

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

martinůREVUE

september–december 2016 / vol. XVI / no. 3

**martinů complete
edition – premieres**

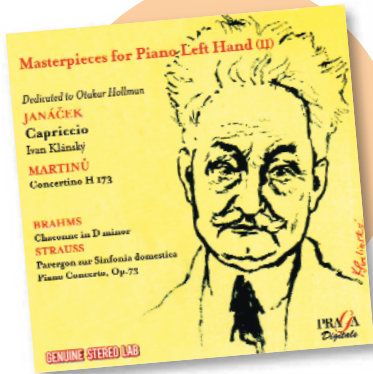
**martinů and
the kroll quartet**

pro arte quartet

mirandolina in venice

new discoveries





**Bohuslav Martinů:
Complete Piano Concertos**

Piano Concerto No. 1, H 149 (Václav Mácha)
Piano Concerto No. 2, H 237 (Karel Košárek)
Concertino for Piano and Orchestra, H 269
 (Adam Skoumal)
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 (Daniel Wiesner, Miroslav Sekera)
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Piano Concerto No. 4 „Incantation“, H 358
 (Igor Ardašev)
Piano Concerto No. 5, H 366 (Ivo Kahánek)
 Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra,
 Tomáš Brauner (Conductor)
 Recorded 2015–2016, Radio Studio No. 1, Prague
 Český rozhlas, Radioservis, 2016, CR0776-2, TT 175:26

**Masterpieces for Piano Left Hand (II)
(Janáček, Martinů, Brahms, Strauss)**

Historical recordings, recorded 1962–1999
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(Left Hand) and Small Orchestra, H 173*
 Siegfried Rapp (Piano),
 Loh-Orchester Sondershausen,
 Gerhardt Wiesenhütter (Conductor)
 Recorded in Sondershausen (Germany),
 4–6 December 1962, Cruciskirche
 Praga Digitals, 2015, PRD 250316, TT 78:35

**Martinů Early Recordings Part 2
The Shadow – Ballet in One Act, H 102 (1916)**

Dorota Szczepańska (Soprano),
 Anna Maria Staśkiewicz (Violin),
 Agnieszka Kopacka (Piano)
 Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson (Conductor)
 Recorded on 16–17 December 2015
 WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING
 Toccata Classics 2016, TOCC 0249, TT 66:37
MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL
 Recording of the Year 2016



Dvořák, Martinů

Christian Poltéra (Cello)
 Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin
 Thomas Dausgaard (Conductor)
 Martinů: *Concerto No. 1 for Cello
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 Recorded in 2014
 BIS-2157 SACD 2016

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the bohuslav martinů complete edition was reviewed by the international music periodical **notes**

NIGEL SIMEONE reviews the first two volumes of the BMCE for the September edition of *Notes*, the Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association.

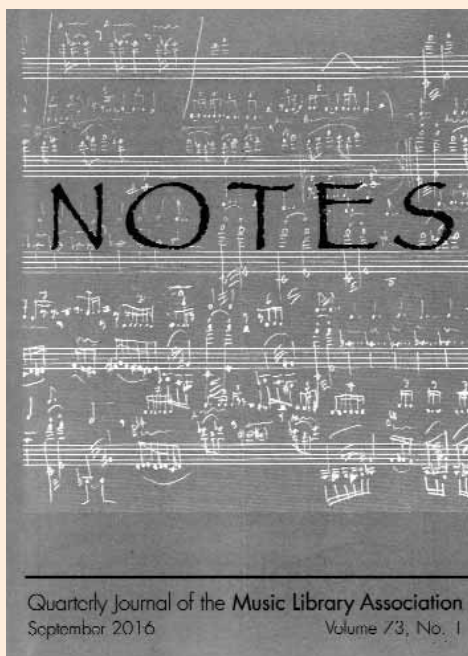
EXCERPTS:

Martinů's published scores are not always as unambiguous as they might be. That state of affairs provides one very good reason for a scholarly critical edition of his works, but in Martinů's case there are other compelling factors. He has a reputation for being "too prolific," and is sometimes dismissed for being an uneven composer. Certainly there are times when he relies rather too heavily on tried-and-tested harmonic formulae, and not everything is on the inspired level of the Double Concerto or the 1937 opera Julietta. But without being able to study the scores of all his largescale works, it is hard to come to any balanced judgment. That is just what this new edition will enable us to do, providing the opportunity to assess Martinů more thoroughly, and (eventually) to be able to study the whole of his output.

This is a big project, and one that should do much to secure Martinů's reputation by making the whole of his output accessible to performers and scholars.

Symphony No. 4, H 305:

Those familiar with the published orchestral score of the symphony ([London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1950], plate number B & H 16616, 166 pages) might wonder whether a new edition is really necessary. The short answer is a resounding "yes," despite the general reliability of the original Boosey & Hawkes score. One reason is that there is plenty more to discover about this symphony. This new edition is not only useful as a cleanly edited text, but it also turns out to be extremely informative. My own curiosity about the musical text of the Fourth Symphony was aroused when the autograph manuscript was auctioned at Sotheby's in London on 23 November 2013 (lot 185), including correction leaves that had music from the slow movement that was nowhere to be found in the Boosey & Hawkes full score. (The



manuscript is now in the Robert Owen Lehman Collection, on deposit at the Pierpont Morgan Library.) These missing measures are to be found among several fascinating appendices in this new edition, which also include the original versions of the opening of the first movement and the closing measures of the finale. This edition is the work of Sharon Andrea Choa—a conductor as well as a scholar—who brings to the task practical experience of performing the work, as well as high editorial standards. As Choa notes in the critical report, "the printed full score published by B&H in 1950 was produced with extreme care" (p. 232), but even so there are errors and inconsistencies that Choa has aimed to correct.

Throughout the score, the small alterations that have been made are pragmatic and helpful, and where Martinů put a mixture of accents in and out of parentheses in B&H (as in m. 11), this is faithfully reflected in the new edition—so there's been no interventionist standardization. The instrumental nomenclature has reverted from the English used in B&H to the Italian on Martinů's manuscript. The rehearsal numbers from B&H (score and parts) have been retained throughout. The editorial guidelines appear to have been worked out with great care, and I'm delighted to report that there is none of the notational idiosyncrasy

of the Janáček complete edition (also published by Bärenreiter). With the additional material in the appendices, and the extensive introduction and critical apparatus, this edition should be of the greatest interest to anybody performing or studying this symphony, particularly as the task of editing it has been done so meticulously.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, H 351:

It's a fascinating work—one in which Martinů avoids any kind of formulaic writing, draws on the influence of medieval music in places to create a rather austere, ascetic sound-world, and finds plenty of rhythmic freedom in the writing. The genre of Gilgamesh was problematic for Martinů: he wrote that it was "neither an oratorio, nor a cantata—it is simply an epic." One puzzle is why it is performed so rarely, and this new edition should encourage are evaluation of a work that doesn't have an easy appeal but is certainly very striking. Březina's edition is a model of its kind. As well as the discussion of context and genesis, the introductory matter also includes a number of carefully-chosen facsimile pages from various stages in the work's evolution (including the preliminary sketch). The critical report is laid out with an admirable combination of clarity and detail, and the complete English and German libretto is printed at the end (the score itself prints just the English text set by Martinů). As with the Fourth Symphony, Bärenreiter's note-setting is beautifully clear throughout, and well laid-out on the page. As befits an edition of this kind, the paper is of high quality, as is the sturdy cloth binding of both volumes. Martinů's admirers have always regarded him as a significant figure in twentieth-century music, but concert promoters have not always shown the same kind of enthusiasm. This new complete edition—which I strongly recommend to music libraries and serious Martinů enthusiasts alike—should do much to bring his music in from the margins. These first two volumes are a most auspicious start to the project.

NIGEL SIMEONE

Excerpts are reprinted from Notes, September 2016, pp 166–170, with their kind permission



new items at the bohuslav martinů institute

/ JANA FRANKOVÁ & JANA HONZÍKOVÁ

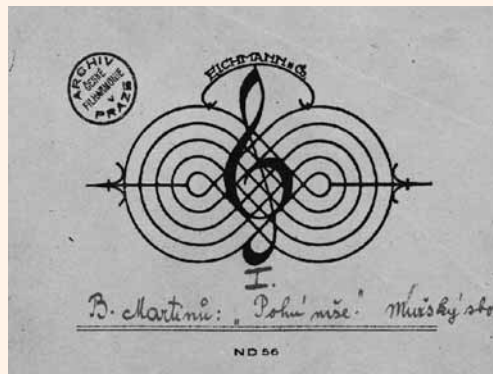
New sources pertaining to Bohuslav Martinů works – *The Field Mass*, *The Spectre's Bride*, *Violin Concerto No. 1*, and others

IN 2015, intensive source research towards the Complete Bohuslav Martinů Edition led to the acquisition of numerous interesting items by the Bohuslav Martinů Institute. We not only sought out sources relating to the currently published works within the Complete Edition, but aimed also to expand our catalogue of archival sources more generally. One of the previous Martinů Revue issues (1/2016) presented sources from the archive of Die Haghe Sanghers in The Hague in more detail, specifically those pertaining to *The Mount of Three Lights*, H 349, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, H 383 and *The Field Mass*, H 279 (see also the article in *Martinů Revue* 2016/1).

In the meantime, our investigations at the Czech Philharmonic archive have yielded performance material that was created for the world premiere of the *The Field Mass*, which was conducted by Rafael Kubelík in Prague on 28 February 1946. As Martinů himself did not directly participate in the preparation for the premiere, the new source is not relevant for the work's critical edition, yet it documents the first performance in a very intriguing way. It includes the complete instrumental parts (Picc I, II, Cl I, II, Tr I, II, III, Trb I, II, Timp, GC, Ptti, Tamb picc c cord, Tamp picc s timb, Tamb mil, Crot, Trgl, Cpnlle, Arm, Pf) and one short vocal score, divided into two books (I, II), containing the chorus tenor and bass parts, as well as the solo baritone part.

This vocal score, dated "23. 1. 1946", sheds interesting light on previously known details of the piece's premiere. In terms of its contents and the division of the vocal parts, it fully complies with Bohuslav Martinů's intent as captured in the work's autograph score and the composer's commentaries (see below), in that it presents the baritone solo in its full extent.¹ Even though the sheet music discovered comports with the autograph score, testimony from the premiere has shown that arrangements were evidently made during the rehearsals. In his autobiographical book *Podivné lásky* (Strange Loves), Jiří Mucha mentions that the soloist (Theodor Šrubař) had his manuscript parts significantly shortened from what appears in the composer's autograph.² The part's altered version, this time with a segment of the solo part transferred to the chorus (the soldier's introductory song, bars 107–148), was also included in the first edition of the work, published by Melantrich in

Prague (1947).³ Mucha's account of the abridgement is supported by Martinů's direct response to a recording of *The Field Mass* made by Die Haghe Sanghers, again conducted by Rafael Kubelík (6 June 1956). The composer repeatedly pointed out that the introductory soldier's song (b. 107–148) is assigned to the soloist, not the chorus.⁴ Melantrich's rental music material was subsequently corrected. The fragmentary nature of the vocal parts preserved from the premiere does not make it possible to confirm or disprove Jiří Mucha's assertion relating to the shortened baritone solo, yet it does document that it did not concern an erroneous copy of the autograph score, in which the soloist's entry is not unambiguously marked. If, then, Kubelík or someone else finally abridged the soloist's part for the premiere, and handed over



these sections to the chorus or deleted them altogether, these modifications must have been entered in the now missing segment of the performance material from the archive of the Czech Philharmonic.

Linked with the same volume of the Complete Bohuslav Martinů Edition is the discovery and digitisation of source material containing Martinů's *The Spectre's Bride*, H 214 A.⁵ It concerns the choral score and the piano reduction of the first version of *The Chap-book*, H 214 I, which have been preserved in the archive of the National Theatre in Prague and came into being in connection with the piece's world premiere there (19 September 1933). These sources are copies of the autograph piano reduction, which has been preserved only in fragments. The choral score has been preserved in its entirety, while the piano reduction with stage directions is only for Acts II and III.

Notable, too, is the discovery and acquisition of copies of the performance material for *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1*, H 226, made for its world premiere (25 October 1973) in Chicago, given by the soloist Josef Suk and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (conducted by Georg Solti). These sources are important for the other planned volumes of the Complete Bohuslav Martinů Edition.

In addition to sheet music, we have also extended our stock of correspondence and other related documents. We have procured from the National Archive copies of 17 previously unknown letters, written by Martinů to Hubert Ripka and Josef Brumlík. The letters date from between 1940 and 1946, and pertain to Martinů's involvement in the promotion of Czech music in France during World War II and his possible participation in similar activities after 1945. We have obtained copies of three letters written by Martinů to Josef Munclinger from the archive of the National Museum in Prague. The letters, written in 1935 and 1936, contain intriguing

stage directions relating to *The Miracles of Mary*, H 236.⁶ Moreover, we have acquired copies of individual letters between Martinů and various figures (Marcel Mihalovici, Louis Kaufman and Boris Koutzén). Furthermore, we have acquired copies of Alexander Tansmann's hand-written autobiographic notes on the École de Paris from a private collection.⁷

OTHER SOURCES

Czech Museum of Music – The Bohuslav Martinů Institute directed its attention to the archive of Czech Nonet, cataloguing the personal effects of the ensemble that relate to Martinů. Documents acquired by the Institute include reviews, programmes and lists of compositions. Notable among these documents are those concerning the Nonet No. 2, H 374.

Bohuslav Martinů Foundation – The Foundation has purchased valuable autographs, prints and sketches from Prof. Ivan Štraus. The materials relate to several works, including the *Songs on One Page*, H 294, *Songs on Two Pages*, H 302, *Czech Madrigals*, H 278, and the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 2*, H 293. With regard to the Concerto, the Foundation acquired the autograph piano reduction (52 pp.), and the autograph violin part (12 pp.), and 8 pages of sketches. The documents are being digitised in high quality at the Bohuslav Martinů Institute.

Schott Publishers – Music materials obtained by the Bohuslav Martinů Institute from Schott Publishers are now being digitised in high quality. These include the autograph score, the autograph solo part and the autograph piano reduction of *Concerto for Cello No. 1*, H 196, and the autographs of Les Ritournelles and the Esquisses de Danses.

Princeton University, USA – The Bohuslav Martinů Institute has acquired several new documents from the archive of Princeton University. These include programmes and correspondence relating to Martinů's tenure at the school between 1948 and 1950.

- 1 Identical information is contained in the score's undated copy, made by the Prague-based copyist Karel Adler, which is also maintained in the archive of the Czech Philharmonic. The connection between the copy and the work's premiere by the Czech Philharmonic is not definite. Russian translations of the original Czech vocal text added under it indicate that the score was used repeatedly.
- 2 Jiří Mucha, *Podivné lásky* (Prague, Mladá fronta, 1988), pp. 308–309. (In the French edition, *Au seuil de la nuit*. Editions de l'Aube, 1991, p. 276.)
- 3 The situation pertaining to the sources and the genesis of *The Field Mass* is dealt with in detail by Paul Wingfield in Volume 3 of the Complete Bohuslav Martinů Edition (in press).
- 4 See Martinů's letters to Die Haghe Sanghers (29 July 1956, Die Haghe Sanghers archive) and Miloslav Bureš (25 September 1956, the Bohuslav Martinů Centre in Polička, shelf-mark: PBM Kb 648). For more information, see www.database.martinu.cz.
- 5 The genesis of *The Spectre's Bride* and the situation pertaining to its sources is dealt with in detail by Paul Wingfield in Volume 3 of the Complete Bohuslav Martinů Edition (in press).
- 6 The letters are analysed at length in Lucie Jirglová's study, currently under preparation.
- 7 The source was dealt with in detail by Aleš Březina in his paper *École de Paris – Fiction or Reality?*, presented at the international conference *Paris, City of Light* in London on 28 May 2015. The study is now being prepared for publication.

MARTINŮ REVUE (formerly Bohuslav Martinů Newsletter) is published by the International Martinů Circle in collaboration with the Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague with the financial support of the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation. **Published with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of Czech Republic, code No. MKCRX006Z32Y**

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Translation of selected articles Hilda Hearne

Photographs

The Bohuslav Martinů Foundation's
and Institute's archive, collections of the
Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička

Graphic Design David Cigler

Printing BOOM TISK, spol. s r.o.

The Martinů Revue is published
three times a year in Prague.

Cover

Bohuslav Martinů in New York, 1942



ISSN 1803-8514
MK ČR E 18911
www.martinu.cz

THE PREVIOUS ISSUE



THE BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ CENTER IN POLIČKA offers an interesting, interactively 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

VOTING SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED

OVER THE past few months, members of the International Martinů Circle voted on the adoption of the new articles of the IMC and the election of its new delegates. We are now pleased to announce that the voting has been completed! A sufficient number of votes have been cast for the IMC's operation to continue. Following the January meeting of the Board of Delegates, at which a new committee and chairman will be elected, all the relevant documents will be delivered to the Municipal Court in Prague and an application will be submitted for the IMC's incorporation in the Register of Societies. The next issue of the Martinů Revue will introduce the newly elected delegates and members of the new committee. We greatly appreciate the support and collaboration on the part of all the IMC members who participated in the vote. Thank you very much indeed!

IMC BOARD MEETING

THE BOARD of Delegates will meet on **27 January 2017** at the Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague. The meeting coincides with a performance of Martinů's *The Epic of Gilgamesh* at the Rudolfinum, with Jiří Bělohlávek conducting the Czech Philharmonic.

2017 SUBSCRIPTION PAYMENTS

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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 ■



Jakub Hruša,
President of IMC

Magdalena Kožená,
IMC Patron

International Martinů Circle

GENERAL INFORMATION

Members receive the illustrated *Martinů Revue* published three times a year plus a special limited edition CD containing world premieres, historic performances and archival recordings from the annual Martinů Festival not obtainable commercially.

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

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For further details and for single copies of the Martinů Revue contact:

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

- > Thanh-Tâm Lê, France
- > Charles Olivier-Munroe, Canada

NEW CD

Bohuslav Martinů Days 2014: *String Quartet No. 4, H 256, Field Mass, H 279* (historical recording)



premieres of martinů's chamber music given by members of the prague philharmonia

/ bohuslav martinů complete edition, volume 4

/ PATRICK LAMBERT

IT IS ADMIRABLE that the Bohuslav Martinů Institute is establishing a tradition whereby compositions receive premiere performances in their critically edited form as each volume rolls off the production line. After Martinů Revisited, we now have Martinů Reborn! These “world premieres” take place not only in Prague but also in Brno, where for instance *The Epic of Gilgamesh, H 351* (Volume 1) was given at a Brno Philharmonic concert conducted by Aleksandar Marković (December 2014) and where that work is now included in Brno



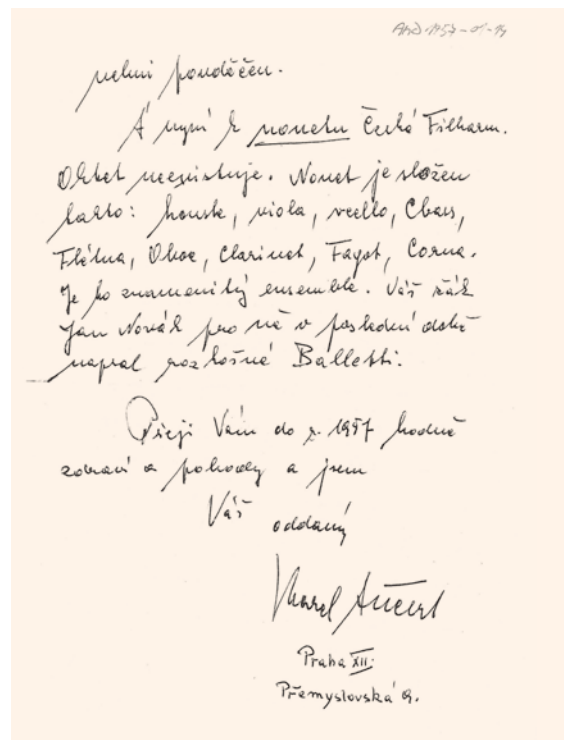
▲ Aleš Březina (presenter)
& members of the PKF –
Prague Philharmonia

◀ From left to right:
Aleš Březina, Jitka Zichová,
Jitka Pánek Jurková, Ludvík
Kašpárek, Jonáš Hájek

National Theatre’s repertoire in a fully staged presentation as part of a double bill with Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. The cantata *The Spectre’s Bride, H 214 A* (Volume 3, originally the final part of *Špalíček*) was also performed by the Brno Philharmonic under the baton of the up-and-coming young conductor Jiří Rožeň (23, 24 November 2016). Let us hope that such ‘christenings’ will promote further performances now that musicians know that reliable and easily obtainable editions from a single source with all textual problems expertly ironed out now exist in the world.

The concert of five chamber works, combining wind with stringed instruments, (Volume 4, editor Jitka Zichová) given by members of the PKF – Prague Philharmonia and friends on 17 October in the Czech Museum of Music, opened with two of the little *Serenades* (Nos. 1 & 3, H 217, H 218). These charming, expertly crafted yet unpretentious pieces nicely set the mood for the evening. Beautifully

played, despite the cavernous acoustic of the Museum’s atrium, they express the sheer joy of music making, which is all one should ask of serenades written as a kind of homage to Mozart. Part one was rounded off by a lively account of *Les Rondes, H 200*, a work that I have always felt deserves to be played just as often as the similarly scored, jazz influenced ballet suite *La revue de cuisine, H 161*. It was dedicated to Jan Kunc, who in the late 1920s unsuccessfully tried to persuade Martinů to return to Czechoslovakia to teach composition at the Brno Conservatoire of which he was director. For perhaps the first time in Martinů’s output the music is deeply influenced by Moravian folk idioms. Indeed, in a letter to Jan Kunc Martinů entitled this set of six effectively contrasted numbers as Moravian Dances. Superbly scored, with brilliant piano and trumpet parts, it unfortunately sounded rather muddled during fast passages, only because of the problematic acoustic. Aleš Březina, a director of Bohuslav Martinů Institute, explained that, though most of the editorial corrections were quite subtle, one



The last page of Ančerl’s letter to the composer from 14 January 1957

obvious and simple mistake was a displaced trumpet line and the players gave a graphic ‘before and after’ demonstration, not without modest blushes from the excellent trumpeter. The Institute deserves congratulations for successfully gathering together five very able recorder players for the work that opened the second half of the concert: *Stowe Pastorals, H 335*, written in New York in 1951. Here, the church-like acoustic actually enhanced the

celebratory concert marking miroslav košler's birthday / bohuslav martinů complete edition, volume 3

/ JIŘÍ KOLÁŘ

music and I was not the only one to detect a Christmas aura to this beguiling composition; perhaps the three movements should have been called Pastorellas. The evening was brought to a glorious close by a well established masterpiece from the very end of the composer's life: **Nonet No. 2, H 374**, dating from January/February 1959 and dedicated to the Czech Nonet on its 35th anniversary. Two years earlier, in a letter to the composer (14 January 1957), Karel Ančerl had explained the instrumental make up of the nonet of the Czech Philharmonic, describing it as an "outstanding ensemble" and informing him that his pupil Jan Novák had recently written "delightful Balletti" for them. By the time Martinů sat down to write his own piece for this combination, Novák had sent him the score of *Balletti à 9* and invited his comments. In a belated reply, Martinů conceded that they "contain a spark", but felt that the thematic working out was somewhat facile (Martinů's letter from February 1959 is quoted in Charlotte Martinů: *Můj život s Bohuslavem Martinů*, 2003 Editio Bärenreiter Praha, p. 193–194). I cannot help thinking that he himself was partly prompted to compose his nonet out of a sense of friendly rivalry with his former pupil. Needless to say, the thematic working out is masterly, though Martinů was seriously ill by that time. Despite the folkloristic brightness of the music, this three movement piece is more than occasionally "tinged with sadness", as the aging composer once described his music, and I have always felt that this work somehow represents his farewell and Amen to life. I recently discovered a Soviet LP, probably dating from the 1970s, where the players take six and a half minutes to perform the central Andante, as against just over five minutes taken by the Czech Nonet, the dedicatees, in their authentic original recording. The players from the PKF – Prague Philharmonia successfully proved that it is not necessary to adopt a funereal tempo in order for this work to be deeply moving. A wonderful concert all in all and a great occasion! ■

ON MONDAY 27 JUNE 2016, under the auspices of the Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic, Daniel Herman, the Prague Mixed Choir held a concert marking the 85th birthday of its honorary artistic director, Miroslav Košler. Born on 25 July 1931, Košler is a legend of Czech choral art. The audience at the packed Church of Saints Simon and Jude in Prague heard three grand vocal-instrumental works by Bohuslav Martinů, one of Mr. Košler's favourite composers: **The Opening of the Springs, H 354; Field Mass, H 279; and Mikeš of the Mountains, H 375**. The programme showcased the excellence of the individual sections of the choir, which were specially reinforced for the occasion, as well as the strength of its basic mixed configuration. Splendid performances were also given by the soloists Nao Higano (soprano), Martina Bauerová (alto), Jakub Turek (tenor) and Josef Škarka (baritone), the instrumentalists Vladislava Hořovská and Anna Anghelescu (violin), Zuzana Peřinová (viola), Petr Ožana (piano), and the Band of the Castle Guards and Police of the Czech Republic. Occupying the podium were the conductors Jiří Petrdlík and Jan Steyer, who were most convincing.

The audience, which included a number of prominent Czech musical figures, were in for a special treat. With support from the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation, the Grant Agency of the

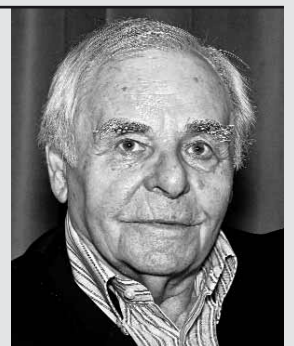
Czech Republic and the State Fund for Culture of the Czech Republic, last year saw the launch of Complete Bohuslav Martinů Edition. This praiseworthy project aims to make all Bohuslav Martinů's compositions accessible in all the versions made or authorised by the composer. It will also encompass recently discovered or previously unpublished Martinů pieces. In 2015, editorial work on the cantata *The Epic of Gilgamesh, H 351*, and *Symphony No. 4, H 305*, was concluded. One of the works the editors have been focusing on this year is the challenging *Field Mass*. In the Addendum to the main musical text, they have presented the original, previously unpublished, not yet performed final section of the piece, written to a text of the 14th-century Czech sacred song *Jezu Kriste, štědrý kněže* (Merciful Jesus Christ). Martinů changed this concluding section immediately after finishing the work in December 1939. Following an explanatory introduction delivered by Prof. Václav Riedlbauch, Director of the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation, the audience at the Church of Saints Simon and Jude heard this original final section as an encore at the end of the first half of the concert.

The wonderful performance, particularly the splendid accounts of the cantatas *Field Mass* and *Mikeš of the Mountains*, was a fitting birthday present indeed for Miroslav Košler, in recognition of all he has done for Czech choral singing over the past six decades. ■

obituary

miroslav košler / 1931–2016

ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2016, the distinguished Czech conductor, chorus master and music educator Miroslav Košler passed away. Brother of the famed conductor Zdeněk Košler, he was born in Prague in 1931. In 1951 he was named artistic director of the Prague Mixed Choir, with whom he garnered acclaim in numerous countries in Europe, as well as in Japan and the USA. He also directed the Prague Male Choir and, from 2005, the Prague Philharmonic Choir. Moreover, he worked with a number of prominent ensembles and orchestras, including the Wiener Philharmoniker and the Dresdner Philharmonie, La Scala in Milan, and the Slovak Philharmonic in Bratislava. Noteworthy too are his collaborations with such globally renowned conductors as Zubin Mehta, Riccardo Muti, Kent Nagano, Jiří Bělohlávek and Vladimír Válek. Throughout his career, Miroslav Košler was an enthusiastic exponent of Bohuslav Martinů's choral works. ■



jolly good fellow:

/ TULLY POTTER

THE VIOLINIST William Kroll, who premiered two important works by Bohuslav Martinů – the *String Sextet, H 224*, and *Concerto da Camera (String Quartet No. 7), H 314* – was a familiar figure on the American chamber music scene for half a century and one of the key artists who assisted Elisabeth Sprague Coolidge in her crusade on behalf of contemporary composers. Described by W. W. Cobbett as ‘the Lady Bountiful of chamber music’,¹ she had an enormous influence on the propagation of new works, not only in the United States but in Europe as well.

Kroll, known as Fritz to his friends because of his idolizing of Kreisler, was born in New York City on 30 January 1901. After initial studies with local violin teachers, he showed such prodigious talent that he was sent off to study with Henri Marteau at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin (1911–14). Although he made a successful New York début in 1915, he felt he needed further training and so, after a gap of two years, he continued his studies in violin and chamber music with the great quartet leader Franz Kneisel and in composition with Percy Goetschius at the Institute of Musical Art in New York. At the Institute, which was the fore-runner of the Juilliard School (1917–22), he won the Maurice Loeb Prize. In 1922, he joined the Elshuco Trio, which was closely associated with Mrs Coolidge.² He stayed with the trio – whose other members were Aurelio Giorni (piano) and Willem Willeke (cello) – until 1929. Mrs Coolidge was a true American aristocrat and, like her rival musical patrons Mrs Gertrude Clarke Whittall and Mrs William Andrews Clark, was considerably deaf: at concerts she would wield a large ear trumpet and unobtrusively lower it to her lap if the music or the performance displeased her. At the 1923 Berkshire Festival, held under Mrs Coolidge’s auspices at Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Kroll led the newly-formed ‘Festival Quartet of South Mountain’ (with Karl Kraeuter, Edward Kreiner and Willeke) in Hindemith’s Op. 10 – the start of a lifetime’s engagement with this composer’s music – and gave the U.S. premiere of Gian Francesco Malipiero’s *Stornelle e Ballate*. Richard Aldrich wrote that the ensemble played ‘with the precision of a veteran organization and much more feeling for style and authority of utterance than many of its elders’.³

For Mrs Coolidge’s inaugural Festival of Chamber Music at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., in 1925, Kroll again led the quartet, with



Kroll Quartet: Harry Zaratzian, William Kroll, William Stone, Avro Twerdowsky

Hugo Kortschak now playing the viola. And in 1926 his quartet, with the composer Conrad Held on viola, inaugurated that year’s festival in Pittsfield with an American programme, featuring quartets by G. W. Chadwick, David Stanley Smith and Rubin Goldmark. At the first of Mrs Coolidge’s two concerts in Paris in October 1929, Kroll was warmly applauded for his contribution to Malipiero’s *Sonata a tre*. Henry Prunières thought his playing ‘was a revelation in its delicate sensitivity, power and brilliant sonority’.⁴ At the same concert, Martinů’s Coolidge Prize-winning *String Quintet, H 164*, had its third performance, played by the Quatuor Pro Arte and Lionel Tertis, and was much liked by Prunières: ‘This work impresses me as one of the best productions of present-day chamber music. One feels from start to finish the presence of an extremely delicate sensibility and a wholly remarkable constructive spirit. Nothing is more alive, more instinct with life. The finale is a trifle scholastic and recalls somewhat the overture of *The Mastersingers*, but the ensemble of the quintet reveals a musician with whom one must reckon in the future’.⁵

In 1930, Kroll was leading another quartet, with Ralph Silverman, Egon Kornstein and Naoum Benditzky. Soon he had organised what at first was called the William Kroll String Ensemble and then the William Kroll Sextet. Their warhorse was Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht*, which they broadcast on 19 November 1933 in the composer’s presence. On 25 April 1933, in the fourth concert of the Chamber Music Festival at the Library of Con-

gress, this ensemble premiered Martinů’s *String Sextet, H 224*, which had won the previous year’s Coolidge Prize. That often obtuse critic Olin Downes kept referring to it as a quartet, but did at least allow that it was ‘rich in material’ and wrote: ‘Its strength, freshness, and swing delighted the audience’.⁶ Kroll’s colleagues were Nicolai Berezowsky, Léon Barzin, David Sackson, Milton Prinz and Ossip Giskin; and they ended the programme with *Verklärte Nacht*, praised by Downes: ‘Mr Kroll’s ensemble had given very fine performances of the same composition in New York, but its performance this morning surpassed any previous one that the writer has heard, and in fact must rank as one of the finest ensemble performances in the history of these Washington festivals’.⁷ They gave several more renderings of the Martinů, including one at a private house – paired with *Verklärte Nacht* – and the New York premiere at Town Hall on 7 December 1934, with Brahms and Bridge also on the programme. That year, Kroll formed another trio with the pianist Frank Sheridan and the cellist Prinz. He also took over the leadership of the New York String Quartet – which had originally been composed of expatriate Czechs – until it disbanded in 1936. By then, only one founder, second violinist Jaroslav Siskovsky, remained: the other members were David Mankovitz and Horace Britt. Playing with them brought him into the orbit of the New York Chamber Music Society.

In June and July 1935, Mrs Coolidge sponsored a Brahms chamber music series at the University of California and Kroll was chosen, with his colleagues

the odyssey of william kroll



American violinist William Kroll, 1959

With Mrs Coolidge's blessing, Kroll founded an ensemble under his own name in 1943 that ran concurrently with the Coolidge for a year or so. His colleagues were Louis Graeler, Nathan Gordon and Avron Twerdowsky, and they gave their first recital at the Library of Congress on 13 December 1943. It was difficult starting an ensemble in wartime and without Mrs Coolidge's backing. They all needed other means of support. Graeler and Gordon were in Toscanini's NBC SO, Twerdowsky was with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the New Friends of Music, and Kroll had his solo work and various teaching jobs. In 1946, they formed the Musicians' Guild, with pianist Frank Sheridan, cellist Leonard Rose and the brother-and-sister team of Joseph Fuchs, violin, and Lillian Fuchs, viola. At the very first concert, in the New York Times Hall on 20 January 1947, they performed Martinů's *Sextet, H 224*, in the composer's presence with Carlton Cooley and Frank Miller of the NBC SO. 'As in his other compositions, Mr Martinů has something to say in this sextet,' Howard Taubman commented. 'He writes with the vigor, feeling and affirmation of a man who believes in himself, his music and his future. If this music, in its zest, color and boldness, is representative of the way Mr Martinů's countrymen feel, it is easy to see that his country will have the energy to rebuild rapidly. In the meantime, it has a rich voice to sing for it in Mr Martinů.'¹⁰ From then on, the Kroll Quartet gave four New York concerts every season with the other Guild members. They were still welcome at the Library of Congress and they gave innumerable recitals at Town Hall, as well as touring. On 15 March 1947 they premiered Jacobí's Third Quartet,¹¹ on 22 April they took part in the premiere of Aaron Copland's Sextet, with Leo Smit, piano, and David Oppenheim, clarinet, and on 20 April 1948 they premiered Ross Lee Finney's Fourth Quartet. They made a point of playing Hindemith's Op. 22, which they later recorded – Kroll's second document of the piece.

On 11 January 1949, they gave the premiere of Martinů's *Concerto da Camera (String Quartet No. 7), H 314* in a Musicians' Guild concert at the New York Times Hall. Expressing the opinion that there was 'little that could be described as radical' in the work, Taubman wrote: 'The Martinů quartet harks back in spirit and in facture to the late nineteenth century. It is as if this Czech-born composer, now living here, were recalling the feel and color of his country and its people. The thematic material is songful, whether dressed out in the vigorous rhythms of the end movements or in the sustained,

rhapsodic quality of the slow movement. The scoring for the four strings has the precision and clarity of a composer who knows his milieu thoroughly. The assurance, vigor and vitality of this music are engaging. The Kroll Quartet ... gave the score a dashing, mettlesome performance, with Mr Kroll playing the first violin part with particular spirit. Mr Martinů was in the audience and shared in the applause.'¹² The players kept the time in their repertoire for some time: on 14 January 1949 they played it at the Library of Congress.

In 1957, the Musicians' Guild suspended its activities after 11 years. It had performed around 150 works, more than 40 by contemporary composers. The Kroll Quartet suffered two personnel changes in the early 1960s: William Stone came in as second violinist and Harry Zaratzian as violist. They premiered David Diamond's *Second Quartet* on 26 April 1961, and Piston's Fifth on 8 October 1962. In 1964 Kroll was appointed head of strings at the Cleveland Institute of Music. The Quartet carried on for another five seasons but in 1969 the players disbanded amicably. Although they had not been able to pursue the sort of radical repertoire espoused by the Coolidge Quartet, they had achieved a good deal for contemporary music. Sadly they made few commercial recordings: best known are Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* on 78rpm discs and on LP, Wallingford Riegger's *Second Quartet*; Tchaikovsky's *First Quartet* with Prokofiev's *First*; Haydn's *Opp. 54/2 and 77/1*; Haydn's 'Lark' with Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden'; Mozart's 'Hunt' and 'Dissonance'; Hindemith's *Op. 22* with Beethoven's *Op. 95*; and Mendelssohn's *Octet*, for which they were joined by a New York Philharmonic quartet. The Library of Congress has concert recordings of such works as Martinů's *Concerto da Camera*,¹³ Mrs Coolidge's *E minor Quartet*, Piston's *Fifth Quartet* and *String Sextet* (with Walter Trampler and Benar Heifetz), Schuman's *First Quartet*, Malipiero's 1963 *Quartetto per Elisabetto*, Irving Fine's 1952 *Quartet*, Egon Wellesz's *Op. 60*, Finney's 1958 *Quintet*, Persichetti's *Quintet* (with the composer at the piano), Beethoven's 'Harp', *Second 'Rasumovsky'* and *Op. 131*, and Schubert's *C major Quintet*. The players used fine instruments: Kroll the 1709 'Ernst' Stradivari (up to 1950 he had a Guadagnini), Graeler a 1744 Carlo Bergonzi, Mankovitz a Gasparo da Saló and Twerdowsky a 1704 Matteo Goffriller.

William Kroll was a busy teacher: he taught at the Institute of Musical Art and then Juilliard (1922–38), he headed the chamber music depart-

Berezowsky, Barzin, Britt and Sheridan, to perform 24 works in eight concerts, a task for which he was well equipped. Just over a year later it was announced that Mrs Coolidge was to sponsor a Coolidge Quartet consisting of Kroll, Berezowsky, Nicholas Moldavan and Victor Gottlieb as the resident ensemble at the Library of Congress. She entered into the project with enthusiasm, calling her quartettists 'the Four Horseman of the ApoCoolidge'⁸ and writing: 'My pleasure is augmented by pride in the fact that these four young artists have chosen to call themselves "the Coolidge Quartet"'. No sweeter honor could befall me; because, in addition to the high artistic esteem in which I hold them, I feel a real family relationship – stronger, perhaps, than some of those of blood. In adopting my name they seem almost to have become my adopted children.'⁹

Alas, they never gelled into the great quartet she hoped for. No doubt personnel changes were partly responsible for this ultimate failure: the original line-up stayed together until 1940, but then there were three new second violinists (Jack Pepper, Louis Graeler, Leon Rudin), two new violists (David Dawson, Jascha Veissi) and two new cellists (Naoum Benditzky, Daniel Saidenberg). Recordings confirm that they reached a respectable standard but nothing more. By 1941 the tensions within the ensemble were critical, by 1944 they were almost inactive and in 1945 they disbanded. Meanwhile, in 1942, Kroll was awarded the Coolidge Medal.

ment at Tanglewood from 1949, and the violin faculties at the Peabody, Hartt and Mannes music schools and Queens College. He started the chamber music series at New York University. He was also a composer: his orchestral pieces included one called *Jolly Good Fellow*. For string quartet he wrote *Four Bagatelles* and *Four Characteristic Pieces*. Every U.S. violinist plays his encore *Banjo and Fiddle*, a delightful piece of Americana. He died in Boston, Massachusetts, on 10 March 1980, aged 79.

In his magisterial study *Great Masters of the Violin*, Boris Schwarz wrote: 'Kroll played with an extraordinary ease and elegance, unfailing intonation and bow control. His musicianship had depth and insight, and he led his quartet with authority, vigor, and much temperament.'¹⁴ And in *Violin Virtuosos*, Henry Roth wrote: 'As a violinist Kroll was greatly influenced by Kreisler. His playing, meticulous though at times a bit over-refined, was not without glints of temperament. His sweet, clear, comparatively small tone never dominated his colleagues, and the chamber music performances he led were always marked by the suppleness, fluency, and polish of his playing.'¹⁵

Tully Potter has been a professional journalist for more than 50 years. He has written for various international musical journals, notably The Strad, and for 11 years he edited the quarterly magazine Classic Record Collector.

Now he is preparing a book on the great quartet ensembles.

He is also a member of International Martinů Circle.



/ ANNA MATOUŠKOVÁ

THE RENOWNED Czech pianist Ivo Kahánek, a prize-winner at the Prague Spring International Music Competition, has a highly professional approach to Bohuslav Martinů's music, yet he also feels a personal affinity for it. So it follows that he has included Martinů's works on many concert programmes. Kahánek's recent appearance at a benefit concert to support the Bohuslav Martinů Institute bears witness to his close relationship to the composer's music. The concert took place on 28 November 2016 and included a selection from the *New Slovak Songs* performed with Martina Janková (Soprano) and Tomáš Král (Barytone). We asked Ivo Kahánek about his path to Martinů and his approach to the phenomenal composer's music.

How do you approach interpreting Bohuslav Martinů's works? I don't think it is the kind of music you can sit down to and simply sight-read for pleasure.

Bohuslav Martinů had a great penchant for permanently motoric rhythm. But the pianist must be careful that it doesn't kill the other facets present in his pieces. Everything in the score that seems just like a motoric element or figuration may also have other functions in the music. It can be said that when it comes to Martinů's pieces for piano, they are not entirely typical in terms of technique either. Accordingly, it takes you a while to get to the bottom of his music. I would compare it with the music of Béla Bartók, for instance: the difficulty of his compositions lies in their being atypical.

When it comes to listening, do you think that someone not possessing any experience with Martinů's music has any chance to get attached to it or comprehend it?

When we compare Martinů with Janáček, for instance, I think that Janáček in particular has the advantage of a particular naturalness. His works have an overwhelming emotional charge, and so they don't leave anyone indifferent. On the other

hand, I am quite surprised by how many people dislike Janáček, to such a degree that they would rather listen to Stockhausen. In terms of harmony and melody, Janáček's music is actually nice. It doesn't feature any aggressive modern atonality, but some people find it difficult to cope with so intense an emotional edge. Martinů presents a different problem. You need to listen to his pieces several times and only then does it strike you how fantastic his music is. I say that there are many Martinů pieces that people only appreciate at the third hearing or even later. His music is rather complex, it contains certain surrealistic elements, passages that rather play with the listener, and such passages may weaken the first impression. Foreigners may find it difficult too.

How do you – as a musician/performer – approach Bohuslav Martinů's music?

Bohuslav Martinů is mysterious in some respects. The sources of his inspiration were rather clear-cut and non-traditional. During his mature period, he also drew stimuli from Italian vocal polyphony. When considering all this together, many a thing becomes clear. Including, for instance, the reason why Martinů sometimes didn't write bar lines, which

- 1 Cobbett's *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, compiled and edited by Walter Willson Cobbett (Oxford University Press, London, Second Edition, 1963), Vol. II, 302.
- 2 The group's name derived from the patron's married name Elizabeth Shurtleff Coolidge.
- 3 'New Music Heard as Festival Ends', *The New York Times*, 30 September 1923.
- 4 'Concerts in Paris', *The New York Times*, 1 December 1929.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 'Prize Composition Heard at Festival', *The New York Times*, 26 April 1933.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Quoted in *Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge: American Patron of Music*, by Cyrilla Barr (Schirmer Books, New York, 1998), 283.
- 9 Broadcast speech, 7 August 1936. *Ibid.*, 283–4.
- 10 'Distinctive Music Offered by Guild', *The New York Times*, 21 January 1947.
- 11 They also gave the first New York performance two days later.
- 12 'Martinů's Quartet Has Première Here', *The New York Times*, 11 January 1949.
- 13 From the 14 January 1949 concert.
- 14 *Great Masters of the Violin*, by Boris Schwarz (Robert Hale Limited, London, 1983), 511.
- 15 *Violin Virtuosos*, by Henry Roth (California Classics Books, Los Angeles, 1997), 251.

mysterious in some respects"

is connected with the linear narrative of his music – it cannot be bound by “graphic charts”. Another thing is that you have to decrypt his music: as I have said, plenty of his piano pieces contain some form of motoric propulsion, with some figurations often present. When you only approach it mechanically, Martinů’s music is deprived of something. When you sit down to the Piano Sonata, it is almost ungraspable – and finding its characters is more difficult than learning the piece by heart. You have to explore the composition, both rationally and emotionally. Then you may be inspired as to how to play this or that passage.

How do you learn Martinů pieces by heart?

In Martinů’s case, it is of great importance to learn his pieces comprehensively, especially his piano concertos, the fourth and the fifth in particular, as they are more akin to symphonies with solo piano. You should connect yourself to the entire organism, perceive the piano’s connection to the orchestral part. This connection evokes in you some emotion, which will help you to remember it better. I think that, among other things, Martinů was also quite a playful person; many of his compositions contain a specific type of musical humour, even though they are not humorous as such.

As you say, his music should be perceived in all its complexity, that is how Martinů himself wanted it to be approached. He didn’t see any sense in analysing his music either. But what about the performer? Analysis is necessary for him/her to understand the entirety, is it not?

When I had time, I analysed *Concerto for Piano No. 4 (Incantation)* inside-out, from all possible angles. When analysis is mentioned, it is rational analysis that crosses people’s minds. That means “I will strip it down part by part, and mark everything in detail”, that is, working in a sort of spreadsheet manner. I had in mind rather a kind of intuitive analysis. I let the music act on me, I can even write down a few characters that may occur to me when listening to it. When it comes to *Incantation*, I carried out both the intuitive and the rational analyses, then I went on to juxtapose them and found out that they conformed to each other in many aspects. What I think Martinů strove to say is that when someone listens to his music, he/she should listen to its course, simply get connected to the code, let oneself be carried by the music and therefore refrain from analysing it in the moment. But I think that performers is in



a different position since they don’t just enjoy the music. To be more precise – so as to be better able to enjoy it one day, the interpreter first has to get to know it thoroughly, and that is why I carry out the analysis. But I really do my best to take into account the emotional-intuitive aspect equally.

I remember that when I was attending the conservatory, the teachers would keep highlighting the “musical-historical milestones” relating to particular Martinů compositions, such as: “By the time he wrote this, Martinů knew that he would not be able to return to his native country.” Do you deem the biographical data to be at all instructive or significant for grasping a Martinů work, or can we just consider them to be something teachers and conductors customarily incorporate into their lessons?

There is a certain type of composer who reflects what he is currently experiencing in his music, and there are composers whose music does not show such a clear connection to biographical events. For my part, I always try to take the biographical aspect into account, thinking that it may elucidate something. But very seldom does it happen that after I have read the composer’s biography I find something totally different to that which I had felt when I let the music act upon me. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the biography either confirms or only extends that which I had already thought of the music. A typical Martinů example in this respect is the Fantasy and Toccata, which he wrote at a highly turbulent period in his life, after he had emigrated to America, left Europe, feared the war... At the time, he was very unbalanced, and it is palpable in the piece. From my viewpoint, it is Martinů’s most controversial

work for solo piano, even though it has been referred to as one of the high-points of his piano oeuvre, which, in a way, it is. But sometimes, because it exudes what Martinů was going through, it is not easy to listen to.

What are the greatest difficulties that pianists have to contend with in Martinů’s music?

Its difficulty lies in the overall musical and technical aspects, but I don’t think that it concerns any especially troublesome techniques. The music comes across as rather exotic and difficult to learn for pianists, when they don’t possess sufficient experience with it, that’s until they have accepted the fact that the performer has to think across the bar line and work with impulses in a premeditated way. Martinů’s is the type of music that all of a sudden can become markedly simpler if you portion it out differently in your mind. If I asked you, for instance, to quickly repeat the letters, u, k, b, u, k, b..., your tongue would tangle itself up, but if you say buk, buk, buk, it is easy. I would liken one of the aspects of the difficulty in Martinů’s music to this.

And how did you personally seek the path to it? Was it a long journey, was it love at first sight?

In some respects, it might have been love at first sight. When I first heard *Incantation*, for example, which was when I was still at the conservatory, I was flabbergasted by what a splendid piece it was. In that case, I can say that I was taken in immediately, at first hearing. But it depends on which of the Martinů compositions you actually encounter. Martinů’s music is really diverse, and that is an advantage, as well as, as some foreign researchers have pointed out, a disadvantage. As far as the piano works are concerned, many will hum the *Three Czech Dances*, but they constitute a relatively early work. When you take the Fantasy and Toccata, the Sonata, the concertos, the Etudes and Polkas, they are totally different worlds, albeit concordant in some respect. In my case, it was love at first sight, which then slumbered for a while and awoke fully sometime towards the end of my studies at the Academy of Performing Arts.

Do you have any special Martinů project in store in the near future?

I will be performing *Incantation* at the Festival *Le Printemps des Arts* in Monte Carlo. This season, I have recorded *Piano Concerto No. 5* for the 3-CD set of the complete Martinů piano concertos, which has been released by Radioservis. The mezzo-soprano Markéta Cukrová and I are now recording a large portion of Martinů’s vocal compositions for Czech Radio, including the *Songs on One Page*, the *Songs on Two Pages*, the *New Chap-book*, and other miscellaneous songs.

Thank you very much.

jakub hrůša on jiří bělohávek / part 2

MY STUDIES AT THE ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE

Jiří Bělohávek was a strict teacher, yet he paid personal attention to every one of his students. He required discipline, all his lessons had a form, with constant references to practical performance. Only today am I fully able to appreciate just how much of his precious time spent in Prague he devoted to us. He always placed

I now know, customary around the world. When it comes to the majority of such distinguished conductors, they only spend a few hours teaching at master classes, and undergraduates are trained by professors, who are more educators than performing artists. I recall how illuminating it was to supplement our more or less theoretical knowledge gained at school with attending the rehearsals led by Jiří. He never forbade anyone to observe any aspect of his own work. His entirely justified self-confidence



Jakub Hruša, Concert for Children with the PKF – Prague Philharmonia, 2014

emphasis on the conducting gesture's functional comprehensibility, clarity and – yes! – its aesthetic aspect, which, he claimed, should never outweigh the approach to the profession as a comprehensive whole. Perhaps it was there and then, at the Liechtenstein Palace, during the conducting lessons, at which Jiří addressed and regarded us not as mere beginners (which we truly were) but earnest artists, when something like my life credo started to form: strive for balance, equilibrium. While the other teachers were often single-sided, either too personal or too dogmatic, too benevolent or too aloof, Jiří was able to highlight all the aspects of the requirements placed on the conductor, including the officially totally omitted psychological factor. More and more have I grown aware of how unique an opportunity it was to constantly work with such a charismatic figure, a sincere teacher, who at the same time was enduring the heat of his demanding career. This is not, as

naturally allowed him to make himself potentially vulnerable, when some of his students could disclose his possible shortcomings, against which, as a teacher, he himself fought when setting the conducting ideal. And, indeed, there were a few who would occasionally make use of this opportunity.

Jiří also took his students abroad, where he spent more time than at home. There too we could observe his everyday work. I recall my stays in Leipzig and Vienna, the preparations for opera productions in Helsinki and Geneva. When he was in Prague, he passionately built up the emerging phenomenon titled the Prague Philharmonia. Sometimes he even rejoiced at the success of this “child” of his at the lessons. When he remembered a packed concert hall, his face suddenly lit up like the sun, and he broke into a wide smile: “To the very rafters!” (With a similar zest, he used to treat us all at the school café, where we were told even more

than during the strictly-led lessons.) How very honoured I felt when once, after a class, he dispassionately told me: “You will be contacted by the Prague Philharmonia, you will do a concert for children.” I think that was when I was in my third year of the program.

Jiří did not even hesitate to discuss with us some of his artistic and human dilemmas. At one of the seminars, he asked our opinion of what is of greater significance when evaluating an orchestra player: a stable and consistently high, though not quite venerable, creative standard, or talent, owing to which a solo performed by such a musician turns into an overwhelming, unforgettable experience? Who is more dispensable for the ensemble? Such questions may seem to be simple, yet the answer is tricky indeed. Impressive, and heart-warming too was (and is) to see how sheer bliss would wash over Jiří with some repertoire pieces, while others (including the most celebrated ones) left him utterly cold. Moreover, Jiří is a master of the apposite, laconic comment, whereas he, I think, really dislikes long speeches. “Well, it must be performed now and then,” that is his style of expressing that which goes against his grain. The classes with him were also lessons in emphatic diplomacy.

The mentioned trips abroad were for us, who had not previously had the opportunity to travel beyond the borders of our country, akin to being thrown in the deep end. Although it was probably more the case that we processed the experience within than manifested it without, it is always an amazing, positive shock for a young person venture beyond the known (including the language!). Jiří's support of our activities with student ensembles was relentless. In my case, this concerned the Brno Youth Symphony (whose artistic director, Tomáš Krejčí, was also once a student of Jiří's) and later on primarily with the Prague Students Orchestra (led by Prof. Mirko Škampa). And Jiří was there in the auditorium when we played at an international festival of young orchestras at the Konzerthaus in Berlin. For me personally, though, all that culminated in Jiří's vehement nod, when I boldly presented my wish to graduate with Josef Suk's gigantic *Asrael*. I would like to imagine how I would have responded if I had been in his position, whether I would have provided as great a support to a student as he did. Not even with a wink of the eye did he indicate that the task may prove to be a tough nut to crack for a 23-year-old greenhorn. In many respects, the spring of 2004 played a decisive role in my life. I experienced certain squalls of a personal nature, great waves of a revived need for spirituality, and I peeped,

perhaps for the very first time, into the true depths of the beauty of music. And, of course, I whipped up my ambitions to the utmost level. I probably finally felt that which is appropriate when graduating from an academy of arts. At that juncture, the person's entire future is at stake.

Amidst all this, Jiří was always indispensable to all of us – in the most subtle way possible. We would never hear him saying something like: “This is the way I do it, so you will do it that way too”, or: “This is the right, the only possible, way”. He repeatedly stressed that we should be able to reason according to the principle “I must know why I feel it this way”. Not to copy anything, ever. We received – particularly as regards the initial formation of the conducting gesture – plenty of instructional help. (Hence, the relatively clearly discernible “Jiří School”.) Yet no smoothing of the path. I could say that Jiří navigated us on our journey and occasionally helped us by giving invaluable advice in the sometimes difficult identification of obstacles and their overcoming. He was our attendant and guide, but he taught us the most by himself setting an example.

AT THE BEGINNING OF MY CAREER

Following the graduation, we remained in scholastic contact for another year, when I had begun studying for a doctorate. Even though – viewed retrospectively – I did not progress too much in this matter, thanks to Jiří I managed to gain experience abroad, this time on my own. During my postgraduate studies at the Universität der Künste in Berlin, I realised what a fabulous training we had received back at home in Prague. And I am not sure whether such a favourable constellation will ever appear again. But I would also like to say how quickly Jiří came to understand that I would hardly become a sedentary musicologist, and how he never rigidly forced me to take on purely musicological assignments, for which I am really grateful now.

Finally, a very strange phase emerged: overnight, a student turned into a chief conductor. The change really was this abrupt: at the tender age of 24, I assumed the post of artistic director of the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra in Zlín. There is no doubt that I will always recall this tenure as one of the most wonderful in my life. This is not the right occasion to describe it in detail, as my text would suffer in both quantity and stylistic terms (that is: simply dissolve into emotion), but I would like to highlight that this time made an impact on

my relationship with Jiří Bělohlávek. When (with a heavy and light heart alike) I interrupted my studies at the Academy of Performing Arts, and subsequently terminated them for good, I felt greatly honoured when, as a colleague, I could address Jiří by his first name, which I continued to use in our ensuing, ample correspondence. And it was by means of this continuous written contact, emails pertaining to every topic under the sun, that we established and developed our close friendship, confirmed at our frequently planned, though seldom materialised, encounters, either purely personal or utterly professional – after all, the two facets simply had to blend together. I particularly recall our critical-musical sessions with the amazing Ivan



Jiří Bělohlávek and Jaroslava Pěchočová, Bohuslav Martinů Days 2007

Moravec, who, I dare guess, had played in the life of the young Jiří Bělohlávek a role similarly essential to that which Jiří had played in mine... In my emails, I always gushed forth my impressions from my conducting work, which just a few months previously I had so longed for and done my best to launch, while Jiří repeated wisely measured recognition of my efforts, ceaselessly encouraging the best that one can squeeze out (even though it sometimes resulted in a lower degree of diligence, and even an easing up). With a certain chill, I now perceive how wisely Jiří was also able to back down from some questions when necessary, bearing in mind that by presenting this or that specific opinion he would inadvertently be depriving my life of the gradual attainment of true independence. I remember how he remained relatively aloof in many respects of my personal decision-making, one such example pertaining to the Prague Philharmonia.

Today, I feel great delight in seeing him putting across – in an earnest and, so typical of him, modest way – one of his major wishes: helping the Czech Philharmonic to become a top-notch orchestra. When it comes to his attendance to any institution that has entrusted him with conducting, he has always shown a venerable traditionalism. His successful leadership of the Prague Symphony Orchestra, the Prague Philharmonia, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, as well as his second tenure with the Czech Philharmonic stand testament to this. Another trait he has displayed has been a high-principled stance at moments when the negotiations about his contract were conducted in a manner different to that agreed

or in a way that threatened artistic integrity. Being firm in his approach and his open-minded consistency are definitely qualities that truly impress me. In addition to his joie de vivre, sense of (laconic) humour, human reliability and diligence, I personally treasure yet another two beautiful features: his gentle, inwardly lived passion, and his love of nature. If I happen to pause in astonishment and intoxication at the sheer beauty of a healthy tree or a flower in bloom, if I take immense pleasure in strolling through a forest or an open landscape, I am enjoying the gifts for which, in my otherwise quite determined musical (and other) life, a personal compartment has been opened by none other than Jiří Bělohlávek. ■

Glyndebourne, 23 May 2016

Jakub Hrůša is president of International Martinů Circle

bohuslav martinů and in an amazing juxtaposition: the

As so often in his life,
it was by sheer coincidence
that he finally stabilized
his ideas on the subject. / M. Šafránek⁴

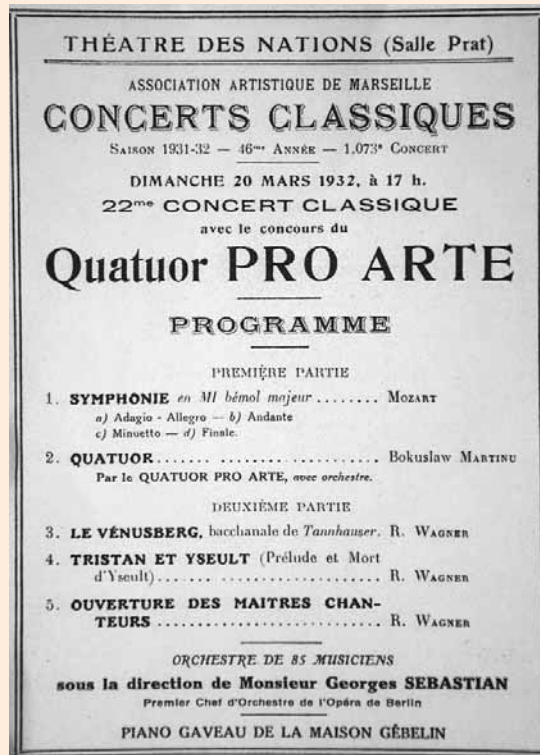
/ ANNE VAN MALDEREN

IN SPRING 1930, Leopold Stokowski and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra performed the *Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra* (1929) by the Swiss composer Conrad Beck, who was a friend of Paul Sacher.² The concert was attended by American patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, whose father was the founder of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. From the outset, she was seduced by this score, with its quite original instrumentation in which the Pro Arte Quartet³ played a kind of *concertino*. The work was awarded the Coolidge Prize. Elizabeth Coolidge, who would be the work's dedicatee, was really impressed by the performance, and decided to contact a composer able to write a similar work for her favorite quartet, the Belgian Pro Arte Quartet.

Gaston Verhuycq, the impresario of the Pro Arte, approached Béla Bartók, who was another friend of Paul Sacher. Verhuycq's letter of 14 October 1930 reads:

Dear Master, I think I have called your attention to the interest in a work for string quartet and orchestra. I am convinced that the Pro Arte Quartet could perform a work by you for all the orchestra societies in the world in less than three years. Moreover, from the musical point of view, the problems raised by the composition of such a work seem exciting to resolve. I would be very happy to know that my idea is attractive enough to induce you to undertake this work. If so, I would take immediate actions to ensure the performance of the work as soon as it is ready. My efforts will focus especially on American orchestras because I am already preparing the 1931–1932 tour, which will be a big enterprise.⁴

A second letter from the impresario to Béla Bartók (dated 24 June 1931) reveals the existence of an intermediate message in which the



▲ Concert Program given at Prat's Hall (Marseille) by the Pro Arte Quartet and l'Orchestre du Théâtre des Nations. Conducted by Georges Sébastian. March 20, 1932 PRIVATE ARCHIVES PHILIPPE LAMURY, BRUSSELS



▲ Photo of the Hungarian-born conductor Georges Sébastian (1903–1989)

PRIVATE ARCHIVES PHILIPPE LAMURY, BRUSSELS

composer undertook to give an answer by the month of June 1931:

May I ask you if you have thought about the composition of a work for string quartet and orchestra? In your letter dated 11 November, you kindly indicated that I would receive some news about this around June. The Pro Arte Quartet has been engaged by the Brussels Philharmonic Society, which is pressing us for details of the work to be performed. They have asked that we program Conrad Beck's quartet (with orchestra) if we are not able to make another interesting proposal shortly. I would be very happy if, at this moment, your work could be already advanced enough to allow you to confirm that the work will be ready for next season.⁵

At the time, Béla Bartók was more concerned about concerts in Ukraine and the Soviet Union (January 1931). It's also the period when his greatest masterpieces emerged.⁶ Bartók had

probably not found time enough to respond to the message of the Belgian impresario. Another explanation is that we never received the composer's letter.⁷

The previous letter is dated 24 June 1931. At that time, Martinů was putting the final touches on the score of his *Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra, H 207*, for an ensemble equal to the one in Conrad Beck's piece. The work seems to be the result of an informal meeting between the composer and the members of the Pro Arte Quartet in the French capital, where the quartet had played. The event – repeatedly reported by Miloš Šafránek⁸ – should have taken place in the very first months of the year 1931. However, it appears that the list of the Pro Arte's concerts reveals no performance in Paris between 1 January and 30 June 1931.

It is likely that the Pro Arte had approached Martinů, who was then part of what has been called *l'Ecole de Paris*.⁹ *L'Ecole* included also Conrad Beck and Alexandre Tansman, who were

the pro arte quartet

concerto for string quartet and orchestra / H 207



Madison WI (May 1939). The Pro Arte Quartet. From left to right: Alphonse Onnou, Laurent Halleux, Robert Maas and Germain Prevost

GASTON VERHUYCK COLLECTION, MUS. MS. 467. (REPRODUCTION SERVICE OF THE ROYAL LIBRARY OF BELGIUM)

both close to the Pro Arte Quartet.¹⁰ The group's inspiration was neoclassical, with a clear return to the old forms. Martinů had a predilection for the *concerto grosso* as established by Arcangelo Corelli.

But our hypothesis is the following: the meeting between Martinů and the Pro Arte had probably taken place at the end of a private audition – customary for the Pro Arte – held at the home of a Parisian patron, Pangalos¹¹, who resided boulevard de Clichy (nearby Darius Milhaud's apartment). This seems to be confirmed by Prevost's diary in the Archives of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and also by Madeleine Milhaud's testimony to us during an interview in Paris.¹²

One should also know that between February and March 1931, three performances of the

Martinů's *Quartet No. 2, H 150*, were programmed by the Pro Arte: in Copenhagen (16 February), Brussels (21 March) and Reims (25 March).

The world premiere of the *Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra, H 207*, was to be held in Marseille on 20 March 1932. Georges Sébastian¹³ conducted the Pro Arte Quartet and l'Orchestre du Theatre des Nations (an orchestra of 85 musicians). The concert was given in the Prat's Hall (Prat being the name of a well-known family producing the appetizer called *Noilly Prat*).

Robert Maas¹⁴, in correspondence with his wife, Julia Gaillard, explains that Germain Prevost (violinist of the Pro Arte Quartet) often mentions the challenge involved in presenting works of the 'avant-garde' to the public of

Marseille.¹⁵ Following the concert, the reviews were not favorable to Martinů. The following is a quote of Léon-Camille Maître in *Artistica* magazine dated 5 April 1932:

We know the high reputation earned by the 'Pro Arte' string quartet in the musical world. We have contributed to another triumph of this remarkable group. If it were not for the fact that we couldn't really judge the piece they programmed. Fortunately, the 'bis' were delicious pages of Haydn which generated enthusiastic bravos. Indeed, one of my friends suggested: 'This is Haydn's revenge.' Why not? B. Martinů's work, which combined the string quartet as soloist with a large orchestra, was therefore handicapped, since the author focussed on opposition effects between the two (or more

precisely effects of alternation). On top of this, a fine tuning of sounds was needed, because the quartet of soloists was not equipped to deploy forces equal to the tutti of the orchestra. The problem is not only there. I devoted myself to this question for quite some time last year. I had anticipated an alternative approach, perhaps more meticulous, but, in any case, moved by another spirit. B. Martinů did not face the difficulty, rather he circumvented it. This resulted in an opus with less character, not very well balanced in depth, disappointing my expectations, especially for his elegance in avoiding tackling the question head-on... I mention only the aggressive writing where the dissonance is used 'in series' and so loses its intensity, instead leaving only an unpleasant feeling that seems to go on indefinitely with no other purpose than itself. We know 'how it is made'. The process is accessible to everybody. OK, but there is 'the way of doing', isn't it [...]? So, one wonders what could be the purpose or the scope of such a work (recognizing interesting but very ephemeral passages). I can't answer. I should use the pen of a snob.¹⁶

A Mozart symphony and some orchestral pieces of Wagner – in the same program – were not able to counterbalance Martinů's 'modernism'.

The public was far more receptive to the *Concerto* when given in London (Queen's Hall, Courtald-Sargent Concerts) on 10 October 1932 by the Pro Arte and the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Malcolm Sargent. This is probably why this last performance was long considered the world premiere of the work before the rediscovery of the concert in Marseille. Gary O'Shea, the critic of the Musical Times, wrote:

The new work by the Czech composer, Martinů, bore no other title but 'String Quartet with Orchestra'. It suggests a Concerto Grosso with the string quartet as concertino. The three movements are in character, and their dependence upon definite schemes of rhythm adds to the resemblance. In other respects, the music is very much of the twentieth century, with its almost arithmetically calculated dissonances, its many cross-threads and involutions of texture, its entire occupation with its own surface, and its acrid flavor. The first and third movements are of the garrulous kind that say a lot but amount to little. The second movement, however, makes a much stronger impression by sticking to a definite idea and expanding it consistently. Its details, whether

*you like them or not, have the virtue of being components of a design that can be readily appreciated and even admired.*¹⁷

The same concert was scheduled five days later (15 October 1932) in Cardiff at St David's Hall with the same performers.

On 3 December 1932, the Belgian premiere was given in Brussels at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. The Pro Arte Quartet and the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris were conducted by Arthur Prevost, the brother of the violist Germain Prevost.

The American premiere took place two weeks later in Boston on 22 December 1932 (Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky¹⁸). The concertino comprised members of the orchestra: Richard Burgin (violin), Robert Gundersen (violin), Jean Le Franc (viola) and Jean Benedetti (cello).

The year 1932 was marked by five performances of the *Concerto*. The work would be played again only in 1936. In the archives of the Elizabeth Coolidge Foundation¹⁹, we found an evidence of performance of the *Concerto* – by the Pro Arte Quartet – in New Brunswick (Canada) on 14 March 1936.

On 8 and 9 April 1936, Carnegie Hall in New York hosted the Pro Arte Quartet and the New York Symphony Orchestra conducted by Hans Lange (1884–1960) for a New York premiere. In the New York Herald Tribune dated 10 April, we read the following:

Martinů's Concerto was introduced to the country in December 1932 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Its form, with the juxtaposition and contrast of a small solo ensemble with the orchestra, suggests the classic concerto grosso and the work is cast in the traditional three movements of this form. In a first hearing, its gave an impression of mastery of form and certain amount of inventiveness along with certain characteristics which can be found in other ably rough works of the last fifteen years. Such characteristics include rhythmic vigour and iterative contrasts in the two rapid movements, a muscular initial theme in the first part and busy briskness in the last, with up-to-date while not ultra-left dissonant harmonies and little concession to sentiment; except in the slow movement, where a meditative introduction for the solo group gave the excellent Belgian visitors their best opportunity to display their praiseworthy collective quality of tone. The broadly melodious close also provided some of the most ingratiating measures of a work which, for a modern novelty, was very cordially received, although leaving one listener

The Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York

1842-1878
CONSOLIDATED 1928

1935 - NINETY-FOURTH SEASON - 1936

CARNEGIE HALL

*Wednesday Afternoon, April 8, 1936

AT TWO-THIRTY

Thursday Evening, April 9, 1936

AT EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

3220TH AND 3221ST CONCERTS

Under the Direction of

HANS LANGE

Assisting Artists:

IGNACE STRASFÖGEL, Pianist

THE PRO ARTE QUARTET

ALPHONSE ONNOU, 1st violin GERMAIN PREVOST, Viola
LAURENT HALLEUX, 2nd violin ROBERT MAAS, Cello

1. HENRY PURCELL.....Four Fantasias from "Three, Four and Five Part Fantasias for Strings"
Three Part Fantasia, No. 1 Four Part Fantasia, No. 3
Four Part Fantasia, No. 2 Fantasia on One Note (Five Parts)
(First time by the Society)
2. D'INDY.....Symphony for Orchestra and Piano, on a French Mountain Song, Op. 25
I. Assez lent—Modérément animé
II. Assez modéré, mais sans lenteur
III. Animé
IGNACE STRASFÖGEL, Pianist
- INTERMISSION
3. B. MARTINU.....Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra
I. Allegro vivo II. Adagio III. Tempo moderato
(First time by the Society)
THE PRO ARTE QUARTET
4. GLAZOUNOFF.....Symphonic Poem, "Stenka Razin," Op. 13

*Instead of Regular Friday Afternoon Concert.

ARTHUR JUDSON, Manager BRUNO ZIRATO, Assistant Manager
MR. STRASFÖGEL uses the STEINWAY PIANO
THE STEINWAY is the Official Piano of The Philharmonic-Symphony Society

Program of the two concerts given by the Pro Arte Quartet and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (Hans Lange, conductor) at Carnegie Hall (New York) on April 8 and 9, 1936

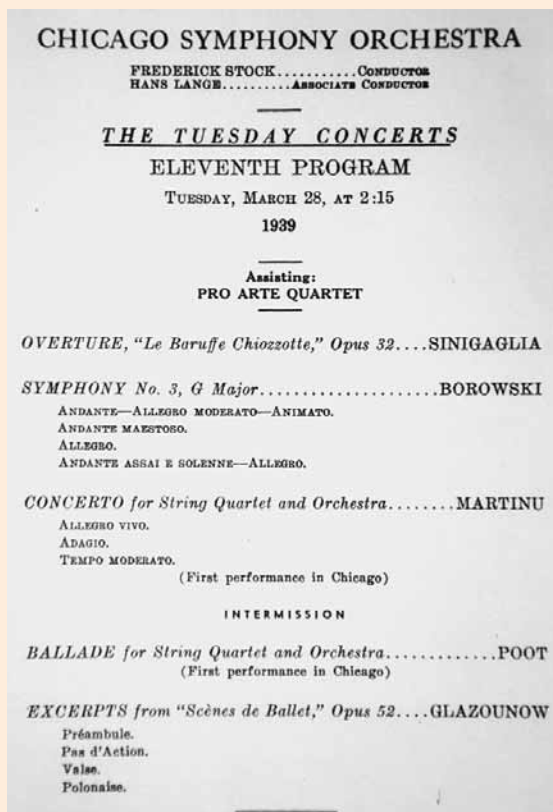
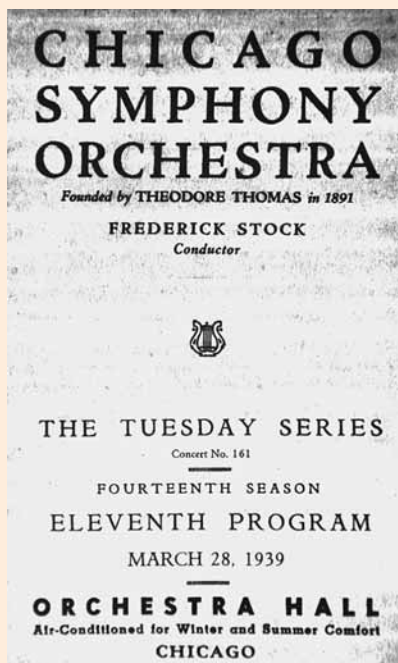
PRIVATE ARCHIVES THÉRÈSE MAAS, BRUSSELS

*wondering whether the combination of string quartet and orchestra is an effective medium for the solo group.*²⁰

On 12 November 1937, the *Concerto* was broadcast on Radio Tour Eiffel. On the same day, the work was performed in the hall of the Paris Conservatory. Both concerts were performed by the Pro Arte Quartet and the Belgian National Orchestra conducted by Franz André.

In May 1938, the Pro Arte Quartet celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. The week-long festivities at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels were grandiose.²¹ On 5 May 1938, the Pro Arte performs the *Concerto* again with the Belgium National Orchestra conducted by Franz André. A work very similar to the *Concerto* was programmed during the same concert: *Ballade* for String Quartet and Orchestra of the Belgian composer Marcel Poot.²² The Pro Arte-Coolidge festivities were broadcast live and in full on Belgian National Radio (I.N.R.), the B.B.C. (London) and the N.B.C. (Washington).

A final performance of *Concerto* by the Pro Arte Quartet was programmed in Chicago (Orchestra Hall, Chicago Symphony Orchestra with Frederick Stock) on 28 March 1939, once again alongside Marcel Poot's *Ballade*.



Concert program given by the Pro Arte Quartet and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Frederick Stock, conductor) at Orchestra Hall in Chicago on March 28, 1939

PRIVATE ARCHIVES PAUL CONINX, NAMUR

Miloš Šafránek also mentions a performance in Vienna and another in Los Angeles with Pierre Monteux.²³ The work was finally played in New York in 1942 at Carnegie Hall, with the WQXR Quartet and the National Orchestral Association under Léon Barzin. This performance allowed for the *Concerto* to be compared with a later work: the *Double Concerto, H 271* (1938).

More recently, on 26 November 2010, the *Concerto* was scheduled as part of the festivities of the fiftieth anniversary of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège (Belgium). The performance was conducted by Pierre Bartholomé and the Ardente Quartet assumed the solo parts.

For Martinů, a *Concerto for Quartet and Orchestra* was undoubtedly a tempting challenge. It is probably why he quickly responded to the request of the Pro Arte and its manager. The formula was an original and interesting field of experimentation. Bartók was perhaps not ready for this challenge mixing classical form and modern language. Marseille's first performance was long ignored. Despite the mixed feelings in the reviews that followed, we want to put things in their right place and highlight the world premiere, which belongs to Marseille. ■

(26 September 2016)

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- 1 Miloš Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů – The Man and His Music* (London, Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1946), 42.
- 2 Kurt von Fischer and Fritz Muggler, "Conrad Beck" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2002), II: 332.
- 3 Founded in 1913, the Pro Arte Quartet immigrated to the United States in May 1940 where it was appointed quartet in residence at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Following the departure of its founders, the Belgian musicians were succeeded by Americans. In March 2013, the University of Wisconsin celebrated the centenary of the quartet.

- 4 Letter from Gaston Verhuyck to Béla Bartók, 14 October 1930 (Gaston Verhuyck Collection, MUS. MS. 467/I., Royal Library of Belgium). All translations of original documents into English are made by the author unless otherwise noted.
- 5 Letter from Gaston Verhuyck to Béla Bartók, 24 June 1931 (Gaston Verhuyck Collection, MUS. MS. 467/I., Royal Library of Belgium).
- 6 Beginning 1931, Bartók completed the composition of his *Second Concerto* for piano and orchestra and was focusing on a commission from Paul Sacher (*Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*).
- 7 According to Yves Lenoir (a Belgian specialist of Bartók and the author's PhD supervisor), letters that are not included in the *Gaston Verhuyck Collection*, if they exist, can only be found in the *Bartók Archives* in Budapest.
- 8 Šafránek, *The Man and His Music*, 42.
- 9 The members of l'Ecole de Paris were meeting together at Café du Dôme on boulevard Montparnasse.
- 10 L'Ecole de Paris included the following members: Conrad Beck (3 performances), Alfredo Casella (23 performances), Bohuslav Martinů (29 performances), Vittorio Rieti (39 performances), Alexandre Tansman (4 performances) and Alexandre Tcherepnine (1 performance).
- 11 Germain Prevost mentions auditions of the Pro Arte organized at the residence of Pangalos on 29 January and 8 April 1931. (*Prevost's Diary*, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Archives: *Pro Arte Quartet*, 1926–1947.)
- 12 Private conversation with Madeleine Milhaud (Paris), 4 February 2000. Darius Milhaud and Mr. Pangalos lived both Boulevard de Clichy (at number 10 and number 62 respectively).
- 13 The Hungarian form of his name is György Sebestyén.
- 14 Cellist of the *Pro Arte Quartet*.
- 15 The same problem occurred before with Beethoven's *Grande Fugue* op. 130. This score was probably too 'modern' for the audience in Marseille. "The two concerts, here in Cannes, worked well. But little audience. This is not a city to give Beethoven's quartets. This is not the kind of music appreciated by the public. It will probably be better in Marseille. However, I express serious doubts." (Letter of 5 January 1939 from Robert Maas to Julia Gaillard, private archives of Thérèse Maas)
- 16 Léon-Camille Maître, 'Feuilleton Musical', in *Artistica*, 5 April 1932, p. 1.
- 17 Review taken again in the program of the Chicago concert of 28 March 1939 (*Orchestra Hall, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Frederick Stock*). Private Archives of Thérèse Maas (Brussels).
- 18 Martinů had close ties with Serge Koussevitzky. The conductor was to play a role in the first performance of several works of the composer: *La Bagarre, H 155*, in November 1927 and the *Concerto da Camera, H 285*, in 1941.
- 19 *Library of Congress, Coolidge Foundation* (Washington D.C.), Files 'Pro Arte Concerts'.
- 20 [Not identified] 'Philharmonic Plays Purcell's Music of 1680', in *The New York Herald Tribune*, 10 April, 1936, p. 1. *Gaston Verhuyck Collection*, Mus. Ms. 467. C. VII.
- 21 May 1938 is also the anniversary of the construction of Henry Lebaeuf's Hall (Grande Salle Henry Lebaeuf). Bohuslav Martinů's and Marcel Poot's works were played at the occasion of a posthumous homage to the Belgian patron.
- 22 Marcel Poot (1901–1980) was part of *Les Synthétistes*, the Belgian equivalent of the *Les Six*. Their inspiration was partly neoclassical.
- 23 Šafránek, *The Man and His Music*, 43

bohoslav martinů

ariane

Simona Šaturová (Soprano)
 Zoltán Nagy (Baritone)
 Baurzhan Anderzhanov (Bass)
 Abdellah Lasri (Tenor)
 Tijl Faveyts (Bass)
 Theater Essen Choir Soloists
 Ivo Kahánek (Piano)

Essener Philharmoniker
 Tomáš Netopil (Conductor)

Text: English, German, French, Czech

Recorded: 2014, 2015, Alfred Krupp Saal, Essen

Released: 2016

TT: 66:00. 1 CD, Supraphon SU 4205-2



“YOU ARE THE IMAGE of my happiness and that happiness will kill you.” These words in Georges Neveux’s play *Le Voyage de Thésée* can yield several levels: a love drama, a mythological premonition, a surrealistic shortcut. Similarly, and in less than three-quarters of an hour, Bohuslav Martinů’s *Ariane*, H 370, with its playfulness and lack of complexity, gracefully serves up to listeners everything they could expect from an opera. A mystical touch of death and a struggle for life, as well as against oneself; a mystery of the beginning of a love affair and the inevitability of its end; the lament of the abandoned heroine – and all that wrapped in a Neo-Classical package, at every turn clearly revealing Martinů at the peak of his invention.

In the summer of 1958, amidst demanding work on the opera *The Greek Passion*, Martinů, as he himself put it, took a break by composing the one-act *Ariane*, to which he wrote the libretto, based on Georges Neveux’s play. The composer had previously, in the 1930s, made use of a subject of the French author in his surrealistic opera *Juliette*. This time, Martinů reached for Neveux’s singular treatment of the myth of Ariadne on Naxos. In Neveux’s drama, while fighting the Minotaur, Theseus realises that he is facing his alter ego, which has yielded to love for a woman. This approach to the ancient Greek myth intrigued Martinů and his play with the human psyche.

Amidst competition with Martinů’s greater and more significant operas, *Ariane* has, to date, been rather overlooked. In 1987, Supraphon released a recording (which was re-released in 2000), featuring an account by Václav Neu-

mann, conducting the Czech Philharmonic, with soloists Celine Lindsey, Richard Novák and Miroslav Kopp. The performance is fabulous, romantic, the singers are splendid (with the only caveat being the bad French of some of them, which simply wouldn’t be tolerated today). Almost 30 years down the road, a new album has come out – a live recording of a performance of *Ariane* made by the Essener Philharmoniker, headed by Tomáš Netopil, who also conducted the most recent presentation of the opera at the National Theatre in Prague, in 2010. Owing to the lack of funding, this performance involved only a concert version of the work.

In Netopil’s hands, Martinů’s inspired score possesses drive and lightness, the vigour of sharp transitions, while the expression is more restrained than that of Neumann’s, thus being closer to the composer’s aesthetics. The music does not hover so much in Romantic arcs, with Netopil respecting the structure of the self-contained numbers, accentuating the dividing lines of the individual passages and savouring the contrasts that permeate the score. A prime example is that which follows Ariane’s lament, the opera’s one and only aria, which forms one quarter of the piece and in which the mythological heroine gracefully bids farewell to her life: “And if I have to die, I will die happy, as the one I loved was King Theseus.” Afterwards, Martinů returns to the playful motif of the introductory Sinfonia, taken over by the glockenspiel (!). It comes across as though a dance of two porcelain elephants were fading

away, not the life of the lead female character. In Tomáš Netopil’s hands, however, it does not sound like a mockery, encapsulating rather Martinů’s typical aloofness, which in fact adds an alluring flavour to the opera. The role of Ariane is sung by Simona Šaturová with a similar aloofness, as well as drama and elegance. The part requires both a coloratura and a character soprano, and although it is not primarily written to impress (although it does contain a few typically coloratura passages), it makes great demands in terms of phrasing and thus can mercilessly expose any of the singer’s technical insufficiencies. In this respect, I must say that I simply cannot imagine that any other Czech or Slovak singer could have performed the role of Ariane better than Mrs. Šaturová, who delivers it effortlessly and with great technical bravado. Outstanding, too, are the other singers, particularly the Romanian bass-baritone Zoltán Nagy, a pliant and sonically delicious Thésée. An amusing anomaly in this performance is to be heard in a few phrases of the male ensemble where total rhythmic and melodic confusion bear testimony to the live recording...

It would seem outrageous to refer to Martinů’s *Double Concerto for Two String Orchestras, Piano and Timpani*, H 271, as a supplement of any sort, yet in this case the word is apposite. Both Supraphon and Tomáš Netopil, who initiated the album, emphasise that the main intention here was to record *Ariane*, which the disc clearly showcases. Nonetheless, the *Double Concerto*, recorded by the Essener Philharmoniker and Ivo Kahánek, is definitely worthy of attentive listening. It may, however, happen that you simply won’t get round to it – you may well find yourself playing *Ariane* over and over again, abandoning it with an even heavier heart than Thésée did Ariane.

MICHAELA VOSTŘELOVÁ

**RATING: Harmonie’s Choice –
 Special Editor’s Choice**

Reprinted from *Harmonie music magazine*,
 No. 10/2016, with their kind permission

mirandolina in venice

/ DAVID CHALOUPKA

Bohuslav Martinů's *Mirandolina, H 346*, (composed in 1953 and 1954, premiered in 1959 in Prague) was the main opera attraction in Venice this July. It was staged in the beautiful Teatro La Fenice, one of the premier opera houses in Italy. The run of five performances took place between 1 and 14 July 2016 and was



PHOTOS: MICHELE CROGERA



Scalla), Amore in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the title role in Peri's *Euridice* (one of the oldest operas preserved), and Silvia in Haydn's *L'isola disabitata*. The waiter Fabrizio, whom the innkeeper finally marries, was sung by the Italian tenor Leonardo Cortelazzi, who in the La Scala production of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* enacts Nero and who has performed a wide lyrical tenor repertoire on stages in Italy and France (Don Ottavio, Tamino, Nemorino, Fenton, etc.).

The other roles in the Venice

conducted by John Axelrod, a former pupil of Leonard Bernstein.

In 2014, John Axelrod was appointed artistic and music director of the Real Orquesta Sinfónica de Sevilla. He has conducted numerous orchestral concerts and, as a guest conductor, he has devoted his artistic powers to opera as well. He has prepared operatic works for the festival in Lucerne on several occasions. In recent years, he has directed opera performances in Italy: in Naples, Rome, Florence and at the festival in Spoleto. In addition to his engagement with the regular symphony repertoire, he has specialised in 20th-century music, giving world premieres of a number of works by contemporary composers (Kilar, Saariaho, Fazil Say, and others).

The *Mirandolina* production at the Teatro La Fenice was directed by Gianmaria Aliverta, who during the previous season had staged an intriguing evening there comprising Poulenc's

La Voix humaine and Janáček's *The Diary of the One Who Disappeared*, with the latter performed as a scenic ballade. The sets for *Mirandolina* were designed by Italy's Massimo Checchetto, while the costumes were created by Carlos Tieppo, who has regularly worked with the Venice theatre over the past four years. The opera's story was transferred to the present day (with corresponding costumes) and set in a sort of modern wellness centre at a large hotel, providing jacuzzis, massages, sun lamps and other services.

Amidst the simple, basically geometrical sets, the majority of the male performers were clad in bathrobes or swimming trunks. The title role was portrayed by the Italian soprano Silvia Frigato, who in the autumn of 2015 appeared in Prague in *Marian Vespers*, conducted by Václav Luks. She has focused primarily on early music, with the roles including Amore in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (also at the Teatro alla

Mirandolina were also assigned to first-rate Italian singers, all possessing excellent acting abilities.

The opera performance, above all, affords great opportunities for artists with skills in characterization and a comic gift. And where else if not Italy should this merry and musically enthralling piece be staged? After all, when composing *Mirandolina* to his own libretto based on Carlo Goldoni's popular comedy *La Locandiera*, Martinů bore in mind the sheer singability of the Italian language. The subsequent Czech translation, used at the world premiere in Prague, was rather necessitated by the practical constraints and the contemporary customs on Czech stages. The production at the Teatro La Fenice was, naturally, performed to the original Italian libretto, with Italian and English surtitles. ■

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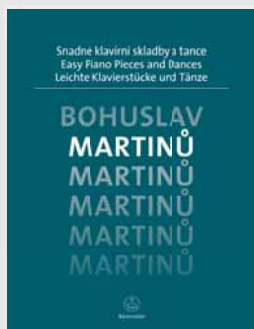
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