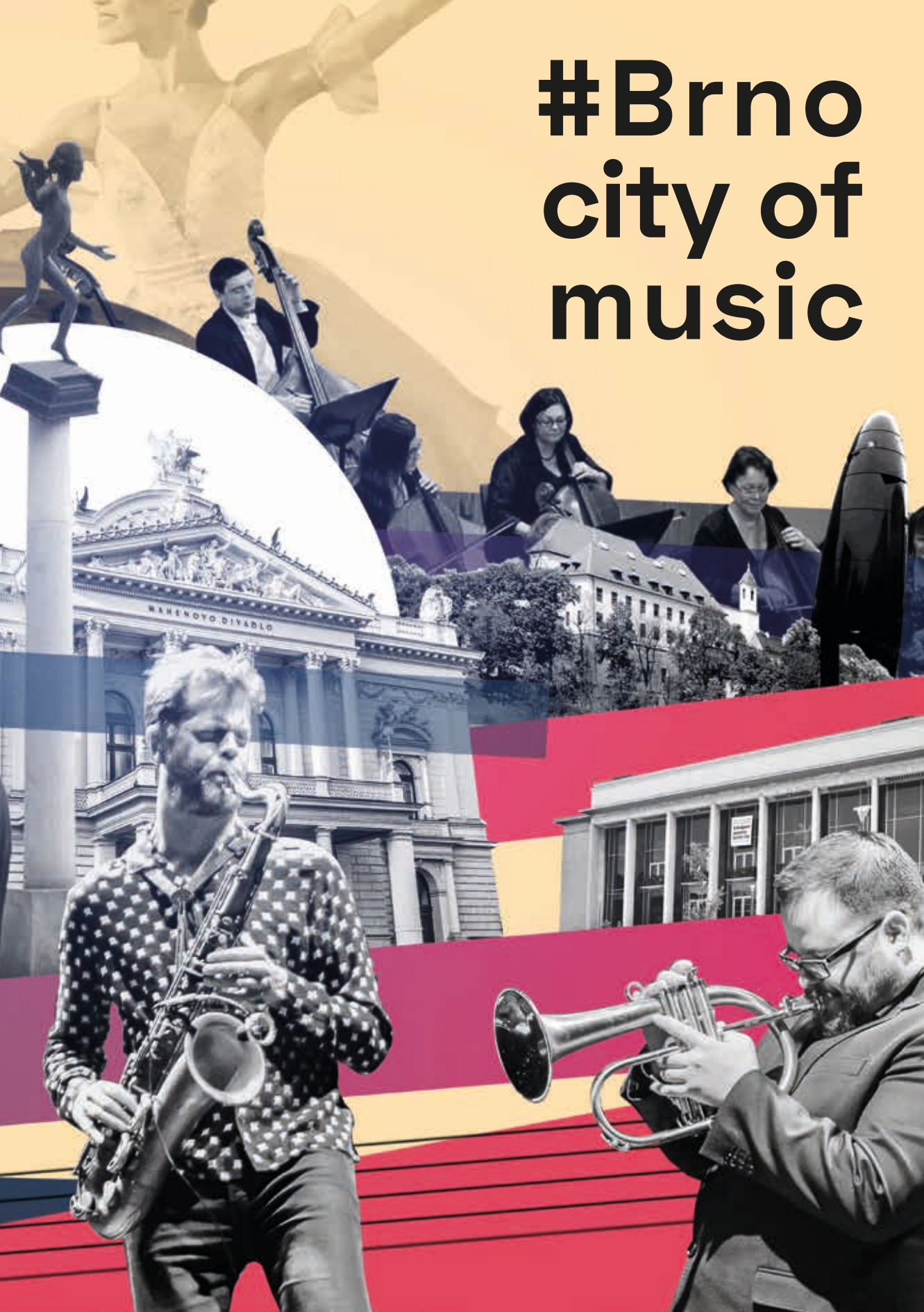


#Brno city of music



A NEW MUSIC GUIDE FROM BRNO, A UNESCO CREATIVE CITY OF MUSIC

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

OPERETTA, MUSICAL

JAZZ

FOLKLORE

“TRAMP” MUSIC, MODERN FOLK. COUNTRY

ROCK, METAL, POP

UNDERGROUND, ALTERNATIVE, PUNK

ELECTRONIC MUSIC



In 2017, Brno was awarded the prestigious title of UNESCO Creative City of Music, thus joining a network of 46 cities viewing music as one of their development priorities.

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BRNO – 3× UNESCO

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UNESCO Creative City of Music	UNESCO Memory of the World Register	UNESCO World Heritage List

#Brno city of music

To write a guide to music in **BRNO** in the past and present means digging deep into one's own recollections and those of others as well as into sources with varying degrees of reliability, and as far as possible not believing anything automatically but always asking "Did this really happen just like that?" And in doing so, to be very, very suspicious of one's own memory.

Two basic questions that cropped up in connection with almost every sentence were "What is it about this band or that event that makes them special? Would someone who's never been to Brno and has no ties with the city find it interesting?"

At times Brno's obsession with Janáček, whom it promotes as one of the few figures of world stature who lived here for a considerable length of time, really does go too far. But it's thanks to a biennial festival devoted to his operas that ninety years after his death the city has moved into the musical big league: in April 2019 Brno was presented with a prestigious International Opera Award in the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London. Earlier, in 2017, the Moravian Autumn Festival staged a megaproduction of Arseny Avraamov's *The Symphony of Sirens*, whose recording on the occasion was commissioned by Bavarian Radio, which offers it to listeners on-line. So Brno's musical activities are far from local in their impact.

Of fundamental importance for Brno is its proximity to important folklore regions, which are an endless source of fresh, creative blood. On the other hand, however, people often leave Brno for larger centres - in the past mostly for Prague, but increasingly in the past thirty years for the whole outside world. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the standard musical genre in Brno is alternative; genuine pop has always had a minimal presence here. With fewer than 400,000 inhabitants, Brno isn't really a very big city, though it's big enough to be the Czech Republic's second largest. Basically all the musicians in Brno know what all the other musicians are doing.

BRNO is the unofficial metropolis of Moravia. It boasts a massive concentration of universities, theatres, clubs and all sorts of spaces suitable for playing music. There's perhaps an even greater concentration of people who want to play, and this is quite logical. Brno has more than twenty basic schools of the arts, a conservatory, the Janáček Academy of the Performing Arts, and a Department of Musicology at Masaryk University. A huge number of people with a musical education are to be found in a fairly small area. And it's impossible to count the number of amateurs who participate enthusiastically in all genres, from choir singers through musicians in symphony orchestras to rockers and singer-songwriters.

A basic feature of life in **BRNO** is the way in which musicians and musical genres are interconnected through innumerable networks, something that long predates the age of the Internet. When Brno became a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the field of music in 2017, it was simply a further logical step in its long development. At the moment Brno is in the first stages of preparing a bid to be named a European City of Culture in 2028.

In writing the individual chapters of this guide, a multitude of facts had to be sacrificed on the altar of brevity. The aim was to offer a general and personal view rather than an exhaustive list. For the preparation of this brochure, even the smallest bits of information and advice were always welcome: my thanks go to on-line sources and to individuals both living and dead, from nearby and afar, people known personally to me and strangers: Jura Cancák (trampsky-magazin.cz), Zdeněk Černý, the Czech Theatre Encyclopedia, Jan Dalecký, David Dittrich, Martin Dohnal, encyklopedie.brna.cz, Petr Gratias, L. P. Fish, Dušan Holý, folklornet.cz, Kateřina Hnátová, kftp.cz, Vladimír Maňas, Ivo Medek, Jan Němeček, Jiří Plocek, Jan Pohunek, Irena Příbylová, Don Sparling, Milan Tesař, trampnet.sk, and myown-memory.bk. All helped to make the guide what it is.

For any shortcomings in the guide, the responsibility is mine.

Boris Klepal

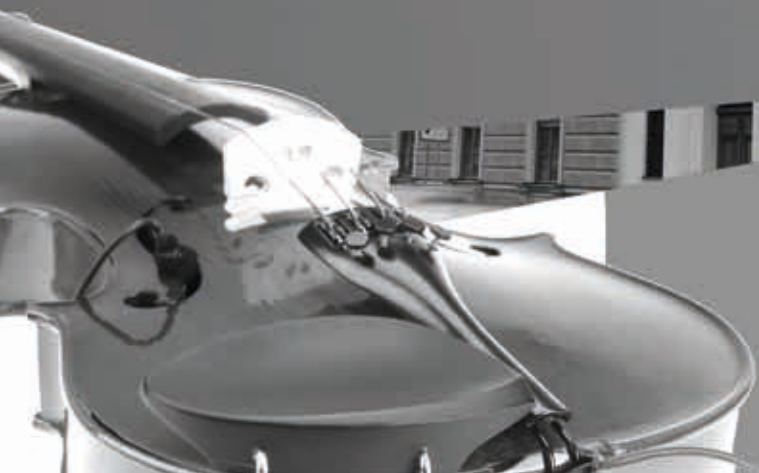
#sympho of the cit



CLASSICAL MUSIC

Cultivated music, art music, serious music ... shifting from one of these messy labels to another usually has one aim: to avoid the problematic “classical music”. Today this misleading term covers everything that was heard in medieval churches, in the course of Baroque festivities, in the age of bourgeois revolutions and at experimental concerts that saw shoes being thrown at the performers. Brno happily recalls visits here by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Liszt and Bedřich Smetana, short as they were. But it also remembers the Hollywood film music celebrity Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who spent his earliest years in Brno. Brno might appear to be a city of brief sojourns, were it not for Leoš Janáček, who made it his home and in the course of the past forty years has become one of the world’s most frequently performed composers. But the musical history of the city mirrored the turbulent political changes in the nineteenth century and drew on the enormous energy released by the creation of a free Czechoslovakia in 1918: never since then has its progressive character vanished completely.

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HOUSES OF (MUSICAL) PRAYER

For hundreds of years the city's skyline has been dominated by the **Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul**, situated on a hill overlooking the city, and the **Church of St James** at its very heart. These two churches housed schools where young boys were also trained in singing. Another important musical centre was the **Basilica of the Assumption of Our Lady** in Mendel Square. This was founded in 1323 by Queen Elizabeth Richeza, quite unaware that many centuries later Brno's greatest musical figure, **Leoš Janáček**, would begin his musical career here.

Liturgical singing is not what we today term "musical life", and has nothing in common whatsoever with concerts as such. Nevertheless, musical activity in those long-gone days often anticipated social development. Paintings by leading medieval and Renaissance artists were probably not to be

One of the greatest musicians of the day, **Alessandro Striggio**, was enticed to Brno by the Habsburg emperor Maximilian II, who was attending a session of the Moravian Estates here. Striggio wished to present the emperor with his forty-voice mass *Ecco si beati giorno*. A second great Renaissance composer was present in Brno as a member of Maximilian's retinue - **Jacob Handl Gallus**. Many works found in the archives of the city's churches can be heard in Brno today as part of the annual **Easter Festival of Sacred Music**.

FROM BAROQUE ORGAN TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Even after the arrival of the Baroque in Brno, the local churches remained the city's musical centres. By this time the Jesuits were established here, and in 1743 they had the city's second organ installed in their church; it remained there until destroyed by bombs in

It was musicians from St James's Church who formed the core of the orchestra that accompanied the eleven-year-old **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** when he performed here in 1767. His concert is commemorated by a statue by Kurt Gebauer in front of the Reduta theatre, where the young Mozart appeared.

Without Reduta, the subsequent musical life of Brno would have been unthinkable. It was the site of the first opera performances in Brno but also a suitable space for concerts. Much later, operetta found a home here, and chamber concerts and operas have continued to take place here down to the present. But of course the hall is too small for concerts by today's first-rate musicians: the size of the public and its diversity have multiplied exponentially since the eighteenth century.

While not even the Janáček Theatre, which can seat more than one thousand spectators, could answer the demand for tickets to a concert by Valery Gergiev and the London Symphony Orchestra in 2013, the much smaller Reduta was large enough for a charity concert by **Franz Liszt** and the appearances of **Clara Schumann** and of **Johannes Brahms** with the violinist **Joseph Joachim**. But far more important than visits by outstanding musicians was the city's everyday musical life, which took on enormous momentum after 1860, when it became possible to establish associations: this was an important stimulus to the emergence of what we now term civil society.



Schola Gregoriana Pragensis' *Holy Week Meditations* at the Easter Festival of Sacred Music. Photo: Brno Philharmonic

seen in Brno's churches, but music by the very best composers could be heard there. We have proof of this from the Renaissance period. Worshippers in Brno listened to the Renaissance polyphony of **Josquin Desprez**, though the historical sources don't give the names of its interpreters. But they do indicate that there were already close links between Brno and Vienna.

1944. Today the city's most modern organ, inaugurated in 2013, with the cost covered partially by the "Opera for Brno" public funding campaign, can be heard there.

Of course concerts as such were not held in the Jesuit or any other churches, but their gradually emerging musical ensembles provided the nuclei of orchestras that also performed on other occasions.

SOCIAL GATHERINGS, ASSOCIATIONS AND THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN NATIONALITIES

At the time, Brno was run by its German-speaking citizens, but in the years immediately following 1860, the Czech- and German-speakers were not yet in open conflict. This was reflected in music. The brilliant pianist **Agnes Tyrrell** performed in events organized by the newly-established Brno Musikverein as well as at Czech social gatherings. It was only several decades later that Czech and

German musical societies began to move apart, deliberately undercut one another and even “punish” musicians for taking part in events organized by the “competition”. Out of the chamber music tradition there emerged the Neruda family string quartet, the precursor of the much later **Moravian Quartet**, the **Janáček Quartet** and many others.

One landmark was the establishment of **Brno Beseda** in 1860. Today one of the oldest Czech choirs, it was founded by the composer **Pavel Křížkovský**, an Augustinian and the first teacher of Leoš Janáček, who led the Brno Beseda from 1876 to 1884. The Brno Beseda was not



Pavel Křížkovský's statue in the park beneath Špilberg. Photo: Pocket media/Ivo Dvořák



Concert organ in the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady. Photo: Pocket media/Ivo Dvořák

only a choir, but also a platform for organizing symphony concerts. As conductor, Janáček raised musical life to a high level. He was also behind the creation of an **Organ School** in 1906; in 1919 it was transformed into the **Brno Conservatory**.

Brno Beseda often held concerts in the **pavilion for hosting social events** in the city park, Lužanky. After 1873 it and many other associations were able to move to the new Czech social and cultural centre **Besední dům**, housed in a neo-Renaissance building designed by the architect **Theophil von Hansen**, later responsible for the Vienna Musikverein. By this point, attending a concert there was a proclamation of one's Czech identity. The creation of Besední dům served as a stimulus for the establishment of the **Deutsches Haus** as its competitive German counterpart.

Besední dům soon became the centre of Czech musical and social life in Brno. It was on the steps of Besední dům that a young worker, František Pavlík, was fatally wounded in 1905 in a forcibly suppressed demonstration calling for the establishment in Brno of a second Czech university - an event commemorated by Janáček in his piano *Sonata I. X. 1905*, titled “From the Street”. And it was from the balcony of Besední dům that the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia was proclaimed in October 1918.

BRNO: MODERN, AT WAR, COMMUNIST ... AND MAKING MUSIC

Following the end of World War I, Brno began to develop rapidly and to transform itself into a modern, Functionalist city. The conductor **František Neumann** moved to Brno; his main focus was on opera, but he also programmed symphony concerts and introduced the first subscription series of concerts. The **Brno Radio Orchestra**, founded by Janáček's student **Břetislav Bakala**, followed in Neumann's footsteps. Thanks to Bakala, the Brno public was able to enjoy outstanding performances of the classics as well as works by contemporary Moravian composers. Bakala continued with this consistent promotion of Czech composers even during World War II.

The war sealed the fate of the composer **Pavel Haas**. His natural talents made him one of the



The Brno Philharmonic and its Chief Conductor, Dennis Russel Davies. Photo: Brno Philharmonic

greatest composers ever born in Brno, but unlike his more famous brother Hugo, he failed to emigrate before the German occupation and was murdered in Auschwitz. At the beginning of the war, another highly

talented Brno composer, **Vítězslava Kaprálová**, died in France. And long before that, another native of Brno, **Erich Wolfgang Korngold**, had left behind Brno and even Europe. In the USA he became a leading composer of music for Hollywood films, twice winning an Oscar.

Ten years after the end of World War II the radio orchestra and the **Brno Region Symphony Orchestra** merged to form what is now the **Brno Philharmonic**; its first concert took place on 1 January 1956. Indirectly, Bakala's work influenced the world famous Janáček specialist **Charles Mackerras**, who conducted frequently in Brno.

The **Brno Philharmonic** is at the heart of Brno's musical life, as is the **Moravian Autumn** festival, now more than fifty years old. Among its legendary events was the Czech premiere of **Olivier Messiaen's** *Turangalila* symphony in 1972 in the presence of the composer himself.



Mezzo Magdalena Kožená in the Villa Tugendhat. Photo: International Slavic Music Centre Brno

PROPHET OF OPTIMISM AND THE ANGUISH OF WAR

When visiting the Jewish cemetery in Brno, few people forget to seek out the grave of the famous Czech interwar actor and film star Hugo Haas. Considerably fewer people standing by his grave remember his older brother Pavel Haas, who, unlike Hugo, failed to flee the country before the Nazi occupation. In 1942 he was deported to Terezín; in 1944 he met his end at Auschwitz.

Pavel Haas was one of the most talented composers in the postwar generation, who rejoiced at the end of World War I, suffered through the Depression, and experienced the horror of the onset of World War II. In the interval between the wars, however, they enjoyed a period when Czechs, Germans and Jews mixed together and influenced each other mutually, in music as in life.

Pavel Haas



PAST AND PRESENT IN A UNITY OF TIME AND PLACE

The performance of *Turangalīly* confirmed Brno's reputation as a city of progressive musical thinking. In recent years the Brno Philharmonic has continued this tradition through its festivals and the programmes for its subscription series of concerts. Most recently this commitment was reflected in the selection of **Dennis Russell Davies**, an outstanding specialist in contemporary music and an experienced interpreter of Beethoven and Bruckner, as its new Chief Conductor. The more experimental trends in contemporary music are reflected in the **Exposition of New Music** and **Meetings of New Music Plus** festivals.

Since 1947 the **Janáček Academy of the Performing Arts (JAMU)** has been a fertile hotbed for contemporary musical thinking. In the Communist era it was a haven for students who wanted to be in touch with Western trends; for this, an immense debt is owed to the composers and teachers **Miloslav Ištvan** and **Alois Piňos**. Both were members of the composers' group **Skupiny A** and the discussion club **Camerata Brno**, whose activities were more or less taken over later by the multigenre **Sdružení Q**.

Skleněná louka is a special case. Under **Zdenek Plachý**, avant-garde musicians from the whole world met up with each other at this centre, and improvisational evenings and interpretations of graphic scores still take place there today. An exceptional musical phenomenon is

Haas was a typical child of his era. He attended German primary school and Czech secondary school; his music includes typical Jewish melodies, but also echoes of the twelfth-century St Wenceslas Choral. The latter is most noticeably present in his *Suite for Oboe and Piano*, which he wrote in 1939 in the oppressive atmosphere of the beginning of the occupation, and in which a fifteenth-century Hussite chorale also appears.

the Central European percussion instrument group **Dama Dama**, founded in 1990. The **Brno Contemporary Orchestra** under **Pavel Šnajdr** is now able to offer subscription series of contemporary music.

The Baroque instrument **Czech Ensemble Baroque**, led by **Roman Válek**, focuses on early music, in particular by the Czech Baroque composer **František Xaver Richter**. The **Concentus Moraviae** festival is also heavily oriented towards early music; for more than twenty years it has hosted outstanding interpreters from around the world. The above-mentioned forty-voice mass by Alessandro Striggio was part of one of its programmes. A teaching basis for early music exists at JAMU, where the harpsichord and organ player **Barbara Marie Willi** established the **Department of Organ and Early Music Performance** in the Czech Republic in 2014. In a similar fashion, she founded the first subscription series of early music concerts under the witty title **BMW presents**.



Statue of Mozart by Kurt Gebauer in Zelný trh. Photo: Pocket media/Monika Hlaváčková

Haas's most popular work is his *String Quartet No. 2*, titled "From the Monkey Mountains", a piece driven by the dance rhythms of the age. His masterpiece is the tragicomic opera *The Charlatan* (1937).

Pavel Haas's death meant the loss of a composer who was undoubtedly Leoš Janáček's most talented student. In 2000 he was named an honorary citizen of Brno.

ADVANCING STEADILY ON ITS OWN PATH

Brno has created such a distinctive musical world that at times there has even been serious talk of the "Brno school of composition". One of its essential features is collective composition, the most popular example of which is the 1995 chamber opera *The Cage Affair, or Annals of the Avant-garde Opened Wide*. Three composers were involved in its creation: **Alois Piňos**, **Ivo Medek** and **Miloš Štědroň**.

Everything in Brno's musical life comes together in *The Cage Affair*. One of the characters is Leoš Janáček, who is visited by the American avant-garde composer Henry Cowell. Bits of Moravian folk music pop up. Cowell plays on the piano with a ruler and Janáček's dog Čipera gets into the act. The dog's role is in Baroque opera style, and was originally written for the mezzo-soprano **Magdalena Kožená**, a native of Brno, where

she also began her career. Čipera bites Cowell, who contracts rabies and infects his student John Cage. Cage's legendary composition *4'33"* closes the opera. Moravian folk tunes, Janáček, world-famous avant-garde figures, and composers and a singer that are the flower of Brno's musical life - all of this together, in an ideal production, concentrated in a single place. #



#great



voices

OPERA

“Every theatre is a madhouse, but opera is the ward for the incurable,” claimed Franz von Dingelstedt, the first director of the Court Opera House in Vienna. And he was right, for once someone’s fallen in love with opera, that’s it. Opera’s a step-child of the Renaissance, with a Baroque wet nurse: it was on the cusp between these two great eras that the idea of purely sung theatre saw the light of day. Step by step, composers taught the art of singing to classical gods and brave women, Christian heroes and pagan enchantresses, a Seville barber, a Babylonian king and the Czech Mařenka and Jeník. But it was only here in Brno, thanks to Leoš Janáček, that truly psychological musical drama was born, drama that sees into a person’s heart. Today the Brno opera company has its home in a theatre named after Janáček, mounts a major festival devoted to the city’s most famous composer every two years, and has set its sights very high. “The more opera is dead, the more it flourishes,” pronounced the philosopher Slavoj Žižek when speaking of this fanatically loved but just as fanatically rejected genre. By this measure, opera in Brno these days must have been dead at least a dozen times.

FROM TAVERN TO THE WORLD OF OPERA

Most projects in Bohemia and Moravia begin their life in pubs. On the site of today's Reduta theatre there once stood the **Theater in der Taffern**, and it was there that the first opera performances in Brno took place. Among the earliest was Domenico Sarro's *Didone abbandonata*. In 2014 the local **Opera on the Move** gave a revived premiere of the work in today's recently refurbished Reduta. In the intervening period, much had occurred: among other things, the Brno opera company had acquired a theatre boasting the largest stage in the Czech Republic, named after Leoš Janáček. The world premieres of all of his operas but one, *The Excursions of Mr Brouček*, had taken place in Brno.

The outstanding conductor and Janáček specialist Jaroslav Vogel once remarked that *Jenůfa* is *The Bartered Bride* in a minor key. This witty comment also makes the less obvious point that Janáček enjoyed a similar position in Brno to that of Smetana in the country as a whole. But for a long time Janáček was regarded from outside as a local oddity, until his oeuvre was introduced to the world first by **Max Brod** and much later by the conductor **Charles Mackerras** (1925–2010) and the musicologist **John Tyrrell** (1942–2018). The former recorded Janáček's operas for Decca, the latter was the pre-eminent Janáček scholar. The Czech translation of the first volume of his definitive biography of Janáček, running to around one thousand large-format pages, was published in 2018 by the Brno publishing house Host.

ONE CITY, GERMAN AND CZECH OPERA COMPANIES

For a long time opera in Brno mirrored the relations between its Czech- and German-speakers. The first operas in Czech appeared around 1840, among them *Žižka's Oak*, by the Brno composer **František Kott**. The years when Czech operas scraped along in the German theatre ended with the establishment of the Czech **Provisional National Theatre** in 1884. This came two years after the opening of the new German Stadttheater, today's **Mahen Theatre** - the first Central European theatre fully lit by electricity.

After the creation of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918 the municipal theatre came into Czech hands, and the Czech and German companies agreed to alternate there. The most distinguished head of the opera



company in the interwar period was **František Neumann** (1874–1929), a workaholic who in addition to intensive staging of operas by both Czech and foreign composers also introduced concert cycles.



A 1977 production of *The Bartered Bride*. Photo: NDB archives

Josef Pančík



ATTAINING EXCELLENCE THROUGH CONCERT SINGING

By definition, an opera theatre must have a chorus. So here we turn to the superb choir master Josef Pančík, who enjoys the reputation of having created the best opera chorus in the Czech Republic, and indeed one of the best in Europe.

"For me, the miracle of the Brno chorus lies in how Pančík manages to maintain its high standards,"

says the bass Richard Novák when speaking of his longtime colleague. "The chorus is the most sensitive element – newcomers to the chorus are fresh out of the conservatory, they don't know anything, they have a bit of a voice, and then they listen. And they absorb techniques and become one with the chorus. The body of the chorus is renewed over the course of twenty years, but its spirit remains one and the same."



The Janáček Brno festival - guest company staging of *Jenůfa*. Photo: Magdalena Osko

Ivo Váňa Psota was another newcomer to Brno in the interwar period, first as ballet master and, later, head of the ballet company at the National Theatre in Brno. It was thanks to him that the premiere of Sergei Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet* took place in Brno.

Neumann was the first eminent personality to enjoy the height of his career in Brno; many others began here and then moved on. Among them was the world-famous heroic tenor **Karel Burian** (1870–1923), who made his debut in Brno in 1891, as did his younger colleague **Leo Slezak** (1873–1946) four years later. **Magdalena Kožená's** debut was also with the Brno opera. The famed **Maria Jeritza** (1887–1982) was born in Brno, though she never sang as a soloist here. The early careers of several conductors played out in Brno, among them **Rafael Kubelík**,

The main strength of the Brno opera chorus has always been its cultivated expression, which Pančík has maintained by, among other things, creating a concert repertoire. Opera choruses often mask minor shortcomings behind the noise of the orchestra. Pančík's chorus knows how to sing demanding compositions without an orchestra, as a purely concert group.

Václav Neumann and **Zdeněk Chalabala**. Another great era for opera occurred from 1953 to 1978 under **František Jílek** (1913–1993).

OPERA IN THE THEATRE, ON THE STAIRS AND AT SCHOOL

In the course of the quarter century he was active in Brno, Jílek raised opera standards here to the highest level. He devoted much time to Janáček (hardly surprising), but also to the work of **Bohuslav Martinů** – definitely not a given under Communism, as Martinů was still regarded with suspicion as an emigré. Jílek also conducted ballets and among other things shaped a ballet form for *Capriccio for Cello and Orchestra* by **Jan Novák** (1921–1984). A brilliant Brno composer, Novák later emigrated; in the past twenty years his work has been enjoying a renaissance. His cousin **Richard Novák** is a Brno opera legend, still singing at the age of eighty-eight.

Novák's compositions are favourites with Brno's **Ensemble Opera Diversa**, which launched itself by staging minioperas on the stairs of the Spolek café, gradually developing into a stable yet flexible chamber ensemble with original operas and musical compositions in its repertoire.

In 1957, on the initiative of the director **Miloš Wasserbauer** (1907–1970), the **JAMU Chamber Opera** was formed. It carried out its projects in today's **Barka Theatre**, but in 2012 acquired a new space, the **Theatre on Orli. Hausopera**, a group focused

But the opera chorus in Brno has a long tradition – both **Leoš Janáček** and his teacher **Pavel Křížkovský** were accomplished choirmasters. The father of the modern choir tradition in Moravia was **Ferdinand Vach** (1860–1939), who founded the **Moravian Male Teachers' Choral Society** – unquestionably the country's most famous men's choir. Janáček, known for his highly critical comments, wrote of Vach "I dedicate to him not one, but all of my choral works."

on site-specific productions, launched its activities in 2018 with an opera set in a swimming pool.

A FAIRYTALE ABOUT THIRTEEN BOSSES AND ONE FESTIVAL

After Jílek's departure opera fell into eclipse, and the situation only worsened in the period of turbulent change following 1989. For a long time people still looked back nostalgically to **Václav Věžník's** stirring Communist-era production of *Nabucco*, with its theme of longing for freedom. But the main feature of opera in Brno post-1989 was instability: between 1991 and 2014 the company ran through no fewer than thirteen heads. Calm, and a sharp and rapid rise in standards, only came with the appointment of **Martin Glaser** as head of the National Theatre and **Jiří Heřman** as head of its opera company.

Their greatest success so far has been the biennial **Janáček Brno** festival, whose quality they improved so markedly that it won in the "Festival of the Year" category at the prestigious **International Opera Awards** competition. Both men were present to accept the prize at the awards ceremony in London in April 2019. #

The concert counterpart to the opera chorus is the **Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno**, founded and led by Petr Fiala. **Kantiléna** is an outstanding choir for children and young people.

In Brno alone more than sixty groups foster choral singing, a figure that doesn't include church choirs; a list of them all, with short descriptions of each, would fill a book – one still waiting to be written.



#light



-hearted muse

OPERETTA

Operetta is a wilful child that stopped obeying its parents and ran away from the opera house. Its origin is much more explicable when one considers France, where operetta emerged in the mid-nineteenth century as an entertaining and often very sarcastic polar opposite to the megalomaniacal productions of “grand opera”. In Brno, as was the case everywhere else in the world, operetta appealed to the broad public, offering both social satire as well as quite conventional entertainment. In the interwar period, thanks to the enlightened lead of Oldřich Nový, it took on a sophisticated polish. Later the Brno theatre scholar Ivo Osolsobě was able to give it a solid theoretical basis, and so move on from the stultified operetta to the lively musical. Today Brno boasts not only a theatre built specifically for musicals but a degree programme in Musical Acting at JAMU. Through the musical *A Ballad for a Bandit* the brigand Nikola Šuhaj set off from Brno into the world of theatre and film, while Brno’s Liza Doolittle made her living as *My Fair Lady* of *Zelný trh*, Brno’s ancient market square. And so we’ve come full circle: the square is the site of the Reduta theatre, operetta’s home in times past.

A MARRIAGE OF MUSIC, THEATRE AND POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT

When the student Theatre on Orli put on Jacques Offenbach's *The Wedding by Lantern-Light* in 2017, it was a return to the genre's local roots: in all probability this comic piece was the first operetta ever performed in Brno – in 1859, only two years after its premiere in Paris. So operetta was launched on its path to widespread popularity, and Brno took the first step to becoming today's musical theatre centre for the whole Czech Republic.

The first operetta in Brno was performed in German; a quarter of a century had to pass before operetta in Czech appeared on the scene. And it was a further thirty years before the first operetta by a Czech was staged at Brno's National Theatre – *Polish Blood*, by the composer **Oskar Nedbal**.

Operetta was a welcome source of revenue for the opera theatre, but it wasn't a welcome guest. Operetta only ceased "encumbering" the Brno opera after the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia in 1918: in the 1918-1919 season a separate musical theatre company was set up.

OLDŘICH NOVÝ AND A NEW ERA

The creation of the new company brought with it the problem of who to hire. Operetta has its own special features and places its

own particular demands on singing actors and acting singers. This was even more true in the period after World War I, when opera acting was a world unto itself and opera directing as such a very young discipline. But among the new members of the troupe was the actor Oldřich Nový.

As joint author Nový also took credit for the highly successful theatre revue *From Brno to Brno*. The protagonists were the brothers **Valentin** and **Václav Šindler**, who as **Uncle Krópal** and **Jozéfek Melhoba** introduced the public to a Brno that was exciting, a city full of surprises and snares for the unwary, all this presented in the broad dialect of the neighbouring Hana region. If someone ever wishes to trace the origin of Brno's love of self-irony, the search should start here. The

link with the suave and charming Nový is a surprising bonus.

Nový's departure from Brno in 1935 foreshadowed the collapse of the First Republic and the German occupation. Operetta remained on the programme (at least as long as the theatres were still open). It copied its more serious sister opera and more distant cousin the symphony concert by putting greater emphasis on Czech titles and love for the country in general. But the difficult times that began for operetta with the war have continued down to the present day.

BOURGEOIS MONSTER, KATE, AND A BANDIT

From time immemorial operetta has had to face the charge that it's a debased genre – only the rationale



THE ELEGANT PHANTOM OF BRNO OPERETTA

"Close your eyes, I'm leaving." This, the most famous line spoken by the actor and singer Oldřich Nový, comes from the 1939 film *Kristián*. This story of an ordinary clerk who once a month acts out his fantasy of being a man of the world transformed Nový into a Czech film megastar. This was certainly not due to the commonplace theme, but rather to Nový's beguiling elegance in the role. And the same was true of his role as the creator of Brno operetta.

Nový came to Brno in 1919 as a talented actor, only twenty years old. At home in both operettas and stage plays, from the beginning he made his name playing elegant lovers with various character flaws – for example, Count Bola in Oskar Nedbal's operetta *Polish Blood*. The perfect exemplar of this type was the seductive gangster Macheath in Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* – and on top of that, the production Nový starred in was the work of the great Czech stage director E.F. Burian.

Oldřich Nový

Mary Poppins in full swing at the Brno Municipal Theatre. Photo: MDB

for the charge changes. After World War II, and even more strongly with the coming of the Communist dictatorship, operetta became one of the symbols of bourgeois entertainment. But this didn't mean that socialist aesthetics rejected it out of hand: on the contrary, it began to use operetta as a propaganda tool.

In the Soviet Union, operettas were composed based on topical themes, and many of them were produced here in Brno. Among the home-grown Czech operettas were **Miloš Machek** and **Miloš Slavík's** *Ondráš the Brigand* and *Mikuláš Dačický of Heslov*, with their eponymous Czech heroes. But the time was fast approaching when initiative would pass to the musical.

Credit for this goes to **Ivo Osol-sobě** (1928–2012), dramaturge of the Brno musical theatre company from 1959. How he managed to mount the spectacular Broadway musical *Kiss Me Kate* on Reduta's tiny stage is a mystery. Osolsobě promoted operetta and the musical as genres fully equal to opera and devoted a still-relevant study to them, *The Theatre that Speaks, Sings and Dances*. It was thanks to Osolsobě and the director **Stanislav Fišer** that Bernstein's musical *West Side Story* was staged in Brno in 1970.

A Ballad for a Bandit - a huge hit on stage and screen. Photo: DHNP archives

It soon became clear that Nový was not satisfied with merely acting in musical comedies, but felt an increasingly strong urge to create them. He became Assistant Director and soon after that Director of the Brno musical theatre company. Nový's decade as head of the company from 1925 to 1935 laid the foundations of what has distinguished the operetta and musical in Brno down to the present day: the effort to bring professionalism and higher aesthetic standards to popular entertainment.



In the 1970s the composer **Miloš Štědroň** and author **Milan Uhde**, both from Brno, teamed up to write musicals. Their *A Ballad for a Bandit* premiered in 1976 in Brno at the Theatre on a String; thanks to the film version it became widely known, and songs from it became common property. A new version of the *Ballad*, created for the same theatre by the director **Vladimír Morávek** in 2005, chalked up over two hundred performances in the course of the next thirteen years. **Karel David's** musical *Stars in the Willow* achieved cult status in 1992.

OPERETTA IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE MUSICAL!

Following the opening of the borders with the West in 1989, the musical slowly but surely steam-rolled operetta. In 2004 the Brno

Municipal Theatre opened a new building designed specifically for performing musicals. That same year, it took over administration of the Brno musical theatre company, which then slowly faded away. These days the **New Operetta Studio** is spearheading efforts to keep operetta alive.

The man behind the Brno Municipal Theatre's special focus on musicals is the theatre manager and director **Stanislav Moša**. Classics such as *Hair*, *Cats*, *Les Misérables* and *Mary Poppins* have been staged as well as contemporary creations by Štědroň and Uhde, Zdeněk Merta, Petr Ulrych and others. And there is a unique opportunity for direct cooperation with the Department of Musical Acting at JAMU: the professional theatre and students of the craft are only ten minutes by foot from each other. #

Nový changed people's attitude to the genre and left behind a lasting imprint on operetta - and by extension the musical - in Brno. And it was here that he learned everything he was later to draw on so successfully in the New Theatre in Prague and in his career as a film star.

During World War II Nový refused to desert his Jewish wife, and was imprisoned in a concentration camp.

After the Communist takeover in 1948, he was only given minor film and television roles. He died in 1983 at the age of eighty-three.





#impro



A photograph of a jazz festival stage. The stage is illuminated with bright blue and purple spotlights that create a dynamic atmosphere. Musicians are visible on stage, including a drummer and a saxophonist. A banner in the background reads "JAZZ FEST BRNO".

visational league

JAZZ

"What is my definition of jazz? Safe sex of the highest order." So claimed the American writer Kurt Vonnegut. Brno indulges in this type of eroticism with a passion approaching the orgiastic: at the present time it has at least three regular jazz festivals, an outstanding big band, and a Jazz Department at JAMU. While in the past jazz players managed to worm their way into dance clubs and night spots, today they can be found in clubs of all kinds, devoting themselves to everything from traditional jazz to free improvisation. Great music promoters and great jazz artists are quite at home in the city. It can happen that just days apart Brno offers concerts by Wynton Marsalis and his Jazz at Lincoln Centre Orchestra as well as by the local improvisational big band Divergent Connections Orchestra. The distant godfathers of Brno jazz are the saxophonist Gerry Mulligan and Charlie Parker. The former had a strong influence on the creation of the Gustav Brom Orchestra, while the latter's nickname was "Bird": in Latin, this is *Ornis* - the name of the first and only Brno jazz club to have lasted more than a few seasons.



The eponymous founder of the Gustav Brom Orchestra, which he led until his death in 1995. Photo: OGB archives

TALENT LOST AND TALENT GAINED

As a gifted boy, the composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold moved with his parents to Vienna, where he went on to become a world-famous composer and later attain renown in Hollywood. Less well known is his older brother, Hans Robert, who as early as 1928 was performing in Vienna with his **H. R. Korngolds Min-strel-Jazzband**. So the departure of the Korngold family from Brno deprived the city not only of the famous future composer but also of the potential founder of its jazz tradition.

Today's choosy jazz fans would have found little to capture their interest on the interwar Brno jazz scene. They would have had to wait till 1940 for the birth of the first genuine - and till the present day unmatched - Brno jazz band. And on top of that, they would have had to travel to the eastern Moravian town of Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, for it was there that the **Gustav Brom Orchestra** was born.

DAISIES, GAGARIN AND THIRD STREAM

In one of his songs the poet Josef Kainar celebrated the stars as daisies over Brno, and the melody the poem was set to is still used today as the signature tune for

announcements at the city's main train station. The first sketch for the tune was made by **Gustav Brom** (1921–1995), supposedly at four o'clock in the morning, when Kainar dragged him from his bed for this purpose. But that was in 1955, and by this time the fame of Brom's orchestra had travelled far beyond the city limits.

The original group that took shape in Rožnov was no more than a six-person nucleus of the future big band. During the war Brom's band grew steadily larger, playing in cafés and variety theatres, and even began making regular radio broadcasts.

But Brom's orchestra became part of jazz history not because of its dance music or even the still popular song "Salute to an Astronaut" (a.k.a. "Hello, Major Gagarin"), but because of its interest in more ambitious jazz projects. The orchestra grew, taking on new members such as **Luděk Hulan**, **Josef Audes** and **Ivan Dominák**. They brought with them a love for the baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan, still fostered today by the Brno saxophone-based cool jazz sextet **MulliGang**.

Later the orchestra also focused on third stream pieces - composed music with a jazz aesthetic. One of the most prominent members of the orchestra was **Jaromír Hnilička**, whose *Jazz Mass* was premiered in the 1960s by Brom's orchestra; recently it met with great critical success when performed by the Brno **B-Side Band**. A key individual,

Jaromír Hnilička

JAZZMAN BY GIFT OF GOD - AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Though born in Bratislava, he identified his whole life fully with, on the one hand, Brno, and on the other, jazz.

"I wanted to be an electrical engineer," recalled the composer and trumpet player Jaromír Hnilička (1932–2016) when speaking of his plans as a young man. But his father, a military officer and admirer of Czechoslovakia's first President, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, served with the American army in World War II, which led to his

imprisonment in Mirov, one of the country's most dreaded political prisons, after the Communist putsch in 1948. As a result, the only school willing to accept the young Hnilička was the Bratislava conservatory.

Of course this wasn't Hnilička's first encounter with music - he'd been taking piano and harp lessons since the age of eight. But the conservatory had enough pianists, so Hnilička ended up studying the trumpet. Today this sounds utterly unbelievable: for us, it's as though Jaromír Hnilička was born with a trumpet in his hand and



and not only for Brno jazz, was the Brom orchestra's dramaturge, **Max Wittmann** (1941–2011). In the 1970s, *Downbeat* magazine ranked the Brom orchestra among the world's top five big bands.

ON THE WINGS OF A BIRD

But Brom's orchestra wasn't all that Brno had to offer. In 1957 the **Ornis** jazz club was established, devoted to educational events and live music. Housed originally in the Brno House of Arts, the club was active in various places until 1988, the only stable jazz club that Brno has ever had.

Interest in jazz fluctuated over time, declining slightly in the 1960s, probably owing to the invasion of rock music. One of the most active organizers was **Jan Beránek**, a jazz violinist and fanatic, nicknamed the "jazz policeman". Now going under another name - Jan Dalecký - he's still the same unmistakable personality, familiar to fans of today's JazzFestBrno as a uniquely accomplished emcee.

Otherwise jazz bands could be found playing in cafés and bars and night spots – though they were gradually eased out from these last by pop groups and new kinds of dance music. The first local jazz festival came in 1987 – **Jazztíval Brno**. Festivals brought with them a concentration of jazz activities,

though spatially they were spread out through the whole city.

FESTIVALS, CONCERT SERIES AND UBIQUITOUS JAZZMEN

Without question the most important jazz festival today is **JazzFest-Brno**, which since its beginnings in 2002 has worked its way to being an internationally recognized event with top-flight guest artists such as Chick Corea, Bobby McFerrin, Wynton Marsalis and many more. But the two key local persons for the festival are **Vilém Špilka** and **Vlastimil Trllo**. Both are skilled managers and active musicians; in 2010 the former founded the Department of Jazz Interpretation at JAMU, the first of its kind in the Czech Republic, which he continues to head.

Spring and autumn series of concerts entitled **Jazz Spring** and **Jazz Brno** were launched in 1998 by the manager **Jiří Švéda**, held first in the Alterna club and later in Stará Pekárna.

Somewhere between a festival and a series of chamber concerts comes **Moravia Jazz Fest** (since 2018 **Groove Brno**). But the main impact of the festival's director **Josef Buchta** comes through his **B-Side Band**, which has taken on the legendary Brom band's role as a top-rate jazz big band engaged in both dance music and complicated projects.

Brno lacks a club devoted solely to jazz, so Brno's jazzmen play everywhere, from the up-scale Sono Centre to the tiny Ebis restaurant. This means there's always a bit of uncertainty – but also a lot of improvisation, which lies at the roots of jazz. #



Bobby McFerrin at JazzFestBrno. Photo: Martin Zeman

straightaway joined the Gustav Brom Orchestra. In fact he became a member of this famous Brno big band in 1956, remaining there for more than half a century.

Only a year after he joined the orchestra, it was playing his *Egyptian Suite*, which he composed together with Luděk Hulan. The young trumpet player's attraction to more ambitious concepts was evident from the very beginning. He enriched the sound of the orchestra not only through his highly distinctive trumpet playing, but also through the invention of an instrument he called the

hniliophone, a combination of trumpet, French horn and tuba.

He composed the music for a song saluting Yuri Gagarin, but for him personally it was of little importance. His masterpiece is the *Jazz Mass* – a major composition based on the liturgical text whose music, content and spiritual quality are the exact opposite of the banal ditty in honour of the Soviet cosmonaut.

At workshops abroad Hnilička met with Miles Davis and Woody Herman. From the composer Pavel Blatný he commissioned a piece

for himself as interpreter entitled *Suite for a Quarter-tone Trumpet*. Working together with Karel Velebný, he made a number of jazz arrangements of folk songs, which he and a ten-member band recorded for an album entitled *Týnom tánom*.

Hnilička's last great composition was his *Brno Suite* (2012), in which his two great loves, the city he lived in and the musical genre he devoted his life to, met symbolically.

#bands and groups



FOLKLORE

Folklore has the capacity to absorb the worst events and historical upheavals and shape them to its benefit. However, it's an open question whether this is proof of the healthy, indestructible spirit of ordinary people, or of an affinity between folk art and capitalism. Folklore was able to survive the Nazi occupation, when people seized upon it like a life belt. It managed to get through the forty years of Communism, when it was misused by the powers that be. In the past thirty years, the folklore movement has gained strength and flourished even more. Often only long after the fact do you realize just how much melodies of traditional Moravian folk songs influenced bands like Progres 2, Druhá tráva and Čankišou. And then there are those who work consistently and intelligently with folklore, like Hana Ulrychová and her brother Petr Ulrych and Jiří Pavlica. But folklore isn't just a matter of the countryside and villages - it's alive in cities as well. Brno is no exception, though here folklore has always felt more at home away from the centre and the Establishment. Brno itself isn't a strong folklore region, but it acts like a magnet to attract everything that's going on in southern Moravia.

and folk



IN SEARCH OF ROOTS

The turbulent nineteenth century was an age of romantic passion, revolutions and the emergence of ethnically-based states. This was closely linked with the urge to uncover the ancient roots of one's nation, and folk songs were one of the sources people turned to first.

In Moravia the leading figures in the creation of collections of folk songs were **František Sušil** (1804–1868) and **František Bartoš** (1837–1906). Thanks to them, it was not only folklore that came to Brno, but also the attempt to collect it systematically. Sušil's collection is a source of many songs that a century later became part of the repertoire of the contemporary singer-songwriter Jaroslav Hutka and the Českomor modern folk group.

FOLKLORE STUDIES AS SCHOLARLY PURSUIT AND ART

One of the many interests of **Leoš Janáček** (1854–1928) was collect-



Jarmila Šuláková, queen of Valašsko folk song. Photo: Fleret band archives

ing folk songs. He was also the first person to bring to Brno musicians from the Horňácko region in south-eastern Moravia. It's fascinating to follow how collecting folk songs, with its need to jot the notes down quickly, affected not only his handwriting but also his musical way of thinking: he went from being a classical collector making careful notes to a scratching, idiosyncratic

musical psychologist, the genius the whole world knows today. But before World War I Janáček also recorded folk singing on several phonograph cylinders. In 1998 Jiri Plocek's publishing house **Gnosis** issued a re-edition, while a definitive reconstruction was carried out in 2012 by the Czech Academy of Sciences.

Janáček also collected what he called "speech tunes", short bits of human speech he heard in the city. Though primarily a source of musical inspiration, thanks to them we have a record of the ordinary everyday speech of Brno folk a century ago. The **napevkymluvy.cz** project is bringing together all these notations, which are documents from the period when Brno's distinctive jargon also emerged. Now known as "hantec", this remains part of the genuinely local, Brno urban folklore.

WAVES OF MIGRATION, BRINGING VIOLINS AND CIMBALOMS

At the age of eleven Janáček was torn away from his native region of Lašsko in northeastern Moravia, thus becoming the godfather of all those in Brno who look back in search of their folklore identity. As early as 1908 "immigrants" to Brno from the southeastern Moravian region of Slovácko founded the **Slovácký krúžek**. Between 1936 and 1947 this association published a seven-volume collection of folk songs that still forms its folk repertoire canon to this day. The Slovácký krúžek also had a strong influence on programming



at the Brno division of Czechoslovak Radio, which issued in the establishment of BROLN.

From its very beginning in 1952 the **Brno Radio Orchestra of Folk Instruments (BROLN)** became the gold standard for traditional folk music and song. Famous singers such as **Dušan** and **Luboš Holý**, **Jožka Severín** and **Jarmila Šuláková** worked with them. At the time of his Brno concert in 1964, the American songwriter, activist and icon of the international modern folk movement **Pete Seeger** heard BROLN. Later, he refused to believe that what he had heard were old Moravian folk songs and not contemporary urban folklore. BROLN was headed by a series of superb musicians, among them **Bohumil Smejkal** and **Bohdan Warchal**. The former later became first violin of the Janáček Quartet; the latter founded the Slovak Chamber

Otakar Nováček



A SCHOLARLY LOOK AT BRNO'S "PLOTNA"

In 1929 **Otakar Nováček** (1901–1986) published the first book dealing in depth with the Brno social underclass known as "plotna", along with its distinctive jargon. His work has three parts. In the first the author's aim is "to capture the colourful life of the interesting caste that prides itself on its Brno moniker of 'plotna'." The second part comprises examples of authentic interviews, jokes and



Living folklore - St Bartholomew feast day in Brno-Žebětín. Photo: Václav Kříž

joined together in the **Association of Friends of Folklore**, which also organizes the annual **Brno International Folklore Festival**. An essential part of the Brno cultural scene is Romani folklore, which can be experienced at the Museum of Romani Culture and in the streets. There's a strong Slovak folklore presence in the city, and the Greek community is also quite active.

FOLK ART OF THE FUTURE

Folk music continues to live its own life, its roots growing into ever new shapes. Alongside the flood of postmodern, postpunk and postrock, postfolklore has also developed, for example with the **Ponk** band, prizewinner both here and abroad (the world music expo WOMEX). The Brno music publisher

Indies Scope captured the contemporary face of Moravian folklore in its eight-part set *An Anthology of Moravian Folk Music*. Brno is closely linked with the singer-songwriter **Tomáš Kočko** and the recently deceased singer and violinist **Jitka Šuranská**, both heavily influenced by traditional Moravian folk music. Marie Hvozdecká's interesting project "Folklore and the City" has been functioning since 2017.

Folklore is not an inert, dead mass, but a living and continuously developing force. The outstanding singer and ethnographer Dušan Holý once commented that "The only proper approach is one that's creative. When I began singing with BROLN, I tried to imitate my uncle Martin Hrbáč a bit. And my dad said 'Old Hrbáč - forget him. Sing like a young person!'"#

Babylonfest, aimed at highlighting the culture and traditions of the city's ethnic minorities. Photo: Robert Vystrčil

Orchestra. BROLN was also an excellent "export article", and spread Moravian folklore throughout the world.

An immensely important role in Moravian folk music's successes abroad was played by the legendary radio editor **Jaromír Nečas** (1922–2015). Thanks to him an album by the **Břeclavan** folk ensemble was included in the Phillips catalogue in its "Voyages autour du monde" edition. The cover notes still retain their French-Moravian dialect charm: "Bienvenue Janiček!"

The **Slovácký krúžek** didn't remain alone in Brno. In 1946, enthusiasts from Valašsko in northeastern Moravia who had drifted ashore in Brno founded the **Valašský krúžek**. Nowadays **VUS Ondráš** is the best-known of the several dozen folk ensembles and cimbalom bands active in Brno. Many of them have



songs of this group, and the third is a Brno jargon-Czech dictionary.

Nováček takes the reader back to a time when Brno was not yet an organic whole and the city's newly absorbed districts were beginning to lose their independent character. In addition to capturing the bizarre world of the urban underclass, almost in passing he presents the vestiges of what we would now call Brno urban folklore.

From the linguistic point of view, Nováček's book is an unintended gloss on the texts of Rudolf Těsnohlídek, who in *The Cunning Little Vixen* and elsewhere captured the speech of Brno and its surroundings with documentary precision. For us today it seems incredible how much the speech of the forester from Bílovice and the poacher from Líšně in Těsnohlídek's tale used to differ, even though these two towns on the outskirts of Brno are less than five kilometres from one another.

The famous Czech actor Karel Höger, a contemporary of Nováček's whose origins lay in Brno's "plotna" milieu, once read excerpts from Nováček's book for Czech Radio. Nováček himself was born in Husovice when it was an independent municipality and died in Brno long after the city had absorbed his birthplace.

#campf





fire poetry banjo

FOLK, COUNTRY MUSIC

"It's a long journey to the West, / Pointless, fruitless is the longing," began the first cowboy song recording issued by R. A. Dvorský's publishing house in 1939. The theme and tone reflect the "tramping" movement, with its idealized vision of "America" and its unspoiled "nature", which led Czechs to take to the woods, where they hiked, met round campfires and sang songs modelled on American folk songs and country music. So widespread was the tramping phenomenon that it made its way into popular music, where it long remained. Over time, the romance of the cowboy and the idea of a free life on the Great Plains found their way not only into songs sung by such late twentieth-century stars as Karel Gott, Helena Vondráčková and Waldemar Matuška but into social life itself: very few countries in Europe have such liberal laws when it comes to sleeping overnight, or even setting up camp, in the woods. In the past young people in Brno could choose whether to be "city slickers" hooked on discotheques or "wanderers", who would head for the main train station every Friday afternoon or Saturday and from there set out on the first train for wherever in the countryside it was heading to.

THE ROMANCE OF THE OUTDOORS

Tramps, modern folk fans, lovers of country music - it's probably owing to the Porta music festival, which caters to all three groups, that many people put them in the same bag. But tramps just laugh at this: they're the single truly original Czech sub-culture, with no counterpart anywhere else in the world. Deep roots and unbelievable tenacity mark tramp music, modern folk and country music - three genres that, despite all their differences, are inseparably linked together in this country.

The beginnings of Brno tramping date back to sometime around 1937, when the **Mládí** settlement was established. This year one of its founding members, **Ladislav "Fidler" Krevňák**, celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday; he's still a member of the **Žízeň** group. He survived - like the tramping movement itself - the eras of Nazi and Communist persecution and was there when Brno bands emerged with their own original repertoires. The early years of the Porta festival saw successful appearances by the rather traditional **Vavasatch** (1969) as well as the more modern, light swing **Příboj** (1973). But the **Karabina** band showed that you could become a legend without winning any prizes at Porta.



TRAMPS VS. UNIFORMITY

The greyness of the "normalization" era in Brno following the Soviet invasion in 1968 was significantly dispersed by the **Ozvěna** group, whose songs were sung everywhere. Equally important was the concert series of the **Friends of Campfires**, which **Ozvěna** organized. The singer **Pavla Střechová (Dvořáčková)** could be considered a symbol of how genres and individuals intermingle in Brno: after leaving **Ozvěna** she became one of the founding members of the modern folk group **Bokomara** and also belonged to the Brno rock group **Progres-Pokrok**. A fixed star that arose out of tramping is the Brno band **Kamelot**, whose leader **Roman Horký** led a recent campaign to block a plan to build a dam on the

Oslava River, a favourite "stomping ground" for tramps.

MODERN FOLK AND ROCK IN ONE BIG HEAP

In 1964 Brno was the first stop on American singer-songwriter Pete Seeger's tour of Czechoslovakia. The soul of the international modern folk music movement, Seeger gave a huge boost to the emergence of different varieties of Czech modern folk, whose form was in fact derived more from American models than from local traditions. (Probably Seeger himself would not have been very happy about this.)

In 1974 **Folk Team** began its march to the heights of Czech modern folk with the musical personalities **Roman**

The League of Brno Settlements

OURS IS THE STRENGTH OF FORTY

Tramping is characterized by many external attributes, romantic attitudes and rituals that may strike outsiders as laughable. But its basic feature is fellowship, and wherever there are "tramps", they create "settlements" - gathering places in the great outdoors, with a rudimentary shack or two and a campfire site, all overseen by an elected "sheriff". Each settlement has its own name.

In Brno and its surroundings this independent fellowship began

to take shape at the end of the 1930s, and its self-imposed internal discipline and independence were to prove anathema to both the Nazis and the Communists. Surprisingly, the rapid development of the tramping movement in the Brno region coincided with the approaching German occupation and the beginning of World War II. In 1943 the idea arose of linking together the Brno-based settlements. Representatives of six settlements met to discuss the proposal.

So on 10 April 1944 around one hundred tramps gathered in a meadow north of Brno, headed by

Venclovský and **Ivan Huvar**. The band leader **Pavel Kopřiva** is also active in the modern folk scene as a CD publisher and manager. **Jiří Vondrák** is a phenomenon on the Brno folk scene, having helped found several bands. He played in the **Vondrák – Bodlák** duo, and in the **Bowle** trio he appeared with the rockers **Pavel Váně** and **Richard Lašek** from the **Bronz** band. Vondrák's concerts at times included Czech translations of songs of the Soviet singer-songwriters **Bulat Okudzhava** and **Vladimir Vysotsky**. He's also a screenwriter and director of documentary films dealing thematically with tramping and modern folk.

For many years Brno was home to one of the greatest Czech singer-songwriters - **Slávek Janoušek**. But **Nikola Mucha** also began her career as a singer-songwriter soloist with a guitar, as did the solo musician and front man for **Květy Martin E. Kyšperský**. The closer modern folk approaches the present day, the harder it is to characterize it as a separate genre. The universal American term "songwriter" is also coming into fashion in Czech to designate someone who creates songs and sings them as he or she feels most appropriate, paying little attention to stylistic classification. For a long time **Zdeněk Němeček** has operated at the borderline between modern folk and rock; as singer-songwriter with the **Quanti**

Minoris group he works with "hard rock" inspired by medieval music.

THE BANJO - AT HOME IN BLUEGRASS AND WORLD MUSIC

When the term "songwriter" crops up, then in Brno it's immediately associated with **Robert Křesťan**, a superb artist who in addition to his own work dedicated one of his albums to translations of **Bob Dylan** and paid homage to **Leonard Cohen** in a song entitled "Vila". He began with the tramp band **Trapeři** and in the 1980s moved to the bluegrass group **Poutníci** - their combination of a strong creative leader and a band with outstanding players was a phenomenon unmatched in the Czech context.

When **Křesťan** and the banjo player **Luboš Malina** left **Poutníci** in 1991 to found **Druhá trava**, they worked from a bluegrass base to create a top-flight band with a contemporary, distinctive sound. The mandolin player **Jiří Plocek** was also a member of **Poutníci**; after leaving it he founded the world music oriented **Tea Grass**. **Etno Brno**, an annual series of concerts in the **Stará Pekárna** club, serves Brno a regular dose of world music.

At times the composer and pianist **Zdeněk Král** also strays into the world of the singer-songwriter. *A Knife for Silence*, an album that he recorded with the singer **AndRea Buršová** and the crossover group **Indigo Quartet**, is magnificent, and in its way links up with the reticent legend of singer-songwriting for the theatre **Jiří Bulis** (1946–1993). #

Poutníci at the height of its popularity in the 1980s. Photo: Supraphon



the sheriff of a settlement named **Český lev** (Bohemian Lion). Astonishing. And equally astonishing is how a settlement named after the Czech heraldic symbol escaped the notice of the Nazi authorities. The true history of the **League of Brno Settlements** (SBO), however, begins on 24 June 1945, when representatives of the **Caballeros** and **Rowers** settlements held a major celebration ("potlach") north of Brno. That August the League was officially proclaimed. By 1948 more than forty settlements were represented and tramps throughout Czechoslovakia were invited to attend joint

events. The grand potlach in the autumn of 1948 took on the character of a national tramp assembly.

The later fate of the League mirrored the political situation. After the Communists came to power the existence of an independent institution was unthinkable, as was the publication of the tramps' magazine **Tulák**. The League revived with the political thaw in the 1960s. Of the original members, **Rowers**, **Sosna** and **Netopýr** still exist. In 1987 an informal grouping, **Old Boys Brno**, began carrying out activities in the spirit of the League.





SYNKOPY
vocal-rock

#hard-bo

ROCK, METAL, POP

For many people, leafing through a brief history of Brno rock music is like looking at their own life - they recall many events, many of them they experienced personally. And there're still some people around who've been involved with almost everything. To get a better idea, it's enough to point out that the drummer Zdeněk Kluka began playing with Atlantis in 1962, was one of the founders of The Progress Organization in 1968, and today plays with the re-formed Progress and the ethnic pop band Čankišou. For his part, Karel Heřman sings with these groups - and more than thirty years ago he was the frontman for the promising new wave band Karlův skok. And the above-mentioned Atlantis became popular in 1968 when it took in the siblings Hana and Petr Ulrych, who've long since ceased to be rockers, but remain musicians and singers of the highest quality. This typical personal entanglement is characteristic of the Brno rock scene, which has absorbed everything from Beatlemania through the dazzling world of conceptual art rock to alternative, heavy metal, entertaining guitar band music and even some pop here and there.





Progress 2, playing since 1968. Photo: band archives

EVERYONE PLAYING WITH EVERYONE ELSE

Quite possibly the Brno rock scene has beat more in accord with the throbbing pulse of the city than any other genre, perhaps because there's something down-to-earth at the core of rock that doesn't allow reality to be ignored. In Brno this reality is that of a small city where you can go almost everywhere on foot, everybody knows everybody else and, depending on the momentary situation, they either cooperate or aren't speaking with each other. But as a group, they're all marked by individuality and by their difference from the rest of the world. It was within this context that the 1960s witnessed the birth of a music of tangled relationships and the first signs of ambitious concepts - features that would mark it for at least the next quarter of a century.

One of the first bands to emerge, in 1960, was **Synkopy**, then known as **Synkopy 61**. Starting with dance music, it soon shifted to rock with pleasant vocals influenced partly by California's **Beach Boys**. And in fact when the Beach Boys held a concert in Brno in 1969, Synkopy was the opening band. By that time it had been joined by the keyboard player, singer and accomplished composer **Oldřich Veselý**, who later left for Blue Effect, headed by the legendary guitarist Radim Haldík. In the 1980s Synkopy was part of

the Brno art rock wave, gifting its fans with a succession of concept albums as well as the memorable maxim "War is an ass!" Synkopy 61 continues to perform today.

Atlantis began playing in 1964, at first others' pieces, but after **Petr Ulrych** joined the band in 1967 they acquired not only a reliable singer but even more important an outstanding songwriter. He was followed soon afterwards by his sister **Hana Ulrychová**, one of the greatest singers in the history of Czech popular music. The highlight of their work together was Ulrych's concept album *The Odyssey*; recorded in 1969, it was immediately banned and only

released publicly in 1990. Later the brother and sister team created an exceptionally interesting fusion of Moravian folklore and popular music for their current band **Javory**.

PROGRES, PROGRESS, THE FUTURE

Ulrych came to Atlantis just as the drummer Zdeněk Kluka left. In 1968 Kluka was one of the founders of **The Progress Organization**. Many lines of force of the Brno music scene came together in The Progress Organization and its later mutations **Barnodaj**, **Progres 2** and **Progres-Pokrok**. Some members even played in bands accompanying Bob Fridl and the sisters **Martha**



Tom Jegr



ECSTASY WITH AND WITHOUT A GUITAR

"All my projects always foundered because of a lack of managerial skills or the total absence of any management at all," the songwriter and guitarist Tom Jegr once confessed in an interview. This makes him sound like the prototype of the rocker who plays a lot but is only interested in the music itself and ignores the business side of things. But Jegr's projects have "foundered" ever since 1982, when he was present at the birth of the Brno heavy metal legend Krabat. Since then he has moved on to blues, Southern rock and rock writing and singing in general,

and **Tena Elefteriadu**, which took them into the world of pop music as pure entertainment. But their most important creative contributions have remained the concept projects *Dialogue with the Universe* (1978) and *The Third Book of the Jungle* (1981). After *Dialogue* the guitarist and singer **Pavel Váně** left the group to found his own project, **Bronz**. Following *The Third Book* the group lost another leading member, **Roman Dragoun**, who went on to found **Futurum**. But we're now well into the 1980s, when alternative and underground as well as hard rock and heavy metal joined the scene.

Sailing through the waters of pop music – Monika Bagárová. Photo: Brno – City of Music



but his music and guitar playing have always retained a feeling of authenticity.

"I play it how I feel it" must be one of the worst clichés uttered by musicians, no matter of what genre. In Jegr's case this comment makes sense in the context of his music and his way of life. With *Krabat* he helped create a Czech concept of heavy metal that rejected foreign models. In later years, Jegr embodied another rock prototype, that of the musician who lurches from alcohol to drugs to religious ecstasy. But luckily the music in him has always won out and though it hasn't changed very much for many years now, it always radiates the need to convey something



THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICES

Probably the first group in Brno to take a serious interest in playing music approximating heavy metal was **Krabat** (named after the apprentice and protagonist of the fantasy novel *Krabat and the Sorcerer's Mill*). The guitarists **Tomáš Jégr** and **Pavel Řehoř** created the repertoire for the band, and though *Krabat* was short-lived, its impact was lasting. At one point it included later members of **Titanic** and **Kern**, bands that were enormously popular in the eighties and nineties and are still playing today. Their hard rock contemporaries performed as **Dogma Art** – today **Martin Marthus Škaroupka**, the son of its guitarist, plays drums in **Titanic** and the extreme metal British band **Cradle of Filth**. The internationally successful

directly. Perhaps it really does just require a bit of management for it to be better known. And perhaps, too, this isn't the best age for pure genres.

The list of bands Jegr has played in, from *Krabat* through *Detto*, *Maxon*, *Lehká noha* and *Charlie the Bomber* to today's *Tom Jegr & Gang*, is amazing. Over the years, it's as though the music gradually stopped shouting, started searching about and thinking more, and finally settled down where it feels best. And it expresses itself as convincingly on the almost acoustic solo album *Harmony* as with his rock gang. It's not hard to like it, even when it's "just" rock'n'roll.

Nicola Mucha, whose music is marked by a punk sound and controversial issues. Photo: Dita Pepe and Petr Hruběš

black metal band **Root**, with the singer **Jiří "Big Boss" Valter**, founder of the Czech branch of the Church of Satan, became a cult legend.

CLUBS AND ROCK FLOURISH

At the end of the eighties and early nineties, following the collapse of the Communist regime, rock clubs began to appear. The legendary **Křenka** predated November 1989, while newcomers included **Labuť**, **Harlem** and **Machina**, followed later by **Mersey**, **Stará Pekárna**, **Alterná**, **Fléda** and the lavish **Sono Centrum**. The more upbeat guitar bands **Výlet** and **Helmutova stříkačka** made their name, as did the intense **Narvan**. The nineties also gave birth to one of today's most distinctive Brno bands, **Květy**.

An alternative approach, a feeling for poetry, the ability of a hit maker, and personal charisma all come together in *Květy*'s founder, **Martin E. Kyšperský**. The band has received several Czech music awards; one of its current members is **Ondřej Kvas**, the house composer for Ensemble Opera Diversa. *Kyšperský* also initiated a memorial album honouring the singer-songwriter and composer of incidental music **Jiří Bulis**.

As for the pop scene in today's Brno, mention must be made at least of the singer **Monika Bagárová**. But Brno has always favoured alternative music and wave after wave of new styles. #

DOBRA PRÁCE - ZÁRUKA ÚSPĚCHU!

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UNDERGROUND, PUNK

Were it not for the bizarre atmosphere created by the political situation in the 1970s and 1980s, many things in Brno's musical underground would have been different. In particular, it's probable that many people simply wouldn't have met up with each other. The desire and courage to express oneself freely was motivation so strong that it could bring together in a single band a publican-singer, a virtuoso double bass player and a trained composer. Brno had to wait a while for its underground music to achieve fame - it only began to flourish in the 1980s. But then it was as though the dam had burst, to the admiring amazement of one of the leading figures in the Czech alternative scene, Mikoláš Chadima. Of course the question always arises what it was that the bands, which often played rather badly, on pitiful instruments, were offering an alternative to. Musically it was the very opposite of the polished cosmic visions and elegant concepts of professional groups. At the human level, it was an alternative to the continual dilemma of how to deal with censorship, repression and endless caution. And this is where the importance of musical alternative and underground still remains today.



adversity

A STROLL THROUGH THE UNDERGROUND

For a long time music in Brno lacked an underground or even just an offshoot that didn't cater to the mass taste of the public. While members of Prague underground bands had already served prison terms and were banned, rock music in Brno led a more tranquil, safer life. But the situation changed at the beginning of the eighties. While Prague was boxed in by prohibitions, Brno lay under the authorities' radar and became the musical centre for bands that were determined to create freely and without any compromises.

"YOU'RE AFRAID? THEN KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT!"

This quote from a song by the *Odvažní bobříci* band was very good advice in the 1980s. If you didn't keep your mouth shut you might well get it smacked, as participants in a rock festival at Žabčice not far from Brno learned in 1983. The festival was banned a few hours before it was to begin, and disappointed rock fans set out for Brno, where most of them ended up in a popular pub. The police raid that quickly followed was brutal: people were beaten, bitten by police dogs, arrested and some even sentenced on ridiculous charges. So the atmosphere in Brno was far from idyllic. Fortunately, the alternative scene refused to be intimidated.

By that time "general meetings" were taking place in Brno where bands who refused to be deprived of their freedom met with each other. Among them were *Odvažní bobříci*, led by Ivo Horák. *Pro pocit jistoty*, linked to it through personal ties, had an even more distinctive musical style set by the composer Martin Dohnal. And of the immense number of "new wave" bands in Brno, it's impossible to overlook *Ještě jsme se nedohodli*, whose members included Karel David, later the lyricist for Iva Bittová, and the drummer Pavel Fajt.



"LIKE GRASSHOPPERS AND LIKE HORSES"

This line from one of the texts of the *Dunaj* band could well refer to the alternative scene in Brno, which multiplied in numbers and charged steadily forward. *Dunaj's* style became one of the most influential on the whole Czech alternative scene. Its first line-up included Iva Bittová and Pavel Fajt. Later both went independent as an untraditional violin and drum duo, and even later Bittová became world-famous as a soloist. Today she lives and works in the USA, where she has cooperated with the composition-focused Bang on a Can and other leading contemporary music groups. In fact there are no limits to her stylistic range and she has even sung Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* and Mefisto in Alfred Schnittke's Faust cantato.



The *Dunaj* style also had an important offshoot. One of its members at one point was the composer Zdeněk Plachý (1961–2018), an organizer of happenings and outdoor megaconcerts and the *spiritus agens* of musical life at

Jaroslav Erik Frič



ART AND LIFE IN A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL

"I'll give him a punch sign between his eyes!" Jaroslav Erik Frič once growled in his raspy voice, angered when an editor returned a text to him. Frič's contribution was too long - he'd exceeded the prescribed number of signs. But this was probably because he measured words and actions not according to their number, but according to their sense. Frič wasn't a musician, but his activities are inseparably linked with the Brno musical underground.

the Skleněná louka club. Without Plachý's activities the Brno music scene would have been infinitely poorer.

Another "Dunaj offshoot" was the **E** band of the guitarist **Josef Ostřanský** and the bass guitarist **Vladimír Václavek**, where the key figure was the singer **Vladimír Kokolia**, now one of the country's leading artists. After Fajt left, he was followed at Dunaj on percussion by **Pavel Koudelka**, formerly a member of the outstanding "Cubist" band **Z kopce**, which had been founded by **Petr Váša**, later well-known for his physical poetry.

A major meeting point for the Brno alternative scene - the "Střelak" pub



LET'S HAVE A GOOD TIME TOGETHER

A great many Brno bands played at events organized by the Bohemian-Moravian Benevolent Society,

One could go on at length about all that Frič did. But if one were to speak of him merely as a poet, a publisher and an organizer, something essential would be missing. Whatever he threw himself into was grounded in the spiritual. This was true of his books of poetry, was an integral part of his Olomouc publishing house **Votobia** and its Brno successor **Vetus Via**. It was there in the **Potulný dělník** poetry festival, the literary and music evenings **Potulné akademie** and the **Ears & Wind Records** label, which he cooperated closely with and which

founded by Jan Šebesta. This bizarre informal collection of friends even had a Persian section, whose only member was **Ruzbeh Oweysi**. He was there at the birth of many projects, among them Brno's Hady, from 1992 to 1995 a haven for independent music on the airwaves. The association's evening events even hosted the hardcore bands **S.R.K.** and **Insania**, still today among the top Czech hard music groups. The punk band **Zeměžluč** is another legend.

"Alternative culture is in a permanent state of readiness vis-à-vis the Establishment," Martin Dohnal once claimed. Every social system legitimizes its existence. Two now deceased poets embodied the importance of the textual message - **Pavel "Homér" Ambrož** and **Jaroslav Erik Frič**. Both were linked to alternative music, Ambrož through the **Idiot Crusoe** band, Frič through **Čvachtavý lachtan**. Another member of the latter was **Tomáš Vtípil**,

composer, sound designer and performer. The **Děti kapitána Morgana** band and the annual **Krákor** festival represent tradition as well as the "gentrification" of contemporary underground.

ALL LENKA'S CHILDREN

Brno alternative music is unthinkable without **Lenka Zogatová**. Back in the 1980s she brought **Nico** and **Swans** to Brno, and she pursued her independent creative activities right until her death in 2014. This marked the symbolic end of a world in which even the creation of a rock band was an act of civic courage. And in this connection, we should not forget the dissident **Petr Cibulka**: spreading recordings of independent music cost him several years in Communist prisons. #

Insania playing on its home turf. Photo: Zbyněk Maděryč



still exists today. For Frič, this spiritual ground was not something calculated - in everything he did, he was honest and uncompromising. He was also an embodiment of the truth that even a free society needs its alternative and underground.

Naturally, music was never absent from Frič's events, and his poetry collection *You are Orkney Wine* first saw the light of day in a musical form with the **Čvachtavý lachtan** group. In addition to Tomáš Vtípil its members included the accordion

player and singer-songwriter **Radim Babák** as well as **Martin E. Kyšperský**, one of the leading figures in Czech rock at the present time. Another person whom Frič often cooperated with was **Josef Klíč**, an unconventional musician and cello player in the Brno opera orchestra.

Frič expressed himself as the age permitted - from concerts held in flats through his own publishing house to his blog and Facebook entries. He died after a long illness on 14 May 2019.



#electron

ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Electronic music, big beat and clubbing go together - but that's only a small part of the truth. In fact electronic music was here long before clubbing, and thanks to enlightened teachers at JAMU it was doing very well indeed in Brno as early as the 1960s. That is, long before synthesizers and sequencers appeared on rock podiums, long before any old band had a computer, long before the first dance parties in glittering halls and dark cellars. Today electronic music is one of music's most omnipresent genres: neither dance parties nor contemporary operas can do without it. Electronic big beat music has occupied reggae and swing, remixing is a daily affair, Brno artists have learned to sell instruments they built themselves to the whole world and to amplify an old knitting machine. As early as 1907 the composer Ferruccio Busoni dreamt of the future potential of electronic music, but not even his imagination and genius could have anticipated what Thaddeus Cahill's first weird experiment with an immense electrical organ would lead to one day.



big beat multimeo



ic music

in the Sky with

dia



ELECTRONIC MUSIC ALL AROUND

Since its beginnings in Brno, electronic music has flowed through the city's musical life in several currents that at various moments meet up, join forces for a while and then part ways. This still remains true, but at the same time there are growing numbers of artists for whom electronic music is a means of expression no different from a guitar and who turn to it when needed.

The Brno composer, producer and sound designer **Tomáš Vtípil** plays the violin and can be heard in the streets with the acoustic band **Urband**, but his electronic projects are more ambitious and more audible. He says of himself that he produces a racket, clearly evident in his solo projects using electronic means to attack underground roots. Vtípil's spatial compositions for electronic music and choir have been performed at the **Exposition of New Music** festival, and everything that pertains to electronic music today appears in his work,

with the possible exception of purely dance creations.

FIRST COMPOSITIONS, THEN BIG BEAT ELECTRONIC MUSIC

The first conceptual use of electronic music was in the work of **Miloslav Ištvan** and **Alois Piños**. Their projects, strongly grounded intellectually and thoughtfully constructed, were far from what most people imagine by the term electronic music today. But their work back then was "basic research" that their students could later draw on and that musical genres oriented more to entertainment could be based on. Piños and Ištvan also benefited from the **Electroacoustic Music Studio** established in the mid-sixties by Brno Radio. This stimulated the use of electronic music in serious musical art – rock and alternative had to wait some time for their first major electronic achievements.

But it's hard not to see the connection between electroacoustic compositions that came in the wake

of abstract films that Piños and the artist **Dalibor Chatrný** created together and the later concerts of **Progres 2**, which made use of visual media techniques. But **Progres 2** was still marked by too little electronic music and too much live playing – even though the composer **Karel Horký**, better known under the name **Daniel Forró**, deserted **Progres** for electronic music.

ELECTRONIC MUSIC BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

Alternative bands only began creating electronic music projects in the eighties; among the first were **Něco, co hýbe ušima** and **Frontální porucha**. However, it was difficult then to obtain suitable electronic music instruments: they could only be purchased, at great expense, on the other side of the Iron Curtain and often had to be smuggled across the border.

This was the case with **Ser un Peyjalero**, which imported a Roland D-50 synthesizer from the West at the end of the 1980s. Peyjalero realized that even alternative music needs good instruments if it wants to sound good. Even in this large band, which had a brass section, the synthesizer added a striking element to its sound. When its leader, Jiří Pejchal, founded a new band, **Mare Nigrum**, in 1995, he moved to full-blooded electronic music – unlike the hermetically existential Peyjalero, here there was even big beat dance music.

Vašulka Kitchen Brno

A MULTIMEDIA KITCHEN FROM NEW YORK

Multimedia projects have always gone hand-in-hand with electronic and electroacoustic music and other related musical genres and sub-genres. One of the founders of electronic audiovisual art and video art is the Brno native **Woody Vašulka** (born 1937). Since 2016 a Brno NGO named **Vašulka Kitchen Brno** has been promoting his work.

Vašulka and his wife Steina founded the first Kitchen in 1971 in New York. The name came naturally: it

was actually situated in a kitchen, the only space available at the time. **Vašulka Kitchen Brno** is located in the city's House of Arts: clearly Vašulka's ideas are taken more seriously now than was the case a half century ago.

Vašulka Kitchen Brno was founded by **Tomáš Ruller**, **Jennifer Helia De Felice** and **Viktor Pantůček**. All three are active in the field of contemporary art, both theoretically and in practice, as teachers, performers, musicians, scholars and dramaturges. The association focuses on the



Cover of Ser Un Peyjalero's album *The Birthday's Ignorance*. Photo: band archives

But Mare Nigrum was preceded a year earlier by **Bullerbyne**, a band formed in 1994 on the ashes of the **Neue Sprache** project. Neue Sprache played on the borderline between noise and brutal electronic music, and from its music there evolved what was the wildly successful dance music of Bullerbyne. Back then, Brno and the whole Czech Republic also found themselves awash in a wave of dance parties dominated by big beat electronic music and ecstasy of all kinds, and above all by DJs.

FROM CELLARS TO DISCO HALLS

Songs on records were replaced by acid house, dub, breakbeat, techno and a host of other styles almost impossible for the uninitiated to distinguish from one another. A certain mutual animosity prevailed among their fans – though everyone hated commercial house music, which

lifework of the Vašulkas and equally intensively on offering all manner of support for artists making use of new technologies.

Multimedia art and electronic music made their appearance in Brno as early as the 1960s, so the Vašulka Kitchen joins a long tradition. It draws on people who have worked hard to ensure that the tradition remained alive and continued to develop.

The curator **Barbora Šedivá** is one of the co-founders of **4AM/Forum for Architecture and Media**, which

started to show up even on private radio stations.

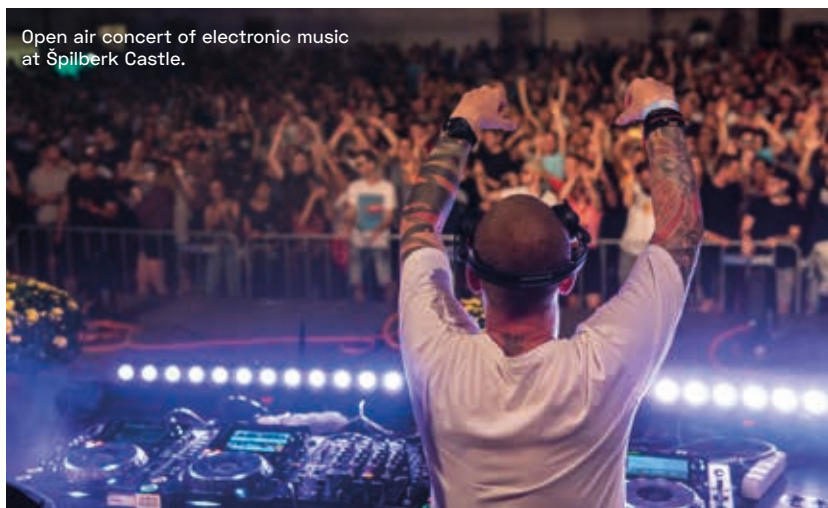
In Brno people began flocking to **Mescalito**, where the music was played from records by DJ Boris, one of the owners, famous for a memorable set he played from the pulpit of the city's Red Church. Discotheques flourished big time in the attractive new **Bobycentrum**. Following the latest trend, they began to play from vinyls in the **Fan Favorit** club, in the originally underground-punk oriented **Šedá litina**, in its successor the **TetraHydroClub** and in the rock music **Mersey Club**. The first portable sound system collectives also appeared, the best known being **Vosa**, which today also functions as a small brewery.

At the other end of the scale, around the beginning of the new millennium **Supersonic Garage** and **Orion Hall** began organizing huge dance parties attended by

thousands. Brno also saw the emergence of **rave.cz**, a server dedicated to electronic and dance music.

SYNTHESIZERS AS NOSTALGIA-FREE RETRO

Nor has Brno been immune from the electronic music retro wave. The big winner here has been the electro-pop band **Midi Lidi**, which began in 2006 and three years later was awarded a prize for music for the film *Protector*. The more thoughtful and ethereal face of contemporary electronic music is represented by **Fiordmoss**, a band formed by students at the Brno University of Technology's Faculty of Fine Arts. **Bastl Instruments** produces outstanding DIY modular synthesizers: their instruments can be found in the homes of Depeche Mode's Martin Gore and Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails. #



has always promoted multimedia, even offering courses in electronic music for kids. Other members of Vašulka Kitchen Brno include **Ondřej Merta** of Bastl Instruments, and **Ivan Palacký**, co-designer of the association's premises, an accomplished player on an electronically amplified knitting machine and the initiator of and participant in many music projects.

Contemporary galleries have long since expanded their remit beyond paintings, graphic works and statues to include electronic music,

sounds and other non-tangible media. Vašulka Kitchen Brno functions as an archive and catalyst of art for the future but also as a practical demonstration of the multifaceted interconnection of artists and the contemporary world.



SELECTED MUSICAL ACTIVITIES IN BRNO

JAZZFESTBRNO

March–June

An international music festival featuring world-famous jazz stars and progressive musicians from the younger generation as well as some of what's best on the local Czech jazz scene.

www.jazzfestbrno.cz

EASTER FESTIVAL OF SACRED MUSIC

April

The Easter Festival of Sacred Music is an international project, unique in Central Europe, that is devoted solely to sacred music.

www.filharmonie-brno.cz

DARK BLUE FESTIVAL

May

An international music festival featuring performances by visually impaired children and young people with a rich accompanying programme.

www.tmavomodry.cz

ZUŠ OPEN IN BRNO

May

A national happening of basic schools of the arts. Guided by their teachers, creative children - musicians, dancers, visual artists and actors - prepare a rich programme for presentation in public spaces.

www.ticbrno.cz

Busking during the Brno Music Marathon.
Photo: Jan Rasch



MOZART'S CHILDREN

May–June

The Mozart's Children project, organized by the Brno Philharmonic in collaboration with the Smetana Basic School of the Arts, aims to attract children and young people of all ages to the fantastic world of music. The project's highlight is a Gala Concert at which "young Mozarts" - pupils at basic schools of the arts - join the members of the Brno Philharmonic in a symphonic performance.

www.filharmonie-brno.cz/mozartovy-deti/

PONAVA FEST

May

A multi-genre festival focused on alternative music, jazz and classical music, accompanied by a rich programme including theatre, poetry, performance art, films and ecology.

<https://www.ponavafest.cz>

BRNO ORGAN FESTIVAL

May–June

Held annually since 1981, the festival features prominent Czech and international organists playing on concert organs throughout Brno.

www.varhany.nomi.cz

CONCENTUS MORAVIAE

June

An annual international classical music festival linking Brno with the surrounding region, it is famous for its innovative programmes. Each year the festival is prepared by a different dramaturge with a strong personal vision. The festival focuses alternately on early and modern music.

www.festivalcm.cz

The Dark Blue Festival - mediating the world of the visually impaired. Photo: TIC BRNO



GHETTOFEST

June

A richly diverse street festival based on music and held in Brno's main Roma neighbourhood. Its aim is to break down the barriers between this locality and other parts of the city of Brno. Part of the festival is held in a two-hundred-year old prison, where musicians recast the atmosphere of its unique space into soundscapes.

www.ghettofest.cz

DOKOŘÁN FESTIVAL OF MUSICAL THEATRE

June

The Dokořán festival of musical theatre presents a selection of the most interesting Czech and foreign musical theatre productions.

www.mdb.cz



IBÉRICA FESTIVAL

June

This festival of Ibero-American cultures offers attractions ranging from flamenco music and dancing to South American food: performances, concerts, film shows, workshops and food tastings.

www.iberica.cz

VAŇKOVKA FEST

June–July

From the end of June until the end of July, the multi-genre Vaňkovka Fest presents various bands ranging from ageless musical legends to talented young artists, and much more, in the splendid outdoor space between the Vaňkovka and Fajt Galleries.

www.vankovkafest.cz

UPROSTŘED FESTIVAL

June–August

A festival animating the streets and squares of Brno's city centre during the summer months. It offers a varied programme of music and theatre performances, dancing and other events.

www.festivaluprostred.cz

INTERNATIONAL GUITAR FESTIVAL

August

This festival focuses on the classical guitar and brings prominent guitar players to Brno. The festival also offers guitar courses and an international competition.

www.guitarfestival.cz

Judith Hill in the Metro Music Bar during the Groove Brno festival. Photo: Tino Kratochvíl

BRNO MUSIC MARATHON

August

A multi-purpose music festival with a unique atmosphere. It presents interesting places in Brno's city centre through music. The festival includes the best Brno has to offer as well as original national and international projects. Programmes for the festival's individual stages are prepared by leading figures in Brno's musical life.

www.maratonhudby.cz

ŠPILBERK INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

August

A traditional summer festival held under the stars on the premises of Špilberk Castle. It offers a rather wide range of genres, including classical music concerts, classical and pop music fusions as well as broadcasts on a big screen with quality sound of concerts featuring international stars from the world's great stages.

www.filharmonie-brno.cz

BRNO INTERNATIONAL FOLKLORE FESTIVAL

August

This festival has been held every year since 1990 at the end of the summer holidays. It presents folklore ensembles from Brno as well as other parts of the country and features international guest performers.

www.folklorinet.cz/mff

BABYLONFEST

September

A festival highlighting the culture and traditions of ethnic minorities living in Brno. Czechs learn something about Brno neighbours who come from places around the world, while the performers can meet one another and showcase their customs and traditions.

www.babylonfest.cz

JANÁČEK BRNO

October

This, among the most exciting music festivals in Europe, celebrates the heritage of Leoš Janáček, one of the greatest Czech composers. It presents all aspects of his work within an international context.

www.janacek-brno.cz

MORAVIAN AUTUMN

October

The Moravian Autumn festival is based on original programming and focused themes. In addition to classical music, it also provides for newer and contemporary music. Established in 1966, it has grown steadily to become a two-week event which, since 2012, has been organized as a biennale by the Brno Philharmonic.

www.filharmonie-brno.cz/moravsky-podzim/

MEETINGS OF NEW MUSIC PLUS

October–December

An international music festival featuring remarkable concerts from the field of contemporary acoustic and electroacoustic music and multimedia projects. The festival is organized by Sdružení Q and by the Faculty of Music, Janáček Academy of the Performing Arts, Brno.

www.setkavaninovehudby.jamu.cz

GROOVE BRNO

October–December

An international groove and funky festival with strong international participation, it presents a wide selection of top performers in jazz and related genres.

www.groovebrno.cz

Brno awash in colour during the pre-Lent Carnival festivities. Photo: TIC BRNO / Michal Růžicka

AMADEUS

November

Amadeus is an international Mozart competition for young pianists under the age of 11. Its aim is to introduce and support talented young pianists from across the Czech Republic as well as abroad. The competition itself and the concert given by the winners are held in Besední dům.

www.amadeusbrno.cz

EXPOSITION OF NEW MUSIC

no fixed date

This festival mainly offers new possibilities to express music as well as new aspects of personal, even extreme, expression. The festival was established in 1987 and since 2012 has been organized by the Brno Philharmonic without any fixed date within the year.

www.filharmonie-brno.cz

BRNO PHILHARMONIC

year-round

The Brno Philharmonic offers ten different subscription series including both classical music as well as jazz and world music. It also organizes several festivals: Moravian Autumn, the Easter Festival of Sacred Music, the Exposition of New Music, and an open-air festival at Špilberk Castle.

www.filharmonie-brno.cz

BRNO NATIONAL THEATRE – OPERA COMPANY

year-round

The opera company of the Brno National Theatre premieres several new productions each season on its home stage in the Janáček Theatre. Its repertoire includes not only major opera titles but also works by contemporary composers. It pays special tribute to Leoš Janáček every two years through the Janáček Brno festival.

www.ndbrno.cz

BRNO MUNICIPAL THEATRE

year-long

A repertory theatre with its own orchestra, the Brno Municipal Theatre focuses on drama and music, particularly stage musicals and premieres of contemporary Czech works. It organizes the Dokofan musical theatre festival.

www.mdb.cz



BACHA NA MOZARTA!

year-round

The only early music subscription series in Moravia. Since 2012 the Czech Ensemble Baroque has performed major cantatas, oratorios, operas and symphonies from the Baroque and Classicist periods interpreted in a historically authentic style and played on period instruments.

www.bachanamozarta.cz

BARBARA MARIA WILLI PRESENTS...

year-round

The oldest early music subscription series in the Czech Republic, launched in 2002. Its chamber concerts are held in the former refectory of the Brothers Hospitallers monastery, with its splendid acoustics. The programmes prepared by Barbara Willi feature top local and international artists. The series is noted for its historically informed performances, innovative programming and the linkage of early with contemporary music.

www.cema-music.com

BRNO CONTEMPORARY ORCHESTRA

year-round

The BCO mostly presents Czech music of the 20th and 21st centuries. The ensemble prepares compact thematic series of concerts as well as original projects such as connecting music with other arts (films, the fine arts, architecture, dance).

www.bcorchestra.cz

CZECH PHILHARMONIC CHOIR OF BRNO

year-round

The Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno represents the best in the field of choral art in the Czech and the international context. The choir organizes a subscription series and has many other concerts throughout the year.

www.cfsbrno.cz

ENSEMBLE OPERA DIVERSA

year-round

Ensemble Opera Diversa is an ensemble of professional musicians and singers focusing on innovative music and theatre projects. Founded in 1999, Ensemble Opera Diversa now offers the public around thirty performances and productions each year.

www.operadiversa.cz

ETNO BRNO FESTIVAL IN STARÁ PEKÁRNA

year-round

A festival offering current approaches and trends in European and local world music, music on the borderline of traditional folk music, modern folk and ethnic music. The festival presents the best of local and to some extent Central European ethnic music.

www.starapekarna.cz

HAUSOPERA

year-round

A unique Brno site-specific opera project for staging operas whose music and librettos are closely linked to the unusual Brno locations where they are performed.

www.hausopera.cz

OPERA NA CESTÁCH

year-round

Opera na cestách (Opera on the Move) first appeared on the Czech cultural scene in 2012. As the first travelling opera project in the Czech Republic it aims to make the opera world available even in areas distant from opera houses and to introduce the genre to the general public.

JAZZ BRNO

year-round

An international music festival offering jazz and blues evenings in the Stará Pekárna club. Although the festival labels its two parts “spring” and “autumn”, the concerts are in fact spread out throughout the whole year.

OTHER MUSICAL ACTIVITIES

BRNO CARNIVAL

February

The Brno Carnival is organized by the folklore group Šafrán Brno in cooperation with TIC BRNO. The day before Ash Wednesday, when Lent with its fasting and abstinence begins, local folklore ensembles organize Carnival festivities and costumed revellers parade through the centre of Brno.

www.safranbrno.cz

BRNO BEATFEST

February

Beatfests are special events in Brno, presenting the legends of (not only) Brno rock, partly forgotten and revived bands, new names as well as top music bands. The festival is held in the Semi-lasso centre.

www.beatpoint.cz

PORTA – BRNO DISTRICT ROUND

April

The Prah Café hosts the public district round of the oldest Czech festival focused on folk, country and blues, with the winners going on to the Porta finale.

www.porta-festival.cz

BRNO REGION DANCES AND SINGS

May

A festival of traditional folklore ensembles and bands from the Brno region.

www.ticbrno.cz

KRÁKOR

June

Established in 1998, Krákor is an alternative to commercial “culture” and the excesses of big festivals. There are no genre limitations; underground is the common denominator. Great emphasis is put on creators themselves and their own works; the festival includes theatre productions, authors’ readings, films and exhibitions.

www.spodniproud.cz

KAMENKA OPEN

June

A three-day music festival with an accompanying theatre programme. It is held on a picturesque meadow above the Kamenná neighbourhood.

EVENINGS WITH ONDRÁŠ

June

Summer evenings in June are enlivened by the open-air performances of the Military Folk Ensemble Ondráš, held in the courtyards of the New City Hall and Špilberk Castle. The whole ensemble takes part in the dance and music performances.

www.vusondras.cz

OLD BRNO MUSIC FESTIVITIES

June

The festival takes place at the Augustinian Monastery in Old Brno. It ignores genres and brings together classical music, film music, southern Moravian poetry set to music as well as modern genres.

www.starobrnenskehudebnislavnosti.cz

BRNO COUNTRY FOUNTAIN

June

A music festival held on the outdoor stage at the Old Brewery in Rečkovice. The music focuses on pop, country, folk and rock.

www.countryradio.cz

JAKUBÁK FEST

June–August

A music festival that animates the square around St James’s Church during the summer. The programme features concerts, small theatre productions, stand-up acts, busking and happenings by the Bolek Polívka Theatre.

PROART FESTIVAL

July

An international multi-genre festival of workshops focused on dancing, singing, acting, photography and other arts.

www.proart-festival.cz

F SCÉNA

August

Summer thematic evenings organized by the Jánošík Brno folk ensemble. Leading folk groups from across the Czech Republic perform in the city centre, each displaying the variety and beauty of the folklore of its own region.

CHRISTMAS IN BRNO

November–December

In recent years, Christmastime in the Brno city centre has featured not only good food but also a rich and high-quality music programme.

www.brnenskevanoce.cz

The Cunning Little Vixen at the National Theatre Brno. Photo: Marek Olbrzymek



More information on music events in Brno

www.mestohudby.cz



www.leosjanacek.eu



www.gotobrna.cz





was born on 3 October 1966, a year and a day after the Janáček Theatre was opened in Brno. He probably came into this world because his parents loved each other back then.

When he was five, his mother taught him to go to the Janáček Theatre. And his grandmother started teaching him to play the piano, which he still considers the right thing to have

done. Soon after, he saw Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* with his mum. He liked the piece, though what he remembered most was Kecal, who kept singing "it's all settled" over and over. Thanks to his mother's habit, he then continued going to the opera regularly and gladly.

Later, his love of music led him to talk about it so much that they asked him to write an article for *Literární noviny*. So he started writing, and since there was such a desperate shortage of people who could write about music, he was soon noticed by the editors of the music review *Opus Musicum*. Soon he also took on the technical editing, which ended up with him writing, producing and reading this distinguished periodical for several

years - though of course it was far from being a one-man show. He also launched a blog called *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* and headed the *Brno - City of Music* web portal for three years.

At present, he writes for the daily *Hospodářské noviny*, *Aktuálně.cz* and *HIS Voice*, collaborates with the Czech Philharmonic and the weekly magazine *Respekt*, and works as the editor-in-chief of the *Magazine of the Academy of Classical Music*. He has to write quite a lot, which he considers divine retribution for all the essays he didn't hand in at secondary school. He's a co-founder of the Trochu nižší C4 prize, which is given annually for the best piece of contemporary Czech music and has so far been awarded twice.

#Brno city of music

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TIC BRNO



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Author: Boris Klepal

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