

VIVACE

*Classical Music Review
in Supraphon Recordings*

SUMMER 2020

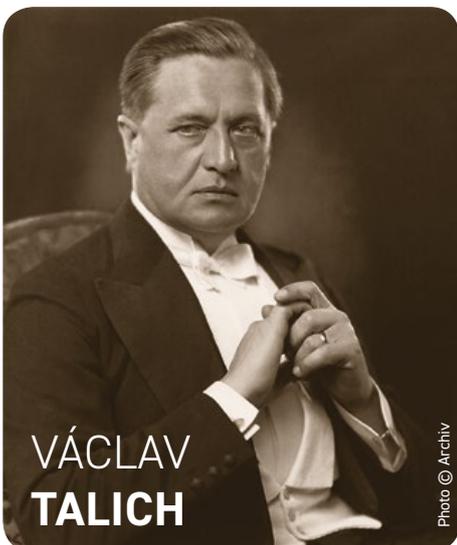
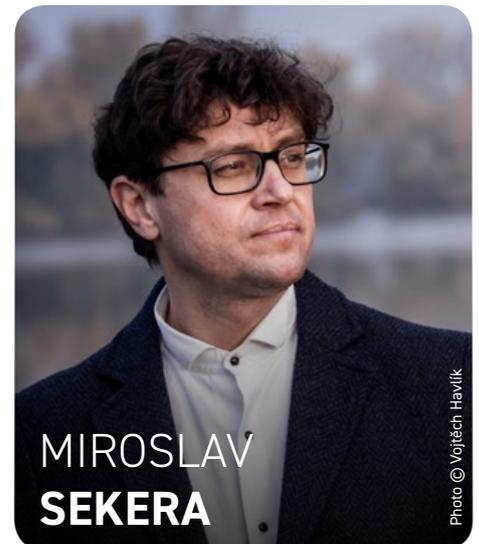




Photo © Martin Kubica

Dear readers,

When, at the end of June, we got together in Prague at the presentation of new Supraphon recordings, we experienced an incredibly powerful atmosphere. It was not only down to the stellar artists who had gathered there on that Thursday afternoon (Jakub Hrůša, Ivo Kahánek, Jana Semerádová, Miroslav Sekera, and others); after a long “fast”, all of us seemed to crave personal encounters and sharing. Owing to the restrictions implemented in connection with the coronavirus pandemic, many musicians were going through a difficult period, with their very livelihoods at stake – and, at the more general level, they may have felt that in our country culture is not actually perceived as an integral, but rather a dispensable part of our lives. On the other hand, the self-same period saw a great wave of creativity, seeking of new ways of reaching out to people through art in the narrowed conditions, as well as gratitude for the immense amplitude and luxury amidst which (in terms of art and culture) we live under ordinary circumstances, without being fully aware of it.

The present Vivace issue contains brief interviews with almost all the aforementioned artists, or conversations about their albums. At this juncture, I would like to mention two of them.

Had it not been for the unfortunate pandemic situation, on 28 April we would have seen the conductor Jakub Hrůša and the pianist Ivo Kahánek taking over at Kings Place in London the 2020 BBC Music Magazine Award in the Concerto category. Yet the accolades

were ultimately given “remotely”. On 20 June, Hrůša and Kahánek received for the same album (featuring Dvořák’s and Martinů’s piano concertos, recorded with the Bamberger Symphoniker) the Czech Angel prize, which since last year has also included classical music. The music itself is, of course, more important than mere medals, yet winning the awards, especially amidst fierce international competition, is for the performers a reward for their excellent work, confirming that the direction they have opted for is indeed the right one. And for all of us, the accolades serve to highlight that classical music is the domain in which our nation is truly exceptional.

The unique live recording of fragments from Smetana’s *Libuše*, conducted by Talich, made in Prague during the time of the Nazi occupation in May 1939, demonstrates that in certain situations music can also play a crucial role within the social and political context – it can serve to express national pride (let us not confuse it with nationalism), encourage people and enhance their bravery in difficult times of oppression. Sometimes it is good to remember this dimension of art.

Before the release in the autumn of the numerous recordings we have prepared for you, you can – and I believe you will – select from our summer menu. I hope you will enjoy pleasant relaxed moments with our albums. On behalf of Supraphon, I wish you good health.

Matouš Vlčinský

IVO KAHÁNEK IN THE GLORY

The recording of Antonín Dvořák’s and Bohuslav Martinů’s piano concertos, made by the pianist Ivo Kahánek and the Bamberger Symphoniker under the baton of Jakub Hrůša, has garnered critical acclaim since its release last September. It has been voted BBC Radio 3 Disc of the Week, BBC Music Magazine Recording of the Month, Choix de Classique HD, Album der Woche – BR Klassik and Choc de Classica. And finally the album has received the prestigious BBC Music Magazine Award in the “Concerto” category and the Czech Anděl Award in the “Classics” category.



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MIROSLAV SEKERA

HEARTFELT MATTERS

Putting together Smetana and Liszt is in a sense logical – both of them were superb pianists, with the piano having played a significant role in their lives and artistic developments, particularly in the first decades of their careers. Liszt was a great model for Smetana, as documented by a note in the Czech composer's diary: "With God's grace and help, one day I will be like Liszt in technique and like Mozart in composition." The correspondence and several personal encounters between Liszt and Smetana ultimately led to a friendship. Yet whereas Liszt's piano works have enjoyed great attention, Smetana's piano music is yet to become widely known and acknowledged.

Miroslav, what was the major impulse behind your making an album of music by Ferenc Liszt and Bedřich Smetana?

I have always found Ferenc Liszt very interesting, even though he has often been viewed as a composer who only brought to bear an amazing technique. In my opinion, he was – along with Fryderyk Chopin and Robert Schumann – one of the greatest 19th-century music creators and pianists. When giving thought to making the album, I arrived at the conclusion that now I may be at the height of my powers and thus the time is ripe to record his works. I combined Liszt's and Smetana's music for several reasons – I am a Czech musician making an album for a Czech label and I am proud that we have such fantastic, globally celebrated composers. I hope that those who will listen to my CD will appreciate Liszt's and Smetana's magnitude.

Is it true that Liszt's piano works are touchstones for performers? Are they really so challenging?

In technical terms, his works do contain a number of truly difficult passages. Yet I do not think it is right for pianists to focus primarily

on the technical aspect of Liszt's pieces. I would say it is more important to show their musicality, and make use of the technique so as to highlight the musical qualities, never vice versa.

Historical documents prove that Liszt and Smetana met. Is it true?

I think they met twice. Once in Prague and once in Weimar, where Liszt set up a noted music centre, an institute that was visited by many young composers and performers from all corners of Europe. Apparently, the two artists respected each other. It should be pointed out that the young Smetana aspired to become a pianist as renowned as Liszt, which is attested to by his early works. That is perhaps most evident from his piano sketch *Macbeth* and the *Witches*, in which he employed a great deal of Lisztesque technical elements.

Smetana's works for solo piano are mainly part of the repertoire of Czech musicians, they have not been over-performed by foreign artists worldwide. How do you perceive them within the European context?



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I personally perceive Smetana's music as being of global significance. It's a pity that it isn't as widely acclaimed as Liszt's oeuvre. The reason may – paradoxically – be the fact that Smetana's works are often even more challenging than Liszt's.

You are known as a distinguished chamber musician, most frequently performing with the violinist Josef Špaček. How do you feel when being alone on the stage?

It is not in my nature to showcase myself merely as a soloist. I deem solo performance to be yet another wonderful discipline. And I also think that today it is important and necessary for musicians to be versatile.

How has your collaboration in the chamber music domain enriched your approach to solo performance, and what impact on you has your teaching at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague had?

I regard chamber music as a good coaction of partners respecting each other. That which inspires me the most in the chamber music collaboration is the melodiousness of the violin, horn and human voice. I think that every pianist would like to be able to render a cantilena and a melody like a first-class singer.

Can audiences look forward to concerts at which you will play the works featured on the new Supraphon album?

I find it really regrettable that due to the current pandemic I could not give a recital within the Resonance Movers cycle, at which the new album was scheduled to be launched. But I believe that the concert will be included in some of the future series of the cycle, which has always taken place at the magnificent Convent of Saint Agnes in Prague. If the next season runs as planned, I will give concerts in Japan, where I have performed regularly. Besides solo recitals, I should get together with the legendary cellist Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, who is said to have played Dvořák's famous Concerto for Cello in B minor on a thousand or so occasions.

You recorded the present album at the Martinů Hall in the Liechtenstein Palace, which houses the Faculty of Music and Dance of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. What is your personal relationship to the place?

I admit that the place is close to my heart. It is not only my alma mater, but also my workplace. The Martinů Hall is where I gave my graduation recital, and I have experienced there numerous splendid concerts, so I wanted to make a recording at my home venue.



JANA SEMERÁDOVÁ AIRY TUNES AT ROYAL COURTS

Eight years after the release of the album *Solo for the King*, the flautist Jana Semerádová, the artistic director of Collegium Marianum, an internationally renowned ensemble specialised in Baroque music, has made a similarly conceived CD, titled *Chaconne for the Princess*. While on the previous occasion she presented the music performed at the court of Frederick II, King of Prussia, in Potsdam, this time she and the superb Austrian harpsichordist Erich Traxler invite the listener to London, where Princess Anne, the daughter of George II, was taught by George Frideric Handel. We talked to Jana Semerádová about the new release.

Jana, in what respect does your new album link up to the CD *Solo for the King*?

I recall that when I was recording *Solo for the King*, I clearly wanted to make use of the music I am fond of so as to pay tribute to Frederick II, the greatest royal flautist. I am in my element with the album's repertoire – heartfelt sonatas by František Benda, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, and Johann Joachim Quantz, as well as one of the most wonderful sonatas for flute created by Johann Sebastian Bach. Eight years later, without anyhow planning it, my desire to record Leclair's sonatas brought me to another royal court, this time "in the services" of Anne, Princess of Orange, whose fate was connected with Handel too. And as regards the title, *Chaconne for the Princess*, it aptly reflects the content of the album, which was a logical next step on my musical journey through royal courts, following the visit to the Sanssouci palace.

How difficult was it to select the repertoire, and what is the album's objective?

I wanted to record both the well-known works and the lesser-known pieces, which were part of Princess Anne's artistic milieu, yet would

also represent something like a light, almost dance bridge between the more serious Leclair sonatas and Handel's extensive harpsichord suite. I must admit it took me a while to arrive at a repertoire that I deemed entirely satisfactory. I intended to include on the CD the splendid chaconne from Handel's opera *Parnasso in festa*, written for the wedding of Anne and William of Orange. And I ultimately had the good fortune to discover, by chance, the chaconne's period arrangement while exploring Handel's collection *Lessons for the Harpsichord*.

The life story of Princess Anne is fascinating too. How do you personally perceive it?

When it comes to Princess Anne's life, I first had to find information in foreign publications. The more I read about her the more I admired the music-loving aristocrat. The eldest daughter of the future King George of Britain, when she was a child her family moved from her native Hanover to London, where she could cultivate her multiple talents – in addition to learning foreign languages and dance, she studied painting and music. She was fortunate indeed to have been taught for 11 years by a master as accomplished as George Frideric



Handel, who, however, as he himself claimed, did not anyhow aspire to gain the post. The celebrated composer hailed Anne as his best pupil, praising her dexterity and proficiency, owing to which Anne matched professional musicians. Attesting to the affection between the teacher and the pupil is the celebratory opera Handel wrote for her and William of Orange's wedding. After moving to The Hague, Anne surrounded herself with outstanding artists, among them the painter Herman van der Mijl and the virtuoso violinist Jean-Marie Leclair, who would dedicate to her a book of sonatas, two of them written for the flute. We can only surmise as to how the sonatas were performed – whether by Leclair himself, accompanied on the harpsichord by Princess Anne, within one of the numerous concerts she held.

When did you begin to work with the harpsichordist Erich Traxler?

The Viennese harpsichordist Erich Traxler and I have known each other for years. He is a member of the several prominent Austrian ensembles with whom I have frequently performed. On one such occasion, I heard him play as a soloist and was impressed by his style. And since Erich is also an excellent basso continuo player, I invited him to Prague to work with Collegium Marianum. Consequently, he would appear before the local audiences in a number of programmes featuring different styles, thus showcasing part of his virtuosity as a versatile harpsichordist and organist.

What was the recording process like and where did you record?

The recording sessions took place at the beautiful premises of the Martínek studio, which previously served as a dance hall. That is probably why I played all the chaconnes, contra-dances and gavottes with such levity... But seriously. The studio has ideal acoustics for chamber ensembles, and I am glad when the space has a natural reverberation. Erich and I could hear each other perfectly. And although we hardly saw each other, we could all the more speak together through music. We did not use pencils much, as we remembered that which we “talked” about in the music. The “conversations” were never identical even when we started repeatedly from the same bar. That, naturally, complicated the work for the recording director Jiří Gemrot and the sound engineer Aleš Dvořák, yet they know me and are true masters in their respective disciplines, so they are able to use ample musical ideas in the manner that results in a lovely recording.

Do you and Erich Traxler plan to perform the music featured on the album at concerts?

Yes, I look forward to presenting this programme next year at the Summerwinds festival in Germany and at subsequent performances.



Photo © Petra Hajsáková

JAN ČIŽMÁŘ CODEX JACOBIDES

Jan Čižmář studied the lute in London and The Hague with true masters (Jacob Lindberg, Nigel North, Joachim Held, Mike Fentross and Christina Pluhar), and today he is a sought-after soloist and chamber musician, performing worldwide. On his new album, based on a manuscript of lute tablatures known as the Codex Jacobides, eight string instruments of various sizes and tunings are heard in a number of combinations, occasionally accompanied by a flute or lute ensemble and voice. Affording a taste of the music performed in Prague under Emperor Rudolf II, the CD is a true delicacy for connoisseurs and all music lovers alike. The listener may know some of the compositions from Spirituál kvintet's legendary record *Songs from the Good Auld Days* or from the Czech film *A Night at Karlstein*. The album, featuring pieces from a fragment of the Codex Jacobides, one of the major Czech sources of lute and instrumental music performed in Prague c. 1600, was released on CD and in electronic formats in June. The lutenist Jan Čižmář made the album with the Bohemian Lute Orchestra, the singer Eliška Tesařová and the viola da gamba player Magda Uhlířová.

You studied the lute with truly distinguished specialists, among them Nigel North, Joachim Held and Jacob Lindberg. How do you remember that time?

Those were amazing years, with every day opening a new chapter, affording new musical experiences and contacts. I made friends with a number of musicians, who have inspired me ever since. Nigel North in particular has largely influenced me as a player and teacher. The same applies to Joachim Held, with whom I have given frequent concerts, rediscovering the repertoire for two lutes. By the way, pieces from the Codex Jacobides will feature in our autumn performances.

The lute was the most popular instrument in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. How did you get to it centuries later?

I started with the guitar, naturally... I played the guitar by the campfire, in the garage, in music clubs, at parties. I was also engaged

in theatre and musical productions, with big bands. Then I went on to study classical guitar at the conservatory. Ultimately, the things somehow cut through and I got to the roots. I arrived at the lute, an immense special chapter, something like music archaeology, combining history, art and culture in general. I actually hail from a family of archaeologists.

What was the most challenging aspect of making the recording?

Finding the right balance between performance and research. On the one hand, I was an editor, who knew about all the errors and mistakes in the manuscript, as well as about what could have been or should be different. On the other hand, I was a musician aspiring to entertain the listener, to pass on joy and beauty. I believe I have succeeded in remaining faithful to both our ancestors' legacy and myself, my own interpretation of long-forgotten melodies.



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Photo © Marek Olbrzymek

What pleases you the most in relation to the album?

The fact that it links up to the work carried out by Jiří Tichota (note: a Czech musicologist, lutenist, singer and lyricist, the founder and artistic director of the Spirituál kvintet ensemble, whose great-grandfather was the first teacher of Antonín Dvořák; he studied musicology at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, graduating with a doctorate with the thesis on intabulations of songs and vocal compositions in 17th-century Prague lute tablatures). Getting together and working with him is actually a dream come true. I am also happy that the recording features such a variety of pieces. It is not an ordinary album of music for solo lute, but a truly colourful mosaic of the repertoire. I am pleased by the participation of my colleagues, who added flavour to the splendid songs. And I am particularly delighted by the resulting sound of the compositions in which I play several instruments successively – such an approach was somewhat risky, as only in the studio and after mixing them could we actually see that we indeed had taken the right path. It was a modern studio work, which is not customary in the classical discipline. Yet I believe that if musicians had had such technical opportunities in the 17th century, they too would have made use of them...

Could you say something about the instruments you play? They are not entirely common.

Every one of them is unique. Some are more common, with the Renaissance lute probably being the most familiar to everyone who has heard something about early music. Others, such as the orpharion, are true delicacies, even for specialists. My instruments are from

the workshops of master lute makers from all over the world, with perhaps the most precious of them being the double-necked lute built by the legendary Michael Lowe, which was previously in the possession of Anthony Rooley and which has been played at hundreds of concerts and featured on dozens of albums of the even more legendary British early-music group The Consort of Musicke. This very lute regularly accompanied the sopranos Emma Kirkby and Evelyn Tubb, who is a good friend of mine. It is as though parts of these artists' souls have remained in the instrument for ever. Great performers have always been an inspiration to composers who were their contemporaries.

Do you intend to perform the music featured on the new album at concerts?

Absolutely. I was actually supposed to tour China, the USA, Chile, Argentina and Brazil in April and May. Scheduled for June was a gala concert in Prague, prepared in collaboration with the National Museum – Czech Museum of Music, within which the CD and the complete critical edition, on which the album is based, were to be launched. Regrettably, all the plans fell through due to the coronavirus pandemic. Yet in the autumn I should be giving several solo concerts in the Czech Republic, and the said gala concert and launch of the album and the edition should take place too. As regards the American tour, I hope it will come to pass as soon as possible. Should the coronavirus situation so allow, the music featured on the album will also be performed in Germany, Austria, Poland and Slovakia, either solo or in various chamber combinations.



Photo © Martin Kubica

JITKA HOSPROVÁ A DEEP INTIMACY OF THE VIOLA IN CONTRAST TO THE MASSIVE SYMPHONIC SOUND OF THE ORCHESTRA

The viola's dark, velvety sound and its depth of expression enchanted many composers of the twentieth century (Bartók, Martinů, Hindemith, Clarke etc.) who made major contributions to the instrument's repertoire. Jitka Hosprová, however, likes to stay off the beaten path. For her recording with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, she has chosen three modern works composed in her homeland over a span of 30 years at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Oldřich Flosman completed *Visions of Michelangelo*, a work that is now nearly forgotten, in 1975 on commission for celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Michelangelo's birth. Jindřich Feld's *Viola Concerto*, one of his last works, bears comparison with Bartók's and even exceeds it in terms of technical difficulty; the demands made on the soloist are quite extreme. Sylvie Bodorová's *Planctus* (the title refers to a Medieval form, the "laments of the Virgin Mary") reflects the gloom, stress, and hopelessness of life in communist Czechoslovakia of the 1980s.

Jitka, why did you choose contemporary Czech music in particular?

The music actually chose me. I encountered the works over the past decade or so. In 2008 and 2009, upon the invitation of the Prague Autumn festival, I performed Jindřich Feld's concerto and Oldřich Flosman's *Visions of Michelangelo*. I was truly enthralled by the latter's beauty. Even though I was familiar with Flosman's connections with the former regime, and I definitely reject totalitarianism, I decided to overlook the political circumstances and solely perceive his music as music. And this piece of his is simply great. Flosman's music for the viola is amazing, and the composer and the violist Lubomír

Malý created a truly wonderful work. When it comes to Jindřich Feld, I met him when I was working with the Bohemia Luxembourg Trio, with whom I premiered and recorded his *Concertino for Flute, Viola and Harp*. He approached me, asking whether I would be willing to explore his *Concerto for Viola*, which he had written to commission for a French violist – he wanted it to be performed by a Czech musician too. Feld addressed me, because he was impressed by my approach to work. I was really pleased that the composer himself asked me to play his piece. Another reason why I selected the three works is that they are scored for the viola and the large symphony orchestra. As regards Sylvie Bodorová's *Planctus*, I have performed it at several



concerts. Sylvie only conceived it a few years after Flosman completed his Visions of Michelangelo, yet she assumed a different political perspective...

You have recorded the three concertos in a studio with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra. What was it like to work with the conductors who participated in the making of the album?

It took several years to complete the album. Over that time, Czech Radio teams changed. I am happy we have succeeded in bringing the project to fruition. Jindřich Feld's concerto is conducted by Jan Kučera, who was acquainted with the work, as we had premiered it together. When it comes to Sylvie Bodorová's Planctus, it was new to

him. It was my very first collaboration with Tomáš Brauner, who conducts Oldřich Flosman's Visions of Michelangelo, and it was great, as his account of the piece is precisely how I had imagined it to be. I performed it earlier with the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Bertrand de Billy, and I must say that at the time we had to work much harder to be able to express the concerto's weightiness and fatefulness, all its nuances. The Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra grasped all that as something natural, perhaps due to their comprehending of what it was like for the country having been occupied for four decades. Everyone immediately understood the gravity. By and large, the recording sessions were pleasant encounters with two outstanding conductors Jan Kučera and Tomáš Brauner.



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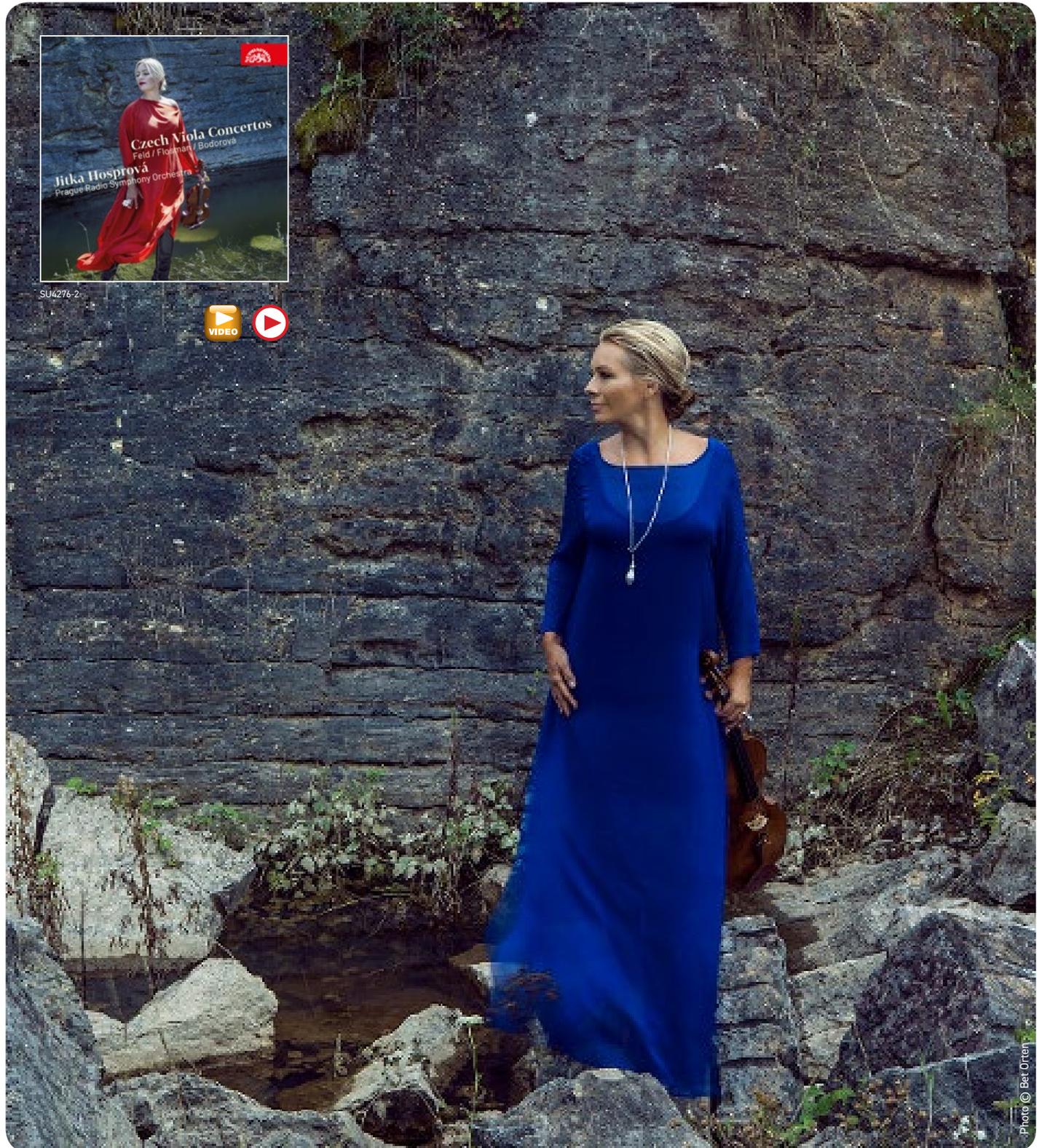


Photo © Ber. Orten

SAŠA VEČTOMOV BACH'S CELLO SUITES: TIMELESS MUSIC ON A TIMELESS RECORDING

Bach could hardly have imagined how popular his cycle of Six Suites for Cello Solo would become nearly 300 years after he finished writing them in Cöthen. There are more than 200 existing historical and contemporary recordings of “informed” and “modern” interpretations – that tells it all. The music makes extraordinary demands on players’ technical and interpretive ability and their overall comprehension. In the suites, Bach managed to create music that is highly innovative (it is worth noting that the cello was still developing at the time), and yet he retained his stylistic purity and comprehensibility. While these are formally dance suites, the architecture of some of them is more like that of a cathedral, in part thanks to the wealth of contrapuntal writing.

They are a great challenge for everyone who has mastered the cello, Saša Večtomov included. His first teacher was his father (he studied in Paris with Piatigorsky and Fournier and with Casals’s assistant Alexani-

an). The playing of the young Večtomov was then strongly influenced by Rostropovich’s teacher Semyon Kozolupov at the Moscow Conservatoire and by André Navarra in Italy. Besides his solo career, he also excelled at playing chamber music (Czech Trio, City of Prague Quartet) and was an equally wonderful teacher.

For the recording of the Bach suites that he made in Prague at the Rudolfinum in the summer of 1984, he prepared himself for several years. In 1980, for example, he played the whole cycle from memory at a single concert. His recording can be characterised as having unmistakable beauty of tone, perfect intonation, and brilliant technique, but above all it is the deep comprehension of the “text” and the immediacy of the musicianship that make this recording something timeless and exceptional.



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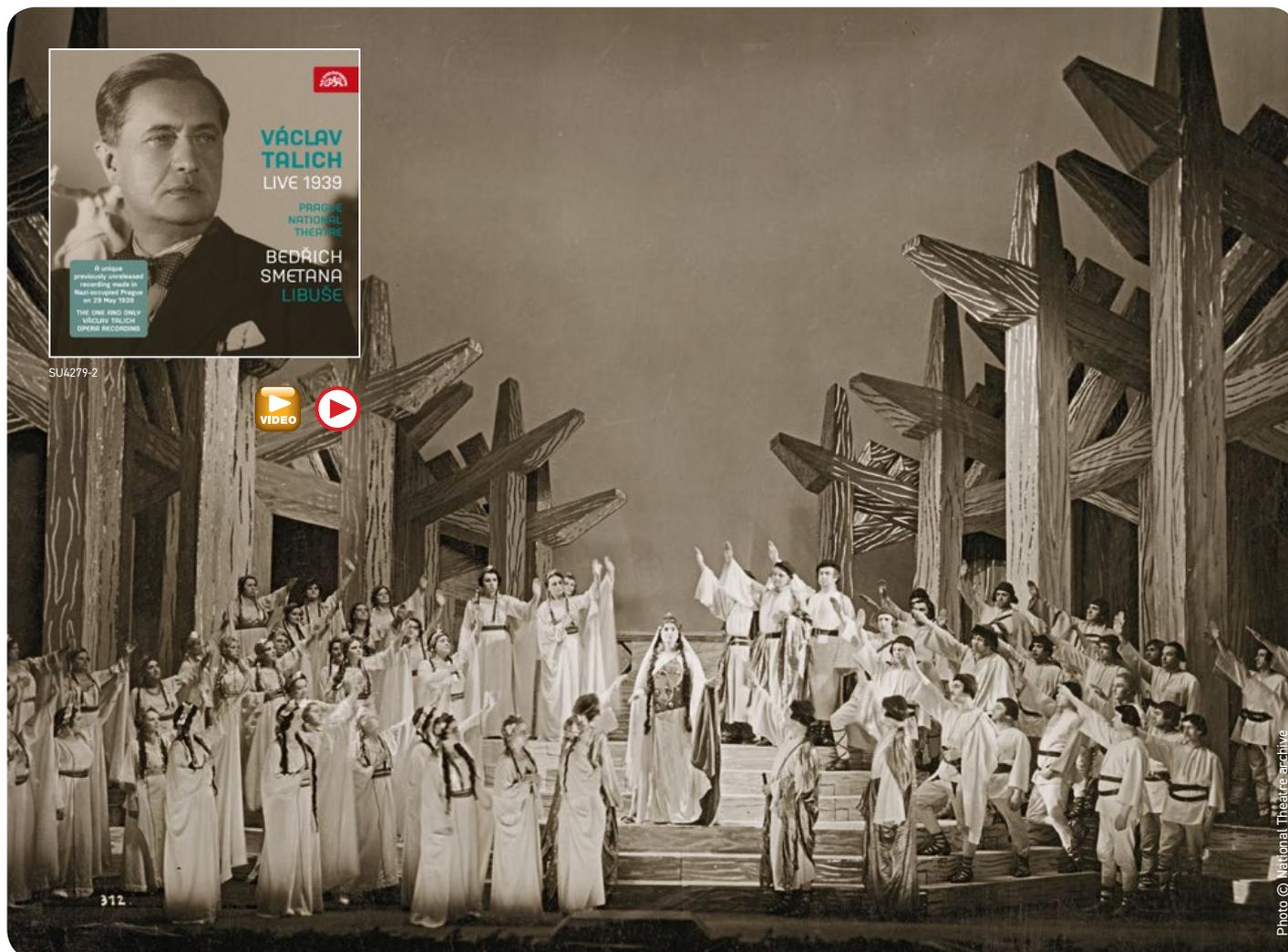
TALICH'S UNIQUE ACCOUNT OF LIBUŠE A BOLD MANIFESTATION OF NATIONAL PRIDE AND BRAVERY IN 1939 IN NAZI-OCCUPIED PRAGUE

Supraphon released for the first time a unique recording of the performance of Bedřich Smetana's opera *Libuše* on 29 May 1939 at the National Theatre in Nazi-occupied Prague. The album also features the Overture, recorded in 1940, and fragments from Act 3, including *Libuše's Prophecy*. At the end, the audience sings the Czech national anthem.

Country conducted by Václav Talich, which took place on 5 July 1939, drew considerable attention worldwide (released on Supraphon in 2011; Gramophone Special Historic Award 2012). It seemed that Talich's discography had thus been rounded off for good.

Yet the personal effects of the late soprano Marie Podvalová, renowned for her outstanding portrayal of Princess *Libuše*, provided another gem. A week prior to the mentioned performance of *My Country*, on 29 May 1939 a recording was made at the National Theatre of Talich's account of Smetana's opera *Libuše*. Fragments of Act 3 have been reconstructed from the miraculously surviving foils (the present CD also contains the 1940 recording of the Overture).

The producer Matouš Vlčinský said: "In 1939, *Libuše's Prophecy* must have sounded to Czech ears like an immensely bold declaration of national pride and courage. Although incomplete and far from being perfect in terms of the quality of sound, the recording's value is truly immense. It is the one and only recording of an opera conducted by Talich, the oldest surviving transmission of an opera performance from the National Theatre in Prague, and the penultimate staging of *Libuše* during the Nazi occupation before performances of it were banned outright. The audience's long tumultuous applause and spontaneous singing of the national anthem attest to the moment's enormous emotional gravity, imbuing the recording with exceptional energy."



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