

GERMAN CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS COMPOSE MELODRAMAS ON CZECH TEXTS

Věra Šustíková and Jiří Bezděk

Abstract

The following essay describes the efforts of its authors to encourage the creation of concert melodramas by German composers to Czech texts. This effort became the subject of the project “Czech composers set German texts to music, and German composers set Czech texts to music”. The authors are aware of the historical context that causes the minimal existence of German melodramas on Czech texts and suggest, with their current project, a way to change this situation. This path has always been accompanied by the willingness of the Czech and German sides to communicate about common cultural intentions, so the project outcome is positive. The following text also provides a research-based reflection on the project. Among the authors are Michaela Augustinová, Michael Emanuel Bauer, Holmer Becker, Frédéric Bolli, Jiří Bezděk, Kamillo Andreas Horn, Robert Schumann, Bedřich Smetana, Pavel Trojan.

Keywords

Bedřich Smetana – concert melodrama – Frédéric Bolli – Holmer Becker – Jiří Bezděk – Kamillo Andreas Horn – Michaela Augustinová – Michael Emanuel Bauer – Pavel Trojan – Robert Schumann – Věra Šustíková

Introduction

The following essay describes the efforts of its authors to promote the creation of concert melodramas by German composers to Czech texts. This effort became the subject of the project “Czech Composers set German texts to music, and German composers set Czech texts to music”. The authors are aware of the historical context that causes the minimal existence of German melodramas on Czech texts, and with their current project, they propose a way to change this situation. This path has always been accompanied by the willingness of both the Czech and German sides to communicate their common cultural intentions, so the project outcome is positive. The following text also provides a specialist reflection on the project.

Heuristic background of the project

Twenty-five years of scholarly research¹ has shown that the specific combination of music and spoken word in melodrama is so fundamental that it defines melodrama as a distinct

¹ The heuristics of Czech melodrama were performed by Věra Šustíková within her project “Revival of concert melodrama” (since 1998), which also included the research task of the National Museum of Music “Sources of Czech concert melodrama”.

art form, although its internal structure, external form, and use may take very different ones. Historically, after about a hundred years, there have been waves of interest in this genre in the search for new expressive possibilities of music. This is true both of classical melodrama in the second half of the 18th century² and of concert melodrama, which developed in the middle of the 19th century as an independent genre in connection with the ideas of Romanticism, the emergence of program music and the new conditions of concert life. In both cases, Germany set the defining line of development for European melodrama, and in both cases, Czech composers made a significant contribution to this pan-European process.

In the first phase of the development of melodrama, it was the Czech composer Jiří Antonín Benda (1722 Staré Benátky, Czech Kingdom–1795 Bad Köstritz, Saxony), who was active in Germany, whose importance lies in the culmination of the 18th century Rousseauian idea of stage melodrama. Especially his first melodramatic works *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Medea* became the paradigm of the genre, and the musical expressive and formative means used enriched the further development of the whole European music.

German melodrama reached Bohemia very early on through itinerant theatre companies,³ which performed new German works in Bohemia continuously, even in the 1890s and early 1900s. The most interesting of the echoes of domestic production is the melodrama *Circe* from 1789 by the Křížovnice regenschori Václav Praupner,⁴ written to a German text by an unknown author.⁵

The best-known echo of the flowering of 18th-century stage melodrama in Bohemia is the melodrama *Bratrovrah* [Fratricide] (1831) by František Škroup to a text by Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek.⁶ Benda's cult continued in Bohemia even later, although he had no direct imitators. This is evidenced by the celebration of the 100th anniversary of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Medea* at the Provisional Theatre in Prague on 22 December 1875.⁷

The second phase of melodrama development is represented mainly by concert melodrama. At the beginning of the 19th century, the newly discovered possibilities of program music led German Romantic composers to explore new approaches to the relationship between words and music. In incidental music for dramas and in *singspiel*, they often left the word in its natural undistorted form, which enabled them to achieve greater dramatic effectiveness. There is perhaps not a single great composer of the time who did not try melodramatic technique.⁸ Experimental attempts in this field led to the creation of a separate genre – concert melodrama. The result was a completely free concert form whose musical component is closely related to the literary poetic subject.⁹ It was in Germany that composers

² A stage melodrama that, based on Enlightenment ideas, became a new form of musical theatre.

³ For example, the theatre company of Johann Joseph von Brunian, Karl Wahr etc.

⁴ Praupner already referred to his work as "Ein Melodram," although at that time, the term was not yet established.

⁵ In addition to melodramas according to the Benda paradigm, drama melodrama based on the French drama of the so-called boulevard melodrama came to Prague through German performers.

⁶ *Bratrovrah* [Fratricide] premiered at the Estates Theatre on 27 February 1831.

⁷ The scenic melodrama of the 18th century has also been theoretically reflected quite often. However, the inconsistency and invariability of the use of the term melodrama, as well as the frequent lack of clarity of value criteria and the subjectivity of interpretation, have caused problems. The most well-founded contributions from older works appear to be treatises by Czech authors: Hostinský's essay "On melodrama", printed in the journal *Lumír* in 1885, and Helfert's critique of Edgar Istel's treatise "On the Origin of German Melodrama. On the history of melodrama" in *Dalibor* 1908.

⁸ Among the most prominent composers are Louis Spohr, Carl Maria von Weber, and Heinrich Marschner, whose romantic, a melodramatic technique of the first half of the 19th century.

⁹ Although the melodramas that originally were part of the stage work had already been performed in concert, the concert melodrama itself was created on a different principle, while the libretto for the stage melodrama was – as in the opera

found a suitable basis in the high level of German poetry. Admiration for the qualities of the literary subject and a reverential approach to it are typical features of the first phase of the development of concert melodrama. From the beginning, the melodramatic declamation of the ode was very popular. It continued to be performed in concerts well into the 19th century. The ballad soon found its place, its mixed lyrical-epic-dramatic character accommodating the flexible intervention of the musical form.¹⁰ Robert Schumann and Franz Liszt contributed most to the development of concert melodrama. In particular, Schumann's three ballads with piano¹¹ and Liszt's less composed but harmonically bold melodramas¹² formed the basic repertoire for the performance of foreign melodrama in Bohemia and later, at the beginning of the 20th century.¹³ Apart from the ode and ballad, lyrical song lyrics were also popular in melodrama.¹⁴

In Bohemia, at the time of the already developed European Romanticism, the program of national revival was just being completed. Its specificity was both the overlapping of various chronologically successive tendencies, trends, and currents, as well as the special emphasis on the Czech language as the defining national expression and its cultivation in individual art forms. In addition to choral and operatic works, concert melodrama also met these demands. Even the main representatives of Czech national music, Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák did not avoid attempts to use melodramatic techniques in opera and incidental music.¹⁵

The development of concert melodrama was significantly influenced by Zdeněk Fibich (1850 Všebořice–1900 Prague), who built on the German Romantics and fulfilled their aspirations for the greatest possible pro-composition and the creation of a new higher structure without disturbing the natural qualities of both components – words and music. He surpassed his predecessors and contemporaries by solving the architectural problem of melodrama. By using characteristic motifs and ingenious motivic work, he avoided mosaic-like descriptiveness and created an independent musical stream, but with a fully balanced proportion of words and music, even in terms of semantics. In this way, he proved that both components could be equal, relatively independent, flowing continuously and not overlapping, but complementing and enhancing each other by alternately taking the lead in the overall structure of the work.¹⁶

– composed with this musical and theatrical use in mind, the concert melodrama is created by setting to music a poem that already existed separately and independently of the musical component and was only subsequently chosen by the composer for musical treatment.

¹⁰ Gottfried August Bürger's *Lenore* has literally become the field's paradigm, and it has all the qualities suitable for musical appreciation. The culminating work is Franz Liszt's melodrama of the same name from 1858, which was well-known in Bohemia. Similarly, the ballads of Schiller became the central subject of melodramatic treatment.

¹¹ *Schön Hedwig*, Op.106, from 1849 on Hebbel's ballad, *Vom Haideknaben*, Op.122, No.1, again on Hebbel's text, and *Die Flüchtlinge*, op.122, No.2, on a ballad by P. B. Shelley (both from 1852).

¹² *Lenore* from 1858 on the text by G. A. Bürger, *Der traurige Münch* (1860, text by Nicolas Lenau), *Der blinde Sänger* (1873, text by Alexei N. Tolstoy), *Des toten Dichters Liebe* (1874, text by Moritz Jókay).

¹³ Among the artistically valuable works of the period production can be added *Schelm von Bergen*, Op. 111, No 2, by Carl Reinecke, set to a gentle text by Heinrich Heine. (This melodrama in printed form is also preserved in the personal library of Zdeněk Fibich.)

¹⁴ For example, Schubert's melodrama *Leb wohl, du schöne Erde* on the text by A. Pratobeverly *Weise Abschied*.

¹⁵ Bedřich Smetana used melodrama as a closed number in the opera *Two Widows* (the scene when Ladislav reads a letter), and Antonín Dvořák created six melodramatic numbers in the incidental music to Šamberk's play *Josef Kajetán Tyl*.

¹⁶ The culmination of Fibich's compositional method is the world's unique melodramatic trilogy *Hippodamia* (1889–1891) to a libretto by Jaroslav Vrchlický, in which he successfully managed to maintain the multilayered ideas and musical connections not only in the individual works (*The Courtship of Pelops*, *The Atonement of Tantalus*, *Hippodamia's Death*), but also

After Fibich, only a few people have made a significant impact on the field of concert melodrama in its classical form, but their works were followed with interest in Bohemia, for example, the work of Richard Strauss (*Enoch Arden* from 1897, a translation of his melodrama to a ballad text by Joh. L. Uhland's *Das Schloss am Meer* from 1899) or Max von Schillings (*Hexenlied*, Op.15 from 1902 to a text by Ernest von Wildenbruch).

Melodramas with piano or piano reduction have become very popular. The performance required the active performance of only two people, which was often a suitable addition not only to chamber concerts but also to social parties. This practice was equally widespread in both German countries and Bohemia. The demands of some of the productions also suited less able performers or amateurs, who found employment for their productions here. Therefore, it is very difficult, almost impossible, to document all performances of concert melodramas, both on the Czech and German sides, and their interconnections. What is certain is that Czech and German melodrama developed in close synergy and that not only did German music initially influence Czech melodrama but at least the work of the most important figures in Czech music influenced the development of German melodrama.

In the following period, the situation began to change. Fibich's work stands at the beginning of a truly rich Czech tradition, characterized by the utmost elaboration of words and music, in contrast to the later German concert melodrama, which often remains largely uncomposed.

Fibich's influence is evident in subsequent generations of Czech composers, whether he influenced them directly or indirectly. The inventory of Czech concert melodramas published in the book *Zdeněk Fibich and Czech Concert Melodrama*¹⁷ is a valuable source demonstrating the breadth of the use of concert melodrama in the Czech lands over the course of 140 years. It shows that Fibich's example encouraged an extraordinary number of composers who continued to cultivate and enrich the genre with new means of expression, even in times of waning public interest.

Where did the development of Czech melodrama go? The authors of concert melodramas turned primarily to domestic poetry, while the musical component was entrusted to the orchestra or piano. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that interest in foreign poetry and other instrumental ensembles appeared.¹⁸ In the first half of the 20th century, concert melodrama was a common part of chamber music concerts. However, the consistent use of the Czech language isolated it from its European context. The war years then necessitated a return to classical settings, which thus fulfilled a nationally conscious function. However, the general knowledge of melodrama in Bohemia ended with the Second World War. The concert life of the period of so-called socialist realism favored large musical forms and mass genres. The fragile chamber form of concert melodrama gradually almost disappeared from public life. As a result, the relatively serious new works of meditative character, which are often on the borderline between concert melodrama and cantata, remained in the shadows. However, one can find small, purely intimate lyrics as well as experimental compositions. They were never used more widely. Gradually, melodrama disappeared from the

throughout the entire trilogy of full-length works. Fibich thus became the author of the modern form of stage melodrama of the 19th century, in which, however, he found no followers.

¹⁷ Šustíková, Věra. *Zdeněk Fibich a český koncertní melodram* [Zdeněk Fibich and Czech concert melodrama]. Olomouc, Univerzita Palackého 2014.

¹⁸ For example, Bohuslav Martinů: *Three Lyrical Melodramas* from 1912 for harp, piano, violin, and viola on texts by French poets.

awareness of musicology and in the last third of the 20th century, it was mostly not taught even in art schools. If there were new dialogues between Czech and German musicologists on this topic at this time, they tended to be related to the Bendovian period in the context of conferences on classical music, singspiel, etc.

From the late 1980s onwards, American musicology unexpectedly became interested in melodrama, even reflecting on Czech melodrama.¹⁹ The invitation of Stanford University to a scholarly discussion of Czech melodrama in 1994 first awakened **a new phase of interest in concert melodrama** within the Zdeněk Fibich Society and launched a number of its activities: The participation of Czech musicologists Jaroslav Jiránek and Věra Šustíková at a conference in Stanford in 1996 and a concert tour of the USA and Canada with Zdeněk Fibich's melodramas,²⁰ the subsequent first attempts at a competition and concert showcase of melodrama in Prague, and the creation of Věra Šustíková's broadly conceived project **"Reviving Concert Melodrama"**, which combines basic research, pedagogical activities, lecturing and educational activities and artistic outputs implemented by the Zdeněk Fibich Society, especially the "International Festival of Concert Melodrama Prague" (since 2018 under the name Melodramfest) and the "Zdeněk Fibich International Competition in the Interpretation of Melodrama". The reintroduction of melodrama to the concert stage has awakened an unprecedented production of new Czech music.²¹

In 2019, the newly established "Zdeněk Fibich International Competition in the Composition of Melodrama" influenced the further development of contemporary melodrama, although it was limited to recitation and piano. Through it, Czech melodrama, in particular, has grown significantly with the youngest generation of authors. Today's composers use the procedures of musical word grasp of all previous stages of melodrama development on a new level, including the alternation of words and music according to the Benda-type melodrama. They experiment with sound by using unconventional instrumentation or even by incorporating modern technology (live electronic).

These platforms have not only stimulated the creation of new works but have also contributed to the all-around revival of interest in melodrama both in the Czech Republic and abroad, especially in Germany.

Since 2000, when the first German performers participated in the Zdeněk Fibich anniversary concert, there has been a new revival of Czech-German relations in the field of melodrama.²² During the festival a number of German melodramas in Czech translations

¹⁹ For example, the dissertation *Redefining melodrama* emerged from the study stay in Prague of musicologist Judith Ann Mabary: *The Czech Response to Music and Word*, Washington University, Saint Louis, Missouri 1999.

²⁰ The background and twenty-year course of the project "Reviving Concert Melodrama" is presented in a bilingual publication by Věra Šustíková: *Nová vlna koncertního melodramu / New Wave of Concert Melodrama*. Prague: National Museum and Zdeněk Fibich Society 2018 (published on the 20th anniversary of the project).

²¹ They were most often: Jiří Bezděk, Sylvie Bodorová, Vít Clar, Jan Dušek, Miloš Haase, Jiří Hlaváč, Lukáš Hurník, Martin Hybler, Daniel Chudovský, Olga Ježková, Jan Klusák, Zdena Košnarová, Václav Kučera, Ivan Kurz, Martin Kux, Otomar Kvěch, Josef Marek, Jiří Matys, Markéta Mazourová, Roman Z. Novák, Jiří Pakandl, Jiří Pazour, Jan Rybář, Sylva Smejkalová, Jan Smolka, Lukáš Sommer, Jiří Sternwald, Miloš Štědroň, Jiří Teml, Jan Trojan, Pavel Trojan, Jan Vičar, Emil Viklický, Jaromír Vogel, Zdeněk Zahradník and others. Vladimír Franz, Ivana Loudová, and Jakub Dvořáček are among the exciting individuals represented.

²² In 2001, Anita and Hermann-Eike Keller from Berlin and Christina Kluge living in Prague, were guests here. They performed works by F. Hummel, C. Reinecke, F. Schubert, R. Wagner, and R. Schumann. In 2003, the artists Petr Tonger and Klaus Zelm were invited to perform repertoire by F. Hiller, M. von Schillings, A. Winternitz, and W. Hildemann. In 2007, the Japanese Nao Higano and Czech musicians performed A. Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* cycle, and in 2008 the Duo Pianoworte presented their music in Prague: Helmuth Thiele and Bernd Christian Schulze. They initiated the creation of contemporary German music. They performed a melodrama by Ch. J. Keller's *Galgenlieder und mehr* from 2006 and the composition V. Dinescu's *Fipps der*

performed by Czech artists were also staged.²³ The Zdeněk Fibich International Competition for the Interpretation of Melodrama, which takes place as a biennial in even-numbered years, is regularly attended by young German performers and the jury is composed of German experts.²⁴ The international competition is also of great importance for the meeting and mutual inspiration of young artists.

Project of Contemporary Czech-German Melodramas “Czechs set Germans to music and Germans set Czechs to music”

The next intended stage of mutual acquaintance should be closer cooperation between Czech and German composers and performers in joint projects. The first venture of this kind was the project “Czech composers set German texts to music, and German composers set Czech texts to music”, the results of which were realized in 2021 and 2022 at concert venues in Prague (17 October 2021, Antonín Dvořák Museum), Pilsen (21 October 2021, House of Music), Konstanz (19 March 2022, Kulturzentrum am Münster), Munich (21 March 2022, Seidlvilla), Zwickau (2 April 2022, Robert Schumann Haus) and Regensburg (12 June 2022, Bezirk Oberpfalz, Sudetendeutsches Musikinstitut). The initial impetus for this project came from Jiří Bezděk, who took on not only the role of the participating composer but also the role of producer. The dramaturgy and direction of the project were co-created by Věra Šustíková. Based on a common agreement, an initiative was created initially, sent to several experienced composers from the Czech Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. The creative incentive included the following points:

Affe from 2007. The winner of the Zdeněk Fibich International Competition for the Interpretation of Melodramas in 2004, the Berlin-based actress Stephanie Maschke, performed her melodrama *Elegy* by W. von Grunelia at the 13th festival in 2010. On their second visit to the festival in 2012, Peter Tonger and Klaus Zelm performed the works: H. Haag *Der Synthetische Mensch*, M. Sievritts *Marguerite*, T. Proszczalek *Lieber Felix* and repeated the humorous melodrama *Pompeianis ubique saludem*.

²³ *Ariadne on Naxos* by J. A. Benda in quartet and orchestral versions in concert and semi-staged versions, most recently in 2022 in Pardubice, when its recording was broadcast by Czech Television, *Medea* by the same composer in 2011 at the ABC Theatre in Prague and in 2022 at the J. K. Tyl Theatre in Pilsen together with Benda's *Pygmalion*, melodrama by F. Schubert's *Farewell to Earth*, all three ballads by R. Schumann: *Beautiful Hedwig*, *On the Run*, *The Boy from the Heath*, all melodramas by F. Liszt, then the *Sad Monk* and *Lenore* repeatedly, R. Wagner's *Margaret's Prayer*, R. Strauss's *Castle by the Sea*, F. von Flotow's *Revenge of the Flowers* and A. Kugler's *Mozart* were performed several times. The Czech version of the melodramatic parody *The Curse of the Robber* by A. Winternitz was very popular with the audience. In 2007, a large-scale orchestral melodrama by the Czech-German Viktor Ullmann *A Song about the Love and Death of the Cornet Christoph Rilke*, and in 2014 the Czech version of Strauss's melodrama *Enoch Arden* had its premiere. In 2016, Paul Dessau's melodrama *Lilo Hermann* was performed in Czech for the first time. In the jubilee year of the festival, even two compositions by A. Schönberg *Ode to Napoleon* and *Kol Nidre* were performed in Czech. In 2018 Beethoven's *Egmont* and Schumann's *Manfred* were performed in concert.

²⁴ The pianist Anita Keller, associate professor at the Hochschule für Musik Hans Eisler in Berlin, and the musicologist and theatre scholar Peter Schneider, intendant of the Stralsund Theatre, have repeatedly served on the jury of the competition; other jurors have included Stefanie Maschke, Klaus Zelm, Peter Tonger, and Moritz Ernst. Antje Manhenke and Ketevan Warmuth, performers from Leipzig in 2002, reached the competition's final and won the second prize. In 2004, the first prize went to the duo Stefanie Maschke and Arnaud Arbet from Berlin. In 2008, three German pairs entered. Nina Schwarz and Linda Kalendareva from Rostock won first prize, Frederik Beyer and pianist Friederike Wildschütz from Weimar won third prize. Beyer and his new partner Friedericke Wiesner won the competition in 2012, and in the same year, the German duo Katja Schumann and Cornelia Weiss from Mannheim also reached the final, winning third prize in the following competition in 2014. In 2016, the second prize went to the duo of Constanze Jader and Christina Choi from Berlin, and the duo of Lydia Dörr and Linda Grizfeld from Karlsruhe achieved the same in 2018.

- a) to create a concert melodrama with piano with a total length of 6–10 minutes;²⁵
- b) the text should come from 20th and 21st century literature;²⁶
- c) the text to be used as a basis will be originally Czech or German, but an artistic translation into Czech or German should also be available;²⁷
- d) professional actors will be selected for the interpretation which has mastered both the artistic and the linguistic aspects of their performance.²⁸

After the offer was sent out, several further consultations were held with interested composers from the Czech Republic and Germany. Many of them asked to refine the standards for writing a recitative part in the score, and some of them had the managerial duo Bezděk-Šustíková approve the selected texts in terms of technical suitability for the melodrama. Since the idea struck all involved as an ambitious project from the start, especially when supported by several domestic and foreign donors, the intended concert of modern Czech-German melodramas was soon filled with new compositions. The Sudeten German Musicological Institute in Regensburg came up with an interesting historical confrontation with the present when its director, Andreas Wehrmeyer, offered to perform the work *Der Fischer* by Kamillo Andreas Horn²⁹ (born 1860 in Liberec – died 1941 in Vienna) to a text by J. W. Goethe, the score of which he had in his archive. The romantic composition in question falls into the context of the fact already mentioned above that many Czech composers in history commonly set German texts to music. However, there is a somewhat atypical geopolitical situation here – the work in question comes from the Sudetenland, where the Czech and German languages meet most closely. In the current project, the question was, therefore, whether the one-way trend of Czech composers setting German texts could be at least partially broken, whether reciprocity could be encouraged from the German side, and what the results would be.³⁰

The successful implementation of the project “Czechs set Germans to music and Germans set Czechs to music”³¹ was achieved on the basis of the following assumptions:

1. German composers who already had a deep experience with the Czech musical environment were approached. Therefore it was not difficult for them to invest their

²⁵ The length of the piece and its instrumentation were limited by the intention that successful compositions could also be performed at the performance competition (see above).

²⁶ The aim here was to maintain the current focus of the resulting works, which would reflect the current situation of the relationship between Czechs and Germans. The time constraint is also supported by the Czech-German Fund for the Future, which also partially supported the implementation of the project.

²⁷ The project organizers soon abandoned the intention to set only the original versions of the texts, as this would have prevented the melodrama’s text from being understood in the other country. It would undoubtedly have harmed audience attendance.

²⁸ The project’s aim was also to achieve the highest possible quality of interpreting the text and music. The project thus inspired the authors’ confidence, reflected in the commissioning of high-quality compositions for the showcase concerts.

²⁹ In: *Drei Gedichte mir begleitender Musik*, op. 38, Kahnt, Leipzig 1908 – *Der Fischer* (Johann Wolfgang Goethe). *Das Kind am Brunnen* (Friedrich Hebbel). *Die Zwerge auf dem Baum* (August Kopisch).

³⁰ This is due to a natural development where composers from small nations often set to music literary works from large cultural entities. Thus, situations in which German composers set Czech texts to music have been very sporadic. In the past, we can assume that such attempts were made mainly in regional areas where Czech and German met in common communication, i.e., in the Czech-German borderlands. Significant artistic achievements, however, certainly only emerged in this sphere in the 19th and 20th centuries.

³¹ The project is run by the Czech-German Fund for the Future under the title Contemporary Concert Melodrama in the Czech Republic and the BRD – Czech composers set German poets to music and German composers set Czech poets to music. / Zeitgenössisches Konzertmelodram in der Tschechischen Republik und in Deutschland-tschechische Komponisten vertonen die deutschen Dichter und deutsche die tschechischen. Project number 8_21_11728.

creative efforts in a language version of their work, which is not very widely used at the European level. However, a preference was expressed from the outset for works to be created in Czech and the corresponding German versions. As shown below, however, a way to circumvent this condition has been found.

2. Composers who were experienced in composing vocal music and could therefore choose suitable literary works accordingly undertook to collaborate.
3. Performers invited to perform who fulfilled not only the artist but also the linguistic requirements. They were always Czechs. However, the German versions were staged by those willing to work out their pronunciation in detail under the supervision of native speakers.

The author of the project and its manager were a person who had long-standing artistic ties with the German environment³² and could therefore draw on a lot of experience in dealing with German composers and musical institutions.

German participating composers about their concert melodramas

Michael Emanuel Bauer (*1974), a composer and musicologist, about his composition *List of Shortcuts...melodramatic loops for voice and piano* (text collage freely taken from **Karel Čapek** and **Jiří Kolář**) remarked: "it is a free adaptation of the traditional genre of melodrama. Lyrically it is related to DADA and OULIPO. The list of acronyms (...) melodramatic loops focuses on the aesthetics of loops from DJ culture and pop culture. Like all of my work, this track is influenced by the art of appropriation. Central to this is an exploration of notions of original and copy, overpainting and overwriting, found material and reconstruction."³³

Bauer's composition was the furthest from the established compositional concept of melodrama. It does not process a complete artistic text but rather words out of context or just letters or sounds, especially differently intoned emoticons. On pages 9, 21, and 22 of his score, Bauer relies on the so-called concrete poetry as conceived by Jiří Kolář (1914–2002), i.e., also on the visual dimension of its notation. The actor's voice became a musical instrument without literalized content, and he treated it as such, immersing it in multiple repetitions of individual speech elements. Despite the composer's choice of the word 'abbreviations' in the title, there is only one – Čapek's *RUR*, which is eventually heard in its full verbal form. The repetitive nature of the vocal utterances is matched by the repetitive nature of the piano diction, effectively rhythmic, rich in texture, dissonantly harsh in the nature of its consonance, fitting into the realm of modern jazz, somewhere in the compositional workshop of Pierre Boulez (see the 1945 piano version of *Notations*). Bauer's composition caused a great stir, and its reception found both negative and positive poles. However, it

³² For fifteen years, Jiří Bezděk taught at music schools in Bavaria and is the author of many Czech-German projects in the field of contemporary music (the melodrama project described above was preceded by a similar one concerning chamber song). He also participates in many projects as an author (he regularly participates, for example, in the modern accordion music project *Nová hudba na druhou* [New Music Second]). He has already had a number of successful premieres of his compositions at German international music festivals (see e.g. <https://www.casopisharmonie.cz/kritiky/ceska-soudoba-hudba-na-letosnim-rocniku-mezinarodniho-bodamskeho-festivalu.html>).

³³ See concert program leaflet.

can only be fundamentally rejected from the purist positions of classical melodrama. As a composition without genre delineation, it is built on deep contrasts between tectonic blocks that are equipped as duos and solos. A loose reprise-like framing of the whole can also be noted. The above suggests that the performers are offered a great deal of freedom in performance – especially in notations corresponding to a Cage-type graphic score (see, for example, Cage's *Sixty-Two Mesostics Re Merce Cunningham* from 1971). However, the remaining parts of the piece are notated classically, and the number of pattern repeats is given accurately. On page 13 of his score, the composer requires precise intonations of the voice, based on an excerpt from the 1962 film *Vivre sa vie* by Jean Luc-Godard, listed on YouTube at an address that has since disappeared from the site. Bauer, therefore, did not want to set the Czech text to music and instead used universal expressive elements. Thus, he did not fulfill the project's goals in detail, but he did point out a way of using declamatory elements, which are often used in contemporary classical music.

Holmer Becker (*1955) is a freelance composer who appreciates Czech contemporary music because it has retained its emotional content to this day. As co-owner of the Edition Brendel label, he has also published many chamber works by Karel Pexidor, Jiří Bezděk, and Pavel Trojan, and has been instrumental in their performance in Germany. He approaches his work with a high degree of self-criticism, claiming that at the moment of his departure from this world he does not want to be ashamed of his compositions.³⁴ His compositions are characterized by a persistent effort to give each phrase a distinct content and function within the whole. He thus arrives at a romantic material interplay with a centralized harmonic component. Becker is not a composer of avant-garde music festivals, but he is all the more revered by the audience of mainstream concerts. In his concert melodrama **Night**, the composer sets to music the poem of the same name by **Ivan Blatný**, which is part of the collection *Search for Present Time* published in 1947. The German version of the poem was composed by the poet himself (*Die Nacht*). It still has a tone of wartime sorrows in places, but its content is already directed towards intimate content emanating from the emotional world of a mature man who, in his nightly waking hours, reflects on the role of a close woman in his life. He concludes each stanza of his “song” with a refrain summarising the images by stating “*nebylas to ty*” [it wasn't you] or “*tos byla ty*” [it was you]. He then concludes with the punch line “*tos byla já, to jsem byl ty*” [it was me, it was you], which in effect convicts all that has been said in the poem of his true love for his wife. The differentiated endings of each stanza structurally divide the poem into three larger units and the short punchline already mentioned. The longest of these is part two “*tos byla ty*” [it was you], containing nine stanzas, three times the number contained in parts one and three (always “*nebylas to ty*” [it was not you]). The predominance of length in the second stanza is also indicative of the dominant substantive tone of the poem.

Becker's music for melodrama follows the path of a more global expression of amorous emotion, i.e. in a musical form that does not quite fit into the poetic structure.³⁵ Its interruptions, however, give a lot of space to the poetic word (even the beginning of the melodrama consists of a recitation of the first verse without piano accompaniment) and only about

³⁴ From a personal conversation with Jiří Bezděk during one of the car journeys from Pilsen to Prague.

³⁵ For more details on the methodology of concert melodrama analysis see BEZDĚK, Jiří. Metodika strukturální analýzy koncertního melodramu: Aplikace na Fibichova Vodníka a další jeho významné melodramy. *Musicologica Olomucensia*. Olomouc: Palackého univerzita Olomouc, 2021(1), 38.

a quarter of the way through the piece do the recitation and piano sound together. Even so, this quarter is significant to the overall shape of the work. Among other things, it is here that the dramatic climax is found when the music underlines an inner personal confession. See the penultimate stanza of the second text block:

<i>To byly matka teta a babička</i>	<i>That was mother aunt and grandmother</i>
<i>To byly děti synovci a vnuci</i>	<i>These were children, nephews and grandchildren</i>
<i>To byly věže hodiny</i>	<i>Those were the clock towers</i>
<i>Tos byla ty</i>	<i>That was you</i>

From the point of view of the distinctive musical component, which is a prerequisite for concert melodrama, one can trace sonata roots in Becker’s composition, which the author realizes in accordance with the local tuning of the individual verses. The exposition and free reprise are made up of the first 19 bars of the piece (p. 4) and its last 26 bars (p. 8).³⁶ The area of the main theme from a first subject group is, however, strengthened in thought in the version where a distinctive melody is interspersed in the upper voice. See the following example (the observed section is up to C).

Example 1.

The theme from the second subject group area does not contain such a coherent musical flow, but it does act as a commentary on the text. See the following example from the exposition.

³⁶ The pages are taken from EBR 1523.

Auf dem Dorffriedhof
kämpfte nur eine Ziege mit dem Kranz aus
Kartoffelkraut
Wer lag dort in dem Grab?

Wer schlief dort?
Wer war es bloß
du warst es

andante
mp

Es war nur der Wind der diese
Geräusche lockte
Aus der Flasche die hinter dem Grab
lag
Von der Blechtafel mit der Zikorien-
reklame
Wer war es bloß
du warst es

nicht

B

Example 2.

The tonal-harmonic world of Becker's musical expression can also be grasped in the examples presented. The fundamental is the key, but its harmonic representatives are strongly complicated by melodic non-chordal tones to the point where harmonic functions can only be determined hypothetically. For example, in the first bar of No. 1, we can hardly speak with certainty of a tonic or subdominant in F minor. The result of such an approach is then a predominant number of verticals whose construction falls within the realm of modern chords (see, for example, the second bar in No. 2). Interesting in this connotation is the role of the diminished seventh chord, which is used extensively in the piece intense places. Because Becker's speech is not epigonally Romantic but uses only elements of it, even the diminished seventh chord does not sound worn out but is artistically credible. In the spirit of the above, it is safe to guess that Becker's *Noc* may continue to appear on the concert stages of mainstream concerts.

Frédéric Bolli (*1953), a German composer of Swiss origin, has developed a rich international artistic collaboration. It also includes frequent visits to the Czech Republic, where he participates in many performances of his compositions. Because his musical language is communicative and content-friendly, he is often invited to compose chamber and choral works for professionals and amateurs alike. It was not surprising, then, that he immediately accepted the incentive to write a concert melodrama.

In 2020 and 2021, the melodramatic piece **Three Fables**, inspired by Jiří Bezděk, was written. In addition, Bolli teamed up with another fellow composer from the Czech Republic, whom he knew was also active as a writer. This was **Karel Pexidr** from Pilsen. Frédéric Bolli has selected three fables from these small prose works, which he has presented in Czech and German versions (the first fable was translated into German by Karel Pexidr, the second by Klara Köttner-Benigni, and the third by Frédéric Bolli):

1. **The Biggest Dwarf (*Der grösste Zwerg*)** plays with the paradox of the biggest dwarf – the smallest giant in a mini-story. The piano sound still supports the recitation. It is filled with a Prokofiev-like march with biting sarcasm. The keys change surprisingly quickly. There is a leap into the distant versions in the spirit of the great pattern. The march's pulse stops on long, mostly classical chords, where the plot of the fable moves forward significantly (e.g., at the point with the text “Some impudent fellow pointed his finger at me”). The final phrase of the first movement again recalls the beginning, as if the composer wanted to make the listener compare the opening and closing messages.
2. **Man and the Rainbow (*Der Mensch und der Regenbogen*)** reflects on the relativity of visual perception and its eventual physical elusiveness. When a man watches a rainbow, it gradually disappears, and when he reaches it, it disappears completely. The fable is credited with saying “The man stood silent and thought he heard a distant, breath-like voice: I am your knowledge, your thought, your life's dream.” The music of this short melodrama bears sonic features. It moves mainly in the middle and high positions of the piano. To express the image where the rainbow arch touches the ground, the composer chooses notes in the great and small octaves in the left hand. The basic building block of the music is the descending tone series 22221111³⁷ in the soprano of the first bar of No. 3.



Example 3.

The rhythmic starting points for further development can also be noted in the above scale runs. Much of the text recited here is planned without accompaniment. Presumably, the author wanted to establish a relationship between the recitation message and its musical commentary. The musical characteristics mentioned above are then added to by the jerky rhythm of the sixteenth and eighth notes with a dot. Here, too, the piece concludes with a phrase similar to the one at the beginning. Here, too, the melodrama begins with an unaccompanied recitation.

3. **A little corner (*Ein Stückchen Kohle*)**. A small piece of coal was under the illusion that it would be as instrumental in generating heat as its larger brethren. It didn't happen, so the fable ends with the punch line, “Surrounded by worthless ashes,

³⁷ See more Tichý, Vladimír. *Modalita. Živá hudba VIII*. Praha: SPN, 1983.

trampled to death and suffocated, he will be taken the next day to the garbage dump, which is the final eternity of all useless things.” This story, too, can be understood metaphorically. In contrast to the two preceding sections, the final fable opens with a piano entrance, which, like the previous section, sums up all the elements. These are also separately used in order to support the content of the recited text. See Ex. 3.³⁸

Uhlíček
Fabel – Melodram

Frédéric Bolli, 2021
Text: Karel Pexidř

Allegro marcato ♩ = 120

ff

5

9

ff

Kdesi hluboko pod zemí se narodil uhlíček.
Jeho bratři byli pořádní habáni, ale on byl malý.

Example 4.

Here, too, the text is underpinned by a musically distinctive tissue. Bolli partly returns the musical language to the reflected mode of the play, the *giocososo* world of the first movement. Here, however, the chording is denser and sonically harder. This is due to the frequent bitonal clashes (see the relationship between the left and right hands in Example 4), with the individual layers generated by black-and-white harmony. Throughout the observed Example 4, we also hear the predominance of the distant hierarchy over the centric hierarchy.³⁹ The form of the piece is then strongly influenced by the tempo breaks between *Allegro marcato* and *Molto piú lento*, which take place in two places,⁴⁰ each time addressing the

³⁸ Sheet music is taken from the author's electronic version, which was used at concerts.

³⁹ Risinger, Karel. *Hierarchie hudebních celků v novodobé evropské hudbě* [Hierarchy of musical units in modern European music]. Praha: Panton, 1969. Edition of Musicology.

⁴⁰ See bars 30 and 50 of the author's electronic version.

question of whether or not the embers will be burned in the oven. It is interesting that the composer chooses a pentatonic line after the black keys for the *Lento* tempo filling when the chance of the ember being burned is real. The filling of the *Lento* will include pentatonic after white keys when the chance has already disappeared. The music of the beginning, given in Example 4, is quoted in fragments at the end of the piece, where the final phrase of the text gradually seeps in. If we want to express the character of this piece, the rondo principle best describes it.

The performance of Frédéric Bolli's cycle of fables has always invited a smile, as have many of his other compositions. Here, the author has musically supported the wise text of Karl Pexidor in a way that fully corresponds to the genre of melodrama.

Participating Czech composers (in alphabetical order) and their concert melodramas

Michaela Augustinová (*1996), Czech composer and pianist, remarks on her work: "The melodrama *The Adventures of a Flying Mouse* (original German text *Die abenteuerliche Geschichte einer fliegenden Maus* by **Torben Kuhlmann**, translation into Czech by **Radek Malý**) tells an adventurous story which, thanks to its poetic presentation, will appeal to all ages. It tells the story of a mouse who, despite numerous difficulties, tries to build an airplane from trap-infested Europe to America, where all his friends have already fled. The polystylistic musical setting supports the importance of the little mouse's longing for America – whenever it appears in the text, the music responds with harmonies and rhythmic jazz-inflected cues. Conversely, moments of disappointment, when the plane's production fails and the dream is in jeopardy, are accompanied by the neo-romantic musical idea of the minor key. The connection between text and music is enhanced by moments using iconic characters. The 'too great silence' is expressed by the loss of musical texture to a monophonic voice, the 'hriil human cry' in the spoken word is enhanced by dissonant sforzato, the mouse's flight is followed by rapid values, the action deep underground is played out in the lower registers of the piano, the rain and the tinkling of bells mentioned in the spoken word can be heard in a sound-picture piano stylization."

Jiří Bezděk (*1961) a renowned Czech contemporary composer, music theorist, and pedagogue. The author comments on his concert melodrama *Heslo Corona* [Password Corona]: (based on a text by the Saxon contemporary poet **Monika Hähnel**; translated into Czech by **Věra Šustíková**): "The piece not only brings back memories of the hardships brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic but also provokes reflection when compared to the Spanish flu that took place a hundred years ago. Therefore, the piece is divided into two units, 'Then', and 'After', which are immediately related to each other. Both units, however, touch on old and new pandemics, as if the views from the time of the hardship and the views after its passing share commonalities. The setting goes for the rawness and simple emotionality of the verses, opting for the harshness of expressionist dissonances on the one hand and the playful optimism of the language of contemporary music of the socialist era on the other. None of these compositional means of expression can be expected to arouse the popularity of the audience. It is, however, an appellative composition that shows the upturned face of human life. Furthermore, that is its main mission."

Pavel Trojan (*1956) is a prominent Czech composer and music teacher. He chose for his concert melodrama *Gebete* [Prayers] texts by **Franz Werfel**, a German writer whose life is connected with Prague. He took Werfel's poem *Prayer for Language* as a starting point, to which he added two other thematically related poems with the word "prayer" in the title, namely *Prayer at Dawn* and *Prayer for the Right End*. The poems have been set to music only in the original German, as no translator has yet been found who could faithfully express their poetry. The composer's music emphasizes these poems' deeply poetic, passionate, and ethical dimensions.

Implementation of the project of contemporary Czech-German melodramas "Czechs set Germans to music and Germans set Czechs to music."

The summary of the concert melodramas created within the project represented a very diverse mix of styles. The task of creating a meaningful dramaturgy for the show and staging both the Czech and German versions of the concert was entrusted to the experienced melodrama director Věra Šustíková, who is currently the only specialized director of concert melodrama in the Czech Republic.

The choice of the reciters was guided both by the nature of the texts, as in the casting of the actors' roles, and by the performers' ability to meet all the demands placed on them by their musical grasp of the texts. Director Věra Šustíková chose the actress Apolena Veldová⁴¹ for the "female" texts and the excellent actor and dubber Jaromír Meduna⁴² for the "male" parts. For Pavel Trojan's melodrama, which was only available in the German version, the singer and reciter Christina Mrázková-Kluge,⁴³ a native German living in Prague, was invited on the assumption that her perfect knowledge of German would convey the most authentic experience to the audience.

Piano parts were prepared by known Pilsen pianist Věra Müllerová.⁴⁴ Only unconventional composition by Michael Emanuel Bauer posed such specific requirements that it

⁴¹ **Apolena Veldová**, actress, dubber, and teacher. She was nominated for the Thalia Award in 1995. Her voice is heard in popular crime series (*Cold Cases*, *Without a Trace*), and she also dubs films. Since 2009 she has been cooperating with Melodramfest in Prague (Medea in Benda's stage melodrama, Kirké in Praupner's melodrama).

⁴² **Jaromír Meduna**, actor, reciter and dubber. He has lent his unmistakable distinctive voice to dozens of famous personalities, such as Robert De Niro, Gene Hackman, Anthony Hopkins, John Goodman, John Malkovich, Ken Watanabe, Liam Neeson, Walter Matthau, and David Suchet. In 2012, he won the František Filipovský Award for male actor in the dubbing of Maxwell. Since 2010, he has been a tribal performer at Melodramfest, where he has premiered many Czech novelties and participated in the concert performances of Fibich's *Hippodamia* in 2010 and 2020 in the role of Oinomaos.

⁴³ **Christina Mrázková-Kluge** soprano, vocal teacher. She was born in Halle/Saale, Germany, and studied solo singing at the Musikhochschule Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Leipzig. After moving to the Czech Republic, she had engagements at the State Opera Prague, the Musical Theatre in Karlín, etc. She performed at Melodramfest for the first time in 2000 (during the UNESCO anniversary of Zdeněk Fibich).

⁴⁴ **Věra Müllerová** pianist and piano teacher. As a soloist, she has performed extensively at home and abroad (in Russia, France, Slovenia, Germany, England, Japan, and the USA). She has worked with Czech and foreign orchestras, singers, and instrumentalists. She has also collaborated with Czech Radio, Czech music publishers, and Slovenian Radio (Ljubljana). She has repeatedly participated as a juror in the International Piano Competition in London and as a lecturer in masterclasses in Frensham (UK). Since 1980 she has been a professor of solo piano at the Conservatory in Pilsen, and since 2001 she has been working externally with the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. She is also an interpreter of melodrama and has recently collaborated with Melodramfest.

was necessary to stage this piece with a different pianist Jiří Pešek,⁴⁵ who is more oriented towards experimental techniques.

The next task was to rehearse the individual pieces with the selected performers. The function of the director of a concert melodrama thus consists of an informed interpretation of the author's intention, i.e., the composer, who is responsible for the overall structure of the melodrama. As a rule, an experienced actor can analyze the realized text or poem and choose adequate means of expression for its interpretation. However, in melodrama, the poetic text is already interpreted once by the composer. The way he grasps the words musically is a manifestation of his understanding of the text, and this must be respected. Otherwise the realization of the text would miss the musical component. However, only some actors are enough a musician to be able to cope with this task on their own. Even the best needs feedback as to whether he or she understands the whole structure correctly; at other times, the coherent guidance of the director is needed. The director then translates the "requirements" of the scored text to the performer of the musical component so that both performers fulfill the director's vision in harmony, based on an analytical understanding of the author's intention.

The biggest problem was the staging of Bauer's composition, precisely because it is not a classical melodrama but an experimental work that places extraordinary technical demands on both performers, both in terms of metro-rhythmic and the application of unconventional techniques. The director's work here consisted mainly of looking after the rhythmic structures and their fulfillment and creating an overall piece of architecture that is not prescribed. It was up to the pianist to stage a technically and rhythmically demanding part. It was then up to the actress not only to master all the pitfalls of non-traditional techniques, to fulfill the metro-rhythmic requirements of harmony and dynamic structures to create the architectural arc of the piece, but moreover, to give the whole text composed of nonsense syllables a certain acting expression that would match the character of the music. The experienced actress Apolena Veldová managed this so originally that it was clear that she would be the exclusive interpreter of this work for a long time. In addition to Bauer's compositions, the project also included an interpretation of Czech versions of melodramas by Michaela Augustinová and Jiří Bezděk, accompanied by Věra Müllerová. In Bauer's composition, pianist Jiří Pešek was her extraordinary partner, even though it was his first encounter with melodrama. Czech version of melodramas by Frédéric Bolli and Holmer Becker performed by the experienced Jaromír Meduna. For the recitation of Pavel Trojan's melodrama, for which it was impossible to create a Czech version of the text, the German soprano Christina Mrázková-Kluge was invited to perform the work in the German original.

First concerts in Prague and Plzeň presented in the autumn of 2021 all the staged works in an order that alternated melodramas by Czech and German authors, from the most traditional concepts to experimental works. The program was preceded by a small historical reminder of Czech-German relations in melodrama, with a performance of works by Bedřich Smetana and Kamillo Horn on the same text by J. W. Goethe.

⁴⁵ **Jiří Pešek**, pianist, pedagogue. During his studies, he won numerous prizes at international piano competitions (1st prize at the International Competition for Piano Duos in Hof, Germany, in 2005, 2nd prize at the "Beethoven's Hradec" competition in 2009, and is a three-time laureate of the International Piano Competition in Pilsen in 2006, 2008 and 2010. He has long collaborated with the Pilsen Philharmonic Orchestra and the Czech National Symphony Orchestra, with whom he has played in many major European concert halls. Since 2012 he has been fully engaged in teaching.

The German co-organizers of future concerts also visited the concert, and the first experiences supported by the audience's reactions in both countries brought the first evaluation of the project. The little historical insert in the introduction was particularly interesting, which necessitated its later expansion at the request of the local German organizers. Only Michael E. Bauer's piece aroused contradictory reactions, ranging from enthusiastic ovations, which deservedly belonged mainly to the interpreter of the text, to completely dismissive reactions of some future German organizers, who, knowing their more conservative audience, rejected the inclusion of this piece as dehumanizing the genre of melodrama.

The situation was further complicated by the bilingual nature of the project. Surprisingly, the hypothesis of an ideal cast of native speakers was not confirmed. All the German authors agreed that linguistic refinement is not the main component of interpreting work for a German audience but that the actor's internal experience and convincing expression are far more important. Thus, the phenomenon that we know from the Czech environment of mediation of historically distant works was confirmed – the audience does not perceive the obsolescence of the language as an obstacle if the interpretation is internally convincing. The original plan to cast native German speakers for the four concerts was abandoned, and the German version of the concert was offered to Czech actors. The performers for the German tour were the musical actress and singer Dita Hořínková⁴⁶ and the actor, chansonnier, and presenter Filip Sychra.⁴⁷ The pianist Věra Müllerová studied the entire program for Germany with them and took over Jiří Pešek's part.

The dramaturgy of the project for the German audience had to create two forms of the concert according to the research in the individual venues. One form – the more classical – took place in the concert hall of the Cultural Centre in Konstanz and the Robert Schumann Museum in Zwickau. Here, the Bauer experiment was launched and the historical prologue of the concert was expanded to include works by the main representatives of the genre of concert melodrama in both countries – Robert Schumann (*Ballade vom Heideknaben*) [Ballad of the Heath Boy] and Zdeněk Fibich (*Vodník*) [The Water Sprite]. The pieces were arranged so that the last number was Pavel Trojan's *Gebete* [Prayers]. Dita Hořínková took over the German versions of the melodramas by Smetana, Schumann, Bezděk and Trojan, Filip Sychra the works by Horn, Fibich, Bolli, and Becker. The second form of the concert finally combined the extension of the prologue and the original order of the pieces with Bauer's work at the end. Apolena Veldová was specially invited to interpret Bauer's work. In this form, the concert took place in Munich and Regensburg.

⁴⁶ **Dita Hořínková**, actress and singer. She performed many children's roles at the Prague State Opera and the National and Estates Theatre. She has appeared in leading roles in the musicals *Cats*, *My Fair Lady*, *Gypsies Go to Heaven*, and others. She was nominated for a Thalia Award in 2017 and 2020. She often performs abroad. She has made solo tours in Canada and Japan. She teaches singing at the Music and Drama Department of the Prague Conservatory. In 2008 she won (together with pianist Miroslav Sekera) the second prize in the International Zdeněk Fibich Competition in the Interpretation of Melodrama. Since then, she has collaborated with Melodramfest (Kirké in the historically informed staging of Praupner's stage melodrama).

⁴⁷ **Filip Sychra**, actor, chansonnier, dancer. He has applied his musical and dance disposition in several musicals (e.g., *Evita*, *Romeo and Juliet*) and purely dance projects (*Bardo*, *The Tale of Honza*, *Gabriel Lion*). He also has several film and television roles to his credit. Since the beginning of the 1990s, he has been cooperating with the association Chanson, a public affair. As a member of Happy Day Quintet's vocal group, he sings in many different genres. In 2006 he became (with pianist Miron Šmidák) the winner of the 4th International Zdeněk Fibich Competition in the Interpretation of Melodrama. Since then, he has collaborated permanently with Melodramfest, where he has staged many important domestic and international chamber and orchestral works and participated in the concert performances of *Hippodamia* as Myrtillos.

The program's rehearsal brought difficulty in the form of the backing of the text in the music notation. In order to meet the demands of contemporary melodrama for naturalness and inner truthfulness of the statement, it was impossible to draw on the experience with the Czech text, where the joint phrasing of words and music is based on different placed stresses and dashes than in German. However, it was necessary to start rehearsing from scratch with the help of a language consultant. The difficulty of this task is related to the closeness of the interplay between the two bands; the closer the relationship between the words and the music, the more difficult it is.

The unusual task for Czech actors raised questions about how they would be received by audiences in Germany. However, after the first successes, confidence grew, and the added value of an adequate experience of the work was conveyed on an emotional level to the audience. Even with the most rigorous assessment of the director, it must be said that at least at the last concert, there was the phenomenon that the linguistic realization was as adequate as if the actors were speaking their native language.

The new experience with a foreign-language text performed by Czech actors thus showed that even today,⁴⁸ it is possible to arrive at an adequate interpretation of a work in a foreign language, and melodrama is not a genre whose weakness is the linguistic limitation.

On the methodological results of the project – summary

The concerts of the described project and the preceding preparatory phase have brought some highly positive suggestions that can be widely applied in the education and training of all age groups:

- a) The project preparation was accompanied by a convivial but very demanding atmosphere between the Czech and German managers, composers, and implementers. Very tough debates were held, for example, between the organizers of the event and the composer Bauer about the structure and content of his work. At the same time, it was also necessary to find standard solutions in debates about the dramaturgy of the concerts, which was not always favorable to him. However, all disputes ended in a compromise solution.
- b) The concert of melodramas was perceived in many places as a dramaturgical enrichment because it presented a text that was understandable to the audience. In the case of Bauer's piece, Apolena Veldová's performance was received with great acclaim.
- c) The selected texts brought many deep thoughts that led the audience to think (see, e.g., poems by Ivan Blatný, Franz Werfel, Monika Hähnel or fables by Karel Pexidr).
- d) It has been shown that the language barrier can also be overcome at the recitation level.

⁴⁸ The suggestive parallel concerning the interpretation of melodrama in the 19th century, when Czech actors commonly interpreted German texts, is inadequate because the situation was completely different. German was the basic language of Czech bourgeois society at that time, and all education, including acting, was conducted in German. Czech artists of the time were commonly bilingual. Therefore, the newly resurgent Czech was the language that could cause difficulties for actors at that time.

- e) The participating composers searched for adequate texts and thus gained a broader insight into Czech literature and the literature of the German language area.
- f) The project involved the Sudeten German Music Institute (Sudetendeutsches Musikinstitut SMI),⁴⁹ which brought new impulses to the understanding of Czech-German cultural overlaps.
- g) A transnational project of this type brings not only a confrontation of creative approaches but also a confrontation in the reception of individual works. The knowledge generated by these confrontations is disseminated through all channels that capture cultural events and trends.

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⁴⁹ The SMI's mission is to research, document, and promote the heritage and creative forces of the musical culture of the Bohemian Lands, with special attention to the population of the German language, descent, or nationality. The work focuses on the intricate German-Czech interactions in the European context and is oriented towards exchange and understanding. The understanding of music is not bound by national or genre boundaries; in addition to "classical" music, the entire spectrum of popular and entertaining music (folklore, jazz, and other music) is to be presented.

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