

# VIVA CE

*Classical Music Review  
in Supraphon Recordings*

WINTER 2023

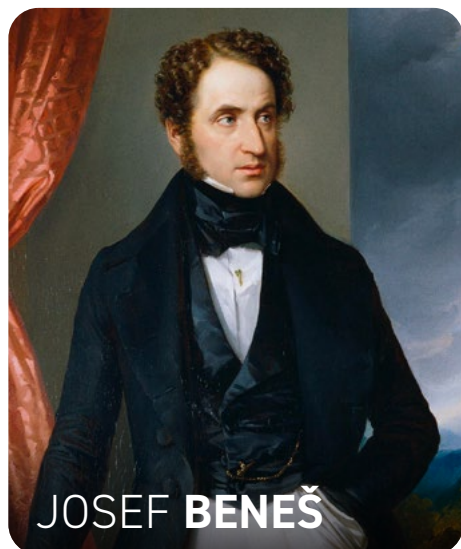




Photo © Vojtěch Havlík

Dear friends,

In this year's first Vivace, we still look back at last autumn and winter in Supraphon's edition plan. Two new recordings dating from that time (Vilém Veverka – Christmas Album and Jiří Slavík – Path of Light) are not dealt with in this issue, for a simple reason: many a reader may find writing about Christmas in February somewhat peculiar. Nonetheless, I would like to say a few words about Jiří Slavík, a new face at Supraphon. He and the Ondráš Military Art Ensemble have created a Christmas album of a calibre we have not heard for a long time. Featuring Moravian folk songs and Slavík's own compositions, it takes us back to the Nativity story, to the mystery of the moment of Jesus' birth, a moment since which we have not been so alone any more. The most recent album this powerful was the composer Luboš Fišer's recording of a cycle of Christmas carols.

During Christmas, my thoughts turned to war-stricken Ukraine more than ever. The last time our country experienced war was about 80 years ago, with the majority of us only knowing it from history books, the eye-witness accounts, films. The life of the composer Miroslav Kabeláč was directly affected by war. He refused to divorce his wife, and would bear the consequences. But in so doing he saved her life. Kabeláč's defiance of evil and his moral integrity also led to his clashing with the subsequent Communist regime, which wanted to silence him. Thus it can be said that his was a difficult life, full of persecution. The question arises of what Kabeláč's music would be like had he not had to face this lifelong stress, that "press in which olives yield the best oil". I personally deem Kabeláč's *Mystery of Time*, featured on a new recording made by Marko Ivanović and the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, released last autumn, an undervalued gem of global 20th-century symphonic music. The forcibility of this dramatically arced 25-minute masterpiece can perhaps only be compared

with that of Maurice Ravel's *Bolero* - when listening to them, you feel something... cosmic. Kabeláč richly deserves our attention. Within further discovery, in March Supraphon will release a new album containing his piano cycles, as performed by Jan Bartoš.

Last autumn was a true season of discovery. The Martinů Quartet completed an album of remarkable quartets by Josef Beneš, about whom – let's admit – most of us hadn't even heard. Roman Válek and Czech Ensemble Baroque continue to discover František Ignác Antonín Tůma's sublime sacred music. When it comes to Adam Václav Michna of Otradovice, we may say we "know" him, yet the soprano Hana Blažíková, a globally renowned Baroque performer, Collegium Marianum and Jana Semerádová present his *Czech Marian Music* with such insight, sensitivity and inspiration as to be revelatory. Read the fascinating sleeve notes and, above all, listen to the music.

In conclusion – as usual – I would like to mention the acclaim Czech albums have gained internationally. The Pavel Haas Quartet's CD featuring Dmitri Shostakovich's string quartets was cited by BBC Radio 3 as a recommended and model recording of the repertoire. That will come as no surprise to those who have heard it. The ensemble's latest album, containing Johannes Brahms's quintets, made with the guest pianist Boris Giltburg and the violist Pavel Nikl, was voted one of Presto Music's Classical Recordings of the Year, and received France's Diapason d'Or and Choc de Classica. The Dvořák Piano Quartet's recording of Schumann's quartets received five Diapason tuning forks, as well as the Choc de Classica recommendation. It's a great joy to see how Czech (and Slovak) musicians succeed amid fierce global competition. And it's a great joy to be a part of it.

Dear music-loving friends, I wish you as peaceful a time as possible and music that reaches out to us.

Matouš Vlčinský



# HANA BLAŽÍKOVÁ CZECH MARIAN MUSIC REVEALING THE PREVIOUSLY OVERLOOKED GRACE AND BEAUTY OF 17TH-CENTURY HYMNS

The renowned Czech soprano and harpist Hana Blažíková has a special penchant for early music. Adored by audiences all over the world, the most prestigious festivals in this domain even condition engagement of the ensembles she collaborates with on her participation. Blažíková is capable of evoking a wide range of emotions. Over the past few years, her voice has adorned numerous Supraphon recordings, made with Collegium Marianum, Hipocondria Ensemble, Tiburtina Ensemble, Capella Regia Praha and Schola Gregoriana Pragensis.

## What do Adam Václav Michna's songs mean to you?

I first encountered Adam Michna's songs at a tender age. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why I have always had an affection for his music, and even feel somewhat sentimental about it today. Back in my childhood, Michna's songs were often played at home at Christmas and Easter, and I myself used to sing them at a village church accompanied on the organ by my grandma, and also as a little soloist with her choir. Later on, as a primary school pupil, I was singing Michna's songs with Pavel Jurkovič and Pavla Sovová. When I was in the third grade, Pavla Sovová rehearsed with us the entire Czech Lute, which our class went on to perform at the church in Bechyně.

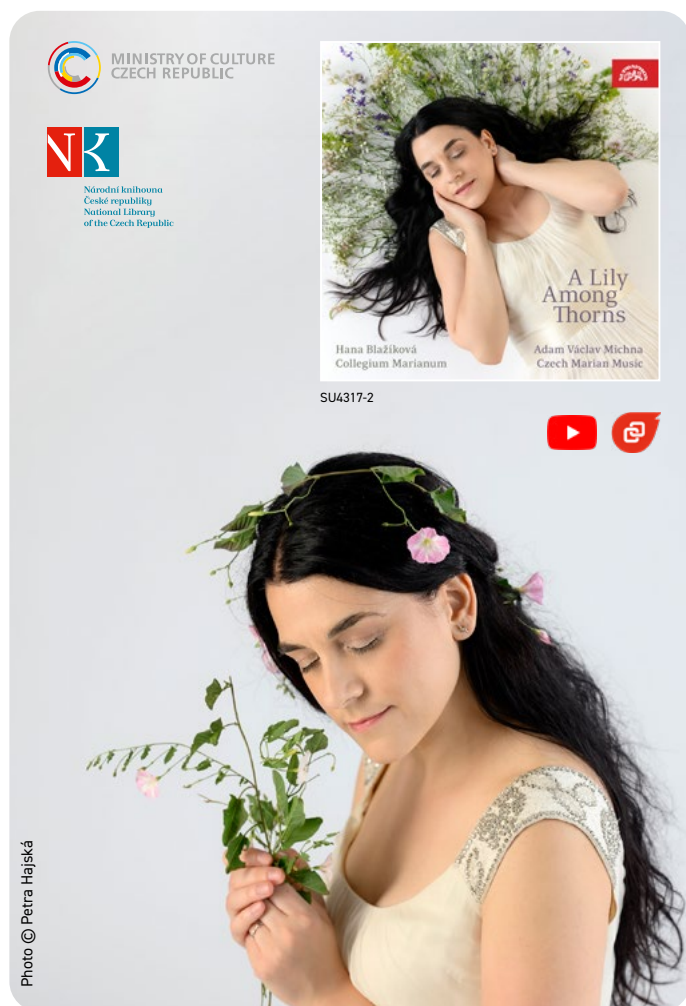
The next time I encountered Michna's pieces was when, by now an adult, I performed them with ensembles specialised in Baroque music. By and large, Michna's works have accompanied me throughout my life, and they have been among my favourite repertoire to this day. I must, however, point out that Michna was not just a composer of songs, for which he is known best (and we should not forget that he was a brilliant poet too!), but also of more challenging liturgical pieces for large groups of musicians. He was one of the greatest early-Baroque composers in Bohemia.

## Why does the album contain pieces by other composers too?

We primarily chose the works by other composers so as to place Michna in a period context, as well as, in part, with the aim to balance vocal numbers with instrumental music, thus allowing the listener to focus fully for a while on the extraordinary art of the Collegium Marianum members. In this respect, I would like to highlight Biber's Sonata No. 1 in D minor, "Annuntiatio", in which the violinist Lenka Torgersen showcases her virtuosity. But all the pieces are beautiful, and without them the recording wouldn't be as special. What is more, all these composers (with the exception of Grandi, whose hymn is the oldest work on the album) were somehow connected with the Czech lands – Biber and Capricornus were born in Bohemia, while Albrici spent his final years in Prague.

## What is working with Collegium Marianum like?

I have performed with Collegium Marianum for longer than with any other ensemble. And I think our collaboration clearly shows it. Jana Semerádová and I understand each other on both a musical and personal level. The programmes of the concerts we give together are tailored to all those involved, and I, as a singer, really cherish our performances. I would term our co-operation as 'family-like' – not just because we know each other so well, but also because my husband Jan Krejča, a theorist, has regularly performed with the ensemble too.



At the end of September, Supraphon released a new album of hers, featuring Czech Marian Music. It draws the listener into the world of poetic hymns praising the Virgin Mary, which formed a significant proportion of 17th-century Czech music. The recording juxtaposes pieces by Adam Václav Michna of Otradovice with works by Alessandro Grandi, Vincenzo Albrici, Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber and Samuel Capricornus, all of them composers who were often in close contact with the Jesuits and drew inspiration from the spirituality practised by the Society of Jesus. Hana Blažíková made the album, titled *A Lily Among Thorns*, with the acclaimed Collegium Marianum ensemble, headed by Jana Semerádová. We talked with Hana Blažíková about the new album shortly before its release.

# MARKO IVANOVIĆ

## ON MILOSLAV KABELÁČ'S THE MYSTERY OF TIME



With his life and work, Miloslav Kabeláč, one of the greatest mid-20th-century Czech composers, foregrounded a highly topical theme: the necessity of not yielding to evil and commitment to humanistic ideals. He manifested both during the Nazi occupation and the time of Communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia. Kabeláč himself wrote about his work: "It sprang from my human and artistic principles and views. Its fate will not depend on me. Only time will verify its value." Kabeláč's music has most definitely stood the test of time.

Supraphon released a new Kabeláč album, made in collaboration with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra and the conductor Marko Ivanović. The album, titled *The Mystery of Time*, links up to the acclaimed complete recording of Kabeláč's symphonies (Supraphon, 2016), thus supplementing the artist's remarkable orchestral discography with further jewels. We talked about Kabeláč's music with the conductor Marko Ivanović.

### What do Miloslav Kabeláč and his music mean to you personally?

I deem Miloslav Kabeláč a truly singular 20th-century composer who has influenced several generations of Czech musicians, an artist whose life and work reflected the tragedy of the time he lived in. He was also remarkable due to having withstood the period political and aesthetic pressures, and remaining unwaveringly true to his creative beliefs, as a result of which all his music comes across as possessing an immense inner integrity. On the other hand, he evidently kept his finger on the pulse of the time, perceiving the trends in Czech and international music development. Consequently, although all his works bore a similar signature, the difference between the aesthetics of his early and late pieces is quite significant.

### What was the most challenging aspect of exploring and rehearsing *The Mystery of Time*?

*The Mystery of Time* is conceived as a single gigantic dramatic arch, which must be built up in terms of tempo and dynamics. Leaving nothing to chance, Kabeláč furnished the score with numerous data and instructions, thus to a certain degree making the conductor's

work easier. While possessing a great potential to enthrall the listener, *The Mystery of Time* places enormous physical challenges upon the orchestra. Accordingly, when rehearsing the piece, the conductor must also apply psychology, so as to persuade the musicians that the enormous effort they expend on the extensive piece is worthwhile, as it is paid back in the form of the audience's enthusiastic response.

### Kabeláč completed his final work, *Metamorphoses II*, just a few weeks before he died. What do you make of the piece?

Over the course of time, Miloslav Kabeláč condensed his musical idiom. His later works attest to his striving to get rid of the "superfluous", to reach the core of the artistic message and convey it to the audience in the simplest manner possible. *Metamorphoses II* is a prime example in this respect. The succinct and terse treatment of the chorale *Lord, Have Mercy On Us* can be considered Kabeláč's epitaph, and it is all the more powerful in comparison with *The Mystery of Time*, written decades earlier.

### How was working on the album with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra?

Excellent. They are absolutely amazing and accommodating, possessing enormous experience with studio recording. What is more, Kabeláč himself worked at Czech Radio in Prague and used to conduct its orchestra. In this light, I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to record his orchestral pieces with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra in particular.

MILOSLAV KABELÁČ  
MYSTERY OF TIME  
HAMLET IMPROVISATION  
REFLECTIONS  
METAMORPHOSIS  
PRAGUE RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
MARKO IVANOVIĆ  
MIROSLAV SEKERA PIANO  
Czech Radio

SU4312-2

MILOSLAV KABELÁČ  
SYMPHONIES COMPLETE  
PRAGUE RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
MARKO IVANOVIĆ

Czech Radio

partner

State Fund of Culture  
of the Czech Republic

Marko Ivanović with an album of Kabeláč's Complete Symphonies, released in 2016

Photo © Martin Kubica



# MARTINŮ QUARTET REDISCOVERED MUSIC BY JOSEF BENEŠ

**Josef Beneš (1795–1873) was primarily referred to in period sources as a virtuoso violinist and distinguished teacher. Born in Batelov (Battelau), a village on the borderline between Bohemia and Moravia, from the age of 19 he lived in Vienna and Ljubljana, and gave concerts across Europe. During his time in Italy, he familiarised himself with Niccolò Paganini and Alessandro Rolla. He held prestigious posts (music director of the Philharmonic Society in Ljubljana, professor of the Music Academy in Vienna, first concertmaster of the Hoftheater).**

Few of his works have survived, with the majority of them being music Beneš wrote for his own solo performances. His final pieces, two string quartets (published in 1865 and 1871, respectively) date from the period when he no longer pursued a career as a soloist, yet all the parts require very dexterous players. Now, 150 years later, the Martinů Quartet, who have rediscovered a number of overlooked works of music (S. Taneyev, P. Eben), are evidently the first to perform the quartets, which definitely do not deserve to fall into oblivion. We talked with the Martinů Quartet cellist Jitka Vlašánková.

## How did this remarkable project come about?

I think that even seemingly hopeless situations can bring along something positive, a case in point being the Covid lockdown. All of a sudden, there was scope to pursue activities I had not found time for previously otherwise. So I re-established contact with a family friend, the violinist František Jaroš, who, decades ago, prepared me for conservatory exams and also taught me French. I asked him whether he could give me French lessons online. Jaroš hails from the village in which Josef Beneš was born, and for some time had intensively explored Beneš's legacy – as a researcher and performer alike. I myself began taking an interest in Beneš's string quartets, ultimately arriving at the conclusion that it is high-quality music that deserves due attention. At the first possible opportunity, the Martinů Quartet got together at a rehearsal and played the bulk of the scores. We agreed that the music possessed a great potential and decided to bring it back to life – to perform, as well as to record it. Subsequently, we proceeded in the usual way – learned the pieces, played them at several concerts, went into the recording studio and put the finishing touches to the album in formal and visual terms.

## How difficult is Beneš's music to perform?

A brilliant violinist of Europe-wide stature, Beneš composed the majority of his pieces for violin accompanied by piano or orchestra, often requiring virtuosity. Accordingly, his string quartets too are quite technically challenging, the first violin parts in particular. Hence, we decided to spread out our forces and, so that the first violinist wouldn't have to carry the complete burden, divide the first violin parts between our two superb violinists, Adéla and Luboš. Beneš drew inspiration from the music of the Viennese Biedermeier era, as well as Rossini and Paganini. The quality of his compositional craft is attested to by the fact that his works were published by renowned companies in Vienna, one of Europe's major music centres. When performing the quartets, we didn't have to "bolster" them, all we needed to do was to employ our musical imagination to the full.

## How do you feel about the new album, containing recordings of pieces the Martinů Quartet are evidently the first to perform in 150 years?

I am really happy that we have managed to add another wonderful stone to the still incomplete mosaic of Czech music history. The album is being released just in time to mark next year's 150th anniversary of Beneš's death. And I am pleased that František Jaroš's all-round and indefatigable support for the project has been rewarded by Supraphon recordings. I feel a warm glow when recalling the fabulous collaboration with all those who participated in the present album's release.



# CZECH ENSEMBLE BAROQUE

## THE SPELLBINDING BAROQUE BEAUTY OF TŮMA'S MUSIC

The first instalment of Czech Ensemble Baroque's series dedicated to František Ignác Antonín Tůma confirmed his position among Europe's major late-Baroque composers. Dating from three different phases of his life, the three pieces featured on the present album – Missa Veni Pater Pauperum, Te Deum and Sinfonia ex C – map Tůma's artistic development. All these three festive pieces, recorded for the very first time, again attest to Tůma's being a composer richly deserving of special attention.

We talked with Roman Válek, Czech Ensemble Baroque's artistic director and conductor.

### How would you describe Tůma's development as an artist?

During Tůma's tenure, the atmosphere in Vienna was comparable with that in other Baroque-era metropolises – Dresden, Venice, Paris, and others. The frequency of music performances, either in churches or at the imperial court, was truly impressive. Such a thriving milieu provided ideal conditions for the young Tůma, who, absorbing the influence of Fux and Caldara, as well as bringing to bear his previous experience in Prague, went on to create a singular style, which earned him general esteem. A crucial role in his artistic development was played by his serving at the imperial court, where he had available a professional vocal-instrumental ensemble, for which he could write music virtually at his own discretion. In this regard, I deem the 1750s to have been the golden era of Tůma's life. His work at the monastery in Geras was undoubtedly affected by living in seclusion after abandoning the excitement of Vienna, yet he could also enjoy creative

freedom and was afforded time to respond to the ascending musical styles. I believe that our albums will convince the listeners that Tůma was an exceptional composer who rounded off and cultivated the late-Baroque sacred style, and served as an inspiration for the great music creators of the incipient Viennese Classicism.

### What was the most difficult aspect of making the album, and what was the most rewarding?

Recording church music entails tackling numerous questions. Where to place the singers and the instrumentalists? How to make a stereo recording in a real space, divided into the concerto group and the ripieni? How to determine the register of a piece that originally reckoned with the sound of a large organ? Sorting out such aspects involves trials and experiments, with the desired objective being to attain as perfect a sound as possible. I was delighted to find out that almost three centuries on Tůma's music works a treat, overwhelming both the performers and the listeners with singular Baroque beauty and powerful energy.



EDITORS: Vladan Drvota, Marek Šulc, Matouš Vičinský, Daniela Bálková, Linda Hružová / translation: Hilma Hearne, Mark Newkirk / graphic design: Marek Šmidrkal

CONTACT: SUPRAPHON a.s., Palackého 740/1, 112 99 Praha 1, tel. +420 221 966 600, e-mail: info@supraphon.com  
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