



Martinů

AND THE SYMPHONY

Michael Crump

**MARTINŮ
AND THE SYMPHONY**

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MICHAEL CRUMP

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*To my parents Vanth and Bill
with love and gratitude*

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PREFACE

The latter half of the twentieth century saw a remarkable reappraisal of the achievement of the Moravian composer Leoš Janáček. For many years, his music was considered provincial, limited in its appeal and unlikely to be appreciated outside his native land. These prejudices were not fully overturned until almost fifty years after his death in 1928: his stature as an artist of international significance has now been definitively and, one hopes, irrevocably established. There are promising signs that a similar rehabilitation is underway for the music of Bohuslav Martinů. In 1990 the centenary of his birth was widely celebrated. Eight years later, the Barbican Centre in London and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama jointly hosted a week-long celebration of his life and music under the banner 'Out of Exile'. The concerts were attended by large, enthusiastic audiences, comprising confirmed admirers as well as people new to Martinů's music. Many of the performances were broadcast by the BBC to a still wider audience.

For many years, Martinů's reputation struggled against a critical prejudice which these days is hard to fathom. It is illustrated by an early review of his *Fantaisies Symphoniques* from the American composer Henry Cowell, who heard elements of Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Falla, Satie, Milhaud, Honegger, Janáček and Shostakovich in the work, but credited Martinů with nothing of his own, feeling that 'his music has never arrived at a high point of originality or individuality'.¹ When Walter Weller conducted the Fourth Symphony at a Promenade concert in London in 1984, the review in *The Times* carried the jaded comment that 'perhaps Martinů had become too cosmopolitan to be all together distinctive'.² This perception has changed markedly since the centenary celebrations and Martinů is now rightly judged one of the most individual musical personalities of the twentieth century. Yet there is still a dearth of literature, especially in English, which investigates the components of his unique style. The most valuable appraisal appeared in the seminal work of the Belgian musicologist Harry Halbreich, first published in 1968 and revised in 2006, an indispensable study which has sadly never been made

¹ 'Current Chronicle, New York', *Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, 1955, p. 515.

² Noël Goodwin, 7 September 1984, p. 9.



Martinu in the garden of the Four Chimneys Estate, Ridgefield, Connecticut, where he wrote the Third Symphony in May and June 1944

available in English.³ Its main purpose was to catalogue and establish the chronology of Martinů's output, assigning an individual number to each piece. Halbreich's numbers have since become standard references – the number H117, for instance, denotes the First String Quartet. Within such a compendious undertaking, limited space was available for a discussion of the composer's style, yet Halbreich's brief analysis brilliantly illuminated important facets of Martinů's musical language for the first time. The present book owes a large debt to Halbreich's pioneering work, and is an attempt to demonstrate the main components of Martinů's style, using his six Symphonies as the focus of the enquiry. These works are his most widely known, a distillation of his mature musical personality. A deeper understanding of the Symphonies forms an excellent base for the exploration of his extensive, wide-ranging and stimulating output.

In writing the book, I have tried to keep in mind two groups of readers – those unacquainted with Martinů's eventful biography, and those who do not have easy access to his scores. The biographical element is woven throughout, beginning with three chapters tracing his career as far as his departure for America, the land where all six of his Symphonies were conceived. They also look at the works for large orchestra which precede the Symphonies – many of which have never received serious attention – examining them for traces of the symphonist to come. Chapters IV–VI form a kind of 'prelude' to the individual symphonic analyses, looking at three aspects of Martinů's style in detail. I have separated these stylistic observations since I felt that they would merely disrupt the flow of the analyses (chapters VII–XI and XIII) if included there. Chapter XII is an interlude giving details of the orchestral works composed between the Symphonies, and the book concludes with an overview of the orchestral works of Martinů's last years.

I make no apologies for the 'point-to-point' style of the chapters on each Symphony. I feel this approach best ensures that all readers can match my remarks to the relevant passage of music, whether they are using a score or CD, or simply relying on memory. The copious musical examples assist in this process but also make thematic derivations much clearer than any amount of description. For the benefit of readers who do have scores, rehearsal marks are clearly shown in the examples wherever possible. Elsewhere, score references are provided in footnotes. A certain ambiguity is inherent in references which I would like to clear up here. In Ex. 11 (a) for instance,⁴ the phrase 'one

³ *Bohuslav Martinů: Werkverzeichnis und Biografie*, Schott, Mainz, 2006.

⁴ Cf. chapter II, p. 57.

bar after figure 29' refers to the second bar of the example, not to the first. The first bar is referred to merely as 'figure 29'.⁵

I wish to conclude by expressing my thanks to all those people who have generously assisted me in the preparation of this book. I owe a special debt to Irene Mairis: without her kind help I would have been unable to study music at university. Professor Jan Smaczny guided my initial studies in Martinů; his insights and wise suggestions remain a powerful influence upon this book. I have had much help and support from the staff at the Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague, in particular the director Aleš Březina, who encouraged this project in the first instance, and has lent me his invaluable advice and assistance ever since. I am also grateful to him for his exceptional instinct and insight in helping to reconstruct the 'lost' bars from the Scherzo of the Second Symphony. My researches on Martinů's earliest orchestral compositions were made all the more pleasant by the help and encouragement of staff at the Bohuslav Martinů Center in Polička, especially Lucie Jirglová. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Günter Thiele for his exceptionally valuable opinions and reflections as the work was in progress. Martin Anderson, my editor and publisher, carried out a painstaking and thorough reading of the text, making innumerable useful suggestions and curbing my tendency to impossibly long sentences. Guy Rickards' proof-reading snared a good number of glitches and infelicities. I am doubly indebted to The Dvořák Society of Great Britain: this book came about as a result of a Society visit to the Martinů Institute in Prague in 1999, and a grant generously offered by the Society has now helped meet the production costs of its publication. The Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague provided support to the same end, as did two personal contributions, from John Babb and Richard Hallas; to it, and them, I offer my gratitude. I would like to acknowledge the encouragement of relatives, friends and colleagues throughout the writing of the book. The flaws that remain are all my own work. However serious they may be, I hope to have provided some encouragement for the continued study and enjoyment of Bohuslav Martinů's wonderful legacy.

Michael Crump
July 2009

⁵ A different strategy is necessary for the Fifth Symphony: cf. note 11 on p. 322.

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I

The Early Years

At the beginning of 1942, in an unfamiliar country far from the land of his birth, Bohuslav Martinů accepted a commission from the Russian emigré conductor Serge Koussevitzky, who had for eighteen years been at the helm of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Koussevitzky requested a work for large orchestra, to be dedicated to the memory of his wife, Natalie. Martinů, then aged 52, had been living in the United States for a little less than a year, having been forced to flee occupied France. He was still finding it difficult to adjust to his new surroundings and the different pace of life in New York. By habit an industrious and fluent composer, he found that the sources of his creativity had dried up temporarily upon relocation to the New World. Work on his compositions had become arduous and, as if to make life more difficult for himself, he chose to fulfil the commission with a Symphony – a genre which he had never wholeheartedly attempted. Indeed, it had been many years since he had written anything at all for full orchestra. Fortunately, many of the techniques he had adopted during his long and varied career proved well suited to the writing of a symphony and the work was highly successful: so successful, in fact, that he wrote four more in as many years, completing the cycle with a sixth in 1953.

A wide stylistic gulf seems to divide his earliest orchestral compositions from the Symphonies and yet many of them contain pointers to the distinctive symphonic style which he later evolved. They form a rewarding, though neglected, area of study. I will deal with each of them as it arises during the following short account of Martinů's life up to his departure for Paris in 1923.

Martinů was born on 8 December 1890, in the little market town of Polička, situated in the Czech highlands on the border between Bohemia and Moravia. A visit to his birthplace is an unforgettable experience, since it is surely the most extraordinary of any composer. He was not born into a wealthy family: his father, Ferdinand, was a cobbler, who earned some extra money by acting as keeper of the church tower. (The Church of St James dominates the town to this day). In addition to winding the clock and generally maintaining the

tower, the keeper had to watch for the outbreak of fires in the town. Twice in its history, Polička had suffered destruction by fire, and so vigilance had to be kept literally ‘round the clock’. Ferdinand Martinů and his wife Karolina took turns to cover the hours of day and night. If they spotted a fire, they were to sound the alarm bell and point in the appropriate direction. In order to accomplish these onerous and not especially well-paid duties, the Martinů family moved to a single-room flat above the bell tower, with commanding views over the town and the surrounding countryside. The way up to the flat is somewhat hazardous, beginning with wide stone steps but yielding to narrow wooden boards as the head-room becomes more limited. The steps lead past a winch for hoisting water and provisions from the foot of the tower, and an imposing set of five bells. The entrance to the flat is by way of the parapet which runs around the top of the tower. The flat itself is now divided from a small antechamber by a wrought iron grill, through which several reminders of the family’s life are visible: the cobbler’s tools, the furniture and young Bohuslav’s rocking horse. It is tiny – no bigger than an average bed-sit – and yet a family of five lived in this confined space¹ and even took in a lodger. Karel Stodola was an older business-partner of Ferdinand Martinů, who came to the tower in 1893 and stayed with the family until they moved to a more conventional dwelling in 1902. He was a married man, but relations with his wife were poor, and he tended to sleep in a space behind the workings of the clock. Stodola was the first person to foster Bohuslav’s interest in music. He was a man versed in folk-song and the repertoire which he brought with him made a deep impression on Martinů, eventually forming an integral part of his mature compositional style.

Bohuslav’s formal musical education began with violin lessons from a local teacher, Josef Černovský. He started at the age of seven and made rapid progress. By August 1905, he was ready for his first public performance as part of a concert given at the nearby village of Borová. By then, the family had moved to larger accommodation in Polička’s main square. Martinů’s stay of over eleven years in the tower was to be his longest uninterrupted residence in any one dwelling.² As he grew older, his existence became increasingly nomadic, but memories of the tower always stayed with him. He later claimed that his early experiences there influenced his artistic development, yet it

¹ Martinů had an older sister, Marie, and a brother, František, who lived with the family only during the school holidays.

² It is rivalled only by his stay in a flat on 58th Street in New York from 1942 to 1953. Even so, Martinů tended to spend the summer elsewhere, allowing the apartment to be occupied by others, among them the American composer David Diamond and the Czech conductor Rafael Kubelík.

seems unlikely that he actually wrote anything in the tower itself. His first composition was a string quartet entitled *Tři jezdci* ('The Three Riders'), from c. 1902, based on a ballad by Vrchlický. *The Three Riders* – H1 in Halbreich's catalogue, of course – is surprisingly extended, lasting some twelve minutes. Although the work is performable, and has even been recorded, the manuscript shows how much Martinů still had to learn – he had not yet mastered all the clefs.

This quartet is the only piece which survives from Martinů's early life in Polička. A gap of four years separates it from its successor, a short piece for flute and string orchestra entitled *Posvícení* ('Village Fair'). His circumstances had changed in the meantime: it had become clear to the townsfolk of Polička that something should be done to allow him to pursue his studies further, since his own family could not afford to send him to the Prague Conservatoire. An appeal was therefore launched by a local newspaper, raising sufficient funds for him to begin his studies there in 1906. It was naturally felt that a glittering career as a violin virtuoso awaited him – but his enquiring mind and growing interest in composition soon led him to neglect his violin studies. His failure to maintain the required standards resulted in a transfer to the School of Organ and Composition in 1909. Here too, he seemed unable to apply himself and was eventually dismissed from the Conservatoire on 4 June 1910. The reason for his dismissal was famously given as 'incorrigible negligence', but to accept it at face value would be to misjudge him. His mind teemed with ideas – he was a voracious reader and an avid theatre-goer. The narrow discipline of Conservatoire life was inimical to him: a rigid adherence to its prescribed routines would have deprived him of much which Prague had to offer.

Halbreich's catalogue gives ample evidence for Martinů's re-orientation towards composition in his last year at the Conservatoire. Only four works are known to date from before this time, but no fewer than 25 survive from 1910. Twelve of them come from the months before his dismissal. In April he made his first attempt to write a work for large orchestra – *Dělníci moře* ('The Toilers of the Sea', H11). This piece did not progress beyond a sketch, but in seeking inspiration from an extramusical source – a novel by Victor Hugo, set partly in the Channel Islands – he set a precedent for the fully realised works which were soon to follow. In spite of his academic failure, Martinů stayed on in Prague, thanks to modest financial support from his parents, supplemented from 1913 onwards by occasional work in the second-violin section of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. His departure from the Conservatoire seemed to lend wings to his compositional endeavours. He set to work almost at once on his most

ambitious project to date: a symphonic poem based upon Maurice Maeterlinck's *La mort de Tintagiles*. The fate of this work is a sad one: it has never been published or recorded. In fact, as far as I am aware, it has never even been performed. Unfortunately, the situation is similar for many of Martinů's early orchestral works. The watershed is his breakthrough composition *Half-Time*, written in 1924. From that point onwards, all of the works have been recorded, though scores of them are not always generally available. Before *Half-Time*, next to nothing has ever been accessible to the general public. Nonetheless, the eight completed and surviving works from this period are important documents in Martinů's development, and contain some attractive music to boot. For those reasons, I hope that the reader will tolerate some description of works unlikely to be seen in print or heard in performance, at least in the immediate future.

***Smrt Tintagilova* ('The Death of Tintagiles'), H15**

In 1894, the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck wrote three short plays for performance by marionettes. *The Death of Tintagiles* is the last of these plays and had inspired music long before Martinů took an interest in it. As early as 1898, it was used as the basis of a symphonic poem, with solo viola d'amore, by the German composer Charles Martin Loeffler, then resident in America; Vaughan Williams also wrote incidental music for the play, a little after Martinů's involvement with it, in 1913. The setting for puppets may make one suppose that the play is trivial, despite its title, but its tone is gloomy, even harrowing. The child Tintagiles is summoned to a dark castle by the queen. Although she is rarely seen by anyone, her power is enormous and her granddaughters – Tintagiles' two sisters – live in constant fear of her. From the moment they receive him, they are agitated lest Tintagiles fall into the queen's power. It is subtly suggested that he has been summoned to the castle as some form of sacrifice. The sisters guard him in their chamber, but when sleep overtakes them he is stolen away. The door to the chamber is locked. One of the sisters falls in a swoon: all the other can do is beat upon the door in desperate entreaty as she hears the last moments of the child's life taking place on the other side. Martinů's response to the drama is an ambitious symphonic poem occupying 87 pages of manuscript score. He evidently felt at the time that this work was his first important statement as a composer – the front page proudly declares it to be his 'Op. 1'. Nonetheless, it was written quickly – the manuscript is dated 8–21 June 1910.

It is often thought that the earliest phase of Martinů's development was Impressionist; in fact, the virtuosic orchestration and tortuous

chromatic harmonies of this first orchestral endeavour betray the influence of Richard Strauss. Martinů saw a number of Strauss operas in Prague. The influence continued through the First World War, when he copied out the score of the ballet *Die Josephslegende*, and it persisted fitfully for some years after. The atmosphere at the start of *Tintagiles* is sombre and funereal, with a doleful C minor theme in the depths of the orchestra (Ex. 1).

Ex. 1

B. Cl., Bns., Vc., D.B.



The ten disparate sections of the piece embrace a wide variety of textures and tempi, although all are unified by varied appearances of Ex. 1. Martinů has fashioned this theme carefully, so that it is capable of handling such a responsibility. It splits quite readily into two overlapping ideas, shown as (x) and (y) in Ex. 1, which can be isolated and developed independently. At a relatively early stage, the theme is pruned back to its first two bars, and the intervals of (x) are treated with considerable freedom. Sometimes the first interval is the larger, sometimes the second, and sometimes they are equal. The characteristic dotted rhythm preserves the identity unmistakably throughout these transformations. Elsewhere, Martinů retains the intervals of Ex. 1(x), but varies the rhythm by squeezing the theme into bars of three beats. His willingness to exploit the shape and rhythm of a theme separately would bear glorious fruit over thirty years later in the first movement of the Fourth Symphony.

Meanwhile, (y) also gives rise to a related network of ideas. At various stages, it takes on a dotted rhythm and is transformed into a brass fanfare. But it has a gentler side, too: after a violent outburst early in the piece, a calmer episode divides the strings into no fewer than 22 different parts, usually entering three at a time with a relaxed version of (y). Gradually, they build up a gleaming chord of E major which lasts for thirteen bars. The harp fills out the texture with a cascade of *pianissimo* arpeggios, and the cor anglais delivers a radiant version of Ex. 1. This passage demonstrates the considerable overlap which exists between the late Romantic and Impressionist styles. Christopher Palmer³ has convincingly traced the antecedents

³ *Impressionism in Music*, Hutchinson, London, 1973, p. 94.

of Impressionism back to Wagner – an idol of the young Debussy, it may be remembered. Palmer cites the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, the ‘Rainbow Bridge’ from the same opera and the ‘Forest Murmurs’ scene from Act Two of *Siegfried* as examples of Wagner at his most Impressionist. All the later trappings of the style are indeed present and correct – the shimmering string textures, washes of harp sound, imitations of nature, chords with added sixths and ninths. The passage in *Tintagiles* is similar to many which Martinů wrote long after his Late Romantic phase had yielded to the influence of Impressionism.

There are many effective instrumental touches in *Tintagiles* as well as several anticipations of Martinů’s mature orchestral style. The cor anglais, for instance, remained a favourite solo instrument throughout his career. An early variation of Ex. 1 is presented by solo viola doubled by clarinets – a frequent combination in the neo-Impressionist works of the 1950s. The fifth section starts with an intriguing episode marked *fantastico*. The words ‘fantasy’ and ‘fantastic’ were to become watchwords for Martinů in the last phase of his career and this brief passage foreshadows the sudden changes of texture and harmony which characterised that phase. The orchestra divides into two opposing camps: half the upper strings (both bowed and plucked) with harp and high flutes on the first half of each bar, the remaining strings with brass and lower woodwind on the second. The harmonies alter with each change of orchestration. For two bars, an augmented triad on C alternates with E flat minor. Then an augmented triad on F alternates with the same E flat minor. Even at this early stage in his career, Martinů’s ear for colourful timbral and harmonic combinations was well developed.

Yet not everything in *Tintagiles* is a success. Most of the slower, more reflective music is admirable, but when Martinů wants to write a dramatic *Allegro*, his enthusiasm sometimes gets the better of him. Parts of the score abound with directions such as *feroce*, *furioso*, *con tutta la forza* – so untypical of the mature composer – as he strives for effect. Some of his more ambitious writing would be difficult to bring off in performance. The most notable example comes in a stormy central *Allegro* which at first sight looks like a *fugato* but is in fact anything but. It begins in the double-basses which, utterly unaided, have to struggle through five bars of semiquavers – with a quintuplet thrown in for good measure – starting at the bottom of their range. Even with a crack double-bass section one could hope for little better than muddy confusion at this point. One by one, the other strings enter with a ‘subject’, the start of which gradually evolves into the first bar of Ex. 1. After this first bar, each instrument duplicates the existing parts, until the wind and strings are engaged in a torrent of semiquavers,

and later sextuplet semiquavers, in octaves. It seems unlikely that this passage would prove very effective in performance.

The overall construction of the piece also leaves something to be desired. The different sections are rather too clumsily delineated: each ends with an extended chord, pedal note or timpani roll, sometimes with activity above but more often lulling the piece to stillness. As a result, it runs aground too often, especially near the start, where the sections are relatively short. I find it intriguing nonetheless, since it points to Martinů's future more clearly than has usually been realised. Not for many years would he write another orchestral piece which so valiantly attempts to exploit the full potential of its opening theme. *Tintagiles* has a healthy measure of discipline, not always apparent in his early compositions. Most remarkably of all, it contains a number of passages which foreshadow his mature harmonic idiom – but I shall reserve my remarks on this subject until chapter V.⁴

***Anděl smrti* ('The Angel of Death'), H17**

Emboldened by his experience with *Tintagiles*, Martinů soon began work on a second, even more ambitious, orchestral piece called *The Angel of Death* (H17). Based on an 1898 novel by the Polish writer Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, it runs to 109 pages and was again written at high speed. The manuscript is dated 6–13 July 1910 and appears to have been written in Polička. At the head of the score, Martinů writes the following synopsis:

The beginning of the composition up to page 19 represents the meeting of two friends, Rdzawicz and Tęźel. Then Rdzawicz reads a letter from his betrothed, in which she breaks off their engagement. There follows a catastrophe and the desire for revenge grows inside Rdzawicz. In his mind, thoughts take shape concerning his greatest work, his wretched life and his revenge. At the end of the composition Rdzawicz takes his chisel for the first time with a firm hand and carves himself a modest sarcophagus, a coffin for the happiness of his entire life.

Perhaps this choice of material was not the wisest for Martinů at a time when he was apparently suffering the pangs of unrequited love. He appears to have identified too closely with the hero of the novel, sacrificing the objectivity and discipline which dignified the best parts of *Tintagiles*. At the start there is little warning of the exaggeration to come – a *scherzando* oboe theme (Ex. 2) is accompanied only by a *pizzicato* chord of G minor every four bars. Martinů's first biographer, the diplomat Miloš Šafránek, detected the influence of Dvořák in

⁴ Cf. pp. 146–47, below.

Ex. 2



this theme.⁵ Ex. 2(y) is indeed reminiscent of the Slavonic Dance in C minor, Op. 45, No. 7, as Šafránek claimed, but the bouncing fifths of Ex. 2(x) echo the central section of a later dance, Op. 72, No. 3. For a while, Martinů's compositional method follows *Tintagiles* quite closely. In both pieces, the opening theme has two distinctive elements, which may be developed together or separately, and is treated resourcefully. *The Angel of Death* is likewise divided into clearly defined sections. The first three, representing the meeting of the friends, the reading of the letter and the resultant catastrophe, all fade out in a solo timpani roll. One would expect the analogy with *Tintagiles* to be completed by the varied appearance of Ex. 2 in each section.

That expectation is denied. In fact, after the first section, Ex. 2 disappears altogether. Perhaps Martinů felt that this theme represented life before the fateful letter and therefore had no place in the rest of the work. This decision is indicative of his attitude in *The Angel of Death*, where he seems less interested in the symphonic potential of his material and much more intent on portraying events as graphically as possible. As it happens, each section of *The Angel of Death* does feature some recurring material – a descending chromatic scale in dotted-quaver rhythm which first appeared in the opening section, at one point replacing the third and fourth bars of Ex. 2. Martinů had already used the same figure in *Tintagiles* but wisely restricted its activity. Its importance throughout *The Angel of Death* ruins the work, in my opinion, and makes it far less interesting than its predecessor. The chromatic scale is inherently inflexible: it imposes its intense and claustrophobic character on every section. Without a distinctive theme to manipulate, Martinů is completely stuck when he has to make a grand or dramatic gesture. As a result, he labours for page after page, churning the orchestra up into ever more grandiose whirls of chromatic sound. The extreme markings already noted in *Tintagiles* are even more constantly applied here, and the work ends with a full orchestral chord marked *ffff* – one of very few occasions where Martinů used such a dynamic. Fortunately, there is some respite. The initial catastrophe is followed by a period of more

⁵ Bohuslav Martinů – *His Life and Works*, Allan Wingate, London, 1962, p. 53.

gentle reflection for solo cor anglais with harp accompaniment. The distinctive profile of this new theme makes possible some unforced but effective development. It returns in modified guise towards the end of the composition, to be followed by a passage of more literal repetition. The last 28 bars of the initial catastrophe reappear, with only the instrumental detail altered. Whereas the original passage faded away on a timpani roll, its repetition leads on, through 23 bars of fresh material, to the towering conclusion. Martinů cannot resist the clichéd gesture of an up-beat harp *glissando* before the last three titanic chords. The gestures and posturing may be unexpected, but the incorporation of repetition will be familiar to anyone who knows the Martinů Symphonies. *The Angel of Death* sees the *début* of this technique, which he used only rarely in his early orchestral works, but which became a standard practice after his move to Paris in 1923.

The Angel of Death, although it has never been performed, has gained the reputation of being Martinů's most wildly extravagant and impractical score. Unfortunately, the exaggeration to which the work is prone has occasionally rubbed off on its detractors, as can be seen from this description by Brian Large:⁶

The musical expression is exaggerated and overloaded, the instrumentation clumsy and sometimes unplayable. [...] Martinů's manuscript is well salted with instructions, though from time to time these suffer from an excess of enthusiasm. (Within the space of a few bars, the orchestra is asked to play *pppp*, *crescendo furioso*, *feroce con fuoco*, *ffff* and then *appassionato religioso*.)

The example to which Large refers in his parentheses is entirely spurious – even this composition is not as crazy as he implies. I also have my doubts whether the work is unplayable, as Large and almost every other commentator has claimed. The most demanding parts are those for the strings, but as a highly competent violinist himself, Martinů is unlikely to have written beyond their capacity. The main difficulty of the piece, as with *Tintagiles*, would lie with the co-ordination of very exacting passages for the strings and woodwind, and the strenuous effort required to play so much loud and dense music. The manuscript shows that Martinů eventually realised that the demands of his score were excessive. The last page carries a comment added in pencil, which Šafránek coyly described as 'a drastic piece of self-criticism',⁷ and I offer my translation with apologies to readers with sensibilities as refined as those of Šafránek: 'It appears at the end

⁶ *Martinů*, Duckworth, London, p. 16.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 53.

that the horn players have shat themselves'. Perhaps, in the end, the composition of *The Angel of Death* was a useful experience for Martinů. He had written the sort of work that he would soon come to despise. This chastening experience helped him steer clear of self-indulgence in the future, leaving the main body of his work singularly free of the bombastic and the overblown.

***Nipponari*, H68**

As a young composer, Martinů seems to have been well aware of the importance of pacing himself, not to attempt too many ambitious works too soon. As a result, the bulk of his early output consists largely of songs and piano pieces. Halbreich's catalogue indicates several abortive attempts to write for orchestra in the following years, but the only surviving evidence of his development in matters of instrumentation at this time is the song-cycle *Nipponari*, (H68) for soprano and chamber orchestra, written in the same year. The work is a glowing testimony to the influence of Debussy, sparked when Martinů attended a performance of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1908. The title of the work reveals that, like so many Impressionist composers, he had turned to the Orient for inspiration, setting seven lyrical Japanese poems in Czech translation. His harmonic vocabulary has expanded to include pentatonic and whole-tone elements, but the most important skill that he has acquired from his Impressionist models is a fine judgement of instrumental timbres and a happy knack of finding sound combinations which precisely mirror the mood of the poetry. The instrumentation of each song is different. The largest ensemble appears in the final song, 'U posvátného jezera' ('By the Sacred Lake'), and consists of three flutes, celesta, harp, triangle, tam-tam, six violins, six violas, two cellos and two basses. The opposite extreme is found in the rather withdrawn fourth song, 'Prosněný život' ('Life in Dreams'), accompanied only by three flutes and four violas. *Nipponari* sees the first use of the piano in Martinů's orchestra, though it appears only in the fifth song 'Stopy ve sněhu' ('Footsteps in the Snow'). Here it combines most effectively with the harp as the orchestra (which also includes four violins, three violas and celesta) brilliantly conjures up the 'dazzling snow' and the 'glitter of the stars' to which the poem refers.

Untitled Orchestral Work, H90

Throughout his career, Martinů wrote avidly for the stage. His output contains fourteen complete and two incomplete operas as well as fifteen ballets, not all of which survive. The series was inaugurated early in 1914 with the one-act ballet *Noc* ('Night', H89), which finds

him wholly absorbed in the world of Impressionism. It is one of his most opulent scores, calling for a female chorus, piano, celesta, three harps and a large percussion section including xylophone and glockenspiel. The same sonorities dominate his next composition, an orchestral work the title page of which is missing. I shall refer to it as H90, after its position in Halbreich's catalogue. It would be fascinating to hear a performance of this piece, since the textures and harmonic combinations look on paper to be most beguiling. As in *Night*, the piano, harp and celesta are constantly engaged in a kind of private dialogue. They work together to form a continuous colouristic background, indirectly anticipating the special role of the piano and harp in the first movement of the Second Symphony. The four horns are the only brass instruments present, and the percussion is represented solely by a tam-tam.

The first four bars of the piece stand apart from the rest of the composition for a number of reasons. Their time-signature of $\frac{6}{8}$ disagrees with the prevailing common time, and the material they present is not to be heard again. It might be thought that they represent the continuation of some earlier section, now lost, but for several reasons I feel that H90 is indeed a complete movement. Its lack of an initial tempo indication is not unique among Martinů's early works, nor is it of any particular importance, since the material readily suggests a moderate pulse. The presence of a time-signature in the first bar is a positive sign, as is the complete list of instrument names in the left-hand margin of the first page – in the following pages, the strings are never again labelled. Finally, a tam-tam stroke occurs in the first and last bars, enhancing the straightforward symmetrical structure of the piece. The first four bars of H90 act as an in-tempo introduction, establishing the distinctive instrumentation of the score, and gradually forming a melodic shape which will dominate for long stretches at a time. The Symphonies contain several examples of similar 'scene-setting' introductions.

The shape hinted at in the introduction is a section of the whole-tone scale – C sharp, B, A, G – with each note harmonised by the appropriate major triad. The piano, harp and celesta present the idea in crotchets in the fifth bar, continuing for the next fifteen. After an eight-bar hiatus they resume for a further fourteen bars. This ostinato holds firm to the same four notes and harmonies whenever it appears. Its shape and sheer persistence have led to comparisons between this work and the music of Ravel – specifically the *Rhapsodie Espagnole*⁸ – and yet the supporting harmonies already display some

⁸ Cf. Halbreich, *op. cit.*, p. 249, and Šafránek, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

touches characteristic of the later Martinů, with clashes between unrelated thirds and a fondness for long stretches of static harmony. The melody is entrusted in turn to the cor anglais, flute and oboe. It belongs to the same generic type as the flute solo which opens Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* – an indolent arabesque which pauses for a while on one note before drifting lazily upwards or downwards to the next. In a somewhat longer central section, a new theme emerges on the oboe and cor anglais in octaves, and the ostinato takes an extended break. In this section, Martinů offers a glimpse of glories yet to come, as the two solo instruments create an unbroken 27-bar span by incessantly varying two or three short ideas. At this stage in his career, the overall line is somewhat shapeless and ill-focused, but with firmer discipline and a more consistent direction of the melodic line, this technique would eventually yield powerful results, especially in the Third Symphony. The interest next moves to the lower strings, with a new, more closed, theme, immediately echoed by the woodwind. Gradually, the theme is distorted, hinting more than once at the descending whole-tone sequence and thereby preparing for the eventual return of the ostinato.

In the final section the ostinato appears no fewer than 30 times, at first accelerated to quavers but soon adopting the patient crotchet motion of the start. The very last appearance slows down to minims in the harp alone, dying away to almost total silence with the final *pppp* stroke on the tam-tam. Martinů had come a long way since *The Angel of Death* and learned his lesson well. The proportions of H90 are slight, the melodic invention relatively simple. He had curbed his ambition and confined himself to a short work which uses the orchestral *tutti* sparingly and where the strenuous thematic development of *The Death of Tintagiles* is but a distant memory. The harmonies have become less chromatic and mobile, but Martinů compensates with his heightened interest in orchestral colour. In this work of 151 bars, the first violins have the melody for little more than a dozen. For the rest of the time, they and the other strings are confined to subtle effects of timbre, to extended *tremolando* or *tremolo* effects, a world away from the careering virtuosity of the first two orchestral scores. On its own modest terms, H90 is charming and rather successful, and was followed almost at once by another orchestral work.

Nocturne 1, H91

Nocturne 1 in F sharp minor, H91, is a short piece, lasting about eight minutes. The instrumentation is more sombre this time, with the celesta absent and the activity of piano and harp drastically curtailed. The discreet addition of trombones lends a certain solemn dignity at

several points. Again, there is no percussion except a pair of cymbals, roused to action only twice. After the opening chord, the strings are left to themselves for the almost the whole of the first section. Muted murmurings in the misty key of F sharp minor support an extensive and plangent viola solo. The absence of wind instruments for long stretches forms a marked contrast with H90, and yet the inflections of the viola line have a kinship with the extended oboe melody from that work. Once again there is no tempo indication at the start, but there are several later on. When the theme returns at the end of the work, Martinů marks it *Lento*, which is presumably also his intention at the outset.

The viola solo gradually winds down to the lowest note of the instrument. This C natural is extended for eight bars beneath syncopated parallel chords in the upper strings. The moment inescapably recalls Debussy, and yet the precise content of the chords again anticipates an important element of Martinů's later style.⁹ The full orchestra is roused for a brief, solemn march of about a dozen bars, containing the only loud music in the *Nocturne*. Martinů was aware that a longer peroration would swamp the piece: for the first time, he shows that love of proportion and restraint which would serve him so well in the symphonies. The march is followed by a curious episode where a *pianissimo tremolando* line in the first violins is shadowed and harmonised by the harp and piano, with the other instruments silent. The texture evokes memories of his recent melodrama *Vážka* ('The Dragonfly', H83) scored for speaker, piano, harp and a violin asked to play *tremolando* and *sul ponticello* throughout, in imitation of the insect. The syncopated chords soon return, now entrusted to the piano. Finally, the opening solo is transferred to a violin, which clings to a mildly dissonant G sharp as the rest of the strings fade out on a soft *tremolando* chord of F sharp minor. Both H90 and the *Nocturne* therefore have a palindromic structure – H90 a straightforward ABA¹, the *Nocturne* a slightly more involved ABCB¹A¹. In his later music, Martinů would often make such formal correspondences even clearer by resorting to literal restatement, but these two pieces nonetheless foreshadow his preference for simple, unambiguous structures. The formal trajectory of the *Nocturne* is nicely complemented by the simple dynamic scheme, which rises from nothing to an imposing short outburst, before receding to virtual silence. Many of his symphonic forms are clarified and strengthened by dynamics in a very similar way.

⁹ To be discussed more fully in chapter V, p. 146.

It is a sad fact that several of Martinů's works from this period are now lost. He is known to have written a second orchestral *Nocturne* shortly after completing the first, but only the title page has survived. It bears the subtitle *Roses dans la Nuit* ('Roses in the Night'),¹⁰ and the additional description *Symphonic Dance No. 2*. Halbreich has given a separate catalogue number, H96, to this work. Both he and Safránek are satisfied that this sheet is not the missing title page for H90.¹¹ A second ballet, *Tance se závoji* ('Dances with a Veil'), completed in July 1914, has also vanished. One of the works which does survive, the *Ballade* (H97) for orchestra, points in its turn to further losses. It clearly belongs to the same cycle as the second *Nocturne*, since its title page carries the designation *Symf. tanec č. 4* ('Symphonic Dance No. 4'). No trace of the first and third works in the group has ever been found.

***Ballada k Böcklinovu obrazu: Villa na moři*
(*'Ballade after Böcklin's picture: Villa by the Sea'*), H97**

The *Ballade* is a longer piece than either the first *Nocturne* or H90. It lasts about fifteen minutes, and was inspired by the painting *Villa by the Sea*, by the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin. This curiosity hardly deserves its sub-title – 'Symphonic Dance' – since it contains little symphonic development and is completely devoid of any dance-like material. Its treatment of the piano is somewhat bizarre, as the opening of the work already suggests. Three subdued chords of E flat, G flat and C minor on the full orchestra are succeeded by five bars for solo piano, playing gentle syncopated E flat chords with only the bass drum for accompaniment. For a while thereafter, the piano is well integrated into the texture, either supplementing the frequent *tremolo* of the upper strings or doubling the cellos and basses. Later, it starts to re-assert itself, exchanging brief phrases with the orchestra at short range. By the end of the *Ballade*, it has achieved total domination.

The title of Böcklin's painting suggests a picturesque scene, but the reality of his vision is quite different. The villa is but partially glimpsed in the background behind a screen of trees being buffeted by the wind. It would appear to be early evening, with a single ray still lingering from the departing sun. The swell of the sea suggests a storm either breaking or on the wane. In the foreground, a single female figure leans pensively against a rock. The whole picture is

¹⁰ The probable source of inspiration is the poem of the same name from the collection *Chansons de Bilitis* by the French poet Pierre de Louÿs, which claimed to be a translation of lesbian poetry from antiquity.

¹¹ Cf. Halbreich, *op. cit.*, p. 250, and Šafránek, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

dark, Gothic in character and rather oppressive. Its mood is well captured by the repeated procession of three themes forming the main body of Martinů's piece. After the syncopated piano chords, the first theme appears in the lower strings, tortuous and angular. It is accompanied by *tremolo* writing for violins and violas, typical of Martinů's orchestration at this time, although its awkward, strangely expressive intervals also recapture the spirit of *Tintagiles*. Indeed, in several respects the *Ballade* feels like an amalgam of Martinů's earlier Straussian phase and his more recent Impressionist leanings. He muses on the first theme for some forty bars, eventually conjuring up a forceful *tutti* statement. A far more tranquil theme in C minor then emerges on a solo viola. The accompaniment is remarkably bare – nothing more than a descending figure in the lower strings and piano, not unlike the ostinato from H90. The second theme is just as extended as the first, but remains flat, refusing to be roused in the slightest – perhaps depicting the character lost in thought in the painting. The final theme also begins in C minor, but is far more questing in spirit, leading through the following forty bars to a tumultuous climax in E flat major. The lush scoring of the strings in three separate octaves once more seems to point to the textures of Martinů's early Romantic works. It is only at this stage that any relationship between the themes can be espied – the third theme



Arnold Böcklin painted several different versions of Villa by the Sea, which inspired Martinů to write his youthful orchestral Ballade. The version shown here dates from 1878.

builds its climax from a distinctive phrase, incorporating a diminished fourth, borrowed from the second.

In the next phase of the *Ballade*, Martinů brings back each of the three themes in order, varying them slightly while reducing their overall length. The procedure foreshadows a technique to be employed frequently in the Symphonies, where the second half of a movement will adopt basically the same ground-plan as the first, subjecting it to certain detours, sometimes expanding the material, sometimes pruning it whilst preserving the overall proportions. The *Ballade* duly proceeds to the third theme, whose final bars are even more forcefully stated than before. It is at this point that a real shock emerges. The climax is torn off, to be succeeded by a piano solo with material which is new, yet congruent with what has been heard already. The gesture duplicates and deepens the surprise of the piano entry at the start of the work. For the next 24 bars, the piano alternates with muted strings whose contributions – based on snatches of the second theme – become ever shorter and more subdued. The passage is strikingly reminiscent of the slow movement of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, which Liszt famously compared to Orpheus taming the wild beasts. The piano subsequently has the field to itself, musing on aspects of the second theme, joined only towards the end by scant *pizzicato* accompaniment. In the final bars, the opening roles are reversed – the piano softly stating the chords of E flat, G flat and C minor, while the orchestra whispers the closing chord of E flat.

Although this treatment of the piano is novel and bold, I cannot pretend that I find it entirely successful. It is difficult to think of another piece which is avowedly for full orchestra where the piano has the last 30 bars almost to itself although it had not had a *concertante* role in the work. On first hearing the *Ballade* I felt that something must be wrong – that perhaps Martinů had not scored the entire work, and that the bars for pianoforte in the performance were merely an indication of his intentions. Yet this is not so – the manuscript has rests meticulously placed in the remainder of the orchestra throughout: Martinů really did intend his piece to sound this way. My thoughts next took a programmatic turn. I had not at that stage seen Böcklin's work and wondered if Martinů was faithfully but naively alluding to the presence of a pianist in the painting. As acquaintance with the painting makes clear, that was not the case either. The curious structure of the piece seems to have been an experiment, and one that was not to be repeated.

Compared with the scintillating mastery of instrumental colour displayed by *Nipponari*, or the sonic attractions of H90, the rather tame and unimaginative sound world of the *Nocturne* and *Ballade*

comes as something of a disappointment. Admittedly, Martinů aims for a crepuscular atmosphere in both pieces, for which the restrained orchestral sonorities, with trumpets again omitted, are well suited. Yet the infallible judgement of timbre he displayed just a few years earlier seems to have deserted him: some of the gestures in these later pieces are clumsy and unsatisfying.¹² The *Nocturne* and *Ballade* are the earliest of Martinů's orchestral pieces which have ever been performed.¹³ They deserve an occasional hearing since, despite their undoubted awkwardness, they possess some charm and an undeniable fascination for anyone interested in the composer's development.

Česká Rapsodie ('Czech Rhapsody'), H118

Martinů's music had so far remained unknown to the public at large. This position was to change, at least in his native country, with the first two performances of his cantata *Česká Rapsodie* ('Czech Rhapsody', H118). This piece, written towards the middle of 1918, anticipates the foundation of an independent Czechoslovak state on 28 October that year. The performances in Prague early in 1919 were a notable success, although the piece itself is hardly representative of the music that Martinů was composing at the time. It is a grandiose work for large orchestra, with organ, mixed chorus and a baritone soloist. Martinů may have felt that the refined sensibility of his Impressionist scores was inappropriate to the heroic, aspirational statement he had in mind. As a result, the *Rhapsody* frequently recalls his early enthusiasm for Strauss – themes are swept along majestically by the strings or thundered out by the trombones in a way that he would never permit in later years. Although the *Rhapsody* is of little importance to Martinů's stylistic development, I find it hard not to respond to its ardent tone. It captures a brief moment of hope for a nation that had been sorely oppressed. In listening to it one forgets for a moment that the Republic it so enthusiastically welcomes would last a mere 20

¹² The precise chronology of Martinů's early works is difficult to establish. The manuscript of the *Nocturne* bears no date of composition. Harry Halbreich, in a conversation with me in May 2009, felt it quite possible that the work appears out of sequence in his catalogue, and even went so far as to suggest that it may be identical with H61, a lost *Andante* for orchestra dating from 1912, known only from a mention in Šafránek (I report the conversation with his permission). This chronology is more satisfying in several ways: the *Nocturne* would then appear as an uncertain first dalliance with the Impressionist style, coming after the Straussian fervour of the early tone-poems but pre-dating the notably more assured *Nipponari*.

¹³ Neither has ever been commercially recorded. I have been able to hear them from tapes of old radio broadcasts, the *Ballade* quite heavily cut.

years, and that the dark times to follow would cast a shadow over the future of its composer.

The stylistic disparity between the *Rhapsody* and the works either side of it – the First String Quartet and the orchestral song-cycle *Kouzelné noci* ('Magic Nights') – indicates that although he had written over 100 works, Martinů had not yet formulated a style he could call his own. Even at this stage of his career, he can be found leaning heavily on recognisable models. The First Quartet, for instance, is so strongly influenced by those of Debussy and Ravel that it has been dubbed 'The French'. His first completed violin sonata (H120), which remained unnumbered, has many echoes of Franck's sonata, including a very similar canon between the violin and piano in the finale. By adopting a range of disguises in this early part of his career, Martinů created several pieces of solid merit, but can hardly be said to have been his own man. This stylistic vacillation is reflected in his next two works for orchestra, the *Little Dance Suite* (H123) completed in October 1919, and the symphonic poem *Dream of the Past* (H124), written at the start of the next year. Though separated by only a few months, these two pieces are as different as two successive works by the same composer could hope to be.

***Malá taneční suita* ('Little Dance Suite'), H123**

The *Little Dance Suite*, Martinů's first multi-movement work for orchestra, is the nearest thing to a symphony in his early works. Its four movements – a quick movement (actually a Waltz), a *Moderato*, a Scherzo and a polka finale – mimic the traditional layout of a symphony, and its treatment of themes occasionally verges on the symphonic too. The title *Little Dance Suite* is perhaps ironic since, at well over half an hour, it is one of his most extended orchestral compositions, rivalling the largest of the Symphonies. The *Suite*, like the *Rhapsody* before it, entirely jettisons all traces of Impressionism, replacing it not with Straussian ardour this time, but with a direct and unaffected lyricism, simply but attractively scored. This manner had already been anticipated by Martinů's second surviving ballet *Stín* ('The Shadow', H102) from 1916, which renounced the opulence of *Night* so entirely that Martinů was usually able to write two complete systems of music on each page of manuscript score. Nonetheless, the *Little Dance Suite* is for me the surprise package among his early orchestral works. Each of the movements employs bright primary colours and vigorous rhythmic patterns and expresses that infectious love of life that was later to become so characteristic of him.

The unsophisticated opening of the waltz demonstrates how far Martinů has moved from the hot-house murmurings of Impressionism

in this work. To the simplest of accompaniments from *pizzicato* strings and harp, a solo violin delivers a sentimental, slightly naïve theme. With admirable economy, Martinů fashions the next 130 or so bars almost entirely from this material – transforming it into a graceful minuet at one point, or a torrent of string quavers at another. The harmonies are mostly diatonic but with subtle chromatic inflections, especially at cadences, which take the music refreshingly and unexpectedly into remote areas. As a result, the opening idea is eventually heard in all manner of keys, as the waltz passes from the prosaic G major of the opening to a radiant and softly scored F sharp major at the close.

The following trio is of a very different hue. At a markedly slower tempo, a solo cello emerges with a repetitive but heart-warming melody whose main charm lies in the subtly shifting harmonies supporting it. The main body of the orchestra has been silenced, and the trio is delivered by divided strings, with the occasional aid of horns, flute, oboe and harp. The trio itself, like the movement as a whole, has a three-part structure. The tempo picks up slightly for a central section where the strings discourse over an arched two-bar phrase. Martinů is not afraid to alternate tonic and dominant harmonies for long stretches of this phase – the main allure is the lavish scoring in parallel thirds and sixths. Eventually, the solo cello reprises its slower theme, which this time passes to flutes in octaves at the close. The waltz then returns in full. With this movement, Martinů seems to anticipate his ballet *Špalíček* by over ten years: the clarity of the orchestration, the adroit harmonic moves and occasionally the melodic profile afford glimpses of the large-scale waltz from the ‘Cinderella’ sequence in Act 3.

The second movement, *Moderato*, bears the title ‘Song’ and is a delightfully lyrical statement from start to finish. The dotted rhythms in $\frac{6}{8}$ time establish a pastoral mood, enhanced by the bucolic piping of the oboe and cor anglais, with brief interruptions from the French horn. Beneath the wind solos, the strings engage in interlacing figurations – not the wearisome and predictable *tremolo* of the Impressionist scores, but a more effervescent concoction of sparkling semiquavers, with hairpin dynamics bringing out the occasional detail. As so often in works of a pastoral nature – and in Martinů’s work in general – the harmonic rhythm may be static for bars at a time. The opening paragraph clings stubbornly to A major, only allowing occasional inflections to suggest other keys. Yet so beguiling is the orchestration and the melodic material that the harmonic monotony is never felt to be an issue. Eventually, the music is allowed to forsake A major for D minor, with an increase in tempo and a short new

phrase exchanged between the strings and woodwind. Barely forty bars have passed in a movement which contains 192, yet already most of the thematic material has been presented. Without ever resorting to literal repetition, Martinů constructs the remainder largely from the two themes which have already been heard. The subtle variation of material demands little of the listener but is thoroughly engaging and good-humoured. As might be expected from a 'song' the melody is largely entrusted to solo instruments, and towards the end a solo violin followed by a muted horn brings the first theme to a hushed close in G major.

The Scherzo has many points of similarity with the Waltz. Each is dominated by a simple theme, subtly developed through a variety of keys and orchestral colours. The slowing of the Waltz into a *Tempo di Minuetto* is echoed when the scherzo theme drops into a *Tempo di Valse*. Much of the figuration is similar, and in both Trios the strings are especially prominent. Yet this movement is not merely a re-run of the first. The perky, mischievous humour of the scherzo sections is enhanced by the scoring for wind instruments alone, with a little help from the percussion. It might be argued that some of the accompanimental figures are repetitive and unimaginative – from bar 59, for instance, the bassoons latch onto a pattern which they refuse to abandon for the next 80 bars. It could also be claimed that the slender main theme is made to work too hard for too long in the later stages – but such criticism is frankly redundant in the face of such charm and eagerness to please.

The strings, divided into thirteen parts, deliver the Trio alone. The score splits them into three distinct groups, which Martinů handles in an ingenious and novel manner. The front desks of violins, violas and cellos form the first group, and play unmuted throughout. The second desks form another group, but have their mutes on. The third group houses the remaining strings, including all the double-basses. It is also muted, and for a while is confined to accompanimental duties, largely *pizzicato*. For the first 32 bars, the first group carries the *piano* melody, which moves at the leisurely rate of one note per bar. Meanwhile, the second has a sort of *pianissimo* commentary. Each voice in the first group has its equivalent in the second, but is instead presented in a less distinct form, usually overlaid with trills or embellished with auxiliary motion. It is as though the second group softens or blurs the edges of the first, smearing the texture. As the Trio proceeds, the third group advances from the background and is entrusted with more melodic material. At the same time, the tempo is gradually increased through *Moderato* and *Poco vivo*. When it reaches *Tempo di Valse*, Martinů has a surprise in store: the theme which so dominated

the Scherzo re-appears and once more is treated at length. Martinů runs the risk of boring his audience here, especially since the Scherzo will be repeated, thus bringing the same theme to prominence for a third time. Thanks to the contrast in instrumentation, though, he is able to bring it off. The tempo continues to increase alongside the volume, as the second group and eventually the larger third removes its mutes. For the last 43 bars, the three groups unite as one while the tempo accelerates to *Presto*. A breathless upwards sweep of quavers is torn off at the zenith, and after a short pause the wind instruments take up the reins once more.

The finale employs the trombones and tuba for the first time, and also adds a fourth trumpet. The title page has the wording *Allegro à la Polka*, though in fact polka rhythms feature only for a few short passages, beginning in the 52nd bar. Before that point, the finale has been unexpectedly agitated and martial, a tattoo on trumpet and side-drum ushering in a rather stern paragraph in A minor. The later stages, on the other hand, are presided over by a splendidly expansive theme, first presented by the violins in the unexpectedly remote key of B major. When the cor anglais takes over this theme, the tempo reduces to *Andante*, the slowest music anywhere in the suite. Yet unlike the earlier *Villa by the Sea* (*Symphonic Dance No. 4*), this piece never entirely forgets the word 'dance' in its title: in the concluding bars, this majestic theme combines with a suggestion of the polka rhythms to bring the work to a rousing conclusion.

The *Little Dance Suite* is engagingly lyrical, abundantly rhythmic, and though its chief appeal will be for listeners with a 'sweet tooth', it manages to avoid becoming too sickly or saccharine. Its tone is not far removed from Vítězslav Novák's *Moravian Slovak Suite* or indeed Bartók's First Orchestral Suite, both of which date from 1903. But whereas Novák's and Bartók's pieces have both been recorded, Martinů's youthful suite languishes unpublished and largely unperformed. As far as I can detect, its single performance took place on Brno radio in 1963.¹⁴ In my opinion, the *Little Dance Suite* is worthy of resurrection: it has distinct potential as an orchestral 'lollipop', enjoying the kind of vogue recently won by Shostakovich's *Jazz Suites*. Some may object to the prospect of widespread popularity for something so unrepresentative of its composer. In my opinion, a good piece is a good piece, and a popular success might do wonders in kick-starting a broader interest in the rest of Martinů's output.

¹⁴ I have not been able to hear this recording, which may indeed be lost. My impressions of the score have been gleaned from putting it into a computer score-writing package and playing back the result.

***Sen o minulosti* ('Dream of the Past'), H124**

The contrast between the healthy, outdoor music of the *Little Dance Suite* and that of *Dream of the Past* is little short of astonishing, for the slightly later score is easily the most languorous of all Martinů's dalliances with the Impressionist style. It is the only survivor of an orchestral triptych with the overall title *The Grove of Satyrs*, which may account for the curiously unsatisfactory effect it makes in performance. One feels that its mood has not sufficiently shifted during its twelve minutes, and that the variety the other two pieces may have offered is sadly lacking. Its formal layout avoids the straightforward sectional structure of the *Nocturne* or *Ballade*: it is fluid and difficult to pin down, and can seem a little disorienting at first. Closer acquaintance reveals a few subtle correspondences within the scheme which firm up the overall structure. The main events are charted in Table 1.

The work emerges from silence like a dream dawning gradually upon one's consciousness. The first element which can be distinctly heard is a brief flute solo in the third bar. The melody, like parts of H90, pays homage to Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* – indeed, when similar material returns at the end of the work, it comes close to quoting the start of that work outright. Although the atmosphere is drowsy, even listless, the flute presents several brief ideas which will be incorporated elsewhere – a falling fourth, a four-note descent and a distinctive pattern of four notes all contribute to the melodic content of later passages. The most obvious references occur in an interlude and postlude where the flute again takes the lead, echoing material from the opening but never repeating it exactly. This formal and textural correspondence is mildly reinforced by the two episodes, in both of which the oboe dominates, and by the presence of *saltando* strings towards the start and end of the piece (*saltando* – literally 'jumping' – is a style of bowing where the bow is bounced).

At the end of the prelude, the French horn has a brief solo which inverts the falling fourth. The oboe at the start of the first episode takes the hint, beginning with a rising fourth before picking up the scattered fragments of the prelude and extending them into a much longer theme, often using them in inversion. Once more, there is an echo of procedures already discovered in H90, where another oboe theme was constructed in a similar manner. Nonetheless, there still is a feeling that the melody is merely 'following its nose' from point to point – that it is ramshackle and lacking in direction. The oboe solo in the second episode adopts a quicker tempo and is more freely constructed. Nevertheless, rising and falling fourths abound, as well as indirect references to the four-note figure from the prelude.

TABLE 1
Formal Layout of *Dream of the Past*

BAR	EVENT	ORCHESTRATION
1	Prelude	flute solo
22	First episode	oboe solo, <i>saltando</i> strings
55	Refrain	solo strings
70	Culmination	tutti
76	Transition	tutti
98	Refrain	strings
113	Culmination	tutti
123	Interlude	flute solo
134	Second episode	oboe solo
186	Refrain (developed)	strings + cor anglais
205	Culmination	tutti
215	Postlude	flute solo, <i>saltando</i> strings
239	Final bar	

Only one group of themes in the entire structure is ever repeated exactly, and as a consequence I have labelled it 'Refrain' in Table 1. It appears three times in all, presented in solemn block chords by the strings and always followed by the climactic statement I have labelled 'culmination'. Neither the refrain nor its culmination shares any material with the rest of the movement – as a result its three appearances form another symmetry which interleaves with the textural symmetry already observed. It will be noticed that the first refrain begins in the 55th bar, and the final refrain commences when there are 53 bars of the piece remaining. But the central refrain is not in the middle of the piece. The symmetries throughout the *Dream* are inexact, and I feel it important to the ethos of the piece that they are suggested or insinuated rather than made too obvious. The overriding impression is of an almost improvisatory work, rescued from the brink of incoherence by the merest dash of formal and thematic discipline. Its unorthodox layout, which holds spontaneity and quasi-symmetry in such a delicate balance, may take its cue from the title. Perhaps this short piece is the first intimation of that 'dream-logic', that fascination for the intuitive and the unplanned, to which Martinů gave full rein in his opera *Juliette* and the 'fantasy' pieces of his final decade.

***Istar*, H130**

By far the most substantial work of Martinů's early years is his first full-length ballet, *Istar* (H130), which he completed towards the end of November 1921. The plot draws upon a story from the ancient Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which later in his career supplied Martinů with inspiration for his finest choral work. It concerns the love of the queen Istar for Tammuz, who is abducted by Irkalla, the queen of the underworld, in the first act. The second act sees Istar descend to the Underworld to do battle with Irkalla and rescue her lover. *Gilgamesh* is the oldest literary work in existence, and this part of it anticipates the Greek myth of Ceres and Persephone, since during Istar's absence the world is plunged into the deepest of winters. Act Three celebrates the return of Spring after Istar's victory, when the gods send down a white lotus blossom which makes Istar and Tammuz immortal. The ballet received its first performance in September 1924, but has only rarely appeared since then, often in drastically shortened form. Indeed, Martinů himself occasionally suggested pruning the work back to half-an-hour or so.

Istar is chiefly known today through the two suites which were extracted from the score by František Bartoš in 1961, and which together last some fifty minutes. *Istar* is not a 'numbers' ballet: rather, each of its acts is through-composed, like an extended symphonic poem. Two themes play a pivotal role in its construction: the first, an arching two-bar melody, represents Istar and the forces of good, whereas Irkalla is depicted by a sinister chromatic ascent. These two themes are manipulated throughout the score in a manner reminiscent of Josef Suk. Martinů had become familiar with Suk's orchestral works as a player in the Czech Philharmonic. He also had personal contact with the composer at this time, though not until 1922 would he briefly join Suk's composition class at the Conservatoire. In works like the *Fantasy* for violin and orchestra (1902–3), the symphonic poem *Praga* (1904) or the mighty symphony *Asrael* of 1905–6, Suk displayed a genius for adapting a thematic outline to a huge variety of expressive purposes and dramatic situations. *Istar* is often described as the culmination of Martinů's work in the Impressionist style, but thanks to Suk's influence I feel it is more accurately described as a stylistic hybrid, much in the way that the *Ballade* was. Its heterogeneous nature is illustrated by the second movement of the first Orchestral Suite, which comes from the end of the first act and represents the battle for Tammuz. The movement begins with a distinctly Impressionist shimmer, as augmented triads in *tremolando sul ponticello* violins descend chromatically over a suggestion of the Irkalla theme in the bass. After a short pause, the

cellos and basses set out unaccompanied on a thirteen-bar expansion of the Irkalla theme, which passes to *pizzicato* violins, back to lower strings, on to trombones and then horns in a desultory *fugato*. The contrapuntal density and the hard edge to the scoring now point more towards Suk than to Impressionist models, even if the unwieldy *fugato* theme does carry a suggestion of Dukas' *L'apprenti sorcier*. The tangled counterpoint eventually retreats to the bass and flickers to a halt, whereupon a more lyrical idea unfolds in the violas and wind. Augmented triads are once more prominent in the harmony – a sonority quite untypical of Martinů, but very characteristic of Suk's later style. It is easy to underestimate *Istar*, thanks to the startling change that was soon to come over Martinů's work, but it is an invigorating and inventive score in its own right. Hidden within it are occasional harmonic and textural glimpses of the composer to come. In *Istar* Martinů develops his principal themes more relentlessly than at any time since *The Death of Tintagiles*. Although the reliance on these themes might become wearisome across three acts, I would welcome the chance to hear the whole score, in order to assess its relevance to Martinů's development more completely.

***Míjející půlnoc* ('Passing Midnight'), H131**

From 1920 to 1923, Martinů was a regular member of the second-violin section in the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, where Stanislav Novák, a friend from his student days, was now the leader. The conductor was the renowned Václav Talich, who took an interest in the young composer. Talich performed one of Martinů's pieces for the first time on 18 February 1923: the central part, *Modrá hodina* ('The Blue Hour'), of another symphonic triptych with the overall title *Passing Midnight* (H131).¹⁵ The programme note for the concert stated that the outer parts of the cycle were not being performed 'for technical reasons'¹⁶ and that the first part of the cycle, *Satyři v háji cypřišů* ('Satyrs in the Grove of Cypresses') forms a sort of prologue to the other movements. *Passing Midnight* is the last of Martinů's 'unknown' orchestral compositions, hitherto unpublished and unrecorded. At one time it was thought to have survived only in fragmentary form. Halbreich's catalogue of 1968 mentions the score of *The Blue Hour* and a set of parts for the final movement, *Stíny* ('Shadows'), but states

¹⁵ The title is most often given in English as *Vanishing Midnight*, but *Passing Midnight* is a more accurate translation of the Czech *Míjející půlnoc*.

¹⁶ The phrase 'for technical reasons' (*z technických důvodů*) will be maddeningly familiar to anyone who has travelled in the Czech lands. It is a catch-all phrase that excuses the temporary closure of public lavatories, ticket kiosks, theatres and almost anything else in public life.

that the first movement was lost. The content of the whole cycle was summarised by Martinů in an unusually extensive manner in the programme for Talich's concert:

I am alone at home: the scent of blossoms rises from the garden through the open windows. The day is ending: only now do the thousands of events of the day desist, and it is as though the continuous flow of time itself rested for a moment and gained strength for the onward journey. In this imperceptible fraction of time the tragedy of the dying day fades away. And now I remember the many evenings which have passed during my life. Once, as another day was vanishing, fauns, nymphs and other fairy-tale beings were conjured up in my imagination. Through the very window, from which I am now looking into the silent night, I caught the distant sound of their celebrations amid the woods in the pale light of the moon. Their time had come, fate had found its fulfilment. And today the leaves are already starting to fall from the trees. The mild blue evening looks at me through the window and brings me the sounds of life. There below, far off, is the town, which is alive and the pulse of its life reaches me, as if inviting me to come closer. There in the distance, thousands of events are being hatched and thousands of interests are intertwining. Although I am here alone with my thoughts in the middle of the night, I am connected with that life in the distance by mysterious threads and I see how an implacable fate descends upon things and people. The day is dying. A chilly Autumn wind has disturbed the dead calm of my room. The moon is hidden behind clouds and eerie shadows flicker on the walls: they fill the entire room. A motionless silence covers all life and weighs heavily upon the soul. Midnight passes. It fades away as inaudibly as a breath: everything hastens towards a final, unalterable resolution. I feel too alone against the vast sky, which peeps into my room by the light of the stars, too weak against the 'Unknown' which lurks in motionless expectation. Yet I defend myself. I cannot surrender. I cannot deny this life, whose voice entices me. Midnight has passed and a new day is dawning.

It is tempting to conclude, upon reading this pretentious nonsense, that Martinů's Impressionist phase had become far too self-indulgent, and that the sooner he tore himself away from it the better. The very title of the first movement seems a painfully self-conscious invocation of typically Impressionist imagery. I expected *Passing Midnight* to be a wispy successor to *Dream of the Past*, suffocated by its own sensitivity – but it is a bold, multi-faceted composition of genuine merit. At 40 minutes, it is Martinů's longest independent orchestral work. Thanks to the composite nature of each movement and the overall duration, it feels almost like a third suite from *Istar*. It also mirrors the hybrid

stylistic content of the ballet, fusing Impressionist textures with harder sonorities, once more recalling Strauss or Suk.

The opening of *Satyrs in the Grove of Cypressess* finds Martinů deep in Impressionist territory and has some marked similarities with the start of *Istar*. The ballet opens with the violins trilling on B flat, the seventh degree of a C major chord in the cellos. *Satyrs* moves this combination up a semitone: the violas embellish B natural over a warm chord of D flat passed between cellos and basses. Muted horn calls spice up the harmony with subtle dissonances, and a cloud of polytonal semiquavers emerges from the violins and dispels in an instant, like 'the scent of blossoms rising from the garden'. The texture swells to an imposing climax, abruptly torn off after 26 bars. A solo violin emerges, with a prominent repeated accompanimental figure in the woodwind, although after a short development the music lapses back into the harmonies and melodic gestures of the opening, bringing to an end the lengthy introductory phase.

The bulk of *Satyrs* is devoted to the symphonic elaboration of a deceptively simple waltz theme which first emerges on the solo flute (Ex. 3).

Ex. 3



The surprisingly bare accompaniment is furnished by strings and horns alone. The slightly irregular theme employs six-bar phrases made up from three distinct melodic gestures, as shown in Ex. 3. One of these gestures (Ex. 3(y)) also featured prominently in *Dream of the Past*, but Martinů proves to be far more resourceful with his material in *Satyrs* than in that earlier work. As the waltz progresses, he re-orders the three elements, expands their constituent intervals, detaches them from one another and lets them emerge as individual elements in an increasingly contrapuntal dialogue. Ex. 3(z) is soon heard in inversion, its dotted rhythm ensuring that it remains identifiable. Martinů's ingenuity allows the waltz phrases to expand until they fuse into an indivisible whole, informed at every step by elements of Ex. 3. The melodic line, invigorated by the frequent application of hemiola,¹⁷ is as urgent and sharply goal-directed as anything he had

¹⁷ The hemiola is a rhythmic device peculiar to music in triple time and especially favoured during the Baroque period. It extends over two bars, treating the six crotchet beats as three groups of two, rather than two groups of three.

yet produced, culminating in a formidable outburst and leading, via a long chromatic descent, to a further return of the opening. The initial material never recurs in quite the same guise: this third appearance is affected by what has just occurred, the delicate sounds of strings and horns almost overwhelmed by massive swells from the percussion.

The restoration of waltz tempo brings further ingenious combinations of material. It begins unexpectedly by concentrating on the repetitive quaver accompaniment from the introduction. Soon a new martial figure is proposed by the timpani and spreads through the other instruments until it assumes the definitive form shown in Ex. 4.

Ex. 4

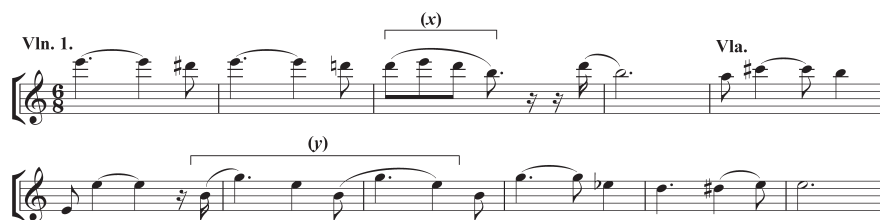
Obs.



Ex. 5

The tempo of the first part gradually increases, and the music starts to recall the second movement of *Istar Suite* No. 2 (depicting the arrival of spring) with its easy-going $\frac{6}{8}$ metre and the general cast of its melodic lines, which blossom forth more readily and without

Ex. 6



the hesitancy of *Dream of the Past*, yet with a nod in the direction of some of its techniques. The melodic processes of this work have been examined in detail by Sandra Bergmannová¹⁸ who identifies two themes which evolve and combine throughout. The first features a prominent ascending fifth or descending fourth, whilst the second sticks to stepwise motion. Neither is stated in a definitive version: rather, the music plays a game of Chinese whispers. As the piece unwinds, intervals and rhythms are ‘mis-heard’, portions of the theme are dropped or new information added. Ostensibly different statements may be linked by the same rhythmic underlay, or by a general similarity of interval rather than an exact reproduction. At the end of the process, the message may seem fundamentally different from the start; in fact, all manifestations are linked by the subtle deformations, the infinite malleability of the melodic line. These transforming methods were to remain influential throughout Martinů’s subsequent changes of style. Many of the works to be examined in the next two chapters contain themes which, though firmer and more tangible than those of *The Blue Hour*, undergo constant metamorphosis. The Symphonies were also to benefit from this way of thinking – the finale of the First Symphony, for instance, has a theme which occurs in many different variations, clearly allied to one another but appearing to allude to some common, unspecified ancestry. One aspect of the harmony of *The Blue Hour* is also prescient. The first complete harmony to be heard – a second inversion of A major in the fifth bar – is the first of several such chords positioned prominently in the early stages. Later, an important formal subdivision is launched on a second inversion of D flat major. The reliance upon second inversions was to become heavier in the coming years, with many implications for Martinů’s harmonic style.

The second section is animated by a lively, distinctive rhythm first announced in major seconds by the horns (Ex. 7(a)). Perhaps this

¹⁸ *Míjející půlnoc (1922): příspěvek k rané symfonické tvorbě Bohuslava Martinů*, Charles University, Prague, 1999.

rhythm is the ‘pulse of life’ to which the programme note refers. Like the melodic motives, it is subject to various transformations – the dotted and triplet elements are combined freely, and elements may be dropped – but the most persistent variant is shown in Ex. 7(b). For

Ex. 7



more than 150 bars, these rhythms dominate the music, sometimes appearing in the percussion alone, elsewhere becoming more melodically active in accompanimental figuration. Only a handful of bars are free of their influence. None of Martinů's earlier orchestral scores employs the cumulative force of rhythm in this way and the significance of its appearance here can hardly be overstated. The same device will be used – usually with more rigidity – on many occasions in the Symphonies, where it becomes a powerful agent of drive and cohesion. Meanwhile, some unexpected developments unfold in the melodic line. The short oboe phrase which opens the second section attempts to re-capture the spirit of the first movement. It combines the inversion of Ex. 3(z) with a quaver figure familiar from another oboe solo within *Satyrs*. At first, this new idea merely alternates with material introduced in the first part of *The Blue Hour*, but its simple phrases soon grow longer and longer. As the tempo quickens from *Moderato* through *Poco Allegretto* and *Poco animato*, memories of the first movement waltz are increasingly stirred. There is never any direct quotation, merely a strong suggestion that the constituent elements are being tried out in new combinations. The phrasing of the waltz – in particular the use of hemiola – is also recalled. The lucidity of the texture disguises the deftness with which Martinů combines first and second-movement material in a relaxed contrapuntal dialogue. At one point, an expanded version of the oboe theme appears for a few bars in canon at the fifth between violins and violas. Eventually, an aggrandisement of a peaceful theme from an *Andante* in the first part takes over and leads to a final powerful outburst. The grand synthesis of ideas is satisfactorily completed as material from the introduction – never heard since – returns to cap the entire movement: the modest phrase shown at Ex. 6(y) is splendidly transformed into an imposing brass chorale before the movement, like the first, fades away in faint reminiscence of its opening.

The final part of the cycle, *Shadows*, contains some of the most astonishing orchestral music of Martinů's entire career. This music is intended to be the stuff of nightmares, of those fears and dreads described elsewhere in the programme as 'shadows arising in the soul, with which man fights an eternal battle'. At fifteen minutes' duration, it is the longest and most ambitious of the three pieces, and uses a slightly larger orchestra including bass clarinet and contrabassoon. The instrumentation throughout *Shadows* finds Martinů at his most showy and virtuosic: the string parts are liberally peppered with switches from *arco* to *pizzicato* and back, whilst the shivering sound of *sul ponticello* – playing on the bridge of the instrument – is frequently employed to maintain the mood of suspense. An episode from the central *Allegro* illustrates the fastidious detail and unprecedented boldness of effect on display here: the strings divide into eleven parts, the top eight of which play rapid descending tetrachords in semiquavers.¹⁹ The eight parts enter successively, each either a major or minor second higher than the last, to produce an opaque and threatening gale of sound, almost devoid of conventional harmonic sense and fast approaching the status of a cluster. In novel writing like this, one hears the germ of the impressive webs of sound Martinů was to spin in his final decade. The upper strings are supported by *sul ponticello* in double basses and a chromatic ostinato in the bassoons, decorated with trills in the cello. The woodwind deliver an angular, chromatic and rhythmically irregular melody in octaves, while two timpanists punctuate the texture at intervals – each striking two notes to produce four-part chords. The extravagant writing for timpani is a special novelty throughout *Shadows*, and sometimes requires careful co-ordination – at one point, Martinů divides an ostinato in quintuplet crotchets between the two players (doubled in lower strings) while most of the orchestra is once again engaged in waltz-like material. On a number of occasions, the four-part chords are extended as rolls, requiring four players. The last bars of the work feature chords of C minor on the timpani, unaccompanied save for brusque closing comments from the rest of the orchestra – an effect bound to cause comparison with the 'Scène aux champs' from Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*.

Shadows, like *Satyrs*, opens on a seventh chord (in its final inversion) where the seventh degree is subjected to much decoration in the viola part. There the similarities end. The introduction, which continues for 50 bars, contains no genuine themes, but a mélange of agonised and fearful gestures which set the tone for the whole movement but

¹⁹ A tetrachord is a pattern of four adjacent notes – e.g., G, F, E, D.

Ex. 8

Trbs.



around from one group of instruments to another, but incapable of much variation and therefore liable to exhaust one's patience. In spite of the ferocity of tone, there are signs that Martinů is attempting a degree of synthesis of materials from the entire cycle. The first indication comes with Ex. 9.

Ex. 9

⑤ **Allegro moderato**



This supple violin theme brings some measure of assuagement, at the same time suggesting a kinship with music from the two preceding movements. The tempo and time signature recall the waltz of the first movement, as does the return of the hemiola, whilst the prominent descending fourth is shared with a group of themes from the second. Anxiety is kept at arms' length, but not entirely dispelled – it remains present in the rumbling ostinato of the lower strings, and intensifies later when they take up the first two bars of Ex. 8 as counterpoint. In spite of the allusions to earlier material, no actual quotations are made until the end of the *Allegro*, when Ex. 6(y) emerges in the brass, swollen to imposing dimensions as it was at the end of *The Blue Hour*. A cataclysmic chord of C minor, using all four timpanists, bass drum and cymbals, and where the woodwind and brass are marked *fff*, brings this hurricane section to a close.

The haunted interior of the movement strikes me as more successful, its gestures less bombastic and more genuinely sinister. Strange *ostinati* strike up on harp and *pizzicato* violins, moving between two adjacent notes like the anxious ticking of a clock. Sinuous chromatic phrases are passed between the bass clarinet and lower strings. The sense of menace is all the more gripping for being so understated, and it is a shame that this mood is not sustained for longer. In another lengthy *Allegro*, the sinuous phrases from the interior are expanded and developed, often heard against augmented forms of Ex. 8. Further reminders of *The Blue Hour* are incorporated at this point, since the rhythm of Ex. 7(a) now comes to the fore. Adapted to a common time-signature, it sounds increasingly similar to the rhythm that dominates the early stages of Debussy's *Fêtes*, from his orchestral triptych *Nocturnes*. The re-appearance of Ex. 9, this time developed at more length, takes the piece through to its final stages, where Ex. 6(y) once more appears in grandiose fashion but is combined for the first time with the chromatic ascent from Ex. 8. The movement ends on a chord of C minor, as the first half had done. The conclusion is something of a surprise given the content of Martinů's programme note, which, written retrospectively, gives the impression of an optimistic ending – midnight passes and a new day is dawning. But I sense no awakening of new hope in this stark conclusion – it is uncompromisingly gloomy and pessimistic. Given the sheer length of this tirade and its excessive focus on neurotic and hysterical emotions, some restoration of calm at the end would certainly have been welcome and musically more satisfying.

Undeniably, I feel that the exaggerated expressionism of *Shadows* lets down the cycle as a whole. Nevertheless, of all Martinů's unloved and unwanted early works for orchestra, *Passing Midnight* most urgently invites discovery. Its very position in Halbreich's catalogue arouses one's curiosity: Martinů was about to undergo a radical change of style and perhaps consciously created this work as a grand summation of his achievements to date before striking out upon a new path. The construction of themes from small building-blocks which can be disassembled and developed independently goes all the way back to *The Death of Tintagiles*. The orchestration enshrines his early love of the late Romantics as well as the influence of his later Impressionist idols. The more simply scored passages in the first movement – such as Ex. 3 – not only look back to the style of his early ballet *The Shadow* but also as far ahead as his greatest ballet *Špalíček*, completed in 1932. The vigour and buoyancy discovered in the *Little Dance Suite* is also appropriated in full measure. Martinů took unusual care with this score: the manuscripts of all three movements are full

of emendations, carried out in consultation with Josef Suk and pasted over the original. It would be an exaggeration to call this cycle a masterpiece, yet it contains many pointers to future mastery, rewards detailed study and cries out for exhumation.

Kdo je na světě nejmocnější?

(‘Who is the Most Powerful in the World?’), #133

When charting the development of a composer, it is not usually possible to nominate a precise moment where his apprentice years came to an end. The path to full maturity is most often gradual, its progress mapped out by a succession of works, each building on the advances made by preceding ones. In Martinů’s case, things were different. His one-act ballet *Who is the Most Powerful in the World?* is separated from *Passing Midnight* by a single piano piece in Halbreich’s catalogue but, as Talich was quick to point out, it represented ‘a leap and not a step’ in his development. When the work was first performed in Brno in January 1925, critics saw its use of jazz, and the apparent influence of Stravinsky, as responses to the stimulating environment of Paris, where Martinů had moved in October 1923. Martinů adamantly corrected them – the ballet, he insisted, was written before his move to Paris, when he was barely acquainted with Stravinsky’s music. As for jazz, it can easily be shown that its influence had begun before the departure for France. He had already written two *Foxtrots* for piano in 1919 and 1920 respectively, the latter sounding surprisingly like a Scott Joplin rag. In spite of its radical stylistic departure, *Who is the Most Powerful in the World?* is an assured score, whose pure entertainment value is very high indeed. It might be claimed that in this work and those which came after it, Martinů succeeded merely in replacing one set of influences with another. This assertion would be unfair – the majority of his work from the 1920s has a personality all its own. It often feels markedly different from his output of the 1930s, and further shifts occur in the ’40s and ’50s. Fortunately, Martinů had a fine ability to express himself in a variety of different ways whilst preserving something essentially his at all times. In this respect he was in good company. Although Stravinsky was undoubtedly a stronger and more original figure, I have similar feelings about the various phases of his career. The early Russian nationalist works, the neo-classical phase and the late serial pieces sound ostensibly very different from one another, yet beneath the surface something uniquely Stravinskian can always be found, be it the choice of instrumentation, the spacing of a chord or certain rhythmic inflections. To be open to new influences is not to deny one’s own personality – through his late appreciation of Webern, Stravinsky found a way to express new aspects of himself.

Likewise, new influences and interests never stopped flowing through Martinů's music, and his personality was eventually strong enough to assimilate and rise above them. Stravinsky, jazz, the Elizabethan madrigal, Baroque *concerto grosso* and Moravian folk song were all to leave their marks on his style, sometimes producing different 'sorts' of Martinů, yet all subjugated to an original and increasingly powerful musical personality.

II

The 1920s in Paris

Martinů's relocation to Paris was made possible by the award of a travel scholarship from the Ministry of Education in Prague. He left for Paris shortly after the death of his father, a bereavement which may have weakened his ties to Czechoslovakia and encouraged him to explore the wider world. He had first encountered Paris in 1919, having been invited to augment the National Theatre orchestra on tour. His scholarship provided for a stay of three months; in the event, Paris became his home for almost eighteen years, until the events of the Second World War forced him to flee to America. One wonders exactly how he made ends meet at first. In Prague, he had been sustained by regular work with the Czech Philharmonic. He did no such work in Paris – indeed, he seems to have given up on life as a professional violinist entirely. Apart from its role in his compositions, the violin disappears from his life after Prague.

He was soon swept away by the variety, vivacity and daring of Parisian cultural life. The apparent influences on *Who is the Most Powerful in the World?* were strengthened and deepened throughout the remainder of the 1920s. He began to use jazz elements more and more frequently in his music, especially in the operas and ballets written in the latter half of the decade. Although he had defended himself against the charge of Stravinskianism in his 1922 ballet, he quickly became devoted to Stravinsky's works, with *The Wedding* and *The Soldier's Tale* as particular favourites. He wrote a number of polemical articles at the time, defending Stravinsky and his music. Nonetheless, it was to the French composer Albert Roussel that he turned for advice and informal tuition. He had played some of Roussel's music with the Czech Philharmonic, and admired both the First Symphony and the ballet *Le Festin de l'araignée* ('The Spider's Banquet'). From Roussel he sought to acquire 'order, clarity, balance, refinement of taste, accuracy and sensibility of expression, the qualities in French art I have always admired'.¹ The admiration was mutual – in later years, Roussel

¹ Cf. Šafránek, *Life and Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.