

VIVACE

*Classical Music Review
in Supraphon Recordings*

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IVO KAHÁNEK

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PAVEL HAAS QUARTET

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BELFIATO QUINTET

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VOJTĚCH SEMERÁD

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CZECH ENSEMBLE BAROQUE

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Dear Readers,

I can begin the new calendar year in no other way than by wishing you beautiful melodic lines accompanied by inspirational harmonies, preferably *moderato* and *spiritoso* rather than *allegro molto* or *prestissimo*. I hope you will always have excellent colleagues close at hand in your ensemble and that your part will be beautifully in tune with theirs.

The time when one year passes into another leads one both to look back and to gaze into the future. When taking stock of the recordings released during the past half year (see below), a few of the names reminded me of the wise proverb that no prophet is accepted in his own country. This might be more true of Czechs than we would like to admit (and probably not only in the world of music). Antonín Rejcha (Anton Reicha) comes to mind, who had to run away from his home and his country in order to devote himself fully to music, his lifelong passion. It was especially in France that he received the greatest recognition including a professorship at the Paris Conservatoire and the highest state honours (something I can't imagine in this country today). Bohuslav Martinů departed for France to find inspiration, and to escape the Nazis he went to America, where he made his mark as one of the great composers of his day. He would have returned home had the communist regime in Czechoslovakia not barred his way. It might be worth wondering who today's "prophets" are... It is my hope that we will gradually learn to hear and perceive those truly prophetic souls, but sometimes we fall for clever media manipulators who pose as prophets but are mere impostors. We would do well to learn to tell the difference.

In the autumn of 2019, Supraphon issued two important recordings that I would go so far as to call timeless: the Pavel Haas Quartet playing Shostakovich, and Ivo Kahánek, the Bamberg Symphony, and Jakub Hrůša in piano concertos by Dvořák and Martinů. Without reference to the critics' reviews and from my very first hearing, I have regarded the Pavel Haas Quartet's Shostakovich recording as the best they have yet made. I feel a chill go up my spine every time I listen to it. In an interview, the violinist Veronika Jarůšková said: "I played the Seventh Quartet for the first time at a master class with the cellist of the Borodin Quartet Valentin Berlinsky, who studied the work directly with Shostakovich... Quartet No. 2 is a monumental work, a 'quartet symphony', and I personally feel that the second movement is like a prayer for all of mankind with a final 'amen'."

A truly exceptional combination of artists took on the piano concertos of Martinů and Dvořák. Ivo Kahánek has Martinů's "Incanta-

tion" deeply ingrained, and the connection between the world-famous conductor Jakub Hrůša and the Bamberg orchestra is more than symbolic – it is vital and strong. The recording they made together has deservedly earned one award after another (BBC Radio 3 Disc of the Week, BBC Music Magazine Recording of the Month, nomination for the BBC Music Magazine Award etc.)

So much for our brief look back (you will find much more on the pages that follow); now let's reveal at least some of what awaits us in 2020. Major anniversaries... The world will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. We will also be celebrating the same anniversary for his friend and colleague Antonín Rejcha – see the interview with the Belfiatio Quintet about their Rejcha recording. In December, 150 years will have passed since the birth of Vítězslav Novák, and in September we will be commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of the conductor Václav Neumann, who led the Czech Philharmonic with great dignity from the era of totalitarianism into the new period of freedom.

For the Novák anniversary, in cooperation with Czech Radio and the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Supraphon is preparing a new recording with Jakub Hrůša featuring symphonic works and the early Piano Concerto for the first time on CD with the soloist Jan Bartoš. In April, another outstanding Czech pianist, Miroslav Sekera, is making his debut on the Supraphon label (Smetana, Liszt). With the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, the violist Jitka Hosprová, who searches tirelessly for new repertoire for her beautiful instrument, has recorded concertos by Jindřich Feld, Oldřich Flosman, and Sylvie Bodorová. Jana Semerádová is again presenting herself on a new recording as a peerless Baroque flautist in works by G. F. Handel and J. M. Leclair. Fans of archival recordings can look forward to something absolutely unique: we are returning once again to Václav Talich for a previously unreleased recording of fragments from Smetana's *Libuše* from the tragic year of 1939. And appearing in March for the first time on CD is the remarkable and the timeless recording of Bach's complete Cello Suites with Saša Večtomov (1984). The tone of his old Italian instrument (Alessandro Gagliano 1712) is simply beautiful.

I won't reveal any more, so I'll still have some aces up my sleeve. Hopefully this sampling is enough to give you the feeling that there is plenty to look forward to in the new year. May your new year be full of good music as well as some peace and quiet.

Matouš Vlčinský

PAVEL HAAS QUARTET AND THEIR SHOSTAKOVICH

The internationally renowned ensemble Pavel Haas Quartet released their eighth album featuring Shostakovich's String Quartets Nos. 2, 7, 8. On that occasion the Pavel Haas Quartet talked to us about the new album as well as about their plans for the future.

What was the impulse for your recording Shostakovich's quartets? Are his quartets part of the staple repertoire worldwide?

Peter Jarůšek: Shostakovich's quartets are among the repertoire staples in this genre. He was a composer of global calibre, who transcended the borders of his own country from the very beginning.

Marek Zwiebel: We deem Shostakovich to be a seminal 20th-century composer whose music boldly expressed human nature, conveying a significant message.

When scrutinising several Shostakovich symphonies, many compelling, often weighty, stories formed their background. What stories are concealed in his quartets?

Marek Zwiebel: Shostakovich began writing quartets later than symphonies. He dedicated his symphonies to the whole Russian people, which is quite evident from the music. I am of the opinion that the Russian nation identified themselves with his works. On the other hand, the quartets were his intimate personal "diary".

Veronika Jarůšková: Perhaps that is why when playing Shostakovich's quartets we feel very close to him as a composer and human being, as though we were engaged in a conversation.

Why did you choose quartets 2, 7 and 8 in particular?

Veronika Jarůšková: I was the first from our ensemble to play the seventh quartet – at master classes with Valentin Berlinsky, the cellist of the Borodin Quartet, who studied the piece with Shostakovich himself. The eighth quartet is like a memorial to Shostakovich, an iconic work that has accompanied us since the formation of our ensemble. The second quartet is a monumental piece, a "quartet symphony", whose second part I personally perceive as being a prayer for the entire humankind, with the final "amen".

Marek Zwiebel: The quartets nicely supplement each other. We should bear in mind that they starkly differ. The seventh and eighth were written in the 1960s, the second was composed in the 1940s, during the second world war.

Which other composers have you combined with Shostakovich at concerts?

Peter Jarůšek: With regard to the forcibility of the message and distinct musical idiom, we have always had to give it a lot of thought. When it comes to Shostakovich's second quartet, we have come to the conclusion that it must be performed in the second half of concerts – what is more, we agreed that it is not appropriate to add anything, as everything has been said, and it would seem that the audience feel the same.

What style of recording do you like? How do you work when recording?

Peter Jarůšek: First and foremost, I would like to say that we fully rely on our now established and faithful recording team, made up of the recording director Jiří Gemrot and the sound engineer Karel Soukeník. In a way, we are actually "in their hands".

Will you be playing the works featured on your new album at concerts in the foreseeable future?

Veronika Jarůšková: The majority of our concerts contained these Shostakovich works prior to our embarking upon the recording – accordingly, this phase is behind us. In a certain sense, we have come to an end of a period in our history. Even though we will perform Shostakovich's quartets at a few concerts, we will, as is usually the case, rather focus on a new repertoire, instead of looking back.

Could you reveal the repertoire you have pursued in the current season?

Marek Zwiebel: Since the previous season, we have been intensely exploring the complete quartets of Bohuslav Martinů, whose works we will perform next season at Wigmore Hall in London. Furthermore, we have concentrated on Bartók, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. And we really look forward to working again with the violist Pavel Nikl and the cellist Danjulo Ishizaka.





SU4236-2



**IVO KAHÁNEK, BAMBERGER
SYMPHONIKER AND JAKUB HRŮŠA**
TO RELEASE ONE OF THE LAST
YEAR'S MAJOR ALBUMS

At first glance, it is evident that an extraordinary constellation of artists is one of the most significant attributes of the new recording of Dvořák's and Martinů's Piano Concerto. A Czech conductor and a Czech soloist, and a German orchestra, who have a Czech sound in their DNA. All three of them enjoy great renown in both the European and global contexts. Symbolic indeed is the selection of the album's repertoire – the same world war that deprived the players of the German Philharmonic in Prague of their home and that in 1946 gave rise to the Bamberger Symphoniker in Germany made Bohuslav Martinů leave his country and Europe itself.

Bohuslav Martinů wrote his Piano Concerto No. 4, „Incantation“, in New York in the twilight of his life, when it was evident that he would never return to his homeland. The soloist featured on the new album, Ivo Kahánek, expressed his high opinion and affection for the work: *“I personally consider Incantation to be one of the finest works of Martinů's and one of the best pieces of Czech music in general, as well as one of the most singular compositions for piano and orchestra of the second half of the 20th century. All the facets, from motoric rhythmicity, through passion and tragedy, to dreamy surrealism, form together a truly breath-taking whole.”* The selection of the soloist for the recording was by no means random. Kahánek has played the Incantation at prominent concert halls all over the world (BBC Symphony Orchestra, Jiří Bělohlávek – BBC Proms; Berliner Philharmoniker, Sir Simon Rattle – Berlin, Prague, etc.).

The performance of the piece in Bamberg, captured on the present album, which will be launched within the Dvořák Prague festival on Monday 9 September 2019, has been lauded by the critics as revelatory. The studio recording of Antonín Dvořák's Piano Concerto ranks among the most forcible returns to the composer's original version of the work, forbearing the “effective and virtuoso improvements” carried out by its later arrangers. It showcases the tender and melodious music of Dvořák, who always strove to emphasise profound expression, giving it preference to instrumental impression. An exceptional encounter of outstanding musicians, performing an exceptional Czech – and global – repertoire.

As Jakub Hrůša put it: *“The concerto possesses immense power and beauty, representing an interesting task for the conductor, an equal dialogue, with the orchestra and the conductor always having something to offer.”*

The recordings were made in 2017 and 2019, in collaboration with a top-notch Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR Klassik) team, at the Joseph-Keilberth-Saal, the Bamberger Symphoniker's home venue, whose acoustics are among the best in Europe.

The recording of Antonín Dvořák's and Bohuslav Martinů's piano concertos, made by the pianist Ivo Kahánek and the Bamberger Symphoniker under the baton of Jakub Hrůša has garnered critical acclaim since its release last September (BBC Radio 3 Disc of the Week; BBC Music Magazine Recording of the Month; Choix de Classique HD). Now it has been selected as one of the three BBC Music Magazine Award nominees in the “Concerto” category. The BBC Music Magazine Awards solely pertain to classical music and, unlike the majority of other prestigious accolades, the winners are chosen via public internet polling worldwide. The vote started on 16th January and will close on 19th February 2020 at musicmagawards.awardsplatform.com.





SU4260-2



PETR NEKORANEC AND HIS DEBUT ALBUM FEATURING FRENCH ARIAS

Petr Nekoranec has garnered a number of accolades at renowned European competitions. In January 2017, he won one of the most prestigious, the Concurso Francesco Viñas at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, where he also received the Plácido Domingo Prize. Supraphon has released Nekoranec's debut album, made with the Czech Philharmonic, conducted by Christopher Franklin. The recording features French arias.

Petr, what did you select for your debut album?

I opted for French arias for leggero tenor, striving to pick something that has occupied a special position in my personal and professional life alike. That is precisely what French arias are.

What was the impulse for making this album?

To tell the truth, I myself did not feel that the time was ripe for me to make a solo recording. The idea actually came from my agent, Alena Kunertová, who suggested it to the Czech Philharmonic. The orchestra's representatives agreed, so we decided to get going on the project.

In May 2019, you had a solo Baroque recital in Prague within one of the Prague Symphony concert cycles. At the Staatsoper Stuttgart, whose soloist you have been since September 2018, you are currently mainly performing in Rossini's operas. What is the basis of your repertoire today?

I am, and have always been, glad that my repertoire has been wide-ranging, from Baroque right the way up to Romanticism. At the present time, I would define myself as a young lyric tenor, which is an extensive category indeed. Of late, I really have mostly performed Rossini roles, yet this season I am also scheduled to portray in Stuttgart the Holy Fool in Boris Godunov, which will be a step in the direction of more lyric parts. Yet before plunging into this recording, my voice had grown a little bit – which certainly was not planned – and it is becoming somewhat fuller, thus opening scope to other roles, so I hope I will soon sing Mozart roles on stage too.

But your debut album solely features French music, which – as you have said – is close to your heart. Have the arias been part of your regular repertoire, or did you newly explore them for the present recording?

Most of them were new to me. Another factor that prompted me to choose these French arias in particular was the response to the solo recital the pianist Vincenzo Scalerà and I had at the Rudolfinum. The audience said: "The concert was wonderful, yet the most wonderful was the French aria ("Fantaisie aux divins mensonges" from the opera Lakmé). It was an entirely unknown aria. At the time, I realised that French arias could be my secret weapon.

Yes, French arias really do appear to be your very powerful secret weapon. After all, performances of two of them have earned you great acclaim.

Absolutely. Nadir's aria, from Georges Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles*, and "Ah! Mes ami", from Gaetano Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*, are the two gems owing to which I have gained success at competitions, either having won them or received some prize. But most significantly, the arias made it possible for me to study opera in Munich, as well as at the MET.

It would seem that you have been destined to sing French arias. Do any of those you did not perform prior to making your debut album will become staples of your concert repertoire?

All of them, I think. The French repertoire is like a Pandora's box, it encompasses a myriad of arias – primarily for tenor, and my tenor type in particular. I myself have found 23 arias, from which we had to make a selection, as we simply could not fit so many on a CD. We ultimately chose 11 arias and one duet. I intend to keep all the arias in my repertoire, especially the concert one. Maestro

Christopher Franklin and I would like to make a small tour with the French repertoire, because both of us really like it, and it is highly attractive.

What music is featured on your debut album?

Music by Jules Massenet, Charles Gounod, Gaetano Donizetti (although he was Italian, the aria is in French), Georges Bizet, Hector Berlioz and Edouard Lalo.

You have made the album with the Czech Philharmonic and the conductor Christopher Franklin. How did the recording go? Had you worked together previously?

We had not worked together before, we only met once prior to getting down to the recording, in Milan, to figure out and rehearse the arias. I would like to stress that my collaboration with the Czech Philharmonic and maestro Franklin was very pleasant. I have the feeling that ever since the then chief conductor Jiří Bělohlávek introduced me to the orchestra, they have treated me as one of them whenever we have collaborated on a project. This attitude was also evident during the recording sessions, when we were stressed, had to make it in time, as we had only allocated five frequencies ... They were even willing to stay longer, five minutes after a frequency had finished, so as to record the whole aria. Our working together was truly amazing.



Photo © Petr Dyrc

BELFIATO QUINTET ANTONÍN REJCHA AS THE FATHER OF THE WIND QUINTET

One of today's most interesting Czech chamber music ensembles has recorded an album with compositions by Antonín Rejcha, regarded as the father of the woodwind quintet. He was one of the first composers to discover the possibilities of the wind instruments. With three members of the Belfiatio Quintet, we have talked about how the album was made and what their future plans are. The flautist Oto Reiprich, the bassoonist Ondřej Šindelář, and the clarinetist Jiří Javůrek answered some questions for us.

In 2017, the Supraphon label issued your debut album with the music of Josef Bohuslav Foerster, Leoš Janáček, and Pavel Haas. Now your second album presents the music of Antonín Rejcha. Why did the choice fall to Antonín Rejcha for your second project?

Oto Reiprich: Above all, this is repertoire we have been playing as long as our ensemble has been in existence, almost fourteen years now. From the beginning we have been playing his Quintet in D major, for example. And we also found out that a Rejcha album of this sort has not been recorded in a very long time. So we picked out three of our favourite quintets and decided to make a recording that would be representative of the Belfiatio Quintet.

Ondřej Šindelář: For us, it's also actually a line of demarcation for a certain period of our development, because we've been playing all three of these quintets as long as our ensemble has been in existence, and it's music that shaped our ensemble, music that we grew up with, so for us it's also the bringing of an important period to a close.

Antonín Rejcha is one of the Czech composers who built up his career abroad. He knew Haydn and was a friend of Beethoven. How important was he in his own day?

Ondřej Šindelář: Antonín Rejcha was a professor at the Paris Conservatoire, and among his pupils were Hector Berlioz and César

Franck. He taught counterpoint, and this is reflected in his quintets, because you find a fugue in every one of them, for example, and this is something of a curiosity in the quintet literature. His quintets contain virtuosic and lyrical elements, and their harmonic structure is progressive. They are sophisticated and challenging for the performers, and this is in part because he composed them for his colleagues – conservatoire professors who were real virtuosos on their instruments.

Today, we think of Rejcha as the father of the wind quintet. Do we know why he devoted himself so intensively to this particular combination of instruments?

Jiří Javůrek: Antonín Rejcha really was one of the few composers to devote himself to wind instruments systematically and over a long period. He was himself a flautist, and he also had very good knowledge of the specifics of the other wind instruments. So he decided to compose wind quintets for his colleagues at the conservatoire, and because they were very well received, he composed a total of 24 of these quintets in a rather short period. This is certainly unique. Rejcha was actually one of the first composers to discover the possibilities of wind instruments. In those days – the early 19th century (1802–1820) – they were undergoing a great development, an evolution. Keys were being added, the bore sizes and measurements were changing, and



technical changes made it possible for the instruments to play in different keys. Rejcha was the first to be able to put these new possibilities to use, and not only in works for solo wind instrument; above all, he was unafraid to use these instruments together. Thanks to his teaching at the Paris Conservatoire, he had the ideal conditions for this, because his colleagues were some of the best performers of their day and had the latest instruments at their disposal.

Rejcha spent most of his life abroad, mainly in Paris. In spite of this, does one find any trace of his Czech origins in his music?

Jiří Javůrek: I think this is hard to judge from today's perspective. But from my point of view, Rejcha makes plentiful use of Czech music's simple lyricism – in the best sense of the word. Because he had a very good knowledge of Czech melodies – Czech folk melodies – he was able to project their melodiousness into his quintets. Of course, this does not mean that the individual parts are not difficult to play.

What might one call the golden era as far as the wind quintet repertoire is concerned? Was it the period when Antonín Rejcha was composing, i.e. the Classical Period?

Ondřej Šindelář: I would say the golden era was the late Classical Period and then the 20th century, when György Ligeti, Paul Hindemith, Jean Françaix, and Francis Poulenc were writing for winds. Of course, Antonín Rejcha belongs to the Classical Period, and his 24 quintets actually laid the foundations of the genre, and other composers took his works as their starting point.

Great performers have always been an inspiration to composers who were their contemporaries. Do you have a work dedicated to the Belfiatio Quintet in your repertoire?

Jiří Javůrek: We have a work that we commissioned, written by our professor from the conservatoire, the composer Eduard Douša. The title is *Quintettino Giocoso*, and it is short and humorous, something lighter for our concerts.

You made an evocative video clip for your debut album. Has something of the kind been made for this new recording as well?

Oto Reiprich: Yes, we have a new teaser for this album. It was made during the photo shoot for the booklet and the new profile photos. It was done once again by our proven team – the director and animator Tomáš Chabrus Hájek and our own photographer and cameraman Tomáš Hejzlar. You can see it on the Supraphon website, on YouTube, on the Belfiatio Quintet website, and on our Facebook page.

And what awaits the Belfiatio Quintet in the near future?

Ondřej Šindelář: We have lots of interesting upcoming concerts this season. We'll be playing in Germany and Scotland. We would also like to establish cooperation with our friend, the pianist Lukáš Klánský, with whom we have been enjoying collaboration for several years, and in the future we would also like to record another album.



Photo © Adéla Havelková

CAPPELLA MARIANA IN THE HEART OF RENAISSANCE EUROPE

Two centuries after the prosperous era of Charles IV, Prague evidently enjoyed its second Golden Age, under the reign of the art-loving Emperor and King Rudolf II, as it became a busy cultural centre, attracting artists from all over Europe. Like in a melting pot, a variety of musical styles mingled together in the city: the Franco-Flemish polyphony, represented by the world's most accomplished composers at the time, as well as the vigorous tradition of literary brotherhoods with the archaic polyphonic repertoire of the previous generations. The focal point of Cappella Mariana's new album is the recently rediscovered Prague Manuscript of Polyphonic Masses, with the fabulously survived *Missa Presulem ephebeatum* by Heinrich Isaac, one of the most significant masters of the Franco-Flemish polyphonic style. Cappella Mariana, made up of stellar early music singers (Hana Blažíková, Barbora Kabátková, and others), have performed Renaissance polyphony to great acclaim at Europe's most prominent concert venues and festivals. We talked about the new album with the ensemble's artistic director, Vojtěch Semerád.

Vojtěch, what type of music does your new album feature? The title indicates that you were greatly inspired by Prague as a city.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Prague was a very busy crossroads in the heart of Renaissance Europe. I would like to present to the listeners the rose symbolising Prague, whose flowers blossomed over the centuries, just as the city boomed from the Middle Ages to the end of the Renaissance era, thus forming an imaginary arc spanning almost two centuries. The bulk of the pieces on the album were written by composers of the Franco-Flemish school, which influenced the evolution of music throughout Europe. New pieces

from the Netherlands were also in demand in Prague, and were diligently copied. I have discovered such compositions at Prague libraries. Thanks to the mobility of the musicians who gravitated towards Prague, this type of music experienced prolific development and was frequently played.

What sources did you select from and what do you deem to be the album's pivotal work?

The axis is Heinrich Isaac's *Missa Presulem ephebeatum* for four voices, which takes the listener on a musical journey through the bygone centuries. The other pieces on the album are from the



Photo © Petr Tomáides

Speciálník and Strahov Codices, and the Rokycany music collection. They encompass a truly extensive repertoire, from which I have only chosen sacred compositions.

Cappella Mariana is primarily a vocal ensemble, yet instrumentalists have occasionally been invited to participate in your projects. Were you not tempted to invite them to record the current album too?

Yes, I was indeed, but I wanted it to be different from our first album, Praga Magna, on which singers are accompanied by instrumentalists. Accordingly, I decided to solely make use of the ensemble's vocal core and pick the best music that could be heard in Prague during the Renaissance era.

How challenging were the pieces to perform?

The most challenging aspect was to interconnect the stylistic facets of the music development over two centuries – from the late Medieval repertoire, which requires vocal performance different from that needed in the case of Joannes Sixtus' music, containing elements of the ascendant Baroque style.

Will you perform the works featured on the new album at concerts?

Yes, some of them, yet I intend for us to perform the entire repertoire during the next concert seasons. I am working on minor arrangements pertaining to the sequence of the compositions.

Your ensemble has performed with various numbers of singers. What did you base the choice of the singers for the new album on?

It has always been something like a voice laboratory. Every piece required a different number of voices, from three to eight, in the case of Pierre de Bonhomme's motet. I am really glad that all the ensemble's main members could participate in the making of the album, including Hana Blažíková and Barbora Kabátková.

How did you select the place where the album would be recorded?

The album was recorded at the refectory of the monastery in Osek. I was seeking a place with excellent acoustics, as well as possessing a genius loci. I bore in mind a place that would draw us into a "different world", so we could fully concentrate on our task.



SU4273-2



CZECH ENSEMBLE BAROQUE

A DIFFERENT PERFORMANCE DIMENSION

Roman Válek, the Czech Ensemble Baroque's conductor, talked to us about their new album featuring works by Franz Xaver Richter.

Supraphon released the fourth Czech Ensemble Baroque album featuring music by Franz Xaver Richter. How long have you been mapping the legacy of the Moravian composer?

Approximately six years of intense work, which has entailed exploration of archives, transcription of scores, performances and making recordings.

Why such an affinity to Franz Xaver Richter in particular? Why do you find him so fascinating?

Franz Xaver Richter was an Austro-Moravian composer, and we, Czech Ensemble Baroque, consider ourselves to be Moravian too. We have mainly worked in Brno, although our members hail from Moravia, Bohemia, as well as Slovakia. Richter's family lived in close vicinity to the Holešov chateau, whose owner, Count Rottal, was a true music enthusiast, holding numerous musical events at the time when Richter was a child, in the 1720s or so. Every summer, operas were performed at the estate, where the young Richter most likely first encountered the composer Ignaz Jacob Holzbauer, who would later on serve as Kapellmeister of the renowned Mannheim court orchestra. It was probably in Holešov where Richter developed an interest in Baroque music and composition. As I have said, Czech Ensemble Baroque are based in the Zlín region in Moravia, and the Holešov chateau is a place where we have regularly given concerts, collaborated with the Musica Holešov festival, and also, over the past 15 years, organised our Baroque master classes for young artists who are interested in performing Baroque music, as well as for esteemed figures. Next year, Holešov should even be visited by the celebrated

countertenor Andreas Scholl. All that, I think, gives a good answer to the question of why we are so fascinated by Richter – there simply aren't many composers of his significance born in the Zlín region.

Richter was one of the Czech and Moravian composers who gained recognition abroad. What was his position in the cultural centres in which he lived and worked?

Richter was evidently a very ambitious man. After completing his studies, he was engaged in several places, first in small parishes in the mid-sized German cities of Kempten and Ettal, where he served as choir conductor or deputy Kapellmeister of the relatively small local ensembles. In 1746, he was hired by the Prince Elector in Mannheim – the question is whether any role in it had been played by his previous encounter with Kapellmeister Ignaz Holzbauer. Nonetheless, the court in Mannheim did employ a number of Czech musicians, including the Stamitz family. It would seem that Richter was not overly satisfied in Mannheim, as his main job was playing the viola and singing, either minor solos or with the choir. And when it comes to writing music, he was just a chamber composer, while at his previous workplaces in smaller towns he was afforded the opportunity to create really grand oratorios. Therefore, in the 1760s, Richter began seeking a Kapellmeister post, which would make it possible for him to pursue his ambition. *Super flumina Babylonis*, featured on our new CD, is actually the work that helped him acquire a prestigious position – that of the Maitre de Chapelle de Notre Dame de Strasbourg. All of a sudden, a little-known Austro-Moravian composer became an artist who shook hands with Marie Antoinette, mingled with Leopold Mozart and plenty of other leading musicians of the time.



Photo © Tino Kratochvíl

What works do your previous three Richter albums contain?

The first CD we recorded features the Requiem in E flat major, the second the Good Friday oratorio La deposizione dalla croce di Gesù Cristo, the third includes the Oboe Concerto in F major and Te Deum. The current album contains the cantata Super flumina Babylonis and the setting of the Miserere in F minor.

You have mentioned that the seminal work of your new recording – Super flumina Babylonis – played a significant role in Richter's life. Could you describe the circumstances under which it came into being?

I could perhaps compare the situation to that of Johann Sebastian Bach, when he was seeking the post of composer at the Dresden court and created for the competition the Kyrie Gloria, which he would later on use in his Mass in B minor. It would seem that Richter wrote his Super flumina Babylonis with a similar intention, that is, when he applied for the position of the Maitre de Chapelle at the Strasbourg Cathedral. Attesting to this assumption is the fact that the piece's orchestration is actually tailor-made for the cathedral's ensemble, even though Richter conceived it prior to his departure for Strasbourg. He scored it for strings, two horns, two oboes, basso continuo, organ, choir and soloists. To all appearances, Richter composed the work with a view to presenting himself at the top level in France... The truth is that his piece was successfully performed in Paris at one of Europe's most prestigious concert venues at the time – the former Tuileries Palace, in a hall with 1,500 seats, which today may be compared to Covent Garden. The critics lauded the premiere, and it is likely that a commendatory review published in the *Mercure de France* magazine was instrumental in paving the way for Richter's engagement in Strasbourg.

What other work does your new album feature, in addition to Super flumina Babylonis, its centrepiece?

Miserere in F minor, which Richter wrote in Strasbourg in 1770, for Good Friday religious services. Its beginning may perplex many a listener, since Richter borrowed for it the theme of Pergolesi's Stabat Mater, which he very craftily elaborated.

In what condition are the Richter works you have discovered in archives?

Very good. Richter was evidently an extremely solicitous person. We have always worked with his autographs, not contenting ourselves with copies, and his manuscripts are legible, meticulous and, with very few exceptions, they do not contain errors, which are quite common even in the case of renowned composers. As regards the autograph of the Requiem in E flat major, we could read directly from the sheet.

Who participated in the recording?

Almost 40 per cent of the Czech Ensemble Baroque singers are superb soloists, trained in early music – we apply the “colla parte” style, whereby they sing solo and chorus parts alike, with the result being a certain homogeneity and integrity of expression. My philosophy and credo is that when performing music ensembles should be in a much closer artistic and personal contact, a contact different from that common in the majority of orchestras and theatre companies. My aim is to make the atmosphere, as well as the cooperation, pretty relaxed, while retaining due respect – both for the music and for each other. At rehearsals, we always seek variants, and I ask the musicians to express their opinions. I believe that when everything is reasonably coherent, it gives rise to a different performance dimension.



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