

VIVA CE

Classical music review in Supraphon recordings

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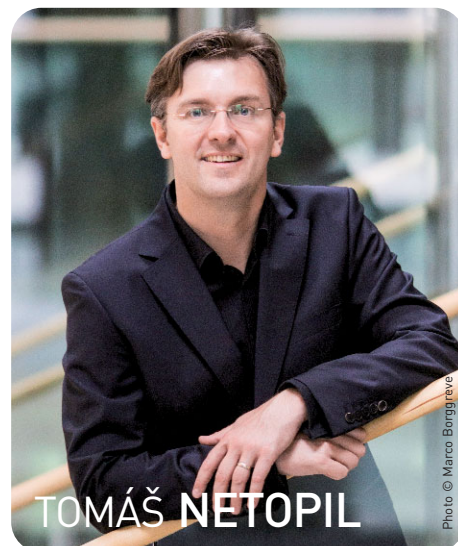
LUKÁŠ VASILEK

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Dear friends,

When looking over the fruits of Supraphon's autumn harvest, I can observe that a number of them have a common denominator, one pertaining to the autumn of life, maturity and reflections on life-long work. I would thus like to highlight a few of our albums, viewed from this very angle of vision.

This year, we have paid special attention to Bohuslav Martinů in particular. Tomáš Netopil deserves merit for an exquisite and highly acclaimed recording (the Sunday Times Album of the Week, for instance), featuring one of the composer's final two operas, *Ariane*, performed with the Essener Philharmoniker and the soprano Simona Šaturová in the title role. Although musically lightened, written in the neo-classical style (in contrast to *The Greek Passion*, which came into being concurrently), the opera does raise the seminal questions of the sense of human life, love, fidelity and personal mission. Martinů's "Bohemian-Moravian Highlands cantatas" (including *The Opening of the Springs*) too were completed during the last years of his life, reflecting the composer's yearning for his homeland, to which he would never return. Perhaps it is this homesickness in which the key to their moving and sheer beauty should be sought. The new recording of the cantatas, re-embracing their initial form, intended by Martinů himself, was made by the Prague Philharmonic Choir, conducted by Lukáš Vasilek.

A few weeks ago, the bass Richard Novák celebrated his 85th birthday. The singer's major opera roles, as well as his beloved vocal repertoire, are recalled on the anniversary 2-CD album, titled "Richard Novák – Portrait", which was released to mark this special occasion.

If I had the unenviable task of designating just one of our recent projects as the "event of the year", then I would most likely choose the recording of the complete symphonies by Miloslav Kabeláč, made by the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Marko Ivanović. I feel gratitude, but also astonishment at the fact that it took such a long time to make this integral album featuring the works

of Kabeláč, the second greatest 20th-century Czech symphonist, only eclipsed by Martinů. The project represents the first large repayment to the man, whose upright posture and unyielding nature made him "inconvenient" during World War II and the Communist regime alike, a human who remained faithful to his principles even when it resulted in his works not being allowed to be performed, paying the price of existential uncertainty and imperilment.

A totally different hindsight is afforded by the unique album of J. S. Bach's complete Brandenburg Concertos, which has been released on CD for the very first time. Following the recent loss of Gustav Leonhardt (1928-2012), this year, on 5 March, Nicolaus Harnoncourt, another of the historically informed early music performance prophets, died at the age of 86. The recordings of the Brandenburg Concertos, made for Supraphon in Vienna in 1950, are the very first to capture, among others, Harnoncourt's and Leonhardt's students, whose life-long enthusiasm for early music was initially nurtured by Josef Mertin, a Bohemia-born, today virtually unknown, Austrian educator, researcher, instrument builder and conductor, who served as the spiritus agens for this singular recording.

The common denominator of several other new Supraphon albums is 18th-century music: the second instalment of the concertos of František Jiránek, dubbed the "Czech Vivaldi" (again the superb Collegium Marianum and soloists!), the premiere recordings of Jan Zach's works (*Musica Florea*) and Franz Xaver Richter's one and only Italian oratorio (*Czech Ensemble Baroque*), and – last but not least – the complete W. A. Mozart horn concertos, as performed by Radek Baborák and his chamber ensemble.

I hope that amid this wide-ranging musical palette you will find the hues most to your liking, which will refine the festive atmosphere of the forthcoming Christmas holidays.

Wishing you all the very best on behalf of the whole of Supraphon

Matouš Vlčinský

LUKÁŠ VASILEK THE PRAGUE PHILHARMONIC CHOIR: THE PATH LEADING TO BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ'S MUSIC IS OFTEN RATHER INTRICATE



Bohuslav Martinů's cantatas have been re-released six decades since their first Supraphon album, made by the Czech Choir and the Czech Philharmonic Children's Choir, led by the chorus master Jan Kühn. The new recording, supported by the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation, meets the highest performance requirements and embraces the composer's original intention. Besides the Prague Philharmonic Choir, conducted by Lukáš Vasilek, it features superlative soloists, the soprano Pavla Vykopalová, the baritone Jiří Brückler, the pianist Ivo Kahánek, as well as the Bennewitz Quartet, the narrator Jaromír Meduna, and other artists.

The new album made by the Prague Philharmonic Choir contains recordings of four Bohuslav Martinů cantatas that form a loose cycle pertaining to the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands. How many times have they been recorded to date?

Several complete recordings had been made previously. The first was created by Jan Kühn, with the Czech Choir and the Czech Philharmonic Children's Choir. Considered the best of them is the album produced by his son, Pavel Kühn, and the Kühn Choir of Prague at the end of the 1980s. The Prague Philharmonic Choir's most recent recording, under the chorus master Jaroslav Brych, was made 15 years ago.

The best-known of the cantatas is The Opening of the Springs, which has been regularly performed by professional ensembles, amateur and children's choirs alike. The new CD contains recordings of another three cantatas: Legend of the Smoke from Potato Tops, Romance of the Dandelions, and Mikeš of the Mountains. How frequently have the pieces been performed at concerts? And are they included in the Prague Philharmonic Choir's standard repertoire?

Yes, they are indeed – we have performed the cantatas quite often.

Nevertheless, owing to their being quite challenging to perform, they do not commonly appear in concert programmes. The best-known and most frequently presented of the cantatas is The Opening of the Springs, simpler than and different from the others, and very popular among the audience. Undoubtedly the most difficult of the four pieces is the Romance of the Dandelions, in which the choir sings 12 minutes a cappella. I would even venture to say that it is one of the most challenging Czech choral compositions there is.

Could you tell us how long it took the Prague Philharmonic Choir to prepare for the recording?

We didn't actually spend that much time preparing ourselves for the recording, as about a year and a half previously we had performed the complete cantatas at the Rudolfinum hall in Prague. And subsequently we had sung some of them on other occasions too, so we were well familiar with them prior to plunging into the actual recording work.

What is it that makes the cantatas so challenging? Is it the vocal-technical aspect or the performance requirements?

I think it relates to both. The higher vocal parts in particular are

► quite extreme in places. Martinů led the voices in a somewhat instrumental way; hence, now and then they are tough to handle for the singers. Moreover, some chords are difficult to adjust and sonically level. Yet when you have negotiated this, the cantatas sound truly wonderful. The performance itself is not easy either. Each of the cantatas is a collage of a huge amount of musical ideas, which have to be somehow interconnected so as to form a logical whole – a daunting task for the performer indeed.

What about the texts the cantatas are set to? The story of The Opening of the Springs is relatively clear and comprehensible. What do the other three cantatas contain and depict?

The most dynamic in this respect is the Legend of the Smoke from Potato Tops. It depicts the story of the Virgin Mary, who descends from the altar at a small country church so as to find her son, which is followed by a number of unique episodes and comical situations. Far more clouded is the story of the shepherd boy in Mikeš of the Mountains, with the plot being not entirely clear at first listen, so it is perhaps advisable to read the printed text. Totally different is the Romance of the Dandelions, in which, I would say, the main role is played by love and the atmosphere in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands in spring and summer. The audience can let themselves be carried away by the splendid music and the tender emotions, merely perceiving the story, which is neither epic nor specific, in the background.

How did Martinů come across Miloslav Bureš's poems?

The two knew each other, both of them were Polička natives, friends. In 1954, Bureš sent a text of his to Martinů abroad and the composer was presently intrigued by the subject. For Martinů, it brought back memories of his childhood, of his native region.

The new recording has been made on the basis of the cantatas' critical edition, which is currently being prepared. How does the new edition differ from the previous versions?

The critical edition is yet to be published – at the present time, it is ready to be issued at Bärenreiter. Therefore, we worked with the original edition, yet we incorporated into it all the revisions suggested by Mr. Vít Zouhar, the excellent editor of the new critical edition. In this "cleaned" version, the cantatas are not diametrically different, but they include modifications in interesting details – the text, melody, rhythm,

harmony, as well as, occasionally, instrumentation and tempo. Some passages, which in the older version come across as rather puzzling, are now utterly logical, far more comprehensive and convincing.

Could you tell us something about the recording process?

The recording was long and gruelling, entailing plenty of intense work. The collaboration with the recording director Milan Puklický and the recording engineer Aleš Dvořák was superb, as they and I shared the same idea of the resulting product's quality. That represented an immense advantage.

The album was recorded at the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague. Was it your first and clear choice?

There are not many venues in Prague in which the Prague Philharmonic Choir could record such acoustically demanding pieces. The Rudolfinum was the best choice, given the number of performers within such a large-scale project.

In addition to the Prague Philharmonic Choir members, the recording features interesting guests. Could you introduce some of them to us?

First and foremost, I would like to mention Pavla Vykopalová, who sings all the soprano solos in all the four cantatas. I deem her to be an ideal performer of Bohuslav Martinů's vocal music. Another guest was the magnificent baritone Jiří Brückler, who sings the legendary finale in The Opening of the Springs. The other vocal solos were recorded by members of the choir: Ludmila Kromková, Martin Slavík and Petr Svoboda. And it was also a great honour for me to work with the stellar Bennewitz Quartet and the renowned pianist Ivo Kahánek. Yet all the other guests did a marvellous job too.

As a conductor, you have devoted to Bohuslav Martinů's music for many years. How would you describe your relation to it?

I am really keen on Martinů's music, and I feel good with it. Some of his works are not at all easy to perform. Plenty of aspects the composer did not pay a great deal of attention to have to be conjectured: the dynamics, tempos, and so on. Furthermore, it is frequently necessary to correct errors, which abound in the majority of the existing editions. Consequently, it is a bag and baggage interpretation, sometimes even more than that, and the path to it is often quite intricate. But it is precisely why I find Martinů's music highly enjoyable.





TOMÁŠ NETOPIŁ LIVE RECORDING REFINES THE ORCHESTRA

Photo © Marco Borggreve

Supraphon has released another album featuring mature works by Bohuslav Martinů. The CD contains recordings of the one-act opera *Ariane* and the *Double Concerto* for two orchestras, piano and timpani. The two, very different, pieces are splendidly performed by the Essener Philharmoniker, conducted by Tomáš Netopil, and first-class soloists, with the soprano Simona Šaturová dazzling in the role of *Ariane*. Both compositions were recorded live within concerts.

We began our interview with Tomáš Netopil by asking him about *Ariane*, which opens the CD.

Thirty years ago, *Ariane* was recorded by the Czech Philharmonic, conducted by Václav Neumann. Do you know the 1986 album? And may it have inspired you at all?

I do know Neumann's recording very well. And the vinyl disc actually served as my very first inspiration, at the time when I was very young. Then I somewhat forgot about it, but returned to the record when Jiří Heřman and I intended to stage the opera at the National Theatre in Prague within a single evening along with Stravinsky's *The Nightingale*, directed by the SKUTR tandem. The idea was ultimately abandoned, yet we did get to present *Ariane* at the National, in a concert version, with Simona Šaturová singing the title role. I find the opera immensely forcible, and I have striven to perform it

throughout my career. If not in its entirety, then at least fragments of it. And I have succeeded a few times in this respect.

Simona Šaturová's performance on the recording is virtuoso, her *Ariane* is engrossing, yet also somewhat dreamy...

The timing of the recording sessions was great. Today, Simona possesses an astounding technique, which allows her to make use of her entire vocal range. What is more, she is highly musical and professional, profoundly involved and keenly interested in the works she performs. I take any opportunity I can to collaborate with her.

What makes her voice extraordinary?

Her voice is light, let us say, Mozartian. Her performance is cultivated, with a colossal inner charge, which is ideal for portraying the role of *Ariane*.

► **Tell us something about the other singers featured on the recording.**

I knew most of them, as they are soloists with the Essen theatre, which made my choice easier. I only had a problem with finding the singer for the lead male role, Thésée. Just a year prior to starting the recording, I saw Zoltán Nagy in Munich. He impressed me with his musicality, invention, as well as linguistic skills, as in this case it is important for the singer to be at home in French. So Nagy was the only artist I did not know previously. The excellent bass Baurzhan Anderzhanov and the brilliant young tenor Abdellah Lasri are both currently engaged with the Aalto-Musiktheater. As for the latter, I am not sure for how long the Essen company will be able to retain him, as he has been in high demand of late. Last year alone, he gave performances in Paris, Dresden and elsewhere. Lasri has an amazing, lovely and pliant voice. All these artists have helped to make my dream come true, a dream I had years ago at the National Theatre in Prague: to record *Ariane*.

***Ariane* is a very audience-friendly opera.**

In a way, it is a Classicist, pretty much lightened composition. At the time when he was writing it, Martinů was evidently inspired by Italian opera, Monteverdi in particular. The music almost seems as if it were written for children, it is simple, light. Bohuslav Martinů, naturally, employed his musical idiom, dance rhythms, ample 6/8 time. As regards the orchestra, *Ariane* is intended for the Classicist chamber configuration with flute, clarinet, oboe, two trumpets and piano. The opera's style actually represents a return to Classicism.

Something totally different from *The Greek Passion*, which was written in parallel.

In actual fact, it is not quite clear which of the two is Martinů's final opera. Probably *Ariane*. After completing the first version of *The Greek Passion*, Martinů took a breather with *Ariane*, which he wrote within two months, before returning to *The Greek Passion*. The change in his musical language is evident. We in Essen have juxtaposed the two operas. In September, we premiered *The Greek Passion*, a more dramatic work, one making large use of the chorus. *Ariane* was presented soon after. Our pianist, who played in both productions, told me something interesting he had observed. Having recently seen *The Greek Passion*, the audience expected *Ariane* to be similar, yet upon hearing the overture they began smiling, their faces lightened up. The impression was simply totally different.

Given its "lightened style", was preparing *Ariane* simpler than in the case of other operas?

No, it wasn't. It was very difficult. The intonation, the leading of melodies, the French, as well as the orchestral component – all that was very delicate and tricky. It took a lot of work.

Even though it is a relatively recent opera, does *Ariane* require historically informed performance?

Perhaps in respect of Bohuslav Martinů's having been profoundly inspired by Monteverdi. I thought about it a lot in connection with, for instance, the final Lament. Martinů prescribed that it be performed in full, warm strings, yet its character may also be very gentle, lightened, so as to alleviate the artificial gravity, to lighten everything. Yet otherwise we must comprehend Martinů according to the notation he bequeathed us. That is the alpha and omega. And that is what makes the work different from, say, a Baroque opera, in the case of which the musicians must find the manner of performance through ways different to simply adhering to the score afforded to them by the composer.

You have pointed to the lightness of *Ariane*. The other piece on the CD, the *Double Concerto* for two orchestras, piano and timpani, is of a totally different nature...

Although written in a Baroque form, it is a very complex, intricate score, encapsulating the immense despair of the time in which it came into being. It encompasses gloominess, cogency and, I would say, even Bachian gravity. All this reflects in the piece. The structure, entailing two orchestras, the munificent counterpoint they inter-

change, plus the solo piano... All that represents a totally different level in Martinů's compositional range.

The piano on the recording is played by Ivo Kahánek. Is he as great to work with as is Simona Šaturová?

Absolutely. Working with him was a real pleasure, faultless. Ivo Kahánek is a superlative pianist. It was not the first time we had worked together, and nor will it be the last, I believe. As a frequent performer of Bohuslav Martinů's music, he has a lot to say, and he is also able to embellish that which he plays in a compelling way.

You recorded both *Ariane* and the *Double Concerto* live, during concert performances. What, in your opinion, are the advantages of this type of recording?

In light of the current gigantic operation, the great acceleration of everything, we are approaching the time when we will not be in the position to fully devote to studio recording. Yet an orchestra facing the microphones does behave somewhat differently: it strives to pay closer attention to itself, so in this case the presence of the microphones had a very salutary effect. That is one of the reasons why my orchestra and I have been regularly making live recordings. It is a way of further refining the orchestra.

You are now preparing for Supraphon another album in your Janáček series, a project that can be branded as highly rare.

Yes, precisely, and I hope it will be intriguing. Following the first Janáček album, a purely symphonic one, and the second, vocal-instrumental, we decided to make a recording of Janáček's opera suites. It may appear to be a somewhat anti-Janáček project, I would say, as Janáček was very particular about the texts to which he set his music, the texts played an essential role. All his melodies are actually set texts, speech, a continuous flow of speech. Accordingly, we were stepping on very thin ice. But I enjoyed it. To date, we have recorded the suite from *Jenufa*, created by Tomáš Ille. It affords a wonderful walk through the whole opera, even though not entirely in chronological order. It is brilliantly elaborated in terms of dynamics and tectonics. Ille has retained Janáček's instrumentation, only helping the orchestra to spread the solo voices into the orchestral parts.

The other suites on the album will be from *Katya Kabanova* and *Fate*.

The suite from *Katya Kabanova* is really tumultuous, just as the opera itself is very intense, replete with twists and turns. I have to admit, though, that getting to the core of the piece did take us a while. Yet the result is, in my opinion, forcible. The suite is actually a condensate of the opera's already compressed psychological drama. The orchestra is employed in its entirety, just as in the opera. As regards the *Fate* suite, it has a totally different charge: it is pretty much dance-like, buoyant, a rapid current of energetic music, employing folk rhythms. And these rhythms serve as the framework of the whole suite.



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Photo © Lukáš Kederábek

A magnificent opera magnificently performed. That is Bohuslav Martinů's Ariane as delivered by the Essener Philharmoniker, conducted by Tomáš Netopil, with the soprano Simona Šaturová portraying the title role. In a nutshell: Supraphon has in store yet another treat for connoisseurs, as well as those simply fond of good music. By the way, Simona Šaturová's performance has also enthralled Tomáš Netopil, who has highlighted her amazing musicality, permanent engagement, immense concentration and interest in the work. The new (live) recording will undoubtedly delight everyone who hears it.

In addition to Ariane, the disc features another Bohuslav Martinů masterpiece – the Double Concerto for Two String Orchestras, Piano and Timpani. Our interview with Mrs. Šaturová, however, naturally focuses on Ariane.

What do you deem the specificities of Bohuslav Martinů's operatic music?

That is a difficult question to answer, as I have so far only sung Ariane. I have not overly devoted to 20th-century opera, since the core of my repertoire is works by Mozart, Donizetti and Rossini. For me, Martinů's music is a sort of, I would say, icing on the cake. My approach is intuitive and I think that when performing it I have to above all remove the deposits of all kinds of mannerisms and clichés we singers tend to

apply to Romantic operas, as these certainly do not work in the case of Martinů. I perceive his music as truly pure, in a way a bit similar to that of Mozart's. That is my inner feeling, and I haven't really mulled it over.

Tomáš Netopil too says that Ariane is, in the good sense, light, lucid music.

Absolutely. Martinů wrote Ariane when he needed to take a breather from The Greek Passion. And he duly created a real gem, a highly inspired piece. I am grateful to Tomáš for having familiarised me with the opera. Years ago, I first sang the Ariane aria at concerts, and it enchanted me. The National Theatre in Prague then intended to stage the opera, yet the plan, unfortunately, fell through and we only got to perform a concert version. Singing Ariane has always been a treat for me.

► **Tomáš Netopil has highly praised working with you. It would seem that you appreciated the collaboration with him too...**

Yes. The chemistry between us works fabulously: without too many words exchanged we are able to get ourselves on the same wavelength. It is a great pleasure to work with him. Tomáš knows me very well, and he is literally breathing along with me at the performances. Singers can consider themselves lucky when they have such a partner.

How did you get along with the other singers during the concerts that were recorded?

With the exception of Zoltán Nagy, whom I met for the first time, I had previously worked with all the singers. And it was a very pleasant encounter. We didn't have much time for preparations; hence, it was a very concentrated job, rehearsals from morning till evening. The score definitely isn't easy for the singers and the orchestra alike, and Tomáš made use of the time we had to the maximum. And owing to that, we really enjoyed ourselves at the concerts.

Has Tomáš Netopil brought to this performance anything novel, anything you did not expect?

I don't actually know any other account than Tomáš's. Yet to speak generally, when you sing a work repeatedly, you always discover in it something that you didn't see there during the first performance. I really like the moment when I am returning to something after some time and detect new connections. And working with new singers and a new orchestra certainly plays a positive role in this respect.

You said that the orchestral part of Ariane isn't at all simple. How challenging is your vocal part?

Now that I know it, I do not find the part that difficult, but it did take me somewhat by surprise at the beginning. I had expected it to be easier to learn. I perceived many melodic lines as being tricky, that which seemed to be simple wasn't at all. I had to spend quite a lot of time with the part, yet ultimately managed to figure it out. Now I deem everything to be entirely natural and pleasant.

Bohuslav Martinů also wrote Ariane in recognition of Maria Callas, even though she would never actually sing the role. What is your stance as regards the diva and her style?

Ambivalent. There are things about her that I admire, but there are others I find less admirable. Naturally, I marvel at her charisma, which was undoubtedly immense indeed. An acquaintance of mine from Vienna saw her at the Wiener Staatsoper in Tosca. He said that when Maria Callas came on stage she received a standing ovation before she had sung a single note. Enormous tension and vibration was allegedly felt even at the moments when she wasn't singing but just listening to her colleagues. Callas's recordings are a different matter, though. Some of them are indeed wonderful, yet when it comes to some of her later albums, I would venture to voice certain objections if I were bold enough to do so. Callas was an utterly unique and comprehensive artist. One cannot choose but to look up to her.

Let us now focus a bit on the past. Professor Miluše Fidlerová, a superlative singer herself, originally trained you as a lyrical coloratura. Today, however, you are also regarded as a superb dramatic soprano. When did you set forth in this direction?

I am still first and foremost a lyrical coloratura, and I have been consistently particular about remaining in this category. It is of the utmost importance to keep the voice in good shape. But I do occasionally sing more dramatic roles, that's true. The most dramatic is Violetta in Verdi's *La traviata*.

And you are also considered one of the finest Czech bel canto singers...

My relationship to bel canto is fervent. It is a style in which I probably feel the most at home. I enjoy negotiating vocal challenges. Nowadays, there is excessive concentration on the text. Everywhere you are told how relevant the text is, yet sometimes the fact that opera is mainly about the music is overlooked. This marginalisation of the musical component to a significant degree relates to the current general trend in staging operas. Some of the directors have no idea of the music whatsoever; they seem to be actually annoyed by it.





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RADEK BABORÁK

MOZART'S HORN CONCERTOS – REWARDING AND CHALLENGING

“The Quintet is a challenge, the other concertos are a reward,” says the world-renowned horn player Radek Baborák about W. A. Mozart’s compositions for horn, which he and the Baborák Ensemble have newly recorded for Supraphon. This gracious and pleasing music is performed splendidly. And with an evident zest and joy.

► **You play the first piece on the disc, the Quintet for Horn, Violin, Two Violas and Cello, in its original form; the other works have been arranged for a small configuration. Mozart actually wrote most of his horn concertos for Joseph Leutgeb, a friend of his family. They all appear as though tailor-made for your ensemble. Is that the reason why you have chosen them?**

There were several reasons. The first, and most obvious, was that we had the sheet music available and all we needed to do was to reach for it. I have had it in my archive for a long time, and now and then we have performed some of the concertos in our basic formation – the horn and string quartet – within a small concert, for instance, at a church, or at a festival. My colleagues and I really like the concertos. They are not long, the music is light, clearly legible. The first movement comprises virtuoso elements, cadenzas; the second is a lovely romance; the third features forcible hunting tones. The listener immediately recognises what it is about. Even when people hear the concertos for the very first time, they are able to identify with them. And that is the way it should be. No wonder, then, that our performances of the concertos at concerts have met with a positive response.

The preserved written records bear witness to the friendship between Leutgeb and Mozart, as well as the mockery the horn player had to endure from the composer. They have brought to mind some of the scenes in Miloš Forman's film Amadeus...

Everyone who has seen the film must have been impressed by its rendition of Mozart's nature. Even though we know it contains plenty of nonsense, at variance with the real history, such as the relationship between Salieri and Mozart, many a thing is perfectly captured, Mozart's character in particular. For years, we have viewed Mozart through the lens of Amadeus. Leutgeb doesn't appear in the film, yet I too, to a certain degree at least, envisage his relationship with Mozart according to the notion presented by Forman. I think that, now and then, many had to encounter and cope with Mozart's personality and genius. Yet musicians respected him, they were well aware that he was exceptional in something, that he could compose, conduct from the keyboard, play the violin and viola. They must have anticipated that his work would endure well into the future.

Your new album evokes joy and the feeling of relaxation. It seems to have been directly made for home music-making or for listening in a cosy milieu. Did you perceive it in this way?

Yes, that is precisely what I like about the pieces; that is precisely how I was thinking of them. I imagine that they could have been played at the Mozart's home, when Herr Leutgeb and other musicians came to visit. Some may ask why they aren't – with the exception of the first piece on the CD – presented in their original versions. Why we have chosen the – as I call it – “Vienna” version, that is, the work as arranged by Mr. Horvath. In my opinion, however, it is appropriate, the concertos can be played in a smaller configuration, as was, after all, customary at the time. I think that neither Mozart nor other composers always waited to be approached by an aristocrat planning to hold a concert on a Sunday and offering a certain amount of money, adding that the orchestra must be made up of 20 or 30 persons. The way I see it is that they often felt like playing in a small formation, they wanted to hear what this or that piece sounded like, how it turned out, what this or that instrument could do. So they simply got together and played it.

Who do you expect to listen to your new CD?

My wish is that our new album is not only for horn players, professional musicians and connoisseurs. I have a dream, which has its roots in my childhood memories. A number of my classmates, whose parents were not musicians, had at home a few nice classical music records and would listen to them. I saw it when I visited them at home. It was befitting to possess, for instance, records with one or two Beethoven symphonies, plus some of Bach's concertos. Well, and I hope – also with regard to my childhood experience – that those who like listening to classical music will reach for our record too, put

it on at home, in the car or on the headphones while jogging – no matter where. I want people to realise that there are also Mozart horn pieces for them to listen to! They may not be interested in who performs them, what is important is that the music gets to people and delights them.

Which of the five compositions on the album was the most challenging to perform?

The album opens with the Quintet in the original version, which is the most challenging of all. I have no idea whether Mozart wrote this piece for Leutgeb, he might well have, yet the Quintet is definitely far more difficult to perform than all the other concertos put together. In this connection, I would like to mention an episode interesting in terms of music history, which may suggest many a thing. As is known, Mozart met in Paris the Czech horn virtuoso Jan Václav Stich, alias Giovanni Punto. And he might have heard him performing at a level totally different to that he had heard back at home. Today, Stich is dubbed the “Paganini of the horn”. He possessed great technical skills and was able to make use of the potential of his instrument in a totally different manner. Mozart must have heard him playing, and he might have been influenced by his listening to Stich when composing the horn part. Leutgeb, an elderly friend of Leopold Mozart's, was certainly capable of making his instrument sing, yet – as the challenging nature of the other concertos indicates – he did not possess such stellar technical abilities. Hence, it is possible that Mozart wrote his Quintet bearing in mind Stich's qualities, being aware that something different, more difficult, can be played on the horn too. By and large, the Quintet for Horn, Violin, Two Violas and Cello represents a challenge for the horn player. When it comes to the other concertos on the CD, which are not so demanding in technical terms, I perceive them as a gift, a reward.

You have mentioned Jan Stich, alias Giovanni Punto, which brings us round to the question of the Czech horn school. It has often been referred to in connection with the French horn. Rightly, or wrongly?

Definitely rightly. We are lucky to know, almost precisely, the beginning of the development of playing the hunting – or French – horn in our country. It dates back to the first decades of the 18th century, when Count Špork had returned from Paris, enchanted by the local vogue of buglers. They evolved from hunters, who during the massive royal hunts had to communicate by means of blowing signals. Owing to Jean-Baptiste Lully, the hunting horns were even made part of orchestras in France. Špork liked the sound and regretted that he did not have anything of the kind at his newly built estate. Therefore, he sent four of his subjects to Paris so as to learn to play the French horn and buy instruments. That is how it all started here. The tradition was established and has continued without interruption for some 350 years. Špork's subjects and their successors were good at it and they began trying out and exploring the instrument's potentialities, with some of them even writing instructional books. Most notably, Antonín Josef Hampl penned the very first horn-playing guide, which would serve for training the subsequent generations of musicians. And, as usually happened in our climes, the most talented and skilful people left for Germany, Italy, and even Russia. Thus the Czech horn tradition spread around the world...

How have you contributed to the Czech horn tradition?

That will require quite a bit of explanation. In all likelihood, I was the very first Czech horn player to have assumed, let us say, prominent posts in the Munich and Berlin Philharmonics. I don't want to dwell on it, I merely mention it because of other connections. So as to be able to join the orchestras, so as to win the auditions, I had to suppress the Czech style of horn playing to a certain degree. The sound required in our country entails, for instance, the use of vibrato, a certain cantabile quality, which is not so much in demand in Germany. This may relate to the national nature. In their music, Wagner, Strauss or Bruckner, for instance, employed the horn differently to the way it has been applied by Czech composers. So, naturally, I played at the auditions as I was expected to – somewhat more in line with the German style, with less vibrato. And, notwithstanding the

► result of the audition, immediately after hearing my performance the horn and brass players met to discuss whether they actually liked my style. Fortunately, I was greatly complimented by string and woodwind players, who, when it was necessary, outvoted those who had doubts about me. They said that my manner of playing was precisely what was needed, stressing that the horn would make work the connection between the brass, the woodwinds, up to the strings.

A sort of bridge between the individual instruments...

Yes, something along those lines. Yet, following the audition, I changed my style and played in my way. The result was that my playing somehow blended the German and Czech styles. And that is what my contribution may be.

A few years ago, you came back to Prague from the Berliner Philharmoniker, a prestigious orchestra, in which you held the post of solo horn. Did it take you long to make the decision to return home?

Yes, quite a long time, although the idea of returning was constantly in my subconscious. I was certain that I wouldn't remain in the orchestras, nor abroad for that matter, until retirement age. But I wasn't sure about when I would give notice for good. That's until many circumstances appeared at once, which accelerated my decision. Then it occurred virtually from one day to the next.

When it comes to the circumstances that prompted your decision to return – your wife and you might have wanted your children to attend Czech schools, am I right?

The children themselves wanted to. Every summer, when we came home to Prague, the elder daughter would wistfully exclaim: "The school here is so beautiful, I would like to go there! And grandma

lives near by..." It is peculiar that although she could understand German very well, she hardly ever spoke at the kindergarten.

More than 10 years ago, you formed the Baborák Ensemble. What were the intentions that made you do so?

We simply wanted to play together. Initially, we had no vision, no inkling that one day we could be an active and busy ensemble. We gave our first concerts in 2001, and at the time I had neither the time nor the energy for leading an ensemble. But there are plenty of musicians in my family; my wife is a cellist, and we occasionally played together. I only began seriously devoting to my ensemble at the time when I had given notice in Berlin. I plunged into compiling the repertoire, making arrangements, various types of programmes. The ensemble's configuration and line-up has changed. And it continues to do so. It appears, though, that the core – the horn and the string quartet – will remain in the future, yet I have already added the piano, and I am planning to include the oboe, bassoon and flute. So it seems that it will most likely be a chamber ensemble: one player, one instrument. As a horn player, I have to combine and seek out new possibilities. There must also be arrangements, since I wouldn't make do with only 20 or 30 original pieces.

You have brought the horn to concert stages, you have accomplished intriguing recording projects. The Baborák Ensemble's previous album, featuring 20th-century music – Martinů, Nielsen, Koechlin – is totally different to the new one.

Yes, it also contains forgotten works, which no one performs today, including by the French composer Charles Koechlin. I like rediscovering such music, as I am not afraid of playing unknown pieces, when I find them valuable and witty.



Photo © Petr Kurečka



“KABELÁČ’S MUSIC GRABS HOLD OF YOU AND WON’T LET GO”, SAYS THE CONDUCTOR **MARKO IVANOVIĆ**

Photo © David Konečný

The conductor and composer **MARKO IVANOVIĆ** has stood at the podium before a number of distinguished Czech orchestras, including the Prague Symphony, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra and Brno State Philharmonic; he has regularly appeared at significant music festivals, such as the Prague Spring, Smetana’s Litomyšl and Janáček May. He has conducted Leoš Janáček’s *Jenufa* at the Malmö Opera and has performed as a guest with leading foreign orchestras. He co-founded the Four Steps into the New World music-educational cycle for youth, and has participated in the success of exceptional projects staged at the National Theatre in Prague – Miloš Forman’s production *A Walk Worthwhile*, and Aleš Březina’s opera *Tomorrow There Will Be...* Marko Ivanović has composed the opera for children *Enchantia*, whose performances he has also conducted. And recently he has put the finishing touches to yet another notable project – a recording of the complete symphonies of Miloslav Kabeláč, which he has made with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra.

What – besides the quality of the music itself – motivated you to take on this grandiose, challenging project?

I would like to get Miloslav Kabeláč back into the awareness of

musicians and audiences alike. He had really bad luck in his life, as he was not an officially acknowledged composer in two eras: during the Nazi occupation and during the Communist regime, his music

► was scarcely performed, and he was seldom afforded the opportunity to present his work in public. Later on, after his death, a new era occurred, yet he has remained more or less overlooked. This project aims to change that situation, at least to a certain degree. I am convinced that Kabeláč's music has something to communicate to a contemporary audience. Even though it may be bound up with the period in which it was created, expressing great defiance and emanating a great inner integrity, in my opinion, it does belong with the present. It is a highly singular, specific music and, I think, similarly to that of Leoš Janáček, it is a type of music unique in the European context.

During Kabeláč's lifetime, it was not frequently heard at concert halls...

During the time of the Nazi Protectorate and the era of the totalitarian regime, Kabeláč's music was performed much less frequently than it would have deserved. Bearing witness to his being persecuted by the Communists are the facts from his biography; for instance, his not being permitted by the authorities to travel to Strasbourg, where he would have had a great chance to present his music to the general European public. But that is just one of the numerous situations in which he was badly hurt.

Your positive relation to Kabeláč is evidently influenced by your being keen on his music – after all, you are a specialist in 20th-century music – but also by his behaviour during the two totalitarian regimes. Am I right?

Yes, absolutely. I think that the figure of Miloslav Kabeláč is very intriguing in that he was bold and principled under all circumstances, in that he was not willing to agree to any compromises. That applied to his aesthetics and moral stances alike.

Who initially aroused your interest in Kabeláč?

In this connection, I must mention my teacher, Prof. Jaromír Havlík. The very first Kabeláč composition I got to know was *The Mystery of Time*, which I chose as my graduation piece at the Academy of Performing Arts, while Prof. Havlík familiarised me with other Kabeláč works too. That is when I actually began pondering my intention, which I have now finally succeeded in putting across in the form of this complete album.

Miloslav Kabeláč's works are also remarkable in that they are often based on spiritual, Biblical themes.

Yes, and his penchant for Biblical themes is close to me. Yet he did not compose sacred music; he universally referred to the Bible for a purpose, mainly quoting it with the aim to generalise the relevance of some of the Christian ethical principles in a broader sense. In my opinion, Kabeláč strove to point out that these principles are still valid today and that they are also important for people who do not consider themselves to be believers. They are ethical principles in general.

Could you give an example?

In *Symphony No. 7*, for instance, the highly lapidary quotations from the New Testament serve to highlight human suffering, as well as how a person as an individual can easily fall victim to the majority. I assume that in his time the subject matter was in the air and that the individual still has to strive to defy the majority pressure nowadays. Something similar has to be dealt with today too...

Which of Miloslav Kabeláč's symphonies are particularly close to your heart?

I would say that all of them are close to me. They are different from each other, when it comes to their intellectual message, instrumentation and aesthetic base. I have been greatly impressed by the *Seventh*, for orchestra and reciter, which, as I said, is set to Biblical texts. Then I was astonished by the *Sixth*, for clarinet and orchestra, which could be performed as a regular clarinet solo piece, as it affords the soloist the opportunity to showcase all his/her skills. But I am of the opinion that Kabeláč's early symphonies possess value too and occupy certain positions within the context of symphonic music.

The *First*, for instance, although being rooted in the conventional interwar aesthetics, already reveals the characteristic traits of Kabeláč's style – compendiousness, obstinacy, cogency.

And which of the symphonies do you, as a conductor, deem the most challenging?

I would say that the higher the number, the higher the demand factor. When making the recording, the first tough task occurred with the *Third*, built on constant acceleration. The symphony contains a long arc, within which you must keep speeding up the tempo. Retaining this gradation is a tough nut to crack for the conductor. Also exacting was the *Sixth*, primarily as regards the metre and rhythm. Challenging too was the *Seventh*, entirely written in proportional notation, with no bar lines, only the time axis; then it is up to the conductor to explain this to the orchestra and deal with some passages technically. I did my best to make the result meet the composer's wishes, in line with his score.

So the final symphony, the *Eighth*, was the most challenging?

Yes, it is extremely challenging indeed. Conceived as a site-specific project, intended to be performed in a church, it counts with the precise placement of two choirs, the solo singer, the percussionists, the organ, in space. Yet since we were recording it at the Rudolfinum concert hall, we could not completely abide by this requirement. But we tried our best. Two choirs, the involvement of many other components, often working in different, parallel metres – it was not easy at all. And I am very grateful – specifically in the case of *Symphony No. 8* – to Lukáš Vasilek, who was really helpful, making our work much easier owing to his having prepared his choir in a highly professional manner.

Imagine a person who does not know much about Miloslav Kabeláč, is virtually unfamiliar with his music... How can the symphonies address such a listener?

Granted, 20th-century music is still not very popular among the fans of "classical". But I would like to tell them that Kabeláč's music is highly communicative, sometimes even more communicative than the music of Bohuslav Martinů. It is not difficult to listen to, yet it is highly intense, so you need time to absorb it. It does not contain merry moments, it is music that comes across as melancholic, dramatic, imbued with an unyielding pertinacity. This type of music is not to everyone's liking. Some lovers of pleasurable music may be disappointed if they put it on while having dinner. Yet it is a music that grabs hold of you and won't let go. I would say that every one of Kabeláč's symphonies has a claw which can clutch you.

Now a few words about you. You are known for liking – let's say – extraordinary, unconventional projects. After all, making a recording of Kabeláč's symphonies is actually an extraordinary accomplishment too. But you have also co-created the National Theatre productions of Miloš Forman's *A Walk Worthwhile* and the opera *Tomorrow There Will Be...* Why are you enticed by exquisite, extraordinary things, often of an experimental nature?

Perhaps because I have always been concurrently a composer and a conductor. As well as, in a way, a sort of musical plebeian, who – when put in a very simplified way – can love Alfred Schnittke's symphony on the one hand and a Beatles song on the other. The concept of "music" is very wide for me. I am aware that a number of my colleagues – which is totally understandable – like specialising in a certain type of music, many of those classically trained do not recognise anything but so-called serious music, whereas other friends of mine solely stick to popular music and have never listened to classical. I for myself am glad that I can, with a certain aloofness, move about in the interspace and undertake projects that somehow veer off from the straight and narrow. I like demolishing pigeonholes – it is actually my objective. I say that music can be either good or bad – regardless of the category it is in. By and large, I think that there is only one music, and we are lucky to have so many options of absorbing and approaching it.

RICHARD NOVÁK

I'M TAKING MY OWN PATH

A singer who at the age of 84 performs, alongside the Czech Philharmonic, the Forester's aria at the end of *The Cunning Little Vixen* in a jaw-dropping way surely knows his stuff. And a good deal about life too. Richard Novák was lucky to have had great teachers, he is focused, and has never ceased to hone his skills. He was not afraid to put his career on hold when it had seemingly reached its peak, feeling that his voice was losing its inner support, and start from scratch. In 1961, he received second prize at Toulouse (the competition was won by José van Dam); in 1962, he became a laureate at Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands. Dvořák, Verdi and Janáček – these are the three pillars of his repertoire, his three great musical loves. He has performed at the Teatro Colón; at the Salzburger Festspiele, under the baton of Claudio Abbado; in Paris, Madrid, Venice... He has sung oratorio roles, conducted by Karel Ančerl and Václav Neumann, and recorded the Glagolitic Mass with Sir Charles Mackerras and Ricardo Chailly. And he has been a distinguished performer of his beloved songs – by Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, Křička – and, in particular, Dvořák's Biblical Songs. The 2-CD album, titled *Portrait*, which has just been released by Supraphon, presents a selection of Novák's very finest recordings and pays tribute to the admirable man and singer, commemorating his upcoming 65th birthday. But it would seem that it's still too soon to congratulate him on a lifetime of work, as he has yet to take his final bow.

Every person receives a gift, the Biblical talents, which he or she should tend to and later on bring to bear. The talent you were given is your voice. Who pushed you towards singing? You could have become a teacher/writer, like your brother, or you could have chosen to pursue a career in medicine, as your son has done...

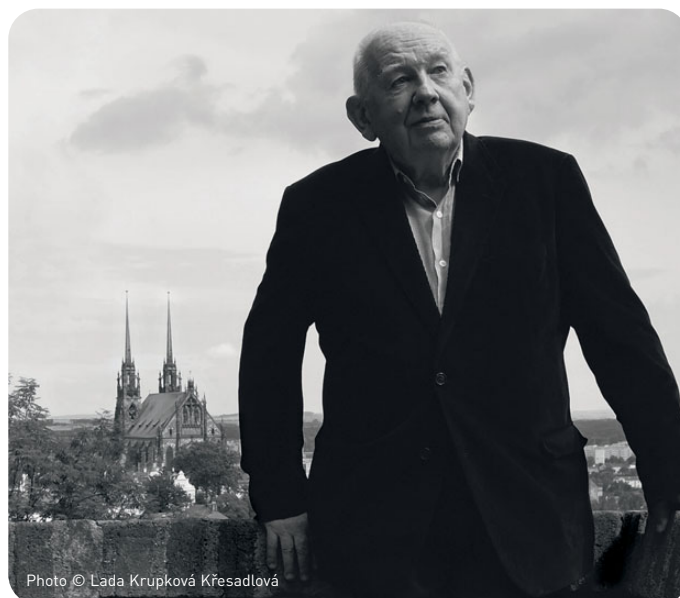
Initially, my voice did not play the major role; it was rather my relationship to music in general. My parents and older siblings said that when I was a child I was singing with quite a zest, yet at the age of five I so longed for a violin that I got one as a Christmas present. And not surprisingly. My dad, a village teacher, played the violin, and everywhere around I could hear singing – at home, at the church, in the fields. At the time, singing was a strong need. So I received my love of music in the cradle.

You were then born into the right family.

Absolutely. My parents were quite ordinary, they weren't rich, and they loved each other. I simply cannot imagine a more ideal background. The Nováks from Rozseč, near Nová Říše, had a rather impressive history, with its chronicle dating back to 1589. My grandpa had seven sons and three daughters, and all of them had a wonderful relationship with one another, throughout their lives. My grandpa was a mayor and he initiated the building of a church in Rozseč. This September, one hundred years have passed since the church's consecration, so we have agreed to commemorate it at a family gathering. Fifty years ago, my father and my younger brother Ludvík, who had continued to work the land, organised a similar reunion, which was attended by 80 Nováks. This year, we can expect about 150 people to turn up.

Did you have to choose between singing and playing the violin? How did it happen that you ultimately became a solo singer?

I really wished to play the violin well enough to be able to study the instrument and subsequently perform with an orchestra, yet there wasn't any teacher around who would have been able to provide me with



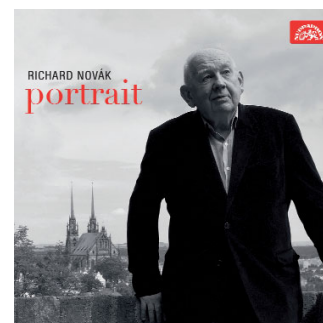
the solid technical rudiments. So I just wasn't good enough to enrol at a conservatory. I also longed to study theology – yet, after a year, the seminary I attended was dissolved. And when I wanted to escape the military bullying in the infamous Auxiliary Technical Battalions for politically unreliable persons, all I had left was my voice, and so I began studying singing at the Brno Conservatory. Regrettably, two years later my teacher Jiří Woth was forced to leave the school, because the government committee had branded his educational method as wrong and duly banned it. But I didn't want to change anything, and my professor of harmony suggested that I join a composition class, which was just being opened. It suited me down to the ground, as I could continue to improve my vocal skills privately, to keep singing in the manner my out-of-favour teacher and I wanted.

Did you start in Ostrava?

That was again by chance. One day, my teacher in Ostrava, from whom I occasionally took lessons, mentioned that the local opera company urgently needed a bass. He suggested that I apply for the post. So I did, and it worked out well, and ever since, that is, 1954, I have been a professional singer.

Let us sum it up. You started to sing because you didn't play the violin well enough, then, after your teacher's method had been banned, you began learning composition, and you entered the opera stage without having had to make any great effort... Imagine that you had been born a few decades later and at the moment you were looking around for an engagement. Do the young singers today have it easier or more difficult?

Yes and no. Today, young singers can freely travel, make use of the services of foreign agencies and work anywhere in the world, yet just a few, the very best, of them actually succeed in this respect. So I would say that my generation did indeed have it easier. When I was young, the bricks-and-mortar theatres were stable, every one of them had its own ensemble. Hence, fledgling singers could start out somewhere and serve their apprenticeship years. At the present time, all the opera companies in the Czech Republic invite guests to perform the lead roles. It is common that good singers cover the needs of three to four theatres and nothing is left for the beginners. Opera is experiencing a great rebirth, with the old no longer valid and the new yet to come into its own. Theatres would have to be able to quadruple their budgets so as to sustain stable companies and guest artists alike.



SU 4206-2

NEW ALBUMS BY COLLEGIUM MARIANUM AND MUSICA FLOREA WITHIN THE MUSIC FROM EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PRAGUE SERIES

Supraphon's acclaimed MUSIC FROM EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PRAGUE edition is now in its seventh year. The new recordings released within the series have drawn upon the musicological discoveries made over the past few decades, as well as the high artistic standard of Czech ensembles specialised in historically informed performance of early music. The Supraphon edition provides listeners with the opportunity to acquaint themselves with a repertoire that has been overlooked, or even completely forgotten, for centuries, thus creating a vivid picture of the musical life in 18th-century Prague.

This autumn, two new titles within the MUSIC FROM EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PRAGUE series have been released. The first is a CD with Jan Zach's Requiem solenne and Vesperae de Beata Virgine, splendidly performed by the Musica Florea and Collegium Marianum Floreum ensembles, and four soloists, conducted by Marek Štrncl.

The second album offers an opulent Baroque music feast, featuring pieces by František Jiránek, dubbed the "Czech Vivaldi", as presented by the internationally renowned Collegium Marianum, headed by Jana Semerádová, and noted guests: the phenomenal Italian bassoonist Sergio Azzolini and the outstanding German oboist Xenia Löffler.



Photo © Martin Kubica

FRANTIŠEK JIRÁNEK / CONCERTOS

The Baroque composer František Jiránek (1698–1778), nicknamed the "Czech Vivaldi", served as a violinist of Václav Morzin's court orchestra. Having only discovered his music a few years ago, researchers are now identifying his works, as the authorship of some of them is still unclear, with some sources ascribing them to Jiránek and others to Vivaldi, his teacher in Venice. Jiránek's music has also enjoyed growing interest on the part of musicians. Besides Jana Semerádová's Collegium Marianum, its champions include the brilliant Italian bassoonist Sergio Azzolini and the superlative German oboist Xenia Löffler. All the ambiguities as to its origin and a few specific requirements (for instance, employment of the viola d'amour, a scarcely used instrument, in the Triple Concerto in A major) notwithstanding, the CD features vivid, ebullient and virtuosic music, pieces previously unrecorded and performed in a top-notch way.

Recorded by: **Sergio Azzolini** – bassoon, **Xenia Löffler** – oboe, **Jana Semerádová** – flauto traverso, **Lenka Torgersen** – violin, **Vojtěch Semerád** – viola d'amour, **Collegium Marianum**, artistic director: **Jana Semerádová**.



SU 4208-2



► JAN ZACH / REQUIEM SOLEMNE, VESPERAE DE BEATA VIRGINE (MARIAN VESPERS)

Jan Zach (1713–1773), whose name is appearing in the MUSIC FROM EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PRAGUE series for the first time, has been ranked among the “Czech music exiles” who in the 18th century moved to Western Europe. Yet before having left Bohemia, at the age of 28, in the wartime year of 1741, Zach had composed a great number of pieces. The bulk of his oeuvre rests in liturgical music (he set the text of the requiem alone three times). His Requiem solempne in C minor was frequently performed at Prague churches (as documented by the numerous copies preserved) during his lifetime and even continued to be played in the 20th century. Today, Zach's mass can be listened to as a textbook summary of the compositional styles customary at the time, with their diversity ranging from conventional contrapuntal movements to modern coloratura arias. The Vesperae de Beata Virgine (presented on the Supraphon CD in modern-time premiere), already drifting towards Viennese Classicism, was amply performed in Prague too. The two Zach pieces give us a good idea of what type of music was heard at the newly built churches in the city in the 1730s. The internationally renowned Musica Florea undertook the premiere with their typical zest and enthusiasm.

Recorded by: **Michaela Šrůmová** – soprano, **Sylvia Čmugrová** – alto, **Čeněk Svoboda** – tenor, **Jaromír Nosek** – bass, **Musica Florea, Collegium Floreum**, conductor: **Marek Štryncl**.



SU 4209-2

F. X. RICHTER / LA DEPOSIZIONE DALLA CROCE DI GESÙ CRISTO

The World Premiere of the Only Italian Oratorio by F. X. Richter

When Franz Xaver Richter became member of the famous Mannheim orchestra in 1746, he found himself in the very centre of the progressive European music scene where a new era was being born in a proverbial melting pot of various influences. However, Richter never gave up his traditional baroque “craftsmanship” and after making himself acquainted with the most successful oratorio libretto by G. C. Pasquini, he set it to music entirely within the boundaries of his characteristic style, combining baroque composition principles (Fux-like counterpoint choruses) with the achievements of the nascent classicist style. For this he used the new 1744 version of the libretto intended for J. A. Hasse. La Deposizione, Richter's only Italian oratorio is a Good-Friday pondering of Jesus's disciples over God's unconditional love and Christ's suffering on the cross. For the first time (and probably also the last) it was performed on the Good Friday of 1748 in the Mannheim court church of The Visitation of Our Lady. After the Strassbourg Requiem (Supraphon SU 4177-2), this premiere recording is another gemstone that the Czech Ensemble Baroque have added to the mosaic of Richter's remarkable, still little-researched oeuvre.

Artists: **Kateřina Kněžíková** (Maddalena), **Jaroslav Březina** (Giuseppe d'Arimatea), **Philippe Mathmann** (Giovanni), **Piotr Olech** (Simone), **Lenka Cafourková Ďuricová** (Nicomodemno), **Czech Ensemble Baroque** (orchestra and choir), conductor **Roman Válek**.



SU 4204-2

J. S. BACH / BRANDERGURG CONCERTOS SOMETHING IMPORTANT IS HAPPENING HERE

Within a short time, early music enthusiasts had to say their farewells to two personalities who, for half a century, influenced the development of what we call the authentic interpretation of early music: Gustav Leonhardt and Nicolaus Harnoncourt. In 1950 Supraphon made a complete recording of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos performed by a chamber ensemble led by a musician of Czech origin, Josef Mertin (1904–1998). A scholar and organ builder as well, he relentlessly “dusted” the works of composers from the previous centuries (including Guillaume de Machaut), stubbornly seeking the way to give their music its authentic sound. The names of his pupils who took up his legacy make an impressive list that includes Claudio Abbado, Mariss Jansons and Zubin Mehta. Mertin has managed to win a number of students for the interpretation of early music on period instruments, among them musicians without whom we can hardly imagine the field nowadays. The Brandenburg Concertos were performed by an ensemble whose members were the 22-year-old cembal-

ist Gustav Leonhardt (playing the solo in Concerto No. 5), a rising violin star Eduard Melkus and a year younger violoncellist Nicolaus Harnoncourt. It was the first time that a chamber size of the ensemble and period instruments were used. Hopefully, listening to the recording will convince you that it is more than just a historical document. As far as Mertin and Harnoncourt are concerned, this unique recording is also a proud reminder of their Czech roots.

Recorded by: Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Gustav Leonhardt, Eduard Melkus, Wiener Kammerorchester, conductor Josef Mertin. Recorded in Vienna in 1950.



SU 4213-2