

OPERA Journal NOVA 2019

23rd TO 27th JUNE 2019

INSIDE:



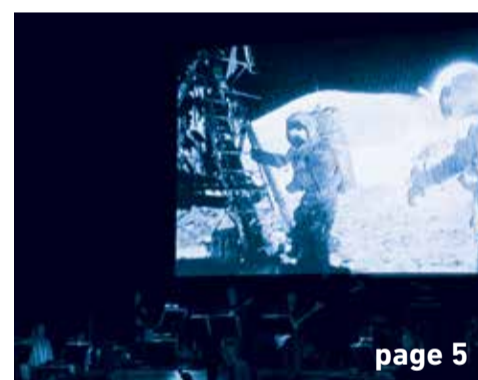
National  Theatre



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Photo: Michal Šeba

Patron of the festival:
So a ervená



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Brian Eno
Apollo



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Photo: Jakub Gulyás

Pavel Novotný
about Tramvestie



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Photo: Archive Galerie Pictura

The Intermezzo
Pop-up Exhibition

PROGRAMME

Sunday 23/06/2019, 8:00 PM,
The New Stage
Petr Wajsar: TRAMVESTIE
Opera of the National Theatre (CZ)

Monday 24/06/2019, 8:00 PM,
The New Stage
Steve Reich: PATTERNS
Cluster Ensemble (SK)

Tuesday 25/06/2019, 8:00 PM,
The New Stage
**Tibor Szemző: THE MESSAGE
– DR. KAFKA'S LAST LOVE**
The Fodderbasis (HU)

Wednesday 26/06/2019, 6:00 PM,
Prague Crossroads
– St Anne's Church
Marek Piaček: 66 SEASONS
Prague Philharmonia,
Choir of the State Opera (CZ)

Wednesday 26/06/2019, 8:00,
The New Stage
**Rudolf Komorous:
THE MUTE CANARY**
Prague Modern (CZ)

Thursday 27/06/2019, 8:00 PM,
The New Stage
Brian Eno: APOLLO
Icebreaker (UK)

EVENTS

Sunday 23/06/2019 at 6:00 PM,
Václav Havel Square
**Petr Wajsar & Pavel Novotný
(showcase)**

Sunday 23/06/2019 at 8:00 PM,
The New Stage
**OPERA NOVA 2019 Opening Night
Ivan Acher: The Duchess
and the Cook**
Soňa Červená & Vanda Šípková

Monday 24/06/2019 at 6:00 PM,
Václav Havel Square
**Cluster Ensemble
(showcase)**

Tuesday 25/06/2019 at 6:00 PM,
Václav Havel Square
**Tibor Szemző & The Fodderbasis
(showcase)**

Sunday 23/06/2019
to Thursday 27/06/2019
National Theatre Operations
Building (ground floor)
**Intermezzo pop-up exhibition,
Pictura Gallery**

Artists:
**Jiří David
Michal Cimala
Markéta Hlinovská
Lubomír Typlt
Jan Kaláb
Jan Merta
et al.**

Curator:
PhDr. Michal Šeba

*A debate with the authors follows
after every performance.*

*The project was financially supported
by the National Theatre Benefactor's
Club.*



National Theatre

opera

PRESENTED
AT THE NEW
STAGE



INQUIRY INQUIRY

Where do you think opera is heading as a genre?

Michal Nejtěk:

I dare not say – the future is an open structure and the spirit freely wanders, wherever it wills. In addition, I am not keen enough an observer of opera to have enough documents and information at my disposal to give a qualified opinion. Just a small remark: one of the possible ways forward might be modification of the opera of the traditional type as played in the big stone theatres with all the bells and whistles. This type of opera should, I think, focus more on comprehensiveness and understandability of information rather than on performing essentially “costumed concerts”. Another option is opera performed outside its traditional space – especially multimedia performances with some elements of opera, which are quite common nowadays (Bernhard Lang: *Das Theater der Wiederholungen*, Michel van der Aa: *One, Eight* etc). It is quite hard to make predictions – but that makes it all so exciting.

Miloš Orson Štědroň:

In its history, opera has often fused with other genres, such as Singspiel, operetta, music theatre, cabaret or musical. Personally, I have written two “pure” operas (*Human Tragicomedy* and *Don Hrabal*) and at least ten music theatres including several musicals (e.g. *Ladies' Luck*), cabarets (*Ivan Blatný Cabaret*), and music-theatrical pieces of architecture-related (*Gočár Theatre*) or painter-related (*Kupka Salon*) nature. Almost always, based upon my own texts. I see the future of opera in two directions: 1) There will be even more fusions and syntheses. 2) Opera will want to keep its exclusiveness – and by that I do not mean exclusiveness from the point of view of some elite audience (which can mean many things). Rather, Opera is

exclusive by offering the supreme level of stylization and thus posing the greatest challenge to its authors.

Petr Wajsar:

Same as any other artistic form, opera is the product of two different approaches to the creative process. On the one hand, authors can make “safe bets”, relying on reliable schemes to make sure that their work is successful. That, of course, does not mean that the other approach detests success as a matter of principle. However, the key motivation of the second approach is the desire to create a new artistic form to join – if all goes well – the existing traditional forms. The truth is that none of the traditional artistic procedures, or inventions in general, was created without someone to assume the risk of trying a new thing for the first time. Assuming such risk equals to heroism. Clever people are aware that innovations are born among pains and struggles, forcing the innovator to leave the safe path. And they also know that even when a new product is finished, it is often not the inventor to reap the fruits of his or her work. That pleasure is often reserved for the inventor's followers or businessmen placing the product on the pedestal constructed by those that came before. A synthesis requires a sum of simple elements, which lack the beauty of the whole and are so much less rewarding to create. I don't mean to say that there can be no spiritually and sensuously valuable work created according to traditional rules or already existing principles. However, I am always the one to call, first to our own ranks: let us play upside down! Let us sing words without music! Speak tones without words! De-compose! Even if our work garners no attention at all or even negative response. It is a hard task but

A LITTLE SOMETHING EXTRA

FESTIVAL PASS

Buying a festival pass for the whole OPERA NOVA festival will gain you more than 50% discount when compared to buying independent tickets for all the 6 festival performances.

OPERA NOVA 2019 T-SHIRTS AND BADGES

Special edition of festival t-shirts and badges will be available for festival visitors (and everybody else) at the box offices of the National Theatre and at festival venues.

the hardship is nothing more than a soap bubble when compared to the awareness of the strong and beautiful current that we contribute to – albeit by the tiniest of drops.

Ivan Acher:

I can only offer more of a wish than a vision of the future. It would be too bold of me to make any predictions. I think that opera will be merging, spreading and intermingling with the other vocal approaches, receiving the influences of vocal experiments. To remain attractive and exceptional, opera will still want to be a great spectacle in its peak form. There will be influences of electronical music. Its sound will gain material volume. The gap between “museum-like” forms and progressive forms will widen. Opera will be the most fertile soil for researchers of classical music because – in spite of posing as the most complete genre – opera offers the largest unexplored territories. The future will be great!

SO A ERVENÁ OPERA NOVA 2019 PATRON

OPERA NOVA 2019 will start with *Tramvestie* on 23/06. But before that, this year's patron, Ms. Soňa Červená, will sing a scene from *The Duchess and the Cook* by Ivan Acher together with Vanda Šípková.

You are the patron of OPERA NOVA 2019. What does it mean to you?

During my career, I passed through the gardens of Monteverdi, Händel, Verdi, Wagner, Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, Martinů, all the way to Stravinsky, Berg, Nono, Henze, Ligeti and Aleš Březina. The OPERA NOVA festival is another journey that I am happy to make.

What are your memories of Aleš Březina's "Tomorrow There Will Be..." and "Toufar", in which you sang?

These two operas were something of a turning point – both for the opera as a genre and for my life.

What do you think is the position of opera in today's world?

The same it has been for centuries. It is the highest art of all because it addresses all senses of the spectator. That is how it will always be. Of course, it is all up to the director and his or her team.

Interview by Denisa Valterová

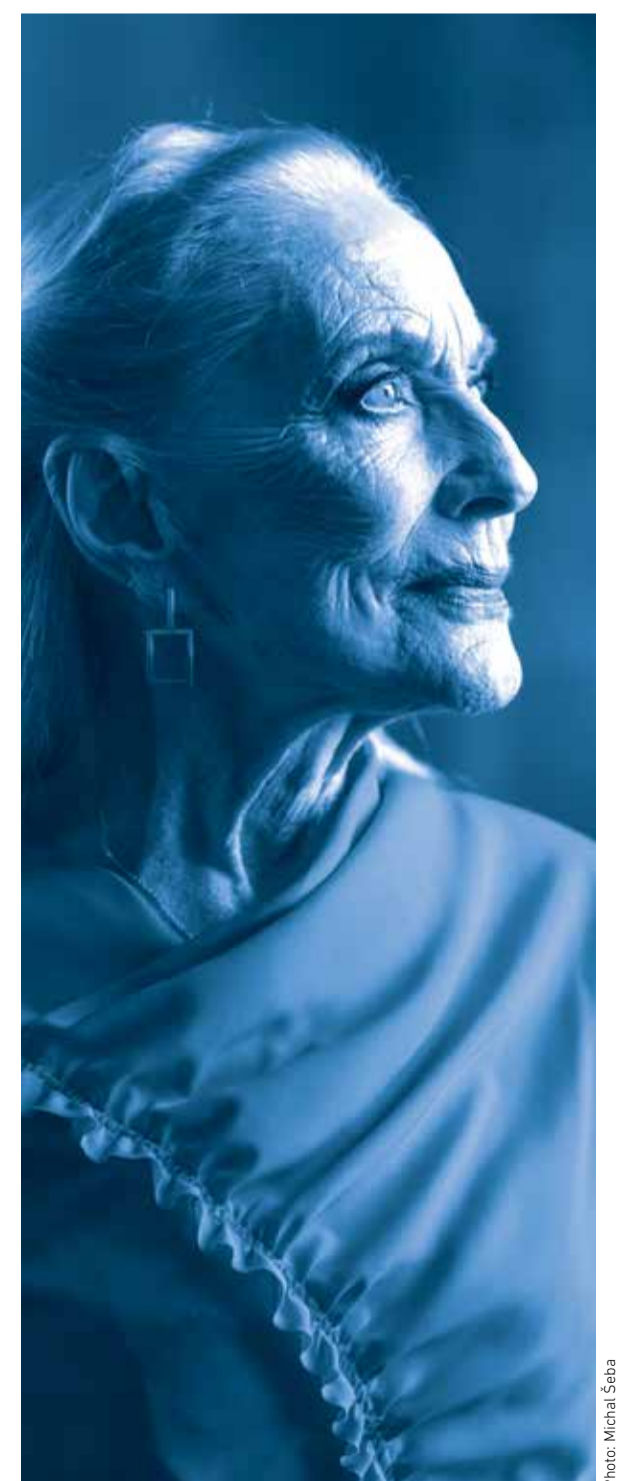


Photo: Michal Šeba



Photo: Ilona Sochorová

FOREWORD

There has always been a link between music and the visual. In the days of magic, music supported the power of rituals (and it still does in a degenerated sort of way in the Catholic Church). Until sound recording technology was invented, music had been "live", meaning that people could actually see and hear the musician or musicians. And the invention of Walkman brought a new spectacle – namely that of a girl with earplugs about to be run over by a car. Thus the recipient of music becomes a part of a theatrical performance.

It was up to the modernists of the 20s, especially their "theatrical branch", to examine this relation of the musical and the visual from various angles.

There is no need to look further than Erik Satie, who composed piano pieces adding text to the notes to be read by the pianist during a performance. This visual became "virtual" – no more is the "theatrical performance" only the pianist playing. Now we also experience, what "goes on in his mind".

Arnold Schönberg in his *Erwartung* and Francis Poulenc in his *Human Voice* approached the same issue from another perspective. They are also interested about "what goes on" in the singer's mind. The singing stems from a train of thought. The text cannot be understood anyway. Schönberg's stage directions are more of a metaphysical image inside the singer's mind, rather than instructions to build a forest on the stage.

This "virtual" aspect leads to another thing: the supreme importance of CONTEXT. Let us take Darius Milhaud and his *Machines Agricoles* as an example. The author claimed that by writing music to a text of catalogue of agricultural machinery he "praised ruralism" but God knows, what really went on in his head.

All the useless pondering over "artistic merit of a work" (so popular among prospective associate professors) may be quite vain and even pataphysical attempt to formulate something, which is quite virtual – contexts change with overwhelming speed, becoming internal

contexts, i.e. the author's INTENTION. And that can only be viewed by hypnotizing the author – except for those rare occasions, when an author leaves behind a suicide note explaining "what he meant". But even then, given the depths of human psyche, not even the author can "be certain" in that respect.

The instrumental theatre during the late 50s and early 60s brought a major breakthrough in the field of ear-eye relation. A pianist sweating over a sonata by Brahms, the sweat dripping on the keyboard, the pianist's slipping fingers, a punning concertmaster accompanying every strong beat with a snort – all of that may often be visually far more interesting than the work of art itself. It should be also mentioned here that the instrumental theatre introduces HUMOR as a serious element of a work. Up to that point, there was not much fun to be had when listening to music as humor was seen as something "light" with the resulting axiological expression. Music to accompany fireworks? How degrading! Fireworks can be accompanied by a number of things ranging from great food on a table all the way to sex on the same table among wine glasses!

Another basic element related to contextuality and intentionality is IRONY. Wikipedia simply defines it as "a rhetorical device, literary technique, or event in which what appears, on the surface, to be the case, differs radically from what is actually the case". This was a major change in the world of arts, from the times of magic (when wrong music could ruin the ritual) to Verismo, judging the power of a work by its "truthfulness".

The 20th century showed us that there, basically, is no "truth" and that "truthfulness" is a matter of context and intention. And if we cannot really present spectators with "the truth", it is far better to present the vast blossoming fields of "untruth" surrounding the small "black hole of truth". A black hole that sunflowers turn to every day, pointing us into the "void".

Petr Kofro

SUNDAY 23/06/2019 AT 8:00 PM



Petr Wajsar: TRAMVESTIE

The opera *Tramvestie* is a setting of Pavel Novotný's collection of poems of the same name, which resulted from transcriptions of the author's conversations with his friends on tram No. 11 on the route between the towns of Liberec and Jablonec nad Nisou. The conversations relate to the tramline's vicinity, the personal histories of their participants, as well as the region's turbulent past. In addition to the texts from the book *Tramvestie*, the remarkable musical work was also inspired by the recordings of the interviewers' voices, as well as the sound of the moving tram.

„The ride we are going to take today may not take you where you expect it to take you. Like the tram-car, the Tramvestie project dashes on the rails, which are strictly determined, while its ambiguity does not even spare the authors. We will hear mere fragments of stories, conversations that are overlaid by the abrupt grinding of wheels against rails, resulting in their meaning fading away, while the passengers can only revel in a sequence of sonic, verbal and optical perceptions as it appears at

the given moment, without longing for seeking any meaning, yet having the opportunity to watch and listen to this ever-changing cluster of images, impressions and stories. The magic of the tram line and unintentional listening to the stories of the passengers rests precisely in its non-explicitness, with our story concluding with the last words uttered by a person leaving the tram, before the door closes – then we can no longer get off and all that we can do is to continue the journey.” (Petr Wajsar)

Direction, set and light design: **Marek Bureš**
 Sound design: **David Hysek**
 Costumes: **Klára Syrůčková**
 Conductor: **Richard Hein**

Cast: **Jana Horáková Levicová,**
Lenka Šmídová, Dušan Růžička, Jiří Sulženko

State Opera Orchestra (CZ)

MONDAY 24/06/2019 AT 8:00 PM



Steve Reich: PATTERNS

The Slovak Cluster Ensemble brings its new *Patterns* program merging music, dance and light performance based upon the early compositions of the American composer Steve Reich, namely *Four Organs*, *Phase Patterns* and the cult *Music for Pieces of Wood*. These are highly contrasting works dating back to the years, when Reich experimented with new ways to use both acoustic and electronic musical instruments. The lights and dancing creates a minimalistic interpretation of Reich's musical structures, building upon an interaction between dancers, lights and music. *Phase Patterns* is a piece deriving from the phase shift as "invented" by Steven Reich. *The Four Organs* is built around algorithmic slowing down of musical time, drawing spectators deep into the music. The almost "tribal" *Music for Pieces of Wood* serves as an intermezzo between the two walls of organ music, composed by Reich under the influence of his research of percussion music in Ghana.

For the Cluster Ensemble, the American composer Steve Reich represents a symbolic return to the roots because it was around his music that the ensemble first formed. Reich's *Six Pianos* was the first piece presented by the young artists in 2009. Being an interdisciplinary group, the Cluster Ensemble is a free associ-

ation of artists performing as guests of Ivan Šiller and Fero Király. The ensemble performs works by contemporary artists and composers of the 20th century both at home and abroad. Its repertoire focuses on original projects challenging the limits of performing arts, as well as educational projects. Almost fifty artists have collaborated with the ensemble thus far, including dancers, painters and others from Europe and the United States. Their debut album *Cluster Ensemble Plays Philip Glass* was published in 2016 by the Slovak Helvetia and the American Orange Mountain Music.

Concept and direction: **Petra Fornayová,**
Fero Király, Ivan Šiller
 Choreography: **Petra Fornayová**
 Light design: **Fero Király**

Cast: **Zuzana Biščáková, Fero Király,**
Dalibor Kocián, Lenka Novosedlíková, Ivan Šiller
 Dancers: **Soňa Ferienčíková, Michal Heriban**

Cluster Ensemble (SK)

TUESDAY 25/06/2019 AT 8:00 PM



Tibor Szemző: MESSAGE – THE LAST LOVE OF DR. KAFKA

"I was interested in Kafka for almost ten years, resulting in various artistic presentations: from a radio program, through theatrical and concert performances and a short film all the way to the current audiovisual installation. The topic is a short period at the end of Kafka's life intermediated by testimony of two people, Robert Klopstock and Dora Diamant, who attended Kafka's deathbed. "An Imperial Message" is a Zen-like parable of great poetic beauty and it is what first got me interested in this area. I wish to present it to the audience using a wide scale of various languages, thus underlining the exceptional force of Kafka's personality. The stage multimedia production to be presented in Prague is build around a balanced ratio of prose, music and film. Just like in my previous works, I tried to integrate all these elements as a natural part of music communicating with the audience." (Tibor Szemző)

Tibor Szemző is a well-known Hungarian minimalist, the head of Group 180 and author of a number of compositions and audiovisual projects, some of which were presented in Prague. In addition to the cinematographic opera, those included a radio program, installations, a short film and a LP record. The current work draws on films showing key places from the life of Franz Kafka, his last lover and his last friend. B d-zin and Dombóvár, Müritz, a Baltic Sea resort, as well

as the High Tatra; Berlin, the scene of the life of Dora and Franz together; Kierling, the sanatorium, where Dora and Robert stood together by Kafka's deathbed. And finally Brooklyn, which does not feature in Kafka's novel, but where Klopstock spent his later years. Kafka's "Imperial Message" – a parable recited in a dozen of languages is surrounded by music during the performance. The mentioned scenes are interrupted by personal memories of Dora Diamant and Robert Klopstock looking back on the years spent in Kafka's presence, as recorded more than twenty-five years later.

Director, music and films: **Tibor Szemző**
 Text, consultant: **András Forgách**

Cast:
 Dora Diamant: **Vida Neuwirthová**
 Robert Klopstock: **Hynek Chmelař**
 Letters from the doll: **Filip Kaňkovský**
 Conductor, bassflute: **Tibor Szemző**

The Fodderbasis (HU)

The performance *Message - The Last Love of Dr. Kafka* is organized with the support of the Hungarian Institute in Prague.

WEDNESDAY 26/06/2019 AT 6:00 PM



Marek Piaček: 66 SEASONS (Concert performance of the Slovak Opera)

The *66 Seasons* documentary is based upon a successful film of the same name by Peter Kerekes. In ten scenes, it tells personal stories of inhabitants of Košice against the background of the great the great events of history. Each character represents a certain "historical theme" through a touching human story. The multicultural city of Košice is represented by the city pool, where summer destinies intertwine with snapshots taken from the history of central Europe (reaching from Trieste in the south to Gdańsk in the North).

Opera as a music genre was often called upon to present a new and original approach in the name of artistic and human justice (the so-called opera reforms). *66 Seasons* is no exception. The traditional operatic structure is replaced with a sequence of music stories or documentary compositions of the ten scenes:

1. Sea
2. Nagymama
3. Bodies
4. Swimsuit

5. Races
6. Waves
7. Clock
8. Shadows
9. Pool
10. Final

Story: **Peter Kerekes**

Libretto: **Martin Ondriska, Marek Piaček, Peter Kerekes**

Dramaturgy: **Martin Ondriska, Silvia Hroncová**

Text of „Final“ song: **Elena Kmeťová**

Conductor: **Marián Lejava**

Chorus master: **Adolf Melichar**

Cast: **Linda Ballová, Patrik Horňák, Pavol Remenár, Lenka Barilíková**

Prague Philharmonia, State Opera Choir

WEDNESDAY 26/06/2019 AT 8:00 PM



Rudolf Komorous: THE MUTE CANARY

The *Mute Canary* opera based upon the work by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes introduces three lonely characters yearning for fulfillment – three worlds trying to understand each other, failing in spite of their efforts. The painful misunderstanding derives from the fact that all characters think that they are someone else and try to persuade the others about that. Even though the surreal story avoiding rational interpretation is framed by a story of adultery, it is the innocence and purity that triumphs, represented by the gentle and quiet music composed by Komorous. The staging respects the dada dreamlike quality of the original. Its authors were willing to adapt the visual side of every performance, always preserving the message of the original literary work.

„I have always admired French modernity, especially the Dadaists and Surrealists. I am fascinated by their general attitude toward art and the world, and their search for and definition of new values through creative experiments, greatly diverging from the often-limiting freedoms of science. For me, one of the most important Dadaists was Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes. When I was in Prague, I received the translation of one of his plays, which was staged at the Liberated Theater. It fascinated

*me. After my arrival in Canada, I asked my friend and then-pupil Christopher Butterfield if he would translate the play into English for me so I could stage it. He was excited about this French author and eventually translated and released three of his plays in the United States. I did not know the play *The Mute Canary*, which was part of that release, but I immediately realized that it fits into my concept of chamber opera: there are few characters and it's not too long. Renáta Spisarová supported me in my determination to write an opera on this motif. She immediately showed interest in putting on the opera in Ostrava.“* (Rudolf Komorous)

Libretto: **Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes**

Director: **Jan Horák a Michal Pěchouček**

Stage design: **Michal Pěchouček**

Cast:

Barate: **Anne Grimm**

Riquet: **Alex Dobson**

Ochre: **Daniel Cabena**

Prague Modern (CZ)

THURSDAY 27/06/2019 AT 8:00 PM



Brian Eno: APOLLO

Icebreaker's version of *Apollo* debuted at London's Science Museum in 2009 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Apollo moon landings. Icebreaker and BJ Cole subsequently toured this multi-media performance of Brian Eno's 'zero gravity country and western' album across Britain and Europe in a series of sold out and highly acclaimed performances. Now the show is has been revived to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the moon landings in 2019.

Widely regarded as Brian Eno's most significant ambient album, *Apollo* was composed by Brian Eno, Roger Eno and Daniel Lanois for Al Reinert's documentary on the Apollo space missions, *For All Mankind*. Music from the album also appeared in the films *28 Days Later*, *Traffic* and *Trainspotting*. This show returns the music to its original conception, as a non-narrative counterpart to NASA footage from the Apollo programme: matching the mesmerising beauty and tranquil mystery of the moon and Earth; the dizzying scale and humbling feat of engineering involved; and capturing the banality and the humour of the astronauts as they skitter about the moon's surface.

Renowned for focus, precision and intensity, Icebreaker performs music appealing to contemporary classical, rock and alternative music audiences alike.

Appearing at most major new music festivals around the world, the 11-piece ensemble presents work by some of the best-known and most influential composers in contemporary music, such as Michael Gordon, Anna Meredith, Julia Wolfe, Gavin Bryars, Kate Moore, Philip Glass and Kerry Andrew. Their version of Brian Eno's album *Apollo*, the early works of

Kraftwerk (Kraftwerk Uncovered), and Scott Walker's *Epizooftics!* have garnered critical praise and celebration.

BJ Cole is a unique innovator on the Pedal Steel Guitar who has carved out a formidable reputation as a session musician, and established his own artistic identity with the release of five albums. He has recorded with many of the great names in popular music, such as Elton John, Marc Bolan, Scott Walker, Beck, Björk, SQng, David Sylvian, Depeche Mode, The Verve and many others.

Steel guitar: **BJ Cole (UK)**

Icebreaker (UK)

Written by Lukáš Jiříčka | Photo pages 4–5: National Theatre Archive

ON THE TRAM BETWEEN LIBEREC AND JABLONEC

I worked on the poetic cycle *Tramvestie* for approximately a decade, from 2006 to 2016. The idea occurred at the now closed Small Exhibition Hall in Liberec, during a conversation with my friend, the gallery manager Jaromír Typl. Jaromír said that it would be good to somehow capture the atmosphere on the remarkable tram line between the towns of Liberec and Jablonec: the terrific narrow-gauge railway, surrounded by a landscape that has undergone numerous dynamic transformations, a town's disintegration into villages and woods, the wild re-assembling of the picture into a urban form. Jaromír and I were fascinated by the chaos reigning in the region, the remnants of old German factories, the gardens with hens, rusty water pumps, coloured garage doors, a picturesque rivulet crawling into dilapidated head-water channels, the spooky dense forest, in which the passengers of the passing tram can spot a deer or a mushroom picker – and so on, and so forth. As I found the idea quite compelling, I soon embarked upon giving an account of the life on and around the tram line. Now and then, I urged some of my friends or acquaintances to get on tram No. 11 – then I switched on my recorder and asked him or her to describe or anyhow reflect on the journey and the landscape outside, or just talk about whatever crossed their minds. Some of them were closely familiar with the surroundings, others only knew the vicinity vaguely. The recordings made on the tram then served for me as the basis for a series of texts, yet I perceived the captured conversations as a mere verbal “storehouse”, an associative guidance. I went on to shorten, extend, rhythmicise, modify, shift, or colour in some of the recorded texts, while in some cases I left the dialogues and monologues as they were, yet I always strove to create a textual essence of the people talking and the landscape alike. Initially, I was just writing the poems based on the recordings for myself and for those I had recorded. I rolled the texts into long scrolls, pasted them on the houses of my friends, unwound them and presented their contents at reading sessions.

Consequently, *Tramvestie* has been made public in many forms and versions, with the texts even having been included in a number of literature magazines and translated into other languages – the whole matter simply started to live a life of its own. And I wondered where it was proceeding, where the “tram virus” was spreading. The graphic artist Jan Míka, who at the beginning independently of my own activities, began

exploring the tram line in visual terms, undertook my texts and helped me transform them into various verbal objects: one of the outcomes was that in 2012 the strips were installed directly on/in a tram car, which, adorned by them, has ever since been running on the Jablonec-Liberec route. In 2016, Protimlův published *Tramvestie* as a book, with Jan Míka's exquisite graphic layout.

The volume captures 10 plus 10 opposite journeys made by different speakers, and also a disc with the eponymous radiophonic composition which I have edited from the original recordings and other audio materials for Czech Radio (in 2012, it was first broadcast by the Vltava station). In all its media forms, *Tramvestie* primarily represents for me a close contact with the language and its mission: the language defines the world around us, describing it, creating an image. Any depletion, any reduction of the language diminishes our ability to find our bearings, obscures the landscape, breaks the picture. Every new recording of a tram journey, every insight into someone else's vocabulary thus creates something that could be called a “bright verbal shaft”, verbal tunnelling forwards. And every new recording makes the picture of the fascinating journey more refined, more plastic in time and space alike.

A few years ago, I was contacted by Petr Wajsar, who expressed the wish to set *Tramvestie* as an opera. His idea flabbergasted me. It also served as definitive proof that the cycle truly lived independently of me, that it was heading somewhere, that I had no chance to steer its trajectory. I gladly agreed, although it was clear that I would not have full control of the result. The bulk of the work is, naturally, done by the composer, yet the outcome is also largely affected by the intricate theatre machinery, the stage's visual design and dynamics, with the actual text only being one of the components of a complex whole. Petr asked me to write the libretto, to transform the tram-journey composition into a form befitting the stage. Presently, we came across an elementary problem, which rested in the fact that it was not easy to transfer the fragmentariness, volatility and multi-perspective nature of *Tramvestie* into the conventional dramatic arch, arriving at the conclusion that any traditional storyline would even be at variance with the original cycle. Another problem was that the original audio recordings consist of a deluge of

words, a torrent of parallel images, which, unlike the reader, the listener or spectator would not be capable of absorbing. When writing the libretto, I closely collaborated with Petr Wajsar and the dramaturge Ondřej Hušín. My endeavour was to create something integrated, yet also sufficiently loose and open, something that would not constrain the composer, nor the other creators. Accordingly, I decided to replace the dialogue with a processual line, or, to be more precise, with that which does not have the form of relations and dialogues between the protagonists, but takes place within their seemingly isolated talks, as mutual combinations, variations of words and rejoinders. After considering the technical terms, we reduced the original high number of speakers to four: two women and two men. Their characters and vocabularies were rather loosely inspired by some of those captured on the recordings (see the book *Tramvestie*). We basically aimed to depict four different fundamental traits, which could be approximately defined as: 1) weariness, introversion, neurosis, 2) homeless persons' knowledge of every corner of the landscape, being battered by life, 3) vitality, understanding the local industrial business, and 4) glumness, even spite, knowledge of the landscape's structural and technical aspects.

At the beginning, monologues totally independent of each other unfurl (if we leave aside the chorus passages by the former Textilana factory workers, the Pharmacy, etc.), yet they gradually linguistically blend together. During the course of the journey, the process gets ever more palpable, occasionally corresponding with the names of the stops: “Vratislavice” indicates that which will take place there, that is, certain returning, or even turning of words and lives. The stop called “Prose” is the first evident point of intersection of the speakers, while there are three such intersections (Prose Post Office, Prose School and Turnout). Subsequently, the protagonists pass through the “Nový Svět” (New World), and the greater their distance from the town and the nearer they get to the forest, the more markedly do their initially linear characters – in accordance with the surrounding nature – turn inside out, revealing things that previously remained concealed. To put it simply: the neurotic suddenly perks up; the weary decrepit person manifests uttermost resilience, recalling his childhood; the vigorous person turns to a lamenting broken being; the dry technocrat opens up, ceases to complain, and even recalls his youth and being in love. The entire transformation is based on the four voices' getting together without knowing about it, on their repeating and paraphrasing that which the other commuters had previously uttered in a different context. There is no escape from the shared “landscape of words”: the only option is to face a variety, perhaps an infinite number, of combinations; yet we are defined by the landscape we see around us, as well as by the words we use to map the landscape. At the “Mnírka” (“Converter Station”) stop, still in deep woods, all the permeations and transformations graduate. The next stop is “Brandl”, on the outskirts of the other town – and all the four passengers reassume their original verbal stereotypes or put on their masks again before getting off the tram: they are the same as when they got on. I handed over the text to Petr Wajsar and Marek Bureš as a – more or less – basic framework for the music and visual composition. I also handed over the radio version of *Tramvestie* and the complete archive of the original “raw” recording of voices. I refrained from being a capricious troublemaker, a vainglorious (still living) author, who would obstinately cling to all the details of his fixed idea and sit tight. I drew upon the fact that *Tramvestie* is principally a phenomenon that I have never had for myself only, that it is something everyone can, and should, interpret from their own perspective. And I am still astonished as to how far the original obsession, the eager pasting of paper strips and tram shuttling have got.

Pavel Novotný



Photo: Jakub Gulyás

THE INTERMEZZO POP-UP EXHIBITION

TO SHOWCASE CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS AND THEIR RELATION TO THE WORLD OF OPERA

For four days, the Intermezzo pop-up exhibition will serve as a place of confrontation of contemporary visual arts with the world of opera. The exhibition will be open to public for free from 24 June until 27 June in the former restaurant on the Václav Havel Square in Prague (Piazzetta of the National Theatre). Visitors will have the unique opportunity to admire forty-seven paintings, sculptures, objects and installations by leading Czech artists including Kryštof Kintera, Michal P. Choupek, Jiří David, Lubomír Typlt, Markéta Hlinovská or Jan Kaláb

Intermezzo is an Italian musical term meaning "interlude". The exhibition of the same name will accompany the first year of OPERA NOVA, the contemporary music theatre festival organized by the National Theatre in Prague. The festival opening ceremony will be held on June 23 at 8:00 PM starring its patron, the legendary singer and actress Soňa Červená and the opera singer Vanda Šipová. Together, they will perform an excerpt from Ivan Acher's *The Duchess and the Cook* based upon the novel of the same name by Ladislav Fuks.

The Intermezzo exhibition will provide an overview of contemporary arts through works by artists such as Michal Cimala, Michal Škapa, Jan Merta, Jakub Tytykalo, Jakub Roztočil, Magdalena Roztočilová, Pavel Šmíd, Josefína Jonášová or Pavel Malina and many more. When designing the exhibition, Daniel Dvořák, a stage designer, architect and former director of the National Theatre, drew inspiration from the world of opera and theatre in general. Art pieces will be installed on pressed wood panels that set pieces are made of. "We believe that Intermezzo will live up to its name and will become a true interlude, a sort of visual counterpoint to the opera festival. It will, however, also be an independent exhibition demonstrating the latest trends in the world of contemporary visual arts," says Michal Šeba of Pictura Gallery, curator of the exhibition. The exhibition will be supplemented by works of Intermedia Confrontation Studio run by Jiří David and Michal Salák at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague.

The exhibition will be open daily from 10 AM to 7 PM. Source: 4press press release



JÍŘÍ DAVID: IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO TELL, WHO CAME WITH AN IDEA IN THE VERY BEGINNING

We sat down for a short interview with prof. Jiří David – a painter, photographer and teacher. Both he and a number of his talented students will participate in the Intermezzo exhibition presenting contemporary arts as a part of the "Opera Nova" festival in the National Theatre.

Profesor, what is your opinion of current Czech fine arts in their international context? You have been a leading member of the Czech arts community from the late 80s.

My personal opinion is that we currently have here excellent and interesting artists from all generations, who have a lot to offer both domestically and internationally. The problem here is that we (and by we, I mean the institutions that we – as artists – depend upon in this respect) have not been successful in adequately presenting them at the big exhibitions abroad. The National Gallery in Prague has recently renewed the efforts; however venues such as Centre Pompidou or Tate Modern are still hard to reach. Of course, geopolitically speaking, we are still a very small nation, not particularly interesting for the eastern or the western world. I may be contradicting myself now, but we have not been able to bring any major themes, something unexpected, experimental in its content or form. Still, I think that we have much to offer – given the right time and opportunity.

When I look at the works created by Czech artists, I often think – I have already seen this somewhere abroad. And conversely, sometimes I see some highly praised foreign work and I think – there was someone doing exactly the same thing in the Czech Republic 20 or 30 years ago. Do you think that this is a product of the interconnected nature of the globalized world? Or is it more a matter of inspiration?

Of course, such things happen. I know what it is like to complete a work only to find out that someone has been working on something similar during the same period. But there is nothing that you can do about that because foreign artists have a number of journals and magazines at their disposal, accelerating the circulation of information and making it more effective. On the other hand, a Czech artist has no real way to tell the world that it was him or her, who first came with an idea or was the first to express it in actual form. Also, the interconnected nature of today's art makes it all sort of fluid and it is very difficult to tell, who came with an idea in the very beginning. In addition, people are more and more interested in works that are able to gain attention also outside the context, in which they are created. Also, the culturally dominant West has created a number of model constructs firmly rooted in its cultural memory. People coming to us from the West tend to look for things that they already know. They do not normally look for things that are specifically local. But to be fair, I do not blame that because I am not myself quite sure, what such specifically local aspects of the Czech visual arts should exactly be!

And how about the young authors or students at the very start of their careers. Where do they get information about the current trends?

They certainly have more information than our generation once had. You have the Internet, various social networks, you may freely travel – the world is open and they have very simple ways of bringing the latest trends from the outside directly to their schools, studios and workplaces. But that also brings another problem. I would hate to sound too conservative or traditionalist but that is exactly what leads to many contemporary works being so interchangeable and universalistic. A week ago, I returned from the Venice Biennale, which is a prestigious exhibition of contemporary arts and it was very difficult for me to find among the hundred or more authors anyone presenting anything new, anything that I did not formally know or that was not to be seen anywhere else. It

seems that everyone has learned to use the current formal speech fluently. And that, in turn, results in far too similar and interchangeable works. Praise to those few defying this trend!

One more question: Don't you think that there are just too many artists for a country as small as the Czech Republic?

That is correct. When I was studying, there were two arts schools. There was the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague (UMPRUM) and the Academy of Fine Arts. Every year, about 30 people graduated from each of those schools, which meant about 60 people a year. Of course, after the revolution, the regions were looking for a certain authenticity rooted in their unique cultures. As a result, regional art schools of university level were established. And they have about 50 graduates a year each. So we have 4 times 50 plus those from UMPRUM and the Academy, which equals to almost 300 starting artists every year. That really is a lot. And what must logically follow is a certain kind of devaluation. Which makes it all the more pleasant to encounter something unexpected, original or highly experimental. But you have maybe 3 or 4 such people. Which is very few, but we are a small country and it is enough for us.

But it used to be the same story in the interwar period and it used to be the same in your time.

I think this strange ratio in a way helps defend true art.

I often feel that the commercial forces sometimes bring forward artists that do not really deserve the attention they get. That certain artists are supported by galleries based upon economic consideration rather than because of the quality of their art.

This is quite obvious. The artists know each other and they are clearly aware of their worth. But they are very rarely in a position, where they could decide, whether their works will be exhibited and by whom. They cannot normally choose a gallery. And the galleries here, of course, have their strategic and business interests. Still, I believe that quality art must prevail over time; as long as we have galleries run by educated people with empathy and clear opinion of what art is.

Thank you for the interview.
PhDr. Michal Šeba, director of GALERIE PICTURA, spol. s r.o. and curator of the Intermezzo exhibition.

ONLY THAT, WHICH IS DULL AND DRY, IS FALSE

The Sufferings of Prince Sternenhoch was written by Ladislav Klíma sometime between 1907 and 1909. He himself called it a "grotesque romanetto". In his approximately thirty years of age, he had already published his philosophical text *The World as Consciousness and Nothing*, which provoked the interest of a number of his fellow scholars. Many of them kept their faith in Klíma, supporting him during the times when he did not have a penny to his name.

At that time, he was yet to become the Klíma of later years – a drinker, vagabond, shabby individual addicted to alcohol and nicotine living in a destitute room in Krása Hotel in Vysoany and subjecting his own body to cruel experiments as a part of his philosophical discipline. He was yet to become that man but what was already present was his radical nature and strict refusal of what we would call "normal life". As a devotee of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, he sought and cultivated a philosophy of his own, one that would lead him much farther, all the way to the edge of the abyss and beyond. He spent a great deal of time writing fiction, perhaps truly believing that he would make his living that way. Of course later, he saw it as a rather embarrassing error of judgment on his part. He saw himself as a philosopher of the ancient Greek kind, living his philosophy and summarizing in a single major work as a pinnacle of his journey through life completely independent of the world around him. For the rest of his life, Klíma thoroughly despised professional writing and all "profane" activities in general. The reason might well have been his own experience of how easy it was for him to write. Creative work was quite natural to him and he could have achieved anything in the world of literature had he wished so. Klíma had no problem piling pages upon pages of colorful narration, as anyone, who read his largest work, *The Great Novel*, must attest. But that not enough for a man of his ambition. To him, fiction was a mere medium to communicate philosophical ideas penetrating even the drastic and morbid story of *Sternenhoch*. Being a metaphysical crime story, *Sternenhoch* is both mad and deeply realistic – with reality, of course, being viewed in an extremely curved mirror. It tells the tale of the insane, demented and degenerated prince Sternenhoch, who madly falls for Helga, a demonic brat yearning for the absolute Will in her sadistic inclinations. She despises the whole world, takes revenge on her father and has nothing but bitter hatred for Sternenhoch. She smashes the skull of their infant child and is masochistically devoted to her lover, who – in spite of his macho attitude – is nothing more than a bum. In a fit of jealousy, Sternenhoch murders Helga but she keeps coming back as a revenant and hallucination that the poor idiot prince struggles with helplessly. In the end, he achieves some kind of redemption when his suffering and madness liberates him from fearful clutching to life. He becomes one with Helga's decomposing body, throwing away

his life, which was completely worthless in the first place.

Klíma did not live to see his *Sternenhoch* in print. He tried to have the manuscript published on several occasions but failed. Thus, *Sternenhoch* was not published until 1928, a short time after Klíma's death. The work attracted little if any attention. Perhaps the time was not favorable: the literary cannon was different, all modernism and functionalism, i.e. the exact opposite of the bizarre romanticism of *Sternenhoch*. It is true that Klíma had his admirers (including F. X. Šalda and even Karel Čapek, who contributed with a polite obituary) but critics did not really know, how to view his prosaic works back then. *Sternenhoch's* time was yet to come. Finally, in the fifties and sixties, its existentialism, absurd nature and one of a kind black humor was rediscovered and treasured in the schematism of that era. Klíma became a darling of alternative intellectuals, loved by Bohumil Hrabal and influencing authors such as Egon Bondy. Klíma became something of an idol for the underground, where he was seen as a predecessor of the hippie-like counterculture of self-destructive drinkers viewing the mainstream society with deep cynicism. And that is how Klíma became to be understood in the new era of freedom, whose values – of course – proved to be quite doubtful soon, which means that Klíma will probably always have plenty of readers bewitched by his work.

In any case, the works of Ladislav Klíma often become passion, a narcotic, alcohol and a haunting riddle for those, who experience them. The reason is that this most radical of the philosophers to have lived in Bohemia, this "thinker of the unthinkable" opens innumerable ways of interpretation. And one of those ways accentuates the world as means to a free, creative game, in which one becomes the supreme creator: a child-god, for whom the world is a ball to play with. Such game is a part of the extasy shining upon the world. One gesture to make the world, the other to unmake it. All governed by nothing but the creator's free will. In this process of creation, a metaphysical vision becomes artistic. And theatre is one of the forms that it may take – and, even better, opera as the theater's more eccentric sister. Of course, it is hard to speak on Klíma's behalf but it would be very surprising if he did not love *Sternenhoch* by Acher. And if he was able to resist the philosophical passion that Vanda Šipová as Helga provokes. It is just like Klíma himself wrote: "*Understood on the deep and internal level, everything is interesting and true. Only that, which is dull, dry, dead, is false. Such is the psychological truth, the truth of living things.*"

And Acher's opera is everything but "dull" or "dry". Anyway, see for yourselves.

Jiří Peš



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INTERVIEW WITH PETR KOFROŇ ABOUT CONTEMPORARY MUSIC THEATER



Photo: Ilona Sechorová

Petr Kofroň, a conductor and composer, is often named when people speak about contemporary opera. We met for an interview in a deserted glass room in the operations building of the National Theatre. Surrounded by old furniture, we discussed the OPERA NOVA festival, the shape of contemporary musical theatre and his thoughts regarding music.

You are the founder of OPERA NOVA, a festival of contemporary opera. What would you like the festival to be? What should it mean and what response should it provoke?

On the most general level, the festival should especially show the changes of opera as a genre continuously developing for approximately 400 years. Especially in the 20th and 21st century, when the term "opera" itself became rather complicated by moving away from the traditional opera form – i.e. singing accompanied by music – resulting in new formats, such as video-operas or narrative operas (which, of course, build upon an older traditions, that of Janáček for example). And we also have forms such as the instrumental theater, where music or singing directly stems from a specific theatrical action.

Apart from the new *Tramvestie* by Petr Wajsar, there is a number of foreign production on the program of OPERA NOVA. Do you regularly go see operas around our country and abroad to keep in touch with the latest developments?

I don't like travelling much, so I could hardly claim to do it systematically.

How do you learn about new operas then?

We have a number of sources at our disposal, ranging from recommendations from our friends, all the way to watching news on the Internet. Together with Ivan Bierhanzl, we select potentially interesting pieces and decide who is going to see what. Not all the projects seem to be worth seeing in person, so we try to get recordings, videos and so on. On the other hand, there are many others coming from abroad. I am not always sure myself, how those people happen to learn about the festival, but there are many people interested in performing here.

Do you think that there is some general way of characterizing contemporary opera, both domestic and foreign?

In my opinion, there are two basic groups. On the one hand, there are operas building on the traditional understanding of the genre. Those are mostly highly conservative pieces, not really interesting, hoping to become famous abroad. This segment of contemporary opera is more or less insignificant. Personally, I am more interested in the other group that has been purposefully trying to find new ways since the 60s, starting with Mauricio Kagel and his instrumental theater. What he did was not really opera but rather a theatrical performance, where specific movements on the stage generated specific sounds. This cannot be simply classified as opera because if you would record only the audio element on tape, the recording would not make any sense. You get the whole picture only when perceiving both the sounds and what happens on the stage. This brings me to, for example, Heiner Goebbels, who always presents us with an object as a source of a specific sound. When being handled theatrically, the object produces the resulting musical-theatrical action. It is a new way to interconnect theater and music in a way that only makes sense as a whole. This is very different from, say, Puccini, whose music may be recorded and played as entirely independent work of art, which is merely supported by the events happening on the stage.

New Opera Days festival takes place every two years in Ostrava. Have you ever been there? Were you inspired by the festival?

Yes, I attended the festival and I can be only envious of the financial and other conditions, under which they operate, and the number of world premieres of works by famous foreign authors. If we were ever to get close to their scope and professionalism, it would be excellent.

What do you think the difference between the two festivals is?

There is a slight difference, namely that the festival in Ostrava is intentionally cosmopolitan. I, on the other hand, would like to focus on new Czech, Slovak or even Slavic works. There is a certain difference in the focus of our festival.

Where do you really like to conduct?

That is hard to say, I have never really been a professional conductor. True, I am a conducting gradua-

te from 1979 but at that time, you could not work as a conductor without the necessary political profile. And, to be blunt, I did not quite meet those requirements. So I kept composing because you do not need anyone else, when you are a composer. You may compose things without the hope of ever publishing them. But you cannot conduct just by yourself. I finally got to conducting mostly by chance in the 90s because I was practically the only one willing to conduct contemporary music. At that time, I hated opera with all my heart. But when I got a job in Pilsen, I understood that that was my inner problem that I had to overcome. I started conducting traditional opera by chance. They were looking for someone to conduct *Šárka* by Fibich and I was in Prague conducting *The Fall of the House of Usher*. I was interested in trying a true romantic opera and invited some people from the orchestra's artistic board to come and see the performance. They said that they would try their luck with me and I have been conducting opera ever since. But I have never grown to fully accept it and I am always very nervous before each performance.

What are you afraid of?

I worry that I might forget the fourth beat and the whole thing will fall apart. Or maybe a chord will get lost and not sound as it should. Thousands of things can happen during an opera performance and you may often stumble at some point that seems quite harmless when you look at it. On the other hand, I only very rarely achieve the state when I just enjoy the sound of the orchestra. We once played with *Agon* some composition by Giacinto Scelsi at the Convent of St Agnes. It was a complicated score with tones always flowing one to the other, very hard to keep track of and once you forget to count every single beat, you get immediately lost. And, of course, that is what happened to me.

What happened then?

For the last five minutes, I was conducting in a sort of trance. To be frank, I have no idea what gestures I was doing, but they made it to the end. I had no idea where I was in the score, so there was no need for me to read the notes. So I just fully enjoyed the music. In a way, it was a beautiful feeling.

Could the players tell that you were lost?

They were not saying anything, so I asked them if they noticed that I had got lost at the end. They claimed not to have noticed anything. Sometimes, music that looks very complicated on paper sounds very natural in performance. Such music practically guides the conductor. But you must know the music very well. Then it may guide you.

Do you spend much time composing nowadays?

I have always liked to compose. Unfortunately, I do not have enough time to compose as much as I would like to. But maybe it is better for all of us that way.

Interview by
Denisa Valterová

GALLERY

Roman Trabura: Wind

Pavel Šmíd: Obstruction

Jiří David: Breath of an Explosion

Josefina Jonášová: Heron

Magdalena Roztočilová: Dolly

Michal Škapa: Far Side of the Moon

Jakub Tytykalo: Manifesto

Pavel Malina: On leaving

Lubomír Typlt: Corn Eaters in the Grass

Michal Cimala: The Accident of Two Tin Cans

Julius Reichel: Snakes