PERFEC

## FOR WHOM PERFECTION IS NOT THE GOAL BUT THE

/ PETR VEBER / LUBOŠ STEHLÍK

With the inaugural concert at the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague on 4 October 2012, Jiří Bělohlávek publicly assumed the post of musical director and chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. He took up the position following a six-year tenure with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London, resuming where he had left off two decades previously.

**You have created a distinctive chapter in the history of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. What did the period bring to you personally and what imprint have you left on them?**

The first period was five years in the post of permanent guest conductor, the next five years were without an official title yet with regular, albeit not so intensive, contact, and that led into the six years as musical director. Each part of my tenure seamlessly passed into the next. Perhaps the common denominator was the attention paid to the Czech repertoire and my sustained endeavour not only to perform Czech music but also to familiarise the orchestra with the pieces beyond the well-known repertoire and teach them how to love them. And in this, I think, I have succeeded very well, as evidenced by, for instance, the recordings we made over the years.

**Which of them in particular would you highlight?**

When it comes to the most recent period, the recording of the complete Martinů symphonies, which was made at concerts throughout the season. I included one of them in each programme. The gradual entering into the spirit of Martinů's music resulted in a label showing interest in releasing the symphonies as a set. The CD was nominated for the prestigious Gramophone Awards this year. I would also like to mention Suk's *Ripening* and *A Summer's Tale* and, of course, two opera titles – Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and Janáček's *The Excursions of Mr. Brouček*.



PHOTO: CZECH PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

**Your London era began with a performance of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*?**

Yes, indeed. Martinů ushered in my relationship with the orchestra. *Gilgamesh* was one of the very first pieces and it sparked interest. The other repertoire centre of gravity was Josef Suk's works – we started with the *String Serenade* and the *Fairy Tale* and gradually proceeded to the large scores, beginning with *Asrael*, which Chandos scheduled among its recording projects. Then we did *Ripening*, the *Symphony in E major* and, most recently, *A Summer's Tale* and *Praga*. Suk was totally new to them. Otherwise, we performed the standard Czech repertoire: Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, but we also played Foerster and Novák, Petr Eben, Luboš Fišer, Erwin Schulhoff, Miloslav Kabeláč, Viktor Kalabis... The total volume of Czech music which we encompassed is immense. Yet, of course, we performed the international repertoire too.

**Martinů's and Suk's music is not overly played by orchestras worldwide. Did you have to wade through them painstakingly? How did the orchestra members receive so specific a type of music?**

When getting to know an unfamiliar repertoire, these musicians have the advantage of being trained in rapid absorption of new compositions and new musical impulses. It is a specific ensemble; after all, it was formed as an orchestra predetermined to perform new works, not just British but international too. From the very beginning, the orchestra's players are trained to be able to adapt to new music extremely quickly. And this quality is underlined by the fact that the orchestra doesn't repeat anything. One of its great features is its ability to prepare new programmes rapidly.

**But isn't that a disadvantage too?**

Yes, it is, when it comes to the formation of the style of playing and the creation of an interpretative opinion. The proverb "repetition is the mother of wisdom" says it all: repeating things stabilises performing skills and you work yourself through to a greater depth, better understand the scores... The BBC Symphony Orchestra members like going on tour precisely owing to the fact that they generally repeat the repertoire in various cities – and for them this has always been a pleasure and a verification of their ability to get to the core and capture the quintessence

# VIOLINIST STARTING POINT

of compositions. The orchestra's huge virtue is that they do not feel reluctant to do anything. They have to produce a new programme every four days – and this requirement presumes the existence of a certain type of inquisitiveness and curiosity, which really is there. The musicians sometimes complain that they are constantly in the process of getting to know something new and having to implement it straight away, yet at the same time they are well aware that this is precisely what makes them special, and they nurture it.

**▷ The Czechs often think that only they can play Dvořák, Suk, Janáček... What is the difference between the approach of London and Czech orchestras to this music?**

London orchestras are not burdened by any weight of tradition in this respect – neither in the good nor, and primarily, the bad sense. The BBC Symphony Orchestra does not have a tradition that would reassure the musicians that the manner in which they performed

a piece most recently is the one and only possible. They are aware that every attempt at grasping a work starts from point zero. They are outstanding players and commit themselves fully to the conductor's will. If I ever had a certain problem with creating with them, for instance, a Janáček idiom or a true Martinů rhythmic pulsation and the natural flow of individual compositional elements from which Martinů always builds up his pieces, all I had to do was to tell them what to do and explain how – and they accepted it automatically and were able not only to imitate the pattern but also to develop it in a creative way. And by means of repeated touches, this gradually strengthened, especially in the case of Martinů's music. We performed not only his symphonies but also the

concertos, the *Field Mass* and other pieces. The orchestra members approached them with an increasing degree of experience and were able to build upon the basis they had and continue in it. Today, it is already in their possession, they know how to approach Martinů's language and how to understand it. The oft-heard mechanical labelling of the structure of his music as "full of syncopations" is not accurate. As Martinů himself explained, a certain motif may look like a syncopated matter yet in fact there are irregular times that must be understood and carried out. This is the very key to Martinů's musical language and Martinů interpretation. ■

*Reprinted (and abbreviated) from the musical magazine Harmonie, No. 10, 2012, with their kind permission*

**JIRÍ BĚLOHLÁVEK** | 1946 born in Prague, where he studied at the Conservatory and the Academy of Performing Arts | 1970 winner of the national competition of young conductors, becomes an assistant conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra | 1971 finalist of the Herbert von Karajan International Conducting Competition | 1972 conductor of the State Philharmonic Orchestra Brno, until 1978 | 1977 chief conductor of the Prague Symphony Orchestra, until 1989 | 1981 conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, until 1990 | 1990 chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, until 1992 | 1994 establishes the Prague Philharmonia, chief conductor until 2005, today its Honorary Music Director | 1995 principal guest conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, until 2000 | 1997 named Professor of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, his pupils included Jakub Hrůša, Tomáš Hanus, Tomáš Netopil and Zbyněk Müller | 2004 debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York | 2006 chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London, until 2012 | 2006 named President of the Prague Spring international music festival | 2007 the first conductor of the Last Night of the Proms whose mother tongue is not English | 2007 he and the Berliner Philharmoniker perform Smetana's *My Country* | 2012 named Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire | 2012 named chief conductor and music director of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, with a contract for four years | 2013 principal guest conductor of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra.

## RECITAL BY MAXIM RYSANOV & ASHLEY WASS

REVIEW

/ MARK TODD

THE VIOLINIST Maxim Rysanov, a native of Ukraine and now based in London, is a previous BBC Young Generation Artist and winner at the Geneva International Music Competition. He played to what was probably his largest audience last year when he appeared at The Last Night of the Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Jiří Bělohlávek in an arrangement for viola of Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations*. Martinů's music for viola has been an interest of his for some time and in previous seasons he has performed the *Madrigals for Violin and Viola, H. 313* with violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky and the *Rhapsody-Concerto for Viola, H. 337* with various orchestras, including again the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Jiří Bělohlávek. A CD issue with Maxim Rysanov is planned, which is to include a number of the Martinů viola works. Rysanov had played the viola sonata some years ago, but when he scheduled it last year he found that he needed more time to re-enter the atmosphere of the work and postponed his public performances until this season.

On Friday October 12 the audience at his recital at the Little Missenden Festival in Little Missenden church with the British pianist Ashley Wass – also a former BBC Young Generation Artist – was lucky



enough to hear one of these performances. The festival is run entirely by volunteers, and the chairman, Alan Hedges, had provided an excellent introduction to the *Viola Sonata, H. 355* in the programme notes. The notes alluded to the range of types of expression in the work – 'nostalgic', 'muscular and powerful, intense and deeply passionate, displaying the power and range of the viola brilliantly, from the gritty darkness of the lower strings to the lyrical qualities of the higher registers.' The final movement was characterised as 'abrasive and rhythmically complex agitation' – this was what a British critic fifty years ago had referred to as 'scrubbing-brush music'.

There was no doubt of Maxim Rysanov's mastery of and response to all these aspects, as well as Ashley Wass's affinity with the 'rhythmic and often percus-

sive' piano writing. Both are confident and bold players, Maxim Rysanov with a full and rich tone, projecting the lyrical aspects of the work with warm vigour, and Ashley Wass delighting in both the full chords and the running interplay with the viola.

The Martinů *Sonata* was the opening item in the recital, and together with the piece 'Incantatio' by the contemporary Swiss composer Richard Dubugnon (its title echoing a title used by Martinů for a Piano Concerto) it was the most substantial item in the programme actually written for viola. There was also a short 'Whispered Lullaby' by the contemporary Bulgarian-born composer Dobrinka Tabakova, which, like the Dubugnon, was composed with Maxim Rysanov in mind. The remainder of the concert included viola and piano arrangements of Bach's third Cello Suite and a selection of pieces originally for piano or cello and piano by Debussy, Ravel and Fauré.

Little Missenden church was packed, with chairs seemingly added in every available space compatible with health and safety regulations – I was seated within a few inches of the violist so received the full impact of his strong presentation. In September Maxim Rysanov presented the work to an audience in Hong Kong, and during the season is scheduled to give further performances in Manchester, Leicester, Belfast and Moscow. ■

# A PROVOCATIVELY POETIC

/ LUCIE DERCSÉNYIOVÁ

OPERAS AND BALLETS by **Bohuslav Martinů** are rarely seen on our stages. In their time, they were deemed experimental, yet as the decades have progressed creators have “at hand” a number of time-proven artistic techniques from which to draw inspiration or innovate. Martinů’s music is captivating, challenging to perform and listen to, but it provides staging teams with ample scope to apply not only modern theatre technology but also dance in its diverse contemporary forms.

Martinů composed fourteen ballets. He perceived dance as a part of his works for stage and dance also plays a significant role in some of his operas. He had the courage to combine unusual musical genres. And, as is the case of a number of his other works, *Theatre Behind the Gate*, **H. 251**, defined both as an opera buffa and a ballet mime, blends several genres too. In the score, completed on 30 April 1936, Martinů referred to it as a *Commedia dell’arte in Three Acts*. The first Act is a ballet mime made up of six scenes after **Jean Gaspar Debureau**, Acts two and three are given over to opera buffa.

Martinů chose as the theme *commedia dell’arte*, which he interconnected with Czech folk poetry, working with texts by **František Bartoš**, **František Sušil** and **Karel Jaromír Erben**. Although this juxtaposition may seem incongruous, Martinů succeeded in creating joyful music perfect to move to, music also imbued with a dramatic charge. The composer had plenty of ideas, as well as doubts, as he confided to Jindřich Honzl: “...I have found quite detailed scripts of Debureau’s mimes, which come in very handy... they are lovely and irresistibly funny. Yet I would not do it as a directive pantomime, since there simply aren’t enough actors, but as a ballet with mime and singing. I would like it to be this way – can you give me advice as to whether it is an anachronism – mime and *commedia dell’arte* and folk song.” (Letter dated 14 May 1935, Paris.) Martinů also sought someone to help him with the text; first he discussed the matter with Vítězslav Nezval, yet ultimately the dialogues were edited by the Czech singer



**Leo Štraus**. The composer extended the *commedia dell’arte* stock characters with other figures: Katushka, the Bellman, the Mayor and the Old Woman-Charmer: “*The first Act in six scenes is a musical setting of burlesque tableaux drawing upon J. G. Debureau’s mime works. Columbine and Harlequin are introduced, Pierrot is jealous, he asks the innkeeper to help him to separate the couple and tell Columbine to come home. In the following scene, Pierrot shaves off the innkeeper’s moustache, thus becoming the source of his physical suffering, then the confectioner enters the action and other scenes unfold in which the innkeeper brings a rifle from home and the clumsy Pierrot shoots Harlequin dead with it. The tumult is calmed by the dead Harlequin himself, who all of a sudden stands up, before he and Columbine kneel down in front of the innkeeper, who blesses them. The characters then run through another two Acts in song. Theatre Behind the Gate is nothing but a scene at the market-place, a fair outside the town, actually a peripatetic theatre show.*” (*Divadelní list*, Brno, Issue 3, 1936, Bohuslav Martinů’s text for the production.)

*Theatre Behind the Gate* was premiered in Brno on 20 September 1936. The sets and costumes were designed by **František Muzika** and the choreography created by **Ivo Váňa Psota**. It was subsequently staged in Olomouc,

Liberec, České Budějovice and Opava. The National Theatre in Prague didn’t stage the opera until 1968, with the dancer **Antonín Landa** appearing in Act 1. In 2000 it was presented by the Moravian-Silesian National Theatre in Ostrava in **Igor Vejsada**’s choreography.

Martinů had a clear notion of his stage works. The Bohuslav Martinů Institute possesses a copy of notes from the autograph score in which the composer gives detailed instructions as to that which should take place on stage and what the visual design should be like. In addition to a precise description of the tableaux, Martinů also specifies dance elements – for instance, he writes that Pierrot should make three pirouettes – and although *Theatre Behind the Gate* is inspired by a comedy type based on mimic action, in his notes Martinů only once mentions mime as a manner of performance, otherwise writing *dances of the soloists and corps*.

**Radim Vizváry**, the director of the new production, conceives *Theatre Behind the Gate* in the way Martinů himself intended, leaving it up to the creators to address “*the audience of their time*”. In his staging, Vizváry employs mime elements, placing emphasis on face-play, as well as paying attention to the overall physical expression. He accommodates to the produc-

# THEATRE BEHIND THE GATE



tion's set design, its simple demarcation of the space, in which strips of white fabric hang down and the performers walk behind them or appear from behind. The austere sets make it possible to highlight the extravagant costumes, making use of a wide scheme of colours and punk stylisation of the mime artists. Now and then, Columbine looks like a gutsy coquette – a dominatrix toying with her admirers Harlequin and Pierrot. The Mayor is portrayed with hyperbole,

with **Irina Andreeva's** looks alone sketching in the figure's piquant grotesqueness.

*Theatre Behind the Gate* transcends traditional themes: it is a succession of tableaux that can exist independently from each other and hence it isn't easy to translate the work into a dramatically consistent form. It's as though it resists this owing to its "fragmentation". In his new production of *Theatre Behind the Gate*, Vizváry succeeds in creating an organically coherent dramatic whole, greatly aided in this respect by the dramaturgic and musical modifications. The creative team focused on conceiving a synthetic theatre piece and consequently condensed two Acts into one. The conductor **Valentina Shuklina** arranged the number and configuration of wind instruments. Singers from the Faculty of Music of the Academy of Performing Arts, members of the N.O.S. Untraditional Opera Studio, the Quattra Chamber Orchestra, the Bubureza choir and mime and dance students all appear in the performance.

The cuts did the production good. As a result of being shortened and owing to a consistent blending of song and dance, it acquires the desired synthesis of form, whereby the soloists sing their arias accompanied by their dancing doubles. When it comes to the choreography, Vizváry applies the principle of mime-mimicry,

with the performers' expressions being accompanied by an equally distinctive pose or gesture. He also employs acrobatic elements and puts everything functionally into moving pictures, when at a few junctures the singers transcend traditional operatic acting and pay more attention to the physical performance of their characters. Rendering Martinů's score, which are complicated in terms of dance, is not easy, yet I personally am of the opinion that it calls for a choreographic excitement even more intense than that in the new production. In the programme, Vizváry is credited with the mime concept and choreography, and in his adaptation he duly brought to bear his own unique penmanship. He observes the dramatic trajectory of individual scenes and works with mime drawn from harlequinade which he idiomatically develops in vivid gesture. His characters are sad, comical and moving at the same time. Their terse, uncompromising display shifts the work into the present, providing more impulses for and manners of expression that could lead to more richly structured movement – dance. Naturally, Vizváry works with that which is close to him – mime – and enriches it with his peculiar creative point of view and provocative poetics. ■

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## THEATRE BEHIND THE GATE

*Music, libretto:* Bohuslav Martinů

*Dialogue:* Leo Štraus

*Arrangements:* Valentina Shuklina, Radim Vizváry

*Stage director:* Radim Vizváry

*Mime concept, choreography:* Radim Vizváry and his creative team

*Conductor, music exploration:* Valentina Shuklina

*Set design:* Jozef Hugo Čačko

*Light design:* Jiří Podubský

*Movement supervision:* Eva Bezzemková, Andrej Mišejka

Project of the Faculty of Music and Dance of the Academy of Performing Arts

*Premiere:* 26 June 2012, National Theatre New Stage, Prague

# ...WITH RADIM VIZVÁRY

In the second half of September 2012, Polička hosted the first edition of the international Mime Fest. It was an extraordinary event, seeing that it is the one and only festival of its kind in the Czech Republic. Its highlight was a performance of Bohuslav Martinů's opera *Theatre Behind the Gate, H. 251*, which was premiered on 26 June 2012 at the National Theatre New Stage in Prague. The festival's dramaturge is the Polička native Radim Vizváry, one of the finest young Czech mime artists, who currently teaches at the Mime Department of the Faculty of Music of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and at the DIE ETAGE school of arts in Berlin.

/ LUCIE JIRGLOVÁ

## How did the idea of holding a mime festival in Polička arise?

We were inspired by Bohuslav Martinů, since he is one of the first to have discovered the source that would later expand into a current of modern Czech mime art. Our audiences primarily know its stage form from Ladislav Fialka.

## The festival culminated in your production of the opera *Theatre Behind the Gate*. The connection between Martinů and mime may be surprising for some of our readers...

Martinů had a keen interest in mime. He was inspired by Deburau's librettos and applied his notion of combining opera and mime in *Theatre Behind the Gate*.

## You have focused on the theme of the relation between Martinů and mime in your thesis too. Why did you choose this work in particular?

I chose the *Theatre Behind the Gate* as my practical doctoral thesis since I would like to use it to assess my theoretical research, work and experience in art. I picked the project for two reasons. The first is that I come from Polička and have a positive relation to Martinů; the second is that I am intrigued by the work's multi-genre nature and the music's actual texture. From this viewpoint, the legacy of Bohuslav Martinů, who was interested in French mime and, as a patriot, injected folk elements into his music, is extremely attractive for me. And the work *Theatre Behind the Gate*, which has seldom been staged, opens up the possibility of creatively integrating these elements, as well as the several genres of comic opera,

mime, dance and music. Moreover, I am interested in seeking the answer to the question of what actually is "folk" at the present time. The theme of my thesis is the French influence on Czech mime art. My specialisation is dramaturgy in mime, and putting on *Theatre Behind the Gate* was a great challenge for me since in this respect it is very demanding to implement.

## Yes, that was the first thing that crossed my mind when I saw its premiere at the New Stage of the National Theatre in Prague in June – it places great requirements on the performers. I had the impression that in your production everyone has to be skilled in everything: acting, movement, dance, singing...

You're right, it was also demanding for the actors and singers. Since it is synthetic theatre, or, if you will, a fusion of genres, we had to learn many new skills so as to meet the creator's requirements. Everyone got down to it with great enthusiasm and diligence, as if they were aware that they were working on something exceptional and at the same time had realised that they could learn something new. I especially appreciated the approach and resolve of the opera singers, since they took movement technique lessons from me, attended rehearsals in gym gear and had aching muscles. Ultimately, they had transcended the boundaries of traditional opera acting and were really happy to have done so.

## The result of their efforts is evident. It's always a real joy when you manage to get together a team of enthusiasts who aren't afraid to learn something new.

At the same time, Martinů commands respect, and some simply can't handle it. One of the



singers backed out about fourteen days prior to the premiere.

## How did you resolve the situation?

Fortunately, opera singers always double up in a role, so the other one appeared in all the performances. But we already have a new, second Harlequin, who has been debuting in Polička.

## Did you have any creative crises during the preparations?

Yes, creation isn't merely fun, it involves suffering too. I experienced two alternating states of mind: when I was at my wits' end, I cursed Martinů for what he had thought up, why he hadn't taken more time to trim it properly, why he just put the folk songs in it without consequence, why he stole some components and put them next to each other without any context, etc. Now and then, I found him really insane, I even came to the conclusion that he must have done it under the influence, there simply wasn't any other plausible explanation... And while in the other state of mind I adored the guy!

## Martinů could simply be somewhat mischievous at times, and in the case of *Theatre Behind the Gate* he must have truly savoured it: Let's shake up the social themes in opera, we'll get a right ticking off but it doesn't matter...

And the mischievousness and provocation is what I like about him.

## What other difficulties did you have to contend with when it came to the preparation of the music and the adaptation of the libretto?

# WE'RE NEVER SO BUSY AS TO NOT FIND A MOMENT TO LAUGH



PHOTO: JAN MUDRA

**The original first Act is made up of ballet mime, while the second and third are given over to opera buffa.**

It is a succession of several scenes that can exist independently of each other, hence it isn't easy to shape the work into a dramatically consistent form. I primarily drew on the original plays, which inspired Bohuslav Martinů too. They include, for instance, the librettos of *Pierrot the Baker* and *Pierrot the Barber*. Yet I didn't use all the Debureau models. I also had to reach for something else, even found inspiration in the Marcel Carné film *Les Enfants du Paradis*. I used all these scenes to create a simple story and after I had consulted the conductor we put together a consistent whole.

**What was it like working with such a traditional subject matter? After all, commedia dell'arte characters are of the stock variety and it can't be easy to treat them in a modern manner, to avoid various clichés, etc. How did you approach it?**

The commedia dell'arte types are, in my opinion, the mirror of today's society. I sought specific types that would address a contemporary audience while, at the same time, not losing their traditional nature. This exploration was really interesting and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I observed every person around me and duly identified him or her. Subsequently, I assessed the basic features of all the characters, and the

result was the current comedic type. I think Martinů would have done it this way too...

**There's no doubt about it, Martinů was an outstanding observer! Were you also inspired in your endeavour by co-operation with the set designer, or did you approach him with a clear notion of what the sets and costumes should look like?**

The designer and I influenced each other to a great extent. We got together quite frequently and brought each other materials, books, videos, etc. I did have a certain conception and he strove to realise it, yet at the same time I afforded him scope for his own invention.

**The production is very imaginative in visual terms and at first glance it captivates owing to its modern conception. To what extent did you adhere to the instructions given by Martinů himself, who, for instance, prescribed half-masks for the mime artists (yet this instruction was perhaps only complied with by František Muzika in the original 1936 staging)?**

We above all drew upon folklore and ultimately found a solution of how to blend folk phraseology and commedia dell'arte elements. The designer Jozef Hugo Čačko was not only inspired by Czech but also, and primarily, Slovak folklore, since it provided a more abundant material. The masks are painted on, you may recall a Harlequin with a red strip across his

eyes. But the most important for us was to reach out to the present so as to be able to address young people.

**And in that, in my opinion, you have succeeded: the sets appear really modern. I was also intrigued by the doubling of vocal and dance roles – was that your idea?**

Yes, I wanted to create an integrated work, knock together three Acts that do not communicate with each other. And I considered this doubling an ideal solution that made it possible to create a dramatic character in a dramatic situation.

**Have you then used material from all three Acts?**

I drew on all three of them. Basically, we began with the second Act (opera), continued with the first (mime), and concluded with the third. They are only modified a little bit. Martinů initially asked Vítězslav Nezval to help him with the libretto, yet ultimately, in haste, created everything on his own. Therefore, so as to imbue the music with better gradation and tempo, the conductor and I had to make a few cuts.

**Martinů insisted that Nezval make it really funny. What has this intensive work of yours revealed about the composer's personality and sense of humour?**

When you live with a work for half a year, you really get to plumb its depths and understand the creator more profoundly. Then you don't reflect upon his artistic qualities but wonder what kind of person he was. I asked myself the questions: Why does he pay attention to this in particular? What does he want to say? Ultimately, I created my own Martinů story connected with this work. I even, as it were, identified myself with him, since his personality is enthralling and somewhat close to me. I have in mind the human behaviour and worldview. I think Martinů had a great sense of humour and he also drew upon his personal experience and adventures. If he was tortured by something, he was able to transform it into a comical situation. This, after all, is characteristic of us Czechs.

**To conclude, we would like to quote a short extract from the opera's prologue:**

"Leave the worries that oppress you at the theatre door – you will find them there again, they will be waiting for you, yet in the meantime we are here to make you laugh... And don't say that you are too busy; you are never so busy as to not find a moment to laugh." ■

# ...WITH STEVEN ISSERLIS

/ LUCIE HARASIM BERNÁ

**At the present time, you are recording Antonín Dvořák's Cello Concerto; in January 2013 you are scheduled to record some of Martinů's chamber music. Which pieces in particular will your Martinů album feature?**

I shall be recording Martinů's three cello sonatas for the second time (along with Olli Mustonen's cello sonata and – space permitting – *Malinconia* by Sibelius). The reason for re-recording the sonatas (apart from the fact that I love them more and more as I get older) is that this time the recording is with Olli Mustonen, who is as much a fan of Martinů as I am. We have played the sonatas together many times over the years, and it seemed natural to record them along with Olli's own sonata. In fact, Olli specifically asked that when we got around to recording his sonata (the premiere recording, by the way), it be coupled with Martinů. Olli plays Martinů amazingly!

**Dvořák in October, Martinů at the beginning of next year – it would seem that you have entered your Czech period?**

Yes, and my second recording of Janáček's *Pohádka* has just come out; and this past summer I programmed and performed in a mini-series of two concerts of Czech chamber music (Suk, Martinů, Smetana, Janáček and Dvořák) at the Verbier and Salzburg festivals. Indeed a lot of Czech music at the moment! But I have always adored these composers, and I'm sure I always shall – there is something about Czech music that I find uniquely attractive. I think it is the innocence, the sense of closeness to the folk spirit – no matter how sophisticated the composition.

**You have frequently performed French composers – Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Ravel. Martinů spent many years in Paris too. Do you perceive him as continuing in the line of 20th-century Czech music, or do you consider him cosmopolitan?**

I know that Martinů cited Debussy (and the English madrigalists!) as his strongest foreign influences; but the music of his homeland always seems to me prevalent over any other



British cellist Steven Isserlis

voices in his music. Of course, one can hear his love of Bach, Haydn and others as well – but Bach, Haydn talking in 20th-century Czech accents!

**How often do you play Martinů pieces at your concerts and recitals?**

I play the sonatas very often, and occasionally the *Slovak Variations*. I have not yet played the concertos or much of the chamber music; but I would like to if the opportunity arises and I have time to learn them.

**Do you work with Czech musicians and conductors?**

I have in the past worked with Jiří Bělohávek and Petr Altrichter, with the Czech Philharmonic and with the Prague Symphony; but most recently I have been working with Jakub Hrůša – he is a big talent, and a very nice person.

**How are you preparing for recording the Martinů CD? Are you working with the Bohuslav Martinů Institute or the Martinů Center in Polička?**

Yes, Mrs Seyčková at the Martinů Institute and her colleagues have been wonderfully helpful; they have allowed me to see auto-

graphs of the first and third sonatas, which I shall study before the recording. The Heugel edition of the first sonata contains so many errors – it's frustrating. The third sonata has recently been published in a very good authentic edition – although Olli and I both like some of the passages that are not in the new edition, so we might possibly restore them. (It doesn't seem to be completely clear whether Martinů approved of or even composed the additions or not; anyway, they are very minor.) Alas, the manuscript of the second sonata appears to be missing – a pity, since there are several inconsistencies in the Schirmer edition.

**What, in your opinion, is prerequisite for performance of Martinů's chamber compositions?**

One needs a strong sense of rhythm – a feeling for dance and for the precise excitement of the motoric elements in Martinů's music. But I think one needs also a strong feeling of joy, somehow – even in an essentially tragic work like the first sonata. His music has to pulse with life!

**Within the context of Czech music, Martinů is one of the most significant composers. How do you perceive him within the context of international music?**

I think that his reputation will continue to grow and grow. Whenever I am present at a performance of one of his symphonies, I see how much audiences everywhere love his music. (When I played the Dvořák concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic under Alan Gilbert, for instance, they played a Martinů symphony in the second half; it was a triumph.) Just last night, I went to hear Juliette at the English National Opera; everybody to whom I spoke was profoundly impressed by the work, and many were wondering why they didn't know more Martinů. Also, his goodness seems to shine through his art. My adorable late friend, the Russian/American cellist Raya Garbousova, told me a charming (though sad) story about Martinů. In the 1940s, she was invited (by Koussevitsky, I think) to commission a composer to write a concerto for her. She went to Martinů. He agreed to compose the work. She then asked what his fee might be. 'Oh, I'll compose it for nothing,' was his answer. 'But,' he added, 'could you just give me enough money to buy the manuscript paper?' Not many composers were that unworldly... ■

## NEW CD

**I FLAUTISTI** - The London Recorder Quartet was founded in 2009 to encourage the popularity and growth of repertoire for recorder consort through engaging and innovative performances. This group have independently commissioned new works for recorder quartet in their professional capacity

as an international ensemble. Their first album *Sound Clouds* presents pockets of sounds and a collaborative mixture of musical colours including pieces from Arvo Pärt, Chiel Meijering and Alan Davis, composers that already have a strong link to their instrument. The album also includes some beautiful early music and the *Divertimento for two recorders, H. 365* by Bohuslav Martinů (previously recorded only at non-commercial CD of the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation in Prague - Bohuslav Martinů Days 2008, published in 2010) as other examples of existing and important works for recorder consort. ■



**IN SEPTEMBER 2012,** JIŘÍ BĚLOHLÁVEK received Britain's prestigious Gramophone Award for the recording of the six Bohuslav Martinů symphonies released by Onyx. Mike Ashman, a Gramophone critic, wrote on this occasion: "I could not agree less. The six symphonies of Martinů, like the contemporary late works of Béla Bartók, are the war pieces of an artist in a state of pain and exile that is both

personal and political. Their lyrical moments, perhaps, can be graceful and elegant although one suspects, as in the tricky (and, in some aspects, most modern) No. 6, that this relative repose is either deliberately cynical or a mocking quotation of other composers who can afford to be at rest at such a time in the world's affairs. That pain and stress are clearly, and superbly, realised here."

Bělohlávek could not attend the awards ceremony in person, since at the time he was busy rehearsing with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. In a video message, he pointed out that recording the cycle of Martinů symphonies was one of the highlights of his six-year tenure at the BBC Symphony Orchestra. He also extended his thanks to the Onyx label, owing to which the album, entitled "Martinů: The Six Symphonies", could reach out to a wider audience. ■

**For more information:** [www.gramophone.co.uk/awards/2012/orchestral](http://www.gramophone.co.uk/awards/2012/orchestral)



**MR. ERIC VAN LAUWE**, a Paris-based collector, has purchased the autograph of the Martinů composition *Pastorals, six pieces for cello and piano, H. 190* from the auction house Ader and kindly provided Bohuslav Martinů Foundation and Institute with a colour copy. Previously, our researchers only had available a black-and-white copy from the publisher. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Mr. Van Lauwe for sending us the facsimile. ■

## PLAY WITH THE PROFESSIONALS – PLAYWIP 2012

## MASTER CLASSES WITH THE MARTINŮ QUARTET IN SOUTH BOHEMIA

AS HAS BECOME AN ANNUAL TRADITION, chamber music master classes led by members of the Martinů Quartet took place at the beginning of August in two one-week batches in the beautiful South Bohemian town of Jindřichův Hradec. The classes, titled *Play with the Professionals (PLAYWIP)*, are intended for amateurs, semi-professionals, as well as professional musicians, who during the summer want to hone their skills (the most frequent instruments being the violin, viola, cello, flute and piano). Christian Boller came up with the idea of PLAYWIP in 2001, and since 2006 the workshops with the Martinů Quartet



have been extended owing to the large number of musicians registered.

During the week-long courses, the participants practised selected chamber compositions in ensembles. For each course, professionals from the Martinů Quartet choose one chamber work by Bohuslav Martinů. In 2012, it was *Promenades, H. 247*, for violin, flute and harpsichord/piano. In collaboration with Mrs Lucie Harasim Berná

from the Bohuslav Martinů Institute, Lubomír Havlák, first violin of the Martinů Quartet, organised an evening lecture on the theme of Martinů's life and chamber oeuvre for each batch of participants. The two lectures met with great enthusiasm on the part of musicians from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, England and the USA.

*Martinů Quartet* is a member of the *International Martinů Circle*. ■

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**Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno**, choirmaster **Petr Fiala**

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