TOCCATA CLASSICS

Recorded in the Cook-DeWitt Auditorium, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan, on 7 February 2013 (Wind Quintet, Op. 34) and Czech Radio, Ostrava, on 1–3 March 2013 (*Amoroso*; *Appello*, Op. 119; *Duettini*, Op. 28; *Miniatures*, Op. 124; *Music for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano*, Op. 52; *Ordo modalis*, Op. 30; Sonata, Op. 1)

Sound engineers: Lubomír Výrek (*Amoroso*; *Appello*, Op. 119; *Duettini*, Op. 28; *Miniatures*, Op. 124; *Music for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano*, Op. 52; *Ordo modalis*, Op. 30; Sonata, Op. 1) and Sergei Kvitko (Wind Quintet, Op. 34)

Producers: František Mixa (*Amoroso*; *Appello*, Op. 119; *Duettini*, Op. 28; *Miniatures*, Op. 124; *Music for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano*, Op. 52; *Ordo modalis*, Op. 30; Sonata, Op. 1) and Sergei Kvitko and Mark Williams (Wind Quintet, Op. 34)

Acknowledgements
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Marlen Vavříková

Booklet essays: Marlen Vavříková and Martin Anderson
Cover: Marlen Vavříková, *Prague Cityscape* (2012); photograph of Petr Eben courtesy of David Eben
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Executive producer: Martin Anderson

TOCC 0195

PETR EBEN Chamber Music for Oboe

	***Miniatures*, Op. 124** (1972)*		**5:50**
1	No. 1	*Con desiderio*	1:01
2	No. 2	*Moderato misterioso*	1:02
3	No. 3	*Moderato con gravità*	0:55
4	No. 4	*Andantino solenne*	0:40
5	No. 5	*Semplice*	0:44
6	No. 6	*Con calore*	1:15
	Sonata for Oboe and Piano, Op. 1 (1950)		**13:30**
7	I	*Militare – Allegro risoluto*	3:39
8	II	*Pastorale – Andante cantabile*	4:02
9	III	*Ballabile – Presto*	5:43
	***Duettini*, Op. 28** (1963)*		**6:21**
10	No. 1	*Abendliches Duettino*	0:43
11	No. 2	*Polka – Duettino*	0:45
12	No. 3	*Walzer – Duettino*	0:40
13	No. 4	*Beschwichtigendes Duettino*	1:13
14	No. 5	*Konzertantes Duettino*	0:59
15	No. 6	*Eigenwilliges Duettino*	0:35
16	No. 7	*Rhythmisches Duettino*	1:11
17	***Appello*, Op. 119** (1995)*		**5:07**
18	***Amoroso*** (1975)*		**5:13**

successes include third prize in Markneukirchen (2006), third prize at the ARD competition in Munich (2008) and, most importantly, first prize in the Prague Spring 2009 competition. Václav is an ardent promoter of the bassoon as an unjustly neglected instrument, not only in original but also transcribed compositions; he also focuses on pieces for bassoon without accompaniment, which were the theme of his doctoral thesis. He founded the Prague Bassoon Band and as a chamber musician has performed with Trio Arundo (2001 Czech Chamber Music Society Award) and the PhilHarmonia Octet. Moreover, every year he leads summer master-classes in Domažlice. Since 2006 he has been bassoonist and double-bassoonist of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. In the same year, he began working regularly with the Barocco sempre giovane ensemble, with whom he recorded a CD of Baroque music, released by Supraphon.

music festivals, and as a member of Ensemble Montage, a chamber ensemble committed to the performance of contemporary works. He studied at the Peabody Conservatory, the University of Michigan and S.U.N.Y. Stony Brook. His teachers were Bonnie Lake, Keith Bryan, Clement Barone, Samuel Baron, Albert Tipton and Jacques Zoon. He has held appointments on the faculties of Interlochen and Michigan State University, and currently serves as Affiliate Professor of Flute at Grand Valley State University.

The clarinettist **John Varineau** was born in Laramie, Wyoming, the son of a University of Wyoming maths professor and a Cheyenne Frontier Days Queen. He attended Michigan State University for two years as a student of Keith Stein, and then received his Bachelor of Music degree in Clarinet Performance from the University of Wyoming, studying under Ralph Strouf. He received his Master of Music degree from the Yale School of Music where he was a student of Keith Wilson. As an orchestral musician, he has performed with the New Haven Symphony, the Chamber Orchestra of New England (principal clarinet) and the Grand Rapids Symphony. As a chamber musician, he performed at the Yellow Barn Music Festival in Vermont for seven years, was a member of the Musical Arts Consortium, and was a founding member of Music at Eden's Edge of Essex, Massachusetts. Currently he performs with Grand Valley Winds, Montage and Ma non troppo, all based in Grand Rapids, Michigan. From 2008 to 2013, he taught at Grand Valley State University and has also taught at Cornerstone University and Grand Rapids Community College. He is Professor of Music at Calvin College, Grand Rapids.

Václav Vonášek, born in Blatná, South Bohemia, in 1980, studied bassoon at the Plzeň Conservatoire between 1994 and 2000 under the tutelage of Ladislav Šmídl and Matouš Křiváček. He went on to study at the Faculty of Music of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in the classes of František Herman and Jiří Seidl, graduating in 2005 with a master's degree. He rounded off his education in 2011 with a doctorate. In 2005 he was awarded a Prize of the Ministry of Education for his excellent study achievements. In the wake of his victory in the Czech-Slovak Talent of the Year 2002 competition, he obtained a scholarship that allowed him to attend the Royal College of Music in London, where he studied with Andrea de Flammineis and Martin Gatt. At the Prague Spring 2002 International Music Competition, he won second prize and the Czech Music Fund Award for the best performance of a contemporary Czech composition. In 2004 he came first at the International Double Reed Society Competition in Melbourne and in 2005 won the international competition in Łódź, Poland. Other

	***Ordo modalis*, Op. 30** (1964)		**14:10**
19	I	*Intrada*	3:13
20	II	*Air*	2:15
21	III	*Rigaudon*	2:49
22	IV	*Sarabanda*	3:46
23	V	*Giga da caccia*	1:59
24	***Music for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano*, Op. 52** (1970)*		**6:28**
	Wind Quintet, Op. 34 (1965)**		**14:09**
25	I	*Monologo*	3:52
26	II	*Dialogo I*	2:15
27	III	*Coro I*	3:18
28	IV	*Dialogo II*	2:08
29	V	*Coro II*	2:27

TT **71:33**

*FIRST RECORDING; **FIRST RECORDING ON CD

Marlen Vavříková, oboe
Radana Foltýnová, piano 1–9, 17–18, 24
Ivana Dohnalová, harp 10–16, 19–23
Václav Vonášek, bassoon 24
Christopher Kantner, flute 25–29
John Varineau, clarinet 25–29
John Clapp, bassoon 25–29
Richard Britsch, horn 25–29

PETR EBEN AND THE OBOE

by Marlen Vavříková

> Perhaps sometimes a composer is predisposed to like a certain instrument. From my early days I felt drawn to the oboe sound, even though neither I nor anybody else from my family nor my immediate circle has ever played it. And when I studied piano at AMU [the Academy of Musical Arts] and had a choice of selecting an instrumental studio where I could accompany, without any hesitation I picked the oboe studio. And this closer, intimate encounter with the instrument only increased my love for the oboe, and in future years I wrote a whole series of compositions for it.
>
> Petr Eben[1]

During his lifetime (1929–2007) Petr Eben was acknowledged as one of the world's finest concertising organists (he was also a fine pianist and cellist), but in the last decade or so of his life and the years since then, his standing as a composer of international importance has increasingly been recognised. Eben was born in Žamberk, near the historical south-Bohemian town of Český Krumlov where he grew up. After studying piano with František Rauch[2] and composition with Pavel Bořkovec[3] at the Prague Academy of Music, he took up a teaching position at Charles University. Later he also taught composition at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, was composer-in-residence at the Dartington International Summer School and served as President of the Prague Spring festival. In addition to several prizes recognising his works, Eben received an honorary doctorate from Charles University in 1994. For his contributions to music, he was awarded the country's highest artistic honour by President Václav Havel.[4]

[1] Quoted in Eva Vítová, *Petr Eben*, Baronet, Prague, 2004, p. 261; translation by Marlen Vavříková.

[2] Rauch (1910–95) had studied composition with Vítězslav Novák at the Prague Conservatoire and became one of his most important champions. In 1962, with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under Karel Ančerl, he premiered Petr Eben's Piano Concerto, which had been written the previous year and dedicated to him.

[3] Bořkovec (1894–1972), a student of Josef Suk, taught at the Academy of Musical Arts from 1946 to 1967; among his other students were Jan Klusák, Jiří Pauer and Vladimír Sommer. His music includes two operas, three symphonies, a number of concertos (two of them for piano), five string quartets and other chamber pieces.

[4] Eben's autobiographical recollections can be found on pp. 8–14, below.

Ivana Dohnalová began her harp studies at the Janáček Conservatoire in Ostrava in 1998, in the class of Ada Balová, graduating in 2004. She then entered the Prague Conservatoire, joining the harp studio of Jana Boušková, who was also her teacher at the Academy of Music in Prague, whence she graduated in 2011. Ivana participated in the Eighth World Harp Congress in Geneva in 2002. The same year she was granted the Magdaléna Jakubská scholarship, enabling her to participate in summer master classes led by Kathleen Bride at the renowned Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. Principal harpist of the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra since 2008, Ivana also regularly appears with the Prague Philharmonia and the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra in Riga, and is a member of the Ostravská banda (an ensemble specialising in contemporary music). As a soloist she has performed in the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Poland. Since September 2012 she has taught harp at the Janáček Conservatoire and Gymnasium in Ostrava.

The pianist **Radana Foltýnová** graduated from the Janáček Conservatoire in Ostrava and the Ostrava University, where she studied with Marta Toaderová. During her studies Radana attended several national and international competitions, including the 1993 Smetana Piano Competition in Hradec Králové (second-prize winner), the 1994 International Piano Competition in Kill, Sweden (fourth-prize winner), the 1998 Leoš Janáček Piano Competition in Brno (second-prize winner and an award for the best interpretation of Janáček), and the 1995 and 1997 International Schubert Competition for piano duos in Jeseník (three prizes). Currently, Radana is an Assistant Professor at the College of Fine Arts at Ostrava University. She is a sought-after chamber musician and has collaborated with both wind and string soloists. She has appeared as soloist with leading Czech orchestras, gives solo and chamber recitals in the Czech Republic and abroad (Austria, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden), and records for Czech Radio and Television.

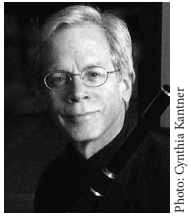

Photo: Cynthia Kantner

The flautist **Christopher Kantner** joined the Grand Valley Winds in 2011. He is the Principal Flutist of the Grand Rapids Symphony, a position he has held since 1976. A frequent soloist with the Orchestra, he has appeared in works by Foss, Schoenfeld and Nielsen. His adaptation of a work for Native American flute by Bill Hill won critical acclaim at the opening of the 2010 season of the Grand Rapids Symphony. He has held fellowship positions with the Aspen Music Festival and the Bach Aria Group. He enjoys a high regional profile outside the orchestra through his long association with the Fontana Ensemble, his appearances at the Saugatuck and other regional

the Ameropa International Chamber Music Festival in Prague, the Illinois Summer Youth Music Festival at Champaign-Urbana and the biannual International Oboe Master Classes and Festival in Ostrava. A second oboe and cor anglais of the Sarasota Opera Orchestra in 2005, she is currently an Associate Professor of Oboe at Grand Valley State University. At GVSU she organises the annual Double Reed Days, inviting leading personalities from the oboe world, and is a member of the faculty wind quintet, Grand Valley Winds.

Richard Britsch is affiliate professor of Horn at Grand Valley State University and Principal Horn of the Grand Rapids Symphony, a position he has held since 1990. Formerly with the Florida Orchestra, the Sarasota Orchestra and the Southwest Florida Symphony, he has appeared as soloist numerous times with the Grand Rapids Symphony and the Peninsula Music Festival on the scenic Door County peninsula on Green Bay in Wisconsin, where he has also been Principal Horn since 1992. He performs regularly with the Detroit Symphony and has performed as guest Principal Horn with the Milwaukee Symphony and the Taegu City Symphony in Korea. In addition to being a founding member of the Florida Wind Quintet, he was a member of the Emerald Brass, which won first prize in both the Fischoff Chamber Music Competition and the Yamaha/Summit Brass International Brass Competition. He holds a BA from the University of South Florida in Tampa where his principal teacher was Ralph Froelich and has participated in such festivals as the Southern Illinois Music Festival, the Florida Music Festival and the American Institute of Musical Studies in Austria. He has taught horn at Calvin College, Grand Rapids Community College, and Manatee Community College in Bradenton, Florida, as well as horn and brass ensembles at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids and the Luzerne Music Center in Adirondack Park in New York.

John Clapp is currently Assistant Principal/Second Bassoonist of the Grand Rapids Symphony. Before this appointment, he served as contrabassoonist of the Grand Rapids Symphony for six seasons. John has also held the position of contrabassoon with the Charlotte Symphony in North Carolina. A native of Philadelphia, John received his Bachelor of Music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School of Music. He has performed with the New York City Ballet Orchestra, Orchestra of St Luke's, CityMusic Cleveland, the Harrisburg Symphony, and the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic. He is currently Artist Faculty in bassoon at Grand Valley State University.

Folk-music and chant were his main inspiration: he would often use either a direct quotation (as in his *Music for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano*) or evoke a folk-like or ancient character by incorporating certain modes, rhythms and instrumentation (as in the Oboe Sonata and *Ordo modalis*). But for all his use of church modes, Eben was also open to contemporary developments and was fond of experimental styles and techniques, including quarter-tones, flutter-tonguing, and sections of chance music (as in *Amoroso*). Whether written atonally (*Appello*), modally (*Ordo modalis*) or bitonally (*Duettini*), Eben's works are full of invention and originality. His appreciation of the oboe and knowledge of its possibilities and strengths is captured in the many compositions he dedicated to the instrument. Where possible, the following notes use his own words to describe the music.

Sonata for Oboe and Piano, Op. 1 (1950)

The Sonata for oboe and piano was the first work to which Eben gave an opus number (on 13 April 1950), later writing:

> The Sonata for oboe and piano centres around three typical sound-registers of this instrument and each movement is inspired by one of its characteristics. Sometimes the oboe sounds like a trumpet as if the composer were looking for a sound of a trumpet at a distance or if he wanted to evoke an echo of a trumpet motif. The first movement of the sonata bears the title 'Militare' 7 and creates something of a military atmosphere, with a 'trumpet call' signalling melody and strong rhythms: here the timbre of the oboe resembles that of a trumpet. The second movement, 'Pastorale' 8, was inspired by the oboe's ancestors, and evokes the timbre of a shawm and, accompanied by slow steps in the piano, brings out the oboe as a pastoral instrument, creating an old, almost Biblical picture: David, who leads his flock while playing his shawm. The third movement 9 uses the earthy sound of the oboe; it is entitled 'Ballabile' (dance-like), and gives the oboe both accented rhythms as well as fast *concertante* passages. The Sonata ends by echoing the opening signal of the first movement.[5]

***Duettini*, Op. 28 (1963)**

The *Duettini* for soprano instrument and piano – seven short characteristic movements 10–16 – were originally written for the recorder, an instrument Eben enjoyed playing, but are also often performed on piccolo, flute, oboe, clarinet, violin and trumpet. The practice of not specifying the instrument was common in the Renaissance; and Eben was fond of having the *Duettini* performed in various instrumental combinations, giving performers his 'full composer's consent to alter any places to fit the instruments' requirements'.[6] In 1993 he also arranged the accompaniment, originally written for piano (or harpsichord), for harp, for Katharina Hanstedt, the harpist of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra. But for two short exceptions, the solo part is written strictly in the diatonic C major, to be easily performed on a recorder, while the accompaniment is in various other keys, enriching the harmonic language.

[5] Quoted in Vítová, *op. cit.*, pp. 261–62; translation by Marlen Vavříková.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

***Ordo modalis*, Op. 30 (1964)**

Eben wrote of his *Ordo modalis* 19–23, dedicated to the oboist František Hanták and harpist Libuše Váchalová:

> The suite *Ordo modalis* was inspired by the poem 'Venus and Adonis' by William Shakespeare. This subject is the connection of Ovidius' antique theme with the Renaissance view of William Shakespeare. In the same way these both elements are present in the music: two ancient instruments, the harp and the oboe, which is a successor of the antique aulos, and the renaissance form of a suite. There is a double meaning to the title. The word 'Ordo' means Suite in the sense of a series of several dances, but it also means 'order'. This word 'order' characterises the technique of the composition. Every movement is written in a seven-tone mode, which brings a big advantage for the harpist: he is able to prepare all his pedals before each movement and concentrate himself on his manual technique. Naturally also the oboe is bound to the selection of this tone-material, which the composition introduces in the original mode or its various transpositions.[7]

Wind Quintet, Op. 34 (1965)

Eben's commentary on his Wind Quintet reads as follows:

> The cyclic form of the Wind Quintet is based on the confrontation of a single part, two parts and the whole ensemble. The first movement, 'Monologue' 25, is mainly one-part throughout, the rhythm being free to the point of psalmody. 'Dialogue I' 26 treats two contrasting, rhythmically related motifs in the oboe and bassoon in double counterpoint; a *pianissimo* background is provided by the remaining instruments. 'Chorus I' 27 is, on the other hand, a homophonic setting *a capella* of invented words, with slavishly corrected declamation, The Trio of this three-part movement presents two-part writing again, but differently handled as compared with 'Dialogue I': flute and horn oscillate in stealthy *pianissimo* round common notes. 'Dialogue II' 28 is a true flute and clarinet duet, the other instruments having the indication *tacet*. Fragments of the cascades of the two instruments reach us, as if carried on wafts of air; on one occasion they follow each other, another time they partially cover each other, and again they proceed simultaneously. The melody in triplets, in parallel sixths, is to be heard only through a screen of distorting acciaccaturas. 'Chorus II' 29 is a finale *impetuoso*, urgently alternating solo passages with repeated choral repetitions of the refrain, or parts of the refrain.[8]

***Music for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano*, Op. 52 (1970)**

Eben's *Music for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano* 24 was dedicated to the trio Eben shared with Jiří Kaniak (oboe) and Lumír Vaněk (bassoon).

[7] Foreword, *Ordo modalis*, Lyra Music Company, New York, 1988, p. 2.
[8] Foreword, *Quintetto per stromenti a fiato*, Editio Supraphon, Prague, 1967, p. iii; translation by Roberta Finlayson Samsour.

Photo: Dan Merlo Photography

Marlen Vavříková began her musical journey in the Czech Republic at the Janáček Conservatory of Music in Ostrava. She won a prestigious national conservatoire competition in Kroměříž, as well as an international competition focusing on contemporary music from Poland. In 1996 she moved to the United States to study at Eastman School of Music (Master of Music, 1998), the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (Doctor of Musical Arts, 2004), and participated in summer music festivals in Sarasota, Hot Springs and Banff. Besides receiving a stipend from the Czech Music Fund and grants from the Ostrava City Council and the Civic Foundation, Marlen won the Presser Music Award and the Kate Neal Kinley Memorial Fellowship and was awarded a Fellowship for the Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Illinois. Her primary teachers include Nancy Ambrose King, Richard Killmer, Daniel Stolper, Gabriel Sýkora and Josef Žídek. She has also attended master-classes and studied with Neil Black, Nicholas Daniel, Scott Hostetler, Alex Klein, Wayne Rapier, Andrea Ridilla (Pew Scholar Teacher Grant 2012), Jacques Tys and Allan Vogel.

Marlen has performed with ensembles in Europe, Japan and the United States and has appeared as a soloist with orchestras in Ostrava, St Louis, Champaign-Urbana, Allendale and Grand Rapids. She has commissioned and inspired new works by contemporary composers, premiering compositions at several International Double Reed Society conferences, the Ostrava International Oboe Master Classes and Festival and at the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music (SEAMUS) conference in San Diego. As a member of Open Gate, Marlen appeared at Weill Recital Hall in Carnegie Hall, New York, in a concert featuring music of American composer Gregory Mertl. Her world-premiere recording of Mike Drews' *Broken Symmetries* can be heard on the CD *Music from SEAMUS 14* (SEAMUS, 2005).

An active researcher, Marlen has published articles about contemporary Czech oboe music in International Double Reed Society journals and given recitals at International Double Reed Society conferences. Her CD *Czech and Moravian Oboe Music* (Centaur Records) was hailed by *Fanfare* as 'a must for all oboe fans' and was 'strongly recommended to all oboe fanciers and to anyone who has an interest in unfamiliar Czech repertoire'. Her playing was praised as 'beautifully throughout, with a sensitive and lyrical touch, sure technique and intonation, and a range of dynamics unusually wide for oboists'.

Marlen is also dedicated to working with young musicians. She has taught chamber music and oboe at

his Symphonies are performed abroad. That's great – but Kabeláč didn't have the pleasure of the experience.[4]

'For me too, of course, it would have been marvellous if it had come twenty years earlier. Sometimes I wonder if it's too much, if I'll have the physical strength to survive it all. But I'm very happy about it. I even have a commission for an opera. I had never been able to write an opera before because the subjects I wanted they said were impossible, and what the Communists offered I was not interested in. Now when the National Theatre asked me to write an opera, at first I didn't have time to do it. At least I could choose whatever subject I like. These are very nice changes. But now I am working on it. I am not sure if I should tell you more about it, except that it is an Old Testament subject, a very dramatic one.[5] The commission was originally for the end of 1997, but the Archbishop of Prague wants me to finish before that so it can be performed in next year's Prague Spring, as part of the thousand-year celebrations of Saint Adalbert. I was at the Aldeburgh Festival recently, staying in Britten's house (very inspiring for a composer), and they said that when I finish it they will translate it and perform it in the same church where Britten's three church operas were first performed. That would be wonderful.

'I am now teaching composition, too. All those years there was a group of communist composers who never would have accepted me at the Academy of Music, and so I was teaching musicology – just analysis, style and musical forms – always in the function of an assistant because I could never have been an associate professor or a professor: these all had to be Party members. It was only in '88 that I got a *dozentura* – nothing more, of course. It was only after the Revolution that the students of the Academy said that they wanted me to teach composition. For me it is wonderful to teach composition. I spent a year at the Royal Northern College in Manchester recently. I enjoyed it immensely because it's a more creative way of teaching than with musicology. But it takes a lot of time. I would really need three lives: one for teaching, one for travelling and playing, and one for composing.'

Martin Anderson writes for a variety of publications, including Tempo, Musical Opinion *and* The Independent *in the UK,* Fanfare *in the USA,* Klassik Musikkmagasin *in Norway and* Finnish Music Quarterly*; he also runs Toccata Classics and Toccata Press.*

[4] Kabeláč (1908–79), who counted Alois Hába, Erwin Schulhoff and Vilém Kurz among his teachers, worked as a conductor and radio producer in Prague. His works were not performed during the Nazi occupation (his wife was Jewish) and when the last of his eight symphonies – all composed for different instrumental combinations – was premiered in Strasbourg in 1971, the Communist authorities would not allow him to attend.

[5] Eben's church opera *Jeremias*, to his own libretto after Stefan Zweig's 1917 drama, was composed in 1996–97.

I wrote the one-movement *Music for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano* in 1970, commissioned by the Stockholm agency Rikskonserter for my tour of Sweden. I chose a less frequent combination of instruments than the usual classical-music trio. It seemed to me that the oboe and bassoon go better with today's piano than do string instruments, and I tried particularly to bring out this homogeneity of sounds. Thus, for instance, the high oboe tone is combined with the sound of the piano in the same registers – both *staccato* and *legato*, and analogously, the sound of the low bassoon with the low piano, exactly the opposite way a normal solo and accompaniment would have been conceived. Sometimes the two voices of the woodwind instruments are contrasted with the two voices of the piano and they mutually interpenetrate each other. But the composition was to have had a concert character with more glamorous instrumental stylisation, which is why it includes solo cadenzas – for the oboe at the beginning and the bassoon at the end of the work. Stylistically, the composition is mainly atonal. It starts with an introductory fanfare consisting of a series of five intervals that gradually grow larger: the beginning minor second, then a major second, a minor third, then an augmented fourth and finally an augmented seventh. In essence, all the atonal parts of the composition are derived from this sequence. But this is contrasted here and there with stretches of purely tonal melody, which forms a sort of second level in the material of the composition. It seems to me that this blending of two worlds lends the work a certain excitement or tension. This tonal melody, which at times is permeated with an atonal web, is taken from a Gregorian chorale; perhaps a certain pastoral quality of both woodwind, chalumeau-type instruments, led to the fact that I chose the Christmas melody, 'Adeste, fideles'. In spite of its concert character, the movement ends with a quiet coda, drawing on the closing part of this Xmas chorale, 'Venite, adoremus'.[9]

***Amoroso* (1975)**

In 1975, Eben arranged the second movement – 'The Tenth Hour', marked *Amoroso* – of his *Noční hodiny* ('Night Hours'), a symphony for wind quintet, piano, percussion and strings composed earlier that year, for oboe and piano 18, retaining the performance instruction as the title of its new incarnation. He later commented:

The piece begins in a mood of lonely yearning, characterised by the constant repetition of the note A. Trying to make contact, it finally succeeds in doing so with the harmonious interval of the third: as if feeling its way, it gradually makes its way in quarter-tone steps up to it. The quest builds in intensity to a desperate *fortissimo*, after which the redeeming 'love-third' is sounded *pianissimo*, now recurring in various guises and also inverted as a sixth. After playing around with these intervals the oboe, at first hesitatingly and constantly re-starting, finally plays the lyrical love-tune with which the piece ends.[10]

[9] Foreword, *Musica per oboe, fagotto e pianoforte*, Editio Supraphon, Prague, 1989, p. iii; translation by Joy Moss-Kohoutová.

[10] Foreword, *Amoroso*, Friedrich Hofmeister Musikverlag, Hofheim-Leipzig, 1995, p. 3.

***Appello* for oboe and piano, Op. 119 (1995)**
Appello 17 explores the technical and melodic possibilities of the oboe: it was commissioned by the Prague Spring festival as a mandatory composition for a competition in 1996.

***Miniatures*, Op. 124 (1972, rev. 1997)**
The opus number of Eben's *Miniatures* might suggest a relatively late work; in fact, he allocated the number when he revisited the music several years after the impulse that initially gave rise to it, as his foreword explains:

> The Miniatures 1–6 have a somewhat different origin to my other compositions. The idea for them dates back many years, when I was called upon to write short interludes for a series of lyric poems that were to be broadcast on radio: at the time I notated only the melodic line for the soloist, and improvised the piano accompaniment myself. Because it seemed to me that despite their brevity these pieces contained something of the poetic nature of the verse, I decided to return to them and to amplify them with a piano part.[11]

SIXTY YEARS OF PLUS AND MINUS: PETR EBEN IN INTERVIEW[1]

by Martin Anderson

'Some plus, some minus' – a leitmotif that Petr Eben sees running through his life, spent, most of it, under the successive oppressions of Nazism and Communism. Eben has a large list of works to his credit, many of them pieces of some scale. But his principal reputation is as perhaps the world's finest improviser, both on the piano and on his main instrument, the organ. No one who has heard Eben improvise is likely to forget it in a hurry: in his hands a small motif can grow into a towering edifice of sound, contrapuntal ingenuity married to a melodic spontaneity that leaves his audiences deeply moved. A friend tells me of a concert Eben gave at the Edinburgh Festival a few years ago: many of his listeners left the hall with their handkerchiefs soaking wet.

Eben is a tall, gangling man, with large, bright eyes emphasised by owl-like glasses, and legs that seem too long for him to cross them with any comfort. He lives in an unassuming, sparsely furnished house in Hamsiková, a nondescript suburb of Prague, where I went to see him. And he is an interviewer's dream: you have almost to interrupt him to ask him questions. His prose, delivered in near-impeccable English with that endearingly modest

[11] Foreword, *Miniaturen für Oboe und Klavier*, Friedrich Hofmeister Musikverlag, Hofheim-Leipzig, 1998, p. 8.

[1] This interview was first published, with minor differences, in *Fanfare*, Vol. 19, No. 6, July/August 1996, pp. 42–52.

How, then, has Eben's life changed in the years since the Velvet Revolution? 'One difference is an enormous amount of activity and work. Now when I'm at the age where I should be retiring, just sitting in my room and composing – and I have a lot of very interesting commissions – I find I have to do a lot of travelling. I have been able to give a lot of improvisation concerts, in Paris and in London, for example. Not all my works arise like that, through improvisation, but some do: I play them for two or three years, I get more and more motifs which I write down, then I see that it starts to crystallise. It stops being an improvisation and becomes more an unwritten composition. Once it gets its form, I feel that I have it and then I must transfigure it into a composition. I have done this recently with a very interesting subject, which is, like my *Job*, for narrator and organ, only this is a work which is intended to take an entire evening. It's called *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, to a text by Jan Comenius. He was a Czech bishop during the Thirty Years' War. It's a wonderful text: very interesting, very modern, very actual. I have been doing my improvisations to it in concerts in a lot of festivals in Europe, then when I write it down, it's for my colleagues, not for me. That will probably be the last thing I play because I want to limit my activities. I still haven't written it down,[3] since I have been interrupted by commissions: I wrote a three-movement orchestral piece called *Improperia* for the hundredth birthday of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra; and I have also completed *Four Biblical Dances* for organ. And there are a lot of functions: for instance, I was President of the Prague Spring festival. I thought it would take me just the spring but it took me all the year. Although I was nominated for three years, I said to the Minister that I couldn't continue. I even said to President Havel that I would like to go back to my work. And he replied: "Oh there are plenty of people who would like to go back to their work!" I said: "I know you would too, but we need you", and he said: "If I'm elected, I would accept it". And we are very happy that he did; it's not easy for him. It's a sacrifice that he makes for the sake of the nation.

'Another change is that travelling is so easy. Every month now I am somewhere abroad, at some church-music school, playing, or listening to some performances. I'm very happy about the interest, of course, but it's a lot of work and I can compose only at night. It's a pleasure to hear one's orchestral and choral works performed, but it takes a lot of time.'

The collapse of the Iron Curtain has been mirrored in music by the gradual relaxation of the cold grasp of modernist orthodoxy on musical fashion, and Eben emerges to his growing international acclaim at a time that is ready for music that, like his, embraces the more traditional virtues of tonality and counterpoint. 'That's true; you're right. Just for the experience, I did try to compose something in a twelve-tone style, but it's not one which is near to me. I want to have access to the public, to the listeners. I couldn't compose if I thought nobody would listen to it. I know that some people say that a score can be interesting because of how it is written, not because of how it will sound, but that is unacceptable from my ethical point of view. Still, I am very happy to have this experience. There are some who didn't: Miroslav Kabeláč unfortunately died, so he never had the chance. Now

[3] Eben finally committed it to paper in 2002.

before. They said that it was for *Entlausung* – delousing – and we really did need it. We had to take off our clothes and they brought us into a room where there were about twenty showers. We didn't know what would come out of them. I took the hand of my brother and we had to wait for one minute. We knew that if it wasn't going to be water, if it was gas, we would have to breathe as quickly and as deeply as we could so that it would be over as soon as possible. And in this one minute I had to decide if the whole of life had some sense, or if it was just bad luck that I was born at that time, in that family, and also to realise what there would be after death – would life continue or was it a wall with nothing behind it? It was for me the most important minute in my life because suddenly I was quite sure that there must be something continuing. Then the water came out, of course, or I wouldn't be here. And although I wouldn't want any of my sons to have this experience, seen from my viewpoint it was very important. Before, I was religious as a boy is, without really thinking deeply about it – it's more a question of custom – but during the war the church was the only place where I felt I was taken as a normal person.

'This continued even when the Communists came. In the '50s when I started to compose, the *avant garde* was starting up in Darmstadt. That was when Messiaen wrote his *Étude de rythme* and the *Mode des valeurs*, where he used a way of composing that was adapted by Boulez and Stockhausen and Nono for several years. We were totally isolated from this sort of experiment; here it was only socialist realism which was pushed – they wanted us all to write as Smetana did. The moment you wrote a dissonant note, you were an enemy of the people. Even the president gave a speech to all the composers in which he said we need a music of the day, which will help the day, which will help the future, it was a human goal of working, that he didn't see why music should be for some hundred specialists, that it must be for the whole people, and so on. It was not easy: we had no access to Schoenberg, to Berg, to Webern. Every so often one of us would get a recording and we'd lend it around our colleagues so that we could listen to it. But it couldn't be performed. For a composer, of course, this was a big disadvantage – but again there was a plus, and for me a very important plus, because when we started in this time to write our compositions, we could see that the people were very interested in art: art could sometimes say things that otherwise couldn't be told. For the same reasons that things didn't get into the newspapers, people would like to go to the small theatres rather than the National Theatre because there things were said that couldn't be pronounced elsewhere. People became accustomed to reading between the lines. In literature and painting it was quite difficult because the censors understood if there was something against the government. But music was abstract and it was not so easy to survey. So if I quoted a Gregorian motif, the people from the churches would know it and enjoy it; they would know that this was a spiritual work – but the Union of Composers would have no idea! In this way composing for me was a sort of message for the people. I wanted to write something that would be modern but at the same time understandable. That formed my whole way of composing: it wasn't all this experimentation, there was no desire to shock. I wanted to offer a message of something spiritual for the people. So there again in my life, some plus, some minus – it has been a lot of troubles but I can only be very thankful to the Lord for it.'

quality that a Czech accent can lend, flows with the same spontaneity as his improvisations: coherent, convincing, at times deeply moving and always utterly sincere.

I began by asking him about improvisation, which he enjoys teaching. He is acutely aware, too, that he is rehabilitating a tradition that was once the stock-in-trade of every competent composer: the history books are full of stories about piano 'duels' between Beethoven and Abbé Vogler, Liszt and Thalberg, and lesser immortals. Yet isn't the teaching of improvisation a contradiction in terms? Eben concedes that it's not easy. 'But there are several possibilities. With the organ you can study polyphony. You have a *cantus firmus*, and you then can add a second voice, a third voice, and so on. The way I teach is a little different. Because working with motifs is quite important for me, I mostly start like that. You have something short. You don't know what you can do with it. You could prolong it or shorten it. You could make an inversion or a variation of it, either simple or complicated. And so on. I start with one tone and ask myself: "What can I do with one tone?" I can shift it up or down an octave, of course. And then I add a second one, which offers all sorts of possibilities. Then comes the third one. So you can start improvising without tonality, which is important for people who have trouble with modulations; then you can start adding chords, and so on. I'm very happy that in our country now the music schools are beginning to let people study sight-reading and improvisation.' I wondered if Eben had had anything to do with that. He's a genuinely modest man, and the enthusiasm with which he talked about improvisation was replaced momentarily with gentler tones before a swift change of subject. 'Perhaps I helped inspire it. Of course, the teachers don't know yet how to deal with it, how to teach it, but nevertheless they try, they let the students play, and it may yet lead to a more spontaneous approach to the instrument.'

There is a very strong jazz tradition in what was Czechoslovakia, as anyone who has visited Prague cannot help having noticed, especially at election times, when the politicians fill the trams and squares with jazz bands wearing their colours. Had that spontaneity helped keep the skill of improvisation alive? 'The jazz tradition can't influence "normal", concert pianists. It's sad that if you ask a good pianist, who can play Chopin, Liszt and people like that, to play a folk tune, he'll say "Well, it's not in my repertoire". That's something which you find all over the world.'

So why, among classical musicians, has the improvising tradition survived only among organists? 'The organ is the only instrument where, in all the schools, improvisation was a subject the students had to take. The reason is very simple: the liturgical use of the organ needs improvisation. There are times in church when you have to keep looking and waiting till some part of the mass is finished. If you are to play a chorale, you must be ready for a chorale prelude, to play something that involves the melody of the chorale. For organists this is very, very important.

'Organists who play in church, that is. In our country nobody of any stature, who was at university, who was teaching or who was in some way employed in the state service was ever allowed to play in the services at the mass. It was strictly forbidden and could mean big problems. I remember teaching at Charles University at

the musicology department. Two of my students were getting married and they asked me if I would play at the wedding. I said: "Of course – with pleasure" and went there and played. Two days afterwards the Dean suddenly called me. He was furious that, at a school that was the only centre of the correct political and philosophical thinking – Marxism, of course – not only should two students get married in church but that one of our lecturers should play the organ at it. This was the problem. In the small towns, for example, none of the teachers was allowed to play as they had done formerly. They had to stop. Even church choirs had their problems. I have a country cottage in a very small town about 120 kilometres from Prague. A woman there went for a job in a milk shop – but she didn't get it because she was singing in a church choir. The persecution of religion in our country was very strong, which meant that the only people who played the organ were those who had nothing to lose. And now the organs are in a terrible state. Some of our most historic organs are so badly damaged that they cannot be saved.'

Eben's own relationship with the state was fairly fraught. 'Yes, from the very beginning, when I started to study. The first work I wrote was an Oboe Sonata and the second was the *Missa Adventus* [1951–52], which was sung quite often. This was early in the 1950s, when the state began to persecute religion very earnestly. The measure of liberty was very different in the various eastern countries: later, at least, Czech sportsmen or musicians could travel occasionally if we were invited and somebody paid for the tickets. We always had to ask about six months in advance, and there were five institutions which had to decide whether we would go or not. Nevertheless, I could sometimes play and be performed abroad, whereas the East Germans weren't allowed to go to western countries at all. And as far as religion is concerned, there didn't appear a single theological book for forty years here, whereas in East Germany they simply took theological books from West Germany and sold them at a very low price and you could buy whatever you wanted. So sometimes I smuggled in books from East Germany. It wasn't easy: if there was a cross on the book, you had to hide it in some newspapers. The two things the customs took were porno and theology!

'So when I started it was clear that there was no way I would ever be active in the Communist Party: I was writing church music and organ music all the time. I was really on the other side – although, of course, there were people who suffered more than I did. In 1953 I got into trouble to because I let out my students' room to a Catholic group which had their meetings there. It was illegal and they were imprisoned. My cousin was there also: she had six years shut in Terezín by the Nazis, then she was imprisoned for twelve years. She got out after nine, but six and nine still make fifteen. I was immediately called to the police, too, and had quite a lot of problems because I had let this room. It was a miracle that I wasn't imprisoned also.'

But Eben spent his own time behind bars: towards the end of the Second World War he was interned in Buchenwald.[2] He speaks about it with a startling equanimity that may derive its strength from his deep Christian convictions. 'I wasn't in there for a long time, but of course one didn't know how it would finish. It was

[2] Although Eben's family had converted to Christianity, his father's Jewish origins were what mattered under Nazi racial policy.

a very difficult time. My whole life was really a life without liberty: under the Nazis I wasn't free and under the Communists I wasn't free. Fifty years without liberty. That might strike you a catastrophic life for a composer – yet when I look back from the vantage point of my current age, it may appear a paradox but it seems for me to have been the optimal life. It's astonishing.

'It started with my youth. I grew up in Český Krumlov – it's a wonderful town in the south of Bohemia, with a wonderful castle, the second in size after Prague Castle. For me it wasn't very practical since I couldn't get an education in music, there were no concerts, and when the Nazis came they even confiscated our radio. So we had nothing. I was fascinated by music but I had no chance of encountering any of it. If I wanted to hear something I had to play it myself. And we didn't have enough printed music, so I had to write it. I don't think I would have started to write so early without these circumstances. I remember once going to buy something and passing an open window when I heard the *Freischütz* of Weber. I was so fascinated that I stood for an hour outside the window, very happy, but worried that someone might come out and ask what I was doing there. That was an exception; otherwise I had to learn to play, sight-read and improvise. So it was one minus, one plus.

'And since all the men were away on military service, there was no one to play the organ. The priest I knew that I could play the piano, so when I was about nine years old he came and asked me if I could play the organ. I said, yes, with pleasure – but I had to wait for my legs to grow long enough for my feet to reach the pedals! It was a very big organ, three manuals, in St Vitus Cathedral. I had a key and so when the service was over in the evening I would close the doors. We didn't have much light because of the air attacks – I had one single light above the organ, with all the Gothic architecture in darkness; it was very mysterious. Now I could really start playing with colours, trying all the stops, improvising all I wanted. So, again, some minus, some plus. And not only did I have the organ at my disposal: I had the choir, and we sang Gregorian chant. For my whole life Gregorian chant has been one of the two sources of inspiration, along with folksong, in which our country is very rich. When I came into contact with Gregorian chant at the age of ten, it was so important for me.

'I was, of course, expelled from school and we had to work very hard, my father also, and we'd come back home very tired. We knew that some day we'd be dispersed, so every day was for us a sort of a miracle that was given to us so we could be together. We played chamber music, my father on the violin, my brother on the cello and me on the piano. Even though the danger was immense and the situation so heavy, nevertheless I must say that I look back on these evenings as among the most beautiful of my life. I was also so happy about this chamber music, because I could feel that the harmony must also be between the people. We played Mozart and Beethoven trios, Dvořák trios and so on. Not in the right intonation, of course, slowly and with mistakes – but *beautifully*, so that when I later played the same pieces with professional musicians I never liked it as much as at that time.

'So I can review my life in this way. In the concentration camp also I was several times confronted with death. There was one minute which was very important for me. We were taken to one building where we hadn't been