OUR NATIONAL HEROES. MUSIC AND COLLECTIVE REMEMBERING[1]

Zuzana Jurková

Abstract: ***The following text is focused on the rise of a new, post-revolutionary (after the 1989 "Velvet Revolution") pantheon on the Prague music scene. Two distinct modalities are discussed: a "state-supported" one, represented by the opera*** Toufar ***(the title hero of which is a priest-martyr of the Communist regime), and a subversive one, represented by the musical*** Velvet Havel!

The ethnographic descriptions show both similarities in the music forms and languages, and a distinctiveness regarding the stakeholders.

Through interviews with the authors of the presented works, the driving forces behind the rise of music representations are revealed, and the basic premises of contemporary collective memory studies about its constructed nature and about its collective-identity-forming character are confirmed.

Keywords: ***Prague; collective remembering; music.***

August 2018: *Summer House for Sale,* a brand-new Czech film. A married couple, perhaps in their early sixties, are selling an old wooden cottage in the woods. They don't say much, but it is clear that they really don't want to. At a certain point, inside the cottage, they almost unwittingly put on a record: Czech pop music of the '70s. Now it is clear: the house is full of memories from their youth. Not only do I understand what they are remembering, but I start to remember, too. The sound reminds me of our kitchen, our light-wood radio which was often turned on, the scratched linoleum, the folding bench my grandfather made that I usually sat on at lunch... Music triggers my memories. And I am not alone in

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this.[2] Remembering is becoming a ubiquitous phenomenon. In the past decades, we have been witnessing a "boom of remembering."[3]

The basic idea of what goes on in our brain when we remember (or when we are reminded of) a piece of music we heard long ago – the activation of specific neural circuits, which are the same at first hearing and in remembering – is described by Daniel Levitin in his book *This Is Your Brain on Music* (2007: 133–168). For anthropologists, the approach of ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino is certainly easily understandable. In the book *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (2008) he attempts to answer the key question of what music is actually for.[4] First, he connects biologist and anthropologist Gregory Bateson's findings of the integrative function of art with the research of psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihalyi (1990), whose concept of *flow*, the optimal experience attained, inter alia, by performing music, confirms and deepens Bateson's conclusions. According to Turino, it is thus obvious that music integrates an individual with him/herself: his/her perceptions, ideas, longings, and experiences, all of which are unconnected from a rational point of view. With the help of instruments from the field of semiotics, then, Turino (2008: 12) demonstrates how a simple musical stimulus lowers the rich "semiotic chain" of various psychological and corporal reactions.[5] By the way, the introductory paragraph of this text testifies to a similar process.

If we were to glance at Turino's concept from the perspective of memory – in semiosis,[6] elements of the past, the present, and also hopes and longings projected into the future are connected – it corresponds well to the idea of English philosopher John Locke, according to whom memory is a condition of individual identity and responsibility. By means of remembering, individuals experience the continuity of life (Erll 2011: 85).

Turino emphasises that, along with the self-integrative potential of music (among other things, by remembering), music also integrates individuals with

2 Quotation from Jurková 2017: 3–4.

3 Huyssen (1995) speaks of a "memory boom." To distinguish between the terms memory and remembrance see, e.g., Erll 2011: 8–9.

4 One of Turino's basic theories is that the expression "music" is an umbrella term for *fundamentally distinct types of activities that fulfill different needs and ways of being human*. (2008:1) I basically agree with this assumption. Nevertheless, for this text, I do not consider it essential to distinguish these types.

5 Turino demonstrates how various types of semiotic signs involved in semiosis mediate various kinds of experiences. He thus indirectly supports his thesis about the universal integrative contribution of art and, concretely, music and, thus, its necessity.

6 The process of interpretation of signs.

various types of collectivities. And this assertion is the threshold over which we enter our main topic: **music and collective remembering**.

Premises

Still standing on the threshold, let us recall the three basic premises from which we will proceed in this text:

1) Individual and collective remembering are inseparably interwoven; nevertheless, they are guided by different rules. The collective is certainly composed of individuals – the bearers of memories. At the same time, however, we are convinced, along with the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1952), that individual remembering is formed in collective frames. They provide him/her with expressions, determine the relevance of individual events, etc. Individual remembering is thus governed by different – psychological – rules from the remembering of the collective. The application of psychological principles to collectives (which is what some authors concerned with collective memories do) leads to erroneous conclusions regarding social reality (Kansteiner 2002).
2) For the function of collective remembering, historian Jan Assmann's concept of "connective structure" is useful. According to him, it "binds the individual to someone close to him/her so that, like the symbolic world of meaning... *it shapes the shared space of experience... and thus contributes to the development of confidence and knowledge*." (2001: 20) Assmann's connective structure also contains an aspect that leads to our main topic, that is, collective remembering. One component of connective structure is also – besides the cultural dimension – the time dimension that "*connects yesterday with today because it shapes formative remembering and keeps it in the present*." (ibid) In Assmann's formulation, Halbwach's social frames of memory (connective structure "shapes formative remembering"), as well as the relevance of the remembered, resonate. Thus: what and how we remember shapes that *shared space of experience ... and thereby contribute[s] to the development of confidence*.

   The other basic feature of remembering – besides the basic identity-forming character – is constructivity. This quality significantly characterises the formulation of Astrid Erll: *Individual and collective remembering are never a reflective depiction of the past, but an expressive statement of*

the needs and interests of an individual or a group who are remembering in the present (Erll 2011: 8).

3) The third basic premise of this text rests directly in the fundaments of ethnomusicology of the last half-century. It is a conviction that music, primarily a collective matter,[7] reflects collective (i.e. social) reality (viz. Shelemay 2012). And this collective character of music is so strong that sometimes it alone generates a collectivity.[8]

In sum: detailed research of musical events which capture collective remembering allows us to gain much important information about a given collectivity (that "shared space of experience"), its current "needs and interests," and also the mechanisms which fulfil them.

Heroes?

When, in 2013, people became aware of *Hořící keř* (*Burning Bush*), the film by young Czech scriptwriter Štěpán Hulík and the famous Polish director Agneszka Holland about one of the symbols of anti-Soviet resistance, Jan Palach (in a few months the film was granted twelve Czech Lion awards, the most important film awards in the Czech Republic), and, almost at the same time, the National Theatre premiered Aleš Březina's opera about Josef Toufar, a priest who was brutally tortured by the Communist police, this concurrence of events evoked the question of actually why these personalities were presented in this way and appeared on the national scene. (And, a couple of months later, *Velvet Havel!,* another work in the cycle of original musicals about important personalities in Czech history by Miloš Orson Štědron, later the recipient of numerous nationwide prizes, was in preparation; it would have its premiere in the popular Divadlo Na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade)).

For answers, let us try to go beyond the vague term *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the time. We are convinced of the correctness of the assertion of Astrid Erll

[7] Not only that music is mainly performed collectively and almost always listened to collectively, but primarily its meanings are created and passed on collectively.

[8] Kay Kaufman Shelemay formulates the role of music during collectivity creation thus: "*...musical processes (*are*) instrumental in shaping musical communities through music's role in establishing the ethnic places that unite a collectivity from within and represent it to the outside world.*" (Shelemay, 2012: 207–8.) Thomas Turino summarises the findings of generations of ethnomusicologists: [*Ethnomusicologists have emphasized the importance of music for expressing and creating social identities in many societies around the world* (Turino 2008: 94).]

that it is about an expression of *needs and interests* of those remembering in the present. Nancy Wood expresses herself even more precisely: the expression of *public memory testifies to a will or desire on the part of some social group or disposition of power to select and organize representations of the past so that these will be embraced by individuals as their own. If particular representations of the past have permeated the public domain, it is because they embody an intentionality – social, political, institutional, and so on…* (Wood 1999: 2)

What, actually, does the Czech pantheon appear to be in this still young third of a century? That is, who are the main saints of the public music space? And who are those who *select and organise representations of the past?* What influences their selection? How does it work from the musical point of view? And which *agency* brought the work to the public space?

Apart from Březina's *Toufar,* we can undoubtedly also include his earlier opera *Zítra se bude (Tomorrow There Will Be)*… about Member of Parliament Milada Horáková, who was executed by the Communist regime,[9] and, in 2017, on the New Scene of the National Theatre, the opera *Žádný člověk* (*No Person*) by Jiří Kadeřábek (music) and Katharina Smitt and Lukáš Jiřička (text).[10]

From the numerous musical theatrical works of Miloš Orson Štědroň, undoubtedly *Velvet Havel!*, which premiered in 2014 in the Theatre on the Balustrade, and perhaps *Hus(que) ad finem*, a musical about Jan Hus, which had its premiere a year later on the occasion of the 2015 Hus celebrations in Old Town Square[11], belong in this pantheon. The play based on songs by Karel Hašler, *Hašler* (prem. 2013 on the stage of the conventional Vinohrady Theatre) can be added to the list of presentations of today's national heroes and

9 It premiered in 2008 in the same place, the chamber Kolowrat Theatre

10 The subject of the opera is the monstrous Stalin monument built on Prague's Letná Plain, 1949–1955. The main tragic (non)heroes are the sculptor Otakar Švec, who created the monument, and his wife.

11 Štědroň is the author of a number of works about important figures in Czech history. Although his heroes are no doubt figures every school child should know by the 7th grade, we do not feel that the format in which some of them are depicted – that is, chamber theatre performances – guarantees them a place in the "national pantheon."

The auditorium with a couple of dozen seats, representing the public space in which they are remembered, is too small for it. In addition, we can assume that, to a certain extent, a "specialised" audience, representing what Turino calls cultural cohorts get together here. Cohorts are defined as *social groupings that form along the lines of specific constellations of shared habits*… (2008: 111). For the needs of the national pantheon, the concept of cultural formation, defined by Turino as a *group of people who have in common a majority of habits that constitute most parts of each individual member's self* (Turino 2008: 112), is much more appropriate.

non-heroes. In it, the almost national writer Pavel Kohout heroises this popular songwriter who was murdered in 1941 in the Mauthausen concentration camp.

This is no especially broad Pléiade. As expressed in the title of the newspaper discussion, it could seem "As if we were ashamed of our heroes."[12] In addition, those who appear on the musical stage are sometimes not presented as real heroes by the authors. Why, actually? Part of the explanation undoubtedly rests in the Czech tradition of resistance to pathos, resistance substantially nourished in totalitarian Czechoslovakia. But writer and historian Miloš Doležal, the author of the excellent book about Josef Toufar, *As if We Were to Die Today*, sees the reason elsewhere: that we lack the courage and the will to reflect on heroic acts of the past.[13]

The second part of the explanation, however, perhaps lies in the understanding of art. As journalist Petr Zídek says: "If art is to have a reason for being, then it, in its nature, must be subversive. Artists have to cut down the idols rather than create them."[14]

And indeed, the contemporary national pantheon, performed on the musical scene, offers the two basic genres of ancient drama – tragedy and comedy; or, in other words, it captures personalities of the past in two ways: heroically or subversively.[15] The first of these can be understood as a distinct instrument of strengthening national identity; the second fills the reflexive function of art regarding society. In the following text, I describe representatives of both modalities and attempt to answer the questions posed earlier.

The Tragic Hero Josef Toufar

Aleš Březina: *Toufar*
Kolowrat Theatre, chamber stage of the National Theatre of Prague
Tuesday, January 28, 2014. 7 p.m.

The Baroque Kolowrat Palace is in the very centre of Prague on Ovocný trh (Fruit Market Square), just a few steps from the Estates Theatre. If you step in along the red plush carpet and on each floor admire the painted-wood ceilings,

12 Lidové noviny, Oct. 5, 2013.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 The term subversively refers to an alternative way of capturing the main character, usually presented in an idealised way. Here, it does not contain any political connotations.

you are then taken by surprise in the garret: you find yourself in a cramped space with ordinary wooden chairs set on steep steps. Only a few dozen spectators can fit in the auditorium, and the simple stage is very close to the first row. The auditorium is full, as it was a couple of years ago when Březina's opera about Milada Horáková, *Zítra se bude (Tomorrow There Will Be)...,* was performed. This time, too, the spectators are all adults, though in a broad age span between twenty years old and seventy years old. Most are formally dressed, but no one is wearing the elegant evening wear certainly worn by at least part of the audience in the neighbouring Estates Theatre.

Neither the name Toufar nor the subject of the opera, the Číhošť miracle,[16] is unfamiliar. I first read about this subject, completely absent from the official cultural sphere in the Communist era, in a typed copy of Josef Škvorecký's book *The Miracle* (published in Toronto 1972). After November '89, a television film about this same man was created with the popular Viktor Preiss in the main role and, a couple of months before the premiere of the opera, an in-depth historical monograph by Miloš Doležal, *As if We Were to Die Today: A Drama of the Life, the Priesthood, and the Martyr's Death of the Číhošť Priest, Father Josef Toufar,* came out.

A short overture prepares the scene: a keyboard, playing in an organ register (by which it unerringly brings us to a church environment), repeats some sort of unfinished motif. As a violin and a bass clarinet are gradually added to them in close harmony, tension is created... On a barely lit stage, meanwhile, a man in a white suit rolls in a table with something covered by a white cloth; he places it in front of a large wall engraving of Christ on the cross, which dominates the stage. In the darkness, we can only guess at the presence of other figures in black. When a bright light falls on them towards the end of the overture, it is clear that they have the inscription Torture on their black hooded coats.

Down the aisle between the chairs, in a plain blue coat and grey pants, walks the main protagonist, the nearly 90-year-old theatre legend, Soňa Červená. With her usual deep voice (as an opera singer, she sang alto roles) and perfectly comprehensibly, yet perhaps too theatrically for some, she tells the fate of Jan Sarkander, who, in the 17th century, was tortured to death in

[16] On December 11, 1949, according to 20 witnesses at the Sunday mass in Číhošť, the wooden altar cross moved while the local priest, Josef Toufar, was preaching. The church attempt to explain it was *wrecked by the Communist State Security. Father Toufar was arrested, taken away, and through torture, members of the State Security Corps forced him to confess to a lie that he had fraudulently installed a mechanical device*. (Doležal 2012: book jacket) As a consequence of the torture, Toufar died.

Fig. 1: Soňa Červená in the opera *Toufar* (photo Zuzana Jurková).

Moravia. Her partners on stage are six girls in black coats who, according to the information in the programme, are members of the Kühn Children's Choir. Červená and the singers, in some kind of counterpoint (the still quite childlike voices of the girls create a strange tension with the declamation of Červená) describe the details of the torture.

Now we understand what the opera is about.

The second scene takes place "338 years later": Cardinal Beran, portrayed today by the popular actor Vladimír Javorský in a bishop's vestment, celebrates the solemn *Te Deum* in St. Vitus cathedral for the newly elected first Communist President, Klement Gottwald. He is now portrayed by Červená in a man's dark suit and red tie; (Fig. 1) her tall, bony build in no way reminds us of the pudgy Gottwald, but, by her striking facial expressions throughout the performance of his texts, she reveals his inner demonic nature. Only now am I properly aware of why Březina calls his opera a "documentary": the libretto is assembled exclusively from materials of that time; references to them are in the printed programme. At the moment we are hearing some excerpts from Beran's pastoral letter and Gottwald's speech at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party describing a strategy for *neutralising the Church so that it is subservient to the regime, as is the case of the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union*. (Červená alternately sings and recites; Javorský as

Beran speaks untheatrically.) The children's voices sing the Latin *Te Deum* as a background of this duet. The sound of the keyboard organ alternates figurative passages with chords and with the accompaniment of the chorus and singers.

In the following scene, the conflict of the Church, represented by Javorský, and the Communist regime (this time Soňa Červená plays not only Gottwald, but also low Communist apparatchiks) escalates. This is clear from the texts of both protagonists and from the nervous passages of the keyboard. At the moment of the conflict's climax, a man in a white vestment walking down the aisle between the spectators enters the scene. In a high, predominantly female-sounding voice he sings *We are sinners and yet we were created for heaven. A place is ready for all of us there.* The countertenor Jan Mikušek in the role of Toufar. His singing, in slow tempo, without dynamic changes, soberly accompanied by a celesta, sounds angelic.

The angelic atmosphere continues when Toufar writes to the boys he supported in their studies. Again the celesta is heard; the melody again flows in broad intervals and without dynamic changes; in a while, echoes of folk carolling again sound. When out of an old radio the historical recording of the well-known (and later often parodied) Christmas address of Antonín Zápotocký[17] about how *Baby Jesus grew old, his beard grew out, and he turned into Old Man Frost,* is played, it seems to come from some other world.

The idyll in a village parsonage, however, is approaching its end. The witnesses – the choristers describe the moving of the cross during mass, which Toufar writes about to his friend. While the girls are almost carefree – their song recalls a children's nursery rhyme – Toufar switches to speech; it is clear that he is aware that *I am only one, so it'll be easier for them*. (Fig. 2) The neurotic figures of the keyboard also return. Right afterwards, we are in the middle of the torture. The choristers – the witnesses of the miracle – have now become members of the torture apparatus. They now sing the interrogator Macha's text about the details of Toufar's torment, and, with drills in their hands, they also demonstrate it. Their totally unemotional, almost robotic singing contrasts with Mikušek, who alternates expressive passages in the head (female-sounding) register with lower tones. The way the confession was acquired is more than obvious... *that the authorities interrogated me decently... and that I made my statement without any pressure.* Soňa Červená reads in a demonic manner

[17] Antonín Zápotocký (1884–1957) was the second Communist President (1953–1957) and, thus, his speech was made more recently than when the opera takes place.

Fig. 2: Jan Mikušek in the opera *Toufar* (photo Zuzana Jurková).

Toufar's confession (forced by torture) of how he feigned the motion of the altar cross. This is interlocked with the liturgical prayers of Javorský supported by the singing of the choristers – anonymous worshippers.

We then see footage from a 1950 propaganda film in which Toufar figures shortly before his death. Červená accompanies it with the text of a Ministry of the Interior announcement for a press conference. In it, the "Číhošť miracle" is part of *the hand of Imperialism, which is not ashamed of anything, of Wall Street and of its supporter – the Vatican*. In Soňa Červená's interpretation, the announcement sounds almost cabaret-like. Then the priest's body appears for the last time. Javorský comments on its condition based on the protocol of the police and the doctors; the choristers repeat "*multiple bruises*" in ostinato patterns. In the short next-to-the-last scene, recorded brass music sounds like the background of the victorious speech of the general secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Rudolf Slánský (also interpreted by Červená), given about the abolishment of the Church (*We closed church schools, we're locking priests up*...). The conclusion itself is a quiet scene in which Toufar's niece (sung by one of the choristers) asks President Gottwald in a letter about her uncle's fate. The music of this scene – a melody, inexpressive interpretation, and even a celesta accompaniment – brings us back to idyllic Číhošť before Toufar's arrest.

Aleš Březina on Collective Remembering, Non-heroes of Our Past, and Music, which Helps Us to Remember

Aleš Březina (born 1965) studied violin at the Pilsen Conservatory and musicology in Prague, Basel, and Berlin.
Aside from chamber and orchestral, vocal and instrumental concert compositions, he is the author of music for the theatre (apart from the above-mentioned operas, also *Muchova epopej* [*Mucha's Epic*], 2010, scenic music for numerous theatre productions, e.g., of Robert Wilson, Jiří Menzel, and others, and for films [over 20 films]).
Březina is the director of the Bohuslav Martinů Institute and the Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Bohuslav Martinů Collected Critical Edition.

On August 15, 2016, I conducted a semi-structured interview with the composer Aleš Březina about his two operas.

AB: First to the question of why I decided to remember Milada Horáková. It seemed significant to me that, in my own memory – I was 24 at the time of the Velvet Revolution – Milada Horáková played no role. I was interested in how it was possible that I was so brainwashed. I grew up in Sušice, which was a military town. Then I attended the conservatory in Pilsen from 1979 to 1985. It was a bastion of peace and socialism... so nobody spoke of it there. Actually I started to discover it here in Prague, when I studied musicology from '85 to '89.

ZJ: And what about your parents? Did you speak about it with your parents?
AB: My father was in the Communist Party... so he blocked it out. And my mother was a soldier in Sušice. She kept the archives there, so she didn't want to open the topic either. When I began to be concerned with it I asked people what they recalled when someone said Horáková. Their initial reaction interested me. And I also asked my mother. And she told me for years that she didn't remember anything. And then I once I played her a (documentary) extract from the interrogation and she suddenly remembered how, as a little girl, she heard on the radio – my mother was born in 1938 – the broadcast of the trial... She recalled the voice of the commentator who commented on it at the time. And she said she hadn't understood it, but that it frightened her at the time, that she was afraid of it. And I realised how brilliantly the Bolsheviks had intimidated my parents' generation without their realising what was going on. I believe my

mother had had no idea what it was about – they probably didn't talk about it at home. And in that case, she blocked it out so perfectly that, for years, she was completely honest in saying she didn't know... So I realised that what I was dealing with was a question of collective memory...

And another comment relating to the term "heroes." I chose Horáková precisely because she is such an anti-hero. I love the fact that she said before the jury: *I'm falling. I've lost*. And she really took it as a fight for an idea and her idea lost. And I was very touched that someone could, right before dying, when she knew it was completely unjust and that she was going to die – she had a daughter, she had a husband – that she could just accept it in that way. The final letter she wrote seems entirely Zen Buddhist to me.

What was important was order, not that a life would end. And I like that about her. And that's why I also chose Toufar. He is not someone who sees injustice somewhere and deals with it and, by doing so, loses his life; he is someone who falls into it completely involuntarily. If it had been even slightly up to him, he wouldn't have chosen it. He didn't even know about it. Others did... and, on the basis of that, he was pulverised. I'm most interested in people who didn't want something but, at a certain moment, decided that, if they did fall into it, they would take action themselves and end it. So I did not take either of them as a priori heroes, but rather as litmus papers of what happened when two systems, two paradigms, clashed. The paradigm in which perhaps Horáková was brought up in the pre-war period and the paradigm when truth was what one party suddenly decided – and how these characters were shaped.

ZJ: And actually how did it happen that, on the stage of the National Theatre, this was remembered through operas?

AB: Originally, this is how it was: The National Theatre asked Soňa Červená to perform in this opera. She turned it down. And that opera? She turned it down. And then they told her to choose one, and she asked if it could be something new. They said yes. After she suggested me, they were even happier, because the head of the opera at that time was Jiří Nekvasil, a friend of mine for many years... And the original idea was that we would do something about some strong Czech woman so that Soňa Červená could give a credible performance. And then we chose Horáková, because that seemed to us to be the strongest subject and because this subject is (or was) cast out somewhere on the periphery... I wanted it to be more than what people only knew, that she was a woman

who represented the democratic tradition of the '30s and, therefore, they killed her. I wanted people to experience the brutality that it somehow came to, the systematics of it. That's why I included that telegram about how they started to follow her in March '48, that there was no escape from it. This is an opera about someone whose scenario was already written from the beginning. That's why I've said everywhere that I didn't create the libretto, that I pieced it together. Because that libretto was issued by that power. And then it did its final deed by ordering that trial... With *Toufar*, it originally came from an external stimulus, because I was approached by the Nitra Theatre festival ... with the idea that they wanted to have some kind of parallels of lives under Communism. At first I turned them down because I had some other big job, and, besides, I didn't want to sort of step into the same river twice. But then I asked myself, why not? Since this was a different enough thing. Then I prepared it directly with the historian Stáňa Vodičková, who works at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. She prepared the groundwork for me... But I put the libretto together myself because I didn't want her to be blamed afterwards... After all, with this choice, I myself stand for a very selective and subjective position, which she as a historian would certainly not do.

ZJ: It seems to me that, in both of these operas, the composition style is similar: polystylistics with occasional quotations. Is that right?
AB: I am of the opinion that the theatre is eclectic, so it seems to me that very often, in musical theatre, people who write excellent instrumental music and base it on a clean style fail. Theatre is exactly the opposite. Theatre cannot have a pure style, because you need to express many characters and many situations – and they can't be expressed through one style. So I compose in what the French call an eclectic music style, because it seems to me that this style is always justified by the musical situation. And quotations – I love quotations because I feel that the appropriately chosen quotation points out various intertextual connections... for example, that quotation of the sacrificed girl (from *The Rites of Spring* in *Tomorrow There Will Be*) – it seemed to me that it suddenly shone. And people will see it in the context of some roundelay, some ritual, because Milada Horáková was only one of many... I wanted to show that it was simply a part of some historical process.

ZJ: In Toufar *even more, right?*
AB: Of course.

ZJ: A question about the girls who sang in it: Did you provide them with some kind of context? Or did you think that they were big enough?
AB: No, no. They were 10, 11 years old. We didn't provide them with it for the reason that they wouldn't have understood it one bit... And it suited me that they actually didn't know what they were singing. I've always been fascinated by people who, in the '70s, confessed that at the end of the '40s they didn't know what they had done. And I wanted this from those girls: I wanted them to be the only bearers of something that was injected into them... I remember how one sang, *I am prosecutor Antonín Havelka, a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, until now working only in smaller trials, where only two death penalties were carried out*. And she went away. Because she didn't know what the death penalty was, so she sang it like a robot. That was perfect! Soňa goes at it fully. She plays all the emotions, but those girls sang just the notes and the words and, if I wrote them something in Latin, they would sing Latin and wouldn't think about it, either.

ZJ: The location also contributed to that effect, didn't it?
AB: I wanted the Kolowrat. After half an hour there, you can't breathe, and it's hard to last another half-hour. It's dark there, so, after a while, you start to feel uncomfortable, which is appropriate for it... About *Tomorrow There Will Be*... people told me afterwards that they felt drawn in, as if they were part of it. I was really glad of that because that's what we wanted. Kristián Suda, the television dramaturge, came to me and said, *We sat up there, watched, and felt ashamed of our passivity. We had the feeling, even if it's ridiculous, that we should stand up and that we should act, otherwise we're the silent mass. At the same time, we didn't dare to step in*. That was probably the greatest praise we got for it, that drawing in, because I really wanted people to experience it, to have the feeling that it's up to them if it works out or if it ends up that way or if it doesn't.

Havel in Shorts

Miloš Orson Štědroň: *Velvet Havel!*
Theatre on the Balustrade
April 6, 2016, at 7 p.m.

Even though Anenské náměstí (St. Anne's Square) is located just around two corners from Karlova ulice (Charles' Street), through which tourists, guidebook in hand, continuously stream day and night, and just a block from the embankment, where the scene is similar, here, it is surprisingly calm. Actually, cars with the logos of near-by hotels are parked all around the square, and one side of the square is comprised of a "fancy" residence, the Charles Bridge Palace, and so it is easy to get the impression that this is the domain of rich foreigners. But appearances are deceptive. St. Anne's Square and its closest surroundings are extraordinarily connected to the personality of Václav Havel. From a corner of the square, you can walk through the narrow Zlatá ulička (Golden Lane) to the Pražská křižovatka (Prague Crossroads – Fig. 3), the deconsecrated church of St. Anne, which the Dagmar and Václav Havel Foundation VIZE 97 transformed into a "spiritual cultural centre". Here, after Havel's death in December 2011, his body lay in state; an unending line of people came here for a last look at "their" President, and, from there, a procession of ten thousand started out for the official farewell in the cathedral at the castle.

And on this square itself is the Divadlo Na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade). (fig. 4) This very theatre was connected with Václav Havel from the beginning. From 1960 to 1968, he held various positions – *from stagehand to lighting engineer to secretary to dramaturge* (Havel 1990: 43). It was here that *Zahradní slavnost* (*Garden Party*), which made Havel famous abroad, had its premiere in 1963. Three years later, they presented *Vyrozumění* (*The Memorandum*), and, in 1968, another play, *Ztíženou možnost soustředění (The Increased Difficulty of Concentration*). Václav Havel spoke of this theatre as of the place that *formed (him) as a playwright* (Havel 1990).

This show has been treading the boards for nearly two years (the premiere was on May 2, 2014), which may be why it is not completely sold out. The production, however, won numerous 2014 Theatre Critics' Awards (among others, for best production of the year and for the best new Czech play; in addition, for music and for best male and female actors). And so, right before the performance, almost all of the 120 auditorium seats are filled; a few people are also

Fig. 3: Prague Crossroads (photo Zuzana Jurková).

Fig. 4: Theater on the Balustrade (photo Zuzana Jurková).

sitting in the additional seats attached to the walls. There is a preponderance of women covering a broad age span. Most people have come in pairs or groups of three. Most of the audience is informally dressed (the men in t-shirts rather than jackets, occasionally in shirts), some women moderately extravagantly, others, on the contrary, in the skirts and sweaters they were possibly wearing in school or at work. The dress code definitely does not imply a homogeneous group of spectators; nevertheless, the reactions during the performance confirm that they are linked with a connective structure.

While the programme of the newly staged *Krásné psací stroje* (*Beautiful Typewriters*) contains just a few words by the author and a few photos, the *Velvet Havel* programme contains the complete text of the play; at the box office, they sell CDs with songs of the show, and, in addition, supertitles in German appear above the stage.

At seven, the curtains open. A great part of the stage is taken up by a horizontal grid and, on it, there are a few mattresses. During the whole performance (which lasts, without an intermission, for an hour and 20 minutes) they will be variously rearranged to create a stage on the stage; that is where most of the action will take place. From the left, back corner of the stage we hear, and, when the scenes are brighter, we see a trio of musicians: a pianist, a percussionist, and a saxophone player. From time to time, they play some scenic music motif, but mainly, they will accompany songs.

Now the grid and mattresses are a sort of catafalque. On it lies a male figure, its face covered with a rubber mask of Václav Havel like those sold on the Prague streets when Havel was President. The scene represents a crematorium, evidently soon after Václav's funeral (Fig. 5).

My deav little Václav, this funeval was a gveat success. His uncle Miloš has a worse problem pronouncing the Czech "r" and "ř" than Václav Havel himself did. (When I later asked the author if he used the uncle's speech impediment for greater theatrical effect or if he had it tried and tested, he protested, a bit offended, and said that the uncle's "r" and "ř" sounded like a "v.") *Well, that was something! In the kathedval at the castle… Thvough all of Pvague! Gveat! What a film it would be! Just to make it!* And today's performance is about such a "film" – the story of Václav Havel.

During the prologue, Uncle Miloš (in a white suit, with a First Republic haircut and with somewhat affected gestures and diction), reminds us of his enormous film undertakings and their bohemian atmosphere, the millionaire environment of the whole Havel family, Václav's wife, Olga, whom we meet

Fig. 5: *Velvet Havel!* Václav and the uncle Miloš (photo Zuzana Jurková).

again in some of the following scenes (... *I still pvefevved Olga…. Millionaives always need someone they can absolutely tvust. Hev pvoletaviam ovigin was also beneficial because we Havels ave vathev impvactical. And, in addition, she had chavisma, veal chavm*...), and also his postwar attempts to emigrate, prison, relationships in the family (...*when they let me out of pvison in '51, ouv whole family abandoned me. And I understood that: what to do with a 50-yeav-old penniless homosexual... when theve is no money, movality takes ovev*...), and the last years abroad.

The prologue ends with Miloš's duet with Havel, who rose from the catafalque and took off the rubber mask of the "late" Havel. Now he is a young man, with a hairdo, gestures and movement reminiscent of Elvis Presley. His uncle and he sing a lively duet in which the musical style intermingles reverberations of an orchestrion accompanying silent grotesque and cabaret films. A certain retro atmosphere of the musical style of the duet corresponds with its vocabulary. It is hard to guess how many listeners register, in the lively tempo of the song, the reference: *The story seems to be as if from Mann's pen, the Buddenbrooks are waving to us*. In any case, this allusion is important. And it

is also evident that the entire performance leads to what delights both Havels: *Let's wash away the accretion of myths*.

In the following twelve scenes Štědroň presents his version of Havel's story "without the accretion of myths" – a version in which often-described "characters" revealing personality traits of Václav Havel are inserted into the scenes. In the very next scene, his wife, Olga, and a Muse appear, the Muse loosely representing various lovers of Havel. She, apparently trying to confide her relationship to Václav, is prevented by Olga from saying a word. She speaks in a monologue about practical things related to the running of a household (*The gooseberries should be treated with something so they don't spoil*), which sometimes intersperses more general thoughts, evidently reflecting Olga's experience (*I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't met him… Would this life be so different? Probably not. I probably would always have been myself. Even if it were somewhere else and with someone else*.), and ends with blues. The text corresponds to the bitterly melancholic music style. (*Living with Václav is no bed of roses. Anyone who sees the world in Žižkov has a patent on life*). Nevertheless, in the refrain, Olga intersperses her harsh way of singing (I am sorry that the actress doesn't have a more resonant, more bluesy voice) with a thin, girlish voice, with which she sings… *You know very well that I hide my feelings*… The relationship of Václav and Olga is again lit up by the 4th scene. Václav, changing from speech to Presley-like singing, goes around in circles trying to tell Olga about his previous meeting with the Muse (during which, however, we see that he does not stop spouting a philosophical and political monologue, not even while unhooking the Muse's brassiere); Olga sarcastically answers. Nevertheless, she then repeats to herself: *Václav, I know one thing. I'll always stand by you no matter what happens*.

In order for him to reach his goal of making an epic film about the life of his nephew and in order to be able to *pvocess politics and VIPs, simply stovies fvom high society,* in the next scene, Uncle Miloš brings on the stage a character who will play politicians and *famous people of the VIP world* (it is clear that such an environment excites him) – Universal, who looks like a large log with a slender branch. (Fig. 6) At an audition, Universal first portrays Salman Rushdie, whom Havel headstrongly invites to Prague on a state visit. Right afterwards, Universal plays Prime Minister Václav Klaus, who reacts furiously to Rushdie's invitation. Klaus switches from time to time to singing in a high head voice, as Karel Gott sometimes does. (From the audience laughter is heard, confirming their familiarity with Klaus and Gott's singing.) It is clear that Havel is beginning to enjoy the power play – including the irritation of the anti-actors.

Fig. 6: *Velvet Havel!* Universal, the uncle Miloš, Václav, and the Muse (photo Zuzana Jurková).

After the scene in which everyone under Miloš's tutelage learns Havel's ideas, and after Václav's prison monologue, which is interrupted by Universal as Havel's conscience, it is time for another musical number. Miloš, now in a glittering jacket with a top hat and walking stick, sings a cabaret song and dances. The international character of this style underlines the bilingual German-English refrain (*Ich liebe das Bühnenlicht… / I love this society… a glass of spirits does the trick*), with which the piano accompaniment corresponds to the style of a (slow) boogie-woogie, a favourite between the wars. Miloš ends the number with a tap dance, which earns him applause and a few enthusiastic shouts from the audience.

Next, the prison scene continues. The Muse, initially in a costume reminiscent of the Dalai Lama's, and later taking off parts down to her underwear, repeats in a monotonous melody a few formulas, some kind of "mantras": *You must be yourself* or *I am your Muse*. Meanwhile, Václav, with expressive falsetto singing (according to the programme, his singing is supposed to evoke a muezzin, but to me, it sounds more like a parody), recapitulates his life: *If*

February '48 hadn't come, I would have belonged to the golden youth… I would have had an English suit that was made to measure. I wouldn't have become a playwright or a writer.

After an entertaining scene of a meeting with Polish dissidents in the Krkonoše mountains, where Havel's vanity is subtly remembered, Universal now appears in the role of Hans Kasper, Olga's lover, and he introduces himself to Václav. The latter, obviously affected, reacts with the rap of philosophical statements we've already heard during Miloš's lesson, and Universal sings Olga an Italian Baroque aria accompanied by the cembalo. On his branch, pink flowers burst into bloom and Olga softens: *Nobody has ever paid me such compliments. This is so beautiful, dear little Hans.*

In the next-to-last scene the Muse, now sitting in a glittering red dress in front of a ventilator that blows her long hair, sings the musical song *I want to be your personal Muse,* and Václav runs in – with a moustache, shorts, a shirt and tie, and with a large bouquet of roses – already *everything arranged. We're going to live together and Olga will help us with everything. Do you know how much she is looking forward to a child? Almost as much as I am… I'm going to make the child the subject of my new play.* But the Muse reports that *she had an abortion* because *she can't live this way anymore.* The scene ends with Václav's big song, the two parts of which are, again, in two different styles. The refrain, again, in the boogie-woogie style reminiscent of the atmosphere of cabarets (*Barrandov, the embankment, Lucerna, Bárová, Gollová, Mandlová…*). The verses are lyrical (in the programme, the author referred to them as "country"), but here on the stage, standing with a guitar, is an introvert who is aware that *my brother and I are the last, the empire is ending, there is no successor… our golden age has come to an end.*

The last scene is a quick-fire summary of the events of November – and, without the hundred-times-repeated pictures known by everyone from the media, they would not be understandable: the rhythmic chanting of *Truth and love, only when you're hitting the bottle* while rattling keys turns into *Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred*. Václav: *I won't allow this child to be taken away. The revolution is my child.* Bill Clinton plays a solo on the saxophone, Uncle Miloš repeats that this was *the quickest film I've evev seen,* an instrumental accompanies the shining sign with Václav Havel Airport – and the Czech variation on the story of the Buddenbrooks ends.

Interview with Miloš Orson Štědroň about Strong Stories and Music, Opposing Forgetting

Miloš Orson Štědroň (born 1973) studied piano and composition in Brno and Prague. Štědroň is the author of a number of musical theatre works about important figures in Czech history. Along with the aforementioned Václav Havel and Jan Hus are a few connected to Štědroň's native Brno: poet Ivan Blatný (*Ivan Blatný Cabaret*, 2007) and geneticist Gregor Mendel (*Mendel*, 2015); others are Czech pre-war architects Gočár, Janák, and Plečnik (*Gočar Theatre*, 2012), writers Jaroslav Hašek (*Hašek Cabaret*, 2010) and Škvorecký, Zábrana, Hrabal, and Kolář (*Beautiful Typewriters*, 2016). Aside from theatrical works, Štědroň is the author of numerous orchestral and chamber compositions, e.g. *Rock* for strings and electro-acoustic guitar (2014), *Roxymoron* for strings, trombone, double bass, marimba, and percussions (2007), Piano Trio Mystery of Symmetry, etc.
Štědroň teaches composition and music theory at the Prague Conservatory.

March 7, 2016

ZJ: First of all: Could you say something about how you choose subjects?
MOŠ: They are all my favourite figures from my love of reading since my childhood; I've always read a lot. For example, I saw Blatný's photo in the library; I remembered it from the age of 12, and then his poems captivated me. Hašek, I've also been reading him since my childhood. And, besides, this: I love a novel, maybe the way Umberto Eco always writes about the novel, and Kundera, so I simply love storytelling. I think everyone loves it – to tell some kind of story on a background of strong facts or strong characters. And then strong patriotism is connected to that because actually all of these characters were somewhat forgotten; I think that Czechs don't value their great figures. That's surely connected to it.

ZJ: But, after all, some of these figures, such as Mendel, already require a certain competence, not merely that you have read their poems. That is: does it all comes from, let's say, your interest in Mendel's cross-breeding pea plants?
MOS: Actually yes, because I found out that this was also a story, a colossal story, and a terribly exciting one that Simon Mawer described much better in the novel *Mendel's Midget*. I knew that story indirectly because we walked around it

in Brno. It was a shrouded figure that was making some kind of experiment with peas. But then, when I found out what kind of story was behind it, that, although Darwin was the initiator of the elucidation of various biological processes, to me, that was a story of the 19th century, whereas Mendel lived in the 21st century – with his analytic, utterly rational, tenacious, relentless approach, he was the opposite of Darwin, who was actually a romantic. When 2009 rolled around, all of England was obsessed with Darwin, and here, Mendel – and nothing happened. About 20 biographies of Mendel exist in English, but not one in Czech.

ZJ: And that same interest compelled you to write about those architects?
MOS: Yes, because that's also a story. I came across it quite by accident when I was playing at Gočár's book launching, 2010, for which he was awarded the prize for Best Czech Architect of the 20th Century. And I got that monograph, which is enormous. Of course I knew the buildings, and so I dove into it and, at the end, I determined that it'd be possible to make a story about him, too, because his two friends – Janák and Plečnik – were also great architects, and coincidentally were all constructing churches in the same year. And so I made a story about that.

ZJ: To continue: it seemed to me that you often work with the same people. That, for example, Mikušek (he sang, e.g., John Wycliffe in Husque ad finem*, note, ZJ) is your favourite singer; director Frič or Nebeský, if I understand correctly, do many things… Could you say something about that? If, at the beginning, you stand alone, you say to yourself: This is my idea of Czech history and this is how I'm going to do it, or if, from the beginning, it's a bit of teamwork.*
MOS: The impulse usually came from me because, for example, with Jan Nebeský, our first collaboration, *Kabaret Blatný*, began this way, that I didn't know him at all and I came to him with the text and with the music. I don't know if he listened, but he said that he would do it, so then we began to meet, and suddenly, I realised that he is a person who sees things exactly the way I do… It was in the Divadlo Komedie (Comedy Theatre), still under Dušan Pařízek, and then, with Nebeský, I also did a performance of *Jana z Arku* (Joan of Arc) that we played in Czech churches… Afterwards, Nebeský and I did *Don Juan* – that was a classic piece in the Stavovské divadlo (Estates Theatre)… and then we did Gočár – and something else I can't remember.

ZJ: And now is the Theatre on the Balustrade your main home scene? Your brother is the manager there, isn't he? He was in Brno recently, wasn't he?
MOS: That's right. He and Dora Viceníková were the managers of the Reduta Theatre and then they won the competition for the Theatre on the Balustrade. Both are dramaturges or theatrologists.

ZJ: So that's partly why you moved to the Balustrade?
MOS: No, not entirely. They included a play about Havel that I was supposed to write in their application for the position. I said to myself that writing a play about Havel would scare me... and then I told myself that it would somehow turn out differently. And it turned out that they won and, in that case, I had to do it. So that's actually how it started.

ZJ: And did you also choose Hus yourself, or was that a commission?
MOS: It was something of a commission because we met the Hussite priest David Friedl... and he came to some performance, I think it was *Matka Tereza (Mother Teresa)*, and then he came to *Gočár*, ... and then he invited us to some event of his...

ZJ: So David Friedl invited you so that you would compose something for the Hus Jubilee?
MOS: It was more or less like that – with the plan that it would culminate in Old Town Square... And when I began to work on it, I learned that everyone dealt with this subject in a memorial-statue-like way or as a martyr, and so I tried to go at it somewhat differently. Hus interested me as a rebel; that's his position. Not that martyr, but the rebel who knew what was before him. Then he vacillated right before that gigantic pressure, but he coped with it.

But otherwise I think that after a while I always move somewhere farther.

ZJ: What do you mean by "farther"? To a bigger stage?
MOS: Yes, now I have two big projects, but I'd rather not talk about that.
(In December 2017 the National Theatre of Prague will premiere Štědroň's opera *Don Hrabal*, the title character of which is the original Prague writer Bohumil Hrabal [1914–1997], note of ZJ)

ZJ: Fine. That brings me to the next subject, that is, the audience. How do they relate to your music? How do you decide or what's the negotiation like in your head, with the cast and with the public in spe, what will it sound like?

MOS: Recently I read in a review about me that I have moved to the mainstream. But that's somewhat simplifying. Actually, there are some people who are revolutionaries their whole lives and they suffer badly in their ghettos. For example, Schoenberg was like that. But I think it's a bit of a pose. In my opinion a composer always needs an audience, and that audience gives him feedback, and the more the better, of course.

ZJ: This is what I want to hear: Is it the more the better?
MOS: By that I think the more in the framework of the fact that you somehow maintain your style. And I think it's possible to write music that seems the same, that the style can be so universal so that the music could be mainstream (in parentheses), wide-ranging, and, at the same time, the composer could always remain himself or herself. But that is the very hardest.

ZJ: Of course, that's dreadfully interesting to me. Nevertheless, when, for example, I recently heard your Hus, he seemed sort of multi-styled. For example, Hus is much more rock than what Mikušek (Wycliffe) sings. Is that so?
MOS: That's certainly right because I founded the theatre on multi-style.

Conclusion: How is the Music Pantheon Arising?

Both sets of data – the ethnographic and the one gained from interviews – offer answers to a whole list of questions relating to what we call the music pantheon, that is, the depiction of heroes of the beginning of the third millennium on the Prague music scene.

Who actually are these heroes? Primarily, they are almost all new: neither Toufar, Horáková, Havel, nor the songwriter Hašler, and, ultimately, not even the "lesser heroes" of Štědroň's plays, Blatný, Hrabal, and Škvorecký, had places in textbooks of pre-revolution history; Mendel and Gočár did, but were just fleetingly mentioned. Actually, only medieval Church reformer Jan Hus appeared in them repeatedly (appropriated by various interpretations). His re-introduction is, of course, easily understandable in the frame of the great Hus celebrations of 2015.

A second, perhaps more interesting question is related to who or what put those heroes on stage. Surprisingly, Astrid Erll's words about the *needs and interests* of those who remember in the present apply at the same time as the statement of Nancy Wood about *institutional intentionality.* From the

interviews with Březina and Štědroň, it is clear that their heroes were close to them, corresponded to their interests and concrete needs of expression: Březina speaks about his need to understand the mechanisms of collective memory (and collective forgetfulness), Štědroň about patriotism and the attempt to recall figures who personally attracted him with their stories and some of them were or are unjustly forgotten.

That's on one hand. But, at the same time – primarily in the case of Havel and Toufar (and, to a certain extent, Horáková, as well) – putting them on stage is the intention of an institution: The National Theatre, the Nitra Theatre festival, or the Theatre on the Balustrade. Thirdly, it is important to add that both composers are renowned authors and their reputations surely simplified their collaborations with prestigious institutions.

In connection with Březina's operas, it is useful to recall once more the name of the singer Soňa Červená, repeatedly mentioned in the interview. According to the composer, her role in the creation and realisation of the operas about Milada Horáková and Toufar in the National Theatre is indisputable. However, one should also be aware of her position/function in the public's perception of both operas. Thanks to her long-term artistic activities and life in exile and her return to the Czech stage only after 1989, as well as her family history,[18] she can easily be perceived as a representative of that new art, critical of the past regime. Through her interpretation, the artistic work (thus) becomes highly credible.

The third area of questions relates how the authors understand their heroes, and how they depict them. In this context, one thing is especially striking: although the resulting dramatic products differ from each other, their starting points actually do not differ much. Both see their characters as non-heroes: Štědroň appeals for the deconstructivist washing off of the "accretions of myths"; Březina speaks of the anti-heroes and litmus tests of his time. And, from the point of view of music, Březina and Štědroň proceed similarly: they use their extensive music education for the creation of a multi-style music language. As with intertextuality in literature, it enables reference to settings or times apparently outside of the scope of the subject he is dealing with, which causes a rich semiotic chain and strong emotional reactions. The musical language

[18] Czech audiences could have learned about all of this: Červená published two autobiographical volumes (1999, 2017) and often gave interviews, e.g. about the death of her mother at the very beginning of the Communist régime, see https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1186000189-13-komnata/211562210800018-13-komnata-soni-cervene (July 14, 2018).

thus is just one way of expressing what Březina speaks about in connection to Toufar's theme, that is, the universality of depicted stories and heroes:

Toufar's fate is extremely inspiring for the present, and for me, as well. It shows the period of a great historical turning point, when one paradigm was changing and being replaced by another, one that over a mere forty years totally disrupted our country and led it to an absolute economic and moral miasma. Toufar's story manifests the gradual assertion of totalitarian power, which back in 1949 was far from being certain of its victory, as it would later on present. Each and every step by each and every individual could have played a role... It is precisely the hundreds and thousands of concessions that gave rise to the power of Communist totalitarian regime. In this respect, Toufar's story speaks to the present, to every one of us (Programme 2013: 97).

Zuzana Jurková is the chair of the Department of Anthropological Studies and the head of the Ethnomusicology Programme at the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University, Prague. The programme focuses mainly on research on the music of minorities and on urban ethnomusicology. Her specialisation is the music of Roma and music as a medium of memory. The following titles are also topics of publications she has written and edited: *Voices of the Weak* 2009; *Sounds from the Margins* 2013; *To Touch the World* 2013; *Prague Soundscapes* 2014; *Crossing Bridges* 2015; *Hledání modalit hudebního vzpomínání* [The Quest for Modalities of Musical Remembrance] 2017, *Romani Musicians in the 21st Century* 2018…

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