

VIVACE

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PAVEL HAAS QUARTET

In May, the Pavel Haas Quartet was making a new recording. Their eighth, studio album will feature Dmitry Shostakovich's String Quartets Nos. 2, 7 and 8. Peter Jarůšek said: "We have always wanted to record Shostakovich's quartets, yet, for various reasons, have not got around to it. So we are happy that we will finally be able to make our dream come true. The new album will be in stark contrast to our previous, for the most part sun-drenched recordings. Music lovers can definitely look forward to it, as Shostakovich's works are very close to our hearts." The album will be released in October 2019.



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PAVEL HAAS QUARTET:
 Veronika Jarůšková – 1st violin
 Marek Zwiebel – 2nd violin
 Jiří Kabát – viola
 Peter Jarůšek – cello



**JAN BARTOŠ JANÁČEK'S MUSIC
SHOULD GIVE THE IMPRESSION
OF BEING IMPULSIVE, AS THOUGH
CREATED HERE AND NOW**

Jan Bartoš is a holder of the Professional Studies Diploma from the Manhattan School of Music in New York and a doctorate from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Furthermore, he has received the prestigious Dutch Rucorva Trust Award, the German Rotary Musikförderpreis and accolades at three competitions in New York. His double album of Beethoven's works has earned the BBC Music Magazine Award. Supraphon released a new recording of his, featuring Leoš Janáček's works. Jan Bartoš talked to us about the project.

Leoš Janáček wrote his first opus, *Thema con variazioni*, at the age of 26, when he was studying at the Leipzig Conservatory. The piano miniature *Reminiscence* is one of the last pieces he composed. How do you perceive the two works?

Janáček dedicated his first opus to his fiancée Zdenka Schulzová. At the time, his ambition was to pursue a career as a pianist, which clearly reflected in its virtuosic character. Even though it is a high-quality piece, its variations seem to reveal Janáček's embracing a number of contemporary trends. In my opinion, he was most significantly inspired by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's *Variations sérieuses* and Schumann's stylisations, which were particularly palpable in *Papillons* and, later on, in *Carnaval*. Just as Chopin and Paganini pass through Schumann's masked ball, in his variations Janáček too appears in the "guise" of other composers. In the first variations, we can recognise Schumann, while the next ones are reminiscent of Tchaikovsky, Liszt, Brahms and Busoni. The variations are significant, because the introduction for the very first time features the primary "female" theme, which would reoccur in Janáček's later works, including the *Piano Sonata I. X. 1905* and *On an Overgrown Path*. It would seem that *Reminiscence* echoes Janáček's memories of Kamila Stösslová, his Muse when he was an old man. A kindred theme is to be found in his opera *Katya Kabanova*. The structure of *Reminiscence* is similar to that of the first three pieces of the cycle *In the Mists*, with the music in the outer sections having vague outlines and reminiscence emerging. In the middle part, they come to the fore and the past painfully "resurges", before it again recedes back to the mist. Such a narrative is typical of Janáček's piano works.

Janáček wrote his three essential piano works, *I. X. 1905*, *On an Overgrown Path* and *In the Mists*, between 1900 and 1912, which was a difficult phase in his life. They are perhaps the most personal, most intimate

pieces he composed. What was the greatest challenge, and what was the easiest thing, when recording them?

Performing Janáček's music entails a major problem. You must play it accurately, since rhythm and time are of vital importance, while you are also often supposed to improvise. More than any other music can it be harmed by anything that comes across as prepared and learned in advance. Its performance should give the impression of being impulsive, as though created here and now. According to Janáček, the piano should sound like the "cimbalom in the open air", which he deemed to be ideal. At the same time, he had a keen interest in the psychology of music, a subject on which he even wrote absorbing essays, which I recommend everyone to read. Consequently, performers must have the sense for nuance, thorough work with the time and reverberation, and overall understanding of the nature of Janáček's music. Very little of it is written in notes. I have played Janáček's music since I was a teenager, and I have regularly performed it at my concerts for over two decades. Perhaps I am not too audacious to claim that a few notes suffice and I immediately find myself in the Janáčekesque landscape.

Being rooted in folk music and the Silesian origin are what you have in common with Janáček. What crosses your mind when Silesia is mentioned?

I recollect my childhood, as I spent the first 11 years of my life in the region. My childhood was happy indeed. It was the old, peaceful world, without mobiles and computers. Two things in particular cross my mind. The melancholy landscape with the mysterious hills of the Jeseníky mountains and the music that I heard at home all the time. Every member of my family played an instrument, and I myself spent my leisure time at the piano from the age of five. I also composed music. The very first piece of mine, which I wrote when I was six, bears the same title as Janáček's final piano opus – *Reminiscence*. Yet my composition was more dolorous than that of Janáček's.





SMETANA TRIO

THREE GEMS OF CHAMBER MUSIC FROM THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The three compositions that the Smetana Trio has chosen for its new recording were written within the span of just four years, but they represent three different musical worlds. The Piano Trio by Anton Arensky recalls the atmosphere of bourgeois musical salons of the nineteenth century, where music was played for the pleasure of polite society. The composition by the twenty-five-year-old Alexander Zemlinsky represents the arrival of the search for new sounds and harmonies. The one-movement trio by the nineteen-year-old piano virtuoso and composer Sergei Rachmaninov exhibits that nobly elegiac quality that would become characteristic of the future works of the world-famous musician. Anton Arensky's short life was marred by mental illness, while the lives of Zemlinsky and Rachmaninov were struck by external circumstances – they died within a year of each other while far from their homelands in the United States. With élan and commitment all its own, the internationally acclaimed Smetana Trio is presenting three noteworthy compositions of the late nineteenth century. We talked to Jitka Čechová about their new album.

Jitka, what enchanted you about these three unassuming chamber music gems of the late nineteenth century, leading you to choose them for the new Smetana Trio album?

All three trios conceal related emotional features. They are charged with emotions and tender themes, full of hope alternating with elegiac nostalgia, with the end of an amazing epoch within sight. Each of the composers speaks his own language, and yet we clearly sense that the works were created during the same era – actually within the span of just four years, from 1892 to '96. This post-Romantic music is loaded with wonderful opportunities for free expression for all three instruments, and that was what attracted and inspired our trio from the moment we began studying these works. Arensky and Rachmaninov shared a common devotion to their musical idol – Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky – and they let themselves be carried away on a wave of the most precious melodiousness and boundless expressiveness supported by colourful harmonies. The same thing applies to Zemlinsky with his predilection for polyphony. His music is often full of canons, and it builds up gradually to an almost orchestral kind of writing that evokes something of a Brahmsian sound. These are truly gems of chamber music, overshadowed somewhat by big Romantic canvasses, but they are deserving of our maximum attention. We hope our

recording will contribute towards their full-fledged incorporation into the worldwide repertoire.

What interesting events are awaiting the Smetana Trio by the end of the season?

We just got back from another amazing, enormously successful tour of the USA and Canada, where we had the chance to present Rachmaninov and Arensky along with Czech music. Now we can gradually start getting ready for and looking forward to another tour next year, and some of the concert presenters from this year's tour want to participate again. Towards the end of the season, there are other tasks awaiting our Smetana Trio, with a number of concerts around the Czech Republic and two trips to England, during which we will be returning to London's famed Wigmore Hall. Then in the summer we're going back to South America, in the midst of which there will be two concerts in the prestigious Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Argentina. But that almost rolls us over into next season, which start right off in September again in a southern vein, but this time the south of Europe, with concerts first in Spain and soon afterwards in Italy. Simply put, something's going on all the time, and we constantly have something to look forward to. What more could we ask for?

SMETANA TRIO:
Jitka Čechová – piano
Radim Krešta – violin
Jan Páleníček – cello

Photo © Daniel Havel

SU4258

VIDEO

JANKOVÁ, KRÁL AND KAHÁNEK MARTINŮ'S SONGS COMPENDIOUSLY EXPRESS THE SUBSTANCE OF HUMAN LIFE

Folk songs are evidently one of the two major sources of inspiration that Bohuslav Martinů drew upon in his music. The composer would take Sušil's extensive collection of traditional Moravian songs along with him wherever he travelled. The texts from the book were used for the majority of the Songs on One Page, Songs on Two Pages and The New Chapbook. Just as Dvořák had done in his Moravian Duets, so Martinů conceived his own tunes and accompaniment, yet his having been profoundly impacted by folk music, its rhythm, melody and harmonic techniques is clearly audible.

Three renowned artists, bearing an authentic relation to folk music and Martinů's work alike – the soprano Martina Janková, the baritone Tomáš Král and the pianist Ivo Kahánek – have made a benchmark recording, in which they have succeeded in highlighting the songs' tender beauty. The singer Martina Janková said: "Performing the songs makes me feel happy. Each of them encompasses people's stories in their entirety. As in the case of Janáček's songs, these miniatures compendiously express the substance of human life. I personally deem their perspective and synthetic nature to be extremely important."

Created in the early 1940s, in the middle of World War II during the composer's exile in the USA, the three song cycles represented for Martinů and his compatriots a connection with their beleaguered homeland. Jan Masaryk, a Czech diplomat and a proficient amateur pianist, often performed the songs together with the soprano Jarmila Novotná, a MET soloist. Owing to their elliptical expression and modesty, the three cycles may serve as the clue to Martinů's late works. The New Slovak Songs constitute a unique piece in the composer's oeuvre; he himself had collected them during his visit to Slovakia in 1920 and subsequently wrote for them piano accompaniments.



A portrait of Jozef Benci, a man with long grey hair and a full beard, wearing a blue sweater over a dark blue shirt. He is standing in front of a large, dark brown wooden door with metal studs. His arms are crossed, and he is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

JOZEF BENCI TO IMMERSE IN THE DEPTH OF THE SOUL

In the 19th century, composers sought inspiration in poetry, the simplicity and modesty of folk songs. Romances reflecting on loneliness, betrayed love and the misery of the abandoned occupied a special position in Russian lyric poetry in the first half of the 19th century, represented by A. S. Pushkin and other writers. Based on the Romantic poets' works, composers expressed their own intimate feelings, as well as muted defiance. One of the first to have written romances was Mikhail Glinka, the founder of the Russian nationalist music school. A whole generation of his successors, including P. I. Tchaikovsky, embraced the genre, creating numerous romances, mainly set to contemporary Russian poetry. Especially noteworthy among such works is M. P. Mussorgsky's cycle *Songs and Dances of Death*, made up of four pieces depicting the horror and bizarreness of death, referred to by the composer as "danse macabre". Supraphon released the album *Russian Romances*, as performed by the superb Slovak bass Jozef Benci, accompanied by the pianist Jana Nagy-Juhász.

Jozef Benci is a highly esteemed opera and oratorio singer, a soloist of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava, who has worked with the Czech Philharmonic and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jiří Bělohlávek, performed with Edita Gruberová and other renowned artists. Owing to his robust, yet highly sensitively led voice, a remarkable sense for songs' intimate nature, as well as an immaculate diction, he is a brilliant performer of Russian romances. We asked Jozef Benci a few questions.

Mr. Benci, who did you arrive at the decision to make an album of Russian romances?

I performed Russian music while I was still as student. Naturally, it included songs and romances. I continued to extend my repertoire, and concurrently kept singing the older pieces. One day I realised that the time was ripe to make an album of Russian romances by various composers. Regrettably, the CD simply could not encompass all the songs I am fond of, for instance, Rachmaninov's romances. Yet I hope that sometime in the future I will be able to record a separate album, solely featuring Rachmaninov's songs and romances. We will see.

In what respect are Michail Glinka's pieces extraordinary?

I consider Glinka's romances to be essential for understanding Russian songs. Glinka himself drew upon Italian bel canto, and his romances possess levity and airiness, the quintessential qualities of Italian music. The harmonic basis is rather simple, with a beautiful melody bearing delicate strokes of Russian nostalgia.

How challenging are Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*?

The *Songs and Dances of Death* is a truly magnificent work, which indeed represents a challenge for many singers. Perhaps everyone encounters death, in different situations and phases of life. In the songs, Mussorgsky presents four depictions of people facing up to death. The cycle affords immense scope for interpretation, yet the performer must delve into different situations. The songs are extremely difficult to sing, and it took me a long time to comprehend them.

Performance of songs requires a great sense of intimacy, the ability to feel and express the atmosphere. How do you perceive it?

Songs are like catharsis, allowing me to immerse myself in the depth of the soul, to seek sincere answers and bring to bear delicate dynamic nuances. I am glad that besides appearing in opera productions I can find time to explore and perform songs.



SU4262-2



Photo © Martin Kubica



BENNEWITZ QUARTET:
Jakub Fišer – 1st violin, Štěpán Ježek – 2nd violin,
Jiří Pinkas – viola, Štěpán Doležal – cello
Pavel Rehberger, guest – percussion (Haas)

BENNEWITZ QUARTET MUSIC BY THE THERESIENSTADT COMPOSERS

The fates of the composers whose works are featured in the Bennewitz Quartet's new album were linked with the musical life in Czechoslovakia between the two world wars, as well as with the Jewish Theresienstadt camp-ghetto, and were afflicted by the monstrous Nazi regime. Viktor Ullmann, who before WWII held the post of Kapellmeister at the New German Theatre in Prague, wrote his Quartet No. 3 while he was imprisoned in Theresienstadt. Hans Krása completed the Theme and Variations in 1936, yet he only saw it performed in Theresienstadt, along with his children's opera Brundibár. Erwin Schulhoff's Five Pieces for String Quartet reveal his zest for rhythm and dance, as well as his evidently having been inspired by the music played in the Viennese salons, Italy and Spain. Pavel Haas's String Quartet No. 2, dating from 1925, goes to prove that he was the most gifted pupil of Leoš Janáček. In 1944, Haas, Ullmann and Krása were among the thousands of Theresienstadt prisoners transported to Auschwitz, where they would be murdered in the gas chambers

The Bennewitz Quartet launched their international career following their victories at the prestigious competition in Osaka (2005) and the Prémio Paolo Borciani in Italy (2008). Ever since they have regularly performed at the world's most prominent venues (Wigmore Hall in London, Musikverein in Vienna, Konzerthaus in Berlin, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, concert halls in New York, Seoul, etc.) and festivals (Salzburger Festspiele, Lucerne Festival, Rheingau Musik Festival, etc.). The music of the Theresienstadt composers has found in them splendid performers. On the occasion of the release of the Bennewitz Quartet's new album, we talked to the violinist Štěpán Ježek:

How did the Bennewitz Quartet get to make a recording of the Theresienstadt composers' music?

We have actually performed the Theresienstadt composers' works since the time when our quartet was formed, which was approximately two decades ago. This long-term experience was one of the reasons why we decided to record the repertoire.

What was the major criterion when exploring these works?

The Theresienstadt composers' music possesses many qualities. On the one hand, it is influenced by the modern compositional techniques of the first half of the 20th century – from the avant-garde to the highly intellectual approach typical of the Second Viennese School – on the other hand, it is interwoven with the traditional Czech softness, melodies and poeticism. We strove to render both of these contrasting facets.

Have you performed the works featured in the new album at concerts?

Yes, we have regularly performed the Theresienstadt composers' pieces at concerts, in the Czech Republic and beyond alike. Even though much has been done for the music to become part of the general awareness, it is – regrettably – still being perceived as something that makes the programmes peculiar. With regard to the fact that we have striven to promote Czech music in general, these splendid, albeit lesser-known, works have afforded us the ideal opportunity to present programmes enriched with intriguing pieces.

ARUNDO QUARTET THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS IN THE LOVELY COLOURS OF WOODWINDS

The legendary Goldberg Variations are among the most frequently recorded Johann Sebastian Bach works; besides numerous versions for piano and harpsichord, there are recordings of transcriptions for other instruments, including the banjo. Even though at first glance the arrangement for wind quartet appears distant from the composer's original notion, when listening to it you may have the feeling that Bach himself might have had such an ensemble on his mind when writing the work. The reed instrument timbers wonderfully merge into joint harmony, while their shadings allow for tracing the leading of the individual parts within the polyphonic texture, which is most definitely an advantage as against the original keyboard version.



Photo © Daniel Havel

ARUNDO QUARTET:
Jan Souček – oboe
Jan Mach – clarinet
Karel Dohnal – basset horn
Václav Vonášek – bassoon

The Aria and the 30 Variations afford sufficient scope for cantilena and foregrounding of the instruments' gracious colours, as well as for showcasing their uttermost virtuosity. The present album features the Goldberg Variations and the Suite in C major, BWV 1066. The remarkable recording (SU 4261-2) has been made by four extraordinary musicians, superb soloists and chamber players, who have adorned some of the most renowned orchestras, including the Berliner Philharmoniker and the Czech Philharmonic. We talked about the new album with the bassoonist Václav Vondrášek:

Václav, why did you choose these works in particular for your debut album?

I discovered the magic of the Goldberg Variations relatively late – unsurprisingly, when listening to a recording made by Glenn Gould (the more recent, more mature one). After having given up attempts to play at least fragments on the piano, I began to work out the individual parts on the bassoon. Afterwards, we got down to creating a “demo version” for a wind trio, a configuration in which we were regularly performing at the time. Our selection (13 Variations) always met with a positive response, yet we could not shake off the feeling

that it should not remain that way. Then, while performing Mozart's Gran Partita, I realised that the basset horn was the missing link and I could plunge into arranging the entire cycle. So the answer to your question is: we decided to record the arrangement following several successful concert performances, to which the audience responded with immense enthusiasm. We had no doubts that it was a great idea.

On your album, the intimate universe of the Goldberg Variations is followed by the festive Suite in C major, BWV 1066, the earliest and the “most French” of Bach's four orchestral suites. Why did you choose the latter composition?

The piece has been referred to as “orchestral”, yet it is written in a very chamber-like manner, prevailing for a mere four voices. We primarily embraced the Suite's dance section, which is very much befitting for wind instruments. As a colleague of mine pointed out – in comparison with the fiddly job with the Goldberg Variations, the work on the Suite went really smoothly: “As though we were playing at a ball”.

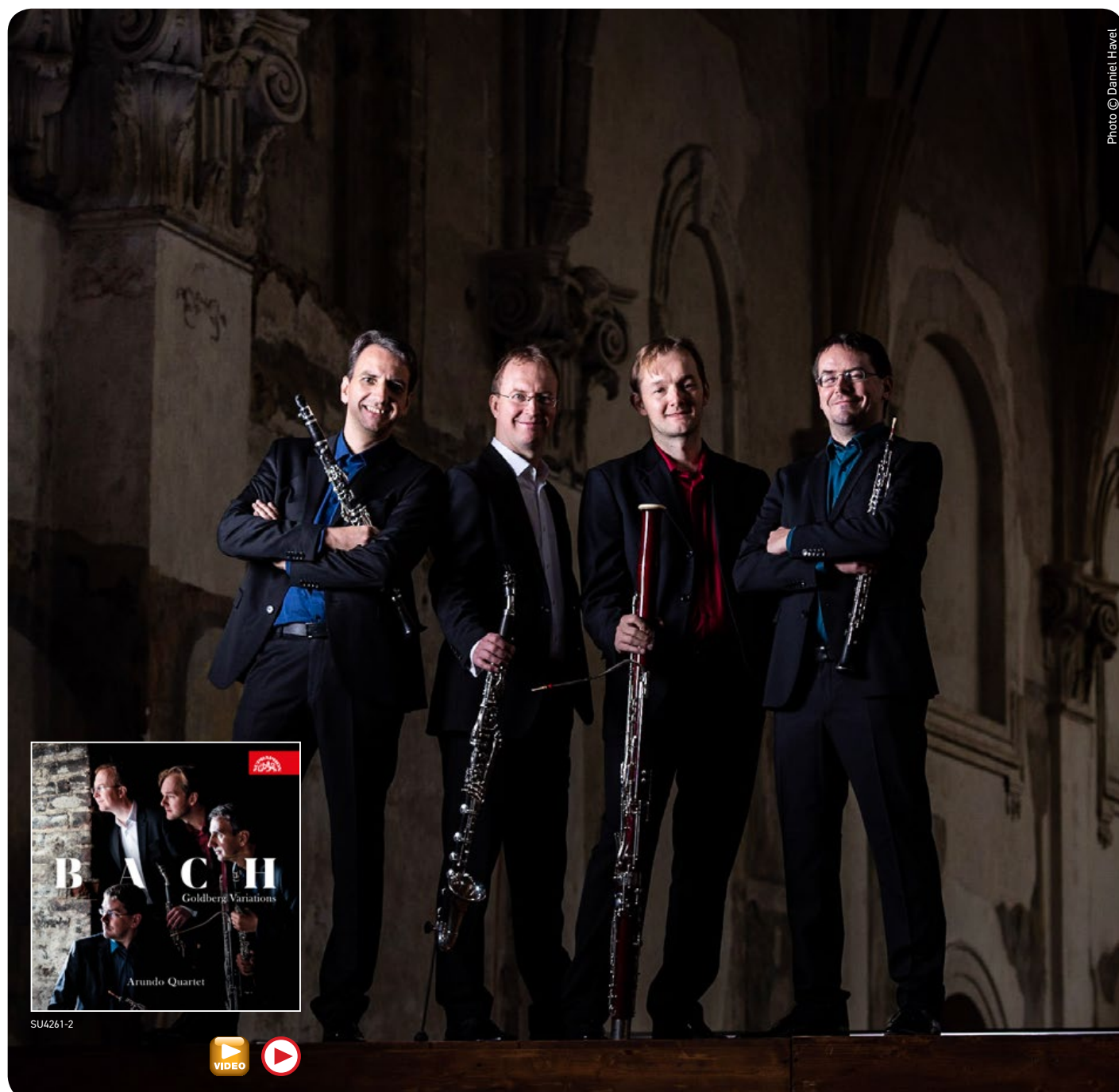


Photo © Daniel Havel



i FLAUTISTI – The London Recorder Quartet:
Jitka Konečná, Doris Kitzmantel,
Ilona Veselovská, Yu-Ching Chao

i FLAUTISTI AN ENGROSSING MUSICALITY, VIVACITY AND PASSION

What can be encompassed in music within 60 minutes? Africa, Japan, Germany. London, Vienna, the Balkans... Four virtuoso recorder players, i Flautisti, will guide you through this one-hour odyssey. Since their getting together in 2009 at the Royal College of Music in London, the female ensemble have given premieres of a number of pieces, directly written for them. The composers who have created music for them include such celebrities as Tarik O'Regan and Nathan Theodoulou. i Flautisti have appeared at renowned festivals and led master classes in the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Czech Republic. Their live performances have also enchanted BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio 4 listeners. The present recording serves to mark the ensemble's 10th anniversary, featuring ten pieces that have earned them enthusiastic responses at concert venues. The album organically blends the Middle Ages and Baroque with torrential Balkan rhythms and the contemporary world. Yet you should not approach the modern tunes with trepidation: i Flautisti present (for the most part in world premiere) music that is beautiful, comprehensive, often catchy even. The ensemble's great forte – also the common denominator of the recording – is an engrossing musicality, vivacity and passion. We asked Jitka Konečná, a member of the ensemble, a couple of questions about the new release, about her colleagues as well as about their plans for the future.



Could you introduce to us your ensemble, and reveal what prompted you to make an album for Supraphon?

We formed i Flautisti – The London Recorder Quartet during our time at the Royal College of Music. After completing our studies, we contemplated whether to carry on, as we were invited to give more concerts. We duly decided to continue, and this year we are celebrating ten years of our ensemble's existence. The new album is actually a musical commemoration of this anniversary.

How did you compile the repertoire for the CD?

In addition to early music, we also like performing contemporary pieces, therefore we have collaborated with several present-day composers, who have written for us a few "tailor-made" scores. We wanted to present these works to a wider audience, so we decided to record four of them in world premiere. The album also includes music of older eras – the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque. And we have recorded two Romanian folk dances, as arranged by Jan Rokyta.

The booklet lists almost 20 types of recorders. How do you decide which member of your quartet will play the particular recorder?

Yes, we play many different types of recorder on the CD. When it comes to the earliest repertoire, we use Adriana Breukink's copies of Renaissance Bassano consort recorders. We play Baroque pieces on instrument copies from Germany and Austria, and use modern instruments from Herbert Paetzold's workshop when performing contemporary music. Even though we have not recently taken turns on all the instruments, at concerts in particular, each of us is capable of playing all the recorder types.

How popular is currently the recorder as an independent musical instrument?

The quality of playing the instrument in the Czech Republic has been markedly rising, notwithstanding that for the time being the

recorder can only be studied here at secondary schools. Yet our colleagues abroad, with whom all of us have been in close contact and whom we have frequently invited to come here, have been very pleasantly surprised as to how high the local standard of playing the recorder at primary and secondary art schools is.

How have contemporary composers' works for your ensemble come into being?

In most cases, the composers attended our concerts and were intrigued by the broad scale of timbres the recorder can generate. Although simple in constructional terms, it is feasible for plenty of modern techniques – you can play on certain parts of the recorder, create extraordinary sounds, etc.

Could you introduce to us your colleagues from i Flautisti?

Two of us are Czech, and we both work at conservatories. Ilona Veselovská teaches in Teplice, and besides the recorder she also studied the Baroque traverso, in the Hague. I teach at the conservatories in Olomouc and Ostrava. Doris Kitzmantel studied the recorder and the piano in Linz and Vienna, she works as an educator and is also a member of other chamber ensembles. Yu-Ching Chao hails from Taiwan and studied the recorder at prestigious music academies in Hamburg, Leuven, Amsterdam and elsewhere. Currently mainly living and working in Hamburg, she has performed all over the world.

Did you invite any guests to join you when making the recording?

We invited the percussionist Radek Tomášek, a member of the Brno Philharmonic and teacher at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts. He performed with us three pieces – in one of them he played the frame drum, in the other two the darbuka and the riq.



STAMIC QUARTET

AN EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY MORE THAN A CENTURY AFTER



STAMIC QUARTET:
Jindřich Pazdera – 1st violin
Josef Kekula – 2nd violin
Jan Pěruška – viola
Petr Hejný – cello

Following the revelatory premiere recording of Josef Bohuslav Foerster's quartets (Supraphon 2010) and the highly acclaimed album of Sofia Gubaidulina's complete quartets (Supraphon 2012), the Stamic Quartet have come up with yet another striking project – an album of Karel Kovařovic's string quartets.

Karel Kovařovic (1862–1920) is primarily known for his work as the director of the opera company of the National Theatre in Prague, as well as a conductor, while his own music has been generally overlooked. Nevertheless, Kovařovic wrote several operas, ballet and incidental music, songs, choral and chamber pieces. The Stamic Quartet has made the very first recording of his string quartets, which are yet to be published. The most remarkable of them is String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, dedicated to Antonín Dvořák, which six years after its premiere in Prague (1888) was performed to great acclaim at the Musikverein in Vienna. Kovařovic did not finish his String Quartet No. 3, most likely owing to his being extremely busy as a conductor and his new responsibilities at the National Theatre. The new album made by the Stamic Quartet serves to prove that Kovařovic's quartets richly deserve to be paid much greater attention to than has been the case over the past century. We talked about the new recording with Josef Kekula, the violinist of the Stamic Quartet.

How did you arrive at the decision to make the album?

The idea of reviving Kovařovic's string quartets was in line with our intention to rediscover forgotten and less frequently performed music by Czech composers. In the past, our ensemble recorded the complete quartets of Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana, Leoš Janáček, Antonín Hába, Bohuslav Martinů, Josef Bohuslav Foerster and Jan Klusák, so the new album is just a logical outcome of our endeavours. When it comes to the "discoveries", they have so far mainly encompassed works by Czech classicist composers – in this

respect, Kovařovic's works are the exception. We found out that Karel Kovařovic wrote three string quartets, which have never been published, and they only exist as manuscripts. Thanks to the assistance and understanding of the staff at the Czech Museum of Music employees, we have succeeded in making the scores fit for use and have subsequently revised them.

What was the most difficult aspect of the recording process?

The most difficult aspect was revising the music material. Another problem we had to tackle was the tempos, as we had nothing to lean on in terms of the performance tradition. Tempo marks were either missing in some places, or were contradictory in the parts, as they were noted down by musicians when performing the pieces. We actually only made the decision about the definitive form when listening.

Will the Stamic Quartet perform Kovařovic's string quartets at concerts?

We have already performed the quartets. We played all three of them at the EuroArt Prague festival. The second quartet, dedicated to Antonín Dvořák, was included in a concert held by the Czech Chamber Music Society. Of late, we have often performed the third quartet, which has a wonderful slow movement. Karel Kovařovic's string quartets have become part of our repertoire, and now we have recorded them. The Stamic Quartet is really happy about it, and we hope that we will also convey our joy to the audience!



IVO KAHÁNEK IMMERSING IN VIKTOR KALABIS'S MUSIC



The very first complete recording of Viktor Kalabis's piano works – just as the previous album featuring his three sonatas (Supraphon 2018) – came to fruition owing to the initiative and keen enthusiasm of the world-renowned harpsichordist Zuzana Růžicková, the composer's wife and promoter of his music. A crucial role was played by the choice of the performer, a highly technically skilled pianist, possessing a deep insight into Kalabis's style.

The new recording album maps more than half a century of the composer's music, from his post-war Sonata No. 1 to brilliant miniatures dating from the very end of the millennium. Following the acclaimed album of Kalabis's symphonies and concertos (SU4109-2 – Choc de Classica, Gramophone Editor's Choice) and the mentioned CD of sonatas, the present project opens yet another window into Kalabis's fascinating musical universe. On the occasion of releasing the very first complete recording of Viktor Kalabis's piano works, we talked to Ivo Kahánek.

Ivo, how long were the preparations for making a recording of such challenging music?

The preparations were long and continuous – it took three years to make the recording. In musical terms, Kalabis's piano works are challenging owing to some of its facets being difficult to grasp, while in technical terms owing to the texture being not “piano-friendly”. His music comes across as relatively rational, yet at thorough scrutiny you find out that it directly expresses emotion – as a result, it is really challenging for the pianist to render. Accordingly, Kalabis's pieces are

very difficult in consequence of their being unpredictable and technically complex, as the scores contain many unconventional grips, skips and extreme tempo.

How much did Viktor Kalabis's style change over half a century?

In a matter of fact, at the first glance there is no palpable stylistic transformation of Kalabis's piano works. He actually changed the manner of composition, viewing of life and the world earlier, before he wrote his first pieces for solo piano. A case in point is the rejoicing, vigorous Strážnice Festival for a large orchestra (recently performed by the Czech Philharmonic), as well as, perhaps, the Piano Concerto. On the other hand, Kalabis's piano sonatas and later works reveal far more scepticism and introspection. A certain development can be seen in the genre and form of his writing, his rather marked shifting from the sonata cycle to smaller, albeit similarly compact compositions, like the Accents, Three Polkas and Allegro impetuoso, for instance, which seem to be imbued with a higher degree of playfulness.



SU4259-2



Photo © Martin Kubica