

**The Prague Manifesto
after (almost) sixty years**
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The first postwar years (1945-48/49) were marked by a remarkable amount of international activity in Czech music culture. Naturally this was partly an attempt to re-establish contacts broken by the war (and in the field of music these had been particularly intensive under the prewar First Republic), but it was also a response to the perceived necessity to enter discussion on newly emerging themes. One of the most pressing themes, raised immediately the war ended, was that of a "crisis of contemporary music". What was also behind these renewed international activities was, however, the attempt to represent the re-established Czechoslovakia to the world – and music had traditionally been a successful Czechoslovak cultural export. The political climate of postwar Europe was generally orientated to the left, and this was even more the case in those areas of Europe that had found themselves in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union as a result of wartime developments. In the ascendant, the left wanted to express its hegemony on an international stage, and leftist campaigning in the sphere of culture (as in other spheres) was considered an important instrument of propaganda and ideological struggle (the communists liked to appropriate the category of "progress" for example, identifying it with fundamental political doctrines based on a single "scientific world view").

2nd International Congress of Composers

From its very first year (1946) the international Prague Spring music festival was a highly respected musical event. Other influential international activities in Czech music culture included the two international congresses of composers and music critics organised by the Syndicate of Czech Composers in May 1947 and the following year – always timed to coincide with the Prague Spring Festival. The 1st International Congress of Composers and Music Critics met in Prague on the 16th to the 26th of May 1947 and was attended by delegates from 16 countries. The main theme was of course the establishment of contacts and the programme motto was the question "Where is contemporary music going?" The papers presented at the congress were published in a collection entitled *The Music of the Nations*¹. As far as can be gathered from these papers, the claim that contemporary music was in a state

¹ *Hudba národů – Musique des nations*. Prague, Syndicate of Czech Composers 1948, 187 pages.

of crisis was universal and made spontaneously by the delegates of both "western" and "eastern" countries. In the following year (20th – 29th of May 1948) the 2nd International Congress of Composers developed the themes introduced at the 1st Congress, and its conclusions were formulated in one of the official congress documents, entitled the *Proclamation (Provolání)* but also known as the *Prague Manifesto*. The question "Where is contemporary music going?" was considered in detail at the 2nd Congress in terms of the creative problems of the contemporary composer and the problems of the contemporary music critic.

The political changes that had just occurred in Czechoslovakia (the communist takeover in February 1948), increased the importance of the 2nd International Congress of Composers and Music Critics for its time. From the outset the communists concentrated a great deal of attention on the field of art and culture as an extremely useful instrument in its political struggle "for the soul of every person", as the Czechoslovak Communist Party Cultural Political Programme put it in a declaration at the Congress of National Culture soon after (in April 1948) the political coup. The communist cultural offensive was planned in detail and skillfully co-ordinated. The main speakers at the Congress of National Culture were the leaders of the communist regime – Klement Gottwald (Prime Minister), Václav Kopecký (Minister of Information), Zdeněk Nejedlý (Minister of Education and Enlightenment) and Ladislav Štoll (literary theorist, communist critic, essayist, high-ranking functionary of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party). They all made the same general points about the need for an ideologically unified cultural political line that would reflect the process of building socialism and become an active force in this process. Štoll focused on the question of the function of art in socialist society. One point that he made may seem rather surprising in retrospect, given our experience of the usual attitude of the totalitarian regime towards (at least some aspects of) the phenomenon of creative freedom: "*As regards the question of "how", the question of form, here no one can prescribe anything....*" At this moment, then, artistic individuality, later to be repressed and deformed for so many years, was still being defended as autonomous and untouchable even by a high ranking communist. As we shall see, subsequent events were to take a different course.

Nejedlý devoted most of his paper to the questions of the relationship between art and ideology, art and reality, and the national quality of art. He stressed that the art of the future must be based on a certain ideology, for that that is the essential nature of art and corresponds to the facts of historical development. On the question of the relationship of art to reality he

proclaimed realism to be the only progressive approach, and so the only approach with a future, unlike the deformed alternatives of naturalism, formalism and surrealism (here we should highlight the way in which these concepts are linked together, despite the logical incoherence of the equation - a linkage that was to acquire an almost magical ritual function in communist music criticism). Nejedlý's argumentation is in places very much an appeal to the "people" in the sense of "popular demagogic". For example, he offers his audience the following intellectual sleight of hand: *"Realist art grows out of reality – and if that reality is Czech, then our art too must be Czech. Only a typically Czech art can also find a place in world culture. National character is therefore the best guarantee of the internationality of art"*. Nejedlý had in fact been obsessed with this conception of Czech national art (and by extension music) for many years and had been working hard to promote it practically from the very birth of the republic in 1918. He was not alone, and it became a very influential concept of the development of modern art in the new Czechoslovak state, and one with both positive and negative consequences in interwar Czech modern music.

The Zhdanov Theses

One very significant impulse behind the ideological political line and concrete programme of the 2nd International Congress of Composers and Music Critics was what is known as Zhdanovism or the Zhdanov Theses – or more precisely the Resolution of the Soviet Central Committee of the 10th of February 1948 on Muradeli's opera *The Great Friendship* and the overall situation of Soviet Music. This document had a very pronounced effect on the discussions of the congress – and naturally also on the content of the Proclamation, i.e. the Prague Manifesto. In any case, the Soviet delegates were among the most important foreign celebrities at the congress² and the delegates to the congress scrutinised the Zhdanov theses very thoroughly. No more than Nejedlý's theories about national-international character and realism were the basic principles of Zhdanov's theses anything new. The term "socialist realism" – one of the key terms of the whole period and specifically the 2nd International Congress as well – had first been formulated in 1932 at the Congress of Soviet Writers and soon became current abroad. In Czechoslovakia it had been used for example in debate on the pages of the journals *Rytmus* and *Tempo* in the years 1936-37, by Vladimír Helfert in *Czech Modern Music* and of course by Nejedlý in his book on *Soviet Music*. The Zhdanov Theses nonetheless brought the issue of socialist realism to a

political head, and formulated it in a very authoritarian, uncompromising and normative way. The 2nd Internal Congress in Prague became a major international platform for these theses, and so aroused lively reactions from both its supporters and its opponents. Indeed, the Prague Manifesto has not infrequently been directly identified with the Zhdanov theses, but this is far from justified either in terms of time or place, or even to some extent in terms of content.

The Prague Manifesto

The Prague Manifesto declared first of all that that contemporary music was in deep crisis, caused above all by the sharp contradiction between so-called "serious" and so-called "light" music. It criticises serious music for extreme subjectivity and complexity of form, while attacking light music for flatness, leveling down and standardisation, cheap pandering to low taste and commercialisation. The manifesto claims that the way out of the crisis is for composers to recognise the seriousness of the situation and so to give up extreme subjectivism and complexity of expressive technique. The manifesto explicitly denies any desire to establish norms and binding regulations for composers, and merely appeals to their consciences and good will, but in later sections it does actually contain concrete instructions on how to overcome the critical state of music. Specifically, there are 4 areas of requirement:

- 1 Composers ought to recognise the state of crisis and give up extreme subjectivism. Then their music will become the expression of the new, highly progressive ideas and feelings of the broad masses and everything that is currently progressive.
- 2 Composers ought in their music to identify more deeply with the national cultures of their countries and defend them against cosmopolitanism, for "music cannot be truly international except as a result of the development of its national character."
- 3 Composers must turn their attention to forms that have the potential to be the most concrete in content, specifically operas, oratorios, cantatas, choral works and songs.
- 4 Musicians should make efforts to educate the broad masses as a way of overcoming musical illiteracy.

Three of these four points are addressed directly to composers, who are expected to take the main role in overcoming the alleged crisis. The last point relates to another serious problem, i.e. education to musicality, the cultivation of cultural interests and needs, the encouragement

² They were T. Khrennikov, B. Zarustovsky and J. Shaporin

of a sense for art. In this point the Proclamation goes beyond the terms of the Zhdanov Theses, although it evidently starts from the view expressed in them.

All the delegates to the congress unanimously agreed on the text of the Prague Manifesto. The problems began rather later – especially in Czechoslovakia, with the further concrete elaboration and practical implementation of the individual ideas set down in the document. Concurrently there was a similar "elaboration and practical application" of the Zhdanov theses. Here of course political pressures exerted by the regime played a much stronger and more immediate role.

Implementation

The 1st Working Congress of the Composers and Music Scientists of Czechoslovakia, which met in September 1948 in Prague, identified with the ideas of the Prague Manifesto. At this congress the ideas of the Manifesto were elaborated with a view to application in domestic conditions. The focus of attention was the "people's" character of new music, postulated here as an obligatory aspect of art. The participants at the 1st working congress declared support for the policy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and proclaimed a five-year plan for composers as an expression of the will of the artistic front to contribute to the fulfillment of the economic five-year-plan through the effects of music during socialism-building and in the conditions of intensified class struggle. To get an idea of the atmosphere of the practical application of the conclusions of the 2nd International Congress of Composers and Music Critics (in this country) it is instructive to note the tone of various articles and commentaries in the press, which elaborated the individual articles of the Manifesto. Characteristically, almost all the journalistic argumentation is clearly focused on composers, on the creation of music. The leader of the 1st issue of *Hudební rozhledy* magazine (September 1948) is typical for its radical uncompromising attitude: "*...we are convinced that only a perfectly politically conscious artist can use his talent to the full to the benefit of his nation... we are convinced that only the progressive artist is predestined to be the creator of new artistic values in the epoch of the birth of socialism... we are convinced that artists in their attitude and above all with their music can not only contribute to the building of a new society but even speed up the process... we do not want to play at being mere sound musicians or jugglers of tone combinations; we want to return music from its social isolation to the heart of the living human being...*" The leader also calls for a radical revision of artistic values, and here the line taken on the concept of "creative freedom" is very relevant. "*...we definitely do not regard it as humiliating for creative artists to be assigned tasks... we do not*

consider there to be anything objectionable about the fact that composers will not now succumb to the fads of excessive experimentation, but instead of games of art for art's sake will be integrated into the nationwide working process, and instead of individual Bohemianism will get to know the needs of a healthy collective."

After the national congress the Czech musicologist Antonín Sychra tried to assess the results of the two meetings – the international meeting in May and the national in September – in a long article.³ In one passage he tried, very unusually in this period, to actually define what was then one of the most commonly used (or perhaps abused) concepts in music aesthetics, criticism and journalism – the term *formalism*: "*We might perhaps (present author's emphasis) be able to define formalism in general as the tackling of creative questions, questions of aesthetic structure, without regard to the functional union of art and reality, and without consideration of the tasks that society imposes on it. In musicology we might call formalistic those concepts that explore the development of musical structures, and musical techniques, in isolation from their meaning, from their social function, thus elaborating the idea, which is in any case deeply rooted, that music creates its own reality, that it is an independent world of "sounding forms of motion (Hanslick)".*

This is a very vague and empty definition – but it was on this kind of principle of argumentation, essentially too vague and schematic for any real judgments on music, that most of the theoretical and critical literature of the time is based. This included a lengthy attempt to put forward some kind of scientifically founded exposition of the concept of progressive music and social realism (using concrete "analyses" of model musical works as effective ways of getting the message across) by Sychra himself, entitled *Party Music Criticism, Co-Creator of the New Music [Stranická hudební kritika, spolutvůrce nové hudby]* (1951). Sychra invested huge labours and his undoubtedly penetrating intellect to his theoretical elaboration of socialist realism. Naturally it was a completely hopeless task and a waste of energy and time, making it one of the greatest professional tragedies of this undeniably able, erudite and creative scholar.

Further concrete elaborations of the conclusions of the Prague Manifesto were to take ever more extreme and bizarre forms. At the end of a joint meeting between representatives of the Syndicate of Czech Composers and the Syndicate of Slovak Composers on the 20th of December 1948, the participants adopted a *Framework Five-Year Plan for Composers and Musicologists*. The plan was based on the principles of the economic Five-Year Plan

promulgated for the years 1949-53. The premise of the composers' Five-Year Plan was the demand that music should play an active role in inspiring efforts to build socialism and in the intensified class struggle. The second premise – closely related to the first – was that music must be composed with a view "to current class and socialism-building needs", i.e. addressed to the people. Emphasis was placed on the need for composers and musicologists to have political training, and not of a theoretical kind, but practical as well "in co-operation with the working class on concrete everyday tasks". The plan identified one effective form of such practical training as what was known as "artistic supervision" (artists were obliged to go regularly to factories and plants, usually near their homes, and to lead art activities for the workers, especially young people, with composers for example writing mass songs for works choirs and so on), because "...new art depends on new experience – and we do not get that at home, at our desks"... and furthermore, "...Hitherto we have placed too little emphasis on vocal music. We have regarded symphonic music as the main centre of gravity of our work... Vocal music must be the reflection of the class struggle against reaction within ourselves and outside ourselves... This means that we must stop any attempts to make vocal music apolitical... We must get rid of naturalism in declamation in the interest of a new, developed cantilena, and avoid all purely instrumental formalism in vocal music..." I do not think there is any need to make further comments on these extracts from the (official!) proclamations of the time. They are as authoritarian and uncompromising as they are contentless and absurd.

International response

Let us, however, return to the international response to the Prague Manifesto, which was not deformed by such political pressures and where discussion was at a rather more serious intellectual level. Soon after the end of the congress the manifesto became the subject of very lively debate and polemic involving many well-known figures on the international music and musicological scene. Probably the most famous contribution to the debate was Adorno's essay, "*Die gegängelte Musik*" (which came out in August 1948⁴), and triggered other, mostly polemic reactions.⁵ Apart from these responses and criticisms shortly after the end of the congress and publication of the Prague Manifesto, reactions to the document were to resume much later. One well-known example was the interrupted discussion seminar held

³ A. Sychra: *Sjezd mezinárodní a celonárodní [The Congress International and National]*. In: *Hudební rozhledy* I, 1948/49, no.2, pp. 22-25

⁴ First published in the magazine *Monat*, May 1953, and in book form in *Dissonanzen* 3, 1963, pp. 46-61

⁵ R. Leibowitz : *L'artiste et sa conscience. Esquisse d'une dialectique de la conscience artistique*. Preface by J.P.Sartre, Paris 1950.

on the theme in April 1969 in the Institute for New Music and Music Education in Darmstadt, originally conceived as part of a broader thematic series of discussions on Music and Politics (Musik und Politik). Two years later a collection of articles came out entitled *Über Musik und Politik*⁶, with a content that overlapped with the theme of the Darmstadt Seminar but was not identical. Czech musicologists were among those who took part in the seminar and made contributions to the collection. To judge from the testimony of the direct participants in the seminar the atmosphere of the discussion in Darmstadt differed greatly from the tone and direction of the collection two years later. In Darmstadt the theme seems to have produced a very diverse range of opinion including views of an extreme leftwing type – voiced not by the Czech musicologists but above all by the "western" participants (K. Boehmer: *The Art of Revolution*). These radical leftwing views did not appear in the collection, however, which on the contrary included papers that had not been presented at Darmstadt and were critical of the principles of the Prague Manifesto. A particularly sharp attack on the Prague Manifesto (set in the context of a broader argument) was presented in the essay by Vladimír Karbusický, *"Ideologie umění a umění ideologie. K podstatě pamfletické hudební literatury 1948-1952"* [*The Ideology of Art and the Art of Ideology. On the Crux of Pamphlet Literature on Music 1948-1952*].⁷ This essay aroused great antagonism among the official representatives of Czechoslovak musicology, all the more so since its author, former radical Marxist, had by this time emigrated.

If, then, the tendencies of the Darmstadt discussion were more "to the left" – i.e. orientated to criticism of the current state of western cultural and cultural politics and so to the defense of the principles of the Prague Manifesto, the tendency in the collection two years later was in the opposite direction – to sharp criticism of the Prague Manifesto and the social system that had applied its principles. For example, in his essay Karbusický claims that the Prague Manifesto had essentially been drawn up beforehand in Moscow. This was a claim that was of course rejected by some of those who had actually attended the 2nd International Congress: Antonín Sychra and Ivan Vojtěch declared that the Soviet delegation had in fact behaved very correctly and with great restraint at the congress, and that it had been leftwing composers and critics from western countries who had contributed most to the more radical formulations of the Prague Manifesto. One whom they mentioned in this regard was the

⁶ *Über Musik und Politik*. Neun Beiträge, hrsg. von Rudolf Stephan, Mainz 1971

⁷ The article came out in the collection *Über Musik und Politik*, Mainz 1971 on pp. 67-85 in somewhat abridged form. It had already been published before (1969), this time in significantly censored form – likewise in the journal *Hudební věda* (*Hudební Věda*, 1969, no.3, pp. 281-311). It was published in full form only 22 years after

English composer, pianist and conductor Alan Bush (1900-1995), a convinced radical Marxist and from 1935 a member of the British Communist Party. Other congress documents would potentially provide objective and very valuable evidence – especially the detailed minutes of discussions (these were made by stenographer, but have been lost with the whole archive of the Syndicate of Czechoslovak composers, and historians have been searching for them vainly to this day).

There would seem to be some analogies between the situation in Prague in May 1948 and in Darmstadt in April 1969:

1) Radical left-wing totalitarian views were far from being expressed only by representatives of the "socialist" countries, who as it were had them in their "job description", but were to a significant extent voiced by some representatives of the West, usually convinced left-wingers of Marxist orientation.

2) The problems of music and politics, music and ideology, music and state power, music and society, artistic freedom and the communicative powers of music (and art in general) remained live issues in the later period, despite the death of Stalin, the ensuing criticism of his "cult of personality" and the gradual revelation of Stalinist (and other totalitarian) crimes. The end of the 1960s actually brought a new radicalisation of the left, especially among students in the West (disturbances in France, West Germany) – paradoxically at the same time as a wave of protest against totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia, Poland and elsewhere. Incidentally, the problems at the Darmstadt seminar were caused above all by radical leftwing students who whistled and heckled the main speaker off.

T.W.Adorno

Since we are well aware of the ideological principles behind the views of the supporters, promoters and administrators of the Prague Manifesto – especially in this country – let us now briefly consider at least the main opponents of the Prague Manifesto on the international scene.

Undoubtedly the most carefully argued and well thought out response was Adorno's essay "*Die gegängelte Musik*". It became very popular both as itself a manifesto of a particular intellectual platform and as a support for future arguments of a similar kind. It was published in Czech translation in the "Darmstadt" year of 1969 under the title *Music on a String [Hudba na provázku]*. The parallel printing of the original text of the Prague

it was written in *Hudební věda* under the title *Ornament revoluce [The Ornament of Revolution]*, *Hudební věda* 1991, no. 4, pp. 341-359.

Manifesto, to which Adorno was reacting, was a particularly useful aspect of the edition. Czech orthodox Marxists naturally tried to engage in polemic with it⁸ but in doing so they paradoxically also popularised the work and distributed it with commentary to the broader public. Adorno brilliantly exposes the "formless melodising" of a document as rife with empty phrases as the Prague Manifesto. This fault in itself, however, would not have made it worth his while to write a reply at the standard of *Die gegängelte Musik*. The Prague Manifesto also contained some opinions that Adorno believed were worthier of deeper examination.

Adorno started from his own current theories of the linearity of the historical development of music based on the evolution of the material of music (it was on this theory that he built his argument in his book, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, which was more or less complete when he wrote the reply to the Prague Manifesto). Mainly on this premise, he argued that there was no real and fundamental differences between the "bourgeois music of the West" (denounced and rejected by the Prague Manifesto), and the progressive music of socialist realism: "... *the avant-garde music denounced in the East is once again creating aesthetic contradictions at a higher level and taking on something of the mechanical and objectified essence peculiar to traditional musical language*". Seeing music in terms of linear historical development from lower to higher forms means that Adorno practically inevitably concludes that reality, "*provides no justification for returning music to its earlier lower level by means of reglementation.*"

Here Adorno was actually playing into the hands of later critics of his critique (Marxists of Soviet type – Adorno as we know was also a Marxist), since the theory of the linear historical development of music (evolution from the simpler to the more complex) was generally considered to be unsustainable from the late 1950s/early 1960s (Georgiades and others). His attack on some of the theses of the Prague Manifesto as voluntarism was also potentially a boomerang, since elements of voluntarism are undeniably present in Adorno's own philosophico-historical concepts. Nonetheless, Adorno's objections to the Prague Manifesto are more complex than this suggests and relate to many different levels of such huge themes as the problem of the relationship between the artist and society, for example, where Adorno defends the autonomy of artistic attitudes unfettered by political or other kinds of social decision (the concept of creative freedom). Here Adorno was very sensitive to the

⁸ For example Miroslav K. Černý: *Ke kritikám pražského manifestu. Od Adorna ke sborníku Musik und Politik [On Critiques of the Prague Manifesto. From Adorno to the collection Musik und Politik]*. Hudební věda 1973 pp. 234-243, 326-338. Cited below just as „MKČ“.

potential consequences of the political administration of the principles of the Prague Manifesto in totalitarian conditions – speaking of the "*horror...at subjects who still speak for themselves...in totalitarian societies*". Practice showed that he was not mistaken. These tendencies did indeed come to the fore, if only for a limited period since in their most radical manifestations – regardless of any paper philosophical solutions to the dialectic of the subjective versus the objective – they came into collision with simple "common sense". This, however, was a matter of the subsequent concrete applications of the Prague Manifesto rather than the document itself. Of course, almost every word of the Prague Manifesto may be "taken at its word" from Adorno's point of view and forced to disclose its full implications, but the same is true the other way round. Many of Adorno's philosophically over-argued positions (and as a mainly politico-propagandist document the Prague Manifesto definitely is not philosophically on the same level as Adorno's reply, which in places seems like the proverbial use of a "hammer to crack a nut") were also taken "at their word" sometimes more and sometimes less adroitly by his critics in the East.

Today we have perhaps advanced in our understanding of the position of art in totalitarian society in one aspect: we see totalitarianism in its universal character and do not make a distinction for example between communist and Nazi totalitarianism. During the period of communist totalitarianism this view was not tolerated in the areas under communist rule, and was considered one of the most criminal of heresies. **Ironies therefore abound in the earlier polemic.** Adorno's critics argued for example against his theory that "*objectivity...is closed to those who are surrounded by the mist of terror and propaganda*" by pointing out the undoubted historical fact that for instance in Hitler's Germany (consider, Adorno's native land!!!) there were some strong individuals whose perception of objectivity could not be clouded even by the most brutal terror and propaganda. This is true, but it could be added that the same could be said (certainly more easily today than back then, with the necessary minimum lapse of time) of the situation under communist totalitarianism as well.

Adorno was well aware that even the "free world" of the western democratic type is not entirely free of these mystifying tendencies (see his book *Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens*, 1938). This was used likewise used as fuel for eastern counter-arguments in the polemic with Adorno's reply to the Prague Manifesto: "*...Adorno is saying nothing else than that the contemporary capitalist world creates its own norms of terror and propaganda, which are even more effective and violent than those open norms that he foists on the socialist world*" (MKČ p. 240). The subjects of "mass art" (the critical, free subject versus the ignorant masses), the relationship between art and ideology, art

and politics etc. etc. generated an immense amount of heated polemic. In many aspects the discussion became bogged down in insoluble stalemate between perspectives that overlapped but had different premises and of course different agendas. It should be noted that Adorno actually conceded that the Prague Manifesto had a number of positive elements, even if these were of a more or less "technical" character (for example he praises the Manifesto's call for a unification of social criticism of the existing institutional leadership of the music industry, to be pursued with skilful tactics in the interests of the new regime's policy – although of course this was the cultural policy of the communists which was specifically unacceptable to him).

Other critics

René Leibowitz's critique (see note 5) is not on the same intellectual level as Adorno's polemic. Leibowitz criticises the Prague Manifesto primarily for the excessive abstraction of the formulation and then moves on to concentrate on the problem of the commitment of the artist. He agrees with the Manifesto that commitment is something desirable, but attacks the Manifesto for a one-sided emphasis on civic (political) commitment, which is potentially easily manipulated by the ruling power. Leibowitz himself stresses the other side of commitment – commitment that is purely artistic, autonomous and individual. Both sides combine in an indivisible whole. This is an obviously so transparent a problem that it can be interpreted differently from any side. Unlike Adorno, Leibowitz is willing to concede that society has a natural right to make certain demands on "its" artists (he points out that this has always been the case historically, and has not led to total artistic conservatism and "non-productivity" but often to the opposite).

As already noted earlier, the Czech musicologist **Vladimír Karbusický** was one of the most bitter critics of the Prague Manifesto in 1969. His position was very radical, far more radical than the views of many western theoreticians. One reason was certainly his personal psychological state following his emigration to West Germany (at the end of 1968), his need to ventilate the accumulated intellectual and emotional tensions that many other Czech intellectuals of his day also experienced (not excepting composers). Paradoxically, this internal psychological pressure was particularly characteristic of those who had earlier been strongly engaged in support for the ideas of the Manifesto (particularly its "practical elaboration" as mentioned above). These had a sudden urge to purify their consciences, to let out their traumatising feelings of guilt both in their own minds and in the public arena. It was the curse of the whole generation of "intellectuals committed to the ideal of socialism in the fifties", who later became disillusioned and in many cases performed a very extreme volte

face. This is understandable, if only to a certain extent. It was something that depended on many circumstances: strength of character, momentary human weaknesses and fatal doubts, which the totalitarian regime was very skilful in exploiting to break characters, to corrupt and to compromise. Karbusický claims in his article that the programme of the 2nd Congress was entirely prepared and staged by the Soviet regime and under the influence of the Zhdanov Theses. Karbusický does not actually manage to prove his claim convincingly, and it was therefore just a hypothesis, certainly interesting and attractive in its time – and calculated to have this effect (as I have already noted, the stenographic minutes of the whole proceedings of the congress have been lost and their whereabouts are still unknown). In fact the Prague Manifesto was not a piece of pamphleteering, as Karbusický claimed, but an attempt at serious material – and this was the way it was received abroad and debated at the time it was produced.

The Afterlife of the Manifesto

Despite all the contradictory aspects of its content, the Prague Manifesto is testimony to the great international campaign launched by Czech music culture in the immediate postwar years. Despite all the pitfalls it aroused crucial and seriously intended international discussion in the period of incipient Cold War just before the Iron Curtain came down. From our point of view it was to be the last act of its kind for the following ten years, during which Czechoslovakia more or less excluded itself from the international context (we might mention for example the attempt at leaving the ISCM in 1951, which was a typically bizarre sign of the times), only to start cautiously stepping back into it at the beginning of the sixties – and it is significant that it was in the sixties that discussion on the themes raised by the Prague Manifesto started again. The Prague Manifesto was a major event organised in response to the then universally felt problem of the “crisis of contemporary music”. This is why it was discussed and provoked reactions in a wholly serious spirit. The real problem – for Czech music culture in particular – started with the Manifesto’s practical implementation in the following years, involving undeniable decline and obvious elements of crisis in the form of loss of contact with modern trends in music and an unproductive traditionalism. This process was unusually lasting and resistant in Czechoslovak conditions. In 1959 we still find the following journalistic pearls being published in *Hudební rozhledy* magazine:

“We are faced with a decisive period. In the next few years as the Soviet Union catches up with and then outstrips the USA economically, the risk of a new war will drop to a minimum. How much this will all mean for mankind! Liberation from fear, anxiety, appalling

images and visions – the removal of the sword of Damocles, in the razor sharp shadow of which people live and even heroically build the future. What will Messrs Stockhausen and co., who currently claim that the results of their electronic experiments express mankind's inescapable fear of atomic war, do then? Is it not the case that on the contrary the aims of today may be fully realised, working their way through every doubt and anxiety to the optimism of the victory of life over death, peace over war, socialism over capitalism? The Soviet seven-year plan and the prospect of outstripping the most advanced capitalist countries of the world is not a fantasy or wishful thinking. It is a real prospect based on real conditions. This cannot even be denied by the spokesmen of the western capitalist countries, who until recently were accustomed to make light of all the plans of the Soviets. Faced with the facts, the figures on the economic development of the USSR today, faced with the Soviet satellites and serial production of ballistic missiles in the Soviet Union, they have suddenly fallen silent. Of course, we must not lull ourselves into a false sense of security – the battle is not over yet. The next decade will decide. I therefore think that now we all of us have to make even more effort. In resolution and faithfulness to communist ideals and work, in the remolding of our own selves into people with a new socialist morality, which will unite us in a strong and firm collective. So that we may get closer even faster to the ideal of the socialist artist – the artist of the future".⁹

The 2nd Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers held in February 1959 was certainly important (nor could it have been otherwise) for development in the field of music from the turn of the 50s/60s. In preparations for the event and in the course of the congress we can already detect those specific "decentralising tendencies" (Marxist interpreters later called them "symptoms of the ideological crisis of the 1960s") which after roughly a decade in which intellectual life, and above all discussion had been suppressed and the country had been isolated from the world, were leading to a "clearing of the intellectual atmosphere". It was becoming obvious the totalitarian regime had not managed to convince a great many people of the correctness of the socialist course, that many – especially intellectuals – were at that time cultivating what was known as the shadow culture (the equivalent off the shadow economy) with various illegal and semi-legal societies, that the embargo on information from the West was not being effectively maintained and that "undesirable information" was seeping in through various unofficial cracks, and even sometimes paradoxically as an unwanted side effect of official policies. In short, much was

⁹ J. Podešva: *Bliž k ideálu socialistického umělce!* [Closer to the Ideal of the Socialist Artist!]. *Hudební rozhledy* XII/1959, no. 4, March 1959, p.136.

already known in this country at the end of the fifties and beginning of the sixties – and when the Union of Composers presented an unusually broad platform for discussion before the 2nd Congress, the floodgates were being opened for something that the official regime was less and less effectively managing to control. In the discussions the supporters of the old dogmatic line of argument were pushed ever more onto the defensive (Podešva's risible article cited above is one of the desperate cries of this kind which by this time tended to do little more than raise a smile), while the upper hand was with the heralds of new "fresh, untarnished and unworn" ideas, attractive like everything from the West for the thirsty senses and minds of Czechs and Slovaks, parched as they were from the years of building socialism. Once pushed a little way open, the floodgates could not be sealed shut again, and the current of ideas toxic to socialism became ever stronger – until August 1968, that is, when "big brother" stepped in with the armies of the Warsaw Pact. And it was precisely in period of thaw that discussions returned to the still live and sensitive theme of "art and politics", already developed soon after the war by – inter alia – the Prague Manifesto. Then came the seventies and once again the repression of the free expression of ideas in socialist Czechoslovakia, including another, apparently final official settling of accounts with serious domestic and foreign critics (of Marxist approach, of course) of this remarkable document (see note 8). In the nineties the Czech musicological community returned to the Manifesto a number of times, although usually only marginally and in most cases as part of sharp polemics with a different focus, related to the fall of communism in 1989. Next year the Manifesto will be sixty years old. Is it ripe for deserved retirement?