



# Lípa Musica

## International Music Festival

21<sup>st</sup> September – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2012

### FESTIVAL PROLOGUE

**Pavel Haas Quartet**  
*Bedřich Smetana – String quartet No. 1 E minor “From My Life”*  
*Franz Schubert – String quartet No. 14 D minor “Death and the Maiden”*  
 Monday 18th June, at 19.30  
 Praha, Rudolf gallery - Prague Castle

### OPENING CONCERT

**Prague Filharmonia**  
**Gaetano d’Espinosa – conductor / Italy**  
*Gioacchino Rossini – Overture from „The Italian Girl in Algiers“*  
*Antonín Dvořák – Czech Suite in D major, op. 39*  
*Ludwig van Beethoven - Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67*  
 Friday 21st September, at 19.00  
 Jablonec nad Nisou, The Town Theatre

**Kateřina Choboková - organ**  
**Yasuko Tanaka - trumpet**  
*Charpentier, Händel, Telemann, Pärt, etc.*  
 Saturday 22th September, at 19.00  
 Nový Oldřichov, Church of the Holy Cross

**Musica Florea**  
**Marek Štrynel – conductor**  
*A. Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*  
*A. Reichenauer: Instrumental Concerts*  
 Sunday 23rd September, at 17.00  
 Kravaře, Church of virgin Mary’s Birth

ST. WENCESLAS CONCERT  
**Schola Gregoriana Pragensis**  
**David Eben – artistic director**  
*„Bohemorum sancti - Bohemian Saints in Heavenly Jerusalem“ – Songs celebrating the most important Czech medieval saints (st. Vojtěch, st. Ludmila, st. Václav)*  
 Friday 28th September, at 19.00  
 Jezvė, St. Lawrence Church

TRADITIONAL CONCERT BY CANDLELIGHT  
**Tomáš Jammik – violoncello**  
*J. S. Bach – Cello Suites (selection)*  
 Saturday 29th September, at 20.00  
 Zahrádky, St. Barboras’s Church

**Pavel Steidl – guitar**  
**Gabriela Demeterová - violin**  
*N. Paganini, Pavel Steidl, etc.*  
 Sunday 30th September, at 17.00  
 Česká Lípa, Basilica of All Saints

**Dan Bárta a Robert Balzar Trio**  
*„Theyories“*  
 Monday 1st October, at 19.00  
 Nový Bor, The Town Theatre

**Joel Frederiksen – bass, lutes / Germany**  
*“The fire and passion in the English lute song”*  
 Friday 5th October, at 19.00  
 Děčín, Castle - Library hall

**Baborák Ensemble**  
**Radek Baborák – French horn**  
*“Via regia - Music between Prague and Zittau”*  
 Saturday 6th October, at 19.00  
 Großschönau, Evangelical - Luther Church Waltersdorf

**Musica Florea**  
**Marek Štrynel – conductor**  
*A. Vivaldi: The Four Seasons*  
*A. Reichenauer: Instrumental Concerts*  
 Sunday 7th October, at 17.00  
 Filipov, basilica of Virgin Mary the helper of Christians

**Children’s Opera Prague**  
*Minioperas of Zdeněk Svěrák and Jaroslav Uhlíř*  
*Sleeping Beauty, The twelve months, Budulíněk, Little Red Cap*  
 Friday 12th October, at 10:00 and 11:30  
 Česká Lípa, Jirásek’s Theatre

**Martinů Voices**  
**Lukáš Vasilek – conductor**  
*“God’s Grace for Zdislava”*  
 Saturday 13th October, at 19.00  
 Jablonné v Podještědí, Basilica minor of St. Zdislava

**Zuzana Lapčiková – vocal, cymbalom**  
**Josef Fečo – contrabass**  
*“The Tree of Life”*  
 Sunday 14th October, at 17.00  
 Česká Lípa, Textile museum

**Tara Fuki**  
**Dorota Barová – vocal, violoncello**  
**Andrea Konstankiewiczová – vocal, violoncello**  
*“Sens”*  
 Friday 19th October, at 19.00  
 Česká Lípa, Basilica of All Saints

**Barbora Sojková a Hana Blažiková – vocal, gothic lute**  
*“Per alegrezza - For pleasure” - Spiritual and secular love in music of the Italian late medieval*  
 Saturday 20th October, at 19.00  
 Česká Lípa, Biber’s Chapel

**Schola Gregoriana Pragensis**  
**David Eben – artistic Director**  
*„Let us sing together“ - Vocal music of Czech and German Reformation*  
 Friday 26th October, at 19.30  
 Zittau, Citizens Hall

**Czech Chamber Orchestra**  
**Andreas Sebastian Weiser – conductor**  
**Vocal Concert Dresden**  
**Peter Kopp – Choirmaster**  
**Anna Hlavenková – soprano**  
**Markéta Cukrová – alto**  
**Jaroslav Březina – tenor**  
**Tomáš Král – bass**  
*W. A. Mozart – Requiem, KV 626*  
 Friday 2nd November, at 19.00  
 Česká Lípa, Basilica of All Saints

## Miroslav Srnka

### Graham’s Subversive Etudes

### Pavel Bořkovec



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## Dear readers,

it is almost six years to the day since Czech Music Quarterly published our first interview with the composer Miroslav Srnka and it simply beggars belief to observe how much ground Srnka has covered within this short period of time, both when it comes to the "immanently artistic view" and the "outer success". I think it is no exaggeration to claim that the Czech Republic has gained in Srnka a composer of international significance – and I am pretty sure that another, just as short, six years will confirm my thesis to the full. Srnka's intelligence, his extraordinary ability to industriously focus on work and the sophisticated nobleness permeating everything that he does conceal in themselves a potential that will continue to take us all by surprise. After all, I guess I myself will be more surprised than anyone – I still remember the doubts I had about Srnka's music a mere six years ago, at the time of our first interview. Yes, at the time Miroslav's music was on the surface more about what he liked listening to than about that which he himself conceived, so to speak, yet there were many people who, unlike me, saw beneath the surface and afforded Srnka opportunities complying with his true abilities. They were right, not I. Fortunately.

Have a nice summer *Petr Bakla*



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## MIROSLAV SRNKA'S FOREST PHASE AND FLYING CARPET

**This interview took a relatively long time to come to fruition. There's no point pretending that it's the result of a spontaneous conversation - it took place in writing, entailed innumerable exchanges, and the interviewee approached the matter with great care and deliberation. Yet the interview as a whole revolves around the themes that have resonated every time we have got together over the years; it started, so to speak, with a sufficient degree of spontaneity. The phenomenally successful composer Miroslav Srnka (\*1975) has something to say about his work, and he is able to say it very concisely. And this fact not only bears witness to Srnka's ability to express himself but also, and primarily, to the qualities of his music as such. There is indeed truth in the expression that music is the sound of thinking.**

*If I had to introduce your music to someone, I would show them the compositions for strings...*

I write most naturally for strings. I began with the violin when I was six and have a "physical" relation to strings. I would perhaps show a single miniature: *Simple Space* for cello and a harmonic instrument.

*Yes, that is a really beautiful piece. But why this one in particular?*

Because when I was writing it I ceased pushing. I was composing it for my own joy, gave it all the time it needed, and actually ventured to eschew pigeonholes. The extremely avant-garde cello is accompanied by totally non-tonally guided major chords. Everything that I am doing today started in this composition. But at the time I didn't have the slightest inkling. I considered it a miniature I'd produced solely to please myself, aside from the "essential" pieces.

*Your String Quartet No. 3 and piano quintet Qu'une vague are divided by four years, during which you as a composer covered a lot of ground, which seems to have culminated another few years later in other string pieces - the trio Tree of Heaven and the quartet Engrams. From your viewpoint: from where to where did this journey lead?*

From the notion of how one should compose to the awareness of how I myself imagine composing.

*I would like to have a closer look at how you imagine composing. At first glance, it is striking that the compositions from recent years are in terms of sound and articulation about twice as slim but double the length. Why?*

When I was a student, it seemed to me that contemporary music revolves around two prototypes: "fast noisy dynamic ten-minute" or "slow soft contemplative half-hour" pieces. At the time, the "sportier" alternative agreed with me. Yet I soon realised that such writing is easy: in such a form it is not about the bearing capacity of the concept or the particular elements themselves, but thickening of the material that is not possible to absorb in real time. The listener never stops marvelling, the musicians are satisfied with the geyser of techniques and the critic is certain that this is "hardcore" contemporary music. But I don't want to malign these compositions (*Les Adieux*, *String Quartet No. 3*, *Magnitudo g. o*, *Quiet Now*), they served to create my basic repertoire of essential instrumental configurations and I am grateful to them for being my primary springboard.

Later on, however, I began being interested in questions with which compositional technique doesn't tend to overly deal, above all memory and expectation, connection and contiguity, balance and reverse proportion. How long a segment of time is still rhythm, how big a segment of time is already the form? How long does memory retain an element and expect its repetition? When does memory forget the element so that its return can come as a surprise? To what extent must an element stand out from the current so as to act independently? Can I offset the compressing of one parameter by thinning another one so that it gives rise to the feeling of change, but not gradation or degradation? I re-composed my work for this purpose. And the result was "non-fast twenty-minute pieces" with lower density of detail.

*You mentioned the possibility of "absorption in real time". There is a certain crossroads here: whether to conceive compositions more as refined "objects" that must be penetrated through repeated listening or rather as "epic" forms that lead*



PHOTO © WILFRIED HÖSL 2x

*The opera Make No Noise at the 2011 Munich Opera Festival*

*the listeners and do not leave them behind, yet at the price of a certain redundancy and rhetoricity that may stunt the composition upon repeated listening. How do you feel about this discrepancy, if we take into account that you create solidly fixed scores, "opera perfecta for repeated use"?*

I try to attain slow changes at the borderline of rhythm and form, which are neither so fast as to give rise to gradation drama nor so slow as to cease to be observable. I need precisely timed tempo and non-haste. On the edge of redundancy. Yet redundancy can also be a subjective perception drawing upon a preset expectation of a certain density of musical information. We listen differently to charged Rihm sound orgies, differently to Renaissance polyphony, differently at a dance party, differently in Feldman trance (which could be termed an ingenious embodiment of redundancy). On each occasion we have set up a different mode of time perception. And those slow transformations of mine need their own mode, not trance, not orgy, not gradation. I would say, a winding "road" on which the performers accompany you. This works fine during long-term co-operation: in the case of *Engrams*, Diotima pulled it off perfectly after performing it for three quarters of a year, when all the areas suspected of being redundant were afforded meaning and sense. Until that time, I had heard on numerous occasions that the composition was too long. The listeners were only divided on whether this applied to the first or second half. I set out in the direction that leads neither to epic shape nor detailed refinement but to a transformation shape entailing strengthening of the performer's freedom as regards the detail of the "opus perfectum". I increasingly require the musicians to make more decisions themselves, and sometimes this discomforts them, since my scores are becoming more and more limited to just the pitch and duration of notes. I haven't abandoned refinement either, but use it selectively, there where marked memory stops emerge, which I aim to mould precisely.



*I've perceived this for a long time now – as though all the “advanced techniques”, those amazing inventions of new music, have lost energy and run dry. Coincidentally, the music that interests me is made up almost exclusively of “normal notes”. Is this how you feel too? About yourself, about others...?*

All the music that has ever interested me was perfectly executed in terms of “normal notes”. But I wouldn't say that “advanced techniques” have exhausted themselves. Granted, as a principle they are weighed down. They no longer possess the sheer magic of the newly discovered, that is, we can detect quickly when they are self-serving and soon lose interest. Superhumanly capable performers, however, are inspiring and dangerous: we, as composers, can still easily succumb to their endless offer of instrumental techniques. Today, it is necessary to involve “techniques” equally, not to tack them on to a composition like peacock feathers. To assess them not as techniques but as colours and sounds possessing a meaning. I enjoy seeking connections between them and a structure from “normal notes”. When music from “normal notes” can organically, continuously pass into colour and technique, then it starts to be thrilling.

*You have spoken of a transformation, of a journey... So that means that there is some “from somewhere” through “some way” to “somewhere”. Let me ask you directly: do you tell stories?*

It is interesting that you have asked about this just now, because in a previous answer I talked about a journey in listening modes and about transformation of the musical structure, not about stories. Didn't you want to ask outright whether I write symphonic poems? I have been asked similar questions frequently.

Perhaps the reason why people have asked me about stories is that I formerly revealed the sources of inspiration for my compositions: mostly narrative and emotionally charged. Maybe too narrative and too charged. Nowadays, I don't do it any more, since the inspirations have become more abstract and since stories can lead to vulgarisation. I don't know why exactly, maybe on account of the sacred notion that “bona fide” contemporary music can only spring from abstract and rationally controlled compositional structures. And I evidently provoke being asked the question about stories by the fact that I work in detail with the evocative charge of the sound and its timbre. For this I am most indebted to Dvořák and Janáček. If I had completed my doctorate in musicology, I would have dealt with computer assisted acoustic analysis of these components in Janáček's late works. But seeing that I didn't complete my studies, I only applied them. In *Reading Lessons*, for instance, the sounds are derived from possible sonic imageries, stress perception and hallucinations at a time when we are engulfed in darkness over the long term. Following the premiere, one gentleman, who had either mixed up the Czech Republic with Yugoslavia or the composer with James Blunt, came up to me and asked whether I myself experienced it during the war. And said that he could hear it all there... Owing to the evocative sonicality, the music is dramatic in detail. But not programmatic. I consider the programme nature or story a question of form. And the form of my compositions is not determined by a “story”, I don't write “symphonic poems” ending with the confluence of two rivers. The form of my compositions – just like their other components – is mathematically and meticulously apportioned. If you could just see a several-metre graph of the time spiral, which is in the foundation of the form of the opera *Make No Noise...* The American musicologist Michael Beckerman has a theory that the melodic line of the New World Symphony – this crystalline embodiment of “absolute” music! – is in actual fact a verbatim setting of the text of Longfellow's Song of Hiawatha. And he is able to recite it alongside the recording completely. If this is true, would the reputation of the New World Symphony have been damaged if Dvořák had confessed to it? Or, contrariwise, what if Strauss had deleted the mountains from the title of the Alpine Symphony? And just as I ceased to reveal the inspirational stories, so did I vow not to talk about the compositional techniques, since this dulls the reception of the music itself.

*If we admit to the “evocativeness” of detail, it follows that there is no reason not to accord it to the whole too – and your compositions simply do evoke some narrativity, even in cases when you don't advertise it. That was what spurred me to ask that question. I can't, however, really agree with the assertion that you would harm your*

*music by revealing something about the background of your compositional strategies, no matter if they are “rational” or “emotional”. Perhaps Smetana didn’t write about a confluence either, but the image for him was the result of some heuristics of compositional inspirations which enabled him to work. So tell me straight!*

First of all, I construct networks of all the parameters that overlap. This is the lengthiest and most difficult part: how do you construct such an area from all the partial networks? For instance, when a melodic succession forms an infinite loop as a result of its repetition, and at the same time a polyphonic structure by means of its being plied over, and this polyphonic structure in turn corresponds to the chosen harmonic progression at every moment. It always has to fit at all the cross-sections. Sometimes it seems there’s no way forward. But usually there is one correct and surprisingly simple solution. An abstract plane, which lies “behind” the specific composition, originates. A “carpet” from one corner to the other. When I have finished weaving it, I have in front of me an immense structure, geometrically regular, repeatable in all directions. The “forest phase” then ensues. For days on end, I go out walking, preferably somewhere in the forest, and try to “absorb” the structure in my head so as to be able to comfortably imagine how it sounds and be able to discover the “nice spots”: the structural knots in which something special is happening as a result of overlap. And then my work is quite the opposite to that which is customary in contemporary music: when I write, I basically no longer sandwich layers, don’t add, don’t append anything, but, contrariwise, pick, isolate, take up elements from that big plane of possibilities.

*Does every composition have its own carpet, or do you make from it several pieces, which are then always the result of a different walk on the same carpet?*

That’s an excellent question, it delves deep into the substance of such a method of writing. If the carpet is sufficiently plush, it is possible to write from it several totally different compositions. This is how it was at the beginning. For instance, Les Adieux and the pieces dating from around that time are from a more or less identical material. It was hard enough learning how to work with that carpet, hence changing it after every piece was simply beyond my mental capacity. When it comes to the first compositions, I actually wasn’t even aware that I was working with a carpet. But once I’d got the knack and an overview, I began observing this method of work more generally and discovering the great openness in it. When in 2009 I received the Siemens Award, I made use of the opportunity not to have to write anything for half a year, yet, without claiming an immediate result, I explored this type of composing – I tried on, sketched, jettisoned, trained, learned. I again began taking consultations from Milan Slavický. It was immensely edifying, I felt like a singer with his vocal coach. At the time, he was already seriously ill. Then the first piece hewn from the new “metacarpet” was the monophonic *Coronae* for solo horn, dedicated to Slavický. Since that time, I have been changing carpets much more markedly for every composition. The transformation often rests in the fact that an unworn layer still remains and is overlapped by something entirely new in a different parameter.

*You have mentioned geometrical regularity. When weaving a carpet, does having a visual image or analogy from the visual world help? 2D or 3D?*

Bingo! The staff is actually a simple 2D object too. But one irregularly crimped, because it has the inbuilt difficulty of bearing the diatonic basis, thus staggering between semitones and whole tones. I have always been irritated by the fact that the simple chromatic scale does not have the note heads on the staff in a straight line. Therefore, I have abandoned the staff in my work and sketched on a continuous plane, on a simple graph with time on the x axis and frequency on the y axis. You can comfortably put on it individual structural networks. I often imagine the movement on it first as lines and curves, which are then quantised by means of intersecting with the discontinuous grid of the networks. Recently, a third axis, the z axis, has accrued too, since I am now also probing the “depth and distance” of some parameters. A distant forte becomes inaudible. Timbre is filtered by distance. Chords and rhythm thin into indiscernible grain in the distance. Harmony bulges from the plane. Owing to the “depth”, the structure can continuously glide into silence, melt into noise, noise glides into articulation, articulation into rhythm, thus gaining plasticity, interconnecting the parameters.

The carpet of mine began to warp, it is now more and more variable. And less material – it is becoming a set of rules as to how this and that parameter can or cannot behave. It is similar to the mathematical models that inquire into the movement of individual birds within flocks or fish within shoals. Each individual abides by several simple rules and reacts to the movement of the individuals around him. This is how the movement of a mass originates. Lately, the lying carpet has often become a flying carpet.

Only at the end do I have to set it into the knotty 2D staff. Therefore, I find writing music on lines flattening, it is the very final phase. And often a very rapid one, since then I only recode everything into a comprehensible medium called the score. Sometimes, this drives those who have commissioned the piece crazy, because they cannot see any sample from the score until the very end.

*Have you ever considered remaining more in the phase of the initial “set of rules” and less “coding into 2D”?*

The principle of walking on a carpet also opens up possibilities for improvisation. I am considering writing a frenetic composition for ensemble in which the musicians will only get the carpet and the rules of their passage on it. Then it is sufficient to co-ordinate them in time, and the result should be a structurally very solid improvisation. As though the carpet became a jazz standard. If I’ve ever totally left the carpet and put something completely different into a composition, it has turned out badly. I really struggled with myself in the case of my two stage works last year, because they are not merely about music. How to comply with the requirements of the stage and not betray my principles? And when it comes to the “opera comic” for children at the Semperoper, I really pushed myself edgewise. Structurally rigorous composers really do have difficulties with writing music for the stage. This notwithstanding, I have really begun enjoying theatre.

*We’ll get around to your stage works soon, but first I would like to talk about your approach to vocal music as such. What does working with voice mean to you personally? What type of text? And how to, and why, set it to music at all? How do you, as a “structurally rigorous composer”, square up to the semantic aspect of the text?*

It took me quite a long time to get to vocal music. I got to stage works through someone else's encouragement, and the vast majority of my pieces are instrumental. Yet, perhaps owing to the "narrativity" in my instrumental music, some have encouraged me to compose vocal pieces since the very beginning... The human voice truly fascinates me. It is a category in its own right, one tainted by the greatest clichés, stylistic mannerisms, technical limitations, as well as human "demandingness" (one female soloist, for instance, gave me the finger at a rehearsal). Yet, at the same time, the human voice is capable of attaining an effect that simply takes your breath away.

When it comes to selection of a text, it is like with any another kickstart: you simply read it, don't put it down and feel an immense scope for sound "beside" the text. Then it is necessary to find for each text a dramaturgical "urgency" for setting and for singing. In *My Life Without Me*, for instance, it is a woman who feels through her situation in dialogues. But she passes by with everyone around her. Hence, I made from the text a "monocantata" for ensemble and soprano, and deleted the partners of her dialogues. We only hear her part of the text. That is the scope for setting.

I definitely incline towards structurally very simple, semantically very open texts. I approach them from above, from the syntax, not from the detailed semantics of the words or the quality of the syllables. I analyse them thoroughly, rewrite, pare to the bone and simplify them until a structure that can be considered another layer of the carpet appears in this text and consequently interacts with the sound. Yet the listeners don't perceive this: I think that they focus far more on the colour of voice, the movement in registers, the compression or, vice versa, expansion of the text in time, and even

Simple Space for violoncello solo and a harmonic instrument (pre-definitive version)

the frequency and length of breaths. I strive to put all this into accordance with the carpet.

*Can you say something about the genesis of perhaps the most significant stage (and vocal) work of yours to date, the chamber opera Make No Noise?*

We would have to go back to my first stage creation, *Wall*, dating from 2005. It just dropped into my lap, there wasn't much time. And it turned out to be a unique encounter - the libretto was written by Jonathan Safran Foer, the soprano part was sung by Anna Prohaska, who was just starting out at the time. Yet the first contact with a large opera house was a crushing blow. The fact that what the composer has written is not respected (although he was initially invited to closely collaborate with the production team...) made me swear to myself that I would never set foot in an opera house again. Yet two years later the publisher recommended that I apply for a scholarship in Britten's Aldeburgh. I approached it in a devil-may-care manner, dashed off the cover letter after the deadline had elapsed and then, a few months later, was informed by phone that I had been selected for the year-long programme for young professionals involved in opera. After the first three stays in Aldeburgh, I got together with the Australian director Matt Lutton, who contacted his compatriot Tom Holloway, a librettist, and asked for the second part of the scholarship to support writing a piece based on Isabel Coixet's screenplay for the film *Secret Life of Words*. To our utter amazement, Aldeburgh supported us in our work and during our study trips between Prague, Aldeburgh, Copenhagen, Oslo, Melbourne and Sydney. The project was subsequently joined by Ensemble Modern, Olivier Pasquet (a freelance sound designer from the Ircam stable) and the premiere was ultimately produced by the Bavarian State Opera within its 2011 Munich Opera Festival. Today, I really find it all rather difficult to believe... When it comes to the composing, it meant three years of working on and off and a bunch of related minor pieces, which functioned as testers. My second experience with a large opera house was the polar opposite to the first, there was great respect and humility. One of the reasons may have been that the stage director, the librettist and I co-operated throughout the time, long before the first note was written in the score. At the very beginning, I had no idea that it would turn out to be my greatest experience. It taught me to swallow my composer's ego.

*The subject matter of Make No Noise (a raped and tortured woman and a burnt man haunted by guilt try to restart their lives) is, if I may, typically Srnka-esque, in that it is definitely a continuation of the line of inspirational stories which you have revealed in many a concert piece of yours. Why are you attracted to unwinding your music from these tragic matters?*

Yes, I am attracted by extreme life situations, though I may not term them "tragic" but "existential". Why, I don't know. It is not about knowing. I can perhaps better say what it is about them that attracts me - that they are a singularity whereby "central questions" suddenly arise: why, for what, for whom, how... When in 2004 I gave the first German interview, I said that art is merely about love or death. I hesitated for a long time then about whether I should actually put it this way. But I did, and paid the price for a long time. That it is embarrassing, fageyish, hopelessly romantic, empty, clichéd. Yet I still

think so today. I don't mind being a fogey... Today, I probably wouldn't have the courage to put it in that manner, and now I'd add "freedom". For me, no art is about structures. They are just a vehicle for taking the listeners to a state where they begin thinking differently and in another way, and they ask themselves those unsettling questions. Some are provoked into it by graffiti, some by Star Wars, others by Duchamp's urinal.

*You refuse to accord your music the semblance of value by not talking about the sophistication of the composing process. So, talking about someone else's pain is better?*

Our European lives at the beginning of the 21st century are so secure and flat. They lack derangement. I seek it elsewhere. The grand, catastrophic, as well as thickly "pathosised" themes (*Magnitudo 9.0, Reading Lessons*) date from the period that ended circa 2007, and since that time this groping has been proceeding to a more private, subtle and abstract level. For the first time - and unexpectedly for me too - in 2006's *Simple Space* (actually composed between 2004 and 2006; I toiled over this seven-minute piece for one and a half years, it lived its own life beside larger things). And then in the opera *Make No Noise*. The central character, Hanna, has gone through unimaginable things, yet the entire opera only takes place "afterwards", it is about her return. About how Hanna "learns" to sing on stage so as to ultimately manage to articulate her life in a new, calm voice - the voice with which we sing in the shower or when cooking. It is also about my own learning how to convey something more delicate.

Matt, Tom and I went to Copenhagen to visit the centre of the multiple Nobel Peace Prize candidate, that astonishing lady Inge Genefke, where they put back together the lives of people who have undergone physical torture, just like Hanna has. And Inge organised a private meeting with two of her former female patients. We, with our secure and flat lives lacking crucial questions, were sat there in front of them, listening to them being able to tell us in calm voices about what they had gone through. About how they had got there where Hanna needs to get too. Do we have the right to treat something like this at all? Inge replied that we simply had to, because within a single evening we could communicate something that she has been doing for years by means of her medical methods and scientific language. That was an obligation of the third kind and encouragement that such themes as these are relevant when superficiality and emotional blackmail is eschewed. We strove to create an intimate story devoid of pathos. And Inge is one of the dramatis personae. She attended the premiere so as to see herself onstage from the first row. Our knees were trembling.

*I hear what you're saying, but - and now we will slightly diverge from your opera - the cardinal question for me remains whether the possibilities of music as such are overestimated. On the whole, I have no doubts in the case of literature, film and the like, simply the verbal and portraying artistic disciplines, that they are able (and rightly so) to deal with these "singularities of human existence". Yet, to all intents and purposes, music is only capable of it through the literature (text or libretto, authorial comment, title) surrounding it. The fact that Hanslick wrote this one hundred and fifty years ago does not change anything a jot in this respect. Then it is just a more or less credible suggestion, association, endeavour for a sort of symbolism (deep clusters vs. high strings and bells as a compulsory requisite of "spiritual" compositions, for*

*instance). A heart-rending programme note can be appended to virtually any piece and it is not possible to verify it in the slightest, scepticism compels one to deem it as the creator's endeavour to furnish the composition with an alibi, which would make possible aesthetic question marks irrelevant, tasteless even. It is more difficult to say of a piece dedicated to victims of this or that atrocity that it is tedious, derivative crap. Wouldn't it be more honest to admit that by choosing music and not, for instance, novel-writing, certain types of statement about the world are not accessible to you?*

But I do agree that specific notional statements are inaccessible to music. You have to separate the accompanying texts from those singularities. The accompanying texts talk about the inspiration for instrumental music. I don't say through them that the music then predicates about something notional and specific. Disclosing inspiration can serve to concretise the listener's associations. With some, it stimulates the imagination; with others, it simply irritates. And now we have come full circle, back to Hiawatha and the New World Symphony.

For a long time, I racked my brain about whether to provide any texts at all for compositions. Writing a commentary seems to have become part of the packaging of contemporary music today. Dramaturges want original texts that will make the listening easier, add an authorial hallmark, sophisticatedly toss in a value and depth. About half a year ago, however, I decided not to write commentaries any longer. For the reasons you have described. With the aim to avoid blackmailing and not to provide an alibi.

Formerly, I used to think that unconditional openness and sincerity belong to the arts. And if something was an inspiration, it should be revealed as such. A pipe dream... In recent years, I have inclined to the Kundera approach, that everything is purer without a commentary. And more convenient for me, to boot!

But those singularities that open up another dimension and provoke questioning, that is a completely different kettle of fish. There are tons of foolscap out there filled with all possible aesthetic theories. Everyone terms it differently, no one is able to denominate it universally, yet everyone together guesses what it is about. You can just as well be taken there by Brahms's First, Wagner's Liebestod. And by Ligeti's Piano Concerto, as well as Grisey's Quatre chants. By music and a poem, a novel and a film. It doesn't matter whether notionally or non-notionally. Literature and film don't directly utter "central questions" either. They enwrap them cunningly and are able to lead you to the state of asking them yourself. And this is the point: the state. Music transports us into it using its own means, which I myself refer to as the energy current (after all, physically it actually is an energy current...). It is able to lead a packed auditorium there simultaneously. It is amusing to sit on the gallery at the Rudolfinum during a concert and observe the audience. The eyes clearly reveal those who have been transported. Recently, neuroscientists researching into the human brain have allegedly found out that language and music stimulate similar areas of the brain. Perhaps the notional aspect is not relevant at all. I am curious about what else the neuroscientists will find out and what piece of aesthetics they will steal for themselves. A sort of Hanslick with a tomography machine.

*Could you then specify the fundamental difference between a composer and a methamphetamine producer...?*

Composing is legal... Otherwise, music and drugs have a surprisingly lot in common. Music is said to be able to invoke “chills”, pleasant excitements giving rise to blood flowing into the parts of the brain that are also affected by dopamine when taking narcotics. But at this juncture we should really consider inviting a neuroscientist over...

*The “opening into another dimension” is undoubtedly one of the abilities of art. Yet you are talking about music more from the position of those listening (for example) to someone else’s work. For the most part, one doesn’t rave about his own artefacts, and if he does then that’s pretty embarrassing. What does composing bring to you personally? Regardless of the external confirmation, which certainly is pleasing, what satisfaction do you derive from your own music?*

I don’t listen to my own artefacts, except for at concerts. I find it narcissist. But, yes, composing does bring me external confirmation and, since last year, it has been my sole source of income. It’s my passion, and it’s addictive. After the double bar line, there’s the same sense of satisfaction as after finishing a thesis. The “chills” from working and rehearsing with superlative musicians are also worth it. Yet the greatest satisfaction of all is the feeling during the writing when you really begin to hear and obey that which the music and material are asking for. Then you feel like a filter. And the best results come when one is really obedient. Sometimes they are totally different from that which the “composer” originally planned.



**Miroslav Srnka (\*1975)**  
*is currently perhaps the most successful Czech composer operating on an international scale. His pieces are commissioned and performed by top-class performers and ensembles (e.g. Ensemble Intercontemporain, Klangforum Wien, Ensemble Modern, Quatuor Diotima, ensemble recherche and many others) and appear at prestigious European festivals. Among other accolades, Srnka has received the Composers’ Prize from the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation. His most recent triumphs include the staging of his full-length chamber opera Make No Noise within the Bavarian State Opera Festival in Munich and the “opera comic” for children Jakub Flügelbunt...und Magdalena Rotenband oder: Wie tief ein Vogel singen kann at the Semperoper in Dresden. The premiere of Srnka’s piano concerto is scheduled to take place this November at the Musikverein in Vienna. Miroslav Srnka studied musicology at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University and composition at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in the class of Milan Slavický.*

## Peter Graham’s *Subversive Etudes*

**Are children at music schools taught that which they really need? Do we make full use of their abilities? What is the training’s objective? Does it respond to contemporary music? These are the questions I, as a piano teacher, have kept asking, questions I would like to deal with in this article. The starting point for my deliberations is the currently prepared collection of the Brno composer Peter Graham’s piano pieces for children, which I am testing out on my pupils within the preparation of the final version.**

Over the more than twenty years I have been teaching, I have observed that the centre of gravity of my work has more and more shifted from exercising fingers and muscles to working on imagining the sound that precedes playing from the sheet music. Children should not begin playing until they can hear with their inner ear at least a rough outline of that which they are supposed to play. We seek melodies, examine their shape, structuring, we clarify phrasing by means of singing. We practise motor skills by clapping on thighs – we purify the rhythmic notion of compositions and face up to passages demanding in terms of the independent motion of hands. We estimate the qualities of consonances, design the dynamic structure of the whole, mull over sound effects, pedalling. Some of the younger children are taken by surprise – what’s