



Bridges

VOLUME 2

Music by Czech and Romanian composers

move



Bridges

In 2003 the School of Music-Conservatorium at Monash University released, *Bridges* (Move MD 3281), with new music written by Romanian, Australian and Korean composers. For the most part the concentration was on music composed between 1992 and 2001, and it demonstrated the vastly different approaches that were available to composers at the end of the 20th century.

This CD also features Romanian composers but this time rather than Australians and Koreans a Czech cohort has joined the recital. The time frame is also much wider as it covers pieces written in the 1930s through to the 1950s, then on to the 1980s, and culminating with a work from 2008. In theory, one would expect that such an expanse of decades would reinforce creative pluralism, after all romanticism, neo-classicism, neo-romanticism, non-tonality, serialism, and minimalism have been significant streams of activity through some or all of the period under review. The opposite, however, is true. What has been captured here is music that maintains audience “accessibility”, and while this is a loaded statement with piles of subjectivity layered upon it, the scores on this recording do have conservatism as the leading driver. This all embracing comment should have factored into it some contextual parameters that highlight possible reasons as to why most of the composers featured on this disc

were more comfortable in connecting their music to the past in varying degrees.

The recorded works by Romanian composers Alfred Mendelsohn and Tiberiu Olah, and Czechs, Otmar Mácha and Petr Eben are at some levels reflections of Communist influences that were all pervasive in their respective countries. At some level the musical past was the only acceptable stylistic method for the European communist authorities, particularly in the Stalinist and early post-Stalinist times. Then again it could be successfully argued that apart from Olah who embraced a modernist track from the 1960s, the other composers were comfortable to maintain either romantic or neo-classicism tendencies throughout their careers. Petr Eben and Paul Constantinescu both experienced hard times with the Communist authorities due in part to their disengagement with politics. Ironically, however, Constantinescu’s folk-music inspired Sonatina for violin and piano (1933), composed long before the Communist takeover of Romania, would have been marked up as a positive contribution to a regime desperate to promote its nationalist credentials. While folk influences was a decisive and ongoing source for Constantinescu, musical spectralism has been Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea’s prime creative ballast. Her engagement with the harmonic series, which is at the heart of spectralism, is used in an energetic manner in *Endeavour Bells*. The work’s chordal construction layers towers of sound that

build, whirr with vigorous intensity and then whither to momentary silences.



Paul Constantinescu

(1909-1963) trained in both Bucharest and Vienna with composition figuring as the predominant direction. In 1941 he found himself back teaching harmony at the Bucharest Conservatorium, where he stayed until his death. Constantinescu composed music across all the genres without one area holding any greater interest for him. The Sonatina for Violin and Piano (1933) is one of Constantinescu earliest acknowledged chamber works, and the only one for that combination. The clearly delineated bookend movements are full of folk-driven melody that allows for rhythm to play an important part in the dance-like characterisations. The stirring, slow internal movement allows the violinist to be abundantly expressive; there is even a very brief hint of the opening theme from the first movement.



Otmar Mácha

After training with Jaroslav Řídký at the Prague Conservatorium Otmar Mácha (1922-2006) commenced musical and administrative duties with Prague Radio and the Czechoslovakian Composers’ Union. He became a full time composer in the early 1960s, and was awarded the

title Artist of Merit by the Czechoslovak authorities in 1982. In the early days his style was romantically-based but he branched out to being slightly more adventurous in later years. He was wedded to “message music” in which officially sanctioned texts or programmes were expressed through his music. The score does not state a programme for his *Elegie* (1982) but what is clear is that the composer harks back to his original compositional position of a deeply expressed romanticism. The work is essentially a study in layered grief-stricken states. First comes what could be perceived as the aching heartbreak then follows anger which leads to a violin cadenza that mixes both emotional responses and lastly the duo descends slowly to resignation.

Tiberiu Olah

(1928-2002) studied composition in both Cluj and Moscow, and was on academic staff at the Bucharest Conservatorium of Music teaching in composition from 1954 until 2001. In 1993 he was recognised with a Romanian Union of Composers’ and Musicologists’ commendation for his lifetime’s achievement, which have included works across all areas and couple with numerous prizes along the way. The Piano Sonatina (1950) is one of Olah’s earliest published works and was composed during his time in Moscow. In many ways the piece reflects the political period in which the Stalinist ideas of musical accessibility

reigned supreme. However, this is not to say that this clearly-textured, three-movement composition lacks inventiveness. The outer movements have copious amounts of Shostakovitch’esque rhythmic interplay; while the Andante cantabile middle section has that certain French quality that comes directly from the Satie lineage of *Gnossiennes*.

Bohuslav Martinů

Czech-born Bohuslav Martinů (1889-1959) settled in Paris in 1923 and established himself as a composer. In 1940 he moved to the United States of America to escape German occupation of Paris, and returned to Europe, this time to Switzerland, in 1953. However, this nomadic lifestyle in the “West” came at a cost as the communist authorities barred his return to the country of his birth, which Martinů emotionally nursed for the rest of his life. Wherever he put down roots he quickly gained recognition as a craftsman who could professionally deliver a commission, which in 1942-1943 was on average one per month.

It was in this period that Martinů composed the *Five Madrigal Stanzas* in 1943, and was a homage to Albert Einstein who championed his music. The five movements are like sound-bites with only one section tipping over the three-minute mark. In fact the composer’s title of them being stanzas as opposed to “movements” is most apt, and the idea of them being a set of madrigals is not without some creative merit when one

considers the taunt construction of each “event”. Lyricism and rhythmic drive, in a variety of syncopated mannerisms, are the overriding characteristics.

Alfred Mendelsohn

(1910-1966) was a prodigious Romanian composer in all genres. After a thorough grounding in composition from Mihail Jora in Romania, he travelled to Vienna where he studied the craft with Franz Schmidt and Joseph Marx. He held various administrative positions in the Romanian Union of Composers and Musicologists as well as a teaching post at the Conservatorium in Bucharest. Mendelsohn’s technique was essentially a conservative one, and ideally suited the socialist realism mentality that the Communist Party insisted upon in varying degrees after 1947. Much of his music is connected, in one way or another, to the Communist-Nationalist aesthetic but this did not mean that he was not appreciative of the dodecaphonic models that were in evidence in the mid-twentieth century. Composer Iancu Dumitrescu recalls that Mendelsohn “...took the risk of secretly introducing [students] to the modern writing techniques of the Schoenberg and Webern heritage. Had news of what he was doing gotten around, he would have been severely punished.”

Originally, Mendelsohn’s Partita for violin solo (1959) was in three movements—Prelude, Sarabande and Fugue. However,

it was re-published in 1966 without the Sarabande. It is the shortened version that appears on this recording. The work sits directly at the heart of Mendelsohn's aesthetic which is amply demonstrated by his lifelong interest in the historical forms of sonata and fugue. This piece is in part a homage to Bach's solo violin works, as exemplified by the composer's use of the "Bach theme", B (Bb), A, C, H (B). The required performance technique is equally as testing as that of the Baroque master.



Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea

(b.1959) is one of Romania's leading composers of her generation, and has written music for theatre, orchestra, chamber ensembles, and solo instruments. She has also contributed to the musicological debate through her theoretical treatises. Teodorescu-Ciocănea is based at the University of Music, Bucharest and maintains strong links with musicians and academies in England, France and Australia. It was in England at the University of Huddlesfield that she gained vital research experience for her PhD and in Australia her music has received regular recognition, particularly at School of Music-Conservatorium, Monash University.

In 2008 Teodorescu-Ciocănea spent some months at Monash University on an Australian Federal Government-funded Endeavour Research Fellowship. *Endeavour Bells* for piano solo was composed during her

time at Monash and is dedicated to pianist Tamara Smolyar.

The composer writes of this piece, "the starting point was the sonic and symbolic variety of bells across cultures and times. Variation of bell sonorities comes with the different sizes, materials, forms, settings etc. But most importantly, the differences are due to their assigned significance within a culture. Bells are resonating bodies that are always calling for people's emotional or practical responses. I have tried to combine features of bell sonorities from the Orthodox and Catholic Churches and also to give a flavour of bells ringing on James Cook's ship *Endeavour* while circumnavigating the globe and discovering the east coast of Australia."



Petr Eben

While Otmar Mácha might have been able to work comfortably within the Czechoslovak communist system, his contemporary Petr Eben (1929-2007) always had an uneasy relationship with Party. Thwarted for promotion in the tertiary education sector due to refusal to join the party, Eben immersed himself in his musical work. Having a deep religious conviction, he focussed on music for organ and choirs, which would not have endeared him with the authorities. Although he is best remembered for his choral and organ scores, Eben wrote music across the genres, which is gradually being revisited by musicians for

various recording projects. His *Sonatina Semplice* (1955) for either violin or flute and piano is a charming example of Eben's passion for neo-classicism. This is not unsurprising as he was greatly influenced by his composition teacher Pavel Bořkovec, who was insistent upon a strong sense of form. The commitment to formal clarity is found in this tonally-based *Sonatina* with strong thematic personalities that do not waiver widely from the original statements. Rhythm too is an Eben hallmark and this composition demonstrates admirably that rhythmic simplicity can be convincingly engaging.



Ivana Tomášková

Melbourne-based Ivana Tomášková (violin) is a graduate of the Conservatorium in Brno, the Tchaikovsky Conservatorium in Moscow, and in 1992 she completed a Master of Music degree at the Prague Music Academy. As a soloist and as member of a number of chamber music ensembles, she has given concerts in many parts of Europe, as well as the USA, South Africa and Australia. She maintains a full schedule of performances in both Australia and Europe, and is actively interested in the dissemination of music by Australian and Czech composers in either place. Tomášková has made a number of radio recordings for Czech Radio and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as well as commercial recordings on the Panton, Multisonic, Arcodiva and Move labels.



Tamara Smolyar

(piano) is Senior Lecturer in Music Performance and Coordinator of Piano in the School of Music-Conservatorium, Monash University, Melbourne. She was the winner of the first edition of Chamber Music Competition in the Ukraine (1983) and was also awarded the titles of Best Accompanist of the Ukraine (1987) and the USSR (1988). She has produced numerous recordings for national and international broadcasters, CDs labels Vox Australis and Move, and has performed at many prominent venues across three continents. As well as the maintenance of traditional repertoire, Smolyar also has an interest in new music and has had compositions written for her as a soloist and chamber musician. In 2008 she travelled to Bucharest to present, as the soloist, the world premiere of Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea's Piano Concerto "Lebenskraft", which is dedicated to Smolyar.



Chamber Melange

The mainstream interests of Tomášková and Smolyar's new music endeavours have coalesced to form a partnership under the title, Chamber Melange. Together they have performed repertoire that demonstrates an eclectic mix of styles from the Classical period to the modern, including Beethoven, Dvorak, Franck and Australian composer Thomas Reiner.



Bridges – volume 2

Chamber Melange

Ivana Tomášková (violin)
Tamara Smolyar (piano)

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Paul Constantinescu (1909-1963)
Sonatina for violin and piano (1933)
1 Allegro moderato 2'53"
2 Andante 3'26"
3 Allegro assai 3'36"

Otmar Mácha (1922-2006)
4 **Elegie for violin and piano** (1982) 8'55"

Tiberiu Olah (1928-2002)
Piano Sonatina (1950)
5 Allegro ritmico 4'01"
6 Andante cantabile 2'48"
7 Allegro ritmico 3'18"

Bohuslav Martinů (1889-1959)
Five Madrigal Stanzas for violin and piano
(1943)
8 Moderato 2'30"
9 Poco allegretto 1'53"
10 Andante moderato 2'35"
11 Scherzando, poco allegro 1'41"
12 Poco allegro 1'36"

Alfred Mendelsohn (1910-1966)
Partita for violin solo (1959)
13 Prelude
14 Fugue

Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea (b1959)
15 **Endeavour Bells for piano** (2008) 9'24"

Petr Eben (1929-2007)
Sonatina Semplice for violin and piano (1955)
16 Allegro giusto 4'07"
17 Moderato e cantabile 4'27"
18 Vivace e accentato 3'11"