

HEARING STRUGGLE: MUSICAL RESPONSES TO TIMES OF CRISIS IN THE CZECH LANDS DURING THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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At the beginning of his talk “Czech Music and Infectious Disease” in May 2020, Michael Beckerman noted that the first violin’s high *E* in the finale of Bedřich Smetana’s autobiographical string quartet no. 1 (*Z mého života* [From My Life]) reflected the composer’s suffering from tinnitus, one of many symptoms he experienced from 1874 onwards.¹ While, in this instance, disease is audible directly rather than metaphorically, Beckerman asked in his presentation whether “there are other ways in which we can hear [...] disease.” He then discussed a number of examples where disease, mourning, and suffering are depicted more subtly through music and its context. Inspired by Beckerman’s analysis of different ways in which we hear struggle in music, and by his work on Czech music more generally, this special-themed issue is devoted to musical responses to times of crises in the Czech lands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To some extent, it emerges from a conference panel presented at the Annual Conference of the Society for Musicology in Ireland in May 2021. The panel was convened on the occasion of Beckerman’s presentation with the SMI IRC-Harrison Medal in recognition of his outstanding achievements and excellent research in the field of Czech music studies.²

* This special-themed issue evolved as part of the project “Concepts of Identity in Czech Cultural Life during Times of Crisis”, financed by the Czech Academy of Sciences funding scheme Strategy AV21 (programme “Resilient Society for the Twenty-First Century: Potentials of Crisis and Effective Transformation”, Fourth thematic pillar “Historical and Transcultural Models: Identification, Representation and Experiences of Crises in the Past”).

1 The talk was given via ZOOM in collaboration with the Czech Centre New York and the Dvořák American Heritage Association and is accessible via Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXQyTXvcT9M> [8 November 2022].

2 The conference took place from 27 to 30 May 2021 via ZOOM. The conference panel, titled “Hearing Struggle: Musical Responses to Times of Crisis in the Czech Lands during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, comprised six papers by Anja Bunzel, Jiří Kopecký, Jan Smaczny, David R. Beveridge, Aleš Březina, and Tereza Havelková. It was chaired by Martin Čurda. I am grateful to the organizing committee chaired by Simon Trezise and the 2021 SMI

Music and musical culture respond to crisis through many avenues, for instance through the words set in vocal music and through compositional aesthetics and styles; through programming and review practices; and through different forms of music-cultural organisation and participation. Perhaps even more so than in times of political, economic, and personal peace and balance, music-cultural phenomena that can be observed during times of crisis are linked to concepts of identity at both national and regional levels. These may show in the musical score itself (for example, through words and/or paraphrases of politicised tunes; through emotionally laden aesthetics including keys, dissonances, or other means typically associated with troubling characteristics; and so on), but they may also surface in interrelationships between composers, audiences, and critics; in formations of movements and/or institutionalised associations; or in personal biographies of individual protagonists.³ With regard to nineteenth-century Central Europe, the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars ending with the Vienna Congress (1814/1815), as well as the revolutionary upheavals in 1848/1849 are often considered highly influential for musical culture. These events resulted in a change of power structures between individual regions throughout Europe; between the aristocratic and bourgeois societal strata; and also between musicians and audiences.⁴ All these changes affected the musicians' geographical, professional, and intellectual mobility.

Being a part of the Habsburg Empire, Czech musical culture during the nineteenth century was heavily influenced by these wider Central-European developments, although there are, besides many commonalities with other Central-European regions, some nuances that are specific to the Czech lands. These particularities have been analysed on numerous occasions and taking various perspectives. One aspect that seems to impact almost all of these elaborations and their subject matter in one way or the other is the Czech national revival, and, entwined with it, the notion of national and/or cultural identity, often occurring in complex combinations and highly personalised forms depending on such demographic categories as age, gender, social class, educational background, language community and proficiency, profession and professional networks, and religion of the individual protagonists under scrutiny.

Focusing on a wide range of crises and identity constructs, and zooming in on history in the Czech lands shortly after mid-century, this collection of ar-

Council, especially President Lorraine Byrne Bodley, for giving us the opportunity to speak at this event, as well as to all members of the virtual audience for their constructive feedback.

3 The essays collated by Detlef Altenburg offer fascinating insights into intersections between musical culture and aspects of identity. Detlef ALTENBURG (ed.): *Musik und kulturelle Identität [Bericht über den XIII. Internationalen Kongress der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, Weimar 2004]*. Kassel et al.: Gesellschaft für Musikforschung / Bärenreiter, 2012.

4 See, for instance, Barbara BOISIRS (ed.): *Musik und Revolution: die Produktion von Identität und Raum durch Musik in Zentraleuropa 1848/49*. Wien: Hollitzer, 2013.

ticles demonstrates how musical-cultural phenomena are often linked closely with other cultural, political, economic, and social issues surrounding them, thus offering insights into both musical history, and cultural developments more generally. Czech crises covered here include, in chronological order: the difficulties of artists' associations in establishing an organised musical scene pursuing a collective goal in the 1860s (Jiří Kopecký); the Hussite Wars as depicted musically by Antonín Dvořák (David R. Beveridge); Bohuslav Martinů's music-aesthetic and infrastructural reactions to the world economic crisis in 1929 (Aleš Březina); the politicised revival of Czech history in contemporary opera during the 1970s and 1980s (Tereza Havelková); and, drawing on personal connotations with the music of Adam Michna and the writings of Leoš Janáček, the impression of (musical) history as a highly individual experience rather than a universal narrative understood in the same way by every human (Michael Beckerman).

While the individual contributions differ in methodology and thematic scope, some themes surface throughout all papers, most notably questions of cultural identity, (re-)occurrences of historical idioms in later centuries, and intersections between national and international per- and receptions of so-called *Czechness*. The collection opens with an article by Jiří Kopecký, in which the author re-evaluates the cultural links of the Artists' Society (Umělecká beseda) with 1860s musical life. He argues that the association's musical achievements were underestimated in their own time, as it contributed significantly to Czech musical culture. Its reception can be interpreted as a valuable reflection of more wide-ranging historical phenomena in times of crisis (for instance, lack of money in a society strongly determined by economic rather than cultural priorities). Placing a specific composition rather than a whole group of protagonists in the centre of his investigation, David R. Beveridge, in his contribution, approaches aspects of Czech musical culture through a music-theoretical analysis of Dvořák's concert overture *Husitská* within its own perception and reception contexts. In his article, Beveridge depicts intertextual traces of traditional Czech songs from the Middle Ages, thus thematising both the significance of the church reformer Jan Hus (c. 1370–1415) for Czech (musical) culture more than four centuries after Hus's death, and Dvořák's position within that context. Widening the perspective on music in the Czech lands across Europe, Aleš Březina scrutinises in his article Bohuslav Martinů's musical responses to the world economic crisis in October 1929, which Martinů experienced in Paris. Sketching changes in Martinů's compositional style during the late 1920s and early 30s, Březina asks whether the composer's shift of focus from French to Czech lyrics, and towards more constructive genres and styles are related in some ways to his challenging financial situation after the Wall Street Crash in October 1929. The final two articles of this collection are concerned with memory culture and recurrences of historical materials either in public discourse (Tereza Havelková) or in private experience (Michael Beckerman). Havelková relates cultural politics associated with State Socialism to motives and themes

originating in Czech history recurring in operas staged at the Prague National Theatre after WWII: *Zuzana Vojíšková* by Jiří Pauer (1959 and 1981) and *Mistr Jeroným* by Ivo Jirásek (1984). The collection concludes with an essay by Michael Beckerman, arguing that, depending on perspective and personal circumstances at any given moment in time, history may not be tangible as a universal concept perceived in the same way by everyone. Offering a glimpse into his own personal experience when listening to compositions by the Czech Baroque composer Adam Michna (1600?–1676), Beckerman demonstrates that his own perception of this music was determined by many factors unique to his own situation. Nevertheless, he argues that interpreting music, paired with considerations of such wider concepts as identity, discourse, and biography, may offer valuable insights into music history and historiography.

Although the overall theme of this collection, musical culture, and, to some extent, also musical historiography in times of crisis, draws on aspects of individual or collective suffering, searching, sadness, and generally negatively connotated moments in Czech history, it also lends itself to a more positive outlook on the matter. If the historical cultural figures featuring in this collection – composers, performers, organisers, writers, pedagogues – faced political upheavals, financial difficulties, and/or inner turmoil on account of their own positions in their own worlds, they also share a belief in their own abilities and networks. Often this belief translated into an endeavor to contribute something valuable to their own personal worlds, if not also to society as a whole. In short, they are united in spirit, so to speak, through a sense of social and artistic resilience ultimately resulting in the better – for themselves, but also for everyone else surrounding them, even when these less visible people and structures sometimes remain unrecognised at first glance. After all, inspiration is always drawn from a combination of sources, for instance, social crises and peaks, intertextual matters, historical heroes and events, or contemporary artists working in one's own or related fields, but also more subtle concepts come into play here (generally and within the context of this collection of essays): aspects of social class, family, and gender; urban vs. provincial, and institutionalised vs. non-institutionalised sites of music-cultural exchange; genre and performance; and, the overall concept of space – one's own inner and outer spaces, but also that of one's own and everybody else's artistic output.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that Beckerman's 2020 talk cited above and the idea of this publication one year later, in May 2021, emerged during a time of economic, political, and individual insecurity. Not only did Covid-19 sharpen our awareness of disease and crises in the (musical) past; it also, and perhaps more significantly, transformed our expectations, habits, and standards of our own communication. Archival research suddenly came to a pause, or became heavily reliant on helpful and industrious archivists who would scan and e-mail sources; cultural interaction became reduced to screens – or also paused completely; priorities in teaching and learning changed drastically; and academic conferences became confined – but at the same time also enriched – through

the virtual space. This virtual space reminded many of us of the human desire to communicate and be a part of a bigger project.

The conference panel and, subsequently, this collection of essays were conceived precisely within this spirit of community, in the hopes of resuming the fruitful dialogue between Czech and Irish musicology and between friends, colleagues, strangers, and also critics at home and away from home. It is these links, good memories, and strong hopes in the growth and exchange between these two (and many more) communities, or, perhaps, more accurately, the sense of friendship and belonging within that *one* community, namely that of musicology as a whole, that inspired me to see this project through in times of crisis, for which I will be forever grateful, and to whose continuation I look forward immensely.

We have decided to dedicate this issue to the memory of Robert Kessler who is remembered briefly by Michael Beckerman in the following:

This issue of Hudební věda is dedicated to Robert Kessler (1933–2021) in admiration and loving memory. As publisher and co-founder of Pendragon Press, he was responsible for producing more than 350 titles with books as varied as George Chadwick, and the television show “The Outer Limits”, and on such diverse subjects as music and architecture and music of the Troubadours. He also nourished and encouraged the series Studies in Czech Music over many years, and gave personal support to so many scholars in the field. He was a man of great wit and humour, a lover of sports and games, but also a serious citizen who was active in politics for many years. He began his career as a successful song writer (his songs were recorded by Dionne Warwick, Bernadette Peters, Gregory Hines, Lena Horne, The Everly Brothers, Ellie Stone, and Waylon Jennings among others), and continued as publisher at Pendragon Press until his death in 2021.

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The editorial board of Hudební věda would like to thank Anja Bunzel (Department of Musicology, Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences), for her cooperation as guest editor of this issue.