

# OPERA *and* IDEOLOGY *in* PRAGUE



*Polemics and Practice at the National Theater*  
1900–1938



Brian S. Locke

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*Opera and Ideology in Prague*

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# *Opera and Ideology in Prague*

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BRIAN S. LOCKE



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*To Donna*



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# Preface

Positive criticism, from both professionals and laypersons, could accomplish much here; unfortunately, its state today shows that, on the basis of our isolation, and having grown up among the “young postwar fighters,” it has churned out more or less personally pointed, comfortably convincing, and attractive slogans about the decadence of foreign art and the elevation of our art above that of all nations of the world, thus fostering a “healthy” conservatism and petty-bourgeois indolence, simultaneously with an inability to healthily express the [critic’s] personal relationship to the real values of artistic works. From whence come all these tiring and shaming arguments, not touching the core of the issue and expressing themselves only through the assembly of mutually antagonistic theories, within which Smetana’s name appears like a *deus ex machina*, invoked to help in the most convoluted circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

This quotation, from an essay by a young composer, Josef Stanislav, in 1924, expresses in two sentences what this entire book attempts to solve: the problem of why the incredibly rich musical sphere of Prague in the early twentieth century has remained all but unknown to Western ears for three-quarters of a century. And yet the circumstances, while certainly convoluted, were not always as dire as Stanislav would have us believe, and there are a great many artistic creations and critical ideas that inform the greater understanding of European modernist culture in its day. Thus, the second goal of this book: to bring the individuals, ideologies, and operas of the Prague community into English-language musicological discourse, and so to provide a local context, not only for household names such as Janáček and Martinů, but also for the modernist “mainstream” of Europe in the fin-de-siècle and interwar periods.

The present text began as a Ph.D. dissertation at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, *Music and Ideology in Prague, 1900–1938*, completed in 2002; it was then transformed through substantial revisions to its present state, with almost every chapter split into historical and analytical “halves.” Several new sections were added, notably the nineteenth-century prequel, the post-1938 epilogue, the Mánes Group, and most of the discussion of Zich’s *Vina*, while almost all others were augmented with new research or ideas. Many of the smaller topics became the subjects of conference papers in the intervening years, including ones on the “Dvořák Affair” and the “Wozzeck Affair,” Jeremiáš’s *Bratři Karamazovi*, Ostrčil’s *Legenda z Erinu*, Czech interwar jazz, Czech Zeitopern, and the aesthetics of Hostinský, Nejedlý, and Očadlík. These papers in turn prompted the publication of two articles: “‘The Periphery Is Singing Hit Songs’:

The Globalization of American Jazz and the Interwar Czech Avantgarde,” *Journal of the American Music Research Center* 12 (2002): 25–55; and “Decadence, Heroism and Czechness: The Reception of Ostrčil’s *Legenda z Erinu*,” in *Socialist Realism and Music*, Musicological Colloquium at the Brno International Music Festival, vol. 36 (2001), ed. Mikuláš Bek, Geoffrey Chew, and Petr Macek (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press, 2004), 71–82. I would like to thank both Thomas Riis of the American Music Research Center and Mikuláš Bek of Masarykova Univerzita for their permission to reuse portions of my work in this book.

A great number of individuals assisted in the creation of this book in its many forms. Certainly the project would never have achieved the scope it did without the formative input of Joseph Auner and Jane Sugarman, my dissertation advisors at Stony Brook. Their guidance informed my methodology and style, but also allowed the full exploration of my musicological imagination. From the beginning, Michael Beckerman also assisted in the development of ideas from the perspective of Czech music studies; his moral support also proved inspirational and essential through this process.

For help in funding my initial research, I acknowledge the generous Doctoral Dissertation Award of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which gave me the chance to undertake my first research trip in 1999. Special thanks also go to various institutions in Prague: the Hudební archiv Národního divadla, for making available so many Czech operatic scores and libretti; Český rozhlas, whose archive provided unreleased recordings of several of these works; the České muzeum hudby, which allowed me to view letters and manuscripts by the composers in my project; the Městská knihovna, the music department of the Národní knihovna, and the periodicals department of the Národní muzeum, all of whose staffs were kind, courteous, helpful, and above all patient, despite language barriers and cultural expectations.

Other individuals in the Czech Republic who assisted in this endeavor are the very encouraging and helpful PhDr. Jarmila Gabrielová, director of musicology at Univerzita Karlova; PhDr. Mikuláš Bek of Masarykova Univerzita, whose invitation to present a conference paper in Brno developed into a research trip in October 2001 and a publication; PhDr. Markéta Kabelková of the České muzeum hudby, Mgr. Zuzana Petrášková of the Národní knihovna, and Mgr. Aleš Březina of the Nadace Bohuslava Martinů, all of whom helped me achieve my research goals in Prague. Particular thanks go to Helena Čapková and Jana Pavelková of the Hudební archiv Národního divadla for their warm-hearted generosity and helpfulness during my protracted sojourns in their midst, to PhDr. Vlasta Reittererová for welcoming me as a colleague in the field of Czech modernism, and to my friend and colleague Mgr. Aleš Opekar for his assistance at Český rozhlas. PhDr. Marie Dohalská-Zichová, granddaughter of the composer Otakar Zich, was also very helpful to me in my search for *Vina*. My wonderful conversations with all these scholars gave me some much-needed insight on the cultural climate of the historical period I chose to study. Special

thanks also to Barbara Eger of Universal Edition A.G., Vienna, who helped me in locating the unpublished bilingual edition of *Strašidlo v zámku*.

Later, certain individual scholars helped me to shape my project as it transformed from dissertation into book. Foremost among these is Geoffrey Chew, whose insight, encouragement, and support continue to be invaluable at every turn; it has been an honor to glean his expertise in the field of Czech fin-de-siècle modernism. PhDr. Bohumil Fořt, my friend, colleague, and former Czech teacher, has been a tremendous source of strength during this process, providing me with continuous language instruction, assistance with translations, and tireless reassurance. My editor, Ralph Locke, has also inspired me to continue this research despite all obstacles, and his energy and excitement have guided me toward the best possible expression of my ideas. During the copyediting process, Louise Goldberg and Martin Nedbal also contributed greatly to the final format of the book.

With regard to my musical examples, I acknowledge the following:

Novák KARLŠTEJN © Used with kind permission of European American Music Distributors LLC, U.S. and Canadian agent for Universal Edition A.G., Vienna.

Křička SPUK IM SCHLOSS, ODER BÖSE ZEITEN FÜR GESPENSTER © Used with kind permission of European American Music Distributors LLC, U.S. and Canadian agent for Universal Edition A.G., Vienna.

I acknowledge also Jan Andreska, heir of Alois Hába, for his permission to use excerpts from *Matka*, and Mgr. Jana Budíková, niece of Otakar Jeremiáš, for her permission to use excerpts from *Bratři Karamazovi*. All other excerpts by composers contained in this book—Otakar Ostrčil, Josef Suk, and Otakar Zich—are in the public domain according to the Czech Copyright Act.

Other friends and colleagues deserve mention for helping me along the way: Derek Katz, Judith Mabary, Alma Santosuosso, Susan Cook, Richard Taruskin, Jennifer Bain, Marcia Swanston, Aileen Laurin, and Andrew Sarty all contributed to my ability to create and complete this project, along with the faculty, staff, and students at the universities where I have taught. Special thanks go to my parents, Phil and Jean Locke, not only for their generosity but also for their faith in me as an individual; my father also helped as a proofreader at various stages of this research. I would like to acknowledge the members of both my family and my wife's family, the Jeffersons, whose encouragement enabled me to keep going. First among all these, however, I would like to thank my wife, Donna, for her unflagging love and belief in me throughout the entire project, as well as for her assistance during my research trips. None of this would have been possible without her, and it is to her that I dedicate this book.



# Notes to the Reader

Because this is a book full of names, terms, and historical data unfamiliar to most native English speakers, I present the following guides to the reader. In addition, there is a Personalia in appendix 1 (p. 339) and a chart of operatic premieres in appendix 2 (p. 349). While none of these purports to be exhaustive, it is hoped that they bridge the linguistic gap that might otherwise hinder an understanding of this rich history and repertoire.

## 1. Pronunciation of Key Names and Titles

Czech words are stressed, for the most part, on the first syllable. They also have certain elongated vowels (indicated by the acute accent, **á, é, í, ó, ú, ý**, as well as **ů** and **ou**) that can fall on either stressed or unstressed syllables; unaccented vowels are simply short in length. Beyond the issue of vowel length, most Czech vowels correspond to those of Italian, with the exception of the diphthong **ou** [oh-oo].

The Czech alphabet contains certain accented consonants: **š** [sh], **č** [ch], **ž** [zh], **ř** [rzh], **ť** [tyuh], **ď** [dyuh], **ň** [nyuh], each of which serves to soften the consonant in question. In addition, the symbol **ě** [yeh] softens the consonant immediately preceding it. Czech has one digraph, **ch**, pronounced as in the Scottish *loch*. All consonants are pronounced, no matter how clustered they appear. Most are roughly equivalent to Germanic norms, including the pronunciation of **j** as [y] and **c** as [ts]. **S** is never [z], and is never [š] before hard consonants, unless written as such. **Z** is never [tz].

The following list gives approximate pronunciations, according to North American English:

|                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Bratři Karamazovi</i> | [BRAT-rzhee KA-ra-ma-zo-vi] |
| <i>Legenda z Erinu</i>   | [LE-ghen-da ZEH-ri-noo]     |
| <i>Karlštejn</i>         | [KA-rl-shtayn]              |
| <i>Matka</i>             | [MAT-ka]                    |
| <i>Poupě</i>             | [POPE-yeh]                  |



|                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Preciézky</i>         | [PRETS-yehs-kee]            |
| <i>Strašidlo v zámku</i> | [STRA-shid-lo FZAHM-ku]     |
| <i>Vina</i>              | [VIH-na]                    |
| <i>Vojcek</i>            | [VOY-tsek]                  |
| <i>Zrání</i>             | [ZRAH-nyee]                 |
| Hostinský, Otakar        | [HOS-tyin-skee, OT-a-kar]   |
| Jeremiáš, Otakar         | [YEH-re-mee-ahsh, OT-a-kar] |
| Ježek, Jaroslav          | [YEH-zhek, YAR-o-slav]      |
| Kovařovic, Karel         | [KO-var-zho-vits, KA-rel]   |
| Krejčí, Iša              | [KRAY-chee, EE-sha]         |
| Křička, Jaroslav         | [KRZHICH-ka, YAR-o-slav]    |
| Nejedlý, Zdeněk          | [NAY-ed-lee, ZDEN-yek]      |
| Novák, Vítězslav         | [NO-vahk, VEE-tyes-slav]    |
| Očadlík, Mirko           | [OH-chad-leek, MEER-ko]     |
| Ostrčil, Otakar          | [OS-tr-chill, OT-a-kar]     |
| Vomáčka, Boleslav        | [VO-mah-chka, BO-le-slav]   |
| Vycpálek, Ladislav       | [VITS-pah-lek, LAD-yi-slav] |

## 2. Glossary of Institutional Names and Other Important Words

The two most important Czech nouns that recur in this book are **hudba** (music) and **divadlo** (theater); four adjectives, **český** (Czech), **hudební** (musical), **moderní** (modern), and **národní** (national) also appear throughout. Note that each of these may also be displayed with varied endings, such as **českých**, **hudebního**, **divadla**.

Journals are often called **listy** (pages) or **revue** [REH-vee].

Administrative bodies are often called **spolek**, **společnost**, or **družstvo**.

České filharmonické družstvo—Czech Philharmonic Association

Devětsil—"Nine Strengths," an avant-garde literary group, also called Poetists

Družstvo Národního divadla—National Theater Association

Hudební klub—Musical Club

Osvobozené divadlo—Liberated Theater

Podskalská filharmonie—Podskalí Philharmonic

Přítomnost—The Present (a new music society)

Spolek pro moderní hudbu—Society for New Music [Spolek]

Společnost Národního divadla—National Theater Company

Stavovské divadlo—Estates Theater/Deutsches Landestheater

Umělecká beseda—Artists' Union [UB]

Two words that I use throughout my analysis are **důslednost** (consequentiality) and **náladovost** (no precise translation: mood-orientation), derived from the aesthetics of Hostinský.

### 3. A Word About Musical Examples and Translations

In the captions for the musical examples, I indicate page and measure numbers (in most cases, from the published piano-vocal scores). Novák, *Karlštejn* (8/1–4) thus refers to mm. 1–4 on p. 8 of the Universal-Edition piano-vocal score of that opera, listed in the Bibliography. Exceptions are Suk's *Zrání*, which requires measure numbers only, and Zich's *Vina*, which is unpublished. *Vina*'s numbering scheme thus refers to (volume: p./mm.) of the manuscript vocal score listed in the Bibliography. Finally, the text accompanying Křička's *Strašidlo v zámku* appears in Czech, despite the fact that its vocal score was published in German (see discussion in chapter 10, n. 28); my source for the Czech text is an unpublished bilingual vocal score in the archives of Universal-Edition A.G. Wien (see Bibliography) and reflects the 1933 Estates Theater production discussed in this book. All English translations in this book are my own.

# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout all endnotes and bibliographic citations in the book. For the most part, they reflect those commonly used in Czech-language bibliographies and dictionaries, with the exceptions of those I have altered for greater specificity (e.g., *HR-S*, *S-HL*, and *S-HL (II)*). Note also that some of the journals changed names during the course of their publication; I have included these subsequent titles under the same abbreviation for the sake of simplicity and because these journals are always kept under the same call number in Prague libraries and elsewhere.

## *Publishers and Organizations*

ČRo—Český rozhlas, Praha (Czech Radio Prague)

HA-ND—Hudební archiv Národního divadla (Music Archive, National Theater)

HMUB—Hudební matice Umělecké besedy (Music Publishers of the Artists' Union)

ISCM—International Society for Contemporary Music

MŠANO—Ministerstvo školství a národní osvěty (Ministry of Education and National Culture)

SNKLHU—Státní Nakladatelství Krásné Literatury, Hudby a Umění

Svaz DDOČ—The Workers' Union of Theater Amateurs of Czechoslovakia

UB—Umělecká beseda (Artists' Union)

## *Journals and Newspapers*

A—*Der Auftakt*, 1920–38

ČH—*Česká hudba*, 1895–1939

ČK—*Česká kultura*, 1912–14

ČR—*Československá republika*, 1918–32

ČS—*České slovo*, 1909–43

D—*Dalibor*, 1879–1913, 1919–27

- HR*—*Hudební revue*, 1908–20  
*HRo*—*Hudební rozhledy* (Brno), 1924–28  
*HRy*—*Hudební rozhledy* (Postwar), 1948–  
*HR-S*—*Hudební revue-Smetana*, 1906–7  
*HVě*—*Hudební věstník*, 1908–27, 1934–41  
     *Věstník československých hudebníků*, 1928–33  
     *Věstník československých hudebníků z povolání*, 1934  
*K*—*Kláš*, 1930–34  
*LL*—*Lidové listy*, 1922–45  
*LN*—*Lidové noviny*, 1893–2000  
*LUK*—*Listy pro umění a kritiku*, 1933–37  
*MsD*—*Musikblätter der Sudetendeutschen*, 1936–38  
*ND*—*Národní a Stavovské divadlo*, 1923–30  
     *Národní divadlo*, 1930–43, 1946–62  
*NL*—*Národní listy*, 1861–1941  
*NO*—*Národní osvobození*, 1924–39, 1946–48  
*NP*—*Národní politika*, 1883–1945  
*NSv*—*Nová svoboda*, 1924–38  
*P*—*Přítomnost*, 1924–43  
*PP*—*Prager Presse*, 1921–38  
*PL*—*Právo lidu*, 1892–1999  
*R*—*Rytmus*, 1935–48  
*RA*—*Rozpravy Aventina*, 1925–30  
*RP*—*Rudé právo*, 1920–38  
*S-HL*—*Smetana-Hudební list*, 1910–27  
*S-HL (II)*—*Smetana-Hudební list*, 1936–38  
*T-LHM*—*Listy Hudební matice*, 1921–27  
     *Tempo-Listy Hudební matice*, 1927–35  
     *Tempo-List pro hudební kulturu*, 1935–38  
*TT*—“*Tam-Tam*” *Hudební leták*—*Gazette Musicale*, 1925–26  
*V*—*Venkov*, 1906–45  
*VPR*—*Vest Pocket Revue*, 1929–30  
*ZSVN*—*Zprávy Společnosti Vítězslava Nováka*, 1980–95



# *Timeline of Modern Czech History*

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 1620–1918    | Provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia within Austro-Hungarian Empire  |
| 1918–38      | First Czechoslovak Republic (with Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia) |
| 1938–39      | Second Czechoslovak Republic (Czecho-Slovakia, minus Sudetenland)      |
| 1939–45      | Nazi occupation (Reichsprotektorat Böhmen und Mähren, minus Slovakia)  |
| 1945–48      | Third Czechoslovak Republic (plus Sudetenland, minus Ruthenia)         |
| 1948–89      | Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (postwar communism)                    |
| 1989–93      | Fourth Czechoslovak Republic (after “Velvet Revolution”)               |
| 1993–present | Czech Republic (minus Slovakia, after “Velvet Divorce”)                |



## Chapter One

# *Introduction*

### *Nationalism, Modernism, and the Social Responsibility of Art in Prague*

Throughout the early twentieth century, the musical community of Prague was the site of intense artistic creativity and aesthetic debates that both reflected and helped shape the cultural life of Czechoslovakia at the time. As Europe entered the twentieth century, profound social changes affected the course of its history, in the realms of politics, culture, and both collective and personal identity. These changes were greatly influenced by ideologies, some held over from the nineteenth century, others transformed by the new era. In the artistic sphere, the new possibilities of cultural interaction forced a confrontation between traditional aesthetic views and the threat of cosmopolitanism. In the years between the turn of the century and the collapse of the First Czechoslovak Republic in 1938, the predominant issues that affected the discourse of music in Prague were nationalism, modernism, and the social responsibility of art.

After 298 years of somewhat parochial existence under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, citizens of the five provinces<sup>1</sup> that became an independent Czechoslovakia on October 28, 1918, experienced twenty years of the most idealistic and Western-oriented democracy in interwar Central Europe. Although not without serious internal problems, this oasis of free thought and cultural endeavor came to an end on September 30, 1938, with the Munich Accord, in which the powers of Europe signed over the country's border regions in order to appease Nazi Germany. Just five and a half months later, the Czechoslovak Republic ceased to exist when Hitler's armies occupied Bohemia and Moravia, leaving Slovakia as a puppet state. Like many national groups throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech, German, and Jewish populations of these provinces experienced far-reaching political shifts in the early twentieth century that affected their view of themselves as individuals, as members of an ethnic group, and as participants in a larger European community. These shifts were reflected in an



extraordinary flowering of artistic production in Prague and other centers, but nowhere more than in the musical community of the capital, which played a key role in the ongoing reformulation of Czech cultural identity. While Prague began the twentieth century as merely a provincial city within Austria-Hungary, after 1918 it was suddenly transformed into the capital of one of the most democratic states in Europe, where the interaction of its three resident ethnic groups placed it among the most cosmopolitan cities of its day.

## Scope of This Study

This book will present an overview of music history in Prague, with a particular concentration on composition and criticism in the years 1900–1938, and on the aesthetic and ideological debates that shaped these activities. The repertoire presented here, in order to demonstrate the importance of these debates in compositional practice, is either opera or other musical genres in which text plays a prominent role, since the theater and literature were also integral to the formation of Czech identity at this time. The following chapters alternate between a narrative history of the Prague musical community and a series of eight analyses that explore major representative operas, as well as one important programmatic orchestral work, Josef Suk's *Zrání*. The analyses are tied into the main narrative by means of the critical reception of each work, where the ideological theories were put most concretely into practice.

Although fundamentally interconnected with music making and culture in Central Europe in the early twentieth century, particularly with the Austro-German sphere, the generations of the Prague community examined in this study have nevertheless not received due scholarly attention until now. Indeed, the dearth of knowledge outside the Czech Lands regarding all but a few composers—Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, and Martinů—hinders an understanding of the Czech circle as a whole, and scholars have ignored the German-Bohemian contingent entirely.<sup>2</sup> An exploration of the activities of Prague musicians and their reactions to more general artistic developments sheds light on the larger picture of European modernism, as seen through the lens of the local. Heretofore the narrative of early twentieth-century music has prioritized solely those individuals whose music has retained wide exposure to the present day, thereby producing a highly selective and teleological view of this period. Since even “famous” composers lived and worked in an environment of their lesser-known peers, whose daily involvements had an impact on their own, traditional historical narratives render an inaccurate and dissatisfying recreation of European musical culture in the modernist era. In this way, the present text seeks to contribute to the retelling of music history in the early twentieth century, already under way since the mid-1990s through other detailed studies and reinterpretations, and in the large-scale rediscovery of a vast amount of repertoire.

What applies to the traditional narrative of European modernism also resonates within the microcosm of music history in the Czech Lands, where the highly idiosyncratic styles of Janáček and Martinů have received the lion's share of scholarly attention, particularly since 1989. While this phenomenon has produced excellent scholarship and has served to introduce some extraordinary repertoire to the musical world, there has been no English-language study of the Prague musical community to date. Since the Prague sphere was, for the Czechs in the early twentieth century, the dominant cultural milieu, against which figures like Janáček and Martinů consciously reacted (often voicing their positions in print), a study such as the present one can surely contribute to a greater understanding of these two figures. In light of the aforementioned scholarship, however, I have chosen not to concentrate heavily on either Janáček or Martinů, in part also because neither composer spent any significant portion of his creative career in Prague, preferring instead to avoid the maelstrom of professional and aesthetic intrigue continuously raging in its musical community. While Janáček and Martinů do make occasional appearances in the present narrative, I have limited these to points where their music or ideas had a specific impact on the debates in the city.

In terms of repertoire, this study concentrates primarily on the operas of early twentieth-century Prague composers, for the reason that the National Theater was the most hotly contested cultural space in the city, and that, through opera, Czech composers were expected to represent the larger collective identity. The eight operas I have chosen for musico-dramatic analysis were selected not only because of their compositional strengths, but also for their relative significance in the community, reflected particularly in the criticism of the time. Such is also the case with the ninth composition, Suk's tone poem *Zrání*, which is based on a significant work of literature and which found itself at the center of a fierce controversy in the early days of independence. As I attempt to show in the subsequent analyses, each of these eight compositions also presents a synthesis of the ideological debates of the time, thereby participating in the discourses of nationalism, modernism, and the social responsibility of art.

Alongside the creative efforts of Prague musicians lies the extraordinary growth of music criticism in the early twentieth century, both in terms of the city's specialized journals and the daily press. The highly charged debates among composers, critics, performers, and audiences regarding the conflicts between traditional and modernist aesthetics, and between national and cosmopolitan worldviews, offer a new window into our understanding of similar processes going on at the same time throughout European music centers. A significant portion of the following study involves the exploration of a series of important ideological polemics that helped shape the Prague music community, changing the way its members dealt with each other as Czechs and Germans in the city, as well as with the outside world. These "Affairs"—the "Dvořák Affair," the "Suk Affair," the "Wozzeck Affair," just to name a few—involved a great

amount of published writing of a frequently caustic nature, producing an environment that served to stifle creative activity as often as to encourage it. These crucial debates affected the musical contributions in a continuous manner, and even more tangibly, the cultural policies of institutions such as the Conservatory and National Theater. Music and culture in general were held in such high esteem in early twentieth-century Prague that not only did these debates spill over into the daily newspapers on a regular basis, involving nonmusicians in protests of various kinds, but in the most extreme cases they also became the subject of controversy in the Czechoslovak legislature. That these debates were taken up with such vehemence throughout these years and with such palpable impact on the compositions themselves reflects several important and unique characteristics of Czech social and cultural life. In this respect, as the narrative will show, music in Prague was possibly far more influential toward the construction of communal identity at this time than was the case in other European centers, including Paris and Berlin.

### Three Ideologies

As I shall trace over the following chapters, nationalism was one of the most contentious ideologies to influence the path of music making in Prague. Nationalist feelings were constantly shaped by the single-most divisive cultural issue of the region: the cohabitation of Czechs and German-Bohemians. The interaction between the two linguistic groups, while surprisingly minimal despite their close proximity, nevertheless shaped their attitudes toward themselves and each other, both in the waning years of the Habsburg Empire and during the First Republic. Czech nationalism, for instance, was defined precisely in relation to the German presence all around them, and quite often, modernity was perceived as a longed-for goal, the path to which was blocked by what many Czechs considered the repressive force of German art and culture. The Czechs' and Germans' willful ignorance of each other's musical activities, while offering an interesting statement in itself, inhibits the researcher's attempt to reconstruct the total picture of musical life in the city. Prague's ratio of population at this time—some 93 percent Czechs with a 7 percent German-speaking minority<sup>3</sup>—produced a situation where Czech musical activity virtually dwarfed the efforts of the German-Bohemians, whose legacy is all but inaccessible in the post-1945 archives. Although the majority of the Jewish community of Prague associated itself, particularly in the early years of the century, with the German cultural sphere instead of the Czechs, after 1918 (and especially after 1933) the tendency shifted dramatically, provoking many Jewish composers to form significant allegiances with their Czech colleagues.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in the present study I have chosen to concentrate mainly, but not exclusively, on discourses and compositions in the Czech community.

The second ideology, modernism, is crucial to an understanding of nationalism, in that modernist aesthetics of art were often seen as a key component of national identity, on the part of both Czechs and German-Bohemians. Although still strongly influenced by Herderian romantic nationalism, members of the Czech community also relished the opportunity to form cultural ties with countries other than Austria, thereby provoking a long-term struggle between nationalist and cosmopolitan/modernist aesthetics and values. Most artists and thinkers involved in the musical community saw artistic (and in particular musical) modernism as an integral part of Czech national tradition, within the context of which each new contribution had to be evaluated. Thus, even nineteenth-century figures such as Smetana were held by many Czech critics and composers to be “modern” long past the currency of their style in the rest of Europe. Somewhat paradoxically, many of the same individuals also saw modernism as a necessary phenomenon to be acquired in order to catch up with the rest of Europe, particularly after 1918; modernism, allegedly integral to Czech tradition, had to be maintained and/or regained, even by means of outside influences. For those opposed to radical change, modernism was viewed as an imported product having little to do with Czech national culture, and conversely, as proof of the moral superiority of Czech conservative values by comparison. The German-Bohemian community, on the other hand, had no such psychological dilemma as a group with regard to cultural interaction in Europe. As representatives of the ruling majority before 1918 they enjoyed fruitful exchanges with the rest of the German world, a situation that continued after Czechoslovak independence despite their sudden loss of power and privilege as a minority in the new state. With the political shift of 1918, the perception of Czech–German relations was reversed, as several Czech institutions perpetrated acts of vengeance on their German counterparts in the effort to reduce the size and importance of German cultural hegemony from the Austro-Hungarian era. Thereafter, the German-Bohemians were forced to find their own artistic voice in the face of Czech domination, and their increased participation in modernist musical activity eventually regained the respect of the Czech avant-garde in the 1930s.

A third ideology, the social responsibility of art, arose as a consequence of the two conflicting ideologies of nationalism and modernism. The debate over the promulgation of high art to a wider public had already been in motion since the late nineteenth century; moreover, for many commentators, it was the national and moral responsibility of modern music to encapsulate the entire Czech collective. On all sides of the ideological spectrum this rhetoric seemed to encapsulate the urgency of doing what was morally correct for Czech society, whether in terms of the preservation of tradition or specific artistic legacies, the assimilation of “non-Czech” influences as a source of cultural rejuvenation, or as in many cases, both of these arguments simultaneously. These ideas had a strong historical precedent. Not only had musicians been considered an integral part of the Cultural Revival in the late nineteenth century (specifically Smetana), but the aesthetic principles of the revivalists were often held to be modern in a way that

transcended temporal boundaries, often on the level of a moral creed.<sup>5</sup> In this manner, it was relatively common for new compositions to be considered “truly Czech” and “truly modern” at the same time, through the righteous adherence to a tradition whose modernity would never fade. The ongoing implementation of a “modern tradition” was thus a social necessity, bearing the responsibility of carrying the moral imperative of the Cultural Revival to future generations. As the twentieth century progressed, the ideology of social responsibility became increasingly attached to left-wing politics, reaching a peak with the largely socialist Prague avant-garde of the 1930s, whose politicization of art occasionally rivaled that of Weimar-era Berlin, albeit with strong nationalist overtones.

The interconnectedness of these general tendencies, however, does not indicate the degree to which the musical community of Prague was fraught with tension, caused by the debates discussed in the following chapters. While in theory the general goals of Czech nationalism, modernism, and the social responsibility of art may have been similar for most individuals, they often saw the specific roots of Czech tradition in differing places. As such, composers and critics located the main model for Czech composition variously in the music of Smetana, Dvořák, Fibich, the aesthetics of Hostinský, or even in universalized notions of what Beethoven or Wagner represented. These “legacies” prompted a variety of opinions as to which composers had the right and/or responsibility to represent modern Czech music to a national or even an international audience. Since these individual musicians were often affiliated with major cultural institutions in Prague, such as the Prague Conservatory, the National Theater, the Czech Philharmonic, and Prague University, these collectives came to represent factional voices in a very powerful way. Czech contemporary music making, be it composition, performance, or criticism, was therefore almost constantly under attack from one or more sides of the factional divide, since new music usually met with the charge of “nečeskost” (literally, “un-Czechness”) for representing a supposedly fraudulent vision of modern Czech music. That such a charge was not only artistically but also *morally* reprehensible demonstrates the degree to which art was thought to bear a responsibility toward Czech society. In no respect, then, could a composer hope to have a work critically accepted without being subjected to a thorough examination of its connection to a musical legacy, its situation within the complex of contemporary debates, and its merit with regard to representing the nation in a responsible way. Indeed, the constant contestation of culture and its symbols in the musical community was so much in the public sphere that it can be said to have formed a crucial part of Czech identity during these years.

### Czech Musical Identity and Its Parallels to Russia

Michael Beckerman has helped to define Czech musical identity as a porous concept, socially constructed and constantly being redefined in the context of

politics and social change.<sup>6</sup> While certain formal or even gestural similarities can be found across the range of music written by Czech composers, these instances can be explained by a system wherein artists consciously modeled their music on each other's work as a referential canon, a phenomenon also epitomized by the quotation of "nationalist" tunes and folk songs.<sup>7</sup> Particularly with regard to the history of Smetana reception, Beckerman found that all other ideological "messages" that claimed to be integral to Czech music and essentialized the music as an expression of the collective national spirit were imposed on the repertoire from without, either by the composers themselves or by subsequent writers on music. Such a formulation describes succinctly many of the aesthetic and ideological debates that shaped ideas of Czech musical identity, both in its crucial, formative stages and throughout the early twentieth century.

Many similarities exist between the history of music in the Czech Lands in the era of nation-building and that of other linguistic or ethnic groups in Central and Eastern Europe. There are, however, just as many crucial differences, encompassing social, cultural, and political factors that distinguish the community from Russia or Germany, to pick the neighboring nations to which Czechoslovakia has often been compared. Richard Taruskin's insightful study of the discourse of Russian musical nationalism in *Defining Russia Musically* is extraordinarily helpful in understanding the Czech context, revealing both similarities and differences.<sup>8</sup> The present study and Taruskin's are both based, in part, on contemporary scholarly views of nationalism as a social construct, generated by a middle-class intelligentsia that sought to represent a collective of its own selection and definition, reflecting the demands of a specific time and place. Taruskin describes the "mythos of authenticity and exclusion" surrounding the imaginary realm of Russian "national" music, created partly to assert an assumed moral authority, and partly to distract from any cultural shortcomings Russian musicians may have felt in comparison with Western Europe.<sup>9</sup> The same can be said for the musical ideologues of Prague, who were, as in Moscow and St. Petersburg, supported by a battery of like-minded journalists whose rhetoric helped to define and strengthen the terms of the discourse surrounding the concept of a modern "Czech" music. As was the case with Glinka, Smetana's followers very quickly converted the musical elements of the composer's style that were, by and large, a personal variation on current Central European models into an ahistorical symbol of ethnicity. The following chapters show that Smetana's compositions, particularly the operas, were frequently used as a yardstick by which "Czechness" could be measured. Although rival factions openly disputed the validity of this claim until the end of the nineteenth century, a discursive shift around 1900 is revealed by the growing use of Smetana's music as almost the sole norm or authority in judging both Czechness (i.e., similarity to Smetana) and difference.

Taruskin places a high value on the "myth of otherness" in the formation of the Russian nationalist ideology in music in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> His phrase

embodies the self-imposed romanticism and exoticism that for Russian artists and thinkers was bound up with the formation of national identity in the modern era. A similar myth of cultural difference existed among the critics of Prague in the ongoing exclusion of foreign composers (and those Czechs who were overly influenced by them) from their own, morally superior category. In contrast to the Easternness exploited by the Russian national school, however, the “otherness” of the Czechs never contained any sense of exoticism. Belonging as it did to a Western European monarchy for the first eighteen years of the century, and then representing an interwar democracy, Prague lay wholly within the cultural sphere of Central Europe, particularly because of the well-connected German-speaking segment of the city’s population. As a result, any post-1900 attempts to exploit a Czech folk character among Prague composers were half-hearted (in comparison to Russian counterparts), in that most composers actively took part in German- and French-influenced musical discourses for the majority of their careers.<sup>11</sup> Such a situation forced the journalistic rhetoric of Prague critics away from exoticist otherness, and led instead to a form of self-righteous conservatism, just at the moment when Czechoslovakia became an independent state in 1918. It seems that, precisely when Czech culture found itself on an equal political footing with its neighbors, certain of its representatives became somewhat embarrassed about their stylistic proximity to Western practices—in other words, that cultural differences were no longer as pronounced as they ought to have been.

As it was described in the critical rhetoric of the time, the sense of identity demonstrated by Czech composers leaned much more toward the collective than the individual, such that the purported goal of every artist was to speak for the community (or the nation) rather than just him/herself. The heavy importance placed on “collective” expression meant that virtually everyone was in danger of not meeting a set of ill-defined criteria, mostly based on the personal style of Smetana. Various Czech commentators’ exclusion of individual Czech composers from the definition of a national identity affected almost every artist mentioned in this study, including Dvořák, Fibich, Novák, Suk, Zich, Hába, Weinberger, Janáček, and Martinů, as well as a host of other personalities from every generation, including Smetana himself. Such a situation sought to negate the reality of a cluster of individuals linked by language, common heritage, or geography, each contributing according to his/her own personal experience and ability; instead, the prevailing system of aesthetic judgments favored an imagined collective identity, which, ironically, was often used to exclude just as many individuals as it included. With the possible exceptions of the 1890s and the early years of the 1930s avant-garde, subjectivism was seen as a distasteful aesthetic stance, morally opposed to the socially minded achievements of the Cultural Revival. For a composer to express him/herself just for the sheer joy of the musical content (art for its own sake or *l’art pour l’artismus*) was to ignore the Czech people and therefore to betray them, for if an artist were not linked with



a sense of immediacy to “the people,” he/she would be more likely to be susceptible to dangerous outside influences, and therefore prone to lead the nation astray. Similarly, a composer could not simply choose to follow a musical style from abroad without public repercussions. Behind the oft-stated charge of cosmopolitanism lay the fear that Czech musical culture was essentially no different from that of other European nations, springing as it did from predominantly Wagnerian, Lisztian, or Brahmsian sources, and only as far back as the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, it was often a matter of pointing a finger at one’s neighbors lest they point first, since everyone’s style was derived from somewhere else in recent memory—Czechness only ran so deep.

As with the Russians, various parameters were put forth as a means to exclude individuals from authentic Czechness in music, including economic success (Dvořák), formal training (all those at the Conservatory, most prominently Suk and Novák), lack of formal training (Zich), or concentration on more popular genres (Nedbal, Kovařovic). Perhaps the exclusionary tactics with the most serious ramifications were those based on religion, wherein the Jewishness of a composer such as Weinberger or Schulhoff might be perceived as Germanness (or simply non-Czechness); or class, such that a composer practicing outside of Prague, like Janáček, Zich, or Jeremiáš, might be considered second-rate, whereas in a socialist context those artists with pronounced urban or cosmopolitan characteristics could be criticized for their distance from “the people.”<sup>12</sup> Obsessed with the idea of collective, national musical identity, Czech commentators, rather paradoxically, constantly sought ways to divide the collective into those who belonged and those who did not.

This discussion is not to say that Czech composers never acted as individuals in such an environment. On the contrary, most creative artists, by and large, made stylistic choices independent of the critical discourse that raged in the music press. In many cases, too, certain composers’ works could influence contemporary thought about larger aesthetic issues, such as expressionism, neo-classicism, or popular culture. Most often, however, individual compositions contributed to the ongoing debate in such a way that the changes they introduced were so incremental as to be almost unnoticeable. While this tendency produced a smooth course of transition for the local music history, it also served to prolong the discussion of aesthetic issues that were long out of date, a factor that in turn slowed the progress of compositional change.

One further noteworthy similarity between Czech musical culture and Taruskin’s reading of Russian nationalist ideology is the debate over the predominance of either absolute or program musics; Czech post-Wagnerian critics (figures comparable to Stasov and the Russian nationalist composers) sided with the latter.<sup>13</sup> This debate shaped the history of music in Prague in fundamental ways in the nineteenth century, in that all other arguments, regarding national expression, larger aesthetic issues, or simply personal politics, had as their musical core this binary opposition. This musical struggle was manifested



in the arguments over the interpretation of Wagner during the Cultural Revival and subsequently over the constant reconfiguration of Smetana's oeuvre in the Czech musical community, both of which related directly to the larger attitude toward national identity and cultural interaction.

### Intercultural Relations and Music Inside and Outside the Czech Lands

Another key component in the formation of cultural identity in the Prague context was the problematic interaction between its linguistic groups, which gave the city an inherently multicultural character in the early twentieth century. The attitudes of Czechs and Germans toward each other influenced their perceptions of the outside musical world, including European modernism. As the domestic situation changed, therefore, so did the relation to the international one, fluctuating constantly between acceptance and rejection across the entire era.

Although much of the music making in the city was carried on with an attitude of willful ignorance on the part of Czechs and Germans toward each other's endeavors, with actual interaction kept to a minimum, their cohabitation influenced the sense of identity on both sides. Every event caused a reaction in the opposite quarter, provoking a reidentification of self, and of both domestic and foreign "others." Prior to 1914, during a period when the Austro-Hungarian regime rigorously maintained a system of societal norms, there existed a greater sense of cultural openness between the Czechs and Germans in Prague, particularly in the institutions where the linguistic factions were forced by necessity to cooperate (albeit on German terms). This situation, however, played out somewhat contrary to expectation in the general attitude toward the rest of Europe and in the interaction with foreign musicians and styles. In the Habsburg era, the Czech community was relatively open-minded toward fin-de-siècle European modernism in order to stave off the threat of enforced cultural isolation (efforts that can be read as an extension of political self-determination). Ironically, this interest in contemporary music outside of Bohemia most often focused on Austro-German composers such as Mahler or Strauss. Conversely, the German-Bohemian musical community, as a satellite of Vienna, never had to exert itself beyond the merely provincial status it enjoyed prior to Czechoslovak independence. This attitude resulted in a dearth of interest in new music (especially before the advent of Zemlinsky in 1911) and a prevailing conservatism that was only slowly overturned in the interwar era. Thus, the stylistic gulf, as well as the extreme nationalist tensions between the two linguistic camps, resulted in strong animosities during the war years, the outcome of which was felt throughout the years of the First Republic.

After 1918, the situation took an extreme about-face, particularly in terms of which camp was considered the bearer of cultural authority. For the first time in

their existence, the German-Bohemians began to worry about their survival amid relative isolation under the thumb of a Czech government. Their eagerness to make up for lost time in forging connections outside of Bohemia was demonstrated by the efforts of Erich Steinhard at *Der Auftakt*, a journal that became a lifeline to the rest of the Austro-German musical world after independence. For almost the first time, the Germans of Prague pursued an active interest in contemporary composition, perhaps as the fruit of activities long sustained by Zemlinsky. The self-determination of the Czechs, meanwhile, had an extremely negative effect on their German neighbors, and the ensuing process of purgation served to sever all ties in cultural life for a period of years: the fates of the German Conservatory professors and the Estates Theater administration (outlined in chapter 5) are testament to this almost violent urge for separation in Czech society. That the careers of prominent Czech musicians, too, particularly Suk, Nedbal, Šák, and Kàan z Albestù, were subjected to suspicions and false “charges,” shows the virulence of the anti-German feeling in the early years of the First Republic. Quickly, the two communities began to define themselves as morally victorious, unfairly punished, modern, true bearers of tradition, and the like.

After approximately two years of belligerent interaction, the Czech and German musical communities of Prague just as quickly began to ignore each other again, this time with a greater sense of purpose dictated by the politics of the time. No longer concerned with mere cultural survival, Czech musicians saw the lack of involvement in German-Bohemian musical life as a socially conscious duty, particularly as the latter had taken such a pronounced interest in the potentially dangerous modernist forces now coming into the country from abroad. The Germans, under Steinhard, Zemlinsky, and subsequently Finke, fought to maintain their position alongside the Czechs in the international cultural forum, such that, by the inauguration of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) in 1923, they demanded equal representation in the form of a German section of the Czechoslovak committee. Interestingly, it was these efforts, as well as Steinhard’s open policy of contribution at *Der Auftakt*, that gradually brought the two linguistic factions back into a sort of minimal contact in the late 1920s.

True interaction, however, would come only with the ascendancy of the younger interwar generation under the leadership of Hába (who had already begun to publish in *Der Auftakt* with greater acceptance than among the conservative Czech establishment). It was in the Hába circle that figures such as Schulhoff, Reiner, Ullmann, Ježek, Burian, and Krejčí could interact as equals, each contributing to the cause of avant-garde art. The situation was not to last, however, as both domestic and international politics forced a further bifurcation of Czech/German cultural life after 1933; the new music community, with its relative absence of “Aryan” Germans (excepting perhaps Finke), remained outwardly unaffected by this split before the end of the First Republic. All of their

cooperative efforts, however, could not prevent the decimation of their numbers after 1938. Nevertheless, the rapprochement between linguistic camps under the aegis of the avant-garde was not a chance happening, as the sense of cultural interaction both within and outside the national borders was strongly tied to the acceptance and/or rejection of European modernism and its perceived effect on the moral fiber of Czech society.

The interaction of the dominant Czech musical community with compositional circles from outside their borders in this period reveals a somewhat elusive relationship, but one that nevertheless helps to shape our understanding of the achievements described in this narrative, with all their relative strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, it is important to consider first and foremost that, despite the perceived cultural isolation of the Czechs—a phenomenon created largely by the political divisions of the mid- to late twentieth century, as well as the language barrier—the music of the fin-de-siècle and interwar periods in Prague was not written in isolation, but rather in full consciousness of the various trajectories of the early modernist era. Despite the efforts of critics to dissociate their notions of Czech musical identity from the rest of Europe, it is undeniable that composers in Prague actively contributed to a larger discourse of European compositional thought. It has already been stated that the late nineteenth-century standards of Czech “modern” music, established by the careers of Smetana, Dvořák, and Fibich, were built upon the largely Wagnerian, Lisztian, and Brahmsian stylistic vocabularies inherited from Central and Western Europe. While many Czech composers of the early twentieth century were affected directly by Smetana’s brand of Wagnerianism, the cosmopolitan aesthetic of the 1890s also served to introduce waves of influence from abroad, whose effects could be felt all the way to the 1930s. It was the generation of Novák, Suk, and Ostrčil—and no less the mature career of Janáček, also blossoming at this time—that introduced various elements of impressionism, expressionism, polytonality, and verismo opera to Prague audiences, often (although not always) through the admixture of folk elements. Even this reworking of folk musics in a high-art modernist framework seems to have more in common with contemporary efforts by Bartók and Szymanowski than the idealized, iconic folk references found in Smetana, for example, and the surrounding musical material presents an interesting reception of Strauss’s and Mahler’s fin-de-siècle scores. After 1918, with the pronounced shift away from Germanic influences of all kinds, the Czech community chose to emulate French culture throughout the arts; while poets imitated Apollinaire, composers also rushed to acquaint themselves with the latest developments from Paris. One such endeavor was the well-known occasion of the Czech Philharmonic’s presentation of Albert Roussel’s music, which intrigued the young Martinů and led him to study with Roussel and ultimately emigrate to the West. The Parisian connection also helped solidify interests in jazz, populism, and neoclassicisms of various kinds, while a strong connection to Busoni’s Berlin masterclass reinforced the trends of *Junge Klassizität* and

microtonality. Thus, even when, in a fit of exasperated conservatism, the composer Emil Axman issued the call to “Leave aside foreign tongues, speak your own!” and turn back to the traditions of Smetana, he did so in the effort to sift through the multitude of European modernist influences making their mark on the Prague of his day.<sup>14</sup>

\* \* \*

This book seeks to present an intricate web of individuals, ideologies, and works hitherto unknown outside of the Czech Lands. The result is a large-scale examination of the nature of Czech musical identity in this era, contributing to a broader understanding of modernism in the early twentieth century and its relationship to nationalism.

## Chapter Two

# *Smetana, Hostinský, and the Aesthetic Debates of the Nineteenth Century*

In order to gain a full understanding of music in Prague after 1900, it is necessary first to explore the aesthetics of music during the nineteenth-century Cultural Revival, and the roles of Smetana and Hostinský in it. In many surveys of music history, it is often assumed that music in the Czech Lands began with Smetana, the so-called “Founder/Father of Czech music,” or more specifically with his return to Prague in 1862 after several years abroad.<sup>1</sup> While this rhetoric certainly plays into nationalist narratives that have held sway since the late nineteenth century, it is impossible to deny the rapid development in Prague’s musical activity after 1860, a situation owing in part to Smetana’s participation. Smetana, of course, had been the product of several different precursors, including the influence of the New German School and an extended apprenticeship in Sweden as well as the substantial music education he received prior to his departure from Prague in 1856. Indeed, the dates of Smetana’s absence are more than a mere biographical detail: they fall during the years of the repressive Alexander Bach era that held sway throughout the Austrian Empire until 1860 (see discussion below). As such, Smetana’s years of exile, return, and subsequent accomplishments on native soil say as much about the artist as about his political and cultural milieu, since his mature career could have happened only after the post-Bach easing of restrictions. Significant in this regard are the new performing venues and cultural institutions—most prominently the Provisional Theater—that gave a sense of permanence to Czech musical endeavors. Most important for the present discussion, the so-called Cultural (or National) Revival, already in its third generation by 1860, could finally be expressed in open, rhetorical terms, amid a growing Czech-speaking and Czech-educated public. All of these components were necessary for the participation of composers and critics in the movement, since public performances, particularly

of dramatic music with Czech texts, demanded institutional support and provoked waves of commentary, especially at this early stage. Thus, while music had already had a substantial history in Prague prior to Smetana's return, the community quickly became an ideological hotbed, spawning polemic debates over the definition of "Czech music" within a few short years.

Granted, Smetana did bring a higher level of compositional professionalism to a city whose creative energies had dwindled well before the 1848 revolution, and Smetana's presence within the post-1860 debates contributed greatly to their prolongation. Nevertheless, these developments are also reflective of a growing trend throughout Europe: the politicization of art, particularly concerning those trends labeled "progressive." Smetana's music and that of all subsequent composers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Prague, as with most communities in Europe, arose in an atmosphere where greater and greater social implications were attached to the pieces themselves. Indeed, the narrative of music in Prague after Smetana can be read broadly as representative of the position of music in the late romantic era, a period when increasing numbers of artists were compelled to come to terms with modernism and its ideological bases. In order to gain a sense of the scope of change in this era, however, we must turn back to the years prior to 1860.

### Music in Prague before Smetana

While the political and cultural history of the Czech Lands is readily available to English readers in recent texts such as Derek Sayer's *The Coasts of Bohemia*, it is worthwhile to give a thumbnail sketch of the period after 1620 as it pertains to music history.<sup>2</sup> Prior to this date, the Czechs had enjoyed political independence under a Habsburg monarch, with an indigenous aristocracy and a sizable population of Czech Brethren, the local Protestant sect. Early in the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), however, at the battle of White Mountain, the Czechs lost their independence and became subsumed into Austria: many of the Czech Brethren, scholars and aristocrats, either converted to Catholicism or emigrated, some as far away as America. The aristocrats that remained were quickly Germanized, many settling permanently in Vienna. With the patronage system almost completely disabled, therefore, Czech musicians were suddenly at a loss at a time when increasing numbers were set to attain professional status.

Despite these hardships, the Czechs began to develop a thoroughly organized music education system, possibly as a remnant of the celebrated court of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, who had chosen Prague as his seat in the late Renaissance. By the mid-seventeenth century, as their language was gradually being forced out of schools and daily life, even the smallest Bohemian and Moravian towns began to produce performers and composers of the highest professional caliber. While aristocratic families such as the Rožmberks in

Southern Bohemia did much to foster the arts on a local scale, the sheer volume of musicians forced many to emigrate by the early eighteenth century. Indeed, it will be remembered that a large number of composer-performers of the so-called Mannheim School were first- or second-generation Czech émigrés, and that Gluck and other German-Bohemians had received their first music education in Bohemia: Burney's famous description of the province as the "Conservatory of Europe" was not without basis.<sup>3</sup> Such rhetoric was gladly appropriated by subsequent generations of romantic nationalists, including some who made the excessive claim that the Czech émigrés were solely responsible for the late-eighteenth century Classical Style. Still, it is undeniable that the contributions of Bohemian-trained musicians influenced certain soon-standard genres, particularly "reform" opera (Gluck), the woodwind concerto (Stamic family), the melodrama (Benda family), and somewhat later, the lyrical piano piece (Voříšek and Tomášek).

As tempting as it is to think of these émigrés as long-suffering artist-patriots, forced away from their homes and native language by the machinations of the Habsburg counterreformation, it must be remembered that the concept of collective or national identity was intrinsically different prior to the 1780s. Bohemia and Moravia had been provinces in a network of states within the Holy Roman Empire for several centuries, and the émigrés, tremendously successful in "foreign" courts, were merely working their way up the existing hierarchy of culture in Europe. Perhaps by virtue of availability, all Czech composers of the eighteenth century set German, Italian, or Latin texts exclusively, using themes from mythology and history in the stylization of authors such as Metastasio. Furthermore, the proud acceptance of such high-profile German composers in their midst as Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber points to a more porous sense of identity than the romantic nationalists would care to admit.<sup>4</sup>

With a German administration and aristocracy, it is natural that the rise of municipal theaters in Prague and Brno at the end of the eighteenth century should be a German-language phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> While the permanence of these cultural institutions can be read as a step toward the increased Germanization of Czech culture, it also provided a limited venue for Czech productions: initially in the form of spoken drama and Czech translations of German operatic repertoire, they came to fruition in the first original Czech opera, František Škroup's *Dráteník* (The Tinker) of 1826. John Tyrrell describes how these first modest productions, amounting to a mere two hours per week, sparked the aspirations for more substantial works and greater public representation.<sup>6</sup> Established in 1783, the so-called Estates Theater, along with the foundation of the Prague Conservatory in 1811, marked the beginnings of municipal music making in a sustained and organized capacity, although the latter institution merely granted official status to the music education system described above. Parallel to these artistic developments, the growth of a Czech-speaking middle class in the early nineteenth century ensured not only an audience for music at these institutions,

but just as important, a recurring crop of students and artists identifying themselves—and their music—as Czech.

The growth of a self-consciously Czech high-art culture after approximately 1800 was one of the results of the Cultural Revival. This oft-discussed phenomenon was a multigenerational nationalist project started by a few individual scholars and amounted to rediscovery (and reinvention) of the Czech language, followed by the creation of a system of arts and media around it, based on the romantic nationalism of J. G. von Herder. Herder's philosophy stressed the reawakening of a people (particularly the people of Central and Eastern Europe) through, among other things, the collection of folk poetry and music. These materials would assist in recreating the linguistic basis of a culture by means of its closest link to the soil—the peasants, a social echelon that had supposedly preserved the oldest cultural forms.<sup>7</sup> Such a project was particularly appropriate for the Czech cultural situation, since most educated citizens of Bohemia and Moravia before 1830 spoke German exclusively, regardless of their ethnic heritage, with Czech spoken only in small villages by peasants. Using Herder's model, Czech scholars such as Dobrovský, Jungmann, Havlíček-Borovský, and Palacký ushered in a cultural renaissance, inspiring generations of young authors and artists to write in their "mother tongue" (which most, including Smetana, had to learn as a foreign language).<sup>8</sup> As Czech-language schools gradually gained precedence in Bohemia and Moravia (a by-product of the Cultural Revival), increasingly larger social groups began to think of themselves as ethnically Czech, a phenomenon that can be seen in the official Austrian census, as well as in the rash of name changes in the latter half of the century.<sup>9</sup> The social stratum most affected by these changes was the Czech bourgeoisie (a class virtually created by the Revival), whose ascent was aided by a flowering of the arts, including literature, scholarship, journalism, painting, and, from the 1860s, musical composition.

One of the immediate aspirations for the revivalists was a form of cultural self-determination expressed in the permanence of institutions such as the Czech National Museum (founded 1818), the aforementioned Conservatory, and increasing demand for representation on the theatrical stage. This permanence was also reflected in the middle-class musical community, more of whose members were remaining in Prague; most prominently among them were the Estates Theater conductor Škroup and the chamber music composer Václav Tomášek, whose salon in the Hradčany district provided an important meeting place for Czechs and non-Czechs, including prominent visiting artists from abroad.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, these crucial, if modest, activities did not immediately flower into a large-scale production of Czech-language works: several of Škroup's later operas, as well as those of his successors, had German texts, as did the songs of Tomášek.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, one gets the sense that the fledgling community had gone as far as it reasonably could within Metternich-era Austria, with any further growth hindered by the aftermath of the failed 1848 revolution.



All branches of the Cultural Revival experienced a setback for the period 1848–60, the so-called Bach era, named for Franz Josef's repressive minister of the interior who instituted one of the most intolerant regimes in Austria's history. Designed to suppress nationalist aspirations among the Slavic and Hungarian provinces of the Empire, Alexander Bach's plan called for increased Germanization in cultural life, along with severe restrictions imposed by censors. For the musical community of Prague, struggling to achieve any sense of continuity, this period was disastrous: it put off plans for a Czech-language theater in the city and precipitated yet another wave of artistic emigration. While several budding composers for the theater were among those who departed (including František Skuherský and the by now elderly Škroup, who died in Holland), the most prominent among them was Bedřich Smetana, who left in 1856 for Göteborg, Sweden, after several unsuccessful years of running a piano school in Prague. Prior to his departure, Smetana was a modest composer of small piano pieces and had only attempted two works for large ensemble: it was in Sweden that he truly began his career as a composer and conductor of note, largely as a result of his assimilation of the Lisztian tone poem, and gradually, the Wagnerian music drama. It is the coincidence of art and politics, therefore, that enabled Smetana to return to Prague in 1862 with his modern compositional techniques, freshly bolstered by his increasing success in Göteborg, right at the point of the collapse of Bach's autocracy. Franz Josef's dismissal of Bach in the wake of the 1859 military defeats against Napoleon III at Magenta and Solferino ushered in a new era of cultural openness for nationalists throughout Austria, and it is precisely these events that enabled the Czech musical community finally to contribute to the Cultural Revival.

The decisive cultural shift in the musical community was twofold: the Emperor finally granted permission for long held plans to build a Czech theater; and in anticipation of the event, in February 1861, the Bohemian nobleman Count Harrach announced a competition for the composition of a new Czech national opera. Smetana's response to both projects, embodied by his return to Prague in 1862, has often been hailed as the birth of modern Czech music. While it is certainly true that a musician of his artistry and cosmopolitan experience could only benefit a musical community just now achieving permanent performance institutions, it should not be assumed that Smetana found himself before a blank slate. Indeed, as the composer's subsequent difficulties with that community attest, the Czechs had had plenty of time to formulate deep-seated opinions about music and collective representation, even in the absence of overt expressions of nationalism during the Bach era.

### Music in the Cultural Revival and the Role of Smetana

As with other branches of the arts and society, the Cultural Revival marks the main division point between Czechs and German-Bohemians in music history.

The Czech community used it as a tool with which to distance itself culturally from the perceived oppression of the Austrian regime, whose representatives they saw in their German-speaking colleagues around them. Such cultural separation was extremely difficult in a city filled with bilingual (or German-only) institutions such as the Estates Theater, the Conservatory, and Prague University. Each of these would split into parallel administrations by 1920, a development instigated by the opening of the Provisional Theater in 1862. German-Bohemian musicians, meanwhile, also found themselves in a new position: whereas, prior to 1860, they had enjoyed a fair amount of status in the multicultural Prague sphere, acting as a bridge between visiting foreigners such as Liszt, Schumann, and Berlioz and their less connected Czech colleagues, no longer were their endeavors appreciated. Indeed, in the late nineteenth century Prague became a decreasingly important center of German culture, a state reflected in the provincial level of musical activity there. Eventually, in the waning years of the Habsburg regime, this increased pressure on the social structure of the Czech Lands forced its German-speaking inhabitants to take a more active interest in music as an expression of local identity. Indeed, any interest in new local compositions was at a virtual standstill until Heinrich Teweles took over the directorship of the Deutsches Landestheater (previously called the Estates Theater) in 1910, at which point he hired Alexander Zemlinsky to help revive the musical atmosphere among Germans in the city.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the late nineteenth century, the Czech musical community met with almost no local resistance with regard to the expansion and promulgation of their cultural endeavors.

The opening of the Provisional Theater and Count Harrach's contiguous opera competition suddenly provided both venue and repertoire for a Czech-language genre that had so far not achieved any works of prominence. Such a decisive shift also guaranteed primacy for opera in Prague for both critics of the day and subsequent historians. The importance of the new genre was so great that performances were heralded as national events and the directorship of opera at the theater was expected to provide, if not secure, the future direction of Czech music. Small wonder that every Czech opera director until the Second World War was faulted for choices in repertoire (including their own compositions) by some portion of the fractured critical spectrum. Despite the nationalist illusion that Smetana's arrival, the opening of the theater, and the "birth" of modern Czech opera were essentially coextensive, such an opinionated, Wagnerian composer as Smetana could never have suited the tentative, parochial atmosphere in Prague during the first post-Bach years, at least not without substantial problems. And indeed, Smetana was refused the first opera director's position in 1862, and his turbulent eight years in that role (1866–74) set a pattern of belligerence between compositional leaders and critics in the city for several generations.

Nevertheless, Smetana's first two operas at the Provisional Theater, *Braniboři v Čechách* (The Brandenburgers in Bohemia, 1865) and *Prodaná nevěsta* (The

Bartered Bride, 1866) were extraordinarily successful, largely because their patriotism was obvious and their Wagnerian traits less so. These two works, along with the orchestral cycle *Má vlast* (My Country, 1874–79), solidified Smetana's reputation in the musical community of Prague. The common description of *Braniboři v Čechách* as the first modern Czech opera is true only if one associates it with the composer's Wagnerian operatic paradigm, fully adopted only with his third opera, *Dalibor*, a few years later. In fact, there were already several composers writing for the stage in Prague at the time, in various subgenres (including opera, operetta, Singspiel, and incidental music), though not always in Czech or based on "national" themes. It was Smetana's synthesis of compositional skill, large forms, subject matter from Czech history or folklore, and the latest German stylistic models that placed him in the best position to "create a national music": to this was added the rhetoric of self-promotion, where his own efforts became inseparable from the moral achievements of the Cultural Revival.<sup>13</sup> His main departure from the approach of his contemporaries was to avoid the direct quotation of folk sources in favor of an idealized recreation of them, a technique that could more easily blend with his prevailing Wagnerian compositional language. As such, the rejection of the naive, rudimentary "ethnography" found in the stage works of the time corresponded closely to Smetana's demand that a truly "national" music be up to date in its expressive means.

Although the sheer quality and popularity of *Braniboři v Čechách* and *Prodaná nevěsta* gained Smetana many admirers and supporters, his Wagnerian aesthetic stance and uncompromising attitude toward his peers' inadequacies became the basis of opposition against him. By the mid-1870s, because his stature in Czech cultural life far exceeded that of any other musician, the bitter controversy that shaped his late career deeply affected the entire Czech musical community. The main question became whether Wagnerian-influenced and/or program music could belong within Czech national music and whether Smetana could stand as its representative, both inside the (as yet imagined) nation and abroad. Fueled in equal part by the deep-seated conservatism of the Prague bourgeois stratum (which comprised the majority of the Czech artistic realm), this particular ideological conflict remained largely unresolved until more modern issues supplanted it with independence in 1918. Indeed, the success or failure of all Czech artists and their compositions during these generations can be understood as tangentially related to the Prague reception of Smetana in the 1870s.

The political life of Smetana's Prague reflected the sharp divisions in artistic circles; indeed, much of the factionalization was underscored by the bifurcation of the so-called Old Czech and Young Czech parties in 1874.<sup>14</sup> The Old Czechs, whose political policy was one of passive resistance to the Austrian regime in the form of a thirteen-year boycott of the Imperial Assembly, had a stranglehold on the cultural institutions of the city, the most important of which was the Provisional Theater. In this respect, Smetana's difficulties in maintaining his

position as opera director at the theater were a result of the administration's politics, and the ideological opposition to the stylistic choices in his compositions reiterated the conservative stance of the Old Czechs. His contemporary Wagnerian aesthetics found resonance in the liberal Young Czech party, as well as in the Umělecká beseda or Artists' Union (hereafter UB), founded in 1863 by a circle of open-minded intellectuals of all artistic disciplines. Initially an informal gathering place for creative artists to discuss aesthetic issues in the absence of politics and institutional administrations, the UB quickly formed three parallel divisions, for music, literature, and the plastic arts. Each division had its own president and secretary responsible for the maintenance of membership and the organization of events; in the music division these events included various concert and lecture series, and after 1871, a publishing house (Hudební matice Umělecká besedy or HMUB) with various affiliated journals. Despite its idealistic beginnings, the UB gradually came under Old Czech domination by the 1880s, which changed the group into an official bastion of the artistic establishment.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, when the young Antonín Dvořák began his ascent to international success in the mid-1870s, it was not simply as another composer alongside Smetana within the Prague musical community, succeeding solely on the merits of his own music. This latter aspect may be true beyond the Czech borders, but in the Prague context he was seen increasingly as an individual embraced by the politically conservative Old Czechs, likely chosen consciously as a rival to the senior composer. Furthermore, it was frequently implied that Brahms's support of Dvořák not only pertained to matters of musical style, but also Old Czech conservatism through their connections to Vienna. From this viewpoint, Dvořák's early career was based in a complex of cultural/political nuances that reveal the Old Czechs' relationship with Austrian cultural policy: while boycotting the Assembly, the party worked alongside German authorities at so-called utraquist institutions, a stance that the more openly confrontational Young Czechs (including Smetana) opposed.<sup>16</sup> Many commentators, including those in his own day, measured Dvořák's success alongside the solidification of Old Czech power in Prague cultural life. Conversely, the younger Zdeněk Fibich, who studied abroad and whose Wagnerian tendencies and affiliation with Smetana were evident from the beginning of his compositional career, faced a lifetime of ostracism from the musical establishment: the political connotations of such artistic choices often prevented his music even from being heard.

By the 1880s the complex political network within Prague music community included yet another significant factor: in 1881, after two decades of planning and public fundraising, the National Theater (Národní divadlo) was opened, an achievement that marks the zenith of the efforts of the Cultural Revival in music and drama.<sup>17</sup> Although the inaugural performance was reserved for Smetana's opera *Libuše* (which had been composed over a decade before and whose premiere had awaited this ceremonial occasion), the theater administration, controlled

by the Družstvo Národního divadla (National Theater Association), was Old Czech in orientation. As a result, the National Theater became a site for the contestation of differing representations of Czechness on the stage, including the “ownership” of Smetana in the decades after his death in 1884. While almost all of the composer’s eight operas were accepted into the repertoire (albeit in severely altered versions by V. J. Novotný), his radical Wagnerian ideology was not tolerated by the theater administration, which resulted in a toned-down body of work, normalized to coincide with the ideals of the establishment. On the other hand, this shift also corresponds to a gradual rapprochement with Wagner’s style (in however a conservative and diluted manner), as evidenced by the late operas of Dvořák and their popularity among the conservative elite. As we shall see, this confused state of affairs continued to exclude the more ardent followers of Smetana and Wagner, most prominently the aesthetician Hostinský, who was increasingly ostracized from the establishment, and Fibich, whose attempts at success at the National Theater were thwarted time and again. This ideological conflict would also form the basis of the debates of the coming century regarding nationalism and modernism in music, as well as the initial stages of the discourse around the social responsibility of art.

### Hostinský, Pivoda, and the Aesthetic Polemics of the Late Nineteenth Century

One of the most interesting figures of the so-called National Theater generation, Otakar Hostinský (1847–1910) also played a role that was perhaps the most difficult to define. His system of aesthetic paradigms, however, would pervade almost all of the ideological debates of the early twentieth century, whether or not subsequent artists and thinkers could trace their intellectual heritage directly to Hostinský himself. A fervent supporter of Smetana from the late 1860s, he had absorbed the doctrine of Wagner’s music dramas from the time of his studies in Munich.<sup>18</sup> Intimately associated with the UB in its early days, his work as a music critic represented some of the most informed contributions to the field at that time in Prague. Later in his career, his lectures on aesthetics and music history at Prague University formed an alternative to the officially recognized Conservatory curriculum, attracting a small group of dedicated students who went on to promulgate his theories in the succeeding decades. Hostinský’s career reflected the ideological shifts in the musical community after the opening of the National Theater, in that, despite being one of its greatest proponents, he was increasingly shut out of the establishment, even while his idol, Smetana, became its cultural property. By the time of the early years of the twentieth century and its first polemics, Hostinský had withdrawn from cultural life, his crucial involvement reduced to a series of shadowy references. Nevertheless, his philosophical discussions of the role of art in Czech

society and his contribution to the aesthetic polemics of his day left an indelible mark on its future debates.

As Miloš Jůzl relates, the musical life of Prague was already divided into opposing camps by 1869, for and against Smetana, who by this point had been director of opera at the Provisional Theater for three years.<sup>19</sup> The opposing camp, firmly situated in the sphere of Old Czech politics, was led by the influential voice teacher and critic František Pivoda (1824–93), although its ideological policy was dictated in many respects by the politician František Rieger. Pivoda, one of the founders of the UB and a contributor to many contemporary Prague journals including the Old-Czech *Pokrok* (Progress), initially supported Smetana's bid for the conductorship of the Provisional Theater, and fervently advocated *The Bartered Bride* as a model for Czech national opera. Had the composer continued in the folkloric style of his second opera, Pivoda would have been content, since he was formulating a theory regarding the essential Slavonic character of Czech music, an ideology based in the then-popular pan-Slavic movement (manifested politically in Rieger's concept of Austroslavism, largely ineffectual for the Czechs). For Pivoda, pan-Slavism in music was best embodied through operas that were essentially strings of folkloric quotations in a Singspiel setting, such as could be found in the handful of Czech operas attempted since Škroup. Smetana, meanwhile, rejected this model, theorizing instead that the role of national opera should be to idealize folksong through high art, rather than to quote them directly. Such idealism would free the composer to follow the most progressive musical trends in Europe without being stifled by local, parochial traditions. As a direct result of this aesthetic schism, Smetana and Pivoda publicly parted company in 1868 with the premiere of *Dalibor*, an opera that firmly tied the composer to Wagner's operatic aesthetics.

Pivoda's reaction in *Pokrok* was to charge the composer with attempting to Germanify Czech music, thereby threatening its moral ascendancy and endangering its very existence.<sup>20</sup> It was doubly insulting to the critic that such a Wagnerian musical language should be used to depict a heroic character from Czech legend who was renowned for his musical ability; Pivoda later suggested that Smetana's main character be renamed "Dalibor Wagner." In a review from 1870 he accused the composer of exercising a monopoly over Czech composition:

Against this [monopoly], the general opinion must be heard more distinctly; otherwise, we will not cultivate our own forms for long, and our opera will not surpass the stage of being hostess to a foreign entity, which might suddenly take over the role of landlord, even here, if it has not already happened thus.<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to note that even at this early stage, the German influences of one composition could be felt to threaten the entirety of what constituted "Czech music." Pivoda also claimed that Czech singers were unable to master the roles, a situation that shut them out of the monopoly and simultaneously