

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: ELGAR AND MARTINŮ: THE CELLO WORKS
AND MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TWO
REMARKABLE, SELF-TAUGHT, NATIONALISTIC
COMPOSERS

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The British Edward Elgar and Czech Bohuslav Martinů were two of the most prominent Nationalistic composers of their respective countries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their musical patriotism incorporates the unique paths of their lives as socially isolated and self-taught composers as expressed in their outstanding Nationalistic compositions produced through the period of history encompassing the two World Wars.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, a brief biography of Elgar is presented and the essential aspects of his formative years influencing him to become a self-taught musician are discussed. The second chapter demonstrates Elgar's musical characteristics through the study of a selection of his masterpieces. In the third chapter, a brief biography of Martinů is presented along with a history of his musical development, characterized by his social isolation during four different periods of his life—his residences in Polička, Prague, Paris, and then in the United States. The fourth chapter considers Martinů's musical characteristics as revealed through the study of a selection of his greatest works.

In support of this doctoral project, I performed two recitals of cello works by Elgar and Martinů at the University of Maryland, College Park. The first recital, accompanied by Susan Slingland and Hiroko Yamazaki, included three of Martinů's works, *Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano* (1941); *Variations on a Theme of Rossini for Cello and Piano* (1942); and *Sonata No. 3 for Cello and Piano* (1952). The second recital, accompanied by Wonyoung Chang and Naoko Takao, presented Martinů's *Sonata No. 1 for Cello and Piano* (1939) and Elgar's *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra Op. 85 in E minor* (1919).

ELGAR AND MARTINŮ:
THE CELLO WORKS AND MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TWO
REMARKABLE, SELF-TAUGHT, NATIONALISTIC COMPOSERS

by

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to the
Glory of God.**

Choral and Chamber Works

The *Cantata* provided the most effective musical genre for Martinů's expression of Czech Nationalism. Ever since the composer had begun to use Czech folk idioms freely in his compositions, beginning in 1931, he had scored more success with his theatrical works (operas and ballets) than with his instrumental works (orchestral and chamber music). He was most at ease expressing his strong feelings of Nationalism by means of verbal and visual methods employing his native tongue and the stories and texts of traditional Czech legends and plays.

His mature choral works including his large-scale oratorio and cycle of four cantatas were all written in Martinů's last years, during the post-War period. They distinctively display the culmination of his Nationalism and his underlying strong Czech character. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (1955) is Martinů's mature large-scale oratorio based on a fourth-century Assyrian-Babylonian poem. This is undoubtedly one of Martinů's most outstanding works, and is written in a passionate and sorrowful mood with beautiful sonorities. Its contrapuntal writing with the use of massive pillar-like chords and melismas illustrates well Martinů's mature style of composition.

The great success of the first performance of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was a confirmation of the composer's perceptive philosophy, recorded in the program notes:

I have come to realize that in spite of the immense progress we have made in technical science and industry, the feeling and the problems which move people most deeply have not changed and that they exist in the literatures of the oldest peoples of which we have knowledge just as they exist in ours. They are the problems of friendship, love and death. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the desire is expressed with almost painful urgency for an answer to these questions to which to this day we have failed to find a reply (Šafránek 1961, 308).

Martinů's Nationalistic character is strongly presented in his cycle of cantatas, all four of which are based on the poem written by Milos Bureš, a native of Polička. These distinguished works, *The Opening of the Wells* (1955), *The Romance of the Dandelions* (1957), *The Legend of the Smoke from Potato Fires* (1957) and *Mikeš from the Mountains* (1959), all find their origins in the authentic folk customs and legends of the Moravian Highlands. Martinů poured out his endless longings and nostalgia in these chamber cantatas by means of harmony from Moravian folk music, modal passages, melodies of a childlike simplicity, and his sensitivity for musical pictorialism. These four cantatas are the ultimate masterpieces in his catalogue. They convey Martinů's unceasing Nationalism, his musical sincerity and authenticity, and his enduring love for Czech folklore.

Martinů composed more than sixty works in the genre of chamber music. Though these compositions often have an uneven quality, he experimented with various combinations of instruments with his ceaseless interest in tone color and timbre. For the cello repertoire, Martinů wrote two cello concerti (*No. 1* (1930) and *No. 2* (1945)), two concerted works with chamber orchestra (*Concertino* (1924) and *Sonata da camera* (1940)), three sonatas (*No. 1* (1939), *No. 2* (1941), and *No. 3* (1952)), two variations (*Variation of a Theme of Rossini* (1942) and *Slovakian Theme* (1959)), and four short pieces including *Four Nocturnes* (1930), *Six Pastorales* (1930), *Suite Miniature* (1930) and *Seven Arabesques* (1931). Among his cello compositions in a chamber ensemble, the three cello sonatas and the *Variation on a Theme of Rossini* stand out as widely popular with cello performers. The sonatas follow the overall structure of a classical sonata consisting of three movements (fast-slow-fast). Martinů, however, develops an element of thematic material in his own way as he typically does in other compositions. He employs some of the harmonic language of Romanticism yet combined with twentieth-century rhythmic idioms in general.

His three cello sonatas typify the three different periods of his life. *Sonata No. 1* was written in 1939, in Paris during the pre-War period, and *Sonata No. 2* was completed in 1941, in the United States during World War II. Martinů then, in 1952, composed *Sonata No. 3*, in Vieux Moulin near Paris, during the post-War period.

These works are all strongly Czech in flavor and incorporate the vitality of twentieth-century music with the lyricism of Romanticism. The pieces are Neo-Classical in form and texture. The sorrowful and despairing slow movements, which also convey the warmth and strength of the personality of the composer, shine in each sonata. As a whole, beautiful sonority and the melodic poignancy of Romantic lyricism, combined with rhythmic tension and vitality (along with rhythmic experiments such as cross-rhythms, syncopation and Hemiola), together describe Martinů's personal musical style and language.

His light-hearted piece for cello, *Variation on a theme of Rossini*, was written in 1942 in New York, at the request of the famous virtuoso cellist Gregor Piatigorsky (1903–1976) who was a dedicatee of this piece. This *Variation* was originally written for cello, unlike the same *Variation* by Paganini (1782–1840) which was composed for violin and later transcribed for cello. There are four variations in this

piece, each developing the theme according to a highly brilliant standard. In the first variation, the irregular meter changes and question-and-answer-like writing between cello and piano produce a natural driving force and dynamic excitement. The second variation, with its motoric rhythm of constant running sixteenth-notes, contrasts with the slow third variation written in a floating mood of deep emotion expressing once again the composer's unending sense of longing. The last variation follows with the dazzling rhythmic devices of hemiola and cross-rhythm. Finally, the entire *Variation*, written in classical form, ends with a majestic and resolute restatement of the theme. Execution of the piece demands highly virtuosic technical prowess on the part of the performer, while the work also demonstrates the refined and skillful compositional technique of Martinů in his most musically mature period. This piece achieves the highest standard of the cello repertoire of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Edward Elgar and Bohuslav Martinů were both distinguished Nationalistic composers. They both represented the musical and patriotic heritage of their homelands, England and the Czech Republic, respectively, through the War period in the early-twentieth century. Both men were shy, withdrawn, and quiet, and both had lower-middle-class origins. Both composers deeply loved animals and nature. A most evident shared feature of their characters is the social isolation they felt throughout their lives. Nonetheless, each in their own way conquered academic challenges through independent study, and both established themselves as self-developed composers of the highest degree of accomplishment and artistry.

Sir Edward Elgar, an innately gifted man, became the musical laureate of his day in the years of the Victorian-Edwardian Empire. His music itself serves as his autobiography—his childhood is depicted in *Wand of Youth*, his friendships in *Enigma Variations*, his patriotism in *Gerontius*, *Coronation Ode*, and *Second Symphony*, and his bitterness and hope during times of war in his *Cello Concerto* and numerous war songs. Despite Elgar's national success and acclamation, the composer

lacked confidence and remained a fundamentally lonely man throughout his life. His sense of insecurity was indelible and can be explained by the struggles of his youth and the hurt and humiliation he experienced as a poor provincial musician. In his volumes of correspondence to his friends, his inferiority complex is revealed in his continual depression and pessimistic outlook that he was unwanted, his music disliked, and his intentions misunderstood. Moreover, Elgar suffered from the conflict between his desire for worldly success and his need for the comfort of the solitary life of the artist in countryside. These profound inner struggles are expressed in Elgar's characteristic musical idioms of gaiety and irony juxtaposed with the darker despair that often pervades his compositions.

Elgar's music is full of heartfelt emotion and intense lyricism and can be characterized by supreme melodic melancholy combined with pastoral traits—his love of his country through his affection for its countryside became a lasting inspiration and motivation for his artistic expression. Elgar's genius reached its greatest height in his orchestral works including the *Enigma Variations*, the two symphonies, and the violin and cello concerti that served to entitle him to a firm place among the foremost

composers of all time. Elgar's motivation to "get to the heart of the people" fueled the great power of music (Reed 168).

Elgar's emotionalism, his affinity for natural surroundings, and his intentional self-expression are captured well in his words to his friend Barry Jackson (1879–1961): "If ever after I am dead you hear someone whistling this tune [from the *Cello Concerto*] on the Malvern Hills, don't be alarmed, it is only me" (Kennedy 1987, 334). Original, sensitive, and genuinely self-taught, Elgar was a true patriot and a melancholic and noble man who still contributes through his musical legacy his passionate love for his home and nation, England.

Similarly, the most distinguishing feature of Bohuslav Martinů's character as expressed through his music may well be the deep sense of isolation he felt throughout his life. His birth in the Polička tower, his seventeen-year sojourn in Paris, his exile in America after the outbreak of World War II, and his return to Europe in his last years all affected him decisively to become an outsider and an observer and all limited the depth of his engagement as a participant in the world of his time. Despite his permanent isolation spiritually as well as geographically, his inspiration and his musical composition always found its root in the national heritage

of his Czech homeland. Martinů's youth spent in the midst of the Nationalist movement of the nineteenth century and his love of the countryside of his birth both served to drive him to continually adapt the idioms of Czech folk music, poetry, and dramas to his own works. His Nationalism is expressed most outstandingly in his choral and theatrical works compared with orchestral and chamber works. Not only did he develop his own musical language through the incorporation of Czech heritage and musical elements, Martinů paved his own way as a self-taught composer to a large extent through his interpretation of a variety of external influences such as Impressionism, Expressionism, Neo-Classicism and jazz. In particular, his experience and appreciation of Debussy's music led him to concentrate on timbre and Stravinsky's orchestral music influenced him to strive for rhythmic vitality and vigor. Martinů's objection to the excessiveness of Romanticism formed another principle of his composition. As he wrote in the program notes for his *First Symphony*: "What I maintain as my deepest conviction is the essential nobility of thoughts and things which are quite simple . . ." (Šafránek 1946, 82).

Martinů was a devoted composer dedicated to creating stirring works primarily for the Czech people. His love and nostalgia for his country, combined with his

lifelong solitude, bring to his music and his life a most genuine Czech character and originality. Succeeding in his personal struggle not to assimilate into conventional settings and foreign environments but to retain his connections to his own identity and that of his nation's culture, Martinů successfully inherited not only the Czech national folk heritage but also the music of Smetana, Dvořák and Janáček and brought these all with him into the twentieth century.

The study of the lives and perspectives of Elgar and Martinů has not only been interesting, it has, further, been invaluable to the preparation and performance of their works. In performing, the musician takes on the role of mediator between the composer and the audience. While the performer, of course, is free to express his or her own character and style in interpreting the music, the first priority should be to strive to convey the spirit of what the composer intended to relate through the piece. This intention can be better discerned by the performer who is knowledgeable about the composer's life and thus has some understanding of the thoughts and feelings the composer derived from his or her own life experience. This comprehension can only enhance the authenticity and expression of a performance, creating the best possible medium of communication for composer, audience and performer alike. I am

convinced that, through the study of the lives of Elgar and Martinů, my increased understanding of these two remarkable composers, including the interesting common circumstances they faced in their lives and their courageous and artistic responses to these challenges, has given me great insight and inspiration, both personally and as a cellist.

Appendix:

Recital Programs

First Program

The University of Maryland School of Music

presents

Kichung Bae, cello

Hiroko Yamazaki and Susan Slingland, piano

Sunday, May 9, 2004 at 8PM

Homer Ulrich Recital Hall

Tawes Fine Arts Building

University of Maryland, College Park

Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano

Bohuslav Martinů
(1890-1959)

Allegro

Largo

Allegro comodo

Variations on a Theme of Rossini

Bohuslav Martinů
(1890-1959)

Intermission

Sonata No. 3 for Cello and Piano

Bohuslav Martinů
(1890-1959)

Poco andante- moderato

Andante

Allegro, ma non presto

Second Program

The University of Maryland School of Music
presents

Kichung Bae, cello

Wonyoung Chang and Naoko Takao, piano

Monday, November 1, 2004 at 8PM
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall
Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center
University of Maryland, College Park

Sonata No. 1 for Cello and Piano

Bohuslav Martinů
(1890-1959)

Poco allegro

Lento

Allegro con brio

Intermission

Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85

Edward Elgar
(1857- 1943)

Adagio- Moderato

Lento- Allegro molto

Adagio

Allegro- Moderato (quasi Recitative) - Allegro, ma non troppo

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I: The Life of Elgar—A Short Biography.....	5
Childhood: 1857–1875	5
Broadening Musical Development: 1875–1889.....	10
Alice and New Life in London: 1889–1920.....	11
Chapter II: The Musical Characteristics and Personal Significance of Selected Works of Elgar.....	16
The <i>Enigma Variations</i>	16
The <i>Dream of Gerontius</i>	19
<i>Cockaigne</i> and <i>Pomp and Circumstance</i>	21
The Violin and the Cello Concerti.....	23
The Symphonies	25
The War Songs	27
Chapter III: The Life of Martinů—A short Biography	31
The Formative Years in Polička: 1890–1907.....	31
The Experimental Period in Prague: 1907–1923.....	36
Maturing Period in Paris: 1923–1941.....	42
Exile Period in America: 1941–1953	48

Chapter IV: The Musical Characteristics and Personal Significance of Selected Works of Martinů.....	51
Music for Theater	51
The Double Concerto and Six Symphonies.....	57
Choral and Chamber Works	65
Conclusion	70
Appendix: Recital Programs.....	76
First Program	76
Second Program.....	77
List of Works Cited	78
Printed Materials	78
Recordings.....	81
Electronic Sources.....	81

Introduction

Music is an expressive art, and thus serves as a reflection of each composer's personal experience, conveying a lifetime of individual thoughts and feelings. A composer's relationship to the world is inevitably couched within his works and is thus communicated through the beauty and power of his art. It is meaningful, therefore, to examine the natural, social, and political environments that have affected a composer from early childhood in order to better understand the personal perspectives that influence his craft. From this viewpoint, my dissertation presents a study of the lives of two great composers, Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934) and Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959), stressing the influence of their life experiences upon their work. These two great men share several important and influential aspects of their life histories including a 'humble' birth, idiosyncrasies in their schooling, and the experience of living through the period of history encompassing the horror of the World Wars of the twentieth century.

Not surprisingly, given the circumstances of their lives, both Elgar and Martinů have become known for the great Nationalistic character of their work. From the

second half of the nineteenth century, as political turmoil in Western Europe grew steadily, expressions of patriotic loyalty could be seen in the great emphasis on national elements incorporated into much of the music of that time. Nationalism in music can be described as the inclusion of melodies and rhythms taken from traditional folk songs and dances, or by the invoking of scenes from a country's history or legends, especially in operas and symphonic writing. Musical Nationalism originally arose as a means, through art, for countries to assert their individuality in the face of a strong international style that had arisen from Germanic origins.

In England, Elgar was a pioneer in the Nationalist movement, followed by composers Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) and Gustav Holst (1874–1934). Elgar became the musical laureate of his time. He was knighted in 1904 at the age of forty-seven and became Master of the King's Music in 1924, and he was made a baronet in 1931.

In comparison, Martinů became an important successor to the Bohemian Nationalist movement which was led by Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884), Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904), and Leoš Janáček (1854–1928). Martinů's music and his identity were consistently rooted in his Czech origins, even during his long sojourn

in Paris (1923–1940) and his exile to America (1941–1953) precipitated by the events of World War II. His keen interest in Czech folklore can be seen in every area of his work including his orchestral compositions, his remarkable theatrical pieces, and his chamber music.

There are other similarities between the composers. Elgar and Martinů both felt especially isolated or alone during various periods in their lives, though for different reasons, as will be discussed later. Furthermore, both composers are regarded as self-taught to a large extent, as opposed to schooled through a typical conservatory experience. The work of each composer can be seen, therefore, to express a quality of personal uniqueness that lacks any relation to a particular school or musical movement. This lends an original and authentic quality to the music of both men.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to look in depth at these similarities and how the path of each composer's life is reflected in his works. This paper will explore the importance of these characteristics and their impact of the musical style and originality of these great artists and their masterpieces. In addition, as part of this dissertation project I have performed two recitals of cello works of Elgar and Martinů

at the University of Maryland, College Park, School of Music. The first recital, performed at the Ulrich Recital Hall in the Tawes Fine Arts Building, included these pieces by Martinů: *Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano* (1941), *Sonata No. 3 for Cello and Piano* (1952), and *Variations on a Theme of Rossini* (1942). The second recital, presented at the Gildenhorn Recital Hall in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, included: Martinů's *Sonata No. 1 for Cello* (1939), and Elgar's *Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85* (1919) (see the Appendix for a full description of the recital programs).

Chapter I

The Life of Elgar—A Short Biography

Childhood: 1857–1875

Edward William Elgar was born in the village of Broadheath, three miles northwest of Worcester, on June 2, 1857. He was the fourth of seven children. His father, William Henry Elgar (1822–1906), was a piano tuner, piano teacher and organist. Ann Elgar, the composer's mother, was not musical, yet, through reading stories and reciting poetry, she inspired in her children a love of nature. After his father and Uncle Henry opened their music shop, named 'Elgar Bros,' the Elgar family settled down in Worcester in 1860. Here, Elgar spent much of his time until his death in 1934.

Elgar grew deeply attached to his mother, developing and sharing her love of literature. His musical gift was discovered by his father when young Elgar began to improvise on a piano in the family shop. Elgar's father did little, however, to encourage his son, and the child Elgar was compelled to teach himself to play. As a

boy, Elgar earned some local recognition as an improviser, yet he maintained a melancholic aspect to his personality and tended to feel lonely and ‘left out.’ Elgar later observed in a letter to a friend, written in 1921:

I am still at heart the dreamy child who used to be found in the reeds by Severn side with a sheet of paper trying to fix the sounds & longing for something very great—source, texture & all else unknown. I am still looking for this—in strange company sometimes—but as a child & as a young man & as a mature man no single person was ever kind to me (Moore 1990, 359).

Despite the constant sympathy of his mother, as Hubert Leicester (1855–1939),

Elgar’s great boyhood companion related:

His father and uncle were merely amused and scoffed at [Elgar’s] childish efforts—an attitude in which they persisted until E. really had made his way in the world. They failed to see not only that they had an exceptionally gifted boy in the family but even that he was moderately clever at music (Kennedy 2004, 11).

His older brother, Harry, was the first son in his family and his younger brother, Jo, was a musical genius, the so-called ‘Beethoven of the family’. The death of these two of Elgar’s brothers may have influenced him to feel vulnerable and isolated.

Throughout his life, Elgar seemed to feel the burdens both of bearing the responsibilities of the older brother and carrying on with the musical expectations placed on the younger.

When Elgar was ten years old, in 1867, he was inspired during a trip to Broadheath, his place of birth, to write his earliest surviving music in a sketchbook along with the note, '*Humoreske*, a tune from Broadheath, 1867.' In this early work, there are three important elements that were to become recognizable characteristics imbedded in Elgar's mature compositions. First, in *Humoreske*, Elgar employs persistent rhythmic repetition, in the form of a jig. Repetition would remain an easy and effective expressive method for the composer given his self-taught approach. Second, in this early work, Elgar develops the principle of repetition to the point of sequential writing (the repetition of a passage at a higher or lower level of pitch). The technique also became a characteristic aspect of his mature music. Third, the recognizable downward stepwise shaping of his sequential phrasing is found in *Humoreske* as if Elgar was already striving at that young age for harmonic firmness. This downward shaping of the melody was to remain one of his insistent musical ideas throughout his life. Perhaps the melancholy aspect of much of Elgar's writing is a result of this downward direction.

Next, between 1869 and 1871, Elgar composed music for a play which he intended to perform with his brother and sisters for the entertainment of their parents.

He took the melody from '*Humoreske*' as the basic tune for one of the scenes of the play. About forty years later, as a mature composer, Elgar found this play from his childhood and remade the score into a suite for full orchestra entitled *The Wand of Youth*.

From this early period of composition, Elgar by necessity began to find his own way to develop his music to a more advanced level. Studying scores and listening to concerts became the primary means for his self-education. He gained excellent practical knowledge of compositional technique through his self-study of scores and theory books. Elgar recalled later, in 1904:

I am self-taught in the matter of harmony, counterpoint, form, and, in short, the whole of the 'mystery' of music . . . Today there are all sorts of books to make the study of harmony and orchestration pleasant. In my young days they were repellant. But I read them and I still exist. The first was Charles-Simon Catel [1773–1830], and that was followed by Luigi Cherubini [1760–1842] (Moore 1999, 41).

Elgar also taught himself through listening to the works of Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713), George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) and Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) while attending the concerts of the Three Choirs Festival and the Glee Club, both in Worcester, in this early period. Elgar recalled later, in 1900:

Corelli was largely drawn upon, Handel's Overture to 'Saul' was a favorite, and Haydn's symphonies were often heard. The rich store of our great glee writers furnished the vocal music, and they were very well done in those days. Not many songs were sung, and they were of a healthy, vigorous type (Moore 1999, 45).

Elgar's admiration for Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) was growing. Later in his life, Elgar would write:

I renew my growth in reading some of the dear old things I played when a boy—when the world of music was opening & one learnt of fresh *great* works every week—Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven . . . the feeling of *entering*—shy, but welcomed—into the world of the immortals & wandering in those vast woods (so it seemed to me) with their clear pasture spaces & sunlight (always there, though sometimes hidden), is a holy feeling & a sensation never to come again, unless our passage into the next world shall be a greater & fuller experience of the same warm, loving & growing trust (Moore 1990, 215).

When he was fifteen years old, Elgar left his local school hoping to travel to Leipzig to study music, but his plan failed for financial reasons. He started, therefore, to work in his father's shop which at least allowed him to study the scores of Beethoven's symphonies. Elgar recalled in an interview with *Strand Magazine* in 1904:

In studying scores, the first which came into my hands were the Beethoven symphonies. Anyone can have them now, but they

were difficult for a boy to get in Worcester thirty years ago. I, however, managed to get two or three, and I remember distinctly the day I was able to buy the *Pastoral Symphony*. I stuffed my pockets with bread and cheese and went out into the field to study it. That was what I always did (Moore 1999, 60).

Indeed, Elgar frequented for his studies both the churchyard at Claines and the beautiful spot where the River Teme meets the Severn. Elgar told his daughter in later years that it was at this idyllic location that he wished to be buried (Kennedy 2004, 17).

Broadening Musical Development: 1875–1889

Elgar soon expanded his musical experiences to encompass the violin, piano, organ, bassoon, and also conducting, and composition. As a young man, in 1875, he joined the violin section of Worcester Philharmonic Society and was appointed Leader and Instructor of the Amateur Instrumental Society. He was also appointed as Music Director of the County Lunatic Asylum at Powick—their belief in the therapeutic effects of music led the asylum doctors at Powick to form an ensemble of players from their staff from 1879 to 1884. This position at Powick provided Elgar with his first chance to compose and to conduct on a regular basis. By now, Elgar lived a

busy life centered around music, serving as Director at Powick, playing in ensembles, teaching violin pupils, leading the Amateur Instrumental Society, playing at Glee Club meetings, performing at St. George's church, working occasionally in his father's shop, visiting London for important concerts and, importantly, striving to compose. During this time, Elgar was especially fascinated with the music of Robert Schumann (1810–1856) which he heard through frequent visits to London and a one-time trip to Leipzig in 1882 (he claimed Schumann as 'his ideal'). Elgar also became attracted to the symphonies of Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) and Antonín Dvořák after hearing and performing Brahms' Third Symphony and Dvořák's D-Major Symphony by the year 1884.

Alice and New Life in London: 1889–1920

The years 1889 to 1899 seem to comprise the most important period in Elgar's life. These years molded the composer of *Salute d'Amour* (piano score, 1888 and orchestrated, 1899) into the composer of the *Enigma Variations* (1899) (Kennedy 1987, 44). With his marriage in 1889 to Caroline Alice Roberts, the daughter of

Major General Sir Henry Roberts, Elgar found himself peace and comfort. He wrote to Charles William Buck, who was a doctor as well as Elgar's old friend:

This is a time of deep peace & happiness to me after the vain imagining of so many years & the pessimistic views so often unfolded to you on the Settle highways have vanished! God wot [God knows] (Moore 1990, 26).

Elgar was, however, distressed by the objections of Alice's relatives to their marriage. The most hurtful aspect for him was "the label of the tradesman" (Kennedy 2004, 34). His affliction over this matter of being regarded as unfit for marriage to Alice is seen in the following letter:

Now—as to the whole 'shop' episode—I don't give a d-n! I know it has ruined me & made life impossible until I what you call made me a name—I only know I was kept out of everything decent,' cos 'his father keeps a shop'—I believe I'm always introduced so now, that is to say—the remark is inevitably made in an undertone (Kennedy 2004, 34).

After they married, Elgar and Alice decided to move from Worcester to London in order to live in the center of England's musical environment. With the active and unfailing support of Alice, Elgar produced some remarkable works such as *Froissart* (1890, inspired by Jean Froissart who was the fourteenth-century author of the *Chronicles of Chivalry*), *The Black Knight* (1892, with words by H. W. Longfellow from *Hyperion*), *The Light of Life* (1896, original title was *Lux Christi*), and *King Olaf*

(1896, based on Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*). The success of these works contributed to a steady rise not only in Elgar's musical reputation but also in his self-confidence as he faced the inevitable insecurities of his humble origins, by British standards of the day, combined with his lack of conventional schooling. In these remarkable large works, Elgar showed his taste for chivalry and depicted his heroes as outsiders. Thus, these compositions seem almost a spiritual autobiography.

In 1896 Elgar accepted two commissions, awarded by the British publisher Novellos, for composing *Imperial March* and *The Banner of St. George*, to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Both works were completed that year. The following year, Elgar composed the cantata *Caractacus* also dedicated to Queen Victoria, with her permission. Elgar had been deeply inspired by the legend of Caractacus, the British leader who fought against but was defeated by Roman invaders in the first century. This patriotic story led Elgar to compose the cantata as a continuation of his recent music for the celebrating sixty years of Victorian reign. According to Kennedy, *Caratacus* was "the summit of Elgar's diamond jubilee music" (60). The Triumphal March from the cantata was frequently played

separately as a concert piece, helping to establish Elgar as Britain's unofficial national music laureate, an impression that remains today.

In March of 1904, the Elgar Festival was held at the Covent Garden Theater and was enthusiastically attended (among many others) by the King, Queen, Prince, Princess, and other royalty as well. During the three days of the festival, many of Elgar's most outstanding works were performed, such as *Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, *Froissart*, a selection from *Caractacus*, the *Enigma Variations*, *Sea Pictures*, the two famous marches from *Pomp and Circumstance*, and his latest overture, *In the South*. Elgar's firm establishment as a nationally prominent figure at this time is confirmed not only by the presence of the royal family at the festival but also by press reviews of the event. *The Sunday Times* recorded on March 13, 1904:

Usual interest attaches to the Elgar Festival which is to be held at Covent Garden to-morrow and the two succeeding evenings, for it is the first tribute of the kind that has ever been paid to an English composer during his lifetime, and in its *locale* and patronage is an indication that our upper classes are no longer disdainful of any independent movement in native music . . . That in the first place special honor should be paid to Dr. Elgar is right and fitting, for he is at once the foremost and the most individual of the younger generation of our composers, and he has compelled even the Continental critics to admit that English music is deserving of serious attention (Moore 1999, 434).

The Referee wrote on the same day:

It is not too much to say that the Elgar Festival scheme is unique in the history of British music. A living composer honored in his own country by three days performances of his works at Covent Garden Theater is positively startling (Moore 1999, 434–5).

It is clear that Alice Elgar played a most important role in her husband's creative life and in his national success. Not only did Elgar produced his most major works after their marriage in 1889, but also there were almost no important compositions completed after Alice's death in 1920. It was through Alice's lifelong devotion and endless support that Elgar was able to overcome his insecurities and societal impediments. Elgar had always sought assurance from the people around him, and Alice's nurturing care satisfied this longing and thus empowered his success as a musician.

Chapter II

The Musical Characteristics and Personal Significance of Selected Works of Elgar

The *Enigma Variations*

Throughout his life, Elgar felt deep attachments to the people around him, and he had many dear friends. This explains in part why more than ten thousand letters written by Elgar have been collected. His creative and highly personal masterpiece, the *Enigma Variations*, Officially titled *Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma)*, Op. 36 (1899), is a direct expression of the composer's affection for his closest companions. This innovative orchestral work consists of fourteen variations—the first thirteen depict friends, and the final variation is a self-portrayal. The idea of composing a musical portrait gallery truly fired Elgar's imagination from the beginning of the work. The first variation, *C.A.E.*, represents his devoted wife, Alice. The ninth, *Nimrod*, is one of the most beloved and moving orchestral selections ever written and portrays Elgar's dear friend and supporter A. J. Jaeger (1860–1909), editor

and publishing manager of Novellos. The finale, depicting the composer himself, is named *E.D.U.* in reference to “Edoo,” Alice’s pet name for Elgar (Kennedy 2004, 62).

There are at least two true enigmas still associated with the work. One is the identity of the original theme which is never stated and which the composer in his lifetime never revealed. Another is the identity of the dedicatee of the thirteenth variation, entitled mysteriously “***,” Some speculate an old flame inspired this portion of the work. Elgar wrote in a letter to Jaeger on October 24, 1898:

Since I’ve been back I have sketched a set of Variations (orkestry) on an original theme: the Variations have amused me because I’ve labeled ’em with the nicknames of my particular friends—you are Nimrod. That is to say I’ve written the variations each one to represent the mood of the ‘party’—I’ve liked to imagine the ‘party’ writing the var: him (or her) self & have written what I think *they* wd. have written—if they were asses enough to compose—it’s a quaint idée & the result is amusing to those behind the scenes & won’t affect the hearer who ‘nose nuffin’. What think you? (Moore 1999, 253).

The *Enigma Variations* premiered on June 19, 1899 in St. James Hall under the baton of Hans Richter (1843–1916), and the very first performance turned out to be a resounding success. After completing the orchestral score, Elgar wrote a piano transcription. This version contains Elgar’s first use of the indication *nobilmente* (in the variation *Nimrod*) which aptly describes one of the composer’s recognizable

musical characteristics. The direction *nobilmente* first occurs in an orchestral score in the work *Cockaigne* (1901) (Kennedy 2004, 66).

The Enigma theme is a haunting melody expressing the melancholy side of Elgar—one may hear his loneliness, longing, hesitant uncertainty and insecurity there. The work is filled with illustrative and personal details—the private whistle with which Elgar announced to Alice that he had arrived home, the difficulties an amateur violinist had with crossing strings, a dog’s bark, a friend’s laugh, the throb of an ocean liner’s engines—and *Nimrod* is a beautifully eloquent and touching commemoration of friendship (Kennedy 2004, 71). In his previous outstanding works such as *The Black Knight* and *Caractacus*, Elgar had found a means for self-expression through his ‘outsider-heroes.’ Through the final variation of *Enigma* however, Elgar created for himself a most genuine expression of his own character. Elgar’s successful musical journey of self-discovery ultimately fueled the warmth of melody and fullness of feeling that pervades the whole of this outstanding orchestra work.

The Dream of Gerontius

In 1900 Elgar completed the composition of *The Dream of Gerontius*, Op. 38 which was based on Cardinal Newman's poem of the same name. The work seems to be an ecstatic expression of Elgar's Roman Catholic faith and is deeply emotional.

Elgar wrote to Nicholas Kilburn (1843–1923) in June, 1900:

My work is good to me & I think you will find *Gerontius* far beyond anything I've yet done—I like it—I am not suggesting that I have risen to the heights of the poem for one moment—but on our hillside night after night looking across our 'illimitable' horizon (pleonasm!) I've seen in thought the Soul go up & have written my own heart's blood into the score (Moore 1990, 87).

The Dream of Gerontius serves as expression Elgar's own sense of isolation through the story of Judas, particularly in the aspect of his solitude among the Apostles of Jesus. Elgar seemed to identify with Judas who was intelligent and well-meaning man who remained always an outsider, as the only non-Galilean among the Apostles. The first performance of *Gerontius* took place on October 3, 1900. Performed by the Birmingham Festival Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Richter, this premiere was under-rehearsed and the piece was not well-understood by the performers or the conductor. Despite the disastrous premiere, the Birmingham audiences and critics received *Gerontius* enthusiastically, and, fortunately, subsequent

performances elevated the popularity of the astounding work. This favorable reception could be anticipated by Elgar's quotation from John Ruskin's words from *Sesame and Lilies* which the composer had placed above his signature on the final page of *Gerontius* manuscript: "This is the best of me; for the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept, loved, and hated, like another; my life was as the vapour, and is not; but *this* I saw and knew: this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory" (Anderson 1993, 45). Moreover, Elgar received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University in the month following the *Gerontius* premiere, November 1900. At this ceremony, the Public Orator of Cambridge both honored and captured the spirit of Elgar using these words:

If from his Malvern and its Hills—the cradle of British arts, the citadel fortified by Caractacus—this disciple of the muses saw the towers of all the temples to religion shining below him in the light of the morning sun, and recalled the beginnings of his own life, he could indeed say with the modest pride of the antique bard:

‘Self-taught I sing; ‘tis Heaven and Heaven alone
Inspires my song with promise all its own’
(Moore 1999, 337).

Cockaigne and Pomp and Circumstance

In the overture *Cockaigne (In London Town)* Op. 40 (1901) Elgar's patriotic and Nationalistic temperament may be clearly seen—Cockaigne refers to the 'old' name for London. In Kennedy's words, Elgar's *Cockaigne* is "one of his most cheerful and humorous works." Elgar described the overture to Jaeger as "cheerful and Londony: "stouty and steaky" (Kennedy 2004, 80), and he dedicated the work "to my many friends, the members of British orchestras" (Moore 1990, 94). The composer completed the work on March 24, 1901 and conducted the first performance in London on June 20, 1901. The overture may well be considered the English equivalent of the Richard Wagner's (1813–1883) famous overture from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868) as an encapsulation of the soul of a city, carrying the work's most eloquent theme marked *nobilmente*, as mentioned earlier. Elgar described this work to Richter: "Here is nothing deep or melancholy—it is intended to be honest, healthy, humorous and strong but not vulgar" (Kennedy 2004, 81).

Next, Elgar wrote the first two of his five *Pomp and Circumstance Marches Nos. 1-5*, Op. 39 (1901–1930). Both marches, No. 1 in D Major and No. 2 in A Minor,

were premiered together in Liverpool by Richter on October 19, 1901. At this time, the Boer War was still waging and was not going well for Britain. Elgar felt it would be a good idea to try to lift British spirits with some inspirational military pieces. On January 12, 1901 he had written to Jaeger: “In haste & joyful (Gosh! Man, I’ve got a tune in my head)” (Kennedy 1968, 137). This stirring melody to which he refers, with its strong inclination of both bravery and melancholy, became the trio section of the D-Major March and was subsequently set to the words “Land of hope and glory,” (possibly at the suggestion of King Edward VII after he heard the orchestral version of the work at his coronation concert in the Royal Albert Hall in June of 1902). The theme is now well-known throughout the world and is often used as a beloved graduation processional. Without any intentional attempt, Elgar had composed Britain’s second national anthem. The composer had not failed to recognize the potential of the melody. In the composer’s own words: “I’ve got a tune that will knock ’em—knock ’em flat,” and “a tune that comes once in a life time,” (Moore 1990, 96).

Elgar’s subsequent work on an oratorio, *The Apostles* (premiered in 1903), brought with it the announcement of a knighthood for the composer, conferred on

June 24, 1904, upon the recommendation of the music-loving prime minister, Arthur Balfour (1848–1930).

The Violin and the Cello Concerti

Along with his outstanding Cello Concerto (1919), Elgar's *Violin Concerto in B minor Op. 61*, completed in June of 1910, is regarded as one of his most remarkable compositions and is characterized beautifully by the genuine *nobilmente* of Elgar's musical expression. The *Concerto* was dedicated to Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962), and the premiere was given by the dedicatee at the Queen's Hall in London on November 10, 1910. The piece was an immediate success. As reported in the *Evening News*:

Kreisler has even gone so far as to say that it is the greatest violin concerto produced since Beethoven's. Already the concerto has been set down for a very large number of performances, both in this country and abroad (Moore 1999, 591).

Elgar composed the *Cello Concerto in E Minor, Op. 85*, his so-called *War-Requiem*, in the summer of 1919. The concerto was dedicated to one of Elgar's close friends, Sidney Colvins and was first performed by cellist Felix Salmond (1888–1952). The *Concerto* was premiered on October 27, 1919 in Queen's Hall,

London, marking the opening of the first ‘post-war’ season of the London Symphony Orchestra following World War I. Due to lack of rehearsal, this rough premier was received with mixed reviews. Ernest Newman, one of the critics who attended the concert, wrote:

On Monday the orchestra was often virtually inaudible, and when just audible was merely a muddle. No one seemed to have any idea of what it was the composer wanted. The work itself is lovely stuff, very simple—that pregnant simplicity that has come upon Elgar’s music in the last couple of years—but with a profound wisdom and beauty underlying its simplicity . . . the realization in tone of a fine spirit’s lifelong wistful brooding upon the loveliness of earth (Moore 1999, 747).

The work was taken up immediately though, by young cellists in Britain and eventually drew the attention of soloists around the world such as Pablo Casals (1876–1973), Gregor Piatigorsky (1903–1976), Paul Tortelier (1914–1990) and Jacqueline du Pré (1945–1987). Today, Elgar’s cello concerto has come to be recognized as one of the most outstanding twentieth-century contributions to the cello concert repertoire.

Elgar referred to the work as “a man’s attitude to life” (Kennedy 2004, 160). Extremely distressed by World War I, the composer seemed to ponder through his writing of the piece the meaning and essence of life tinged by the war and by the death

of his friends at this time. The mood of the concerto is at times influenced by Elgar's vein of nobility, at others, the agony of the war. The work also expresses the composer's life-long underlying feelings of emptiness and loneliness—through the melancholic melody of main theme in the first movement, indicated by *nobilmente*; the dream-like and questioning passages of sixteenth notes in the recitative-like beginning of second movement; the sweet and sorrowful main theme in the third *Adagio* movement; and, finally, the emphatic and resolute passages, marked again *nobilmente* in the last movement. The cello concerto is regarded as the composer's final masterpiece, and it well expresses the distinctive character of melancholy, solitary, and sweet bitterness that influenced the brilliant, personal, and creative art of Elgar throughout his life.

The Symphonies

In 1908, Elgar's *First Symphony* followed his completion of the marching song, *The Reveille* (1907), which was commissioned by the Worshipful Company of Musicians in order to lift British spirits during that period of conflict between England and Germany. Elgar did not compose a symphony until the age of fifty-one although

he had eagerly longed to do so since the beginning of his creative years. The *First Symphony* was dedicated to Hans Richter, who Elgar described as ‘true artist and true friend,’ and was given its premiere with the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester conducted by the dedicatee on December 3, 1908 (Kennedy 2004, 109). Immediately following its first performance, the *First Symphony* became widely recognized as a truly fine masterpiece and won the praise of critics and audiences alike. On December 8, 1908, the *Morning Post* wrote of the *Symphony* as:

. . . a masterpiece such as no other British hand has yet produced. The work increases the author’s fame; to the world it goes forth as a masterpiece and our incontestable claim to be regarded as a creative musical nation (Moore 1999, 547).

Arthur Nikisch (1855–1922), conductor of the Symphony a Gewandhaus

Concert in Leipzig in 1909 made this interesting comment:

I consider Elgar’s symphony a masterpiece of the first order, one that will soon be ranked on the same basis with the great symphonic models-Beethoven and Brahms . . . When Brahms produced his first symphony it was called ‘Beethoven’s tenth’, because it followed on the lines of the nine great masterpieces of Beethoven. I will therefore call Elgar’s symphony ‘the fifth of Brahms’. I hope to introduce it to Berlin, with my Philharmonic Orchestra there, next October. . . (Moore 1999, 548).

Elgar composed his *Second Symphony* in 1911. This great work bears resemblance to Beethoven's *Third Symphony, Op. 55 "Eroica"* (1803–1804) in both its musical ideas and overall form. In the *Second Symphony*, Elgar deliberately pursues the musical expression of heroic identity, an effort which he began in the *First Symphony* and which matured in his *Violin Concerto*. *The Second Symphony* was premiered by the Queen's Hall Orchestra on May 24, 1911, conducted by the composer. This masterpiece further enhanced Elgar's growing reputation in orchestral writing. The importance of the *Symphony* was emphasized in this entry from Mrs. Elgar's journal dated February 28, 1911: "This is a day to be marked. Elgar finished his Symphony. It seems one of his very greatest works, vast in design and supremely beautiful," (Moore 1999, 611).

The War Songs

Elgar's patriotic Nationalism found direct and useful expression in the inspirational songs he composed during World War I. At the outbreak of the war, Elgar's urgent patriotism led him to volunteer as a special constable for Hampstead in August 1914, as a substitute for a young man who had gone to fight in the war (Moore

1999, 669). During this time, after the fall of Belgium, Elgar was requested to write a war song as a contribution to the Belgian Fund in London. Elgar therefore set to music the poem 'Carillon' written the Belgian poet Emile Cammaerts. The very successful premiere on December 7, 1914 at the Queen's Hall, led to frequent performances that surely boosted British spirits and patriotism. Subsequently, also upon request, Elgar made three selections from a book of twelve war poems entitled *The Winnowing-Fan* which had been written by English poet Laurence Binyon at the beginning of 1915. The musical settings of these three selected works, *The Fourth of August*, *To Women*, and *For the Fallen* were compiled under the title, *The Spirit of England*, and inscribed 'to the memory of our glorious men, with a special thought for the Worcesters' (Moore 1999, 682). Among these songs, *To Women* and *For the Fallen* were performed for the first time at a benefit concert for the Red Cross in May 1916. The success of the songs in their Nationalism and artistic expressivity can be seen in the following excerpt from the article 'On Funeral and Other Music' written by Ernest Newman (1868–1959):

With the exception of Elgar, none of our composers, so far as I know, has produced any music, inspired by War, that expresses anything of what the nation feels in these dark days . . . Only out of an old and a proud civilization could such music as this come in the midst of war. It is a miracle that it should have come at all, for

Europe is too shaken just now to sing . . . The artist in [Elgar] gives him the power, denied to the rest of us, of quintessentially singing his emotions, of extracting from the crude human stuff of them the basic, durable substance that is art (Moore 1999, 696–697).

Elgar wrote two other important war-period compositions. *The Starlight Express*, Op. 78 (1915) is the musical score for a fantasy play of the same name written by Violet Pearn based on Algernon Blackwood's novel, *A Prisoner in Fairyland*. Soon after the composition's premiere, the Gramophone Company recorded the work in February of 1916, and distribution of the popular records served to inspire the British people even more widely and broadly than before. In another remarkable patriotic song, *The Fringes of the Fleet* (1917), Elgar set to music selected verses by Rudyard Kipling which had appeared in 1916 in a pamphlet of the same name. The song was a huge success and became part of a program continually performed at the Coliseum Theater in London in June of 1917. As described in the article 'British Musical Genius' written by the Coliseum manager at the time, Arthur Croxton:

To me the great hope of Edward Elgar standing out as a master-mind in musical composition after the war is shown by his wonderful setting of Rudyard Kipling's songs of Sea Warfare. In these songs you get the real magic of British seafaring spirit, of the open air, of the sea. The music smells of salt-water, and you feel that here at last is work which to its hearers gives added confidence

that from the Great War Edward Elgar will obtain impressions to which his musical genius will give magnificent utterance (Moore 1999, 710).

Chapter III

The Life of Martinů—A short Biography

The Formative Years in Polička: 1890–1907

One of the most prominent Czech Nationalist composers, Bohuslav Martinů was born on December 8, 1890 in Polička, Bohemia, where this remarkable region borders Moravia. His father, Ferdinand Martinů was a shoemaker and town's keeper whose duties included watching for fires day and night as well as taking care of the church bells and clock. In order to carry out his fire-watching responsibilities, Ferdinand moved to the church tower of the Church of St. James the end of 1889. It was here that Bohuslav was born, in the topmost room of the church tower, more than a hundred feet above the Polička market square. The backdrop of his birthplace greatly influenced the characteristic essence of Martinů's life's work which was always strongly bound to both the countryside and the isolation of his childhood.

Martinů was a weak and frail infant, and he spent the first six years of his life entirely within the church tower of his birth. During this period, he was almost completely isolated, and he learned to observe and interpret the world below mostly

on his own. Later, in Paris in 1934, at the age of forty-four, he recalled his childhood in the Polička church tower:

I've always kept a picture postcard of Polička as seen from our tower-like home in my room. This view, and many others, are so firmly planted in the memory that I know them all to the last detail. On one side there's the lake, on the other the cemetery and village stretching further and further into the distance. To the north there's flat, unwooded country, and below, the town itself, everything in miniature, with tiny houses and tiny people moving, creating a kind of shifting pattern. And above, boundless space where the sky kept changing as regularly as nature did below. Expanses of winter snow changed into russet fields, green patches and blue forests. The harsh atmosphere of winter began to melt away: the field grew into a sea of golden grain and life moved from town to the country where people became part of nature's pattern along with trees, streams and birds. And at night there were storms and fires and I don't know what else . . . These are impressions of home, my home, indelible and unforgettable (Large 1).

And he continued to recollect:

Since I was so long isolated on the tower and as cut off from the outside world as if I had lived in a lighthouse, I could do nothing but engrave the views from the top of the tower in my memory. From each side of the balcony the outlook was different, and a wide expanse of space covered everything . . . This space, I think, was the greatest impression of my childhood. Before everything else it penetrated my consciousness and it was only later that I became aware of people. In my early days people seemed like little dots, shifting I knew not where nor why, figures working in an unknown fashion . . . Building houses like boxes, moving like ants. This picture, I remember, was always changing and was dominated by

space. When you consider that I lived more or less in isolation except for spatial phenomena, it perhaps explains why I viewed everything differently (Large 5).

This unusual environment of a simple country life yet lived high up in a tower seems to have served to purify and refine his outlook beyond the pettiness of the world below. The question young Martinů often asked was “Why are the people and animals down there so small and we here are so big?” (Šafránek 1961, 24)

Karel Stolda, an elderly shoemaker who lived with the Martinů family, was fond of singing folk songs, hymns, and rhymes. These provided great entertainment and stimulation to Martinů as a child. This influence is seen in Martinů’s first *singspiel*, *Carols*, which he composed at the end of World War I. *Carols* includes the folk song, *Šel jest Pán Bůh šel do ráje, Adam za nim poklekaje* (*The Lord God visits Paradise, Adam falls upon his knees*) and the hymn *Nad Betlémem krásná hvězda vychází* (*Over Bethlehem a lovely star doth rise*). The song and hymn were both sung by Stolda in the church tower.

When Martinů began primary school at the age of six, his daily descent to the real world, the world of conventional human activity, was a new experience. At this time, he had some difficulties adjusting to school life and his classmates, and he

displayed a shy and introverted personality. At the same time however, he began to develop what were to become his lifelong passions for music, literature, and the theater.

During his first year of primary school in Polička, Martinů began violin study with Josef Černovský, who was a self-taught musician as well as a local tailor. Enrolled in 'group lessons' with four or five other children, Martinů spent much of his time practicing and made rapid progress. Černovský recognized Martinů's musical talent and encouraged him to compose as well. He recalled Černovský many years later:

When I look back there is no one who can replace him. Even though he had no diploma or anything like that, he had a love of music and art of which he himself was possibly unaware. It was he who showed me the way to appreciate both music and art. His lessons were extraordinary. He was the first to acknowledge my gifts and the first to encourage me (Large 7).

Martinů's interest in literature began also in these early years, this time under the influence of his family. The Martinůs frequently borrowed books (mostly patriotic and historical novels) from the local library, and young Martinů became such an enthusiastic reader that he soon had read almost all of the interesting authors whose works were available in the Polička library. His love for reading grew with him and

expanded later to encompass literary works of value, in his own recollection: “up to Dostoyevsky and beyond him and back” (Šafránek 1961, 32).

Along with music and reading, Martinů developed an enthusiasm as a youth for the theater. His father, an actor and prompter with the Polička Amateur Dramatic Society, habitually took his son with him to rehearsals. Young Martinů was fascinated with the dreams and fantasies expressed in staged dramas. The core of his appreciation for the dramatic arts clearly originated from this childhood exposure. Eventually, Martinů would create twenty-eight works of opera and ballet for the stage.

A result of his first public performance on August 19, 1905, a promising debut on violin, the townspeople and the local newspaper rallied to support the gifted (yet poor) young musician so that he could study seriously at the Prague Conservatoire. A successful fund-raising campaign, combined with an annual contribution from the Polička Town Council, sufficed to send Martinů to the Conservatoire beginning in 1906.

The Experimental Period in Prague: 1907–1923

After entering the Prague Conservatoire as a violin student of Štěpán Suchý, Martinů was enthralled by the stimulating environment in the city of Prague. There were two opera houses and a great number of concerts, recitals and exhibitions to attend. In addition, there were excellent libraries. Despite the atmosphere of political turmoil in the capital in 1907, Prague proved to be an abundant source of culture and arts, providing as much stimulation as any other European city at that time.

The Czech people increasingly appreciated the paintings of Auguste Rodin, Eduard Munch, Daumier, Cézanne, Van Gogh, and members of the Impressionist School.

Meanwhile, Josef Suk (1874-1935) and Vítězslav Novák (1870-1949) were following after Dvořák and Smetana as successors to new Czech music, though the Nationalist revival movement led by Dvořák and Smetana was quickly dying. Meanwhile, as the tradition of the classical symphony and the Neo-Romantic School was fading away, Prague (in 1907), was occupied by various tides of European music: German works such as those of Richard Strauss (1864–1949) and Max Reger (1873–1916), the French Impressionist music of the likes of Claude Debussy (1862–1918), and Italian *Verismo* (an Italian operatic school of realism in the late nineteenth century) as found

in the operas of Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1857–1919), Pietro Mascagni (1863–1945) and Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924). During this time works of Wagner, Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) and Brahms were also still widely popular.

Martinů intended to fit the mold and apply himself at the Prague Conservatoire where teachers were very demanding of their pupils, a rigid curriculum was established, and strict regulations were followed, but he soon failed. Instead, as a daily routine, he attended concerts, recitals and the opera. Through this exposure, he came to know well the symphonic and operatic works of Dvorák, Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), Wagner, Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847), Schumann, Anton Bruckner (1824–1896) and Gustav Mahler (1860–1911). He loved the tone poems of Richard Strauss, but Martinů's favorite work was *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Debussy, who had a great influence upon him. Another habit that fed his creative life was to walk through the streets and stop by second-hand bookshops. In this manner, he came to discover the Russian classics of Dostoyevsky, Gogol and Tolstoy, and was deeply impressed by Przerwa-Tetmajer, Przybyszewsky, and Strindberg. During Martinů's second year in Prague, he began an intimate and long-lasting friendship with a brilliant student violinist, Stanislav Novák, whose greater knowledge of music and

literature attracted Martinů. Novák became later a leader of Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, a founder of the Frank Quartet, and, eventually, a professor at the Prague Conservatoire. The two young men attended concerts together and shared their private lives, their interests, and their enthusiasm. This deep friendship helped them to live happily despite the difficulties and poverty of student life.

Expelled and re-enrolled repeatedly however, Martinů eventually failed in his efforts to adapt to the strict conformity of the educational system of the Conservatoire. In a Conservatoire report, his behavior was recorded as “less than satisfactory,” his capability to work as “erratic and inconsistent,” and, most surprisingly, his violin playing as “incompetent” (Large 14). Martinů decided in 1909 to move to the Organ School, the only music school in Prague where composition was taught. By then, Martinů knew that what he had been eagerly anticipating upon arriving Prague was the study of composition rather than the violin (he had been composing in his modest and self-taught way since his departure from Polička). In the end, Martinů was expelled from the Royal and Imperial State Conservatoire in Prague for “incorrigible negligence” (Šafránek 1961, 48).

In spite of continuous failure at school, Martinů decided to stay in Prague—where he was able to deepen his artistic experience and commit himself to composing—until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. During this time in Prague, he produced many early works that were written mostly in Debussy-like idioms under the influence of French Impressionism. Some of these pieces exhibit technical problems because Martinů was self-taught and there was no one to advise him. Though these works overall are uneven and inconsistent, they do reveal his early attempts at colored instrumentation and his desire to create a new exotic timbre.

Upon the outbreak of the war, Martinů returned to Polička and continued to compose while teaching violin lessons privately in order to support himself. Among the compositions he wrote in this war period, some works clearly show his inclination toward Impressionistic and Nationalistic characteristics. *A Nocture, Three Lyric Pieces* (1915) and *Ruyana* (1916) demonstrate the influence of Debussy's *Préludes*. *Five Polkas* (1916), a *Furiant* and a *Burlesque* (1917) seem to be written within the framework of Smetana's *Czech Dances*. The choral-ballet *Koleda (Christmas Carol)* (1917) was based on a series of old Czech Christmas customs including folk dances,

instrumental interludes, spoken recitatives, and traditional Czech carols and poems.

His *String Quartet No. 1* (1918) shows the influence of both Dvorák and Debussy.

Martinů wrote three remarkable works during this period. The first of these is the patriotic cantata *Česká rapsódie* (*Czech Rhapsody*) (1918), inspired by a growing feeling for political and cultural independence in the population after the first Czech Republic was established on October 28, 1918. Martinů dedicated the work to the author Alois Jirásek and assembled the text from a portion of the text of Psalm 23 (*The Lord is My Shepherd*) and verses from old Bohemian chorales combined with collections of secular words. *Czech Rhapsody* was premiered by the Czech Philharmonic in Smetana Hall in January of 1919, and its second concert, in the same month, was attended by the President of the Republic. Martinů immediately became recognized as among Prague's best-known composers.

Two other works that should be mentioned are the ballets *Istar* and *Kdo jena světe nejmocnější?* (*Who is the Most Powerful in the World?*), both composed in 1922.

The premier of *Istar* was given on September 11, 1924 and labeled Martinů as a 'French composer.' Based on the Orpheus legend, with a scenario by the Czech mystic Julius Zeyer, the huge three-act ballet is full of exotic effects and demonstrates

important development of Martinů as a composer. *Kdo jena světe nejmocnější?* was first performed on January 31, 1925 in Brno. The story of a family of mice, this work is filled with moments of parody and gentle humor. Simpler than his previous works, this ballet is essentially diatonic, unlike the chromatic idiom, for example, of *Istar*. This transitory work is worth noting, however, with its jazz idioms and greater sense of rhythm going beyond Martinů's former Impressionistic style.

In the spring of 1919, Martinů joined the National Theatre Orchestra in its tour of London, Paris, and Geneva, giving him the opportunity to fall in love with Paris, then the center of Western culture and arts. He served as a second violinist in the Czech Philharmonic until 1923, again failed compositional study with Josef Suk through the Composition Master Class at the Prague Conservatoire in 1922, and finally decided to move to Paris after the death of his father.

Maturing Period in Paris: 1923–1941

Martinů arrived in Paris at the age of thirty-two in October 1923, and there developed more fully his own musical style and identity as well as his craftsmanship as a composer. He recorded in his diary written during the period of World War II:

So I went to France not to seek there my salvation, but to confirm my opinion . . . What I went to France in quest of was not Debussy, nor Impressionism, nor musical expression, but the real foundations on which Western Culture rests and which, in my opinion, conform much more to our proper national character than a maze of conjectures and problems (Šafránek 1961, 88).

In the 1920s, Paris was not only the center of contemporary music, but also of contemporary art and literature. There was at the time a strong reaction against late nineteenth-century Romanticism in all areas of the arts. In musical Paris, the Neo-Classacists were playing an important role and audiences were attracted by the six radical musicians who were known as Les Six: Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), François Poulenc (1899–1963), Louis Durey (1888–1979), Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983) and Georges Auric (1899–1983). The music of Debussy was rarely performed in Paris after his death in 1918, and the musical seriousness and heaviness of late Romanticism was going out of fashion. Instead, lightness, excitement, and wittiness in music rose in popularity. This

tendency towards titillation and against seriousness seemed to come from the stresses of the war years between 1914 and 1918 and from the guilt of commitment to the cause of war. Composers happily incorporated newly-discovered and much appreciated means of expression in their works: African-American rhythms, turns evoking the Parisian night-life, elements of jazz and ragtime, and Brazilian air with their Tango and Rumba dance rhythms. The prominent composers at this time were Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), Béla Bartók (1881–1945), Manuel de Falla (1876–1946), Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953), Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882–1973), Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), and Arnold Schönberg (1874–1961).

In the midst of this maze of various artistic trends however, Martinů was just as slow to assimilate new musical thoughts and idioms as he had been to acclimate to the demands of civilization when he moved down into Polička from the church tower of his birth and later to Prague away from his country home. Though he was too shy to present himself in Paris society, he was able to build good friendships with his fellow-countrymen and several outstanding Czech artists. He also continued one of his favorite habits—strolling along the street to observe people and take in the social

atmosphere—and he continued to visit second-hand bookshops. Later he reflected upon these strolls in his piano composition *Les Bouquinistes du Quai Malaquais* (*The Second-hand Book-seller*) (1948) (Mihule 20).

During this Paris period, Martinů began to study with Albert Roussel (1869–1937) whom he had admired since the days of Prague. Their relationship, however, was considered to be more of a friendship than an ordinary teacher-pupil relationship. In spite of an initial language barrier, Roussel’s caring paternal interest in Martinů gave him courage and more confidence in his compositional ability. This enduring friendship grew as did Roussel’s admiration for Martinů’s musicianship. Though it cannot be said that there is any direct and definite influence of Roussel found in Martinů’s works, certainly his evolving artistry in itself was an expression of Roussel’s priceless mentorship. It is also interesting to note that the two musicians made artistic leaps simultaneously in terms of achieving individuality of expression during this time. When Paris celebrated Roussel’s sixtieth birthday, in 1930, Roussel declared among a circle of friends: *Ma gloire ça sera Martinů* “My glory—that will be Martinů” (Šafránek 1961, 95). Likewise, Martinů described his appreciation for Roussel according to *La Revue musicale* in November, 1937:

I came all the way from Czechoslovakia to Paris to benefit from his instruction and tuition. I arrived with my scores, my projects, my plans, and a whole heap of muddled ideas, and it was he, Roussel, who pointed out to me, always with sound reasoning and with precision peculiar to him, the right way to go, the path to follow. He helped show me what to retain, what to reject, and he succeeded in putting my thoughts in order, though I have never understood how he managed to do so. With his modesty, his kindness, and with his subtle and friendly irony he always led me in such a way that I was hardly aware of being led. He allowed me time to reflect and develop by myself . . . Today, when I remember how much I learned from him I am quite astonished. That which was hidden in me, unconscious and unknown, he divined and revealed in a way that was friendly, almost affectionate. All that I came to look for in Paris, I found in him. I came for advice, clarity, restraint, taste and clear, precise, sensitive expression—the very qualities of French art which I had always admired and which I sought to understand to the best of my ability. Roussel did, in fact, possess all these qualities and he willingly imparted his knowledge to me, like the great artist that he was (Large 37).

Along with Roussel, Martinů's wife, Charlotte Quennehen, became a most helpful supporter. Because of her French origins, their marriage on March 21, 1931, lent Martinů credibility in Paris and also incorporated a stabilizing influence into his life. She was fully devoted to her husband and to his career, working hard to earn money to support the couple financially. Her sacrificial devotion to her husband persisted throughout their married life, which produced no children.

Despite difficulties stemming from his poverty, nothing could stop Martinů from composing. In Paris, he created an immense number of works through sheer determination and perseverance. Most of these were experimental—representing a variety of styles—however, there were two remarkable orchestral pieces written during this period, *Half-time* (1924) and *La Bagarre* (1926). Both were composed under the distinctive influence of Igor Stravinsky. Martinů recalled about Stravinsky:

He is positive and direct. Life is full of the beauty around him, not however of invented, transformed, mysterious beauty, but the simple natural beauties of things themselves. That is what prompts his music, in which we sense the almost primitive touch, the basic questions cleansed of all veils. It is not a show, it is the form of expression of a man who loves life with an ingenuous, simple direct love (Mihule 21).

The ten-minute-long *Rondo* for orchestra, *Half-time*, was inspired by the excitement of the crowd at a football game and was first performed in Prague in December of 1924. Critics noted that Martinů's interest in rhythm over melody, dominating fragmentary *rondo* theme, conflict of tonality, harsh ostinatos, and rhythmic effectiveness and aggressiveness of hammering chords in this piece were clearly influenced by Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1911) and *Le Sacre du printemps*

(*The Rite of Spring*) (1913). The second orchestral work, *La Bagarre (Tumult)*, was inspired by the overwhelming public welcome of Charles Lindbergh upon his completion of the first Atlantic Ocean crossing by air (New York to Paris) on May 20, 1927. Martinu showed his manuscript of *La Bagarre* to the distinguished conductor Serge Koussevitzky who met him at a boulevard café, and at the composer's request, Koussevitzky premiered the work with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in November of 1927. Despite their imitation of Stravinsky's works, *Half-time* and *La Bagarre* enabled Martinu to present himself to both Paris and the United States. The compositions also remain as important works, both in his catalogue and as a glimpse of his continuous process towards his most mature techniques and characteristics.

Martinu's numerous other works including theatrical compositions for opera and ballet and chamber music were to follow. These experimental pieces were written in the new language of *avant-garde* music with the adoption of Jazz, Blues, and Tango, Foxtrot and Charleston dance rhythms. Martinu produced no less than nine works for the stage between 1925 and 1930. Though these works brought him little success and were considered as experimental, uneven, and not stage-worthy, they demonstrate

the composer's musical potential, his flexibility in the acceptance of fashionable trends, and his adoption of new musical language and methods.

Exile Period in America: 1941–1953

After the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Martinů decided to leave Paris due to the threat of the impending German occupation of France. He had been blacklisted by the Nazis because of his support in Paris of the Czech National Council. Ultimately, Martinů and his wife were to able emigrate to the United States in March of 1941. For their safety, until then (from 1939 to 1941), they lived as refugees in Aix-en-Provence. During this period of bitter distress and insecurity, Martinů expressed his spiritual strength and personal and patriotic passion through composing. Several remarkable works were completed during this potentially empty and hopeless time: *Cello Sonata No. 1* (May 1939), *Eight Czech Madrigals* (July 1939), *Field Mass* (December 1939), *Military March* (January 1940), *Fantasie and Toccata for piano* (September 1940), *Sinfonietta Giocosa for piano and small orchestra* (November 1940), and *Sonata da Camera for cello and small orchestra* (December 1940).

After arriving in America on March 31, 1941, just as in his previous experiences in Prague and Paris, Martinů again found himself an outsider as he strove to adapt, as much as possible, to his new environment. Martinů remained fundamentally Czech at his core, however, and produced the many compositions with Czech Nationalistic tone color and character while living on American soil. During this period, his intellectual maturity, great balance, and high-spirited freedom enabled him to produce his great masterpieces in the field of symphonic compositions and concert works including various mature chamber works. Above all, his six symphonies produced during this time had tremendous meaning as the sum of his life's experience, representing with profound nobility and significance the composer's thoughts and feelings as a longtime refugee and outsider.

Interestingly, during this period, Martinů also composed *Madrigal Stanzas for violin and piano* in November 1943 dedicated to the famous scientist Albert Einstein. The piece is composed of five short pieces in madrigal form which exemplify the composer's aptitude for structural simplicity and directness and his fondness for sixteenth-century poetry and music. The piece was inspired by Martinů's admiration of Einstein and his astounding Theory of Relativity. It remained a very pleasant

memory for Martinů to recall that Einstein played the *Madrigal Stanzas* with the famous French pianist Robert Casadesus, who was in residency at Princeton University, upon the composer's visit to Einstein while he was at Princeton (Šafránek 1946, 94).

Chapter IV

The Musical Characteristics and Personal Significance of Selected Works of Martinů

Music for Theater

During his residence in Paris, beginning in 1923, Martinů's musical characteristics were cultivated beyond their roots in his Czech origins. Then, he made a swift return to Czech Nationalistic expression in the 1930s while he was working on important pieces for theater, based on Czech folklore: *Špaliček* (1931), *The Miracle of Our Lady* (1934), and *Suburban Theatre* (1936). Unlike his chamber and symphonic writings, these works were exclusively intended for the Czech theater and reveal a departure from a more international viewpoint back to his intimate folk-oriented approach.

The first major work exhibiting his growing Nationalism is the vocal ballet, the so-called Czech 'cantata-ballet', *Špaliček*. In his theatrical works, Martinů always sought to express essential human feelings, instincts, and relationships. He

completed *Špaliček* in January of 1931, and this one-act ballet incorporated Czech folk texts, customs, dances, legends, ballads, and children's games. The ballet was intended only for Czech theater and for the Czech people who were to feel the work in their hearts. Through his scenic compositions, Martinů furthermore intended to educate his audiences about various forms of musical drama that were based on Czech historical surroundings. Martinů wrote the text as a mixture combining an old Czech story, the *Legend of St. Dorothy*, with fairy tales including internationally recognized tales (such as *Puss in Boots* and *Cinderella*) and local folk tales (such as the Czech, Slovak, and Moravian *Seven Ravens* and *The Magic Sack*). Martinů described the work in his words in 1933:

This legend had been in my mind for a long time, indeed since 1924, when I first began to consider it, but I did not know what form it would be necessary to choose. In the summer holidays of 1927, I went back to it, but again without any tangible result. Finally the composition of the female choruses last year showed me a possible way of treating the Legend, both from the musical and the dramatic point of view; the problem of form then solved itself . . . What I chiefly aimed at was the production of a folk drama, that is, folk theatre. The whole tone of the ballet has, for that reason, quite a different character from my symphonic or chamber music. I have limited myself, if one can use the expression at all, to a completely simple folk lyricism and preserved this tone throughout the whole play, not complicating it with any novelties or original features such as are now in fashion, but keeping to a simple folk tone, and I am convinced that this is

the best and only possible solution and that it fully conforms to the solution of the dramatic or, for that matter, of any other treatment (Šafránek 1961, 140).

These fairy tales represent the fullness of free imagination in the setting of simple children's games and folk customs. What Martinů achieved in *Špaliček* as a whole was the placement of Czech elements in a simple and natural way in a great mixture of folk-music elements and the most modern musical diction. *Špaliček* was immediately successful after the first two performances—September 19, 1933 at the National Theatre in Prague and November 25, 1933 in Brno. This remarkable work also brought the composer the Bedřich Smetana Prize for Composition in 1934.

Špaliček was directly followed by the cyclic opera, *The Miracle of Our Lady*. Martinů worked on the opera from the spring of 1933 to July of 1934, during a most feverish period of his Czech Nationalism. He originally planned to deal with old Czech subjects, but what he found was not suitable for the music. So, instead, he selected more fitting subjects from French literature and diverted them to Czech plays and legends with the employment of Czech folk texts. *The Miracle of Our Lady* is divided into two parts with four episodes: *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*, *Mariken of Nimègue*, *The Nativity*, and *The Legend of Sister Pascaline*. The Prologue in the first

part, *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* is based on the famous parable from Chapter 25 of the *Book of St. Matthew*. The text is taken from the old French play, *The Bridegroom* (*L' Époux, Sponsus*), which dates from the middle of the twelfth century as one of the existing oldest liturgical plays. *The Nativity*, also a short introductory piece, is a one-act Pastoral set to Moravian folk poetry. These two 'curtain-raisers' each set the stage for the main dramas of *The Miracle* and are regarded as folk oratorios in the character of a pageant. The miracle depicted in the first part of the cycle, *Mariken of Nimègue* is an adaptation of a Flemish play written in the fifteenth century. The French poet, Henri Ghéon set the lyrics according to the composer's desires. This drama illustrates the delightfulness of medieval plays especially in the scene wherein the Carnival King takes the stage with a modern band of folk musicians. The second part of the opera, *The Legend of Sister Pascaline*, is a true amalgamation based on old legends and texts from the Czech mystic Julius Zeyer. This portion also contains a Moravian Ballad, uses some Latin text, and incorporates a folk hymn. The music of *The Miracle of Our Lady* comes to the point of naivety and primitivism in general and there are archaistic expressions both in the short episodes and the longer dramatic expressions of the miracles themselves. The opera was premiered to enthusiastic

response on February 23, 1935 at the National Theatre in Brno and on February 7, 1936 at the National Theatre in Prague. Soon thereafter, Martinů was awarded the highest Czech public distinction, the State Prize for 1935.

His opera buffa, *Suburban Theatre* or *The Theatre Beyond the Gate* (*Divadlo za bránou*) (1936) also illustrates Martinů's inclination to employ and display Czech folk idioms. In this comic opera, written from June 1935 to April 1936, Martinů incorporates elements from the Italian folk theatre, *Commedia dell'Arte*, alongside famous figures from popular Czech theatre. This is a three-act divertimento in the form of an opera burlesque. Act I is a ballet-pantomime, and Act II and III are *opera buffa*. In these three acts, three main characters—Columbine, Harlequin, and Pierrot—and the Czech character, Katushka, perform dance and mime set to Czech poetry and folksongs. This light-hearted play illustrates Martinů's typical style and his taste for spontaneous flexibility and dynamism all within a setting of simplified expression, as opposed to the overwhelming passion of Romanticism. The Director of Opera at the National Theatre, Václav Talich (1883-1961), who was Martinů's favorite conductor, described the composer's operatic technique: "There is speech

when there is the need to speak, singing when there is the need to sing, and dancing, because at that moment nothing else is possible” (Šafránek 1961, 160).

Martinů had begun to employ Czech folk idioms and customs freely in his compositions in 1931, and he gained more success with his operas and ballets than with his orchestral and chamber works. He wrote another remarkable opera, *Juliette* (1937) between May 1936 and January 1937, and it premiered on March 16, 1938 at the National Theatre in Prague, conducted by Talich. The text is based on the play of the same title by the French poet, Georges Neveux. Martinů translates the original French to his own Czech language in the beginning of the work. The text explores the boundary between the world of reality and that of dreams. Originally written as a beautiful scenic poem, *Juliette* is set to music full of warmth and expresses the strength of human longing. The opera is composed in three acts in an arch form with the climax in Act II. It is notable that Martinů used the ‘Moravian cadence’ for the second motif which also appears later in each of his six symphonies and, in fact, in almost every work he subsequently wrote. The style of the vocal parts, defined as “spoken melo” by the composer, dominates the entire piece with the exception of one song, the song for Juliette.

His vast four-act opera, *The Greek Passion* (1958) took Martinů four years to complete, from fall of 1954 to the winter of 1958. The opera is based on the novel of the same name by the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis whose work greatly inspired Martinů. The composer transformed the novel flawlessly into a musical drama incorporating Czech idioms and language. His only tragic opera, *The Greek Passion* is his last major work, written near the end of his life. This masterpiece incorporates Martinů's understanding of dramatization, his full sense of musical beauty, and his endless nostalgia for home.

The Double Concerto and Six Symphonies

Martinů's personal attachment to the *concerto grosso* form is not unexpected given his interest in folk music and in old vocal forms such as the motet and the madrigal. Martinů described himself as a "*concerto grosso* type", and he was deeply inspired by the *concerti grossi* and by the *Sonata da Camera* of Corelli.

Martinů explained his affection for the *concerto grosso* form as follows:

You will find a superficial description of the form in almost all text-books, except for the fact that in it the soli and orchestra alternate. But in reality the matter goes much deeper. The whole structure of this form points to quite a different conception, a

different attitude to the problem. . . . The Concerto Grosso requires strict adherence to design, imposes restrictions, demands a balancing of the emotional elements, a limiting and adequate equalization of the sound volumes and the pace, an altogether different and strict structure as regards the thematic arrangement, in short, quite another world (Šafránek 1961, 131).

Given this point of view, the *Double Concerto* (1938) is the most outstanding and impressive work of this musical form among his compositions. The fact that he selected a strict classical form is a reflection of his desire for a musical setting, emotional balance, and the integration of structural elements. The *Double Concerto* was composed in September 1938 and was premiered by the Basler Krammer Orchestra under Paul Sacher (1906–1999) on February 9, 1940. This piece is essentially written for two string orchestras, piano and timpani. Throughout the entire work, including all three movements, polyphonic writing and chordal structure evoke the composer's feelings of faith, anxiety, doubt and hope aroused by his turbulent surroundings just before World War II. The patriotic feeling in this work would later serve to inspire Czech war immigrants. The *Double Concerto* is well explained in the composer's own words from 1942:

With anguish we listen everyday to the news bulletins on the radio, trying to find encouragement and hope that did not come. The clouds were quickly gathering and becoming steadily more threatening. During this time I was at work on the *Double Concerto*;