

Otakar Ševčík Opus 10: Seven Czech Dances for the Violin

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1. Introduction

Around 1874 the Czech virtuoso and pedagogue Otakar Ševčík (1852-1934) adapted seven dances for the violin. His sources were mainly Czech folksongs, and in turning to folksongs for inspiration he was following the nineteenth century Romantic tradition of seeking out folk or historical sources rather than classical ones. His aim was to make them accessible not only to violin practitioners like himself, but also to more general teachers in the schools, who usually found the portable violin more convenient than the cumbersome piano.

Folk music had strength and appeal which musicians like Ševčík appreciated. This appeal is well captured by Rosa Newmarch:

The poetic basis of popular song is much the same in every country: patriotism, love and courtship, revelry, the procession of the seasons, Nature in its varying aspects – these are the subjects common to all folk-songs; but their emotional character is influenced by the history of each individual country.¹

The folksongs which Ševčík collected and turned into his seven dances were part of the Czech tradition. They were felt to be part of the national heritage, as well as being musically very interesting:

The folk music of Bohemia and Moravia began to be collected systematically in the 19th century. Bohemian and western Moravian folksong tended towards a

1 Rosa Newmarch, *The Music of Czechoslovakia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 36.

regularity of metre and a simplicity of melodic outline based on the triad. In contrast, the folksong of the eastern parts of Moravia, remote from German and Austrian influence, is often more rhapsodic, the melody characterized by resonant open intervals, sharpened 4ths, and flattened 7ths with irregular metres and snapped rhythms common to Slovakian and Hungarian folk music. Violins and clarinets were used in instrumental combinations in all areas, with the bagpipe (ubiquitous since the Middle Ages) prevalent in Bohemia, and the double bass and dulcimer in Moravia. Of the rich repertory of folk dances the *furiant*, with its characteristic hemiola rhythm, appears most frequently in art music though the *sousedská* (a ländler type) was also common. Though not of folk origin the polka became a favourite duple-time dance in both popular and sophisticated society and best typifies the mobility of the folk element in music-making.²

Ševčík went to Kiev in 1875 and stayed there until 1892.³ Not a lot is known about his time there – except that his eyes gave him constant trouble – or about life in Kiev at that time – except that it was Russian dominated. In Kiev he met other Czech musicians, and from time to time used to return to his homeland in south Bohemia. Possibly living in Kiev helped him to appreciate the Czech musical heritage.

One result of his eye problems was that he had to curtail his public performances. This left him time to attend to his writing and to collecting materials such as the seven dances being discussed here. In these seven dances it is possible to discern the influence of Ferdinand Laub (1832-1875), the concert violinist and Moscow Conservatory professor so highly admired by Tchaikovsky. In his younger years Ševčík had heard Laub play and had been highly impressed by the virtuosity. More importantly he admired and used to play Laub's compositions, many of which contained nationalistic themes. Ševčík's nostalgic memory of his homeland is reflected in these seven dances, and they are fantasies and variations on the basic form. The dances themselves contain a significant degree of technical difficulty – approaching the level established by Paganini – and are challenging for all players. Consequently, the material requires the kind of training that Ševčík him-

2 Alison Latham (Ed.), "Czech Republic: 3. Bohemia and Moravia: Romanticism and nationalism". In *The Oxford Companion to Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 336.

3 For a full account see Minori Nakaune, "Otakar Ševčík: The Enduring Legacy". Hiroshima Shudo University, *Studies in the Humanities and Sciences*, 46(1), 190–129. September, 2005.

self gave in his published work, for example Opp. 1, 2, and 3.⁴

In this paper I shall give a description of each of the seven dances in order, paying particular attention to the music and words, and to Ševčík's description of the technique to be used in the performance of each piece. A brief account of an actual performance will also be given. Finally I shall indicate how Ševčík's seven dances are part of Czech musical history, and as such are worthy of being more widely known.

2. Description of the Seven Czech Dances and Songs

The first of the seven Czech dances is called *Holka Modrooká* (The Girl with Blue Eyes). In this still-popular Czech song, the words at first seem to be directed to a child, but may also be seen as a love song.

An English translation gives the general idea:

1. The Girl with Blue Eyes

You, blue-eyed girl,
Do not sit by the brook.
You, blue-eyed girl,
Do not sit there.
There is deep water in the brook;
It could take you away, great pity.
Blue-eyed girl,
Do not sit there.

4 See Minori Nakaune, "Ottakar Ševčík's Opus 1: The Basis of Modern Violin Pedagogy". Hiroshima Shudo University, *Studies in the Humanities and Sciences* 47(2), pp. 1–34. Feb. 2007. Also, Minori Nakaune, "Ottakar Ševčík's Opus 2 and Opus 3: The School of Bowing Technique". Hiroshima Shudo University, *Studies in the Humanities and Sciences* 48(2), pp. 109–145. Feb. 2008.

HOLKA MODROOKÁ

Mírně rychle Česki

Hol - ka mo-dro - o - ká, ne - se - dá - vej u po - to - ka,
 hol - ka mo-dro - o - ká, ne - se - dá - vej tam:
 v po - to - ce je vel - ká vo - da, vez-me - li tě, bu - de ško - da,
 hol - ka mo-dro - o - ká, ne - se - dá - vej tam!

The second song, also a Bohemian love song, is called *Když Jsem k Vám Chodíval* (When I Used to Visit You):

2. When I Used to Visit You

When I used to visit you,
 Passing through these forests,
 Ah! Oh! across these forests,
 You were, my darling, much more cheerful,
 Ah! Oh! more cheerful.
 But now you are a pale girl,
 Ah! Oh! a pale girl,
 Maybe your heart does not allow you to sleep,
 Ah! Oh! does not allow you to sleep.

KDYŽ JSEM K VÁM CHODÍVAL

Hybně Česki

Když jsem k vám cho - dí - val přes ty le - sy, ach,
bý - va - laš, má mi - lá, ve - se - lej - ší, ach,
D'

ou - vej! přes ty le - sy, a - le ted' jsi,
ou - vej! ve - se - lej - ší:
G'

hol - ka, ble - dá, snad se ti sr - deč - ko
D'

vy - spat ne - dá, ach, ou - vej! vy - spat ne - dá,
D' G' D' G'

The third dance is called *Bez Názu* (Untitled). It has no words and is not a Czech national song. It is likely that Ševčík composed this one.

The fourth song is called *Sil Jsem Proso* (I Sowed the Millet). It is also a Bohemian love song:

4. I Sowed the Millet

I sowed the millet in a field,
But I shall not reap it.
I loved one girl,
But I shall not have her.
To sow, not to reap,
To love, not to marry.
I sowed, but I did not reap,
I loved, but I did not marry.

SIL JSEM PROSO

Živě Česká

Sil jsem pro-so na sou-vra-ti, ne-bu-du ho žl - ti,
 mi - lo - val jsem jed-no děv-če, ne-bu-du ho ml - ti.

Sí - ti ne-žl - ti, mi-lo-va-ti ne - vzl - ti,

sil jsem, ne - žal jsem, mi - lo - val jsem, ne-vzal jsem.

The fifth is called *Břetislav*, which is still a popular social song recounting a well-known historical story:

5. Břetislav

Když mě-sí-ček spa-ní-le svi - til, vě-vo-da Břetislav vstal...

While the moon was shining beautifully, the Prince was up...

Only this fragment of the story remains. The historical account is that Prince Břetislav I (known as the Czech Achilles) ruled the Czech lands from 1034 to 1055. As a young man, he had fallen in love with a girl called Jitka (Judith in English) who was living in a convent. One night while the moon was shining he came to the convent on horseback and snatched her away. They were married in 1021 and their sons, particularly Vratislav II, maintained the Přemyslid dynasty in Moravia and Bohemia.⁵

The sixth song is called *Furiant* (Furiant). There are two parts to this song, *Sedlák* (Farmer), and *Poštovský Pan* (Postman), with the second one being the more popular of the two.⁶

5 Petr Čornej and Jiří Pokorný, *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2004*, Prague: Práh Press, 2003.

6 I heard the song *Sedlák* sung by Mrs. Květa Soukupová (89) and Mrs. Milena Deulová (90) on 21st September, 2008, in Prague.

6. Furiant

(1) Farmer

Farmer, farmer, farmer, once more,
Farmer, farmer, farmer is a big man.
He wears a belt around his belly,
And a tulip on his fur coat, on his fur coat.

SEDLÁK.

Se-d-lák, se-d-lák, se-d-lák, je-ště je-dno,
se-d-lák, se-d-lák, se-d-lák, je vel-ký pán.
O-n má pás na bři-še, a na své-m ko-ži-še,
a na své-m ko-ži-še, má tu-li — pán.

(2) Postman

The postman's coach is coming,
The postman is coming.
He's wearing trumpets on his front,
And little bells on his back.
He's coming from Rokycany.

POŠTOVSKÝ PÁN.

Je-de, je-de, poš-tovs-ký pa-ná-ček,
je-de, je-de, poš-tovs-ký pán.
Vpře-du má tru-bič-ky, vza-du má rol-níč-ky,
je-de, je-de, od Ro-ky-can.

The seventh song, called *Andulko, mé dítě* (Andulka, my Child) is another popular Bohemian love song:

7. Andulka, My Child

Andulka, my child, I like you!

Andulka, my child, I love you!

But people don't want me to follow you,

Nor do they want me to visit you.

Andulko, mé dítě. Z Čech

Andante. *p*

1. An - dul - ko, mé dí - tě; vy se mi lí - bí
2. Truc na truc ně - ko - mu do va - šo -

Andante. *p*

1. lí - bí - te, An - dul - ko, mé dí - tě, já vás mám rád!
2. ho - do - mu, truc na truc ně - ko - mu do va - šich vrat.

Piu vivo. *mf*

1. E - a - ní mi to lí - dí ne - pře - jou, že cho - dí - m za te - bou, a - ní mi to lí - dí
2. E - a - ní mi to lí - dí ne - pře - jou, že cho - dí - m za te - bou, a - ní mi to lí - dí

Piu vivo. *mf*

ne - pře - jou, že cho - dí - m kvám.

3. The Musical Technique

In this section I shall examine the musical technique of each of the above dances. In general, the music may be compared, in places, with Paganini's *Caprice* (Op. 1), which was very familiar to Ševčík from his playing days.

(a) *The Girl with Blue Eyes* (in E major)

This dance starts like a polka in double time. It then progresses to a secondary theme which is melodic and sentimental in character. This is followed by a reprise of the first (polka-like) theme, but even more lively and in a minor key. The ending increases the pace to a frenetic tempo, with rapid scales and arpeggios.

Regarding the left hand, at first the performer should practise the double-stopping scale (third, sixth, octave, tenth, and harmonics). The exercises for this are in Ševčík's Op. 1 (part 4). The shifting (see his Op. 1, part 3) should be done smoothly, to achieve an even tone in the arpeggios, of which there are many. At the tremolo the left arm

I. Holka modrooká.

Otakar Ševčík, Op. 10.

VIOLINE.

Ossia: *arco* *pizz.* *pizz.*

Allegro. M. M. ♩ = 126.

Vivace. 22

pizz. *du talon*

should be relaxed as for a trill, that is, not tensed.

Regarding the right hand, the position of the elbow is important. The elbow position should be carefully planned to cope with the crossing strings during the spiccato and slurred passages (see Ševčík's Op. 2 and Op. 3).

The introductory bars are shown on p. 201.

(b) *When I Used to Visit You* (in G major)

Originally in 3/4 time (a kind of *sousedská*), this dance was changed by Ševčík to 6/8 time, which he probably considered more expressive. Possibly he had in mind the 3rd movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, also in 6/8 time, which he had played himself and had heard Laub play. The piece starts out sonorously, followed by an elegant theme. This elegant theme – rather like a waltz or minuet – contains expressive variations, some of which need to be played energetically like a mazurka. Other parts make use of hemiola passages, which convey an active mood. The ending builds to an energetic climax, again utilizing hemiola passages, plus Scottish “skipping” rhythms, and pizzicato with right-hand sforzando.

This piece requires double stopping (third, sixth, octave, and harmonics) and arpeggio. The right hand requires spiccato, slurred staccato, and flying staccato.

II.

VIOLINE.

Otakar Ševčík, Op. 10.

(c) *Untitled* (F# minor)

The third dance follows the standard arrangement regarding the tune, starting in F# minor with the first theme and changing into the key of D major for its second theme. The second section starts in C# minor (the same as in the first theme) and then moves to its finale in F# major (the same as in the second theme). The dance is of the type called *Skočná*, that is, in 2/4 time and containing rapid jumps. The ending has triads (*vrtěná*, that is, revolving dance steps).

Before playing this piece, the performer should prepare by working on double stopping (third, sixth, and octave). The right hand needs spiccato, and slurred staccato not only with up bow but also with down bow.

III.

VIOLINE.

Otakar Ševčík, Op. 10.

Allegro. $\text{♩} = 128.$

IV^a Corda

II^a

mf spiccato

f

II^a

mf II^a

(d) *I Sowed the Millet* (in G major)

This is the most difficult to play of all the seven dances. Its polka-like structure has not only three variations but also a melody with *dumka* ("A type of Slavonic folk ballad, Ukrainian in orig., in which elegiac and fast tempi alternate."⁷). The first passage of the *dumka* is slow and melancholic, the second quicker, more joyful, and also more technical.

The introduction is similar to a *sousedská*, and its expression is *allegretto scherzando*. It has a simple theme – though difficult to play because the left hand must play the chromatic scale downwards (glissando) with *sautillé*. At the first variation there is double stopping (third, sixth, octave) and sixth chromatic scale downwards (glissando) with *ricochet*. Also, the player must deal with octave chromatic scale downwards (glissando) with slur. At the second variation there are artificial double harmonics (see Ševčík's Op. 1, part 4, No. 23). In the third variation there is *pizzicato* with the left hand (+) (see Ševčík's Op. 1, part 4, Nos. 19 & 20). The ending – following the *dumka* mentioned above – is like a coda, and includes double stopping (third, sixth, octave and tenth), and chords of three notes and four notes.

IV. Fantasie.

VIOLINE.

Otakar Ševčík, Op. 10.

Allegretto. ♩ = 112.

Tema.

Allegro moderato. ♩ = 124.

f 43 = 33 Corda

7 Michael Kennedy (Ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

(e) *Břetislav* (in E minor)

The structure here is ternary form, that is A (E minor) –B (C major) -A (E minor)). The first section contains the melodic lines of the story, and becomes recitativo (cadenza). The middle section, in C major, presents the performer with challenging technical phrases. The ending reprises the story melody, but very calmly, using mute.

In the middle part the performer must use double stopping (third, sixth, octave), and arpeggio. For the right hand, spiccato, flying staccato and slurred staccato must be used.

V. Břetislav.

VIOLINE.

Otakar Ševčík. Op. 10.

The musical score is for a violin piece in E minor, 9/8 time. It is divided into five staves. The first staff starts with a 9-measure rest, followed by a 'Recit.' section. The second staff has a 'f' dynamic and a 'sul G' instruction. The third staff includes a 'dolcissimo' section with a 'p' dynamic. The fourth staff is marked 'IIIa' and the fifth staff includes 'rit.' and 'pizz.' markings. The score contains various technical markings such as double stops, arpeggios, and slurs.

(f) *Furiant* (in G major)

A *furiant* has been described as “a quick, exhilarating Bohemian folk dance characterized by the alternation of 3/4 and 2/4 time”.⁸ Ševčík’s version alternates two bars in triple-time (e.g., 3/2) followed by two in 3/4. He employs *furiant* sections twice in this piece, once at the beginning and once again at the end, while the middle section has a waltz- or scherzoso-like quality (e.g., A-B-A). At the coda he gives a more sensitive ending by using an altered chord.

The performer needs good double stopping (third, and octave chromatic upwards) with the left hand, and with the right should be able to cope with slurred staccato.

VI. Furiant.

Otákar Ševčík, Op. 10.

VIOLINE.

Vivace.

8 Alison Latham (Ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

(g) *Andulka, my Child* (in G major)

This pretty dance is a type of *sousedská*, with five alternating *Andante* and *Vivace* (*Presto*) passages.

Technically this requires not only double stopping (third, fourth, sixth, and harmonics) but also steady intonation in the high position (8th or 9th). For the right hand flying staccato is required, and near the end two hemiola passages appear.

ČESKÝCH TANCŮ Č. 7.

pro housle s průvodem klavíru.

Rev. prof. Viktor Nopp.

OTAKAR ŠEVČÍK. OP. 10

VIOLINO.

Andante con moto.

Vivace.

restez

4. Performing the Dances

Ševčík's basic material was the folk dances of Bohemia which he had known from birth and had heard throughout his life. He also knew that both Smetana and Dvořák had on many occasions adapted similar airs. The seven that Ševčík chose were particularly suitable for adaptation to the violin, being familiar throughout the Czech countryside and thereby containing implicit nationalistic and nostalgic feelings. He created a fantasy

of these tunes, the performance of which requires magnificent virtuosity. However, each song remains perfectly recognizable within the scope of Czech culture.

Like a number of others of his generation, Ševčík had fallen under the influence of Paganini (1782-1840), in particular the *24 Caprices* (Op. 1, c. 1805).⁹ These caprices contain many technical challenges as well as inspirational passages which fascinated the European musical world. Some of the technical challenges, for example, his extremely difficult left hand pizzicato and artificial double-stopping harmonics, were too much for ordinary players. In his prime Ševčík had been able to play Paganini's caprices, and in his seven dances he included some passages of similar difficulty, for example the second variation of No. 4, *I Sowed the Millet*.

Figure 1 shows the various techniques required for each of the dances.

Figure 1. Left Hand Technique

Contents: Left Hand Technique	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Crossing strings with scales or arpeggios	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Semitone shifts with single or double stopping	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Chromatic Scale using 1 or 2 fingers on the same strings (glissando)	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Changes of position in single or double stopping	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Pizzicato (+)	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Pizzicato (+) with simultaneous right hand arco technique	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Ornaments (trills or tremolos)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Double stopping (third or sixth or octave or tenth)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Harmonics (a) natural	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Harmonics (b) artificial (single and double stopping)	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
Chords of three or four notes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Degree of Difficulty: (Easier) → F → E → C → G → B → A → D (More difficult)							

Note: The letters in Figure 1 refer to the dances as follows: A = *The Girl with Blue Eyes*, B = *When I Used to Visit You*, C = *Untitled*, D = *I Sowed the Millet*, E = *Břetislav*, F = *Furiant*, and G = *Andulka, my Child*. "Y" and "N" refer to the presence (Y, Yes) or absence (N, No) of each specific technique in each dance.

9 Paganini was an original and dominant figure whose musical creativity, expression, and technique influenced Liszt, Schumann, Brahms, Chopin and others of the Romantic movement. Liszt, Schumann and Brahms, for example, all adapted Paganini pieces for the piano.

The right hand techniques for the same pieces are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Right Hand Technique

Contents: Right Hand Technique	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Crossing strings with scales or arpeggios	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Spiccato	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Flying staccato	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Slurred staccato with up bowing	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Slurred staccato with down bowing	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Saltato (sautillé)	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Ricochet	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Occasional pizzicato	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Degree of Difficulty: (Easier) → A → E, F, G → B → C → D (More difficult)							


Finally, there is the question of the degree of emotional expression or representation in the seven dances. In this sense some are “simple”, that is, they have a melody and rhythm that is easily comprehensible to both performers and listeners, while others are more complex. Figure 3 shows this in numerical form.

Figure 3. Emotional Expression and Representation

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Emotional expression and representation on stage	2	6	4	7	5	1	3

Note: The numbers 1, 2, 3, etc., refer to the degree of difficulty of interpretation of each piece, where 1 = easier, and 7 = most difficult.

The performance of these seven dances on the violin is, of course, greatly enhanced if the players have a knowledge of the actual dances themselves. The polka, for example, appears in *The Girl with Blue Eyes*, *Untitled*, and *I Sowed the Millet*; the waltz appears in *When I Used to Visit You*, and in *Furiant*; and the sousedská in *When I Used to Visit You* and *Andulka, my Child* (which also contains a mazurka). The *skočná* is featured in *Untitled*, and the siciliana in *Břetislav*. These dances can still be seen in every part of the Czech Republic today, being danced by young men and women. They are an integral part of Czech life.

The performance of the seven dances is also greatly helped if the player has worked on Ševčík's Op. 11 (part Vlc), called *Remarks on Interpretation – 40 Bohemian Melodies for Two Violins*. It covers all the dances except No. 3 (*Untitled*). Ševčík's Op. 16, *School of Interpretation for the Violin on a Melodic Basis (No. 5)* contains useful material for preparing to play *Břetislav*, especially regarding rhythmic studies on . In preparing to play *I Sowed the Millet* the player should consult Op. 16 (32), which is useful for practising the changing of tempo moderato to quick, and Op. 16 (35) which is good for the sautillé and glissando.

5. Conclusion

Classical composers had paid very little attention to the music of the folk, even though they themselves came from quite ordinary backgrounds. It was in the middle of the nineteenth century that composers – often in a spirit of nationalism – began to mine the folk resources that they found all around them. The collection of folk materials was also happening in literature, where writers sought out their country's legends and folktales. What Ševčík did in collecting folk dances was therefore a perfectly appropriate thing to do, and he was helping to preserve some part of Czech musical history. His seven dances are not often played *in toto*, but *The Girl with Blue Eyes* and *Andulka, my Child* can often be heard in concerts given by Czech performers.¹⁰

These dances were first published in 1898 by Bosworth (Leipzig), and Nos. 1 – 6 were dedicated to Jan Kubelík (1880-1940); No. 7 was dedicated to Jaroslav Kocian (1883-1950). Ševčík had returned from Kiev in 1892 and began teaching at Prague Conservatory. His return was not popular with everybody, especially his previous mentor Bennewitz. However, Ševčík continued to teach and impressed people with his skill and dedication. At that time his first and most famous pupil was Jan Kubelík who had just graduated at the Conservatory. On 24th June, 1898, Ševčík played his own Czech Dances at his final concert in Prague with Kubelík, accompanied by the famous pianist Hanuš Trneček. The performance was received with enthusiasm and praise from all sides, even from Bennewitz. This performance ended Ševčík's virtuoso career, after which he turned

10 All seven dances were, in fact, played on 7th September, 2008 in Písek by The Ševčík Players under Minori Nakaune. The accompanist was Miroslav Sekera. This group is based in Hiroshima, Japan, and has been performing Ševčík's works regularly.

to teaching full time.

As time passed, the teaching side became more and more important, and the seven dances were an important part of that. Many of his pupils retain fond memories of working with him. Regarding this relationship of teacher to pupil, Kocian later said:

Individual teaching intensifies and becomes more effective over a long period...

The music teacher's spirit, and the pupil's spirit, become more united than in other subjects, and the teacher grows with his pupils... The relationship between both is sometimes more powerful than that of a blood relation.

(Funeral Oration for Otakar Ševčík, 18th January, 1934)

Ševčík's contribution was to turn these folk dances into materials that could be used for pedagogic purposes. As violin pieces, they encourage the student to work on specific techniques and to achieve perfection if possible.

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