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Recording engineers: Gabriela Blicharz and Lech Dudzik
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Producer: Ian Hobson

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Booklet essay: Michael Crump
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MARTINŮ

Early Orchestral Works Volume One

Prélude en forme de scherzo
Orchestral Movement, H90
Little Dance Suite
Village Feast
Nocturno

Sinfonia Varsovia
Ian Hobson, conductor

FIRST RECORDINGS

MARTINŮ'S EARLY ORCHESTRAL WORKS – A PREFACE

by Aleš Březina

After the recent recordings of early works for violin (Bohuslav Matoušek with Petr Adamec on Supraphon), solo piano (Giorgio Koukl on Naxos) and early songs (Jana Wallingerová with Giorgio Koukl, again on Naxos) we finally receive an insight into the early orchestral output of Bohuslav Martinů. With the exception of the composer's own arrangement of the short 1929 *Prelude* for piano, all the works on this CD date from 1907 to 1919. They all are enormously interesting documents of the development of this autodidact composer, who starting with the String Quartet No. 2, H150, of 1925 became one of the most readily recognisable voices in twentieth-century music.

The stylistic range of the works on this CD spans from the charming naivety of *Posvícení*, in which the seventeen-year-old violin-student of the Prague Conservatory quotes a well known Czech folksong *To je zlaté posvícení, to je zlatá neděle* ('What a golden feast, what a golden Sunday'), via the Debussy-inspired works from 1913–15, to the *Little Dance Suite* from 1919, with its obvious references to his great Czech predecessors Smetana and Dvořák.

All these works bring clear evidence of Martinů's strong melodic capacity as well as his ability to create effective combinations of sound. In some moments they point towards the music he wrote in the mid-1920s without really anticipating the revolutionary development after his relocation from Prague to Paris at the end of 1923.

Knowing well the original sources and the editorial difficulties they involve, I have to express my deep admiration for the detective and archaeological skills and always insightful and precise work of the editor of most of these scores, Michael Crump, and of Sandra Bergmannová, who prepared the *Nocturno*; their work has allowed this music to reach an international audience for the first time.

Aleš Březina is Director of the Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague.

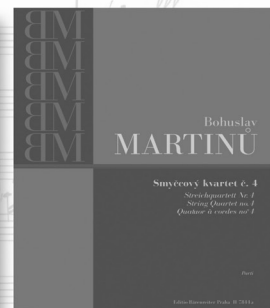
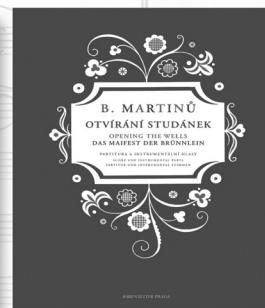
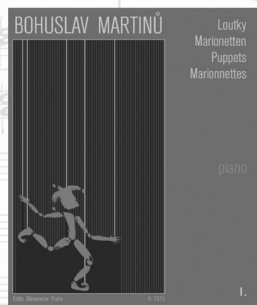


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Performance materials for the works recorded on this CD (except the *Prélude* H 181) are available from the archive of Bärenreiter Praha. Most of these editions – now published for the first time – have been prepared by Michael Crump.

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for the Zephyr label in the dual role of pianist and conductor – an achievement no other performer has matched. In addition, he has recorded more than twenty albums for the Arabesque label featuring the music of Clementi, Dussek and Weber, the complete piano sonatas of Hummel, the complete solo piano transcriptions of Rachmaninov, and *Hobson's Choice*, a collection of his favourite pieces exploring the multiple facets of virtuosity across the span of three centuries.

He has also been engaged in recording a sixteen-volume collection of the complete works of Chopin, also for the Zephyr label, having marked the composer's 200th birthday with a series of ten solo concerts in New York. In addition to the large body of work for solo piano, this recording series features his performances as pianist and conductor, with the Sinfonia Varsovia, in all of the works for piano and orchestra, as well as his collaboration as pianist with other artists in Chopin's chamber music and songs. In this edition there is around three-quarters of an hour of music by Chopin that has never been recorded before, making Ian Hobson the first-ever artist to record the composer's entire *œuvre*.

Ian Hobson is in increasing demand as a conductor, particularly for performances in which he doubles as a pianist. He made his debut in this capacity in 1996 with the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, and has since appeared with the English Chamber Orchestra and the Sinfonia Varsovia (at Carnegie Hall), among others. He also performs extensively as pianist-conductor with Sinfonia da Camera, a group he formed in 1984 and which quickly gained international recognition through its recordings. The ensemble celebrated its 25th anniversary in May 2009 with the first performance of Moscheles' Piano Concerto No. 8, orchestrated by Ian Hobson from notes scrawled by the composer on an original piano score.

He is also active as an opera conductor, with a repertoire that encompasses works by Cimarosa and Pergolesi, Mozart and Beethoven, and Johann and Richard Strauss. In 1997 he conducted John Philip Sousa's comic opera *El Capitan* in a newly restored version with a stellar cast of young singers; the recording was issued the following year as one of the inaugural releases of the Zephyr label, which Ian Hobson founded. A fervent advocate of Enescu's music, he conducted the 2005 North American premiere of *Oedipe*, in a semi-staged version performed by Sinfonia da Camera on the 50th anniversary of the composer's death; a recording of the event was released by Albany Records in 2006.

In April 1984 Yehudi Menuhin was invited to Poland to perform as a soloist and conductor with what was then the Polish Chamber Orchestra, and in order to meet the requirements of the planned repertoire, the orchestra brought in extra members. After the first concerts the delighted Menuhin expressed his desire to continue working with the new-formed group and became the first guest conductor of the new orchestra, which took the name **Sinfonia Varsovia**. The ensemble has since performed in the world's most prestigious concert halls, participated in some of its most renowned festivals, and welcomed many eminent conductors and soloists. It has also made numerous recordings, from CD to radio to television and now boasts a discography of over 200 albums. Krzysztof Penderecki became musical director in 1997 and artistic director in July 2003, a position he still holds; from 2008 to 2012 the music director of the orchestra was Marc Minkowski.

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ: EARLY ORCHESTRAL WORKS, Volume One

by Michael Crump

In 1923 Bohuslav Martinů made one of the most important decisions of his life, when he resolved to undertake a short period of study abroad. Although he already had well over a hundred works to his credit, he clearly felt he required new nourishment and stimulation. Paris seemed to be the obvious place to seek this inspiration: he had visited the city in 1919 while on tour with the Orchestra of the National Theatre. Furthermore, he had always been drawn more naturally to the aesthetic world of French music than to the Austro-German models held up to students of the Prague Conservatoire during his (eventually unsuccessful) time there. A grant from the Ministry of Education in Prague provided for an initial stay of three months in the French capital – but such was the allure of this great city that it soon became his home for many years. It was here that he met his wife, Charlotte (*née* Quennehen), here he profited from informal instruction from the composer Albert Roussel, here that he absorbed the influence of Stravinsky and jazz, here that he allowed his love of the Baroque *concerto grosso*, the Elizabethan madrigal and the memory of Moravian folksong that he had brought with him to infiltrate his style – and here that he slowly developed, over the remainder of the decade, the distinctive musical personality that is familiar today. Indeed, it is here, arguably, that he would have lived for the remainder of his life had the Nazi occupation of France not forced the Martinůs to flee France to the USA in 1941.

The move to Paris, obviously a watershed in Martinů's career, has served posterity as a convenient dividing line – as though it separated music that was worthwhile from *juvenilia* which could safely be ignored. But although Martinů went to France to refine and clarify his musical vision and was not too proud to seek advice from Roussel, he had already tasted success in his native land. His patriotic cantata *Czech Rhapsody*, written to celebrate the founding, in 1918, of an independent Czechoslovak republic, met with considerable acclaim. In the years immediately following his departure for Paris, the National Theatre in Prague mounted productions of his ballets *Istar* and *Who is the Most Powerful in the World?*, both written before he left. These works, along with others such as the First String Quartet (1918), the song-cycles *Nipponari* (1912) and *Magic Nights* (1918), and the three cycles of piano pieces known as *Puppets* (1912–25), present a composer who, though not yet entirely distinctive in his utterance, displays impeccable craftsmanship and the ability to write fascinating and highly attractive music.

Although some of these pieces are becoming better-known, they still stand as islands of familiarity in the vast uncharted sea of Martinů's early compositions. Gradually, these waters are being navigated,

thanks to inaugural recordings of piano pieces and songs (the two genres which dominate this part of his career, accounting for over 100 out of 140 works). Nonetheless, there has been virtually no attempt until now to extend the voyage of discovery as far as his early orchestral works: they remain unexplored, as though surrounded by treacherous reefs. Indeed, several of them have garnered poor reputations over the years, labelled by the handful of musicologists who have examined them as incomplete, incompetent or downright unplayable. It is true that Martinů left many of these early manuscripts in a rather poor condition and that a considerable amount of editorial intervention is required before adequate performing materials can be prepared. Even so, the effort is always amply rewarded, as the works on this CD, the first in a projected sequence of six, testify. Not only is this music well-crafted and beautifully orchestrated, but from time to time it gives hints of future glory. That life-enhancing sense of exhilaration, so familiar from the Martinů symphonies, is present in no small measure in these gems from the start of his career.

***Prélude en forme de scherzo, H181a* (1929, orch. 1930)**

This little work [1] was first conceived as the second of the *Eight Preludes* for piano which Martinů wrote in Paris in 1929 and dedicated to Charlotte. In the following year, he arranged it for a large orchestra, with an extensive percussion section which, curiously, omits timpani. Although it post-dates Martinů's move to France, it has been included here as an ideal curtain-raiser and because it, too, has not yet been recorded.

In the late 1920s Martinů produced a number of works which employed a harsher tone and a higher degree of dissonance than almost anything he had previously composed. Works such as the *Fantaisie* for two pianos (H180) and the Third String Quartet (H183) display a motoric intensity and uncompromising harmonic language shared by several of the intervening preludes, not least the one presented here. The title of each prelude attempts (with varying degrees of success) to summarise its character. Two of them (*Prélude en forme de blues*, *Prélude en forme de foxtrot*) attest to Martinů's lingering interest in jazz; others (*Prélude en forme d'andante*, *Prélude en forme de largo*) are little more than enhanced tempo indications. The title *Prélude en forme de scherzo* is perhaps a nod to Beethoven, the swift triple-time pulse matching the invigorating scherzi of Beethoven's Fourth, Fifth, Seventh and Ninth Symphonies. The orchestral version enhances this affinity, at the same time anticipating later developments in Martinů's career: the vigorous cross-rhythms and tumultuous orchestration distinctly foreshadow the scherzo of his own First Symphony, written in America a dozen years later.

trombones and a tuba, employed to good effect in the unexpectedly agitated and martial introductory paragraph in A minor. Martinů pulls out all the stops here, creating a 50-bar introduction of intense restlessness – a kaleidoscopic succession of disparate moods, textures, tempi quite unlike the relatively settled demeanour of the preceding movements. The polka/polonaise takes its place as merely the last of these fleeting impressions, stability achieved only with the emergence of yet another new theme in the unexpectedly remote key of B major. This splendid theme, stately and expansive, is the emotional highlight of the entire suite. It is one of the most memorable and affecting inspirations to be found in Martinů's early output, and he surely realised that he had struck gold with it, since he now affords it the luxury of several restatements on cor anglais, solo violin and finally flute. Gradually, the music emerges from this reverie, and the polka/polonaise episode is restated in its entirety, extended by means of a quirky, almost bi-tonal development of its materials. At the very end, the majestic central theme combines with a suggestion of the polka rhythms to bring the work to a rousing conclusion.

Michael Crump is the author of Martinů and the Symphony (Toccata Press, London, 2010) and the editor, for Editio Bärenreiter Praha, of several of Martinů's early orchestral scores.

Ian Hobson, pianist and conductor, enjoys an international reputation both for his performances of the Romantic repertoire and of neglected piano music old and new, and for his assured conducting from both the piano and the podium, renewing interest in the music of such lesser-known masters as Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Hummel as well as being an effective advocate of works written expressly for him by contemporary composers, among them John Gardner, Benjamin Lees, David Liptak, Alan Ridout and Roberto Sierra.

Born in Wolverhampton in 1952 and one of the youngest-ever graduates of the Royal Academy of Music, Ian Hobson began his international career in 1981 when he won First Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition. He studied also at Cambridge and Yale Universities. Among his piano teachers were Sidney Harrison, Ward Davenny, Claude Frank and Menahem Pressler; as a conductor he studied with Otto Werner Mueller, Denis Russell Davies, Daniel Lewis and Gustav Meier, and he worked with Lorin Maazel in Cleveland and Leonard Bernstein at Tanglewood. A professor in the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), Ian Hobson received the endowed chair of Swanlund Professor of Music in 2000.

He is a recording artist of prodigious energy, having to date amassed a discography of some sixty releases, including the complete piano sonatas of Beethoven and Schumann and a complete edition of Brahms' variations for piano. In 2007, with the Sinfonia Varsovia, he recorded Rachmaninov's four piano concertos and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*



the dotted 6/8 rhythm of the theme passed between oboe, horn and cor anglais strongly suggests the *siciliano* as a model. The opening paragraph clings stubbornly to A major, only allowing occasional inflections to suggest other keys, but the orchestration and the melodic material are so beguiling that 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, and 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 beguiling Scherzo [7] is chiefly remarkable for its novel approach to instrumentation. The outer sections are entrusted to a subset of the wind and brass players, given a little help from percussion. The absence of strings brings a more austere, less luscious sound-world to the fore – mischievous at the start, charmingly bucolic in the central *Grazioso* and more sternly martial towards the close. The restriction of timbre intriguingly looks forward to Martinů's First Symphony of 1942; in that case, the trio of the second movement is delivered by wind and brass alone, as is a short episode in the finale.

The central trio, by contrast, is scored for strings alone, divided into three distinct groups deployed in such a novel manner that Martinů felt obliged to add a few extra staves at the top of the score to show precisely what he had in mind. The first group is a solo string quartet, which plays unmuted throughout. The second group comprises eight players (the second and third players from each string section except the basses) and begins with 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*. As the trio proceeds, the third group advances from the background and is entrusted with more melodic material. For the last 43 bars, all three groups are unmuted and 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 title of the finale [8] is as misleading as the name of the whole piece. The title page has the wording *Allegro à la Polka*, though the characteristic duple-time rhythm of the polka is present only for a passage of fifteen bars, once repeated. Triple-time music is actually more characteristic of this finale, suggesting a polonaise rather than a polka. Although the finale is the shortest movement of the suite, it is nonetheless the most imposing and multi-faceted. The orchestra is augmented by a fourth trumpet, three

Posvícení ('Village Feast'), H2 (1907)

Martinů's very first work was written in his home town of Polička around 1902, when he was at most eleven years of age. It is a work for string quartet entitled *Tři jezdci* ('The Three Riders'), based on a ballad by the Czech poet Jaroslav Vrchlický – an ambitious undertaking for one so young, and sufficiently well done to have been performed and recorded in modern times. Nonetheless, the manuscript betrays its author's modest experience: the viola and cello parts are written in treble clef throughout, since he had not yet mastered the alto and bass clefs. After this promising start, there is a puzzling gap of several years – perhaps filled with compositions which have not survived, but more likely a period where composition was temporarily abandoned in favour of his violin studies.

Posvícení, his second known composition [3], was composed in 1907 and performed in the Municipal Theatre in Polička that same year. It is a brief but charming suite of dances for flute and seven-part string orchestra (there are three violin and two cello parts in addition to viola and double-bass). The title *Posvícení* is variously translated into English as 'Village Feast' or 'Harvest Festival'. Traditionally, it is celebrated on dates which coincide with the anniversary of the consecration of the local church. Increasingly, the term is used for communal celebrations of almost any sort. In *Posvícení*, Martinů quotes the melody of a song associated with the traditional festival, *To je zlaté posvícení* ('What a golden feast!') a tune familiar to many Czechs to this day.

The piece begins with a relatively placid introduction, the accompanimental rhythm of which – in divided cellos with detached interjections from upper strings – brings the Habanera from Bizet's *Carmen* to mind. In due course, the *posvícení* song is quoted for the first time, in slightly elaborated form, by solo viola and two solo cellos. It is then taken up by the full ensemble before dying away to a hushed *ppp*. After a short pause, the more dance-like episodes ensue: a tense chromatic ascent in the strings lead to a brief episode in the style of a mazurka and an even shorter snatch of music reminiscent of a polka. The traditional *posvícení* theme stays aloof from these proceedings, and remains absent as the music momentarily recalls the very opening. The final section is a more extended and rumbustious dance, somewhat in the style of the Czech *skočná* (a vigorous dance in duple time, exemplified by the fifth dance from Dvořák's first set of *Slavonic Dances*), full of verve and high spirits. The *posvícení* theme is delightfully worked into this new material, concluding the work with an irresistible *joie de vivre*, not far removed in tone from Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances* (written ten years later, in 1917). Although the perfunctory closing chords of *Posvícení* betray the impetuosity of youth and may raise an understanding smile, the infectious *élan* of the preceding bars stays longer in the memory and is sure to win this youthful composition many friends.

Orchestral movement, H90 (1913–14)

Martinů's early compositional endeavours include a number of abortive attempts to move beyond *Posvícení* with a work for full orchestra. In his complete catalogue of Martinů's works¹ the outstanding Belgian musicologist Harry Halbreich – after whose efforts Martinů's works bear H numbers – records a piano sketch dating from 1909 (H4^{bis}), and a further sketch of four pages from 1910, intended to be a symphonic poem based on Victor Hugo's novel *The Toilers of the Sea* (H11). Not until later that year did two substantial symphonic poems finally progress to fully completed manuscripts. These two works – *The Death of Tintagiles*, H15, after the puppet play by Maurice Maeterlinck, and *The Angel of Death*, H17, after a novel by the Polish author Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer – have, more than any other early works by Martinů, been roundly censured by musicologists as impractical and perhaps impossible to rescue from oblivion. Maybe he, too, was dissatisfied with them, since the next few years reveal only tentative steps towards a return to orchestral writing. Halbreich records another piano sketch (H45) covering 28 pages of manuscript which dates from around 1912, which could have given rise to a very substantial orchestral work but was instead abandoned. An *Andante* for orchestra (H61) is mentioned in a list of works by Martinů's friend and biographer Miloš Šafránek² but has never come to light. The only testimony to Martinů's developing prowess in instrumentation is the song-cycle *Nipponari*, also from 1912 and no longer a stranger to the concert stage thanks to the persuasive advocacy of the Czech mezzo-soprano Dagmar Pecková. The vocal soloist is accompanied by a chamber ensemble of thirty players and although the instrumental complement varies markedly from one song to the next, the mastery of instrumental colour remains constant. Not until 1914 did Martinů return to writing for full orchestra for 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. A number of single-movement works followed in its wake, the most mysterious of which [2] is its immediate neighbour in Halbreich's catalogue.

The work has no title page, nor is there any tempo indication at the start, and it is therefore referred to by its catalogue number, H90. For these reasons, it has been claimed by Halbreich³ that the work is a mere fragment, but the presence of full instrumental names on the first page (which one normally sees only at the start of a composition, or of an individual movement) argues against this viewpoint, as does

Martinů seems to have become reconciled to the fate of this work, it surely does not deserve the oblivion into which it fell. Harry Halbreich, in the brief notes which accompany his catalogue entry for the Suite, enthusiastically praises its merits, elevating it above the Impressionistic scores which surround it:

How refreshing, after so much over-refinement, after all these languorous cor anglais solos and endless tremoli on divided and muted strings, to come across this vigorous, cheerful and unaffected village music!⁶

The suite opens with a Waltz [5] which at once demonstrates the qualities Halbreich so enthusiastically described. To the simplest of accompaniments from *pizzicato* strings and harp, a solo violin delivers a sentimental, slightly naïve theme. In spite of the earthy good humour of this music, there is subtle craftsmanship to be found in the details of the thematic working. The violin solo contains two vital elements: the three-note ascent at the very start and the turn-like figure which immediately follows. Throughout the Waltz, the melody passes from one instrument to the next, always referring to those two elements yet never restating the theme in its original form. The Waltz resembles an elaborate orchestral game of Chinese whispers, in which each instrument remembers the most essential characteristics of the melody passed to it, but alters its phrasing or re-orders its elements. Along the way, the initial melody is successfully transformed into a charming duet for the oboes, a graceful minuet for the full orchestra, and a more elephantine statement in the lower strings – all decked out in sumptuous but sparkling orchestral colours. The harmonies are mostly diatonic but with subtle chromatic inflections, especially at cadences, which take the music refreshingly and unexpectedly into remote areas, moving 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 and is delivered by a reduced orchestra of divided strings, with support from horns, flutes, oboes and harp. At a markedly slower tempo, a solo cello emerges with a repetitive but heart-warming melody, the charm of which lies in the subtly shifting harmonies supporting it. The trio, 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.

The second movement, *Moderato* [6], bears the title 'Píseň' ('Song') and is a delightfully lyrical statement from start to finish. Although the title of the movement avoids referring to any specific dance,

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 251.

¹ Bohuslav Martinů: *Werkverzeichnis und Biographie*, Schott, Mainz, 2006.

² Bohuslav Martinů: *His Life and Works*, Allan Wingate, London, 1962, p. 334.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 249.

of the Past from 1920 and *Passing Midnight* from 1922) are of a similar ilk. Yet the Suite jettisons all traces of Impressionism, replacing them with a direct and unaffected lyricism. Unlike the only surviving *Symphonic Dance* (which has precious few, if any, terpsichorean qualities), the *Little Dance Suite* lives up to its title, employing vigorous rhythmic patterns and a far less fussy (though nonetheless alluring) approach to orchestration.

The Bohuslav Martinů Centre in Polička contains a complete set of orchestral parts for this work. On the back page of the tuba part, the copyist (presumably) has noted that the Suite was to be performed at the Municipal House in Prague, by the Czech Philharmonic. He adds the date 8 February 1920, which may be either the date on which he finished his work or perhaps that on which the performance was meant to take place – for Talich withdrew the work at the rehearsal stage. Martinů must have felt crushed by this turn of events at the time, and the incident remained vivid in his mind for the rest of his life: as late as 1955, in a heart-warming letter to Talich, he reflects on their long artistic association, and refers back to this episode:

I must thank you for this, because it was an important turning-point in my life, where I could have lost those qualities that make an artist, and your blunt rejection made me realise many important things. [...] I have to admit that you gave me the biggest lesson of my life when one day you stopped the orchestra and said 'Gentlemen, we shall not be playing this'. [...] And I have remembered this sad misadventure often, whenever I have been tempted to make a composition lighter, and I have always thanked you in my soul and thank you yet again today.⁵

Martinů's last sentence may encapsulate the reason for Talich's decision. Perhaps he felt that this engaging, unaffected music was insufficiently adventurous for his tastes – he was certainly more enthusiastic about later, more progressive works such as *La Bagarre*, which he performed on many occasions in later years. Had Talich persevered with the Suite, he would have found that the composer had strewn many more obstacles in his path, since the manuscript given to the copyist contains countless errors – accidentals and changes of clef are frequently missing, articulations are inconsistent and, on one occasion, an entry clearly intended for the clarinets appears on the cor anglais stave. Precious rehearsal time would have been wasted on the correction of parts; it would not have taken long for Talich to appreciate the situation, and perhaps this consideration, too, played a part in his decision. In the event, the *Little Dance Suite* had to wait over forty years for its first (and, before this recording, only) complete performance. Like *Nocturno 1*, it was broadcast on Brno Radio in 1963, but sadly that recording does not survive. Although

⁴ Letter dated 9 November 1955, preserved in the archives of the Muzeum Českého krasu, Beroun.

the return of the opening bars, in highly decorated form, at the mid-point. Listeners may now judge for themselves whether H90 is a complete musical utterance. The glittering sounds of *Night* are evoked right at the start, with harp, piano and celesta working in tandem – suggestive, indeed, of the sounds of the Balinese gamelan which had so intrigued Claude Debussy at the International Exposition in Paris in 1889. In spite of its highly coloured surface, H90 employs a relatively modest orchestra. Apart from four horns and a tam-tam, brass and percussion are eliminated from the scoring, and even the strings are strictly limited in their activity. For most of the time, they add a shimmering *tremolando* halo to the upper reaches of the texture, leaving the woodwind to look after the main thematic material.

Although H90 is a highly distinctive composition in its own right, certain vital elements of its structure point to two famous landmarks in Impressionist orchestral music. The first of these is a four-note descending ostinato, (C sharp, B, A, G, harmonised in parallel major triads) which stalks through the outer sections in the lower reaches of harp and piano, and suggests an acquaintance with Ravel's *Rhapsodie espagnole* of 1908. Above this ostinato, a sinuous melody is entrusted in turn to the cor anglais and flute. 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.

The ostinato winds down, leaving the first violins momentarily stranded on a high C sharp *tremolando*. The oboes and cor anglais embark on an unbroken 27-bar melody, free of the ostinato at last but illuminated by the rainbow commentary of harp, celesta and piano. Eventually, the music builds to its central climax – seven bars in which, for the first and only time, the strings carry the melody unaided. At its zenith, the melody is abruptly torn off, revealing a ruminative new ostinato circling ominously in the cellos and basses. The opening bars are now reprised with extravagant opulence, and in due course the cor anglais repeats its sinuous theme, accompanied now not only by the original Ravelian ostinato but also by the new ostinato in the lower strings. In the final bars, the music appears to dissolve into nothingness. Clarinet and viola solos attempt in vain to imitate the cor anglais and eventually both ostinati fragment into isolated notes in the celesta and *pizzicato* double-basses. The movement ends in attenuated sonorities full of poetry and mystery, with artificial harmonics on solo strings and the softest possible concluding stroke on the tam-tam.

Nocturno 1, H91 (1914–15)

Nocturno 1 in F sharp minor ⁴, the immediate successor to H90 in Halbreich's catalogue, is another short orchestral work in Impressionist style. Structurally, it imitates its predecessor quite closely. The opening

material recurs in altered guise at the close, the two statements sandwiching a more martial episode for full orchestra, likewise interrupted at its summit by a disconcerting change in texture. Its instrumentation, on the other hand, is notably more sombre, omitting the celesta and drastically curtailing the activity of piano and harp. The discreet addition of trombones lends a certain solemn dignity at several points. Whereas the woodwind received the lion's share of the melody in H90, they are here kept silent for long stretches, the main material entrusted instead to a solo viola at the start and solo violin at the conclusion. Once again there is no tempo indication at the start of the piece, but there are several later on; the return of the theme on violin is marked *Lento*, which is presumably also the intention at the outset.

The long initial viola solo gradually winds down to the lowest note of the instrument, extended for eight bars beneath syncopated parallel chords in the upper strings. Although the moment inescapably recalls Debussy, the precise content of the chords again anticipates an important element of Martinů's later style. He became very fond of combining two major triads at the distance of a tritone – a combination found in embryonic form here. The full orchestra is roused for a brief, solemn march of about a dozen bars, containing the only loud music in the piece. It 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 Martinů's recent melodrama *Vážka* ('The Dragonfly', H83; 1913), scored for speaker, piano, harp and a violin asked to play *tremolando* and *sul ponticello* throughout, in imitation of the insect.

The syncopated parallel chords soon return, now entrusted to the piano. The closing violin solo ends on a high G sharp as the rest of the strings reiterate soft *tremolando* chords of F sharp minor. But there is a slight surprise at the end of the piece – the very last, almost inaudible chord on the strings is not F sharp minor, but C sharp minor. This chord makes the mildly dissonant G sharp of the soloist consonant once more – but by now, the ear has become so accustomed to the tonality of F sharp minor that this late change feels like anything but a resolution. The effect is mildly unsettling, which perhaps explains the treatment it was given when the *Nocturno* received its only previous recording, on Brno Radio in 1963: the performers on that occasion omitted the last chord, the soloist simply fading out on an unresolved G sharp.

The title *Nocturno 1* bears witness to the sad fact that other orchestral works written by Martinů are currently lost. A further *Nocturno* is known about; it occupies slot 96 in Halbreich's catalogue and apparently dates from 1915. The title page bears the subtitle *Růže v noci* ('Roses in the Night') and declares its source of inspiration as the *Chansons de Bilitis* (1894) by the French poet Pierre Louÿs.⁴ Martinů

⁴ Martinů will almost certainly have known the three poems from this collection that Debussy set to music in 1897 and perhaps also the *Six Épigraphes antiques* from 1914 (published by Durand in 1915), though their connection with Louÿs might not have been

quotes the text of the poem in Czech translation on the title page, but there is no indication of what sounds it inspired in him, for the title page is all that survives.

Thus H90 is a piece with no title page and H96 a title page with no piece. It is tempting to assume, naturally enough, that these two incomplete manuscripts belong together, that they represent one and the same work but, sadly, it seems unlikely that this conclusion can be sustained. The title page of H96 is written on sixteen-stave manuscript paper, whereas the paper on which H90 is written contains twenty staves – not conclusive proof, admittedly, but enough to convince both Miloš Šafránek and Harry Halbreich that the two pieces are indeed separate and, in the absence of any stronger evidence, one has to agree with their verdict. The title page of H96 also hints at other losses. It bears a further subtitle: *Symphonic Dance No. 2. Symphonic Dance No. 4* survives intact as the *Ballade*, H97, to be recorded in a later volume in this series. Perhaps the missing title page of H90 would, if found, declare it to be the first or third dance in the series. That leaves at least one more orchestral piece unaccounted for. In recent years, a number of Martinů works, previously thought lost, have resurfaced and at least one work has been found whose existence was previously unsuspected (the humorous piano piece *Victorious March of the R.U.R. Sports Club at Polička*). It is therefore not entirely unrealistic to hope that, in due course, further discoveries will result in a full complement of *Nocturnes* and *Symphonic Dances*.

Malá taneční suita ('Little Dance Suite'), H123 (1919)

Between the years 1920 and 1923, Martinů served as an 'extra' with the Czech Philharmonic, usually occupying a position towards the rear of the second violin section. At the helm was the renowned conductor Václav Talich who, in the years to come, was to be a staunch supporter of Martinů's music. The highpoint of their collaboration came in early 1938, when both conductor and composer triumphed at the premiere of Martinů's surrealist opera *Julietta* (dedicated to Talich). The two men became life-long friends, though the beginning of their artistic collaboration was anything but promising. In 1919 Martinů began work on his first multi-movement orchestral work to date, finishing the composition at the end of October that year. He gave the piece the title *Malá taneční suita* ('Little Dance Suite') – ignoring the fact that it was actually rather lengthy: it is the nearest thing in his early works to a symphony; indeed, at over 40 minutes' duration, it is longer than any of the six symphonies he was later to write. The nature of the suite comes as something as a surprise: his previous orchestral works had been soaked in the atmosphere of Impressionism and the orchestral works still to come before he left for Paris (*Dream*

obvious: Debussy had reworked them for piano, four hands, from music he had sketched for two flutes, two harps and celesta in 1900, to accompany a projected reading of twelve of Louÿs' poems.