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From the New World... by Sonya Szabo Reynolds

In February, I had the pleasure of attending the **International Janáček Festival and Conference** at the **University of North Texas** in Denton, Texas. It was fabulous seeing the many distinguished Czech musicians, composers and scholars together in one place with the American students and other conference participants. UNT Professor Dr. Thomas Sovík, Festival Coordinator, is to be commended for organizing such a splendid event.

The College of Music at the University of North Texas has a long history of distinction, and I was impressed with the degree and depth of talent exhibited each day by the students and ensembles involved in the Festival's concerts.

At the Festival's final banquet on Saturday, 9 February 2013, a formal agreement of cooperation between the **University of North Texas** and the **Janáček Academy of Music & the Performing Arts** was signed by the Presidents of both institutions. This was followed by the capstone event of the Festival/Conference: the American première of Janáček's *Zápisník zmizelého* (*The Diary of One Who Disappeared*) (1920), as orchestrated by Miloš Štědrón (b. 1942) and his son Miloš Orson Štědrón (b. 1973). The orchestration of Janáček's song cycle by the Štědróns was completed in 2003, and received its world première in Brno, Czech Republic in November of last year by students of UNT's opera department who had traveled there for the occasion. The production was semi-staged and sung in Czech. Main character *Janík* was admirably and convincingly sung by the internationally recognized tenor Marek Olbrzymek-- a last-minute substitution flown in from Brno for the ailing UNT vocalist who had sung the earlier world première. Laurel Semerdjian, alto, was alluring as the gypsy girl *Žofka*, and the chorus of three women (Megan Sherrod LaFour, Chaazi Munyanya and Julie Silva), set off-stage, complemented the ensemble. The Štědróns' orchestration of Janáček's rich original piano part for chamber orchestra (consisting of violin, viola, cello, double bass, flute, clarinet, bassoon, trombone, celesta, harp and timpani) succeeds and serves to intensify the dramatic aspect of the work.



The wide array of concerts held during the festival celebrated not only the music of Janáček, but also other Czech composers both past and present. For example, an outstanding early music program presented by the UNT Baroque Orchestra, UNT Collegium Singers, and UNT Baroque Trumpet Ensemble included masterworks by Czech composers Biber, Capricornus, Vejvanovský, Tolar, Michna, Vodička, Benda, and Zelenka. Zelenka's *Miserere in C minor*, conducted by Richard Sparks, was powerful and moving, and the performance can now be viewed online by simply typing "UNT Zelenka Miserere" into YouTube's search bar.

At the other end of the spectrum was a contemporary operatic romp, *The Cage Affair or Annals of the Avant-Garde Open Wide* (*Věc Cage aneb Anály avantgardy dokořán*), collaboratively composed "in layers" by Ivo Medek, Alois Piňos and Miloš Štědrón. This was the first English-language performance (trans. Pavel Drábek) of the work which received its première in 1995 in Brno with Magdalena Kožená as *Čipera*, Janáček's dog. (Among other characters are also *Slepice* ["hen"] No. 1 and *Slepice* ["hen"] No. 2). Composer Ivo Medek informed me that the work is performed each summer in the garden of Janáček's house (now museum) in Brno. The fanciful plot is inspired by the historically documented 1925 trip to Brno by American composer Henry Cowell, inventor of the tone cluster piano technique, founder of the New Music Society and teacher of John Cage. UNT's production was thoroughly entertaining, with Darry Hearon (UNT senior voice major) lighting up the stage as Henry Cowell, and Jessica Morel (UNT orchestral conducting doctoral student) masterfully in charge on the podium.

Other high points of the festival included the UNT Symphony's all-Czech program (Suk's *Meditation on the Old Czech Chorale "Saint Wenceslas"*, Janáček's *Sinfonietta*, and Dvořák's *Symphony No. 8*), an authoritative performance by UNT faculty of Janáček's *Mládí (Youth)*, and the recital given by ISHA Trio guest artists Sára Žalčíková, piano; Kristýna Vaculová, flute; and Luci Rozsnýo, soprano. The lovely and talented ISHA Trio, based in Brno, would be ideal to engage for an event sponsored by the Dvořák Society, should the opportunity ever arise; they excel particularly with twentieth and twenty-first century works.

The Academic Conference took place on the final day of the festival. Dr. Thomas Sovík's opening remarks included a heartfelt dedication and toast in memoriam to Professor Jiří Fukač (1936-2002), "a great scholar, Janáček scholar..." who many in attendance had known personally and held in very high regard. A large portrait of Prof. Fukač graced the stage for the duration of the day's proceedings. The keynote speaker was Dr. Michael Beckerman of NYU. His paper, "Does Music Have a Subject and, If So, Where is It? Reflections on 'Middles' in Janáček's Second Quartet" was typically unique, interesting and thought-provoking.

The International Janáček Festival and Conference was sponsored by the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas (CEFT), Frank J. and Hermine Hurta Kostohryz Residency in Czech Music and Culture, Dr. Jim J. and Rose A. Bezdek Endowment Fund Celebrating Czech Music and Culture, UNT Fine Arts Series, and UNT College of Music. The Festival Coordinator was Dr. Thomas Sovík of UNT.

photos courtesy of Jonathan Reynolds, Senior Photographer, UNT.

