

CZECH CHORAL MUSIC AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Stanislav Pecháček

Abstract

The study overviews the most important choral compositions created in the Czech lands after 1945. In the introduction, it characterizes the most important milestones in the country's development after the end of the Second World War, especially the impact of the communists and their ideology on art, the influence of avant-garde techniques of the so-called New Music, which came mainly from Germany and Poland, and the ideological relaxation after the fall of the communist dictatorship in 1989. The survey of the choral pieces is divided according to themes into sacred, inspired by folklore, ancient and medieval literature, mainly in Latin. A brief compositional analysis is also given for some of the pieces. The study does not focus on compositions set to the verses of Czech poets nor on the vibrant field of choral pieces for children, which could be the subject of another study.

Keywords

Czech music – choral compositions – choirs – Petr Eben (1929–2007) – Jindřich Feld (1925–2007) – Jan Hanuš (1915–2004) – Emil Hradecký (*1951) – Karel Husa (1921–2016) – Ctirad Kohoutek (1929–2011) – Marek Kopelent (*1932) – Jiří Laburda (*1931) – Zdeněk Lukáš (1928–2007) – Otmar Mácha (1922–2006) – Jan Málék (*1938) – Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959) – Jan Novák (1921–1984) – Alois Piňos (1925–2008) – Miroslav Raichl (1930–1998) – Zdeněk Šesták (*1925) – Antonín Tučapský (1928–2014) – Jan Vičar (*1949)

Historical overview

Czech musical culture in the second half of the 20th century was, as throughout its previous development, closely linked to the social situation in the country. The liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945, the communist takeover in February 1948, the so-called Prague Spring of 1968 and the subsequent occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in August of the same year, the fall of the communist dictatorship in November 1989, and finally the establishment of an independent Czech Republic in January 1993 are the most important historical milestones in the development of the country in the second half of the 20th century.

The broad democratization of all musical life forms was a positive feature of the post-war development. The network of professional music institutions expanded, and radio and, later, to a lesser extent, television played an increasingly important role. Music education was quantitatively strengthened by the establishment of academies in Prague and Brno, new conservatories were established, and the network of primary art schools, where children were educated in playing musical instruments, solo and choral singing, and dance and visual arts, experienced an unprecedented growth. This system of after-school arts education for

children and young people is one of the most sophisticated in Europe in terms of its scope and quality.

At present, choral conducting can be studied at music academies and conservatoires, and in the early 1990s, the subject was also accredited at faculties of education in Prague, Ústí nad Labem, Hradec Králové and Ostrava, usually in a double-disciplinary combination with a music education degree. Thanks to the vast network of music institutions, there has also been a significant upsurge in amateur music performance in recent decades, represented mainly by singing, dancing, and instrumental ensembles.

In the first post-war wave, the themes of the end of the war and the expression of optimistic feelings linked to the hope of building a new society dominated musical production. After the Communists took power in the 1950s, most artists succumbed to ideological pressure, whether out of conviction, sheer conjuncturalism, or existential reasons. The effort to communicate as broadly as possible and to be relevant to contemporary social events accompanied artistic production, at least throughout the 1950s.

“[...] this kind of work was absolutized as the only correct one. The state authorities of the totalitarian regime put pressure on composers to compose music accessible to the audience and traditionalistically unexceptional and protected works that were politically and ideologically tendentious. [...] Many composers, however, did not narrow their work in this direction and followed the tendencies of the pre-war avant-garde and found contacts with innovative efforts in other countries.”¹

A thematic and stylistic recovery of musical creation took place in the country from the late 1950s on, when avant-garde compositional trends of the so-called New Music began to penetrate from the West and Poland, and composers no longer had to limit themselves to depicting the joyful feelings of a man building a new, just society but could capture social and individual life in its entirety. However, this development was soon interrupted by the occupation in 1968 and the subsequent two decades of so-called normalization, which again limited the space for innovative expression. A number of artists who had expressed themselves in the previous “revival process” and refused to recant their positions and adapt to the old ideological conditions in the early 1970s found themselves blacklisted, and their works ceased to be performed and published. It was only at the so-called Velvet Revolution at the end of 1989 that creative freedom was restored and allowed Czech music unrestricted contact with the world.

Few so-called “official” composers sympathized with the regime and consequently held essential positions in social, cultural, and university institutions, mainly Václav Dobiáš and Ctirad Kohoutek. A few composers embraced communist ideals in their youth, and later sobered up from them. Some prominent personalities did not get along with the ruling regime, more or less opposing it, and therefore found themselves on the list of unwanted artists. They were prevented from advancing in their careers, and the possibilities of their works being used in concert and publishing practice were severely limited or wholly suppressed (Petr Eben, Jan Hanuš, Miloslav Ištvan, Miloslav Kabeláč, Viktor Kalabis, Jan Klusák, Marek Kopelent, Otmar Mácha, Klement Slavický).

¹ Jaroslav Smolka, *Dějiny hudby* [History of Music] (Brno: TOGGA, 2001), 619.

The older composers who had lived and worked in emigration since the pre-war years (Bohuslav Martinů, Karel Boleslav Jirák) were joined in the second half of the century by Karel Husa, Jan Novák, and Antonín Tučapský. The life and professional fates of not only composers but virtually all citizens were fundamentally influenced by their political attitudes toward the totalitarian regime from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Also connected with the nature of the totalitarian regime was that contacts with foreign countries, especially with the culture of the so-called West, were severely restricted. The regime prevented composers from traveling to music festivals and performing their works in concert, and even personal contacts were subject to strict police control. Despite this, the compositions of some composers became known abroad and were performed and published in renowned publishing houses, mainly in Germany (Bärenreiter Verlag, Breitkopf & Härtel, Pro organo Musikverlag H. Jess, B. Schott's Söhne, Carus-Verlag).

Composers took a very differentiated attitude towards modern compositional techniques, collectively referred to as New Music, which came to the country after the Second World War mainly from Germany (dodecaphony, serial techniques, aleatorics, concrete music, electroacoustic music). Among the unreserved supporters can be identified Karel Husa, Miloslav Ištvan, Marek Kopelent, and Zdeněk Šesták. Many other composers were positive towards the ideas but adapted them to their own nature or tried to combine them with other techniques. These include Jan Rychlík, who combined them with traditional techniques of counterpoint work. Marek Kopelent combined them with microintervalics and aleatorics. Karel Husa and Karel Reiner followed the tradition of quarter-tone and six-tone music, which was already promoted in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s by Alois Hába. Specific methods and techniques of modern compositional work were developed by Jan Kapr (method of constants), Ctirad Kohoutek (method of projection), and Jan Klusák (principle of the invention). Klement Slavický also based his work on the rational organization of musical material. Otmar Mácha, in particular, took a fundamentally hostile position towards these methods of compositional work.

Jiří Laburda, Zdeněk Lukáš, and Jiří Teml are characterized by a stylistic differentiation in the areas of vocal and instrumental music, motivated for the most part by the performance possibilities of predominantly amateur choral ensembles and, on the other hand, more or less professional instrumental groups.

Despite all the limitations and obstacles placed in the way of artistic creation by the regime, the second half of the 20th century also saw the creation of many high-quality compositions in the choral art. It has significantly enriched the repertoire of all Czech choral ensembles, many of which will be included in the permanent treasury of our choral music. As has been shown once again, it is possible to influence or limit the external forms and expressions of musical life. However, the human spirit, especially the creative one, has never been wholly subjugated, deformed, or even eliminated by any regime in history.

Sacred music

Religious institutions and all believers were under ideological pressure during the forty years of communist totalitarianism. As a result, spiritual creation, or rather its performance in the church environment during the liturgy, was restricted. Nevertheless, even by 1989, many important sacred compositions of a liturgical and non-liturgical nature had been

written in this country, which occasionally received public performances. Among the composers who never renounced their faith and openly proclaimed it throughout their lives, we should mention especially Petr Eben and Jan Hanuš.

Petr Eben (1929–2007), an outstanding organist and pianist renowned throughout Europe for his compositions and performances, worked as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts in Prague until his retirement age, and only after 1989 was he able to habilitate, obtain a professorship and move on to teach composition at the Prague Academy of Music. Eben is the author of several masses, such as *Missa adventus et quadragesimae* for unison male choir and organ (1952) and *Missa cum populo* for mixed choir, four brass, percussion, organ, and folk singing (1982). Eben met the needs of young people's involvement in liturgical practice in the non-traditional genre of the so-called guitar mass with the *Trouvère Mass* for solo, choir, recorders, and guitars (1969). The six-part mixed choir a capella *Ubi caritas et amor* (1964), set to an anonymous Latin text from around 450 AD, is intended for the liturgy on Maundy Thursday. One of the highlights of Eben's choral and cantata works of the late 1980s is the *Prague Te Deum* 1989 for mixed choir, four brass, and percussion, which Eben wrote to celebrate the fall of the communist regime in 1989.

Jan Hanuš (1915–2004) composed eight mass cycles over a fifty-year period, intended for liturgical occasions and, therefore, generally of a smaller scale and less demanding interpretation. The traditional ordinarium is usually expanded to include some parts of the proprio which have a specific destination within the church year and are placed in the title of the work, for example, the *Christmas Missa II Pastoralis in G and Pange lingua* (1950) or the *Missa IV et Tantum ergo In honorem d'Immaculatae* (1959). Hanuš's great protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops and his reaction to the subsequent death of Jan Palach is the cantata *Message* [Poselství, 1969]. In this composition, Hanuš was inspired by modern trends in European music of the second half of the 20th century, such as electronic music combined with live sound and aleatorics.

However, Jan Hanuš was not the only composer who responded to Palach's self-immolation. The cantata for mixed choir and orchestra *Ignis pro Ioanne Palach* was composed by **Jan Novák**, who lived in exile.

A great and long tradition in Czech music has the specific *Missa pro defunctis*, a mass for the deceased. Among them, the most remarkable monument is the *Requiem in B minor* (1890) by **Antonín Dvořák** (1841–1904). In 1998, **Jan Málek** (*1938) joined the ranks of the authors of the funeral mass. For the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, he composed *Requiem super L'homme armé* with a dedication to the Dead of All Wars of the ending millennium, using as musical material the famous song of the same name, a true hit of the late Middle Ages, to which many famous composers wrote their masses.

Among the most popular funeral masses among Czech choirs is *Requiem* for mixed choir a capella (1992) by **Zdeněk Lukáš** (1928–2007). No less popular among Lukáš's masses is the smaller *Missa brevis* (1982), which exists in two versions – for female choir with baritone solo and mixed choir. This easy piece can be performed at the liturgy and in concert.

A unique work in the genre of Mass for the Dead is the great 1994 collective work *Requiem der Verzeihung* (Requiem of Forgiveness) for solo, choir, and orchestra. The impetus for the work came from Helmuth Rilling, head of the Bach Academy in Stuttgart, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. A total of 15 composers from various European countries were approached, such as Luciano Berio,

Krzysztof Penderecki, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Alfred Schnittke, and the Czech composer **Marek Kopelent** (*1932), who was commissioned to set the fourth movement of *Judex ergo*.

Antonín Dvořák is also inseparably linked in the history of Czech music with his celebratory cantata *Te Deum*, which he composed in 1891 on the occasion of his appointment as director of the National Conservatory in New York. An *American Te Deum* for baritone, mixed choir, and wind ensemble (1978) by composer **Karel Husa** (1921–2016), who lived in France after emigrating from communist Czechoslovakia and then in the USA from 1954, is also linked to the American environment. He worked at the University of Ithaca, where he was appointed permanent professor in 1962. The new environment fundamentally changed his compositional focus. There was a long tradition of wind orchestras at American universities, which is why most of Husa's vocal-instrumental works of this period were written with the accompaniment of a so-called band. The large-scale *Te Deum* contains 13 numbers in all. The author compiled the text from many different sources; all the texts have been translated into English. The music is organized on the principle of the dodecapronic series and the series derived from it; not only the pitches but also the rhythmic structure of the music is organized. Especially in the vocal component, the author uses other unconventional means – quarter tones, spoken singing, whispering, glissando, etc.

After the fall of the communist dictatorship in 1989, the production of compositions with spiritual themes increased significantly. The mass remains the representative form. Among the composers working in the domestic environment, **Jiří Laburda** (*1931) made a significant impact with his eleven mass cycles. His masses are intended for liturgy but can also be performed in concert. They are interpretively demanding, have different durations and casts of vocal and instrumental components (mixed choirs, children's or women's choirs, men's choirs, with orchestra and organ accompaniment, or just organ), and some can be performed a capella.

From other sacred works of the second half of the 20th century, we should mention **Bohuslav Martinů's** (1890–1959) cantata *Mount of Three Lights* [Hra tří světél, 1954]. The author composed the text himself. In it, he combined excerpts from the Gospel of St. Matthew with texts of folk spiritual songs and quotations from the English writer H. V. Morton's book *Steps of the Master*. The cantata for male choir, tenor and baritone solo, recitation, and organ is a kind of folk religious ceremony.

Antonín Tučapský (1928–2014) has been an important personality of Czech musical emigration. In the 1960s, he made his mark primarily as a university teacher and choirmaster of the famous Moravian Teachers' Singing Association. Although he did not take any severe anti-communist positions, he found himself in disfavor in the early 1970s, mainly because of his marriage to the English singer Beryl Musgrave. Having been dismissed from the faculty and stripped of his position as choirmaster, he left the country voluntarily in 1975 and has lived in London ever since. Here he pursued a career as a teacher at Trinity College of Music, concentrating primarily on his compositional work, the results of which brought him recognition not only in England but also in other European countries and in the United States. Among Tučapský's rich sacred works, the 1977 cycle for mixed choir a capella, *Five Lenten Motets*, set to Latin texts, is extremely popular among Czech choirs. From the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, Tučapský selected excerpts from Christ's discourses in an abbreviated form; he thus elaborated the Passion story.

Among the large-scale vocal-instrumental works, the cantatas *Stabat mater* (1988) and *Mary Magdalene* (1991), which sets to music a part of the poem of the same name from Boris

Pasternak's book *Doctor Zhivago*, have gained great acclaim. Tučapský's choral works on verses by English poets are numerous and widely available. In 1980, he created a four-part a cappella female chorus, *I Saw Thee Weep* to a poem by G. G. Byron; he set an anti-war poem by S. Sassoon in the male chorus *And Beauty Came* (1990). Numerous mixed choruses are represented, for example, by the cycle *Songs of Joy* (1983) to verses by several English poets, and especially the four-part cycle *Under the Starry Sky* in which Tučapský set to music the beautiful intimate verses of contemporary poet Kathleen Raine.

Folklore inspiration

Many composers turned to folklore at least at some point in their lives, and for example, they adapted folk songs for various types of choirs and composed pieces to folk texts. The emergence of a significant number of these works was primarily due to the communists' positive attitude towards folk traditions; they conformed to their idea of bringing art closer to the broad popular masses and were, moreover, except for songs in which the people addressed God, ideologically "harmless."

Two positions exist on how a composer should treat the musical component of songs in choral settings. On the one hand, there is the view that the composer should interfere as little as possible with its structure and should strive to preserve its character as much as possible, primarily by respecting the so-called latent harmony. On the other hand, some composers have taken folk songs more as musical material, which they can treat to a large extent, free to express their personal compositional type in their arrangements. The views of **Zdeněk Šesták** (*1925) are an example of this attitude. This composer, open throughout his work to the influence of the compositional techniques of the so-called New Music, arrived at a view close to Stravinsky or Bartók, for example, that the preservation of the life of folk song in modern society can be significantly helped by its updating with modern means of contemporary music. The composer's aim, therefore, should not be to try to preserve authenticity as much as possible but to seek a link between folklore and modern music.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of composers move somewhere between these two extreme approaches. While preserving the song's originality, they apply various compositional techniques that are more or less removed from the original folk music. Adaptations of folk songs and original compositions to folk texts have one disadvantage concerning their possible use abroad: they are written exclusively to Czech texts. However, many editions also include translations into European languages, mainly German and English. On the other hand, in recent decades, the tendency to perform works in the original languages has prevailed in the interpretation of vocal music in all its fields. Therefore, even in the case of choral works, the linguistic aspect should not be an obstacle to their performance outside the country of origin.

The folk tradition is very close to the folklore work of **Otmar Mácha** (1922–2006). His *Moravian Folk Songs* for three women's voices and piano (1950) gained extraordinary popularity early on and is still one of Mácha's most popular and frequently performed choruses. The arrangements of the six songs form a dramaturgically closed and internally contrasting whole, in which the composer managed to capture the specific features of Moravian folk music and provide them with a spare but extremely effective piano accompaniment. Mácha's second key work in the folk field is the five-part cycle *Lachian Whooping*

[Lašské halekačky] for children's choir a capella (1971). The composer himself said of the piece: "Choirmaster Jiří Chvála performed them with the Kühn Children's Choir in America, and ten choirmasters there took them apart. (...) It's quite funny, but one of the haleki, *Hoj, hura, hoj*, is my most famous and most worldly piece because children sing it all over the world."² The extraordinary popularity of the choruses is due to their sonic appeal. It is due to the imitative exclamations (hoja, hoj, helo, hojajaja), the 'overlapping' of chords, where the same chord is heard, but the assignment of notes to individual voices is changed, folk modes, thickening of chords, harmonic transversions and the effective use of solo voices.

Folk songs have always played an essential role in the work of **Antonín Tučapský**. He admitted several times that he had a very warm relationship with them and that folk songs were one of the means for him to remember his native country, which is ultimately demonstrated by his arrangements for choirs and solo voices with accompaniment, which were most numerous just after he left for England. As a result, Tučapský's arrangements run the gamut from simple harmonizations to elaborate arrangements. Of a large number of songs, let us mention a large five-volume set of arrangements of 43 Czech, Moravian, and Slovak songs with the English title *The Joy of Singing*, which was primarily intended for school purposes. Tučapský also devoted cycles called *The Painted Valley* to different types of choirs. A specific group of Tučapský's compositions consists of Christmas carols, also in arrangements for various ensembles.

Interestingly, they mostly date back to the English period and, for the most part, include carols from other nations. The *Time of Christmas*, containing Christmas songs from England, Holland, Germany, and Bohemia (1975), is for soprano, baritone, mixed choir, and small instruments. Other Christmas repertoire is contained in the collections *Three Christmas Carols* (1980) and *Cycle of Czech Carols* (1982) for mixed choir and organ. The texts of Czech carols are translated into English.

Miroslav Raichl (1930–1998) became a very successful arranger of folk songs that became a part of the repertoire of Czech choirs, especially children's and girls' choirs. His arrangements are essentially homophonic. In choral writing and instrumental accompaniment, the composer usually respects the latent harmony, which he often enriches with subtle dissonances. He entrusts the accompanying instruments, including the highest voice of the piano, with distinctive countermelodies. The dance songs are often enlivened by stylizations from popular music, which are characterized by the use of syncopated rhythms. Among his hundreds of songs for children's and girls' voices, a set of *10 Folk songs for mixed choir* stands out. These arrangements, rich in the number of voices and harmonically far exceeding the latent harmony, are proof of the author's mastery of a rich variety of compositional techniques and represent one of the highlights of this area of choral music in Bohemia.

Jan Málek is the author, among other things, of a piece for children's choir, violin, clarinet, and piano entitled *Princesses Královničky* (1976), in which he combined 14 songs depicting the course of an ancient spring ceremony that originated in pagan customs associated with the welcome of spring, worship of the sun, rejuvenated nature and water. The arrangements are generally very simple. Single to double voices predominate, the voices are almost always conducted in a syrrhythmic manner, with frequent parallel progressions, yet the combination of accompanying instruments makes them original and impressive.

² Marie Kulijevyčová, *Ještě něco chci* [There's one more thing I want], *Reflex* (13, no. 48, 2002), p. 58.

Jiří Laburda contributed to the repertoire of our choirs not only with numerous arrangements of songs mainly from his native South Bohemia and his unique set *Aven Roma* (1989), containing simple three-part stylizations of six *Romani* songs for girls' and mixed choirs. Their oriental character is emphasized by the frequent use of augmented seconds in both tetrachords.

Jindřich Feld (1925–2007) introduced an original way of treating folk song in his cycle *Little Polyphonies* [Malé polyfonie, 1974], which contains eight pieces for children's choir and piano in which he demonstrated various techniques of polyphonic work to singers and listeners – ostinato, two- and three-part canon, canon in inversion, canon in augmentation, free imitation, fughetto and polytematism.

Among **Zdeněk Lukáš's** numerous works on folk poetry, the a capella girls' chorus *Wreath* [Věneček] became very popular in the late 1970s. It is generally based melodically, harmonically, and rhythmically on folk songs. Lukáš enriched the repertoire of male choirs with a five-part cycle, *Spring is Opening* [Jaro se otvírá, 1975]. The author gave an essential role to the accompanying solo violins, whose position perfectly complements the sound of the male choir.

Petr Eben practiced an original approach to folk songs. Evidence of this can be found in the cycle *Of Swallows and Girls* [O vlaštovkách a dívkách, 1960], which contains arrangements of nine songs for a three-part female choir a capella. Eben created an original type of choral arrangements that already transcend the arrangements category and become, to a large extent, original compositions inspired by folk songs. The composer preserves the basic rhythmic-melodic structure of the song in its original form, but the multi-part arrangement is far from simply harmonizing it. He is usually not content with homophonic notation but often introduces polyphonic elements (imitation, canon, ostinato) into his arrangements. Also, the harmonic progression of the songs is often unconventional; the author often abandons the classical-romantic cadence and places the harmonic functions differently from how we usually feel them latent in a monophonic song. A particular characteristic is the substitution of major-minor tonality with ecclesiastical and folk modes or at least its enrichment with individual modal elements. Although the degree of authorial stylization is considerable, the accompanying voices do not violate the area of folk intonations and are always non-violently connected with the authentic melody. Even from the semantic point of view, Eben's stylizations are not autotelic; on the contrary, the composer tries to go after the content and contribute to its development, enrichment, or updating, utilizing multiple voices so that the song can appeal to today's listeners as convincingly as possible. Eben's work with folk song thus creates a kind of a connecting bridge between choral arrangements and original compositions on folk texts, represented, for example, by his cycle of seven mixed choruses on the words of folk poetry *Love and Death* [Láska a smrt, 1957]. The influence of folk songs is manifested in the vocally led melodic line and folk modes in terms of time arrangement by varying meter or recitative rhythm. The vocal texture is mainly polyphonic. On the contrary, the harmonic structure of the songs, full of chromaticism, thickened chords, modulations, and tonal deviations, is outside the framework of folkloric influences.

After 2000, **Jan Vičar** (*1949) attracted attention with several folklore-inspired choruses. The first is *Hillbillies* [Gorale, 2006] for a twenty-one-part mixed choir, percussion, and violin. The source material is a simple tune about two highlanders fighting over a girl, followed by an exhortation not to fight but to share her because she has everything twice

(eyes, hands, cheeks, braids). The author detailedly analyzed the large and technically demanding composition (paraphrased): the opening part of the piece unfolds in a very slow tempo and weak dynamics. It consists of gradually layered delays of twenty-one notes progressing along a Mixolydian mode from G_2 to F_5 . Thus we arrive at the final diatonic cluster covering three octaves. The second part consists of a choral recitation moving smoothly in crescendo from whispers to expressive exclamations in forte and high positions. The third movement begins with four beats of a large drum. In it, the melodic outline of the song is introduced in a slow tempo, in single motifs scattered in the sound space. This is played out in the soft dynamics with the ostinato accompaniment of the big drum. The breakthrough is brought by the exclamation of the two soloists, followed by the expected overall song in a fast tempo. In four-part texture, the melody passes through various voices while others imitate the instrumental accompaniment. The sonic climax comes in the short fifth movement. It consists of both aleatoric shouts of the text and a homophonic eight-part chorus in which the even meter changes to odd, and the song is heard in augmentation.

In the following year, 2007, the composer also adapted the piece for male, female, or children's choir. Vičar's second most famous choral work is *Owl [Vejr/Gufo]* for mixed (eight-part), male (six-part), or female/children's (six-part) a capella choir (2007). The chorus is based on three songs with varying meters. In addition to a primarily homophonic treatment that basically respects the latent harmony but enriches the chords with thickening seconds, the composer used several enriching elements: the opening cries of the word "vejr" in different octave positions, the sonic imitation of an owl hoot, the rhythmic body play, or the final cluster on the word "vejr", performed by glissandos in both directions.

Ctirad Kohoutek (1929–2011) was perhaps the furthest away from the folklore basis in some of his compositions on folk texts. An example is a ballad, *Skalice Bells* [Skalické zvony, 1970], on folk texts with organ, three gongs, and timpani accompaniment. Here the composer fully developed the impulses he had gained through his knowledge of modern compositional techniques, especially during short stays in Dartington, England, on courses in Darmstadt, Germany, and during several visits to the Warsaw Autumn Festival, which at the time was the only major music showcase in Eastern Europe focused on the presentation of contemporary music. One of Kohoutek's original contributions is the combination of these techniques with folk inspirations, as evidenced by several instrumental compositions from later times in addition to the Skalice Bells. The composer has expressed the view that children are willing to carry out even the most daring experiments without inhibitions and ingrained conventions, especially when they find in them an interesting rhythmicity, wit, playfulness, attractiveness, or, again, a serious sense of being entrusted with tasks no less important than those of adults. There is no reason, therefore, not to use all the possibilities of contemporary compositional techniques in works for children. Why not use modal systems, or serial methods (including dodecaphonic), based on a consistent organization of pitches? In this piece, Kohoutek treats the text template very freely. These are excerpts from three lyrical-epic ballads linked by the motif of death. When setting them to music, Kohoutek changes the order of the stanzas, repeats some words or phrases (often aleatorically and in multiple voices), omits other verses, lets different texts sound simultaneous, some verses are sung, and others are declaimed. From the point of view of tonality, Skalické zvony represents a type of atonal composition. However, it is not a free atonality but an organized one, according to the principles of dodecaphonic and serial techniques. In terms of the interrelationship between the individual choral bands and the instrumental

accompaniment, the composition can be described as multilayered, using elements of bimetrics and polymetrics. In a live performance, it is necessary to consider aleatorics to some extent in their relationship to each other since the tempo data in the individual bands cannot be followed precisely, and the result is always, to some extent, a work of chance. In addition to the compositional principles of contemporary music, however, one can also find in the piece inspirations from the Gregorian Chant (the use of simple recitation formulas) and folk influences. Considering these findings, one might get the impression that Skaliké zvon, as a composition that is sophisticated to the last degree, and in which mathematically calculated ways of working with the musical material are applied, would come across as austere and cold. However, we get a completely different impression when listening to it. On first look, it strikes us with a powerful emotional charge, without us being aware of all the technical finesse the composer used in its composition. Moreover, this is the unmistakable sign of high compositional mastery. It is surely no coincidence that, in conformity with the general tendencies of European music, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, represented mainly by German Expressionism, Kohoutek also uses this way of organizing musical material to express strongly tense, even tormentingly tragic moments in human life.

Ancient and medieval inspirations

Even at a time when the ruling communist dictatorship was striving for an ideological unity of creation celebrating a bold and joyful tomorrow, some composers turned to timeless values, not only spiritual, expressed primarily in the *Bible*, but also to ancient Greek and Roman culture. Ancient poetry became a major inspiration for several composers for its content and the beauty of classical Latin and Greek.

Jan Novák (1921–1984) composed his vocal works exclusively on Latin texts, not only ancient and medieval ones but also his Latin poetry. Alois Piňos characterized the influence of Latin on Novák's compositional style:

“The study of Latin and ancient culture, in general, brought Novák as a composer countless inspirational themes and purely musical impulses, for example, in the field of rhythmic-metrical, intervallic, and instrumental. At the same time, the means of 20th-century music, with its new and changing relationships between meter and rhythm, enabled Novák to imitate the rhythm and meter of ancient poetry more accurately and faithfully, with all its subtle nuances, than had been possible in previous centuries, in which European music was bound by fixed, binding meters, when rhythm depended on regular two- or three-period measures and the regular construction of periodic phrases, etc. Thus, Novák experimented in the field of meter originally, confronting the old refined ancient poetic meters with contemporary rhythms.”³

While setting Latin verses, Novák paid crucial attention to the relationship between music and words, specifically to the observance of the meter of Latin verse, for example, the preservation of the opposition of short and long syllables on which its rhythm is based.

³ Alois Piňos, “Návrat Jana Nováka” [The Return of Jan Novák], *Hudební rozhledy* 43 (1990): 274.

Novák's first encounter with ancient poetry in the choral field is the 1959 cycle *X Horatii carmina* for solo or chorus with piano accompaniment. In the 1965 cycle *Amores Sulpiciae* for the four-part girls' choir he set six elegies attributed to the Roman poet Sulpicia. The verses depict the vicissitudes of her love affair with the young man Cerinthus. Several other choral works were composed in 1968. The cycle *Catulli Lesbia* for a capella male choir set the verses of one of the greatest Roman lyricists, Gaius Valerius Catullus. Lesbia is a literary pseudonym used by the author to name his mistress. He dedicated a series of poems to her, depicting the evolution of a relationship from passionate love to disappointment to hatred. *IV fugae Vergilianae* for mixed a capella choir (1974) is also highly praised. Among Novák's best-known and most frequently performed compositions is the eight-part cycle *Exercitia mythologica* (1968) for mixed choir on his own texts, in which the author celebrated the ancient gods and other mythological figures associated with art (Apollo, Orpheus, Erato, Midas, Echo, Minerva, Tityrus, Terpsichore).

Alois Piños (1925–2008) was Novák's friend and close collaborator, who, influenced by Novák, was also an admirer of classical Latin. His work on Latin texts highlights the large-scale cantata *Ars amatoria* (1967) for soprano, mezzo-soprano, male chorus, and large orchestra on poems from Ovidius' famous collection of the same name. Ovidius' subject matter is given many humorous, ironic, and satirical positions in Piños' score, which perfectly match the poet's elegance and amorous variety.

Petr Eben was also inspired by ancient culture in several of his compositions. One of his masterpieces is the oratorio *Apologia Sokratus* for baritone, alto, children's, and mixed choir and orchestra (1967). From Plato's dialogue, The Defence of Socrates, the composer selected three thematic areas he developed in three movements – On Virtue, On Evil, and On death. While still in grammar school, Eben fell in love with the classical languages, Latin and Greek. He particularly admired their sound. In his own words, he was inspired by the surviving remnants of ancient melodies and by some types of Greek folk melodies, which led him to use modal techniques from time to time. His fascination with the sonorities of ancient Greek is also evidenced in his nine-part cycle *Greek dictionary* (1974) for two- to the four-part female choir, harp, or piano. He always set to music one or two words in classical Greek, which attracted Eben for its content and sound. He tried to express both in music, and a kind of real musical dictionary was created. The cycle *Catonis moralia* (1975) for four-part children's choir a capella is set to an anonymous text from the 3rd century AD, erroneously attributed to Caton. The poems' content is the basic rules of moral life, always formulated in two hexameters. The cycle is also evidence of Eben's tendency to combine various musical forms, styles, and types, in this case using the purely instrumental cyclical form of the Baroque suite in the field of vocal music (Preludio, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Air, Gigue). The result is a concert work of high technical complexity, which stems mainly from the instrumental way of leading the voices.

In 1975, the Latin verses of Quinto Horatio Flacco became the textual basis for **Antonín Tučapský's** five madrigals for mixed choir a capella *In honorem vitae*. From Horatio's often long poems, each focusing on a different aspect of the individual's life and humanity as a whole, the author always chose only the first stanza. It deals with the poet's mission in society, depicts the disasters the gods have sent upon the earth, and also portrays life's joys. The statement of the inevitability of the passage of time and the acceptance of the finality of life is essential.

The verses of the ancient poets Horatius and Catullus also inspired **Jiří Laburda** in his five-part cycle of women's a capella choruses *Carmina* (1981). The selected poems are very diverse in content, ranging from intimate lyricism to the celebration of nature, the greatness of human achievement, and anti-war verses.

Jan Málek composed the seven-part cycle *Amor vincit omnia* for women's choir and flute in 1994 on quotations from the Latin classics about love. The choruses are linked attacca and the composer has employed varied methods of contrapuntal work (canon in various forms, exposition of fugue, homophonic four-part harmony, diminution). The chorus is composed in an extended tonality with a marked predominance of dissonant harmonies. Quotations from the Roman classics also form a textual treasure in the mixed chorus *Motetus 1991*, with which the composer responded to the war conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

In recent years, several composers have also been inspired by *Carmina Burana*, a collection of medieval poems and songs. We encounter its texts several times in **Zdeněk Lukáš's** works. The first time this happened was in the cycle of three male a capella choruses *Omittamus studia* in 1966. Although the individual poems are different in content and mood, they share an everyday thematic basis, and for example, they reflect various aspects of uncommitted student life. Here the composer has used various polyphonic techniques to reinforce the medieval character of the music. In contrast, the music's chordal component is almost one hundred percent dissonant without any significant tonal anchorage. The impetus for the cycle *Vivat iuventus!* (1972) for tenor, baritone, mixed choir and tape was the existence of an electroacoustic studio in the Pilsen radio station. In the three-part cycle *Canti iuventutis* (1975) for chamber mixed choir, two flutes, piano, harpsichord, double bass, and drums, the author used various techniques of rational organization of musical material. This area of Lukáš's oeuvre concluded in 2000 with the cycle *Tres canti studiosorum* for four-part children's choir and string orchestra.

Compared to the demanding choruses of Lukáš, the mixed chorus with piano *Florebat olim studium* by **Emil Hradecký** (*1951) is easy to perform. The chorus, whose content is a lament for the corruption of youth and its disrespect for older generations and time-honored values, alternates between two expressively contrasting works – a syncopated rhythmic four-part voice with significant piano support and two recitative areas the first of which is for female, the second for male unison.

For **Jan Vičar**, in his cantata, *Tempus iuvenis* (2018) for soprano, bass, mixed choir, and orchestra, medieval student poetry represented only one, albeit very significant, source of inspiration. He also used texts from the *Old Testament* and Moravian folk poetry. The author wrote about the composition: "The cantata (...) on Latin texts is a tribute to the young generation and a celebration of the ephemeral youth. It contains whimsical, even debauched parts, but on the contrary, it is also serious. It is a Central European parallel to Carl Orff's cantata *Carmina Burana* (1937). Unlike that, however, it is based on a postmodern material base."⁴

Stylistically, the piece is multilayered. Some elements give the music an archaic character, such as the progressions of voices in parallel fifths or the characteristic intervals of church modes; in some parts, the influence of Carl Orff's music is noticeable – the rhyming character of the melody in a major tonality, the stereotyped rhythm; in two movements

⁴ Jan Vičar, "Tempus iuvenis." Český rozhlas, accessed October 31, 2020. <https://informace.rozhlas.cz/kantata-tempus-iuvenis-jana-vicara-v-katalogu-ceskeho-rozhlasu-8273019>.

there are also folk music devices, such as the use of a bagpipe fifth in the accompaniment or the progressions of voices in parallel thirds. However, the dominant role is played by compositional devices of the contemporary period: the prevalence of dissonant harmonies, polyphonic chords approaching clusters, aleatoric, whispering, or declamation only on approximately marked pitches.

In its past and present, Czech music often has turned to the great personalities of its history, such as Saint Wenceslas, the emperor and king Charles IV, the religious reformer Jan Hus and many others. The ideas of the great educator and thinker Jan Amos Comenius remain a living source of knowledge. His anti-war attitudes were set to music by **Jiří Laburda** in his hymn *Ut omnes homines vivant humaniter* for alto and mixed choir a capella (1971). Comenius's proposals for an ordering of human society that would ensure a peaceful life for all people can be described as a critical point in terms of thought and music. The a capella mixed chorus *The Message* (1989) sets Komenský's famous verses professing faith in the happy future of the Czech nation, which became particularly relevant after the country's occupation by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 and again in the final period of the communist dictatorship.

Among **Otmar Mácha's** most serious choral compositions for children is *Hymnus Cedant arma togae* from 1989, set to J. A. Comenius's Latin triple verse, depicting the contrast between peace and the fury of war with extremely effective musical means. The piece exists in a total of four versions. The first two feature a symphony orchestra accompaniment, the third version features an organ and timpani, and the fourth is for a children's choir and piano.

Conclusion

In our discussion of Czech choral music of the past decades, we have concentrated mainly on compositions that, on the one hand, show undeniable artistic quality and, at the same time, can reach performers and listeners in other countries with their message. We have yet to focus on compositions setting the verses of Czech poets nor on the vibrant field of choral works for children, which could be the subject of another particular study.

The choral output of the period under study is very rich in number. Although we are only a few years or decades away from its creation, it is already possible to estimate to some extent which works have been or will in the future be included in the basic fund of this area of musical creation. The simplest criterion that can predict this development is their popularity among performers, respectively the frequency of their performances, which is, of course, also determined by their social resonance or timeliness and acceptance by a broad audience. Equally important is the artistic aspect, which must be based on a comprehensive analysis of the compositions in relation to their contribution to musical development in terms of the individual means of musical expression. These criteria have guided this study's presented selection of composers and compositions.

Bibliography

- Český hudební slovník osob a institucí. [Czech Musical Dictionary of Persons and Institutions]. <http://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/>
- Fond materiálů a hudebnin Stanislava Pecháčka [Fund of materials and music of Stanislav Pecháček], Praha.
- Hrčková, Nada. *Dějiny hudby VI. Hudba 20. století, 2. díl* [History of music VI. Music of the 20th century, Volume 2]. Praha: Ikar, 2007.
- Nedělka, Michal. *Mše v soudobé české hudbě* [Mass in contemporary Czech music]. Praha: Karolinum, 2005.
- Pecháček, Stanislav. *Lidová píseň a sborová tvorba* [Folk song and choral music]. Praha: Karolinum, 2010.
- Pecháček, Stanislav. *Česká sborová tvorba III/A (od poloviny 20. století)* [Czech choral music III/A – since the mid-20th century]. Praha: Univerzita Karlova – Pedagogická fakulta, 2017.
- Pecháček, Stanislav. *Česká sborová tvorba III/B (od poloviny 20. století)* [Czech choral music III/B – since the mid-20th century]. Praha: Univerzita Karlova – Pedagogická fakulta, 2022.
- Saláková, Leona. *Česká liturgická tvorba pro dětské a ženské sbory* [Czech liturgical works for children's and women's choirs]. Praha: Univerzita Karlova – Pedagogická fakulta, 2006.
- Saláková, Magdalena. *Musica poetica latina aneb Postwar vokální tvorba českých autorů na světské latinské texty* [Musica Poetica Latina or Postwar vocal works of Czech authors on secular Latin texts]. Praha: Univerzita Karlova – Pedagogická fakulta, 2013.
- Smolka, Jaroslav. *Česká kantáta a oratorium* [Czech cantata and oratorio]. Praha: Supraphon, 1970.
- Smolka, Jaroslav. *Dějiny hudby* [History of Music]. Brno: TOGGA, 2001.
- The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2. ed. London: Macmillan; New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2001.

About the author

Stanislav Pecháček graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in Olomouc in 1974. Since 1985 he has been teaching at the Music Department of Charles University – Faculty of Education in Prague, since 1998 as a senior lecturer and since 2012 as a university professor. He has published six monographs about Czech choral literature and folk songs (one of them in Polish) and nine textbooks in the field of intonation, conducting techniques, didactics of music, and practical harmonization of folk songs for the piano and the guitar. From 1990 to 1995, he was the conductor of the women's choir Puellae Pragenses; from 1995 to 2006, he led the children's choir "Mláďi" [Youth]. In the 1990's he was engaged in choral organizations in the Czech Republic (Presidium of Association of Czech Choirs) and abroad (AGEC – Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europäischer Chorverbände). From 1993 to 2000, he was editor-in-chief of the review for choral arts Cantus.

✉ pechacek.stanislav@seznam.cz