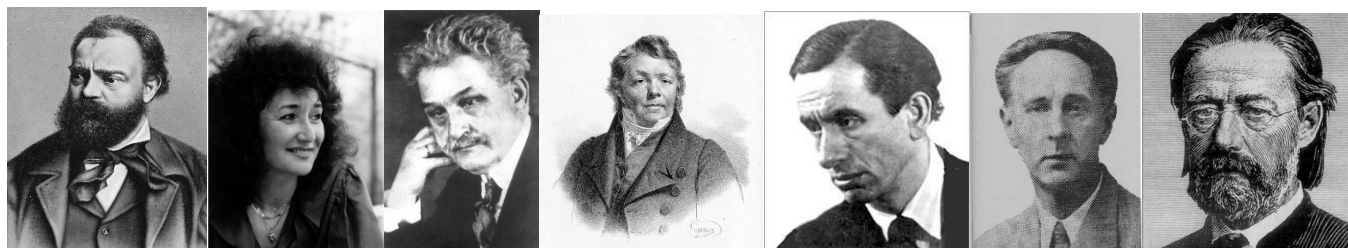


The Dvořák Society

For Czech and Slovak Music

Founded 1974

Newsletter No. 137 January 2022



Proposed Society trip to the Czech Republic in 2022

We are looking to run a Society trip again in 2022. Having visited Brno and the Janáček Festival on our previous 2 trips, it is proposed this trip is based around the Prague Dvořák Festival. The dates are 8th to 25th September, but the detailed programme is not yet available. In addition, there is the usual Festival “On the trail” event which will take place on 4th September, possibly in Karlovy Vary, although this has yet to be finalised. The usual Dvořák celebrations in Nelahozeves will take place on 11th September, ie. during the Festival. There will also probably be a trip to Vysoka. We are hopeful too of being able to arrange a private recital from our vice-president Radoslav Kvapil. If you are interested in going on this trip, either for the whole of the Festival or in part, please would you let me know by an email to gwattsuk@yahoo.co.uk. We are only after expressions of interest – there is no commitment at this stage.

Gordon Watts

On the Trail of Dvořák



At Maleč Chateau

The owners, Jan Simon, Director of the Prague Dvořák Festival and David Beveridge behind.

PRESIDENT:

Jakub Hruša

PATRONS: Karel Janovický and Richard Phillips

VICE-PRESIDENTS: David Beveridge, Sylvie Bodorová, Petr Dvořák, Markéta Hallová, Steven Isserlis, Miloš Jurkovič, Radoslav Kvapil, Alena Němcová, Jan Smaczny .

quizzes one of her theatre friends about his origins in the Rhineland), to ice-cold power as Paul ‘strangles’ Marietta in Act 3.

Thankfully, all is a grief induced dream, the work ending in the real world with faithful friend Frank suggesting Paul quit Bruges, leaving death infused thoughts behind. He agrees, and in a beautifully wrought coda Korngold brings back the ‘big’ tune once more. Tears welled in my eyes.....just as they should. The power of music remains undimmed.

Ian Bailey

**Antonín Dvořák: Unreleased
World première recordings
by Tomáš Víšek (piano)
ArcoDiva UP 0240 – 2 131**

This is a real treat, and our Society can be justly proud to have sponsored it. Tomáš Víšek is a distinguished Czech pianist who steps forward here also as a Dvořák scholar and a composer, filling in gaps in some of the pieces in a finely judged Dvořák manner. How to arrange a programme of 18 attractive but unusual pieces? Víšek has plumped simply for the chronological order, thereby giving us a mini Dvořák biography, interesting and in parts amusing too. We begin in the company of Antonín Liehmann, Dvořák’s teacher at Zlonice, giving his teenage pupil a lesson and composing a Trio to his “Forget-me-not” Polka. The next piece, a mazurka from the same period, is thought by some scholars to be of doubtful provenance, but Víšek none-the-less includes it – rightly, I think. It is a contrast and a hint of the mature Dvořák to come. A few pieces later we have another polka, *Per pedes Polka*, dating from Dvořák’s student years at the Organ School in Prague and only discovered at the end of the 20th century. Víšek’s playing is remarkable for the sensitive phrasing of the wealth of the Dvořák melodies, the typically trochaic cadences of some of the polkas, and the attention he pays to the polyphony, especially the bass line. The substantial item on the CD is a *Potpourri* from the comic opera “King and Charcoal Burner” - a cogent sequence of moods, drama and wit - a story to be enjoyed in its own right. Another item ready to engage one’s own imagination is an 1892 sketch for the well known *Humoresque*: why did Dvořák change it two years later, that’s the puzzle. The CD is rounded off with five “Bonuses” – short pieces and fragments, including a Theme that Dvořák once wrote on the blackboard for his students at the Prague Conservatoire - among them Oskar Nedbal who wrote a set of Variations on it, his own Op.1. It was the same Nedbal that was to become an internationally famous conductor and operetta composer. The final work on the CD is Dvořák’s setting (here realized by Jarmil Burghauser from a sketch dating from two years before the composer’s death) of Samuel Francis Smith’s poem “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee” which Dvořák hoped could become America’s national anthem.

Karel Janovický

**Ján Cikker (1911-1989) *O živote* – *On Life*,
symphonic triptych**

**Slovak State Philharmonic Košice, directed by
Zbyněk Müller**

Pavlik Records PA 0187-2-131

The title *O živote* (*On Life*) refers to life in one decade of the Slovak composer’s life, the 1940s during World War II.

The three parts of the triptych are *Leto* (*Summer*), *Vojak a matka – Boj* (*Soldier and Mother – Battle*) and *Ráno* (*Dawn*). The lyrical melodies of *Leto*, reminiscent of Debussy’s *L’après-midi d’un faune*, give way to stormy music, reflecting Cikker’s feelings for a young lady to whom he became engaged and later parted. *Vojak a matka – Boj* depicts not only the horrors of war, but also the calming nature of a mother to whom a dying soldier is saying farewell in a poem by Andrej Žarnov, ‘*About a soldier who caught a star*’, quietly recited in Slovak. Finally, *Ráno* is dominated by music depicting gunfire, marching and sirens, with the addition of the melody of a Russian folksong, considered to be symbolic of the liberation of Slovakia by the Soviet Union.

In the informative brochure, the complexities surrounding the composition and reception of the work in various political contexts from the 1940s to the present day are evident. Ján Cikker was fortunate enough not to be involved in fighting when conscripted in 1941. Although not openly a pacifist, he indirectly expressed his protest against war in this symphonic triptych. In 1944, in the seclusion of his home in Banská Bystrica, he was discretely in contact with collaborators of the Slovak National Uprising against the Nazi occupation.

The inclusion of the poem by Andrej Žarnov was problematic after the first performance in 1944, as it was considered a risk to morale. After the war, with the country under Soviet domination, the poem was omitted. Žarnov, who was also a doctor, represented the Slovak state in the investigation of the Katyn massacre of 1943, and agreed with the conclusion of the international commission, attributing the crime to the Soviet Union. He refused to change his opinion, was imprisoned and later emigrated. It was not until 2016 that the work was performed in the original version.

The first performance of *Ráno* took place in Bratislava in 1947. Whereas the title may be deemed to be hopeful, Cikker had raised the question: ‘*Can we enjoy victory when thousands are still crying? What is the price at which the new morning was redeemed?*’

This performance in 2020 by the Slovak State Philharmonic Košice is the first recording in the original form. I strongly recommend it for the quality of its orchestral textures and colours produced by all sections of the orchestra.

Susan Jenkinson

**Ernst von Dohnányi: Overture Tante Simona,
Op.20, Suite in F sharp minor, op.19, American
Rhapsody, Op.42.**

Leó Weiner: Serenade in F minor, Op.3.

**ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra,
Roberto Paternostro**