

the 4th festival of piano teaching literature gradus ad parnassum

was devoted to the life & works of **vítězslava kaprálová & bohuslav martinů**

/ ELIŠKA NOVOTNÁ

THIS YEAR'S Gradus ad Parnassum Festival took place on 1 and 2 February 2019 in Ostrava (CZ) and enjoyed extraordinary popularity among teachers at schools for the arts both within and outside of the Moravian Silesian Region. Close to 50 piano teachers participated in the performance workshop led by Ivo Kahánek and Ivana Kalina Tabak's lecture on the piano works of Vítězslava Kaprálová and Bohuslav Martinů; many also attended the concert at Czech Radio Ostrava's Studio 1. It was no doubt the popular Martinů who was responsible for drawing such attention. The number of children who played during the workshop and the final concert totalled twenty! But the festival's success is primarily and unambiguously linked with the teaching methods of Ivo Kahánek, who inspired all participants with his clarity of musical vision and his exceptional sensitivity for the soul of the child. High attendance was no doubt also brought about by the newly acquired accreditation of the Ministry of Education for the further education of teachers. Participants included students from the Department of Keyboard Instruments at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Ostrava, some of whom worked on their interpretations of pieces by Martinů and Kaprálová at the interpretive workshop and then experienced the atmosphere of a recording session at the radio studio. We are very grateful that students and graduates of the Department of Keyboard Instruments give rise to teachers whose active presence at the festival shows their clear interest in music pedagogy and in furthering their own education.

One of the most intriguing moments of the festival is always the connection of perspective, interpretation, experience, and teaching methods between different generations of pianists. The concert hall of the Faculty of Fine



Ivo Kahánek as a teacher

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Arts is visited by the youngest generation of pianists, who come – accompanied by their teachers – to present their accomplishments, to improve their interpretation of a specific work, and to mature in general. They are joined by older students who have already decided to make a professional career in music, whether from conservatories or from the Department of Keyboard Instruments, which organises the event. Their ranks are bolstered for the final concert by university professors, who take the festival to its climactic finish. This year's repertoire consisted of the works of Bohuslav Martinů, who is

greatly popular among teachers and pupils alike, and of the more neglected but no less interesting compositions of Vítězslava Kaprálová. Besides obvious inclusions from the much-performed cycle *Puppets, H 137*, festival-goers



enjoyed *Four Pieces for Piano, H 92*, several parts of *Spring in the Garden, H 125*, *Sonatina for Two Violins and Piano, H 198*, or *Carillon* from *Film en miniature, H 148*; of the larger cycles there was *Windows to the Garden, H 270*, *Butterflies and Birds of Paradise, H 127*, a selection of *Etudes and Polkas, H 308*, and *Czech Dances for Two Pianos, H 324*. From Vítězslava Kaprálová's oeuvre, almost all the miniatures from *Childhood Compositions* were performed, also *April Preludes*, and the first movement of *Sonata Appassionata*.

At the conclusion of the interpretive workshop, I asked Ivo Kahánek about his opinion of the music – especially the piano music – of Bohuslav Martinů:

very warm-hearted, despite being something of an introvert. We are not used to seeing those two qualities in one person, but that was how he had it, and he has it in his music as well. His music is very diverse – it has many moments that we can solve and which can teach us something new. Martinů's music encompasses the issues of multiple stylistic periods.

For one, it is his hidden horizontality, his hidden lyricism, which he maintains despite his use of various time signatures and various rhythmic figures that complicate that kind of interpretation and distract the interpreter's attention. You have to see what the root of the music is. Frequently, lyricism is the root. The second thing is the general problem of small notes in the composi-

Martinů was a prolific composer who touches on perhaps every musical genre there is. The task of the teacher is to recommend the pupil listen to similarly conceived compositions for instruments other than the piano. The piano is an all-encompassing instrument, but it is necessary to have the aural image of other instruments to actually realise this versatility of sound. It would be great if every teacher was able to decode the combinatorial and mathematical traps set in place by Martinů so they do not obscure the fact of Martinů's pure and unadulterated musicianship. Most of his compositions contain a natural, naturally felt musicality and emotionality, regardless of any difficulties of rhythm – so we should always search for this aspect, which



In your workshop, you often mentioned the specifics of Bohuslav Martinů's music – the organisation of his compositions in kind of "boxes", the choral or quartet structure of the melodic parts of his works, the differences between Romantic elements (the triathlon of soprano, bass, and middle parts) and the elements that are true Martinů. Do you see any other tangible characteristic of his music? What exactly can we learn while studying his works?

Ivo Kahánek: *I think that Martinů as a composer has an absolutely fantastic application in the instructional environment because he offers, on the one hand, the core musical problems with utter purity, yet on the other hand he usually hides them in a somewhat coded form. This must be decoded and organised. One feature of Martinů is that he is a bit obsessed with motion and the constant movement of rhythm. I think he was a very playful person, I'd guess he liked chess and enjoyed riddles. That is one side of him, but at the same time he was a man who must have been*

tions of Bohuslav Martinů. He often embellishes the "skeleton" of the work with a plethora of little notes which, if not given due care, considering the pitch they are written at and their sheer numbers, very often drown out the rest of the music, whitewashing the composition's vertical and horizontal structure and comprehensibility. That is the great challenge for the musician, but it is not always clear, sometimes it is even disputable – especially in his crowning works. It is up to the musician to investigate Martinů's purpose behind the minutiae. Sometimes they truly are the bearers of motion, which is at the forefront, but then there are passages where hidden motion is only one of the mood flavours, which is to create a degree of nervousness or direction; in some of Martinů's compositions, these little notes work together to create the timbre. But at first glance it all just seems to be "semiquavers". If the pianist correctly channels the musical potential of these smaller notes, he increases the imaginative potential of the music, but he also discovers much of the potential of the instrument.

should shine through the music of Bohuslav Martinů and should only be decorated by the rhythmic "pranks". Those are just compositional garnish; musicality is the core.

I trust that the cultivation of musicality in children and the broadening of their horizons was also aided by this year's Gradus ad Parnassum Festival. And for their teachers and all us attendees, it was a highly inspirational experience that will fuel us until the next iteration, which will again take place at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Ostrava during the 2020 mid-year break. ■

(The author lectures in piano at the Department of Keyboard Instruments at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Ostrava)