

The Dvořák Society

For Czech and Slovak Music

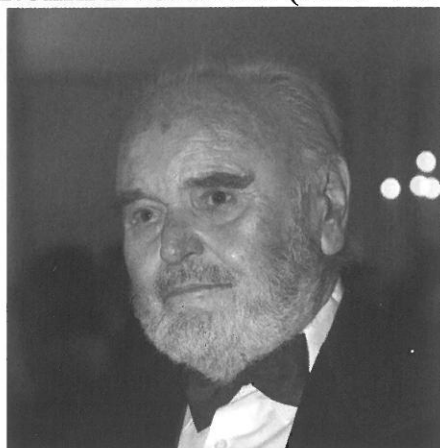
Founded 1974

Newsletter No. 120

July 2017



Antonín Dvořák III (1929- 2017)



Antonín Dvořák IV wrote:

'On 28th May 2017 Antonín Dvořák III left us for ever.

Excellent father, faultless grandfather, enthusiastic great grandfather and above all a wonderful person, friend and zealous promoter of the music of Antonín Dvořák. Those who loved him, please remember him together with us.

A book of condolences will be displayed in the Antonín Dvořák Memorial House in Vysoká near Příbram. A memorial concert for friends will be held in Prague during the period of the Antonín Dvořák Composers Competition in Prague between 23rd and 31st July.

According to the wishes of Antonín the deceased will be interred in the family grave in Prague Vyšehrad in the presence of family members only'.

Antonín Dvořák IV

Jiří Bělohlávek (1946-2017)



It is with very great sadness that we report the death on 31st May of our President, truly great conductor and fine friend, Jiří Bělohlávek. Although we knew of his lengthy illness, his passing so soon still came as a shock, not only to us but to the world of music at large and especially to Czech music and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in particular. The past decade saw him bring the orchestra back from the wilderness to its former international standing, akin to the years of Karel Ančerl and Rafael Kubelík, with a warm rapport with both players and audiences communicated in the performances. [continued on page 2]

Graham Melville-Mason

PRESIDENT: Jiří Bělohlávek†

PATRON: Graham Melville-Mason

VICE-PRESIDENTS: Antonín Dvořák III†, Radomil Eliška, Markéta Hallová, Miloš Jurkovič, Radoslav Kvapil, Alena Němcová, Zuzana Růžicková

Andrew Morris, Nicholas Morris

Alistair Auld

Saturday 1 April

The all-Dvořák programme of the local 80-strong Marches Choir and the Marches Sinfonia attracted a large audience in Bishops Castle's parish church on April 1. The two major works, the Te Deum before the Interval and the Stabat Mater after it, were preceded by two less familiar opening items, Slavonic Dance No 8 from the first set and the Song to the Moon from Rusalka.

The performances showed that conductor Alistair Auld had drilled the local orchestral players and choir with very great care and concern for dynamics and phrasing, and the four professional soloists all showed an appropriate understanding of their roles and enjoyment in the music. This enjoyment communicated itself to the audience, many of whom said they had previously been unfamiliar with these Dvořák choral works and expressed surprise they were not better known.

The choir were spaced in front of the altar with the strings of the orchestra in front and the wind and brass in the wings on either side. This balance worked out reasonably well for the Stabat Mater but in the more strenuous opening and closing sections of the Te Deum the small string section was completely swamped by wind and brass, at least from where I was placed – no fault of the players, whose energetic bowing could be seen but not heard.

This was a very successful event, both in the performances and in inspiring the large audience and introducing them to a side of Dvořák's art they had not known before.

Mark Todd

Royal Festival Hall, London

Philharmonia Orchestra

Jakub Hruša

Thursday 6 April.

Society members will have been delighted by the recent news that Jakub Hruša has been appointed a principal guest conductor with the Philharmonia Orchestra, and the first programme scheduled for them after the announcement finished with Dvořák's Symphony No 8 and opened with Dvořák's orchestrations of the last set of Brahms's Hungarian Dances. The concert also included Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto performed by Julian Rachlin. and was repeated at Basingstoke the following day.

Both the dances and the symphony received exemplary performances – the dances lively and varied in mood but relatively straight without self-conscious attempts at abrupt tempo change, and the symphony with due excitement and lyricism in an organised and structurally clear framework. The ensemble playing of the orchestra was fine and the many instrumental solos very beautifully handled.

The Philharmonia Orchestra has an excellent record with this symphony. In the earliest years of its existence in the late 1940s it performed and recorded it with Rafael Kubelík conducting and a few years later the young German conductor Wolfgang Sawallisch recorded it with them as one of his first international success. More recently Charles Mackerras's performance of the work with them has been made available in recorded form, and there have been several other recordings, and of course many concert performances, in between. All of these recordings are still available in some form. The Dvořák orchestrations of Brahms Hungarian Dances were also recorded in London with Rafael Kubelík conducting back in

the 1950s, though with a different orchestra. Jakub Hruša's concert performances with the Philharmonia takes their place as leading ones amongst all these, and with his new appointment there must be every expectation of many other outstanding performances of Czech and other music in London and other cities around the UK in the years to come.

Mark Todd

Winchester Camerata, 14th May 2017

I managed to get to the concert on Saturday 14th May, at St.Paul's church in Winchester by the Winchester Camerata who raised desperately needed money towards saving the Winchester City Mill and had brownie cakes made from the mill's flour for us to taste at the interval - delicious!

The audience enjoyed :

Herschel, William	- Symphony No.2 D major
Elgar, Edward	Elegy for Strings Op.58
Mozart, W.A.	Eine Kleine Nachtmusik
Janáček, Leoš	Idyll Suite for Strings

It was a good concert and lovely to hear the Herschel opening the evening. After the interval we were treated to the Janáček and the useful programme notes said :-

'Janáček's place in musical history is based on his operas, his two string quartets and his *Sinfonietta*. These are generally later works which reflect the development of a unique rhythmic and harmonic style. Dating from the 1870s, this *Idyll Suite* for Strings (not to be confused with a separate *Suite for Strings*) is an early work. Janáček was born in 1854, but already there are elements of his later style to be found, not least his penchant for remote keys with multiple sharps or flats. The seven movements offer a variety of mood, from the lyrical to the vivacious.

The fifth movement is the *Idyll* which gives the Suite its name and which is often played on its own. Janáček was a younger contemporary and friend of his fellow Czech, Antonín Dvořák, and this Suite owes much to Dvořák's inspiration.'

Georgette Miller



Reviews of CDs

Luboš Fišer: Amoroso (arr. V. Mazáček); František Benda: Sinfonia in C; Jan Václav Stamic: Concerto for Violin and Strings in C major "Dresden"; Antonín Liehmann: Ave Maria; Dvořák: Cavatina from Op.75 (arr. Václav Mazáček); Dvořák: Gypsy Songs Op.55 (arr. Mazáček, Radovan Kravák); Miroslav Hlaváč: Slovak Inventions.

Viktor Mazáček (violin); Jana Bínová-Koucká (soprano); Komorní orchestra Dvořákova kraje; Václav Mazáček (conductor).

No label or number!

This rare CD is more than worth seeking out from Široký dvůr:

it is a splendid find! The music is ravishing, the performances excellent. The orchestra's members are amateurs drawn from all the towns around Dvořák's birthplace and the CD represents 30 years of their existence. There is none of the hesitance that one might expect and the band's ensemble is perfect. There is so much to enjoy here that I hesitate to pick out the gems, though I do have to mention the brilliant arrangement of Luboš Fišer's *Amoroso*. Also, while I am sure the *Stamic* has been recorded before, I cannot recall it and it is typically lovely, though I must allow one or two uncertainties in the orchestra albeit very transitory. Of great interest is the *Ave Maria* by Dvořák's old teacher, Antonín Liehmann. At nine minutes, this is a lengthy setting, slow, majestic, utterly delightful and beautifully sung. The sleeve notes say that it was written for soprano and violin and for the young Dvořák to perform with his daughter Terinka. As such, it makes this CD desirable if only for this one lovely piece. The arrangement of one of Dvořák's *Romantic Pieces* works very well indeed and I was much taken with the arrangements of his *Seven Gypsy Melodies*, though some of them were perhaps at the top end of the soloist's register. Hlaváč has sadly died (2008) since this CD was recorded. Born in 1923, but little of his has been consigned to disk, which, on this evidence, is a great shame. Do bear in mind that this is an amateur band playing its socks off and I believe it can and should be very much recommended.

Peter Herbert

**Tomáš Hanzlík: Krvavá pavlač (Bloody Gallery)
"A picturesque passion opera"**

Ensemble Damian; Markéta Večeřová (soprano); Bedřich Levi (countertenor); Martin Ptáček (tenor);
Arta F1 0217

The work that Hanzlík has done with his Ensemble Damian for the baroque music of eastern Bohemia (especially that of Tomáš Norbert Koutník) has been of great importance. Something of the baroque rubs off onto this drama about Wenceslas II and Wenceslas III, to a libretto by Hanzlík. The CD comes in a cardboard sleeve with no notes and no text at all, which is a great pity. However, please do not let that trouble you, dear reader, because I really cannot recommend this to you. The singers are accompanied throughout by the same single electric organ, whose monotony detracts seriously from the whole effort. The work is "minimalist baroque" and you can take it or leave it. My advice is to leave it because unless it gets rescored for a more varied sound world and texts are given, this is a repetitive, dull experience.

Peter Herbert

Miloslav Kabeláč: Symphonies complete (1-8, 4 CDs)

Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra; Marko Ivanović (conductor)
Supraphon SU 4202-2

I simply have to sit down and listen to this set again two or three times because, I fear, it made too little impression on me at first hearing. Kabeláč (1908-1979) is an important figure in Czech musical history and was a pupil of both K.B. Jirák and Alois Hába. There is a darkness in much of his music which must make one listen to, say, one symphony a day to better appreciate it. He was as much in danger from the Nazis (*Do not Retreat!* was a defiant Hussite call to arms against the

occupation) and then again from the communists, who banned his music after the Prague Spring.

The symphonies date from 1941, 1942, 1948, 1954, 1960, 1961, 1967 and 1969. To the politically aware, these dates will be significant and help to explain much of the music's character.

Supraphon have done us and the composer a great service on issuing these Czech Radio recordings. There is much powerful and highly personal music here. It is all dramatic, tonal and approachable. The set has to be recommended as a valuable document. One may not get it off the shelf every day but to dip into every now and then will be rewarding. I should welcome a fuller review from a more knowledgeable reviewer.

Peter Herbert

Gideon Klein: Partita for Strings; Dalibor Silka: Tristezza; Partita for Strings; Vít Zouhar: Ritorni per archi e cembalo; Pavel Haas: Etude for String Orchestra.

Ensemble Opera Diversa; Vít Spilka (conductor).

Ensemble Opera Diversa no number

This was the Ensemble's first CD and it is an interesting and enterprising one. Klein's *Partita* is an arrangement by Vohtěch Saudek of the *Trio for violin, viola and cello*. I am not sure that it benefits from the extra layers of sound and the performance lacks spontaneity. Dalibor Spilka (1931-1997) was unknown to me. His *Tristezza* was written after the composer's brother died and is well in keeping with the event. Spilka's *Partita* is neoclassical in feel and fits well with both the Klein and Haas works. Its three movements are most pleasant. Vít Zouhar (b. 1966) now finds himself one of the senior contemporary Czech composers. His *Ritorni* also have something of a neoclassical approach at various points in its three movements and the music falls very well upon the ear of this listener. The Haas *Etude* needs no introduction. I feel that the performances get stronger through the CD and on the whole are more than acceptable and just a little more drive would have served the music well. The interest lies in the Spilka and Zouhar works, with the latter being especially impressive.

Peter Herbert

Ladislav Kubík: a. Sinfonietta No.1; b. Concerto No.3 for Piano, Orchestra and Electronics; c. Sinfonietta No.3 "Gong".

a. Ensemble 21; Jakub Hruša (conductor); b. Read Gainsford (piano); Brno Philharmonic; Alexander Jiménez (conductor); c. Jadwiga Rappé (mezzo); Kühn Mixed Choir; Marek Vorlíček (choirmaster); Prague Radio S.O.; Jan Kučera (conductor)
NEOS 11011

Kubík is nowadays an American citizen and is not without controversy in the latter days of the Communist regime in his native Czechoslovakia. However, he has carved out a highly successful international career, especially at the University of Florida. Concentration is required by his music which, while modernist in outlook, has nevertheless retained anchorage in tonality. Kubík is well represented also on the Col legno label, with four CDs to his name there, plus another on Neos. I have to confess that my interest in the composer and his music is largely that of the completist but there are still many passages on the present CD that I can gladly return to, especially the