

Beckerman, Michael

## Garlic Soup and Zimmermann's Festschrift

*Musicologica Brunensia*. 2010, vol. 45, iss. 1-2, pp. [37]-40

ISBN 978-80-210-5303-8

ISSN 1212-0391 (print); ISSN 2336-436X (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/115271>

Access Date: 22. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

MICHAEL BECKERMAN, NEW YORK

## GARLIC SOUP AND ZIMMERMANN'S FESTSCHRIFT

“What do you mean you can’t write scholarly articles any more?” This spoken by Jan Broucek, the new Professor of Musicology at Kafka University. He looks disapprovingly at his American friend Joey Benjamin. “I just can’t,” says Benjamin. “I mean, all those footnotes as if we were doing science experiments. Read Derrida. You can deconstruct a footnote as easily as any other part of the text. Why should it have special authority?” “Because,” Broucek getting angry now, “that’s the way it’s always been done, and that’s the way it’s going to be done in this Festschrift.”

They are arguing about a publication to honor Stan Zimmermann, one of the great personalities and scholars of the old days. Zimmermann had played a major role in those heady early conferences at Kafka U., then called Nepoživatelný University. For those curious readers, by the way, only a small statue of Nepoživatelný remains in the Republic today, not far from Mléko’s birthplace, and occasionally someone writes an article about his various villanies. Kafka, on the other hand, has not only been turned into a University, but now accounts—in T-shirts, mugs, sweatpants, postcards, and the occasional book—for more than 10% of the national economy.

“Besides,” adds Broucek, scratching his nose, “Zimmermann wouldn’t like it. He’d feel disrespected. I’m sure you’ve noticed that his own work certainly features brilliantly documented arguments.” That was true enough, his ideas on medieval chant were recently the subject of a major review in the *Journal of the American Liturgical Society* where the author, a luminary from the Deep South rightly described Zimmermann as a “major figure in the history of chant research.” “Remember when the legendary firebrand from the Nemeč Archive called him an ‘up and coming member of the younger generation?’” Broucek warms to his remarks, “And what about his vast and impressive digital project? He’s making the entire corpus of world religious music, 200 Zettabytes, available online for the registration fee of \$620 a person, keyed to the Euro of course. No, such an important and serious person requires documentation from others. He insists on it! He needs footnotes in his Festschrift and you are going to put them there!”

Joey Benjamin shakes his head and smiles. “You’ve got it all wrong. For one thing, Zimmermann has the best sense of humor of any of you. He won’t care.

Remember when he and Zelny poured the water down the pants of that lecturer in the Northern Industrial Town in the Good Old Bad Old Days? And surely you haven't forgotten the drunken pictures of old Nemeč he showed at various parties! Besides, his impeccable scholarly legacy doesn't depend on the way I document my own contribution to his *Festschrift*."

Brouček getting a little angry now. "I don't know what the hell you are talking about? Historical details don't mean anything if you don't document them with footnotes! Otherwise you could say anything you want!" Benjamin sighs deeply. "Okay, if I must, I'll give you a little demonstration." He continues, "You know that Karlicek travelled across the ocean to start a National School of Music in the old British Colonies, right?" Brouček scowls, "Go to hell. Everyone knows that. They're even doing a recreation of his living room on the third floor of the new National Hall in Apple City." Benjamin pushing right ahead, "All right, so let's say we have a letter from Karlicek, dated February 4<sup>th</sup> 1879 saying, 'I am quite miserable in the Former Colonies.' The normal thing would be to write something like, 'Evidence shows that The Master was miserable in the Colonies!'<sup>1</sup> There. That's your documented factoid!" Benjamin adjusts his glasses and continues. "But Karlicek's sentence in the letter might also be proof of the following statements among an infinity of others: 'The Master was *always* miserable; The Master was *often* miserable. The Master was *sometimes* miserable. The Master was miserable *when he wrote that letter*, or that part of the letter.' It might also mean that writing about how miserable he was made The Master feel less miserable. Since all those sentences could be documented by the same footnote perhaps we need some more documentation in our documentation to clarify the matter:<sup>2</sup>" "That's just sophistry of the kind that makes me want to tear out my hair," muttered Brouček, his face getting a bit redder. "Besides," pointing to the bottom of this page, "see what you've done below? You can't put footnotes into your footnotes!" "Why not, my friend, who says so? If you believe in documentation you must document your documentation, and so on to infinity!" Benjamin pauses, "Besides, I haven't even gotten started yet. " He takes his glasses off and places the tip between his teeth, then begins again: "What does Karlicek actually mean by 'miserable'? How about an etymology of misery? A closer reading of it? Could this 'misery' be, God help us, 'normal human unhappiness'? Or is it the primary source for Karlicek's famous 'homesickness' that all the scholars drag out when they get a bit bored and feel a bit chauvanistic? Or (let's have a drumroll here...) is misery really a code word for *depression* of a clinical nature? Agoraphobia?" Benjamin smiles at his own thought and shakes his head. "They keep fiddling

<sup>1</sup> Karlicek to Macek, Feb.4<sup>th</sup>, 1879. *Really Really Complete Letters of Karlicek...Really!* Kafkaville: South Slavonian Industrial Press Company, 1999, p.21.

<sup>2</sup> The quote offered in the text could also be evidence of several other scenarios explored by Mitchell Bochemann in his "Old Planets of Karlicek," (insert footnote in this footnote) where he argues, among other things, for the new view of the only partially miserable Karlicek, while Milos Krajny understands the sentence as an ironic commentary on the concept of misery (insert another footnote in this footnote).

with the names of all those psych conditions so the insurance companies back home can make more money. In the end, we don't really have a clue about what 'misery' means in this case."<sup>3</sup>

Just as Broucek is getting ready to scream in frustration, a group of young student-acolytes come by on their way to Cultural Theory Indoctrination classes. Missing of course are those who have opted for the workshop in Adorno and Continental Philosophy. A young woman leading the group says, in a stage whisper, "Look at those Old Dinosaurs arguing about evidence. Thank goodness we left all that behind years ago!" Broucek glowers, but holds his tongue. He finally decides to respond to her, but Benjamin interrupts. "But the real problem, the real issue, is that we're mostly interested in Karlicek because of the music he wrote, masterpieces like *Jiri's Polka*, *The Bebin Dance*, and the symphonic poems, *Native Canadian Tetralogy*." Benjamin draws himself up to his most compelling mode of false authority and speaks with self-conscious gravity, glasses now on his nose, "Is there any one of us who can say even a single true word about the connection between The Master's words about misery and the Canadian Legends? Did his misery make him more lethargic, more passionate, more manic? And Ladies and Gentlemen, if it existed at all, did it contribute to the sixteen miniature funeral marches that are found in the very middle of the Manitoba section?"<sup>4</sup>

"Okay, okay. Stop!" cries Broucek, "I get your point. I catch your drift. It's hard to really know what to say in the end that's not a stream of crap. But why pick on the poor little footnotes? What did they ever do to you?" Joey Benjamin stops for a moment, and gathers up the papers that are lying on the desk in front of him. He pauses for a moment, and then a longer moment, perhaps for dramatic effect before answering, with a twinkle in his eye, "The only thing I mind, Dear Friend, is the pretence of authority. The past happened a long long time ago, and mostly far away—and when I say 'the past' I'm speaking about an hour ago 'right here' not just last century 'over there'. If most people can't remember where they put their car keys five minutes before, how can I or anyone else claim to know what Karlicek was thinking more than a hundred years ago?" He pauses again for effect and then continues, "Stating something as if its accuracy was not in any doubt, and capping it off by pointing the intrepid reader to the musty archive—complete with a superscript number that looks like a mathematics equation—makes it seem as if our hold on the past is real, and that this particular footnote makes something true. But just what makes anything true, and how it makes it true is never really understood or explained." Concluding now with more than

<sup>3</sup> For a new view of the concept of misery as it applies to late 19<sup>th</sup> century artistic figures see Kay Raconteur's *The Dark Light at the End of the Tunnel* where misery, masquerades as what she calls, "The Bloody Fairy." See also *The Diagnostic Notebook of All Available Conditions Treated by Second Tier Hospitals V/II*, (Baton Rouge: Pete Maravich Press, 1988) especially the note on post-agraphobic musicality on pp.412–19.

<sup>4</sup> See Jo Anne Carnivalis, "Misery Loves Funeral Marches," in the *Yearbook of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*, Cahier 16, Midwinter, 1967, p.44 ff.

a hint of whimsy, “The point in any inquiry, dear Dr. Watson, is to begin by stating what is unknown rather than merely cataloguing what is known, thus ensuring a continuation of the enthusiastic and dedicated hunt, while at the same time avoiding the appearance of pedantry.”

“So what you are saying,” finally Broucek getting it, “is that most of what passes for knowledge, for science, in our profession is really belief, and rather arbitrary belief at that.” Benjamin looks at him for a long while, and thinks about responding with something like, “Yes, that’s it exactly. Zimmermann knows this, and you can read it in every line of his work! It is what makes him a great scholar.” Instead he says, “Let’s head over to the Lanterna for lunch. I hear that the garlic soup is particularly good today.” “Is that Belief or Knowledge?” asks Broucek with a wink. “Not sure,” Benjamin now laughing a bit, “but in this rare case we can test it empirically in a few minutes and decide...Perhaps.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> This is a faithful transcript of an argument that never took place. Scholars still have trouble saying with authority exactly where, however, it did not take place.