

# An Outline of English and Czech Music

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## Introduction

This paper is an account of the development of English and Czech music.<sup>1</sup> It was not a parallel development by any means, but rather consisted of whole periods in which one or the other country showed remarkable peaks of inventiveness and creativity. However, in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, both countries produced composers whose works are part of the standard orchestral repertoire today. For example, the “Musical Revival” in England from around the middle of the nineteenth century was powered by composers such as Sullivan, Elgar, Holst, Britten, and Vaughan Williams; at around the same time we find in the Czech lands the names of Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, Suk, and Martinů.

In both countries two influences can be felt, though in varying degrees: the first is religion; the second is nationalism. In England, the strength of the religious inheritance, dating back to William Byrd and Henry Purcell, was exploited by all the major composers of the Revival period. Nationalism played a smaller part, but is evident in several of the English composers. Almost the exact opposite is true in the Czech lands: the nineteenth century nationalism that was rife all across Europe inspired many of the Czech composers to work on patriotic themes, while religion played a smaller part. Even for them, however, the martyrdom of Jan Hus in 1415 provided a religio-nationalistic memory which became a symbol of national identity and defiance. Opera (or in England comic-opera) was a genre that cut across both religious and nationalistic lines, but managed to touch composers of all nationalities, including of course English and Czech ones.

This paper is divided into two major sections, one dealing with English music and the other with Czech music. We shall begin the English part of this paper by describing

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1 The paper is based on a series of six public lectures delivered at Hiroshima Shudo University, Japan, between October and December, 2009. For a full list of the music that was played during these lectures, see Appendix 1.

the polyphonic music of the Elizabethan period, followed by the Restoration (1660) and the music of Henry Purcell. The next major event was the arrival of Handel in London in 1710, though from the time of his death (1759) for almost a century little of musical significance was created. The Revival that began from about 1850 extended into the middle of the twentieth century, and we shall look at its most important composers at some length.

## Section 1: English Music

### (a) Elizabethan Music

Elizabeth I was the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, and reigned as Queen from 1558-1603. Hers was a period of great international achievement – there were conquests and discoveries, trade flourished, and so forth – and amidst all this fervour there were also advances in the kinds of entertainment that surrounded the monarch. These included the theatre and the music that accompanied it, and the musical instruments that were used. The music of the Elizabethan court drew on two opposing traditions: that of the Church and that of the troubadours (wandering knights). That is, there was austere and formal music inside the church buildings, but songs of love and lust, of warriors and spies, indeed of all human emotions, outside of it. The four instruments of the time (the guitar, the orpharion, the cittern, and the lute) could play secular music as easily as church music.

The musical style of the era was polyphonic rather than harmonic, which came later. Polyphonic music was heard across Europe at that time, including in the Czech lands, developing between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and reaching a peak in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its spread was helped by the fact that music was now being widely printed.<sup>2</sup> However, the trouble with polyphonic music was that with one voice going up and another voice going down, it could not easily express emotion. Emotions, human feelings, and so on were key points in Renaissance thinking, so musicians searched for a different way to convey feelings, and the answer lay in harmony. One of the most popular was the well known *Greensleeves*, which has had a long history. The feeling of melancholy is evident

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2 See Alison Latham (Ed.), *Printing and publishing of music. The Oxford Companion to Music*, Oxford: 2002. The earliest printed music appears to have been printed in Constance, in Southern Germany, around 1473.

in the tune as well as in the words (“Alas, my love you do me wrong, ...”).

### **(b) William Byrd (c. 1540-1623): A Man of all Styles**

The most famous musician at this time was William Byrd, a pupil and friend of Tallis in the Chapel Royal. He composed masses, motets, madrigals, polyphonic songs, and many sacred compositions, a good number of the latter being composed when he was organist and choirmaster in Lincoln Cathedral. Although England as a whole was Protestant, he was a Catholic and had strong connections with the remaining Catholic nobility. To be a Catholic in England at that time (1580s) was a problem because of the threat from Spain (which tried to invade England with the ‘Spanish Armada’ in 1588). However, the Elizabethan court, particularly the Queen herself, seems to have “turned a blind eye” to his Catholicism on account of his outstanding skill as a musician. She also found it convenient to have some Catholics around her, because that showed the world that she was not absolutely against that version of Christianity.

### **(c) William Shakespeare (1564-1616): Music in his Plays**

Byrd’s impact on the next generation of composers was significant. One of his pupils was Thomas Morley (1557-1602), Shakespeare’s friend and the person who set “It was a lover and his lass” to music for *As you Like It*. Shakespeare used as many as 100 well-known songs in his plays. He also used “stage music” to indicate processions, serenades, battles and so forth, or sometimes to create an atmosphere for love, hate, or jealousy. Because the songs were so well known, frequently all that was needed was a few bars and the audience would immediately connect with the idea being conveyed. In the case of *Hamlet*, Ophelia sings the song *Tomorrow is St. Valentine’s Day*, the keyboard setting of which is generally traced back to William Byrd.<sup>3</sup> Also from Byrd comes another of Ophelia’s songs, when she refers to the song generally known as *Walshingham*. Ophelia sings a song that clearly alludes to the well known song of the same name.

In *Hamlet*, Ophelia becomes progressively demented, for two reasons: the first is that she is forbidden by her father Polonius to accept any advances from Hamlet, who in the early stages of the play (Act II), seems to be in love with her. The second is in Act III, when Hamlet kills Polonius, thinking it is the King. These two points drive her towards

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3 Ross W. Duffin, *Shakespeare’s Songbook* (Norton, 2004, p. 408).

insanity, and in Act IV she sings two songs, one about the dishonest nature of men's love ("Tomorrow is...") and the other about death ("How should I..."). Shakespeare's audience would have recognized both, as they were well known songs of the period.

**(d) John Dowland (1563-1626)**

The Elizabethan court was a magnet for musicians in England and a position in the Queen's Music was the dream of every player. One who was disappointed for many years was John Dowland (1563-1626), a composer and lutenist. He had become a Catholic in 1580 on a visit to Paris, and this may have stood against him when he applied to be a member of the Queen's Music in 1594. He finally achieved his wish in 1612, but he remained a somewhat sad and disappointed person to the end. However, his compositions continue to be played, for example his "Lachrimae Antiquae Pavan".

In summary, Elizabethan music was derived from Medieval times, when the primary social organization was the Church (Cathedrals, parish churches, monasteries, chantries, etc.). These were stronger than any political arrangement (King, etc.). Firstly, in the Churches, singing developed as a religious accompaniment to the Mass. Choirs of men and boys were trained and organs were built to provide the music. Secondly, during the Renaissance, secular music (songs, ballads, folksongs, etc.) began to have a greater place in social life – such music could express human emotions and feelings. Words and music were combined equally to give an emotional effect, especially with the use of portable instruments like the lute. Finally, music at the Royal Court had a great influence on what took place elsewhere. A lot depended on the enthusiasm of the Monarch, who might encourage or discourage the music of the Chapel Royal. The 15C – 17C was a high point in this regard, and many talented musicians and composers were attracted to London.

**(e) Henry Purcell (1659-1695): Triumphant Music**

With the execution of Charles 1 in 1649 Britain entered the period known as the Commonwealth, which meant that Cromwell and the Puritans (extreme Protestants) dominated the social and intellectual life. Both sacred and secular music suffered, though Cromwell himself liked music – he had a good voice and sang well – but without royal patronage the creative impetus was lost. Musicians were deprived of income, church organs were broken up, churches were desecrated. Music had to be local and if possible secret.

When King Charles II was “restored” in 1660 a whole new era began. Charles had been in France and had seen the court of Louis XIV, and now wanted his own court to be just as bright and happy. His reign, however, was not free from incident, for example the Great Plague of London in 1665 and the Great Fire of London in 1666. Despite these awful events, Charles set up a new Chapel Royal with an orchestra of strings, cathedral music was re-established, and court music was revived. For the Chapel Royal a new generation of choirboys was trained up, including the major musical figure of the era, Henry Purcell.

Purcell was a musical prodigy from the beginning. He came from a family of musicians and began composing songs from age eight. After singing in the Chapel Royal as a choirboy he became an assistant organist at Westminster Abbey, and in 1679 Organist there. His major compositions began from about 1676 with anthems and songs. These initially showed Purcell’s mastery of polyphonic music, but as Charles II enjoyed the string instruments new sounds began to be heard in the Chapel Royal.

The move away from Elizabethan music had begun, in part because Purcell himself was open to continental influences and styles, particularly Italian ones. For example, in his collection of sonatas (1683)<sup>4</sup> he writes to the “Ingenuous Reader”:

“I shall say but a very few things by way of Preface, concerning the following book, and its Author: for its Author, he has faithfully endeavour’d a just imitation of the most fam’d Italian Masters: principally to bring the Seriousness and gravity of that Sort of Musick into vogue, and reputation among our Countrymen, whose humor, ‘tis time now, should begin to loath the levity, and balladry of our neighbours”. (Fiske, Ed., pp. XI-XII)

Besides introducing a new Italian “violinistic” style into his sonatas and other instrumental compositions, Purcell also developed new forms, for example the “Ode”, which celebrated Saints’ Days, royal birthdays, arrivals and departures, and so forth. His famous *Hail, bright Cecelia* (1692) was written to celebrate St. Cecelia’s Day of that year. His opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), while not a “first” in the England of the time, is justly regarded as a small masterpiece. Purcell was fortunate in that he was composing at a time when new instruments were being developed. For example, Ruckers in Antwerp had developed the harpsichord, Stradivari in Italy had advanced the making of violins,

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4 Roger Fiske (Ed.), *Henry Purcell, Sonatas of Three Parts*. London: Ernst Eulenburg, 1974 (1683).

Harris in England had improved organs, and Silbermanns in Germany was creating both organs and clavichords.<sup>5</sup>

As a Baroque composer, Purcell also adhered to the following points: first, it was a time when harmony established itself as essential to music; second, both Purcell and Bach were masters of chaconne form, in which the theme is not a tune but a sequence of chords; third, variation in form was important because it involved the deliberate exploration of a theme's possibilities, for example in jigs and sonatas, as in his 12 violin sonatas of 1683 (see Fantasia #3 for three viols); fourth, he used the Baroque practice of holding an ensemble together by means of a keyboard accompaniment, which became especially important as the number of players increased; last, in Baroque times the orchestra as an organized body began to take shape.

Unfortunately for Purcell, King Charles died in 1685 and was succeeded by James II, who was a militant Catholic. James tried to re-establish Catholicism in England, but after just three years of disorder and riots he was forced to flee back to France. The joint monarchy of William and Mary now took over (1688~), and this compromise was a happy one for Purcell, and for the whole country. Queen Mary loved music and all the arts, even though her husband King William was more interested in military matters. However, from the time of the Queen's death in 1694 things began to go down for Purcell and he died a year later. Purcell's main influence was on the 20<sup>th</sup> century English composers of the "Revival" group: Gustav Holst, Benjamin Britten, and particularly Vaughan Williams.<sup>6</sup>

#### **(f) Handel (1685-1759): *The Messiah***

One question should be immediately answered: Was Handel English? The simple answer to this question is No! He was born in Halle, Saxony, in 1685, but went to London in 1710. He felt that London was ready for Italian-style opera, which was his main interest. Although he made a few visits back to Germany after 1710, he was really an Englishman from that time, and in 1727 became a naturalized English citizen. When he died in 1759 he was a national figure, and was buried in Westminster Abbey in front of a crowd of about 3,000 people.

Of all his famous works (the opera *Rinaldo*, *Water Music*, *Music for the Royal Fire-*

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5 Christopher Headington, *A History of Western Music* (pp. 121–140). London: Bodley Head, 1974.

6 Headington, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–140.

*works, etc.*) the work for which he is most famous in Britain is the oratorio *Messiah*. Written at the beginning of the 1740s in only 23 days, *Messiah* became one of the foundations of the English choral tradition, and has been the joy of generations of singers and audiences ever since. It has a very English combination of high seriousness and exuberance; the high seriousness being the Christian story of redemption, and the exuberance coming from Handel's enthusiasm for Italian opera.

The first performance of the *Messiah* was given in Dublin on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1742 in the "New Musick-Hall" in Fishamble Street. Handel had been invited by William Cavendish, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to give a series of oratorio concerts in Dublin for local charities. The prospect of a new audience and of getting away from the bickering and jealousies of London seem to have inspired him with fresh energy. He arrived in Dublin on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1741 and immediately revived several of his operas, gave many subscription concerts, and instantly became the talk of Dublin society. Some 700 people attended the first performance of the *Messiah* (and ladies were asked not to wear hoops, so that more could be seated in the hall) and it raised 400 pounds for the three charities it supported. When Mrs. Cibber, a singer and actress, sang *He was despised...* a Reverend Dr. Delaney rose from his seat and called out "Woman, for this, be all thy sins forgiven!" The *Messiah* was repeated on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, in what was to be Handel's last concert in Dublin.<sup>7</sup>

#### **(g) The English Musical Revival: Gilbert and Sullivan**

For 100 years after the death of Handel (1759) English music relied on overseas performers and composers. Visitors such as Clara Schumann (piano) and Joachim (violin) attracted large audiences, and Mendelssohn became the most popular composer. Opera – usually sung in Italian – was dominated by German or Italian pieces. In short, English music generally was in a poor state.

In 1867, however, a meeting between the composer Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) and the dramatist and librettist W. S. Gilbert (1836-1911) led to the beginnings of a revival in English music. Together they created a series of operettas which are still being performed by professional and amateur groups: *HMS Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), *Iolanthe* (1882), *The Mikado* (1885), and *The Gondoliers* (1889), all of which were performed at the Savoy Theatre in London (hence the generic name: "The

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Hogwood, *Handel*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1984.

Savoy Operas”).

The appeal of these operettas was that they provided the audience with a distinctively British mixture of gentle music and verbal satire, which was especially popular with the middle classes. Sullivan’s tunes and Gilbert’s clever words appealed (and still appeal) very strongly to the English taste. The stories are comic and all end in “happy” marriages – often with three or four of the main characters getting married. They were popular with British audiences from the beginning because the British have never taken to serious opera as other nations have.

The operettas take place in different locations (London, Venice, Japan, etc.), but they are all in fact satirical about British institutions (the police and law, the navy, army, the House of Lords, and others), and show up human failings such as pride, ambition, and so forth. Gilbert had a flawless ear for the rhymes and rhythms of English, and Sullivan (the son of an Irish bandmaster) could compose in any form, as required.

Sullivan’s skill can be heard particularly in *The Mikado* (1885), in which we can hear a madrigal, a sea shanty, a sentimental song, a military song, or sometimes several of these styles in just one song (e.g., *A Wandering Minstrel I*). As is known, the period from about 1880 to 1900 was one in which Europeans were fascinated with Japan. Travelers came to Japan and wrote about what they had seen; artists became interested in Japanese art; potters and workers in ceramics studied Imari-yaki, and so forth. Gilbert saw the potential for a Japanese-style comic opera, and created the libretto of *The Mikado*. Although Japanese people are seen in a comic way, the words and music have a catchy appeal, and this work remains one of the most popular of the Savoy Operas to this day. Musically, Sullivan’s music is related to Verdi, Handel, and Wagner. In short, Gilbert and Sullivan created “a new form of entertainment, precisely pitched between the music hall and the concert hall, which was intelligent but not intellectual, tasteful but not pretentious, tuneful but not cloying”.<sup>8</sup>

#### **(h) Edward Elgar (1857-1934): Enigmatic Man**

The next part of the English musical revival concerns the work of Edward Elgar. When we look at Elgar’s dates and think of the historical events that happened in those years, we can see that they include both the high point of the British Empire (for conven-

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8 David Cannadine, *In Churchill’s Shadow*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 211.



ience, let us say 1900), and the low of the post-war years (1918-) and the Depression (1929-). His music, and indeed his personal life, followed the contours of the times. Consequently, he is the author of some of the most strident imperialistic music on the one hand (e.g., his *Pomp and Circumstance march*, 1901), and some of the most agonizing and melancholy music on the other (e.g., his *Cello Concerto*, 1919). He is regarded as the most English of all the English composers. From early on people talked of the “sunset” quality in his work, or as a recent writer said, “a pastoral calm and confidence which is invaded by a shaft of sadness”.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this is where his Englishness lies!

The music for which Elgar is best known is his *Pomp and Circumstance March* (#1, 1901). This is played every year at the “Last Night of the Proms”, the biggest musical event of the British year, and with the title “Land of Hope and Glory” is often termed the British No. 2 National Anthem. Elgar himself called it “a tune that comes once in a lifetime”.

In addition to his marches, he is perhaps best remembered for his *Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma)* (1899), which consisted of 14 short pieces which were portraits of some of his friends. The most notable of these is the one he wrote for August Johannes Jaeger (1860-1909), a lifelong friend whom he called by many names, including Nimrod. This work was modeled on similar works by predecessors, one of whom was Brahms (e.g., *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*, Op. 56, 1873).

Elgar’s early musical development had been influenced by several major composers. One was Dvořák, who in 1884 visited the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester while Elgar played in the orchestra. Another, perhaps more lasting influence, was Brahms. Elgar had heard a lot of Brahms in Leipzig, in 1883, and he heard Brahms’ 2<sup>nd</sup> *Symphony* twice in 1889. Later, Elgar’s second lecture as Professor of Music at Birmingham University (on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1905), was devoted entirely to Brahms’ 3<sup>rd</sup> *Symphony*. His analysis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> mentioned “absolute music” – music with no program to it, and no “pictures” to be imagined, only music. Unsurprisingly, Elgar’s 1<sup>st</sup> *Symphony* (3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1908) was quickly compared to those of Brahms and Beethoven.

Elgar’s *Violin Concerto* (1909-10) followed a formal pattern, similar to those of the Russian Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936) and the German Max Reger (1873-1916), and carries on the idea of “developing variation” which Brahms had also used. In 1919 Elgar

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9 James Naughtie, *The Making of Music* (London: Murray, 2007), p. 234.

produced his most melancholy work, his Cello Concerto in E minor (Op. 85). This concerto reflects the sorrow of the First World War, and has been a challenge to all cellists since it was published.<sup>10</sup>

### **(i) The Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century – Music for the People**

The English musical revival that started with Gilbert & Sullivan and Edward Elgar in the 19<sup>th</sup> century continued with even greater strength in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here we shall continue this theme, looking at the work of Gustav Holst and his good friend Ralph Vaughan Williams. A third person of importance was Benjamin Britten, who will be mentioned more briefly.

The English musical revival that started with Gilbert and Sullivan and with Elgar was a distinctly middle-class affair. That is, it required an educated bourgeois sensibility in order to be fully appreciated. With Elgar it required an understanding of musical forms, instruments, and so on. With Gilbert and Sullivan, an appreciation of the satire in their operettas was greatly enhanced by an understanding of state institutions such as the Law, the Military, and so forth. But the revival took a different turn with Holst, Vaughan Williams, and Britten, in that all three drew much of their strength both from English folk melodies and from the English religious musical tradition. Further, all three were determined to spread music to all classes of people. This common approach can be seen in their founding of local musical events: Holst's Whitsun Festival in Thaxted in the 1910s; Vaughan Williams' Leith Hill festival in the 1930s; and Britten's Aldeburgh Festival from 1948 to the present day.<sup>11</sup>

### **(j) Gustav Holst (1874-1934): The Years in Thaxted**

Holst is a rather "different" English composer, having had from his early years a love of simple forms of music: folksong, church choirs, seaside bands (he played the trombone), school music (St. Paul's Girls' School, London), and Hindu poetry and music. Many of these enthusiasms he shared with his lifelong friend Ralph Vaughan Williams. He didn't enjoy wide fame until he was 45, and that was on account of *The Planets* (1919).

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10 J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *Elgar: An Extraordinary Life*. London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2007.

11 To this list may be added the name of Sir Michael Tippett (1905-1998), of whom it has been written that he was "an evangelist for original music – for example the transformation of folk song and church music" (Naughtie, *op cit.* p. 285).

The town of Thaxted, in Essex, about 60 kms. from London, was and still is a quiet place containing a Guildhall (c. 1450) and St John's Church (c. 1340). It was here that Holst came to live in 1914 with his wife and daughter Imogen.<sup>12</sup> At first, his daughter writes, the local people were suspicious of the Holst family, because their name was 'von Holst' which sounded foreign, even though Holst himself had been born in Cheltenham. Once these suspicions had been allayed, he was accepted fully into the town, and soon became involved with the church choir. In 1916 he organized a Whitsun Festival, which featured Bach Cantatas and Byrd's *Mass for Three Voices*, Thaxted was still the family home in 1924 when he had an illness, despite which he worked on his *Choral Symphony* (Leeds, 1925).

From time to time his good friend Ralph Vaughan Williams came down from London and the two had regular "field days" (as they called them) in the countryside near Thaxted. They shared an interest in the choral side of music, and both sought to incorporate local songs and ballad music into their works. Holst's *Choral Fantasia* (1930), the settings of many songs, attest to this fascination with choral music. Although the Holsts left Thaxted in 1925, he never lost touch with the town, and is gratefully remembered there to this day.

#### **(k) Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958): Folk and Church**

Ralph Vaughan Williams was the leading composer in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century renaissance of English music. He was directly inspired by English music of the past and English folk song (e.g., his arrangement of *Greensleeves*).

He studied at the Royal College of Music with Parry and Stanford, at Cambridge (1892-95) with Charles Wood, privately with Max Bruch in Berlin, and with Ravel in Paris. He loved the Bible and the English religious tradition, and in 1904 accepted an invitation to edit the *English Hymnal* (1906). This involved him in the area of religious music, in which he felt very at home despite being an agnostic himself. Next came his magnificent choral symphony, Symphony No. 1: *A Sea Symphony* (1910), based on a Walt Whitman poem from *Leaves of Grass* (1868). This was followed by *Five Mystical Songs* (1911), and

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12 In *Gustav Holst and Thaxted* (1974) Imogen Holst wrote: "The cottage dated from 1614: it had a thatched roof, and open fire-places, and a wonderful view across meadows and willow trees to the church spire in the distance... Here, in this quietness, my father...was able to work at *The Planets*".

then his *London Symphony* (1912). In 1953 he arranged the music for the Queen's Coronation, also known as *The Old Hundreth*.

As with his friend Gustav Holst, Vaughan Williams was connected with a musical festival, in his case the Leith Hill Musical Festival, held in Dorking, Surrey every April. He was the Festival Conductor from its inception in 1905 until 1953, and for many of the early years used to walk the 20 miles from his home to the Festival, and then back in the evening. The event is now one of the major choir festivals of the year, running over three days and attracting major choirs and youth choirs. Typical concerts include Handel's *Messiah* or Bach's *Passion* settings. Vaughan Williams' determination to bring music to the people has had long-lasting results. When he died in 1985 at the age of 85 he was mourned by countless ordinary music lovers whose lives he had touched as choral conductor, author, composer, and arranger of many of the nation's favorite hymns. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, next to Henry Purcell.

#### **(I) Benjamin Britten (1913-1976): The Outsider**

When Benjamin Britten and his companion Peter Pears (1910-1986) founded the Aldeburgh Festival in 1948 the idea of festivals to promote music for all classes of people became a traditional part of English musical life – as it still is. Not alone was it music for all, but it was typically music about all. That is, its subject matter drew on the lives of ordinary people. For example, Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* (1945) is about the fisherfolk of Aldeburgh, hardly a likely topic in traditional opera. Here Britten set a direction which he was to follow all his life: a fascination with the lesser-known and the outsiders of society. One large group of “outsiders” always fascinated him: children. With them in mind he composed *A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra: Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell* (1946), using Purcell's music for the Restoration play *Abdelazer, or The Moor's Revenge* (1695).

## Section 2: Czech Music

### Background

Regarding Czech music, the story begins with the religious reformer Jan Hus (c. 1372-1415), whose ideas on religion he shared with the English reformer John Wycliffe (c. 1330-1384). Hus also composed Protestant hymns in the Gregorian style. In addition to the Gregorian style, under Harant z Polžic a Bezdrůžic (1564-1621) and others, polyphony also developed in the Czech lands around the end of the sixteenth century.

Unfortunately for the Protestant group that revered the memory of Hus, the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620 was a loss from which they could not recover, and many left Prague for Vienna and other western cities. Vienna, in particular, was the city where musicians wanted to play and be seen. Bohemian musicians took with them new and fashionable ideas about music, for example the sonata form, earlier classical styles, the symphony, and so forth. In their absence, the Catholic musicians of Prague thrived, often adding rural Czech elements to their compositions.

Comenius, the last bishop of the Unity of Brethren, followed in Hus's footsteps by publishing a collection of 330 hymns (Amsterdam, 1659). Comenius' work did much to internationalize the music of the Czech lands. Although Comenius had to flee from his motherland, some composers stayed, for example Comenius' contemporary Michna.

The Baroque and Classical eras saw something of a revival in Prague, causing the music writer Charles Burney (1726-1814) to call 18<sup>th</sup> century Bohemia the "Conservatoire of Europe", following his visit to that region in 1772.<sup>13</sup> His comment was particularly true in the area of opera because Prague's first opera house (Nostitz Theatre) was opened in 1783 and it was the venue for Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) and *Don Giovanni* (1787). But while visiting maestros and the dignitaries that accompanied them were very welcome in Prague, the trained musicians of Bohemia and Moravia mostly departed for more lucrative appointments elsewhere in Europe. It was not until the Romantic period and the rise of nationalism that Czech composers began to emerge and establish the area as one of the most prolific musical locations in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Czech Republic. In Alison Latham (Ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

14 Alison Latham (Ed.), *op. cit.*

The twentieth century was a difficult time for Czech music, as well as for the intelligentsia and the artistic world generally. War across Europe, followed by the rise of Fascism and later the post-war “dead hand” of Socialism meant that musicians once again found greater reward in Western democracies than they could ever obtain at home. They also had greater freedom to compose in a Modern style than if they had remained under Socialism.

**(a) Jan Hus (c. 1372-1415): The First Reformer**

Although Jan Hus was a powerful reforming influence on the political and cultural life of the Czech people during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, he had inherited much from the “Golden Time” of Charles IV (ruler, later Holy Roman Emperor, 1346-1378), when Czech culture, architecture and music flourished. Among the musicians were the Bohemian theologian and composer Závěš ze Zap (1350-1410), who became a professor in Charles University in 1391. He is credited with the song *Alle Freude verlasst mich*, as well as with several Latin liturgical tropes and also *Kyrie Immense conditor*. This energetic period also produced Jan z Jenštejna (1350-1400), who was Archbishop of Prague from 1379 to 1396. He composed folk hymns. In general the music of this time was monodic, with little polyphony or other variation.

Jan Hus, sometime Rector of the University at Prague, is remembered, along with John Wycliffe, as one of the founders of Protestantism. In religion he stressed the doctrine of predestination; in politics he became the focus of Czech resentment against the German hierarchy; and in music he is associated with “a number of Latin and Czech hymns” in the Gregorian style.<sup>15</sup> There seems to be evidence that he arranged hymns for his followers, the Bohemian Brethern, in particular the medieval melody *Jesu Kriste, štědrý kněže* (‘Jesus Christ, thou bountiful prince’). Further, some of his work is believed to have been included in the collection of Protestant hymns that were published (1501) in the vernacular by a later generation of Brethern. Hus’s contribution to church music is therefore best seen as indirect (see Appendix 2, “A Hussite War Hymn”, 1419). The Hussite reformation, which placed the choral singing of hymns at its centre, established a new dimension in Protestant worship. From this point Protestant church music moved ahead with Luther, and the first Lutheran hymnbook (Wittenberg, 1524). Much later, the

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15 Hus, Jan, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Macmillan, 1980).

idea of chorales was taken up by Bach, who introduced them into his church cantatas and settings of the Passion.<sup>16</sup> Currently music plays an enormous part in Christian services, whether Catholic or Protestant.

**(b) Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius, 1592-1670): The Pedagogue<sup>17</sup>**

Comenius is another who might be said to have had an indirect effect on Czech music. Famous for his pedagogical writings, he was nevertheless active in many other matters, including the Brethern's church services. These services involved a considerable amount of hymn-singing, and had done so since well before Comenius's birth.<sup>18</sup> Congregations of the Brethern sang under a choirmaster, using a collection of hymns that had first been put together in 1501. By Comenius's time this book was in its 10<sup>th</sup> edition. In 1624 he published in Amsterdam a Hymnal which contained 743 hymns and psalms, many of which are still in use today. Later in his life he himself wrote a number of hymns for a 1669 collection of hymns, and he may also have composed the music for some of them.

In his educational writings Comenius advocated the use of music in schools from the second year onwards. "External music begins to delight children in their second year, such as singing, rattling and striking musical instruments. They should be indulged in it so that their minds may be soothed by concord and harmony".<sup>19</sup> Well-known melodies should be learned by heart, as well as the words of hymns and psalms (see Appendix 3, "Lullaby"). When children reach a higher level ("The Class of Philosophy") they should become skilled in musical instruments. In short, we can therefore regard Comenius as one who, like Hus, forwarded the cause of choral music in the religious and scholastic contexts in which he moved and over which he had influence.

An interesting contemporary of Comenius was the Jesuit-trained Adam Michna (c. 1600-1676). He did not emigrate, but used his advanced technical skills to compose settings for Latin hymns and psalms using soloists, strings and organ. He also composed simple Czech hymns, as well as pieces for the lute (*Loutna česká*) which are still popular.

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16 Latham (Ed.), *op. cit.*, entry under 'Hymn'.

17 Komenský is the correct version of his name; "Comenius" is the Latin version, but used commonly in English.

18 See J. E. Sadler, *J. A. Comenius and the Concept of Universal Education* (London, 1966, p. 89). From as early as 1570 the Brethern's hymn-singing had attracted praise.

19 In Sadler, *op. cit.*, p. 217.



He apparently made a fortune from his wine business and with it set up a fund for young musicians.

**(c) Baroque Music in the Czech Lands**

The Baroque period in Czech music featured a number of prominent composers, many of whom had a teacher-pupil relationship: first came Bohuslav Černohorský (1684-1742) who was called the “father of Bohemian music,” and founder of the Czech organ school. His pupil Josef Seger (1716-1782) followed him, with compositions that were admired by J. S. Bach, particularly his fugues for piano and organ. In turn Seger’s pupil Josef Mysliveček (1737-1781) became the most prominent Czech composer of his generation. However, Mysliveček did not do his composing in Bohemia but in Italy, which attracted many Czech musicians and composers who found difficulty in making a living at home.

**(d) Rococo and Classical Music: The Story of the Émigrés**

In Italy Mysliveček settled in the congenial atmosphere of Bologna, where he composed many operas, symphonies, and so forth, and even took on the young Mozart as his pupil in 1770. He gave Mozart the basics of the Vienna Classical School, with the result that an element of the Bohemian spirit can still be detected in Mozart’s music.

As a “divine Bohemian” in Italy, Mysliveček was part of a more widespread musical migration from the Czech lands. Outstanding names in this migration include several generations of the Stamitz family, who went to Mannheim where they raised the musical standards in the Mannheim School there, especially regarding the sonata form of the concerto and symphony. Another important name was František Václav Míča (1694-1744), who had pioneered the sonata form and brought it to the Mannheim School. The Benda family of musicians, active throughout the eighteenth century, moved from Bohemia to Berlin where they found greater success than they might have had at home.

Another émigré was the composer and virtuoso pianist J. L. Dusík (1760-1812), who made a habit of visiting various European countries. In Paris he performed for Marie Antionette. He spent the years 1789-1799 in London, where he appeared in performances with Haydn. It could be said of him that he opened up the Romantic element in European music, and his performing style with the piano sideways on the stage is still used today.



Jírovec Vojtěch (1763-1850), like Dusík, traveled to London and Paris, finally coming back to Vienna as a conductor at the Court Theatre. He composed about 60 symphonies and was the originator of the classical Bohemian symphony. He was a good friend of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

Vienna, to which a number of Czech musicians gravitated, was home to the pianist and teacher Karl Czerny ((1791-1857), whose father was from Bohemia. Czerny was both a pupil and friend of Beethoven, and also taught Beethoven's nephew Karl and the nine-year-old Liszt.

One composer and teacher who did not become an émigré was Jakub Jan Ryba (1765-1815). Apart from his musical output, which included symphonies, concertos and chamber and vocal music, he was a teacher and the author of a major text on music.<sup>20</sup> His *Czech Christmas Mass "Hey, Master!"* is still popular in Bohemia at Christmastime. He notably favored the Czech language – rather than German – in his songs and compositions. However, his revolutionary ideas about education were not easily accepted by his superiors, and in general his life was an unhappy one, leading him to commit suicide at the age of 50.

#### **(e) The 19<sup>th</sup> Century – Romanticism and Nationalism**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Prague had experienced fluctuating fortunes as a musical centre. Its successes included the building of the first genuine opera house (1783), and the premieres of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *La Clemenzia de Tito* (1791). Beethoven had visited in 1796. Opera, mostly in translation, had been seen, and the collecting of folk music was progressing. However, Prague had become a place for talented composers and performers to visit, but for local musicians to leave. Now, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the growth of Nationalism, fired by the Romantic outlook that swept across all of Europe from around 1800, began to be felt strongly. The feeling developed among Czech people that their national culture (as opposed to Austrian culture) should be a source of pride. This led to a powerful resurgence in the musical world.

#### **(f) Smetana: The Creator of Czech National Music**

However, it was the powerful duo of Smetana (1824-1884), Dvořák (1841-1904),

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20 *The First and General Principles of the Entire Art of Music* (1817).

together with the lesser names of Janáček, Suk, and Martinů that finally placed Czech music on the international stage. Smetana's *Má Vlast* (1874-79) is perhaps the most nationalistic music of the century, though Elgar's compositions (see above) are also in that category. *Má Vlast* (My country) is a cycle of six symphonic poems with the titles *Vyšehrad* (The High Citadel), *Vltava* (River Moldau), *Šárka* (Leader of the Bohemian Amazons), *Z českých Luhů a Hájů* (From Bohemia's Meadows and Forests), *Tábor* (stronghold of the Hussites, a town in south Bohemia), and *Blaník* (Valhalla of the Hussite heroes, a mountain in south Bohemia). Smetana was here expressing his love for the folk tales, the scenery, the history and the culture of the Czech people.<sup>21</sup> His aim, in fact, was the revival of the national consciousness. A confirmation of his success in achieving this aim came in 1881 when the National Theatre was opened: the opera chosen for the inauguration ceremony was Smetana's *Libuše*, about the founding goddess of the Czech lands.

#### (g) Dvořák: Enhancing the National Art

In 1866 Smetana had produced the most successful opera ever to emerge from Bohemia, *Prodaná nevěsta* ('The Bartered Bride'). Dvořák's *Rusalka* (Prague, 1901) is generally regarded as a fine successor.<sup>22</sup> The libretto for *Rusalka* was by Jaroslav Kvapil (1868-1950), a noted poet. Kvapil drew on the mythological stories about Rusalki, who were water sprites who inhabited lakes and rivers, and drew men and children to their deaths. Sometimes they fell in love with their victims, and it is a version of this idea that Kvapil used for what became Dvořák's *Rusalka*. Here, Rusalka yearns to become mortal and is allowed to, but on condition that she will lose the power of speech. A prince falls in love with her, but at the end of the story she must return to her habitation in the water. Rusalka's *Song to the Moon*, asking the moon to tell the Prince about her love, is the opera's most famous aria.

In 1892 Dvořák was invited to New York, where he became Director of the National Conservatory, staying there until 1895. While in America his experiences were broadened, and he completed his *From the New World* symphony in 1893. In 1896 the new Rudolfini (now Dvořák Hall) was opened with this symphony, conducted by Dvořák

21 A saying attributed to Smetana goes: "Language is a word of thinking: music is a word of feeling".

22 See Kurt Honolka, *Dvořák*, London: Haus Publishing, 2004.

himself with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.

On a holiday in Iowa he composed his String Quartet in F major (*America*), and a Sonatina in G major for his children as a Christmas present, together with a number of other works.<sup>23</sup> These compositions reflected an American consciousness, including native American themes and black spirituals. However, this consciousness generated later controversy over the relative merits of Smetana and Dvořák, with severe criticism coming from Zdeněk Nejedlý, later a prominent communist and Minister of Culture.<sup>24</sup> The operas of both Smetana and Dvořák made use of Czech literature and language – rather than Italian or German. Consequently, their melodies reflected the articulation and intonation of the Czech language.

#### **(h) Janáček: Music and Speech Melody**

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) lived much of his life in Moravia, with just brief visits to Prague, Leipzig and Vienna to study. He founded and became the first director of the Brno Organ School in 1881. He began to collect Moravian folksongs from 1885 onwards, emulating Musorgsky, who aimed at realism and orientalism in his musical style. Janáček indeed became known as “Musorgsky in Bohemia”. All this preparation bore fruit in 1904 with his opera *Jenůfa*, a passionate tale of love and jealousy set in a Moravian village. This opera was revised and the new version had its premiere in Prague (1916), establishing his reputation. From this time onwards, and for about 12 years, he composed prolifically, his muse being a woman 38 years younger, Kamila Stösslová. She inspired several of his operas and works, particularly *Kát'a Kabanová* (1921). His music has strong individuality and character, and his operas display his dramatic interest in the bizarre and unusual. For example, many oriental elements can be noted throughout his works. Further, Tolstoy's short story “The Kreutzer Sonata” is known to have influenced the first of his string quartets (1923), while his own Intimate Letters (to Kamila) influenced the second (1928). In his later years speech melody superseded tonality, and tended towards unconventional sounding – sometimes called “affective vibration”.

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<sup>23</sup> See Honolka, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> Apparently when he was young Zdeněk Nejedlý wanted to marry Dvořák's daughter, but was refused and bore a grudge against the composer for many years.

**(i) Suk and Martinů: Followers of Dvořák**

However, Dvořák remained the main influence at this time. Josef Suk (1874-1935), the Czech violinist and composer, studied composition with Dvořák at the Prague Conservatory, and in 1898 married his daughter Otilie. Suk wrote the symphony *Asrael* (1906) to commemorate Dvořák's death, and from 1922 also taught at the Prague Conservatory. His music is both traditional and Romantic, and yet is close to the Impressionism of Debussy. In addition, he got some Modern influence from Stravinsky.

One of Suk's pupils at the Conservatory was Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959), though he did not complete his studies there. Instead he went to Paris, where he found the 1920s modernism very congenial. In 1941 he moved to America, as many other Jews did. He admired and respected Dvořák, and in his compositions he used traditional Czech themes. However, his work is eclectic in style, strongly influenced by Debussy, Stravinsky, jazz, and surprisingly, English madrigals. Prolific in every genre, he composed over 400 separate works during his lifetime, many for the piano or small chamber groups. His operas *Julietta* (1935) and *The Greek Passion* (1958, with Nikos Kazantzakis) have been described as "masterpieces".

**(j) Czech Music: A Summary**

The richness of the music produced across seven centuries in the area now known as The Czech Republic is remarkable. At the very centre of Europe, this region has been subject to religious wars and invasions from outside, to political domination and civil unrest, to poverty and magnificence, to unwanted immigration and sometimes unwanted emigration. Yet the concert halls of the world are alive with the music that was created there. The names mentioned above, together with others which space does not allow us to cover, are now international currency, celebrated in places which lie far away from the Czech lands themselves. Almost all drew on folk elements in their works, as well as on local features of the landscape of Moravia and Bohemia.

Prague, nowadays a popular tourist destination, is famous also for the musical buildings and institutions that make it a prime musical venue. The city saw the establishment of its Conservatory in 1811, and its Organ School in 1830; the Charles University began to offer music courses in both Czech and German; music societies were formed (e.g., the Czech Quartet in 1891, the Czech Chamber Music Society, 1894; the Czech Philharmonic, 1895, and so forth). Choral singing became a feature of national life. In

short, Prague lives for music and is largely sustained by it. Its musicians look fondly back on a remarkable tradition of famous names, and look forward to a vibrant and sustainable future.

### **Conclusion: English and Czech Music: Two Rich Traditions**

Inevitably the two traditions that we have described here have some features in common and other features not in common. In historical terms both traversed the same road that led out of Medieval times, through Reformation and Renaissance times, through the Enlightenment and Romantic times, and now what we like to call Modern times. Both countries started with forms of chant, as befitted people for whom the Catholic Church was a birth-to-death institution. Church music then expanded in both places – Comenius with choral singing in church, and Purcell with Anthems. In the eighteenth century Handel developed the oratorio in England, while Černohorský and the composers who followed him developed their own forms of Baroque music. For almost 100 years after Handel's death in 1759 there was no very strong musical force in England, and likewise in the Czech area there was only the sound of departing musicians.

The nineteenth century, perhaps the most vigorous in European history, saw the rapid growth of Romantic and Nationalistic music in both countries. Such figures as Smetana on the one hand, and Elgar on the other, created music that touched patriotic feelings, whether it drew on nature and culture, or on the marching of soldiers. In both countries there was a flowering of musical energy which carried over into the twentieth century.

Turning to differences, we have seen that the great composers in the Czech tradition – Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, Suk, and Martinů – were from the start keen to draw on folk music and traditions. In England that idea took longer to develop, but in Williams, Holst, Britten and others it appeared in the first half of the twentieth century. However, these English composers also drew strongly on the traditional religious music of England, with many, like Williams, seeing themselves as heirs to a specifically religio-musical line of composers, starting with Purcell. The Czech composers were, perhaps, more concerned with being heirs to a secular-patriotic musical tradition, that had its roots deep in Bohemian and Moravian folk life.

## Appendix 1

### Music Played or Discussed During the Lectures

#### Lecture 1: Elizabethan and Czech Revolutionary Music

William Byrd: *Haec Dies; Ave Verum Corpus; Magnificat; Vigilate.*

Of uncertain origin: *Greensleeves* (played by Harimochi Kazuro, guitar, Nakaune Minori, violin, and Kihara Misako, violin)

Morley: *It was a lover and his lass*

Byrd: *Tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day*

Byrd: *Walshingham*

Dowland: *Lachrimae Antiquae Pavan* (played by Harimochi Kazuro, guitar)

Of uncertain origin: *A Hussite War Hymn* (c. 1419) (played by Nakaune Minori, piano)

Smetana: *Tábor* and *Blaník* (from *Má Vlast*)

#### Lecture 2: Henry Purcell and Comenius

Purcell: *Come All ye Songsters, Music for a While, Sweeter Than Roses, To Celebrate This Triumphant Day.*

Purcell: *Abdelazer Overture* (B. Britten, conductor)

Purcell: *Sonata No. 1 for 2 violins and Basso Continuo* (played by Nakaune Minori, violin, and Kihara Misako, violin)

Comenius: *Viva Comenius* (a tribute to Comenius at the Uffizi Gallery, Firenze, a musical talk with guitar)

#### Lecture 3: Handel's *Messiah* and Czech Baroque

Handel: *I Know That my Redeemer Liveth, Hallelujah Chorus.*

J. C. Bach: *The Yellow Haired Laddie*

Seger: *Parthia in F major for Harpsichord*

## **Lecture 4: English Folk Music & Czech Classical Works**

*Early One Morning, The Ash Grove, Bluebells of Scotland.*

*Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms* (played by Kusunoki Sakai, piano)

*Danny Boy* (played by Nakaune Minori, violin)

Mysliveček: *Violin Concerto in C major* (Nakaune Minori, piano, and Kihara Misako, violin)

Stamitz: *Concerto for Violin and Viola in D Major*

Dusík: *Piano Sonata in F minor "Invocation"* Op. 77

## **Lecture 5: Czech Nationalism and the English Musical Revival (1)**

Smetana: *Vltava*, from *Má Vlast*.

Dvořák: *String Quartet in F Major "America"* (played by Nakaune Minori, Hatamoto Kazuko, Miwa Yoshiaki, Hatamoto Nobuo)

Sullivan: *The Mikado* (scenes from the operetta)

Elgar: *Enigma Variation #9 – Nimrod, Cello Concerto – Final movement, Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1: Land of Hope and Glory*

## **Lecture 6: 20<sup>th</sup> century Czech Music and the English Musical Revival (2)**

Holst: *Jupiter*, from *The Planets*

Vaughan Williams: *Sea Symphony, Lullaby, Coronation Hymn*

Britten: *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra (Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell)*

Janáček: *String Quartet No. 1 "Kreutzer Sonata,"* and *Violin Sonata*

Suk: *Appassionata* from *Four Pieces*

Martinů: *Five Madrigal Stanzas*

## Appendix 2

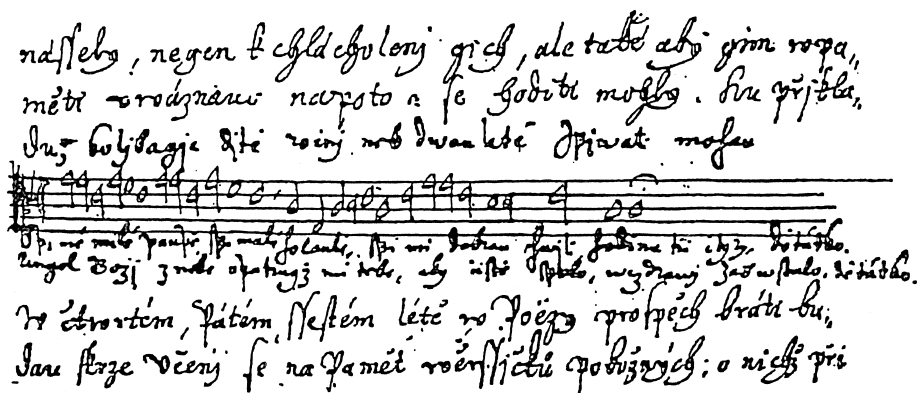
## Jan Hus: A Hussite War Hymn (1419)



2. A HUSSITE WAR HYMN, c. 1419

## Appendix 3

## Comenius: Lullaby



*Dětská ukolébavka vepsaná vlastní rukou Komenského do rukopisu  
Informatoria školy mateřské.*