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Musical and Educational Activities of Franz Kučera in Eastern Ukraine from 1890–1911

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Abstract

František Wojciechowicz Kučera is one of the most conspicuous representatives of the Czech music community in Kharkiv in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He played an important role in the professionalization of music education and the formation of chamber-instrumental and orchestral culture of Eastern Ukraine. As a teacher at Kharkiv Music College and a multi-instrumentalist, he confidently presented the bassoon at the city's concert venues. At the same time, his performances as a violist in the string quartet contributed to the intensification of musical and educational activities of the local branch of the then Russian Music Society. The most significant achievement of Franz Kučera in the development of Kharkiv's musical culture was the founding of a summer symphony orchestra in 1898, which for twelve years performed free public concerts for the townspeople. Until recently, the name of F. Kučera remained obscure, and only the perusal of old prints and Kharkiv periodicals of the late 19th to early 20th centuries made it possible to rediscover the lesser-known pages of this Czech artist's creative career within Ukraine.

Key words

František Kučera, Prague Conservatory, Kharkiv Music College, Eastern Ukraine, musical education, symphony orchestra, string quartet, wind instruments, multi-instrumental performance, repertoire, conducting

Introduction

In the history of musical culture of Ukraine, as well as other countries of Western and Eastern Europe, there are many bright pages related to the activities of Czech musicians. A particularly intense activity in the development of Czech-Ukrainian musical relationships is observed in the second half of the 19th – early 20th cc., when in different cities of Ukraine worked and toured more than 400 performers and teachers of Czech origin.¹ A noticeable revival in the musical culture and educational spheres of life was largely determined by the implementation of economic reforms and the abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire, which included parts of the territory of modern Ukraine, Poland, and Finland.

After the abolition of serfdom in 1861, began an active process of forming a system of professional music education, led by famous Russian pianists, teachers and musicians, brothers Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein. Describing the state of musical art in the Russian Empire at that time, Anton noted: “*Musical art was in its primal state: there were no Russian artists-musicians, so to speak, guild artists; there were [...] amateurs, there were patrons of music – there were a lot of fans of Italian opera, there were landowners and officials indulging into music, but musicians-artists [...], I repeat, there were no guild people such as that at all.*”²

The absence of music and educational institutions in Russia at a time when Paris Conservatoire had existed in Europe for more than half a century and a number of conservatories in Prague, Vienna, Leipzig, and Budapest were in full operation was the main reason for A. Rubinstein and his followers in 1859 to found the Russian Music Society, which intensified the process of professionalization of music education. The opening of St. Petersburg (1862) and Moscow (1866) conservatories gave impetus to the emergence of music colleges in other cities of the Empire – Kyiv (1874), Kharkiv (1883), Odesa (1897), on the basis of which will later appear Kyiv (1913), Odesa (1913) and Kharkiv (1917) conservatories.³ The expansion of the number of music schools and the lack of qualified specialists among local musicians have become one of the reasons for the frequent invitations of foreign teacher-performers. They facilitated the development of musical infrastructure in larger cities and the formation of a system of professional music education. In the middle of the 19th c., Ukrainian cities of Kharkiv, Odesa, and Kyiv were among those large industrial and economic centers of the Russian Empire in which, after St. Petersburg and Moscow, representations of the Russian Music Society were organized.

The Europeanization of musical infrastructure, which was undertaken by the Russian Music Society (RMS),⁴ according to its updated Statute (1873), apart from “[...] *the estab-*

1 ЩЕПАКІН, Василь. *Чеські музиканти в музичній культурі України кінця XVIII – початку XX ст.* Автореферат дисертації. Харків: Харківська державна академія культури, 2001, с. 8.

2 АСАФЬЕВ, Борис. *Антон Григорьевич Рубинштейн в его музыкальной деятельности и отзывах современников (1829-1929)*. Москва: Музсектор Госиздата, 1929, с. 76.

3 Before musical colleges were founded, in the above listed cities operated music classes and music schools.

4 In 1873 the Russian Music Society was renamed into the Imperial Russian Music Society (IRMS).

lishment of music classes, colleges and conservatories in various cities of Russia,⁵ consisted in creating a whole complex of concert performing and music-educational organizations. Their activities were to cover such important areas as “[...] holding concerts, publishing musical works by Russian and foreign authors, books on music, specialized music magazines, organizing competitions for the best work with the encouragement of winners (opening public lecture-halls on music and libraries).”⁶

Foreign musicians in the music and educational world of Kharkiv

Even before the official approval of the new statutory tasks of the Russian Music Society (RMS) in Kharkiv, an active process of formation of the musical and educational infrastructure of the eastern region of Ukraine began, which resulted in the opening in May 1871 of a local branch of the Russian Music Society.⁷ One of A. Rubinstein’s associates, pianist, conductor and musician Ilya Slatin was elected its chairman.⁸ As the main direction of the society’s activity I. Slatin aimed at “increasing the level of the public aesthetic development,” which was to be facilitated not only by the organization of concerts and music gatherings, but also by the creation of a music educational establishment.⁹ The first step undertaken in this direction was the opening on Oct. 1, 1871 of music classes, among which, in addition to solo singing, piano, violin, cello and double bass, there were wind instruments, choral singing, music theory and harmony classes as well. The next stage in the development of professionalization of music education in Kharkiv was the creation in 1883 of a music college on the basis of strengthened music classes of the school; and the expected director of that college became renowned Ilya Slatin.

As the head of the school, well acquainted with the system of training musicians in the Russian Empire and Western countries, I. Slatin, during the formation of the teaching staff of the college, tried to select future teachers without any preferential bias for local musicians. An example of high demands and impartial attitude to the candidates can be his critical assessment of the training of pianists at St. Petersburg Conservatory, as he reported in one of his letters “[...] there are more than 1,000 students in the conservatory.

5 Устав Императорского Русского Музыкального общества. *Полное собрание законов Российской империи 1873* [online]. Санкт-Петербург, 1876, Т. XLVIII, ч. 2, № 52441, с. 12. [Accessed 2024-02-16]. Available from: <http://nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php?part=1003®im=3>.

6 Ibid.

7 First attempts to open the Kharkiv branch of the RMS were undertaken in 1864; however, due to the lack of support on behalf of local authorities and proper management it ceased to operate in 1866.

8 As a pianist, Ilya Slatin studied at St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1863–1868 in the class of the famous Czech pianist Alexander Dreyschock (1818–1869). After the professor left for Italy in 1868 for medical treatment, I. Slatin left the school two months before his graduation from the conservatory, unwilling to study with another teacher. During the following years (1869–1871) I. Slatin studied at Berlin Neue Akademie der Tonkunst with the famous German pianist and teacher of Polish origin Theodor Kullak.

9 *Краткий обзор деятельности Харьковского отделения Императорского русского музыкального общества и состоящего при нем музыкального училища за 25 лет. 1871-1896*. Харьков: Типография и литография Зильберберг, 1896, с. 4.

I need a pianist for next year as a teacher at the school and I can't find one, I will have to call for one from abroad."¹⁰

The result of a purposeful search was the invitation to Kharkiv Music College of a graduate of Vienna Conservatory, Manolis Kalomiris, who later, after returning to his motherland, became the founder of the National Conservatory in Athens and chaired it for many years. Careful selection of teachers soon allowed I. Slatin to create an international team of highly qualified professionals that included students of Paris, Prague, Warsaw, Leipzig and other foreign music institutions, in addition to graduates from St. Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories. Not everyone liked Slatin's approach to inviting the best Western European musicians, which is why graduates from St. Petersburg and Moscow were not always in demand by the Kharkiv branch of the Imperial Russian Music Society (IRMS). An example of this is the discussion that unfolded in the pages of the local newspaper *Yuzhnyi Krai* (*Southern Lands*). In one issue, an anonymous contributor stated: "*The strange thing is that when teaching any subject is entrusted to people whose knowledge and specialty are known in advance, teaching music requires nothing more than the Czech or German surname of the teacher.*"¹¹

This subjective position of the anonymous author did not go unnoticed by local music lovers familiar with the musical and cultural realities of Kharkiv at the time. Less than a week later, in the *Southern Lands* issue of Dec. 23, 1880, Andriy Shymkov, Professor at the Institute of Technology, gave a well-reasoned answer to the author of the IRMS's accusations of ignoring the interests of local musicians. Touching upon the subject, he writes: "*Regarding the authoritative significance of Czech and German surnames of musicians in comparison with Russian ones, I will note that in the Music Society [IRMS] it is not these patriotisms that need to be juxtaposed, but only musical patriotism; music is important for the above mentioned society [IRMS], not the nationality of the musician; and the mediocre Russian musician should hardly be preferred to good musicians, at least Germans or Czechs.*"¹²

Ivan Lipayev,¹³ a well-known music critic, educator, and public figure, described in a series of publications on Czech music in *Russian Music Newspaper* why "the talents of the Czechs were valued more than any nation" in the Russian Empire: "*Since the time of serfdom our teachers in most cases were Czechs and Germans, mostly Czechs, because they quickly learned to speak Russian, quickly mastered our customs and habits, were closer to us spiritually. All this, willy-nilly, forced us to prefer them as leaders, rather than our home-grown middle-level musicians.*"¹⁴

10 КОНОНОВА, Елена. Илья Ильич Слатин – основоположник профессионального музыкального образования в Харькове. *Искусство и образование. Трудности взаимодействия искусства, педагогики и теории и практики образования*. Сборник научных трудов. Вып. 18. Харьков: Харьковский национальный университет искусств, 2006, с. 7.

11 Музыкальные заметки. *Южный край*, 17. 12. 1880, с. 1.

12 ШИМКОВ, Андрей. Несколько слов о харьковском отделении музыкального общества. *Южный край*, 6. н. 23. 12. 1880, с. 1.

13 Ivan Lipayev (1865–1942) – russian trombonist, music critic, writer and public figure. Musician of the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra in Moscow, professor of Saratov Conservatory.

14 ЛИПАЕВ, Иван. Чешская музыка. *Русская музыкальная газета*, № 2,14. 1. 1907, с. 58.

Among the first Czech musicians who were invited by I. Slatin as teachers of music classes at the Kharkiv branch of the IRMS, and later at the Music College, stand out two graduates of Prague Conservatory – violinist František Němec¹⁵ and cellist Zigmund Glaser.¹⁶ Each of them made a significant contribution to the formation of the musical and educational infrastructure of Kharkiv and the development of solo and chamber orchestral performance.¹⁷

As the head of the music society and educational institution, I. Slatin always preferred performing teachers who could successfully combine pedagogical and concert activities, regularly performing both solo programs and as part of chamber ensembles. Organizing chamber music concerts, the key unit of which was a string quartet, was considered one of the main responsibilities in the IRMS Statute and an indicator of the effective work of the society in the promotion of classical music. Of course, the concerts of the symphony orchestra were always a priority in the activities of the Society, but without a constant performing staff and the necessary financial support organizing concert was accompanied by significant difficulties. Therefore, for most of the regional branches of the IRMS, a compact string quartet, whose members were college teachers, was considered the most practical and mobile unit. I. Slatin, inviting F. Němec (1878) and Z. Glaser (1882) as teachers of violin and cello classes, at the same time solved the problem of ensuring the efficient work of the quartet, manned by a periodically shifting staff due to the migration of musicians.

František Kučera – violist of the string quartet

The beginning of a new stage in the development of string quartet art in Kharkiv can be considered year 1890, when the director simultaneously invited three talented teachers to the music college, two of whom were students of Prague Conservatory: František Kučera, cellist Zigmund Glaser, who had previously worked in the College in 1882–1884, and violinist Konstantin Gorsky, a graduate of St. Petersburg Conservatory.

15 Career biography of F. Němec see: SANKOT, Jiří. «Český Berlioz» z chudé chvalenické rodiny [online]. [Accessed 2024-07-30]. Available from: <<http://www.chvalenice.cz/obec-107/z-historie-obce-1/kapitoly-z-historie/rodiny-a-osobnosti/cesky-berlioz-z-chude-chvalenicke-rodiny/>>.

16 Zigmund Glaser (1862–?) – Czech cellist, a graduate of Prague Conservatory. In 1876–1882, he studied cello with F. Hegenbartha and composition with J. Förster. From 1882 to the beginning of 1910 he lived in Ukraine with a short break (1894–1895) during his military service. In different years he worked in music classes and colleges of Kharkiv and Odesa branches of IRMS. During 1890–1906 he was a senior teacher at a music college and a member of a string quartet. He often gave solo concerts in Kharkiv, Odesa, Poltava, St. Petersburg and other cities. For diligent work and creative achievements he was awarded the Orders of St. Stanislaus (1897) and St. Anne (1905). After the First World War he returned to the Czechoslovakia, later worked as a cellist in the German town of Elberfeld. His further fate remains unknown.

17 It should be noted that in 1860–80 there was a large community of Czech musicians in Kharkiv, among whom were pupils of Prague Conservatory brothers – violinist Josef Král (1812/1813–1882) and violinist and violist Vojtech Král (1822? –1890), graduates of Prague organ school Václav Volner (?–1892) and Josef Vlček (1832–1889) – teachers of the classic figure in Ukrainian music M.V. Lysenko, as well as other musicians who taught in private boarding houses, the Institute of Noble Maidens and other educational institutions.

The report on the activities of the Kharkiv branch of the IRMS and the Music College for 1890–1891 places a particular emphasis on the responsibilities of F. Kučera, who, in addition to teaching bassoon and flute, “assumed the responsibilities of a violist in the string quartet.”¹⁸ By inviting F. Kučera, the IRMS management placed a particular hope on “the opportunity to create a permanently staffed string quartet of music college teachers starting from this season. In such conditions, it will be possible to achieve better performance of chamber music.”¹⁹

From 1891 onward, for seventeen years, František Kučera was a permanent member of the string quartet of the Kharkiv branch of the IRMS, the staff of which remained unchanged for 15 seasons (1905).²⁰ The high level of professionalism of the musicians, their inspired work on the repertoire and the stability of the quartet allowed it to achieve great success and popularity among local music lovers, which was repeatedly noted by critics: “The staff of the string quartet has not changed for several years; its participants played so well that their performance became exemplary. Of course, to achieve such results, they had and have to work hard, and fans of serious music cannot but appreciate this important and fruitful work, cannot help feeling grateful that the quartet of music college offers in its excellent performance both classical, well-known (or, rather, which should be known to all) works and new – the lesser-known ones.”²¹

The triumphant performances in 1896 of the “Czech Quartet” from Prague, which toured successfully in Ukraine and Russia, became a stimulating factor in the development of quartet art in Kharkiv and the increase in interest in ensemble music making. The correspondent of the *Southern Lands* newspaper compares the performance of Kharkiv quartet with the skill of musicians of the Czech ensemble, noting that the performance of the former “was exemplary in everything and came very close the performance of the famous Czech quartet, which recently toured here.”²²

During the long period of creative cooperation of musicians, a large-scale repertoire was formed, which covered the bulk of the string quartets composed during the classicist and romantic periods. Among them are the opuses of W. A. Mozart, L. van Beethoven, F. Schubert, R. Shumann, F. Mendelssohn, B. Smetana, A. Dvořák, E. Napravnik, A. Rubinstein, P. Tchaikovsky, A. Borodin, as well as works by contemporaries Z. Noskowski, O. Winkler, J. Vitols, A. Arensky and other composers. During the vigorous activity of the ensemble in the same line-up (1891–1905) the musicians performed about 100 times only in the officially recorded concerts. The refined skill and extremely well-coordinated play of all members of the quartet, with their impeccable technique and fine artistic taste, in which “none of the performers tries to stand out, worrying only about the integrity of

18 Отчет Харьковского отделения Императорского русского музыкального общества и состоящего при нем музыкального училища за 1890-91 год. Харьков: Типография Зильберберга, 1891, с. 20.

19 Ibid.

20 ЩЕПАКІН, Василь. Музична культура Сходу і Півдня України другої половини XIX – початку XX століть: європейські виміри. Харків: ФОП Панов А. М., 2017, с. 219.

21 Часть неофициальная. Театр и музыка. Харьковские губернские ведомости, 16. 2. 1899.

22 Театр и музыка. Южный край, № 5193, 21. 2, 1896, с. 3.

performance”,²³ became a model for students and role models to follow. We find confirmation of this in the programs of student concerts, in which the participation of young performers in various chamber ensembles is becoming increasingly popular.

Multi-instrumental performance and pedagogical activity of František Kučera

Despite the fact that František Kučera was largely perceived as a key member of the string quartet, his performing and pedagogical preferences were broader and were not limited to the viola. It is known that at Prague Conservatory he studied bassoon and viola at the same time, but in Kharkiv his performance at the viola is mostly associated with performances as part of a string quartet. In the music college viola was taught by F. Kučera’s quartet partner, violinist K. Gorsky, who had taught violin and viola for many years.

In his orchestral-performing and pedagogical career multi-instrumentalist F. Kučera preferred the bassoon, which after his arrival in Kharkiv continued to be his leading instrument. It was the bassoon that F. Kučera connected his successful activity with in the orchestra of Kharkiv Opera House, in which he held the position of the first bassoonist for a long time. As a bassoonist, F. Kučera was even more remembered by local music lovers after a solo performance in Feb. 1891, shortly after his arrival in Kharkiv. He performed *Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra* by C. M. Weber. For the townspeople, this was the first meeting not only with the performer, but also with the instrument, which was previously perceived only as an orchestral one, as reported in a brief review of musical and cultural events of the city: “Note that the management [of IRMS] introduces us to such instruments that have never been heard before in Kharkiv. So, in the third public concert, on Feb. 10, we got acquainted with the wonderful bassoon performance by Mr. Kučera.”²⁴

The musician repeatedly appeared with the bassoon in mixed ensembles with his partners – colleagues from the string quartet and teachers of wind instruments of the music college. In particular, on Nov. 10, 1891 a concert of chamber and instrumental music took place, in which F. Schubert’s *Octet*, Op. 166 for 2 violins, viola, cello, double bass, clarinet, bassoon and horn was performed.

In the annual reports of the Kharkiv branch of the IRMS and local newspapers you can find information about the frequent performances of multi-instrumentalist František Kučera in one concert both as a bassoonist and as a violist. In this role, the musician appears as a performer of rather complex chamber and instrumental opuses. A striking example of this is the concert on Feb. 23, 1892, when in L. Beethoven’s *Septet*, Op. 20 he performed the part of the bassoon, and in K. Navratil’s *Quintet*, Op. 17 for piano, two violins, viola and cello – the part of viola.²⁵ Kučera-bassoonist demonstrates

23 Театр и музыка. *Харьковские губернские ведомости*, 16. 10, 1903.

24 Театр и музыка. *Харьковские губернские ведомости*, 26. 2, 1891.

25 Наука, литература и искусство. *Харьковские губернские ведомости*, 22. 2. 1892.

a high level of skill in a concert on January 15, 1895 in W.A. Mozart's *Quintet* for oboe, clarinet, French horn and bassoon and at the same time no less successfully performs the viola part in B. Godard's *Quartet*, Op. 136, No. 3.²⁶ Local critics praised the artist's mastery of the two instruments.

While presenting the bassoon to the local public as a solo and ensemble instrument, F. Kučera begins to promote it ardently among students of the music college. F. Kučera's predecessor, the well-known conductor F. Prochažka²⁷ in Kharkiv, who was a bassoon teacher during the years 1886–1890, had his students focused more on playing it within the orchestra rather than involving it in solo and ensemble performances. Having the bassoon class handed down from his compatriot, F. Kučera intensified his work on the study of concert solo and ensemble repertoire for the instrument. Significant changes in this direction are already noted in the final exam of bassoonist student M. Sukhomlynov,²⁸ whose examination program includes concerts for bassoon by C. M. Weber and K. Matys (1835–1908). And while the student had to learn the opus of K. Matys independently on his own, the work on one of the best pieces of the bassoon repertoire – the *Concert* of C. M. Weber – was carried out under the guidance of a mentor.²⁹

The debut of F. Kučera's student-bassoonist K. Nasedkin, with a solo program in a public concert-competition for senior students took place a little later, on Nov. 13, 1892, where the *B-dur Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra* by W. A. Mozart³⁰ was performed. It is quite possible that the work of the genius composer, written more than a century ago (1774), Kharkiv public heard for the first time.

František Kučera's intensive pedagogical and performing activity in the 1890s developed in several directions. As a bassoonist, he became the leading soloist of the opera orchestra, periodically performing solo programs and as member of mixed ensembles. His commitments to participate in the preparation of concert programs and string quartet performances are being fulfilled with no less enthusiasm. At the same time, persistent work is being done to train qualified performers - bassoonists, flutists and double bassists in the multi-instrumental class of Kučera as a teacher. The artist's solo, ensemble and orchestral experience encourages the search for more effective methods of working with students in class that would provide them with the appropriate level of professional development. F. Kučera is much more meticulous in forming the solo repertoire of the specialty, widening and enriching it with highly artistic works of classical composers (J. S. Bach, W. A. Mozart, C. M. Weber) and adding to them opuses of his compatriots.

26 Театр и музыка. *Харьковские губернские ведомости*, 13. 1. 1895.

27 F. Prochažka (date of birth and death unknown), conductor of the summer orchestra in "Bavaria" garden (1774). The first teacher of flute and bassoon at Kharkiv Music College in 1886–1890. (БОГДАНОВ, Валерій, БОГДАНОВА, Лідія. *Історія духового музичного мистецтва України: від найдавніших часів до початку ХХ ст.* В 2-х томах, Т. 2. Харків: ФОП Силичева С. О. 2013, с. 26).

28 The exam took place on May 11, 1892.

29 *Отчет Харьковского отделения Императорского русского музыкального общества и состоящего при нем музыкального училища за 1891-92 год.* Харьков: Типография Зильберберга, 1893, с. 72.

30 *Отчет Харьковского отделения Императорского русского музыкального общества и состоящего при нем музыкального училища за 1892-93 год.* Харьков: Типография Зильберберга, 1894, с. 66.

At the same time, he tries to raise the standard of chamber and instrumental performance of students to a higher level, involving them in various ensembles.

Among the pupils of the multi-instrumental class of F. Kučera stand out bassoonist Nikita Pohrebniak – the founder of the bassoon class at Saratov Conservatory, flute professor of Kharkiv Conservatory Boris Krychevsky, associate professor of double bass class of Leningrad Conservatory Mikhail Kravchenko, double bass teachers of Kharkiv Conservatory A. Rezyntin, I. Uhlitskyi and others.

Determining the role of F. Kučera in the development of bassoon performance in Ukraine, it is impossible not to mention the contribution of other representatives of the Czech school, who actually “monopolized” the process of training bassoonists in newly established music institutions. In the late 19th and early 20th cc., apart from Kharkiv, graduates of Prague Conservatory taught bassoon at two other key music colleges in Ukraine, Karel Duda³¹ – in Kyiv and I. Horník³² and V. (H). Hauer³³ in Odesa. One of K. Duda’s students, Jan Kostlán,³⁴ a Czech by birth, later became professor at Moscow Conservatory and is considered one of the founders of the Russian Soviet bassoon school. If we ascertain the influence of Czech musicians on the development process of performance on wind instruments and the formation of professional music education in Ukraine in the second half of the 19th and early 20th cc. In general, their dominance over the representatives of other performing schools is obvious.³⁵

Meeting with Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

A historical event in the musical life of the city of Kharkiv on March 11–15, 1893 was a visit of the outstanding Russian composer P. I. Tchaikovsky, who at that time was at the

31 Karel Duda (1855–1941), bassoonist, educator. In 1867–73 he studied at Prague Conservatory. After leaving for Russia, he worked in orchestras and music educational institutions in Astrakhan and St. Petersburg. From 1877 he worked in Kyiv at a music college, from 1913 - at the conservatory as a bassoon teacher. In 1922 he returned to the Czechoslovakia. Author of the “*Latest Practical School of Bassoon Playing*” in 3 parts, the first manual for bassoon in Ukraine and Russia.

32 I. Horník – bassoonist, teacher, conductor, graduate of Prague Conservatory, soloist of Odesa Opera and Ballet Theater Orchestra, from 1897 to 1902 he was a teacher at Odesa Music College, from 1902 to 1914 he was the conductor of the military orchestra in Mykolayiv.

33 V. (H). Hauer (?–1937), bassoonist, teacher, graduate of Prague Conservatory. He was a teacher at Odesa Music College from 1902, and later from 1913 at the conservatory. He worked in the orchestra of Odesa Opera and Ballet Theater until 1933.

34 Jan Kostlán (1877–1963), Czech bassoonist, teacher, student of K. Duda. In 1892–1897, he studied at Kyiv Music College, in 1903 he graduated from Moscow Conservatory. From 1897 he played at the Italian Opera House in Moscow, and from 1901 he was a soloist at the Bolshoi Theater. From 1922 to 1963, he taught at Moscow Conservatory, and from 1939 he was a professor.

35 Among the most famous names of Czech performers on wind instruments, most of whom graduated from Prague Conservatory and later taught in music colleges and conservatories of Ukraine, stand out: in Kyiv - K. Duda (bassoon), V. Purnoch (clarinet), V. Richter (French horn), A. Mašek (trombone), in Kharkiv – K. Kestner (flute), J. Procháčka (flute, bassoon), F. Kuchera, in Odesa – G. Jelínek (oboe), R. Schwan (French horn), M. Hrul (percussions), J. Kutil (clarinet), I. Horník (bassoon), V. (H). Hauer (bassoon), A. Morávek (clarinet), D. Urbánek (clarinet) and others.



Fig. 1 P. I. Tchaikovsky. March 13, 1893. Photo by A. Fedetsky.

zenith of his renown and was revered by the musical and cultural elite as a national relic. “A real celebration for all fans of musical genius” was his own concert, the main conductor of which was the composer himself. “Orchestra musicians from the Opera, teachers of the music college, former graduates of the school, invited even from other towns and the best students of the music college were involved in the realization of this grand project. [...] Never before has there been an orchestra of more than forty to forty-five people in Kharkiv. This time the orchestra was increased to seventy.”³⁶

36 БУКИНИК, Исаак. Концерты П. И. Чайковского в Харькове. Воспоминания о П. И. Чайковском [online]. Москва: Музыка, 1973, с. 341-354. [Accessed 2024-02-16]. Available at: <<http://www.tchaikov.ru/memuar188.html>>.



Fig. 2 P. I. Tchaikovsky with teachers of Kharkiv Music College. F. Kučera is first from the left in the second row. March 13, 1893. Photo by A. Fedetsky.

F. Kučera, like all teachers of the music college, and at the same time as a soloist of the opera orchestra took an active part in the concert of P. I. Tchaikovsky on March 14, 1893.³⁷ The concert of the outstanding composer met with an unprecedented success. After the concert, “[...] *Young people from the audience and students of the music college ran onto the stage, seated Peter Ilyich in a chair and carried him in across the hall, to the accompanied of greetings and applause. Members of the music society, led by I. Slatin, put Peter Ilyich in a phaeton and took him in a tailcoat with a white tie to photographer Fedetsky.*”³⁸

It was this wonderful photographer-artist³⁹ who managed to create one of the best photo portraits of P. I. Tchaikovsky, whose work was extremely highly praised by the composer himself⁴⁰ (Fig. 1). At the same time, A. Fedetsky took another historic photo

37 The concert program comprised Symphony № 2 (c-moll) on the themes of Ukrainian folk songs, op. 17, Fantasy for orchestra “Storm” (based on Shakespeare’s drama) op. 18, Violin Concerto with Orchestra, Op. 35, Solemn Overture “1812”, op. 49, as well as some romances and arias from the opera “The Queen of Spades”. Ibid. [Accessed 2024-07-30]. Available at: <<http://www.tchaikov.ru/memuar191.html>>.

38 Ibid. [Accessed 2024-07-30]. Available at: <<http://www.tchaikov.ru/memuar192.html>>.

39 Alfred Fedecki (1857–1902) Polish photographer, the first cameraman of chronic documentaries in Ukraine. He studied at the Photographic Institute at the Vienna Academy of Arts. In 1880–1886, he worked in Kyiv, in 1886 he moved to Kharkiv, where he opened his own photo studio.

40 In a letter dated of Apr. 15, 1893 to I. Slatin P. I. Tchaikovsky wrote: “*I have now received my photos from Fedetsky. He turns out to be a first-class photographer; at least I haven’t seen anything better. You know, no one has ever taken photographs of me like Fedetsky.*” The composer praised the photographer’s high-quality work with even greater admiration in a conversation with a correspondent of a Kharkiv newspaper: “*This is definitely my best portrait. This is not a photograph, but a true work of art!*” (Southern Lands, Jul. 24, 1902, p. 3). At the international

of P. I. Tchaikovsky together with teachers of the music college and members of the Kharkiv branch of the IRMS, including František Kučera⁴¹ (Fig. 2).

The next day, March 15, 1793, a concert, organized by the administration of the music college, was held for the honorable guest; it was performed by “*the students of the college only*.” F. Kučera’s students are not listed as soloists this time, but they participated in the symphony orchestra, which performed the first part of Beethoven’s *Symphony № 1* (C Major) and the first part of his piano concerto in E Major. After the concert P. I. Tchaikovsky praised the skill of young musicians and expressed his sincere gratitude to the director I. Slatin and teachers of the college “*for the excellent performance and proper training of students*.”⁴²

František Kučera – conductor and music educator

Against the background of performance and pedagogical achievements of F. Kučera as a multi-instrumentalist, his achievements as an organizer and conductor of a symphony orchestra seem no less significant. The summer symphony orchestra that he founded in 1898, the permanent leader of which he remained until the last days of his life, became one of the highlights of the artist’s musical and educational activities in Kharkiv in the late 19th and early 20th cc. Like the well-known Kharkiv compatriots F. Němec and F. Prochažka,⁴³ who were active initiators and supporters of the development of orchestral art in the city, Kučera initially created an amateur student symphony orchestra at the Kharkiv Institute of Technology. Over time, he tries to implement a larger cultural and educational project that would regularly allow the citizens to get acquainted with the best examples of Western European and Russian symphonic music. It should be noted that with the intensification of the Kharkiv branch of the IRMS, competition between existing, newly formed and touring orchestras begins to grow. In addition to the permanent opera house in the city, the student orchestra of the music college, the symphony orchestra of the Imperial Kharkiv University, military ball orchestras (enlarged staff, which included the string group), as well as symphonic groups of touring musicians periodically performed with concert programs. Therefore, the idea of creating a summer symphony orchestra by F. Kučera seemed doubtful to “*many skeptics, who predicted a quick and inevitable fiasco*.”⁴⁴

exhibition in Antwerp in June 1894, a photo portrait of P. I. Tchaikovsky’s by A. Fedetsky was awarded the Gold Medal.

41 Apparently the high quality of A. Fedetsky’s photographs prompted F. Kučera later in 1894 to order his own photo portrait, which was also made flawlessly (fig. 3). A photograph of the musician taken in the Kharkiv studio of Mykhailo Leshchynsky, which was taken a month before F. Kučera’s death in January 1911, is also preserved (ЩЕПАКІН 2017, p. 213).

42 БУКИНИК 1973. [Accessed 2024-07-30]. Available at: <<http://www.tchaikov.ru/memuar188.html>>.

43 F. Němec in 1882 founded a student symphony orchestra at the Imperial Kharkiv University, the leader of which he remained until 1888. The conductor F. Prochažka, as we know, in the summer periodically performed with the orchestra (apparently military) with entertainment repertoire in “*Bavaria*” garden.

44 ДОН-ДИЕЗ (СОКАЛЬСКИЙ, В. И.). Музыкальные заметки. *Южный край*, № 9979, 4. 5. 1910, с. 6.



Fig. 3 F. Kučera, 1894. Photo by A. Fedetsky.

However, the first performances of the newly formed orchestra in May 1898 were extremely successful, as reported by an anonymous author under the pseudonym S. P. in the newspaper *Southern Lands*: *F. Kučera began giving daily summer symphony concerts in the Garden of the Commercial Club. Musical evenings for Kharkiv residents, exhausted from the off-season contemplation of vulgarity and stupidity, with which we are treated by the ‘étoiles’ of summer venues, are just a treasure, and they are also very affordable.*⁴⁵

Trying to make the concerts accessible to a wider range of listeners, the conductor forms the orchestra’s repertoire with utmost care, “removing from it everything vulgar and hackneyed.”⁴⁶ In preparing concert programs, František Kučera seeks to directly engage

45 С. П. Театр и музыка. *Южный край*, № 5960, 19. 5. 1898, с. 2.

46 ДОН-ДИЕЗ. Музыкальные заметки. *Южный край*, № 5967, 28. 5. 1898, с. 2.

listeners in determining their preferences by organizing mini-surveys at the concerts.⁴⁷ In this way, the artist tries to get to know the musical and artistic tastes of Kharkiv fans of symphonic music and take into account their suggestions in the orchestra's repertoire. In addition to the "pre-ordered" concerts, thematic concert programs are also gaining popularity: an evening of waltzes, symphonic miniatures, symphonic overtures, etc. During the first summer season, as noted the newspaper *Southern Lands* on August 25, 1898, the orchestra of F. Kučera prepared and performed six symphonies, eight suites, ten symphonic poems, 74 overtures, 34 waltzes and more than 250 others pieces. In the programs of his performances, in addition to symphonic works by L. Beethoven, P. I. Tchaikovsky and other Western European and Russian classical composers, F. Kučera incorporates the opuses of his compatriots – B. Smetana and A. Dvořák.

The successful debut of the orchestra of the Czech artist allowed it even in its first year to enter into fierce competition with much more powerful orchestras of Moscow, which in the summer seasons went to serve the resorts of the Crimea and often stopped on the way there in Kharkiv. Evidence of this is the final concerts of the summer season of the Kharkiv orchestra with performances by a larger Moscow group of Rudolf Bullerjahn,⁴⁸ who was on a stopover in Kharkiv. Comparing them, the correspondent of the newspaper *Theater* reported that the orchestra of 80 musicians under the direction of R. Bullerjahn gave three symphony concerts in the garden of the Commercial Club with full financial output. However, "skilled and talented conductor" Kučera always managed to completely fill the garden with listeners during his orchestra performances,⁴⁹ and "there were even benefit concerts when the public were refused entry due to the sold out tickets."⁵⁰

In assessing the skill of the orchestra's musicians, critics noted their ensemble and sophistication of performance. The orchestra reached a special perfection in the *piano* and *pianissimo* dynamics. Some remarks were made about *forte*, in which "the sharpness, most noticeable in brass and wooden instruments, sometimes gets in the way. Mr. Kučera, conducting the orchestra, brings a lot of life, style and order to the performance,"⁵¹ – sums up a critic in their concert review.

The program's diverse genres and creatively inspired work of the conductor to achieve the perfection of orchestral performance were always gratefully received by his true fans.

47 Newspaper *Southern Lands* points to one of these polls: "On a separate leaflet handed out to the listeners, F. Kučera asked them to mark on the repertoire the pieces they would like to listen to in the Aug. 9 concert. The largest number scored the overture to the opera 'Ruslan and Lyudmila', the overture to 'Robespierre' by Lutolf, pieces by Meyerber, Moshkovsky, Rubinstein, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Saint-Saens." (Театр и музыка. Южный край, № 6392, 9. 8, 1899, с. 4).

48 Rudolph Bullerjahn (1856–1910), German conductor. He graduated from Königlichen Akademischen Hochschule für Musik as a violinist, a student of J. Joachim and H. K. H. de Ahna. From 1891 he lived in Moscow. He conducted summer concerts at the Zoo Garden, Sokolnyky Park and others. He toured as a conductor in St. Petersburg, Odesa, Kharkiv, Riga and others. In 1897 R. Bullerjahn was invited to Kyiv, where he headed the music school of S. Blumenfeld.

49 Covering one of the concerts in the summer garden, the correspondent of the *Theater* newspaper (28. 8, 1904) noted: "The garden was overcrowded, despite the increased fee, more than two thousand entrance tickets were sold yesterday."

50 БУ-Ш А. П. Корреспонденции. Харьков. *Театр*. 18. 9. 1898.

51 ЛЕОНИДОВ (name unknown). Театр и музыка. Южный край, № 8091, 15. 5. 1904, с. 5.

Sometimes they were ready “[...] to listen to Kučera’s wonderful symphony orchestra with great pleasure, despite the cold weather”.⁵² Soloists-instrumentalists and vocalists often performed with the orchestra; among them there are often names of the well-known compatriots of the artist – cellist B. Karásek, violinists Anton Trakal⁵³ and Emanuel Ondříček,⁵⁴ harpist Louisa Holubová⁵⁵ and other touring musicians.

The competition between orchestras trying to win a contract with the management of the Commercial Club to hold summer concerts in Kharkiv sometimes forced František Kučera to search for concert venues in other cities. And then the talented conductor turns into an equally successful impresario, who signs a number of lucrative contracts for the orchestra to hold summer concerts at the Crimean resorts in Yalta and Sevastopol. Here he meets no less worthy competitors from St. Petersburg and Moscow, but the high level of skill of Kharkiv musicians, diligence in preparing concert programs and a large and diverse repertoire of works by foreign and domestic composers allowed them to compete successfully with the capital’s bands.

The absence of F. Kučera’s orchestra at summer concerts in Kharkiv for several seasons and the sometimes-negligible attitude to the preparation of concert performances by visiting musicians, which cost the Commercial Club much more and did not bring financial benefits, forced cultural organizers to resume cooperation with the Czech conductor. The reasons for the Kučera orchestra’s return to its native penates are later fully revealed by the well-known Ukrainian musician and critic V. I. Sokalsky (pseudonym Don-Diez): “Mr. Kučera is not only undefeated by an unlucky year, but, on the contrary, looks like a winner. He had rivals, and for several seasons he traveled for the summer with his orchestra to Yalta and Sevastopol. But the rivals’ claims were puffed up: none of them finished the season successfully, and, in the end, Mr. Kučera, by fate, returned ‘home’, to the same rightful place, and reaffirmed himself even stronger. Both the orchestral musicians and us, the audience, can only rejoice: the respected artist has long established himself in the best way, and one of his names for musicians is a sure guarantee that, despite all the dangerous shoals and underwater reefs, the ship of enterprise will successfully complete its voyage and no one from the team will suffer, and for the public – is a sure guarantee that their expectations will be rewarded in full.”⁵⁶

This assessment of F. Kučera’s creative achievements voiced by his contemporary and one of the respected musicians of Kharkiv, who often conducted in front of the

52 Театр и музыка. Южный край, № 7006, 15. 5. 1901, с. 4.

53 Anton Trakal (1871–?), violinist, student of Antonín Bennewitz at Prague Conservatory. From 1901 to 1910 he took part in the performances of the summer orchestra of F. Kučera. He was a member of Kharkiv Czech Quartet in the 1900s. From 1903 to 1921 he was a member of the Russian Imperial Opera Orchestra (later the Mariinsky Orchestra and the Kirov Orchestra).

54 Emanuel Ondříček, (1880–1958), violinist, pupil of Otakar Ševčík (1894–99) at Prague Conservatory. He played in the summer of 1901 in the orchestra of F. Kučera. He worked in Odesa, gave solo concerts in various cities of Ukraine (Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Poltava, etc.). In 1910 he moved to the United States.

55 Louisa Holubová (1881–1962), harpist, studied at Prague Conservatory from 1897 to 1903. She was a soloist with the Czech Philharmonic, with which she toured abroad in St. Petersburg and Warsaw. In the summer season of 1907 she played in the F. Kučera orchestra. She also worked at Lviv Conservatory and Opera House orchestra. In 1914 she moved to Zagreb.

56 ДОН-ДИЕЗ. Музыкальные заметки. Южный край, № 9979, 4. 5. 1910, с. 5.

orchestra himself, is an objective appraisal of the place occupied by the Czech artist in the musical and cultural life of the city.

On resuming the orchestra's participation in summer concerts in the garden of the Commercial Club, F. Kučera, with even greater perseverance and creative inspiration, keeps searching for new original works for the orchestra, often orchestrating instrumental and vocal opuses himself. The orchestra's repertoire at that time included about 800 works by composers of different epochs, among which almost all of P. I. Tchaikovsky's symphonic creations deserve special attention. In order for the listeners to get acquainted with such a large-scale repertoire, the conductor offers to give concerts every day in four sections, and Thursday is allocated for the participation of soloists accompanied by a symphony orchestra.⁵⁷ The management of the Kharkiv branch of the IRMS highly appreciated the creative achievements of the tireless artist-educator and on May 6, 1902, at its request, Franz Wojciechowicz Kučera was awarded the Order of St. Stanislaus of the third degree *"for excellent, persistent and useful service."*⁵⁸

F. Kučera's achievements were not only his artistic career as a conductor, who managed to create the best orchestra in Kharkiv, which competed with the capital's groups at various concert venues. No less successfully he develops as an impresario, who *"risking his work and well-being, without subsidies and at his own risk, conducts business, which is everywhere organized on a completely different basis."*⁵⁹ For the provincial city of Kharkiv, where the symphony orchestras of the opera house and music college, as well as the amateur groups of the university and the technological institute, constantly experienced financial difficulties and largely existed due to donations and subsidies from local authorities, the idea to create one's own orchestra looked unrealistic and doomed to failure. However, the Czech musician, endowed with a remarkable entrepreneurship, successfully implements a business project to create an orchestra, presents to the people of Kharkiv a high-quality artistic product to meet musical and aesthetic needs and achieves at the same time a financial reward.

František Kučera's organizational and business qualities have a certain connection with the successful work of the Austrian singer and impresario Angelo Neumann (1838–1910), with whose troupe he toured with R. Wagner's tetralogy in St. Petersburg in 1889 before arriving in Kharkiv. Like A. Neuman, who, thanks to a well-formed troupe, skilful repertoire policy and the involvement of the best soloists, makes a number of financially successful tours in Europe, F. Kučera acts in a similar way within Kharkiv and the Crimea. The orchestra created by him "small in number,⁶⁰ but well-chosen (in the sense of the best musicians),"⁶¹ the core staff of which comprised orchestra performers from the opera, college teachers and guest instrumentalists-soloists, became an example of a new direction in the development of orchestral culture of the town. By his example

57 Театр и музыка. Южный край, № 7003, 30. 4. 1901, с. 3.

58 Отчет Харьковского отделения Императорского русского музыкального общества и состоящего при нем музыкального училища за 1901-1902 год. Харьков: Типография Зильберберга, 1903, с. 42.

59 Театр и музыка. Южный край, № 9471, 27. 8. 1908, с. 4.

60 The average number of orchestra musicians was 50.

61 ДОН-ДИЕЗ. Музыкальные заметки. Южный край, № 5967, 28. 5. 1898, с. 2.



Fig. 4 F. Kučera 's grave in the German cemetery in Kharkiv. 2018.
Photo by O. Ovchar.

F. Kučera demonstrates that with the proper organization of the orchestra's creative and economic activities, the possibility of achieving financial independence and commercial gain is quite real. He does not try to increase internal competition with the symphony orchestras of the opera house and the college of which he was a member, but seeks to fill the free space that arose in the summer. Thus, the Czech artist, as noted by the newspaper *Southern Lands*: “*Taught the audience to listen to serious music in the summer for an affordable fee, representing a good lineup of musicians and excellent soloists.*”⁶²

It is obvious that the great physical and mental strain of the artist, who pursued active pedagogical and performing careers as a bassoonist, conductor and impresario of the orchestra, being left without summer vacation from year to year, could not but affect

62 Театр и музыка. Южный край, № 9471, 27. 8. 1908, с. 4.

his health. The sudden death on February 5, 1911 of a heart attack⁶³ by the energetic 53-year-old František Kučera, who was in the prime of his creative powers and plans, was a great loss for the music community and the people of Kharkiv. *“This abrupt death came suddenly, shocked everyone who knew this humble and conscientious worker, who honestly and responsibly performed all his duties for many seasons to the musicians and his contractors. [...] As an extremely kind and honest person, the deceased enjoyed genuine sympathy among comrades, students and orchestral musicians and left a good memory of himself; Everyone who knew him will feel sorry for him, and the beginner-musicians who lost a caring friend in him will remember him especially well.”*⁶⁴

The funeral of František Kučera took place in the church. The choir and orchestra took part in the mourning mass and close friends of the deceased V. Bilousov and K. Horsky separately performed mourning music. The burial took place in the German cemetery (Fig. 4). To bid farewell to the musician came *“[...] the whole local music world, which has always appreciated and respected the late Franz Wojciechowicz [Kučera].”*⁶⁵

After the artist's death, his wife and two sons, who studied at secondary schools in Kharkiv, donated a large part of his huge library of musical orchestral literature to the music college.

Summary

F. Kučera's multifaceted work is a vivid example of a selfless service to art. His multi-instrumental performance and pedagogy opened new perspectives for the development and establishment of the bassoon as a concert solo and ensemble instrument. In the process of training professional performers, F. Kučera-teacher actively worked on revealing the potential of ensemble music making, which contributed to a significant increase in the popularity of chamber and instrumental music in concert programs. The most significant and socially acknowledged achievement of F. Kučera in the musical culture of Kharkiv in the late 19th – early 20th cc. was the creation of a private symphony orchestra for the summer seasons. Creative activity and entrepreneurial flair allowed him to lay foundation of a new model of concert and performance activities of the academic orchestra on the principles of financial sustainability. Thanks to an effective financial policy and a creative approach to the formation of a large-scale multi-genre repertoire of composers of different eras, the conductor has significantly expanded the audience. Thus, not in words, but in deeds, he successfully solves the tasks declared in the IMRS Charter, aimed at “aesthetic development of the public.” However, unlike the conservative directorate of the local branch of the society, F. Kučera achieves much higher results in terms of both creativity, musical-education and financial entrepreneurship.

63 It is known that the tragedy occurred during the signing of another contract for summer concerts. БОГ-ДАНОВ 2013, p. 28.

64 ЭМБЕ Е. Ф. Кучера. Южный край, № 10211, 6. 2. 1911, с. 8.

65 Погребение Ф. В. Кучеры. Южный край, № 10213, 9. 2. 1911, с. 4.

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