

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

martinůREVUE

may–august 2018 / vol.XVIII / no.2

the greek passion
in ekaterinburg

juliette in wuppertal

martinů's holidays

martinů's operas in ostrava

highlights and news





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www.martinu.cz/festival

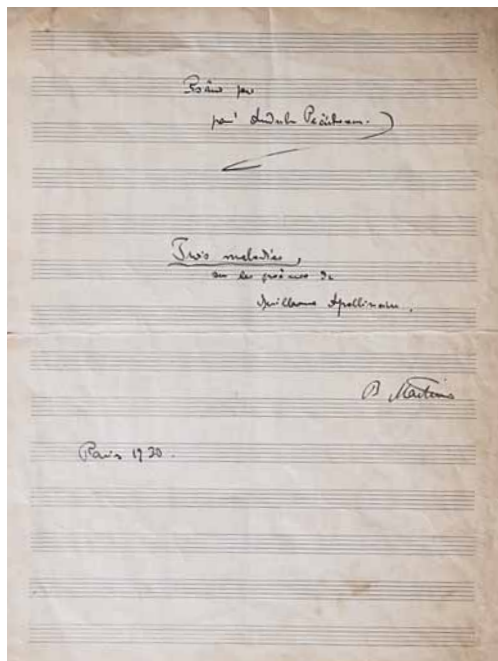
news

new autograph

WHEN Bohuslav Martinů composed his *Three Songs after Poems by Guillaume Apollinaire*, (H 197) in 1930 for the singer Anna Pečirková, he probably did not foresee that the songs would be lost three times over in the following years – and that they would be found again three times. The first loss occurred in 1933, a few days before the first performance, but the songs were successfully discovered in time for Pečirková and her accompanist Václav Štěpán to perform them as planned in Prague's Mozarteum. The autograph was lost for a second time in 1944, when the Gestapo burst into Anna Pečirková's flat. The autograph and

other things belonging to her were packed up; she herself was taken to Terezín and later to the concentration camp at Ravensbruck. Fortunately, all turned out well and she survived the war. Miraculously, Karel Šebánek discovered the manuscript in a second-hand bookshop after the war and brought it back to Pečirková. It was lost for a third time when the singer loaned it to Miloš Šafránek in 1949 and he failed to return it. In the end, the three songs were discovered last year in the estate of Czech choirmaster Miroslav Košler, later to be purchased by the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation.

From the article by Eva Žižková, more info: www.martinu.cz/en/news/1192-songs-thrice-lost/



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30 October + 21 November 2018

> Ekaterinburg State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre,
Ekaterinburg, Russia
www.uralopera.ru

The Greek Passion, H 372 I

Oliver von Dohnanyi (Conductor)
Thaddeus Strassberger (Director)
Kevin Knight (Set, Costume Designer)



**4th BENEFIT CONCERT 2018
FOR THE BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ INSTITUTE
19 November 2018 / 7.30 pm**

> Kaiserstein Palace, Prague
Mahan Esfahani (Harpsichord)
(for more information see the last page)



festivals

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ DAYS

**18 November – 19 December 2018,
Prague**

www.martinu.cz/festival
see also page 2



concerts

3 October 2018 / 6.00 pm

**CONCERT FOR THE 100th ANNIVERSARY
OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

> Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague
www.ceskafilharmonie.cz

Double Concerto for Two String Orchestras, Piano and Timpani, H 271

Czech Philharmonic
Semjon Byčkov (Conductor)
Ivo Kahánek (Piano)
Michael Kroutil (Timpani)

Czech Philharmonic

11 + 12 + 13 October 2018 / 8.00 pm

> Philharmonie, Berlin
www.berliner-philharmoniker.de

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1, H 226

Berliner Philharmoniker
Jakub Hrůša (Conductor)
Frank Peter Zimmermann (Violin)



MARTINŮ FEST BASEL

10–25 November 2018

www.martinu.ch

String Trio No. 2, H 238

(Julia Fischer Quartet)
Film screening of opera **What men live by, H 336**
(Director Jiří Nekvasil)

Film en miniature

(Family Concert)

Little suite from Comedy on the Bridge, H 347 A

(Nicolas Altstaedt, Conductor)

Sonata da Camera for Cello and Chamber Orchestra, H 238

(Nicolas Altstaedt, Cello and Conducting)



anniversary

czech music lover patrick lambert turns 75



ON FRIDAY, 15 JUNE, Patrick Lambert celebrated his 75th birthday. Throughout his long career as music editor and BBC Radio 3 producer, Lambert was able to demonstrate his special interest in Czech music, particularly that of Janáček and Martinů.

Patrick Lambert has tirelessly promoted the music of Martinů and added to the sum of knowledge about him. His monograph **MARTINŮ IN HIS TIME – THE RECORDED LEGACY: A Biographical**

Survey of the Early Recordings, published in 2016, dealt with early recordings of the composer's music. In the Czech music magazine *Harmonie*, he published a series of articles about Czech music. Lambert is also a regular contributor to the *Martinů Revue*. For example, in the last issue (No. 1, 2018), he wrote about last year's Bohuslav Martinů Days.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

gennady rozhdestvensky has passed away at the age of 87

ONE OF THE WORLD'S most famous conductors Gennady Rozhdestvensky passed away on Saturday, June 16th. Rozhdestvensky, who was also a composer and pianist, was one of the founding members of the Bohuslav Martinů Society, International Martinů Circle, and for his lifetime promotion of Martinů's work was awarded the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation Medal in 2003.

Gennady Nikolayevich Rozhdestvensky was born on May 4, 1931 in Moscow into a musical family. He studied conducting with his father at the Moscow Conservatory and piano with Lev Oborin. During his career, he worked as a chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in Stockholm, or as a chief conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre. He has promoted works by foreign composers not well known in the Soviet Union, such as Paul Hindemith, Carl Orff or Bohuslav Martinů.

"In 1956 I studied for six months in Prague, where I attended Ančerl's rehearsals, and for the first time I heard the Fourth Symphony by Bohuslav Martinů."



Gennady Rozhdestvensky (on the photo also with his wife Anna Postnikova) receiving the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation Medal from Ivan Štraus

FOTO ZDENĚK CHRAPEK

The first score of a Bohuslav Martinů piece I actually held in my hands was the Memorial to Lidice, and these two works brought me to Martinů. In Moscow I later introduced a cycle of all his symphonies."

During his frequent stays in Prague, Gennady Rozhdestvensky performed works by Leoš Janáček,

Hector Berlioz, Bohuslav Martinů and Dmitri Shostakovich. In 1962 he first conducted at the Prague Spring Festival, where he performed at the closing concerts as well in 1974 and 2007.

May he rest in peace.

/ VOJTĚCH JOUZA

pierre-emile barbier (alias peb)

THE WELL KNOWN French musicologist Pierre-Emile Barbier died in April 2017, aged 82.

With a mathematician father (Ecole Normale Supérieure) and a violist mother, Barbier was educated in both fields and became an electronics engineer while still completing his thesis on Béla Bartók.

He later specialised in the music of Dmitri Shostakovich and other Soviet composers, such as Mieczysław Weinberg, and extended this interest to include composers from the former Warsaw pact countries. Among Czech composers, he was especially devoted to Leoš Janáček and Bohuslav Martinů and became good friends with both Viktor Kalabis and Jindřich Feld.

In the early 1970s, he contributed to the two-volume Larousse music dictionary, writing dozens of articles about these composers under his initials P.-E. B., which were soon contracted to PEB, a nickname under which he became a world authority! Alongside fellow specialists André Lischke and Harry Halbreich, PEB has probably authored the greatest number of items in this dictionary, always taking care of the less well-known composers. His succinct and precise articles clarified the role each composer played in the development of Soviet-influenced music. For example, Pierre-Emile has been prominent in making Mieczysław Weinberg and his music better known in the West.

In Paris, between 1974 and 1984, as Artistic Manager of the AMC, he was able to put on concerts by the Talich Quartet (their first concert in the West)



and arrange a return visit for the City of Prague String Quartet in 1976; for this event, Pierre-Emile had to deploy his considerable diplomatic talents: the Quartet had been deprived of their

passports by the Husák administration after the Soviet invasion in 1968! He was similarly tactful and influential in Budapest and was able to bring the Bartók and Kodály Quartets to Paris for their first concerts in the West.

Later, after the 'Velvet Revolution' in Prague, his help was enlisted by Jindřich Feld, who, seeing how so many Czech musicians were being attracted away to the West by the better economic conditions, was trying to provide better incentives for them to stay. Pierre-Emile's response was to found two CD Labels, PRAGA Records and PRAGA Digitals. The first radio archive recordings to appear (under a contract concluded by Jindřich Feld) were 'David Oistrakh in Prague' and 'Sviatoslav Richter in Prague'. These were great commercial successes. There was also a warm reception, in France and elsewhere, for recorded concerts where Vladimír Válek conducted the Radio Symphony Orchestra, above all Shostakovich, but also featuring Martinů and other more recent Czech composers, including Kalabis and Feld himself. PEB's genius was to balance 'commercial' and 'non-commercial' products!

PRAGA Digitals also issued new recordings by chamber ensembles that were then mostly unknown in

the West: the Kocian and Pražák Quartets, the Guarneri Trio, the Prague Wind Quintet, the Czech Nonet and others.

Most of these recordings were made at Prague's Domovina Studio, with producer Jiří Gemrot and sound engineer Karel Soukeník, and received awards from western magazines such as *Diapason*, *Monde de la Musique* and *Classica* in Paris, *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik* in Germany, and above all the British *Gramophone*, with its world-wide English reading public. Some highly prized CDs were recorded in Paris under Pierre-Emile's own supervision: for instance, Weber's Clarinet Quintet played by Pascal Moraguès and the Pražák Quartet, which also won awards! Later CDs brought some younger Czech artists, such as the pianist Slávka Pěchočová or the Zemlinsky String Quartet, to the fore. Among the CDs produced by the Zemlinsky quartet, my favourite has to be the complete String Quartets by Viktor Kalabis which they shared with the more established Kocián Quartet! In total, Praga and Praga Digitals produced around 350 to 400 CDs during PEB's life. His contribution to the advancement of Bohuslav Martinů's music was acknowledged with gratitude when he was awarded the Martinů Foundation medal in 1995.

Pierre-Emile passed away on April 13th after falling on the stairs of an insufficiently-lit car park. His family and friends in France and the Czech Republic will be comforted by their memories of a highly cultured man, a great architect of the century-old Franco-Czech friendship.

For me, he was more than a friend - he was a real brother in our common passion for music!

/ GEORGES FONADE

Co-founder of the French Janáček Movement (1984)
Member of the International Martinů Circle

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Opera Juliette by Bohuslav Martinů in Wuppertal, 2018, photo Jens Grossmann



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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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www.cbmpolicka.cz



incircle news

IMC BOARD MEETING 2018

THE IMC BOARD meeting will held in Bohuslav Martinů Institute on 8 December 2018, to take place during the Bohuslav Martinů Days in Prague.

ANNUAL CD

THE ANNUAL CD contains two live recordings from the 2016 Bohuslav Martinů Days. In that year, the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation Competition was open to woodwind and harpsichord players. The CD contains two performances from prize-winning contestants – Jana Černohouzová playing the *Clarinet Sonata, H 356*, and Marie Ptáková playing the *Harpichord Sonata, H 368*.

We are also pleased to present a historical recording of Martinů's last *String quartet No. 7, H 314 (Concerto da camera)*. The performance dates from 1949 and comes from the Kroll Quartet.

The next CD, giving highlights of the 2017 Bohuslav Martinů Days can be expected by the end of this year. This will at last remove the one-year delay in releasing our annual CDs.



Jana Černohouzová

2018 SUBSCRIPTION PAYMENTS

WE WOULD REQUEST members to forward their 2018 subscription payments through their usual channels. A list of our international contacts:

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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.

MEMBERSHIP & SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION IN 2018

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(14 GBP if paying for dual membership with Dvořák Society of Great Britain)

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570 CZK for members in the Czech Republic

33 EUR / 25 GBP for members in the rest of Europe

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► SUBSCRIPTION FOR CORPORATE MEMBERS: 100 EUR / includes

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WE WELCOME THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS:

> John Pringle, Australia

> Brigitte Kowarik, Switzerland

> Caroline Cochrane, UK

> University of Wisconsin, USA

juliette in wuppertal

a clash between logic
and the world of dreams

/ HARTMUT SASSENHAUSEN

Wuppertaler Bühnen have a touring production of *Juliette*. Despite that, many seats were empty at the first performance.

INDEED, *Juliette* is unknown to many. In 1959, the year in which Martinů died, *Juliette* had its first performance in Germany. After that, the work disappeared through the trap-door of time and was not shown anywhere. Only in recent years has *Juliette* again appeared on the stage with the success it deserves – in Zurich, Geneva, Bremen, Frankfurt and Berlin.

Music was not important to the surrealists. Nevertheless, Martinů was so fascinated by Georges Neveux's drama "*Juliette, or the Key to Dreams*" that he made a libretto from it and set it to music in a neo-Classical style.

The production team of Inga Levant (direction), Rafal Dziemidok (choreography), Jan Freese (set design) and Petra Korink (set design and costumes) has done much to make this unreal dream-world, set successively in a small town,



a forest and a Travel agency, an engrossing experience for the viewer. The costumes worn by the main characters are wonderful.

This performance revives memories of Greek mythology

The dark and sombre suit of the main protagonist Michel is meant to mark him out as a rational

man whose strong sense of reality eventually unravels and collapses. Juliette, carrying an antique urn, with her billowing hairstyle and white robe recalls Greek mythology as she emerges from an ancient fountain. In the forest scene, Juliette appears to be a person far removed from the world and from reality, as a hippy in a prim yellow and green outfit and exaggeratedly high heels.

a momentary opening of the heavens

TWO SYMPHONIES by Bohuslav Martinů were performed by the Czech Philharmonic on 28, 29 and 30 March 2018.

For three days late this March, Prague's Rudolfinum was almost exclusively devoted to Bohuslav Martinů. Besides a rendition of Arnold Schoenberg's *Piano Concerto Op. 42*, Jakub Hrůša, President of the International Martinů Circle, led the Czech Philharmonic through two of Martinů's symphonies – *Symphony No. 3, H 299* and *Fantaisies symphoniques (Symphony No. 6), H 343*. The performance was part of a project to record the symphonic works of Martinů for Supraphon and to create a complete audiovisual series of his symphonies.

Read the excerpts of the enthusiastic reviews published in *Harmonie*, *Opera Plus*, and *iDnes*:

HARMONIE: Martinů and Schoenberg, a night for Jakub Hrůša and Mitsuko Uchida / Ivan Žáček

"The innate, familial understanding that Jiří Bělohlávek had for the symphonic oeuvre of Bohuslav Martinů was always highly appreciated – his complete recording of the six symphonies, whether with the BBC Symphony of the Czech Philharmonic, is telling evidence of the fact. To say that Jakub Hrůša conducted both symphonies – in the best sense of the words – in the shadow of his mentor and friend, would perhaps be quite accurate and yet somewhat demeaning. I would even say that the energy, nerve-wracking tension, and drive of his approach was reminiscent of Bělohlávek's vehemence at the helm of the BBC. All the more admirable is how he managed to convey his conception to the Czech Philharmonic without enforcing it. The overall sound gave



an utterly balanced and remarkably solid impression. It was a magnificent tribute to one of the greatest symphonists of the twentieth century."

www.casopisharmonie.cz

OPERA PLUS: Total Martinů / Petr Veber

"Two symphonies by Bohuslav Martinů in one evening, that is an uncommon serving, but the music is so exquisite and Jakub Hrůša and the Czech Philharmonic gave it such a unique rendition

Reminders of surrealist performances, submerging the conscious mind in the world of sleep or drug-induced dreams, occur at the moment when on-stage video projectors begin screening optical illusions. Meanwhile, the operatic characters move on stage in grotesque fashion, as if under the influence of someone unseen.

In the third and final act, the Office Clerk stands as a contrast to the two preceding dream-like, even nonsensical acts. In his Office of Dreams, the fantasies of his customers are unfeeling evoked and then dispelled. But Michel is not put off; Juliette's voice seduces him and leads him back into a dream-like trance.

The clarity of the German libretto for Juliette is outstanding; all the soloists strove to make the text intelligible, as did the Wuppertaler Bühnen female chorus (prepared by Markus Baisch). Sangmin Jeon as Michel has a wonderful glowing tenor voice and Ralitsa Ralinova has an enchanting soprano, excellently suited to the title role of the opera. The other singers, too, were equal to the expressive demands of their various roles.

The Wuppertal Symphony Orchestra, under the precise baton of Johannes Pells proved capable of realising the multilayered nuances of the score, only occasionally overwhelming the singers.

At the final curtain call there were many shouts of acclamation, well deserved by this production, in which the worlds of dreams and of logic are mutually at odds. For some people, this opera had nothing to say and they left at the first interval. Nevertheless, it remains clear evident that the surrealists of the interwar years are still capable of making us question the apparent monochrome perfection of the world in which we live. ■

that there was beauty and joy in abundance, yet certainly not as to be excessive. [...] The third symphony is one of the composer's most accomplished and most beautiful works. [...] The lyrical tranquillity [of the third movement] was that proverbial "momentary opening of the heavens" that is in some way present in each of the symphonies of Bohuslav Martinů."

www.operaplus.cz/totalni-martinu/

iDNES: Baroque hits versus modern experiments. And one conciliator

/ Věra Drápelová

"Under Hrůša's baton, the orchestra developed the enchanting music into its full glory. And, as is so often the case with Martinů, I was left thinking that this composer is something of a conciliator in the history of "modern" music, offering his own bridging link between intellectual sustenance and audience interaction."

www.kultura.zpravy.idnes.cz

Translated by Adam Prentis, prepared by Vojtěch Jouza



BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ: Juliette (The Key to Dreams), H 253

Premiere:

3 March 2018, 7.30 pm

Johannes Pell
(Musical preparation,
Conductor),
Inga Levant (Director),
Jan Freese / Petra
Korink (Sets),
Petra Korink (Costumes),
Rafal Dziemidok
(Choreography),
Jana Beckmann
(Dramaturgy),
Ralitsa Ralinova
(Juliette),
Sengmin Jeon (Michel)

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*Translated by
Michael Crump*

[www.wz.de/lokales/
wuppertal/traumwelt-
und-logik-im-gegensatz-
1.2633764](http://www.wz.de/lokales/wuppertal/traumwelt-und-logik-im-gegensatz-1.2633764)

PHOTOS JENS GROSSMANN

bohuslav martinů's holidays in czechoslovakia

WE TEND TO associate the summer months with rest and holidays. Most often we travel to new places, take part in sport or just relax. And what about Bohuslav Martinů? How and where did he usually spend his summer months?

During his time as a student at the Prague Conservatoire he made friends with the violinist Stanislav Novák, a fellow-native of eastern Bohemia from the town of Smiřice. Not surprisingly, the young friends used to visit each other. Sometimes Stáňa would travel to Polička, or Bohouš would spend his holidays in Smiřice, which was his preference. By day he would swim in the River Elbe (something he could not do in Polička), and in the evening or even at night he and Stáňa would travel on the pleasure-boats. There was also a relatively busy musical life and Bohouš gladly joined in with it. This made him popular with the local girls; Stanislav's younger brother Karel later remembered how he used to deliver hand-written notes to Bohouš's various love interests. These idyllic summer meetings were brought to an end in June 1910 when Bohouš was expelled from the Conservatoire for "incorrigible negligence". The crestfallen Martinů reacted in typical fashion – by working on a new composition. Within a mere eight days at the start of July 1910, he composed the symphonic poem *Angel of Death* for large orchestra, a work whose decadent atmosphere corresponded with the depressed mood of the young composer. This tendency to fill his holidays with composing continued into the future. Although he continued living in Prague after his expulsion from the Conservatoire, he would still go back to Polička during the holidays and always took along an incomplete composition. He would alternate composing with walks around the town (often with a book in his hand, as his contemporaries remembered) or with excursions into the countryside and sometimes even sightseeing trips abroad.

In 1923, Martinů obtained a grant to study in Paris, a city which was to be his home for many years, but this caused no change in his working habits. He still tended to return to his native Polička and usually extended his trip with a few days spent in Prague, always taking unfinished pieces with him. The compositions *Half-time*, the first Piano Concerto, the first version of the *Cello Concerto No. 1*, the opera *The Soldier and the Dancer* and others all owe their existence to various summer holidays undertaken during this period. In 1929, Martinů took his future wife Charlotte to Polička for the first time. Her reception by the family was somewhat bewildering;



B. Martinů and Ela Vejrychová-Švabinská, Kozlov, 1920

spent almost the whole summer together in Czechoslovakia, not only in Polička but also in Prague, where the ninth All-Sokol rally was being held. In August, together with Marie and their neighbours from Polička, the Šmíds, they made an excursion to the Eagle Mountains in north-eastern Bohemia. But Martinů's marriage and his gradually increasing fame as a composer meant that his priorities soon had to change; in the following years, he spent the summer months hard at work and did not go to Polička. He explained to his family: *"As far as my holidays are concerned, I don't think I can allow myself any this year because I have lost a great deal of time already. I hadn't done much by Christmas, then I suffered that illness and then we were away, so I will probably stay in Paris and have to prepare further things"*.

At that time, in the summer of 1933, he was working intensively on the opera *The Plays of Mary*,



B. Martinů after the opening of the Tyl House, Polička, 1929

the composer's sister Marie quickly befriended her, but his mother Karolina made her dislike very clear indeed. As a result, the Frenchwoman spent only a short amount of time at Polička before returning to Paris alone, while Bohouš stayed on. From the 14 to the 18 of September, Polička celebrated the opening of the newly built Tyl theatre and the composer took an active part in the celebrations. In concert, he performed *Three Piano Pieces*, one of which bears the appropriate dedication "For the opening of the Tyl theatre."

Bohuslav and Charlotte were married in 1931, but she did not travel to Polička with him that summer, perhaps because of the unpleasant experience when she was introduced to the family. Martinů divided his free time between visiting his relatives in Polička and exploring the glories of France with his wife. However, a year later they

which he duly finished a year later, towards the end of June 1934. But he did not spend his summer in Polička that year either. He had assumed that he would go there in December for the Brno premiere of his opera (which was eventually postponed until the spring) and therefore tried to work as intensively as he could during the summer in Paris, despite the prevailing heatwave, so that he could complete all the compositional tasks he had set himself. He referred to this with a certain feeling of guilt in one of his letters: *"The heatwave here is dragging on. There have been some storms and then for two days it was a little cooler but it's all starting again. I would like to work on that violin concerto but work progresses slowly when it's this hot. Everyone is leaving the city because no-one can endure the heat inside a flat."* And in another letter he elaborates: *"It's impossible to do anything now because it's so hot*



Bohuslav and Charlotte Martinů, with Bohuslav Šmíd family, 21 August 1932 in Orlické hory

here that one can hardly breathe. If we didn't have a garden it would be unbearable. Zrzavý has a sort of hosepipe in his garden, for watering the flowers with, so I always take a shower there." The summer of 1935 was very similar – Bohouš stayed in Paris to work, despite being bothered by the excessive heat. Not until the end of August did he gain a little respite by spending five days with his wife in the Alps. In 1936, the composition of his opera *Juliette* absorbed him completely. In 1937 he took the opportunity to stay first in Charlotte's home town in the French countryside near Vieux Moulin and then later by the sea at Pas-de-Calais. But the compositions on which he was currently working accompanied him there too. Work had become

everything to him – he began to feel ill at ease if he went for a long time without composing and he considered times spent on other pursuits to have been wasted.

In the summer of 1938, he saw his native country for the last time. Apart from visiting his family in Polička, he took an interest in the tenth All-Sokol rally and also – since he was travelling without Charlotte – in the young composer Vítězslava Kaprálová, one of his students from Paris. Her parents invited him to their country villa in Tři studně, where he went together with his friend Stáňa Novák and some other young people. It was a lovely, carefree time. They went for walks in the woods collecting mushrooms, or went swimming

in the ponds of Sykovec and Medlov. Last of all, Bohouš spent a few days more at Polička – here too in the company of Vítka Kaprálová – before travelling back to France via Prague. Little did he suspect that he was now seeing his native country for the last time; the political events of the following months, the outbreak of the Second World War and the change of regime after the war meant that a return was out of the question. In the years to come, Bohuslav Martinů would spend his summers exclusively abroad.

/ MONIKA HOLÁ

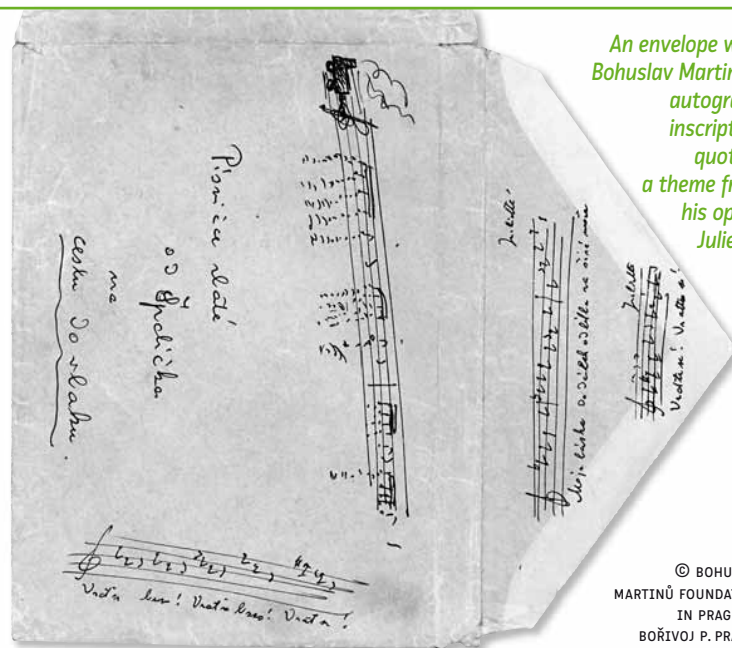
Translated by Michael Crump
PHOTOS CBM

news

bohuslav martinů foundation's acquisition of martinů's letters from the estate of přemysl pražák

/ KATEŘINA MAÝROVÁ

LAST YEAR, the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation in Prague acquired from Mr. Bořivoj P. Pražák a unique set of written materials that he inherited from his father, Přemysl Pražák, who co-ordinated and edited the first collection honouring the composer Vítězslava Kaprálová (24 January 1915, Brno - 16 June 1940, Montpellier). Titled *Vítězslava Kaprálová, studie a vzpomínky* (Vítězslava Kaprálová, Studies and Reminiscences), it was published in 1949 in Prague by the Hudební Matice of the Umělecká Beseda (Artistic Society). The purchased set of non-musical manuscripts includes 14 letters of condolence relating to the death of Vítězslava Kaprálová (from Otakar Šourek, Stanislav Novák, and others), as well as Kaprálová's 1940 correspondence with her husband Jiří Můcha. Also included was a previously unknown package, containing mostly letters and postcards, sent to Kaprálová by Martinů in 1938, when he was her private composition tutor. The envelope shown in the picture (right) is also part of this package, as is a further annotated sheet. The unique set of intimate messages sent by Martinů to Kaprálová illustrates the ruffled emotions of Martinů, whose feelings towards "Vítulka", or "Song" – as he tenderly addressed Kaprálová in his letters – ranged from euphoria to hopeless despair. The correspondence wonderfully supplements the 29 already processed letters Martinů sent to Kaprálová between 11 September and 31 December 1938, which are maintained as part of the collections of the Music Department of the Moravian Museum in Brno (call no. G 149). An important part of the Martinů acquisition is an original article Martinů himself typed and sent to Přemysl Pražák for the planned volume in honour of



An envelope with Bohuslav Martinů's autograph inscription quoting a theme from his opera *Juliette*

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IN PRAGUE –
BOŘIVOJ P. PRAŽÁK

Vítězslava Kaprálová. I would like to point out that the money Bořivoj P. Pražák has received for the non-musical materials bequeathed by his father will not be used for private purposes. Mr. Pražák has decided to donate the funds to the Přemysl Pražák Prize for the best performance of a Martinů composition within the Bohuslav Martinů Competition in Prague, which is co-ordinated by the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation. Over the next 10 years, the funds Bořivoj P. Pražák has so generously provided will thus serve to support talented young musicians and the promotion of Bohuslav Martinů's music. ■ Translation by Hilda Hearne

the passion in

/ LENKA ŠALDOVÁ

EKATERINBURG (formerly Sverdlovsk), the fourth largest city in Russia, is a remarkable place in the Urals. There is a striking contrast between the ancient buses, trolley-buses and trams that ply the streets, looking more like museum exhibits, and the up-to-date architecture of the buildings currently under construction. In 2011, a museum dedicated to Russian actor/singer Vladimir Vysotsky was opened in one of the city's two skyscrapers; just down the road in 2015, enormous expense was lavished on the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Centre, its ultramodern exhibition a pretentious and uncritical memorial to the local hero.

The local opera house has a tradition more than a century old, and its current remarkable form is to a great extent to the credit of Oliver von Dohnányi, the chief conductor since 2015. It can stand comparison with larger and better subsidised opera houses in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Last year it received two Golden Mask awards for the production of *Satyagraha* by Philip Glass, and a further two this year for Mieczysław Weinberg's *The Passenger*. Dohnányi himself won the category *Best Operatic Conductor*, fighting off competition from 85 other nominees. In Russia, he promotes Czech opera among other things,

having presented Dvořák's *Rusalka*, and most recently Bohuslav Martinů's *The Greek Passion, H 372/I (first version)*, the first performance of which was on April 19, 2018. Most of the roles in *The Greek Passion* had three singers allocated to them – and on the basis of the performances I attended on 23 and 24 May, where apparently the best of the local singers were not on display, the Ekaterinburg ensemble – orchestra, chorus

and soloists – seems to me to be in fine fettle. Their names are not familiar to the average European, though some may eventually break through on the international stage or move to a more prestigious opera house in Russia – nonetheless I heard genuinely good singing, with good technique.

The staging of *The Greek Passion* at first sight appears somewhat austere and unostentatious. It is not really possible to compare it with any sort



excerpts from some of the reviews

The Ural mystery: who created the triptych of non-repertoire 20th-century operas

/ Yelena Cheremnyh

Greek Passion premiere: a Ekaterinburg performance based on the novel *Christ Recrucified*.

[...] The Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů's opera *The Greek Passion*, composed according to the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis' novel *Christ Recrucified*, was performed in Russia for the first time ever. Following on Philip Glass's *Satyagraha* and Mieczysław Weinberg's *The Passenger*, the premiere was the logical culmination of the operatic triptych on the theme of humanity's spiritual searching in the 20th century, which was initiated by the theatre's director Andrey Shishkin. [...]

[...] The production was authored by the same people behind the Ekaterinburg performances of the operas by Philip Glass and Mieczysław Weinberg, namely, the American director Thaddeus Strassberger and the Slovak conductor Oliver von Dohnányi, who was recently awarded the Golden Mask for his work in *The Passenger*. [...]

[...] All in all, the traditional feel of the performance caused no harm to the enlightenment enter-

prise of the Ekaterinburg artists, who are the first to tackle *The Greek Passion* in Russia. The peasants are dressed in folk costumes, the refugees in rags, perhaps in reference to the Gospels, the heroes of the Passion mystery are in Biblical garb. The heroes' familiarity occasionally worked as a useful aid, a kind of bridge to comprehension. The scene in the pub was reminiscent of the famous tavern scene in Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Only a deaf man would not hear the nod to Musorgsky's "Bread, bread! Give to the hungry!" in the refugees' chorus. The refugees' backstage appearance with the Catholic prayer of Kyrie Eleison was like a scenic citation of the present-day prayer chorales of MusicAeterna from Perm. These prayers are well-remembered by last year's audiences both from the Diaghilev Festival and from Salzburg. [...]

[...] The main idea we are to appreciate in *The Greek Passion* is the repetition of betrayal and the non-repetition of their personal condemnation. The idea paradoxically allows the directors to distance themselves from reality while not allowing for any falseness or dishonesty on the side of the actors. The vocalists of the Ekaterinburg Opera solve this problem excellently. The hypocritical boorishness of Father Grigoris (Alexander

Krasnov) is confronted with the manly suffering of Father Fotis (Mikhail Korobeynikov). The rascally provocations of Katerina/Mary Magdalene (superbly played by Natalya Karlovova) resonate with the lyrical force of Lenio, the bride-to-be of Manolios (Olga Tyenyakovova). And of course, if the theatre did not have a Christ so virtuously sung and enacted by Yevgeniy Kryukov, the Passion could hardly be called a noteworthy achievement. [...]

[...] Now, as the triptych of uncommon 20th-century operas in Ekaterinburg is complete, we can congratulate the theatre director Andrey Shishkin on the feat, which he began in 2012 with *Satyagraha*, which cost him 6 years of his life, and which has now given potent arguments to proponents of so-called non-repertoire operas and 20th-century world heritage music alleged to be unappealing to the Russian audience. Well then – the heritage is appealing, and non-repertoire operas are necessary, if they are assembled with the idea of making people better or at least pointing them in the right direction. Ekaterinburg now offers a choice from three operas depicting the life of the non-violent Indian peacemaker Mahatma Gandhi (*Satyagraha*), the concentration camp prisoner Zofia Posmysz (*The Passenger*), and Christ Recrucified in the Greek shepherd Manolios (*The Greek Passion*). Whoever

ekaterinburg

of tradition, because until now *Ariane* has been the only Martinů opera to be put on in Russia; Ekaterinburg's production of *The Greek Passion* is therefore the first time the opera has been seen in Russia. The American director and set designer Thaddeus Strassberger was involved in both of the award-winning Ekaterinburg productions and interprets Martinů's opera in the context of local religious and cultural traditions, relying on the

familiarity of such concepts to local audiences. *The Greek Passion* (being played in its first, London, version) has met with enthusiastic responses.

In the program, the director writes of the influence of Greece, of its marble and the omnipresent white surfaces of its buildings. On the stage we see a marble floor, wooden beams and white "stone" walls (on which can be projected anything from a church to a landscape). Interior and

exterior scenes can then be easily depicted within a single performance space. At the outset, the priest Grigoris in the village of Lykovrissi assigns the roles for the Easter Passion play: the shepherd Manolios has to portray Christ, the widow Kateřina will play Mary Magdalen, while her suitor Panait will become Judas Iscariot. In the Ekaterinburg production, events from the villagers' lives, their preparations for the Passion play and the play itself all merge together. The sharpness of the conflicts is thereby diminished – the production does not make villains of the plotters, not does it make heroes of those who help the refugees establish a new home after their village was plundered by the Turks. There is no pathos – neither in the musical interpretation, nor on the stage. The villagers simply prepare for a celebration, gather around Manolios, dance at a wedding. That is just how it is in life, people choose how to behave from day to day, whom to marry, whether to become embroiled in schemes or instead show a generosity of spirit. Manolios is in the end murdered. But is he really murdered? Or was it in fact the death of Christ, as part of the Passion play? Even before the last sounds of the opera have died away, the cast have all gathered together on the proscenium to receive their applause – the priests Grigoris and Fotis, Manolios, Panait, happily side by side. The Ekaterinburg production certainly does not end tragically. Instead, it has a feeling of liberation. ■

Translated by Michael Crump

PHOTOS BY ELENA LEKHOVA



finds this important should set out to the Urals to Ekaterinburg. [...]

www.business-gazeta.ru
Biznyes online, 24 April 2018

Links of one chain. Good and evil, birth and death in *The Greek Passion* of Bohuslav Martinů

/Ekaterina Biriukova

[...] This story may be told with utterly divergent accents. The American Thaddeus Strassberger, who has already made a name for himself with the operas *Satyagraha* and *The Passenger* (direction, stage design, lighting), seems to narrate it with the utmost simplicity, as if it was not art theatre but rather a folk play. But the constant alternation of good and evil on the backdrop of delicate ethnic elements (the costumes by British artist Kevin Knight are especially good) reveals the director's stance. It is not about who is right and who is wrong, everyone is worthy of compassion, even Judas is needed for the story to continue. Similarly to how at the end of *The Passenger*, the director put Marta opposite her prison guard from Auschwitz, Lisa Franz, the final bars of the *Passion* strike a conciliatory tone as all the protagonists of the folk play come together on stage. Both of the feuding

priests are there, Manolios in a bloodied shroud and wreath of thorns, and his former bride, who ends up happily marrying a normal man. [...]

www.colta.ru/articles/music_classic/17905
COLTA.RU, 23 April 2018

Not too distant places. *The Greek Passion* performed in Ekaterinburg

/Anna Galaida

[...] The contemporary relevance of the opera in Ekaterinburg was highlighted by the refusal to perform the piece in English, the language in which Martinů composed the opera, even though the Russian translation made the already difficult work of the soloists and choir even more complicated. Like the first two parts of the Ural trilogy, *The Greek Passion* was entrusted to the director and stage designer Thaddeus Strassberger and the Slovak conductor Oliver von Dohnányi. They predictably chose the path of enlightenment, which was presaged in the operas *Satyagraha* and *The Passenger*, with the aim to place the opera in a Russian context and make it as broadly accessible as possible.

The two artists, who are long-time collaborators, did not attempt to place the *Passion* into the

present-day context, nor did they search for a contemporary mode of theatrical expression for the work. Von Dohnányi emphasises the Slavic foundation of Martinů's music together with the French influence of melodic embellishments and rich instrumentation. Strassberger responds with an affectionate reproduction of rural and ecclesiastical life, dancing, rituals, decorations. He asks pressing questions without trying to answer them himself, but he does everything he can to make the audience live and breathe the village life in those two and a half hours. This is facilitated by the acting, which is brilliant in the first cast (Manolios – Yevgeniy Kryukov, Katerina – Natalya Karlova, Fotis – Mikhail Korobeynikov, Jannakos – Vladimir Chebryak) and firmly united in the second. Their efforts have given this play about faith a passion that is reminiscent of the genre of folk mystery and that elevates every member of the audience to role of co-creator. [...]

www.rg.ru
Rositskaya gazeta, 22 April 2018

Translated by Adam Prentis

...with oliver von dohnányi

"I feel that we can confidently

Oliver von Dohnányi talks to Aleš Březina about the production of Martinů's *Greek Passion* at the Ural opera in Ekaterinburg.

Aleš Březina · How did you become involved with the Ural State Opera in Ekaterinburg? Would you describe this opera house for us?

Oliver von Dohnányi · I first came to Ekaterinburg as a guest conductor. In 2014 I was invited to work on the opera *Satyagraha* by Philip Glass. The production was successful and they offered me the chief conductor's post as a result of this co-operation. As chief conductor I have a big say in the choice of repertoire. I also look out for new productions together with our general manager who, as the head of the company, is responsible for absolutely everything. It is my pleasant duty to conduct all the new operatic productions. We have two new opera and three new ballet productions every year – it would be inadvisable to have more than that, because we have a very extensive permanent repertoire.

AB · I think that our readers probably know of the Mariinsky theatre in St Petersburg and the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, but not everyone is familiar with the system of state theatres in Russia. Could you tell us something about the history of this theatre, why it is a state theatre and what that means in practice?

OD · This year our theatre celebrated the 106th anniversary of its founding, which shows that Ekaterinburg has an operatic tradition going back many years. During the Soviet era, all theatres were state theatres though since then some cities, like Moscow or St Petersburg, have acquired their own municipal theatres. Ours is a state theatre, which means that it falls directly under the control of Moscow, not of our local regional government. We suffer a bit as a result, because the main budget in Russia is divided between three regions: Moscow, St Petersburg and the rest of the country, which is where we fit in. We are governed by the Central Ministry of Culture. Our region does have its own ministry of culture, but we get little in the way of money or attention from there.

We are always on the lookout for unusual and interesting operas. Some time ago, for instance, I suggested a few things that I considered interesting. From the many operas we discussed, we eventually chose *The Passenger* by Mieczysław Weinberg, which had never before been staged in Russia. I knew it not only from its world premiere staging at the Bregenz Festival in 2010, but from a subsequent production in Karlsruhe. We chose it not only for its inherent strengths but because Weinberg – a pupil, protégé and friend of Shostakovich – had been utterly neglected since his death. *The Passenger* had been performed only once in Russia, and even then it was a concert performance with piano accompaniment. And our choice was a good one: as soon as we announced it, the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow reacted by scheduling Weinberg's second opera, *The Idiot*. I told Valery Gergiev about this and, a month after our meeting, he put *The Idiot* onto the program of the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, and the Bolshoi Theatre finally decided to hold a large conference about Mieczysław Weinberg. Among those invited were David Pountney, the director of the world premiere of *The Passenger* in Bregenz, and our theatre, which had the great honour of presenting this opera on the Bolshoi stage. A year later we returned to the Bolshoi with the same production at the invitation of the *Golden Mask* Festival – the most important theatre festival in Russia. The festival's team of experts, which closely follows every sort of activity in Russian opera, nominated us for the highest theatre award in four main categories. Two of those nominations resulted in our carrying off that very special trophy – the *Golden Mask* award. In the meantime we have of course continued staging classic works like *Rusalka*, in the production of Tomáš Pilař, with a team exclusively from the Czech Republic (it was sung in Czech on this occasion, naturally). We also did a sci-fi version of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, sung in German but with dialogue in the sort of Russian slang



Oliver von Dohnányi

that young people speak today. We had intended to attract young people to the theatre and we succeeded – that production is very popular with teenagers.

AB · Is Dvořák's *Rusalka* considered a classic in Russia?

OD · Yes. The Mariinsky theatre has a production currently on its roster, in Czech. I have not seen it, so I can't tell you anything more about it. *Rusalka* was once given in Ekaterinburg too, although it was ten years ago and in Russian. Many people here still remember it and are glad that we have chosen to do a new production. When I thought about what else we could do, Bohuslav Martinů's *Greek Passion* occurred to me. We gave the Russian premiere of that opera too. Martinů is not very well known here yet. As far as I know, only his *Ariane* had been put on here, at the theatre of the Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Music Academy.

show this production anywhere."

AB · *Ariane* is a chamber opera using just a few singers and a small orchestra, and so I was surprised that you chose *The Greek Passion*, one of Martinů's most difficult and demanding operas, requiring a large cast.

OD · Well, if we are the best theatre, we must play the most difficult things! But seriously – at any event we are one of the most progressive theatres and currently have one of the largest followings.

AB · Why, after the operas *Satyagraha* and *The Passenger* did you, in your third season as chief conductor of the Ural opera, choose Martinů's *Greek Passion*?

OD · We wanted to find an opera that would address a current theme – that would portray something which happened in the past, which still occurs in our time and may well be important in the future. *The Greek Passion* is really the continuation and culmination of a loose trilogy. The theme of Glass' *Satyagraha* is peace and the capacity of one individual to influence large numbers of people, a whole state or society. That individual is Mahatma Gandhi, who brought the British Empire in India to its knees by non-violent means, and who, in the same manner, managed to save Indians in the Republic of South Africa from the widespread



The Greek Passion in Ekaterinburg, 2018

tendency of the English to humiliate them, to treat them like slaves, or fourth-class citizens. Gandhi, who had studied law in Britain, took a stand against a whole empire and won. But in the opera there are references to Martin Luther King and other people who intervened in the course of history and brought about changes which had previously seemed impossible.

Weinberg's *Passenger* deals with the problems of those who endured the hell of the concentration camps. But it also looks at the problem from the other side, for instance from the point of view of a female guard, who tried to return to a normal life after the war. But because one of her prisoners had also survived the war, she could not carry on in the way she had imagined. The most important idea in the opera is a motto from the French poet Paul Éluard: "If the echo of their voices disappears, then we will all die." Even this is a contemporary theme – after all, it is not that long ago that people in Europe once again found themselves caught up in a war, with executions, the digging of mass graves and so on.

The Greek Passion deals not only with a conflict between two representatives of the church, but above all with the struggle between good and evil within each of us. In the opera, events play out which are almost a hundred years old, but we can still see the same things happening around us. Whether it's in Syria or elsewhere, masses of forced refugees are dying on the borders of Europe right now. That's why we chose Martinů's *Greek Passion*. I decided on the first "London" version, which of course has a libretto in English only. A production in English would have been difficult to understand and



The Greek Passion in Ekaterinburg, 2018

not very effective, so we had the libretto translated into Russian.

Ever since I took up my appointment at the Ural opera I have striven to make Ekaterinburg a centre for contemporary opera, for contemporary creativity. We chose this direction because traditional repertoire operas like *La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, *Aida* and so on, though excellent and interesting in their own right, would probably not receive the widest publicity or arouse the interest of journalists, critics and so on, neither here in Russia, nor abroad. But by putting on operas which have never been performed in Russia and which scarcely anyone knows, we can, at a stroke, introduce our listeners to a figure like Mieczysław Weinberg – Russia had almost forgotten him, yet all of a sudden there's this huge event and all Russia is talking about it. Our repertoire choices have met with critical approval; we received two *Golden Mask* awards for *Satyagraha* (one of them being a special critics' prize). Our success signals a fundamental change in attitude, since these awards used to be won by the main theatres in Moscow and St Petersburg, occasionally in Novosibirsk and Perm, but never by anyone else.

AB · Two of the three composers we have mentioned are known as composers of film music. They did not make a distinction between "high" and "low" art and showed equal commitment to both genres. Does that strike you as a complete coincidence, or do you see a more general tendency at work here, something typical of a less elitist understanding of contemporary music?

OD · When I was a student, I had great respect for the words of my professor, Alois Klíma. On one occasion I was considering an offer to conduct something in a more popular genre and I asked for his advice. He told me: "If a conductor wants to do something properly and learn something, he can conduct a little folk band or whatever he wants, as long as he is constantly learning and working in earnest." The same applies to composers – if they write excellent film music, there is no reason for it to be considered as something of less value. On the contrary, I have a high regard for composers who can write really good film music.

Today there is a huge demand for this sort of music and listeners enjoy it, so why shouldn't a truly fine composer devote some of his energies towards it? This applies to Weinberg, who wrote music for the film *The Cranes are Flying*, as well as for the Russian version of *Winnie the Pooh* and other films for children.

AB · In Russia, Martinů is definitely the least well-known of these three composers – the public is aware of Glass probably because of his films, and although Weinberg was half forgotten, he did after all live in Russia and was apparently the closest friend of Dmitri Shostakovich, who thought highly of his music and did what he could to promote it.

occasions and managed to engage him to perform the work. Unfortunately he then broke a finger, so that we could not give the performance on the original date, though we still have plans to perform it. Next spring we are hosting a composers' symposium on the theme of contemporary opera and I want to invite some of the leading operatic composers. The conference will be accompanied by a series of concerts, and Bashmet's account of the viola concerto could perhaps at last be heard in one of those concerts.

AB · How do you think the perception of Martinů in Russia has changed after the successful premiere of *The Greek Passion*?



OD · Several very important artists, such as Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, or David Oistrakh, have tried to champion Martinů's music in Russia, but so far no-one has had much success. Right now I think that Martinů's status – around the world, not just in Russia – is like that of Janáček before Charles Mackerras took up his cause. We should now be trying to play as much of his music as possible – that's my opinion. As part of the preparations for the premiere of *The Greek Passion*, I myself conducted a concert in our theatre which included the Fourth Symphony and the cantata *Kytice* (*Bouquet of Flowers*). I originally planned to include the *Rhapsody Concerto* for viola and orchestra with Juri Bashmet as soloist. But although he knew of Martinů as a composer, he did not know the viola concerto. I sent him the music, consulted with him on several

OD · I spoke with many people after the first night and the audience was basically divided into two halves. The people in one group were surprised by what they had heard; they had expected something different and were caught unawares. People in the other group were utterly enthusiastic and fell in love with the opera. I came across varying opinions – for instance, that Martinů often introduces some beautiful musical idea but then abandons it, without development; or that in his works something beautiful will suddenly emerge from a dramatic situation, only to be forgotten again after a short interval. I, on the other hand, consider this to be a part of his musical personality, a characteristic feature of his style. He offers you a little morsel of something, lets you acquire a taste for it, then takes it back and says "Wait a bit, now I will let you enjoy

another bit, then I'll withdraw it again and say No, not yet." In this way he arouses the curiosity of the listener and increases desire, just as happens in real life – it's a kind of flirtation, almost.

AB · I personally consider that Martinů's struggle to achieve a non-linear narrative in his stage works (which marks him out from, for instance, Richard Strauss or Puccini) is one of the most modern traits of his output. He was one of the first composers to realise that contemporary music doesn't just mean new combinations of notes but also new ways of presenting the drama, so that spoken and sung words have equal value, a single instrument can be just as effective as a passage for the full orchestra and no motif is exploited to the maximum. And it seems to me that it is, in its own way, a very original rethinking of that remarkable concision that we find in the works of Janáček. But it places much greater demands upon the conductor.

OD · Of course it is much more difficult for the conductor, who must be constantly on his mettle. His biggest task is to negotiate the fundamental changes that can take place every few bars. I had an interesting question from one of the journalists, who asked whether I intended to present the second version of *The Greek Passion* sometime. He thought it would be interesting to record both versions. But I think that it's a question of one or the other. For those who love long-breathed melodies, singing from start to finish, the second (Zurich) version is better. Those who see opera chiefly as a kind of musical theatre prefer the original London version.

AB · It's clear to see that you developed the whole concept of the production of *The Greek Passion* in collaboration with director and set designer Tadeusz Strassberger. You both emphasised the dramatic qualities of the music and the text. You often chose swift tempi, despite the numerous pastoral motifs that the score contains, in a way that brought out the modernity of the music and propelled the drama towards its catastrophic conclusion.

OD · We concentrated on violent contrasts and deep emotions, starkly portrayed on the stage. The whole opera is a drama, a great tragedy revolving around human relationships and death. Russians are well known for their great emotional depth and that's why this concept spoke so clearly to them. I feel that this was



From the left: Aleš Březina, Marek A. Havlíček and Oliver Dohnányi at the Press Conference

entirely appropriate and I can't imagine that a more sober performance would have suited a Russian audience better. The one request Tadeusz made of me was a slower tempo right at the end of the opera, because he wanted the ending to open out into a greater sense of calm and form a sort of anticlimax.

AB · At the premiere I was fascinated by the extent to which the main performers identified with their characters. During the curtain calls, they were still inhabiting their stage roles a good five minutes after the performance had finished and I think that this helped the premiere to be such a success. Was it a lot of work to achieve this?

OD · Yes indeed, and I must say that Tadeusz did a great job and that they all immersed themselves entirely in the study of *The Greek Passion*. The purely musical preparation lasted over a year and the rehearsals – three periods daily – more than two months. There is no point in mounting such a production half-heartedly, it just can't be done. It's all or nothing.

AB · *The Greek Passion* at the Ural Opera had three singers allocated to each of the lead roles, which is very unusual. What advantages does it bring?

OD · The main advantage is that we don't have to change the performance when someone falls ill or is doing a guest appearance abroad, because finding an understudy for this opera, and especially for this production of it, would be impossible. Even an understudy with a thorough knowledge of the musical and linguistic (i.e. Russian) aspects of the role would be com-

pletely lost here without a knowledge of the production concept. We always allocate each role to at least three soloists. Partly because we have a large number of soloists available within our own ensemble, and partly because they are so good, that it would be hard to decide whom to cast in a new production and whom to leave out. With our total of just two new productions per year, problems would also arise if we left out a certain soloist. He or she would then be without new work for half the year and that is not at all desirable. Furthermore, with these more difficult contemporary operas it can sometimes happen that one of our chosen performers is unable to master his or her part in time, but we are not saddled with the problem of deciding who should take over. If by the end we have only two singers covering a role, that's not so bad. But at the moment we have three and that is good.

AB · Would you like to take this production to somewhere else outside Ekaterinburg, maybe perhaps even outside Russia?

OD · I imagine that we will perform it at the Bolshoi and Mariinsky theatres and of course I would love to transfer it to Prague – it would be wonderful if we could manage to do it. We will certainly be offering it to other theatres abroad and I feel that we can confidently show this production anywhere. ■

Translated by Michael Crump

PHOTOS (THE GREEK PASSION) BY ELENA LEKHOVA

a seventy-year tradition of performing bohuslav martinů's

/ TEREZA OSMANČIKOVÁ

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ'S operatic output did not reach the stage of the National Theatre in Ostrava until after the Second World War. At the very beginning of 1948 – on the 9 January – the radio opera *Comedy on the Bridge* (from 1935) was first heard there, in the very first staged production of what is now the most often-performed of Martinů's operas. Since then, the National Theatre of Moravia and Silesia (to give it its full title) has presented a total of ten Martinů operas, mounting two different productions of two of them. In the 2018–19 season, one of Martinů's supreme operatic masterpieces – *Juliette* – will be presented, the first performance being in April 2019.

Bohuslav Martinů visited Ostrava only once, at the age of thirty. He had been a rank-and-file member of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra since the autumn of 1920 and in the following year went with the orchestra on a tour of Czech municipalities. The resulting stay at Ostrava lasted from the 6 to the 9 May 1921. Although many years would pass before Ostrava became acquainted with Martinů's operatic works, its tradition of interpreting these works is now as strong as any in the country.

The conductor Jaroslav Vogel had been interested in including a Martinů opera in Ostrava's repertoire, even before his appointment as chief conductor there in 1927. He approached Martinů, then living in Paris, and Martinů revealed that he had just promised his new comic opera *The Soldier and the Dancer* to the theatre in Brno. He wrote back to Vogel: "I think it would interest you, because it has been conceived as a sort of modern Czech revue, very gratifying to put on, yet not too expensive to produce. The orchestra is small and, furthermore, it makes a very amusing theatre piece." In the event, Ostrava audiences had to wait a full twenty years more to hear a Martinů opera, when the one-act *Comedy on the Bridge* was included in the repertoire of the Municipal Theatre on the 9 January 1948. This opera had been composed on commission from Czech radio, which broadcast the work just once on the 18 March 1937, in a live performance conducted by Otakar Jeremiáš. The composer fashioned his libretto from the play of the same name by Václav Kliment Klicpera and right from the start had felt that the work could successfully be transferred to the stage. The opening night in Ostrava was the first time such a staging had been attempted, and

since then the work has ranked among the most popular of twentieth-century Czech operas, not only on its home soil but around the world. The Ostrava production (with František Jílek conducting, Osvald Albín directing, and with set designs by Miroslav Cygan), formed part of a triple bill with the one-act opera *The Zvíkov Imp* by Vítězslav Novák and a ballet based on Leoš Janáček's *Lachian Dances*. This production ran until the 10 April 1948, chalking up a commendable eighteen performances during those three months. *Comedy on the Bridge* gained worldwide renown, when a television broadcast by NBC resulted in a New York critics' prize for the best chamber opera of 1951. It was successfully revived at Ostrava after a 30-year interval, this time directed by Květa Ondráková, with sets by Vladimír Šrámek and costumes by Alexej Babraj.

Jaroslav Vogel himself informed Martinů of the Ostrava premiere in 1948 and received a reply from the composer's New York address, dated the 25 May 1948:

Dear friend

*Cordial thanks for the letter and reviews as well as your good wishes. I'm very happy that you have taken up my little comedy and am sure that it can work well on stage. From the reviews I can tell that the performance was excellent, as was the reception given to the work. I'm delighted that my work gave you a moment's diversion and thank you for including it in your repertoire. My only regret is that I am still so far away and that I could not be with you all. I'd like at the same time to answer the theatre's letter regarding royalties. Please send them to my brother's address: František Martinů, Na svépomoci 182, Polička. I also draw your attention on this occasion to another comedy, *Divadlo za branou*, which is a sort of Czech commedia dell'arte, which has been almost forgotten in Czechoslovakia despite the splendid success it had in Brno. The score and*



The Marriage (1971) – Drahomíra Drobková (Fjokla), Alena Havlicová (Arina), Jitka Kovaříková (Agafja)

PHOTO BY FRANTIŠEK KRASL

orchestral material are at the municipal theatre in Brno and I'm sure they would let you have them on loan.

With most cordial greetings, yours B. Martinů.

Vogel did not take up the offer (*Theatre Behind the Gate* was not staged at Ostrava until the year 2000) and another 21 years would elapse before Ostrava would hear another Martinů opera.

The Greek Passion was first presented in Ostrava in 1969, when it not only launched the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Czech theatre in Ostrava but was taken by the company on tour to Italy in February 1969. As the theatrical poster proclaimed – Ostrava opera was going to Italy with an out-and-out novelty for Parma! Under the stewardship of conductor Jiří Pinkas and director Ilja Hylas, this tragic opera operated on two levels

operas at ostrava



The Greek Passion (1969) – Jiří Herold (*Fotis*)

PHOTO BY FRANTIŠEK KRASL

simultaneously – the stylized, almost Brechtian scenes and the melodramatic elements of the romantic story complemented each other most ingeniously. Hylas and his set-designer Otakar Schindler were keen to reflect the intellectual arguments of the opera in the way that they staged it. They drew out the parallels between the fate of a shepherd from a Greek village in the 1920s and the Biblical martyrdom of Christ. The stage was dominated by a large table, a sort of reference to the Last Supper. Manolios, who was sent to his death by the fanatical crowd, was crucified on the stage and taken down from the cross just as Jesus was. The whole production made constant references to Biblical scenes from the life of Christ, which neither the Brno production (3 March 1962, directed by Oskar Linhart) nor that of Prague (directed by Václav Kašík, 10 March 1967) had incorporated, even though such references had been the composer's intention all along.

Two more stage works of Martinů were combined in a double bill at Ostrava two years after *The Greek Passion* opened – the comic opera *The Marriage* (director Miroslav Nekvasil) and the short ballet *Revolt* (with direction, choreography, costumes and set designs all by Emerich Gabzdyl). The satirical *Marriage* (1951) was originally composed for New York television, which screened the first performance. A year later, it was presented

on stage in Hamburg. The popularity of Martinů's one-acters at Ostrava continued in 1976, where another triple bill saw the conversational opera *Alexander bis*, directed by Miloslav Nekvasil, staged alongside *The Bashful Casanova* by Václav Felix and *Swansong* by Jiří Pauer. Martinů's opera is set to a French text by André Wurmser and was written for the Paris World Exhibition in 1937,



Alexander bis (1976) – Věra Nováková (*Armanda*), Ladislav Malínek (*Oskar*)

PHOTO BY FRANTIŠEK KRASL

a year which also saw the creation of his greatest opera *Juliette* (or *The Key to Dreams*).

The production of Martinů's first opera *The Soldier and the Dancer* had to wait until 1990, the 100th anniversary of his birth. Directed by Miroslav Nekvasil and conducted by Jan Šrubař, it was intended not just for Ostrava audiences, but also for the Prague Spring international music festival. In that anniversary year, special events were laid on by several institutions as Prague Spring featured Martinů's complete operatic output. The Ostrava production of *The Soldier and the Dancer* was only the third time that the opera had ever been mounted (after Brno in 1927 and Olomouc in 1966, despite the fact that it is a fine opera packed with witty and entertaining music). The Ostrava "opera buffa" performance of this work, full of inspired gags, dance rhythms, jazzy melodies, cartoon-style chases and the original's male striptease made this a theatrically revolutionary production (even though such a thing seems almost impossible, given the audacious character of the original work).

In the same year, the director Miloslav Nekvasil tried to make Martinů's operas more accessible to children when, as part of the series *Opera for Children*, he staged *The Voice of the Forest* (originally another radio opera, set to a libretto by the poet Vítězslav Nezval).

Like the opera *The Voice of the Forest*, the opera *Theatre Behind the Gate* belongs to a tradition of

folk musical theatre. It was first produced in Ostrava in the year 2000. In his comments on how to stage the opera, Martinů suggested that the players need not be overly concerned with sticking to the original text, but should take the dramatic requirements of each scene as their starting point. It was in this spirit that Michael Tarant, who until then had directed plays rather than operas, set about his task. He abandoned traditional operatic acting styles in favour of

their treatment by two leading Czech composers, but were made to share a single set design divided by a dark gangway. The director Rocc (born Roc Rapp) brought a post-modern sensibility to these two Czech one-acters, and he was also responsible for the set and costume designs. The setting of *Ariane* was updated to a coastal summer resort at which Theseus' sailors arrive as though they were tourists. Theseus himself appeared as a businessman, by whom Ariane is dazzled.

Martinů often demonstrated how close Italian subjects were to his heart. He had fallen in love with the country back in the 1920s when on tour there with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. Even at that time, he had been interested in Goldoni's play *La locandiera* (*The Innkeeper's Wife*), fashioning an Italian libretto from it, yet completing the score only in 1954. "I am writing to an

and the first time that the score had ever been performed in its entirety. The world premiere of this opera had occurred in Brno in 1971, a full 12 years after the composer's death, and it was produced for a second time in 1990 at the National Theatre in Prague.

"I shall do the whole thing as though it were a film" declared Martinů in 1929 and, under the influence of its jazzy high spirits, scored the work in unorthodox fashion for a standard symphony orchestra augmented by piano, saxophones, flexatone, banjo and accordion. Director Jiří Nekvasil and set designer Daniel Dvořák respected Martinů's intention of blending the media of opera and film together, using contemporary expressive and technical resources to achieve the effect. In the production of this work, which is a multi-layered "play within a play", the video sequences were permeated with live outside broadcast pictures, speeded-up clips and stylized subtitles. Czech radio oversaw the recording of this opera (the only existing professional recording of the complete work).

In the last two decades, the operas of Bohuslav Martinů have become more and more frequent on the Ostrava stage. Work on *Juliette* will begin right at the start of the 2018–19 season, with the opening night in the spring of 2019 in a production by the SKUTR theatre group. In the final balance, from the total of 16 completed Martinů operas, only five remain to be given at the National Theatre of Moravia and Silesia. The theatre's long-term plans include the one-act operas *Tears of the Knife*, *What Men Live By* and *Mariken of Nimégue*, the full-length opera *The Plays of Mary* and the first version of *The Greek Passion* (assuming one regards the one-act *Mariken of Nimégue* and the first version of *The Greek Passion* as two autonomous works).

For the sake of completeness, it is appropriate to mention the Martinů ballets that the National Theatre of Moravia and Silesia has put on. In total, there have been three ballets as well as a dance adaptation of one of the composer's symphonic works. In 1960, the choral ballet *Špalíček* was given by the Ostrava State Theatre with choreography by Emerich Gabzdyl. In 1966, Martinů's symphonic triptych *The Parables* was adapted as a ballet and given alongside *The Spider's Feast* by Albert Roussel and *The Rat-catcher* by Pavel Bořkovec, with scenery by Vladimír Šrámek and costumes by Jan Skalický. In 1971, Emerich Gabzdyl took on the choreographic and production duties for the ballet *Revolt*, given under the title *The Revolt of the Notes*. Finally, in 2013, the ballet company worked on the one-act ballet *The Strangler* (with choreography by Natasha something) which was presented together with Pavel Šmok and Jiří Kylián's choreography of chamber music by Smetana and Janáček under the umbrella title "Returning home." ■

Translated by Michael Crump



Ariane (2010) – Martin Bárta (*Théseus*)

PHOTO BY MARTIN POPELÁŘ

dance and acrobatic routines, under the guidance of dance master Igor Vejsada. This miscellany of various improvised scenes and comic situations, derived from the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, yet set in a typically Czech environment with Czech and Moravian folk poetry, was conducted by the Italian Paolo Gatto. Director Michael Tarant was also responsible for production of the Zurich version of *The Greek Passion* in 2003.

While working on *The Greek Passion*, Martinů also composed one of his most admired one-act operas *Ariane*. In June 1958 he wrote the following words in a letter home to Polička: "I am writing a short opera in just one act, as a kind of respite from work on the large opera, *The Greek Passion*, which is giving me a lot of work." The presentation of one-act Martinů operas alongside those of other significant composers is characteristic of the National Theatre of Moravia and Silesia. In this case, the Martinů work was paired with Leoš Janáček's *Šárka*. In this production, the Czech *Šárka* and the Greek Ariadne had in common not only their mythological origins, their feelings of unfulfilled love and

Italian text and things go better that way; Italian is a mellifluous language and it is pleasant to work in it" he wrote in a letter home from Nice in the South of France. Although Ostrava's production of *Mirandolina* (given in 2013 with Jiří Nekvasil directing), was the fourth to appear in the Czech Republic, it was the first time that the opera had been sung there in the original Italian. The set designer Daniel Dvořák transported the action to that playful and colourful decade, the 1960s, and it was this very production which opened the 2014 *Year of Music* festival with a performance at Prague's Estates Theatre. The performance under Marko Ivanović was broadcast to eight other European countries by Radio Vltava through the European Broadcasting Union.

Ostrava witnessed its most recent Martinů opera production in 2015, when *The Three Wishes* (or *The Inconstancy of the Life*) was included in the series *Operatic hits of the 20th Century*, having been deliberately chosen as a musical antithesis to the preceding *Mirandolina*. This was only the third outing for the opera in the Czech Republic

martinů and rybka

/ MONIKA HOLÁ

IN 2017, THE POLIČKA Municipal Museum and Gallery received a unique one-off donation – a comprehensive collection of the original letters which Bohuslav Martinů wrote to his friend and fellow countryman Frank Rybka. Rybka's descendants, now living in America, had decided to donate them to the museum's collections. The documents were presented at a ceremonial occasion hosted by the Czech Embassy in Washington in October 2017, on the anniversary of the formation of the Czechoslovak Republic. In March 2018, the manuscripts were transported to the Republic and entrusted to Polička Museum, where they will become part of an extensive collection of Martinů's writings. The official handover of the documents took place on the 29 March, 2018 at the Bohuslav Martinů Centre in Polička. The Czech Ambassador to the USA, Hynek Kmoníček, and the mayor of Polička, Jaroslav Martinů, both took part in the ceremony. Finally, a public lecture was organized for 23 May, when it was possible to view the original documents.

The Municipal Museum and Gallery of Polička is fortunate to have a unique collection of musical and non-musical autographs of Bohuslav Martinů. For his entire life, Martinů earned a living almost exclusively from composition. The total number of his works is therefore considerable (Halbreich's catalogue lists over 400 works). Furthermore, he spent more than half his life abroad, always remaining in written contact with his family in Polička as well as with a good number of friends around the world. The volume of his correspondence which has been preserved is thus remarkably high in comparison with other writers. This material is now dispersed, quite literally, all around the world in various institutions or in private hands, though the collection in his hometown is, in all probability, the most extensive and comprehensive. The cornerstone of the collection is the material from the estate of the composer's sister Marie, who dutifully preserved her brother's manuscripts at Polička. The collection was then enlarged by the posthumous legacies of his wife Charlotte and of Miloš Šafránek, a longstanding family friend and the author of the first book on Martinů.

The Martinů collection, which comprises some 3600 items, has now been significantly enlarged by a group of original letters which Martinů wrote to his friend Frank Rybka in America. It was his son Frank James Rybka who, together with his siblings, decided to donate the letters to Polička Museum.

This unique collection contains over 100 letters and six postcards sent by Martinů to Rybka, but also has seven letters from other correspondents – from Martinů's sister Marie and from Maja Sacher. It also contains the telegram in which Charlotte informed Frank Rybka of Martinů's death, asking him to pass the information on to the American Press. The correspondence dates from the years



1941 to 1959, quite a long period of time, concluded only by the composer's death.

Who then was Frank Rybka? He was born František Rybka in 1895 at Babice near Zlín, Moravia. The family moved to Vienna to find work, but the father died not long afterwards. Rybka's mother remarried but the marriage was a tempestuous one, full of conflicts which resulted in her fleeing to Brno with her four children. František proved to be a very talented musician and gained admittance to the prestigious Leoš Janáček Organ School. Several of his fellow students went on to have significant careers – especially the composer Břetislav Bakala, with whom he formed a lifelong friendship. His studies did not precede without difficulty, since the family's financial position was not a healthy one. Allegedly, Janáček himself made a financial contribution, which allowed František to complete his studies. Afterwards, František moved went back to live in his native Babice for a while. Here, he attained a position as organist for the local parish but soon there came an offer of work in the USA, which changed his entire life. František made the journey to America and successfully established himself there. He worked not only as an organist but also as a cellist. He married Doris Summers in America and together they raised three children – two sons, Boris and Frank James, and a daughter, Mary Carolyn, returning to the Czechoslovak Republic only as guests.

Martinů probably first got to know Rybka in Paris sometime in the mid-1920s. In 1941, when Martinů and his wife emigrated to New York, where Rybka was then living permanently, they at once got in touch with him. Soon a firm friendship was forged between the two artists – a friendship which endured even when the composer settled in Europe again during the last years of his life.

Martinů mentioned Rybka rather often in letters to his family in Polička, or to Charlotte when they

were apart. These references make it clear that František was a man full of energy, constantly organizing all sorts of different activities for the times that he and Martinů were together.

"Yesterday I went fishing with Frank for the whole afternoon. He caught 28 trout and I just two... In the evenings Frank and I tend to play chess and then I sleep like a log until after nine. We have wonderful breakfasts, occasionally dumplings at dinner, but of course I'm not putting on weight – I walk off most of it..." (letter to Charlotte, dated July 1947). Martinů was a frequent guest at the Rybka household and in a letter to his siblings at Polička he refers to one particular visit at Christmas time: *"We were at the Rybkas' for Christmas. We had a proper goose with cabbage and dumplings and we are going there for turkey at the New Year."* (letter dated 30 December 1955).

Like any composer worth his salt, Martinů expressed his gratitude for all these pleasant occasions at the Rybkas' by dedicating two of his works to them. The piano *Dumka, H 285bis*, written in 1941, was dedicated to Doris Rybka on the occasion of her birthday and in the same year, Martinů dedicated the *Second Cello Sonata, H 286*, to his friend Frank.

The younger Rybkas were also clearly impressed by their meetings with the characterful composer. Frank James, for instance, though his chosen profession was far removed from the musical traditions of his family (he studied at the medical faculty of Cornell University and became a plastic surgeon) has made American readers more familiar with the personality of Bohuslav Martinů in his book *Bohuslav Martinů: the compulsion to compose* (Lanham, Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 2011). ■

Translated by Michael Crump

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