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# **Early Czech Music Theory: Characterization, Personalities and Trends**

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## **Abstract**

The article contains an extensive overview of the history of early Czech music theory from its beginnings in the late Middle Ages to the First World War. The emphasis is on trends of development rather than on detailed study of individual treatises. More space is devoted to key founding figures such as Jan Blahoslav and Jakub Jan Ryba. The text summarizes a number of findings that are not easily accessible to the non-Czech reader.

## **Key words**

history of music theory, czech history, music history

In the following paragraphs, I aim to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the history of early Czech music theory. The text is based on parts of my doctoral dissertation<sup>1</sup>.

Although the existing literature lacks any review of the type presented here, there is, of course, a considerable amount of valuable literature of a more specifically focused nature. For reasons of scope, I will not present a comprehensive survey of these here. Individual shorter works of note are of course cited below, but it is worth mentioning a few truly significant works in the musicological treatment of the history of Czech music theory. First, two broad studies by Jitka Ludvová look at successive periods of Czech music theory between 1750–1850<sup>2</sup> and 1850–1900<sup>3</sup>; second, several shorter passages in the well-known *Hudba v českých dějinách*<sup>4</sup> (Music in Czech History) are also of value; and third, no overview would be complete without an acknowledgement of the substantial editorial achievements of Jiří Matl (the published dictionary of Tomáš Baltazar Janovka<sup>5</sup>), Thomas Sovik (the editing and English translation of the Renaissance treatises of Blahoslav and Josquin<sup>6</sup>) and Viktor Hruška (the textbook of Jakub Jan Ryba<sup>7</sup>). The history of Czech musical terminology is beyond the scope of this text for linguistic reasons, but for those interested it is worth recalling the work of Miloš Štědroň and Dušan Šlosar.<sup>8</sup>

First of all, it is necessary to note that the relationships between the terms “music theory of Czech authors”, “music theory in the Czech lands” and “music theory communicated in Czech” are mutually ambiguous. The historic inhabitants of Bohemia and Moravia who did not speak Czech were not less Czech than those who did. In earlier times, “Czechs” were only those born in the historical and administrative territory of Bohemia.<sup>9</sup> We are therefore unable to distinguish the ethnicity of some personalities, but on the other hand in the historical context this is often not as decisive a matter as it is seen to be today.

Apart from a short excursion into music dictionaries written in Latin (see below), this article focuses predominantly on treatises written in Czech.<sup>10</sup> This limitation is not without controversy, but it makes sense within the practical requirement to round the paragraphs that follow into a graspable and readable whole.

1 HRUŠKA, Viktor. *Dějiny české hudební teorie do počátku 20. století*. Praha, 2016. Dizertační práce. HAMU.

2 LUDVOVÁ, Jitka. *Česká hudební teorie 1750–1850*. 1. Praha: Academia, 1985.

3 LUDVOVÁ, Jitka. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby, 1850–1900*. 1. Praha: Academia, 1989.

4 ČERNÝ, Jaromír, Jan KOUBA, Vladimír LÉBL, Jitka LUDVOVÁ, Zdeňka PILKOVÁ, Jiří SEHNAL a Petr VÍT. *Hudba v českých dějinách*. 1. Praha: Supraphon, 1989.

5 JANOVKA, Tomáš Baltazar (aut.), MATL, Jiří (ed.), POSPÍŠIL, Michael (ed.) a Jiří SEHNAL (ed.). *Klúč k pokladu velkého umění hudebního*. Praha: KLP, 2006. Clavis monumentorum musicorum Regni Bohemiae.

6 SOVIK, Thomas. *Music theorists of the Bohemian Reformation: Translation and critique of the treatises of Jan Blahoslav and Jan Josquin*. Columbus, 1985.

7 RYBA, Jakub Jan. *Počáteční a všeobecní základové ke všemu umění hudebnému*. HRUŠKA, Viktor, Kateřina VOLEKOVÁ a Ivana BAŽANTOVÁ (eds.). V Praze: NAMU, 2017.

8 ŠTĚDROŇ, Miloš a Dušan ŠLOSAR. *Dějiny české hudební terminologie*. Ed. 2., revised. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2010.

9 See e.g., SEHNAL, J. Pobělohorská doba (1620–1740). In *Hudba v českých dějinách*, p. 156.

10 Of course, it is not possible to avoid German completely in the Central European cultural sphere.

## From the foundation of Charles University (1348) to the Battle of White Mountain (1620)

The oldest Czech music-theoretical work published as a separate treatise is Blahoslav's *Musica* from 1558. However, Czech writing on music existed even earlier than that, and the purpose of this chapter is to sketch an outline of those beginnings. There are two significant separate themes that fall within the historical area defined by the title: music theory from the Prague university, with the distinctive personality of Pavel Židek, and the largely idiosyncratic stream of theory by Blahoslav and Josquin, authors from the Unity of the Brethren.<sup>11</sup> A third related topic is the birth of Czech musical terminology, which I do not go into here because (given that I am writing in English) it would require extensive linguistic analysis.

The early years of this period are marked by a lack of reliable sources. As a result, we cannot be entirely sure what the earliest works in the history of music theory in the Czech lands were: for example, the nationality of Hieronymus de Moravia is not certain, and the fate of several Latin treatises of the *musica practica* type, which are known from fragmentary references but which have never been found, is unclear.<sup>12</sup>

From a music historical point of view, the delimitation of this historical period is slightly problematic: the musical renaissance had not yet begun in 1348, while some baroque elements were already present in the Czech lands before 1620. We might best define the period as “from the beginnings of the Czech proto-Renaissance to the limitations of freedom of religion”. The immediate influence of these events on music itself is debatable, but their rapid impact on writing about music – which is what we are primarily concerned with here – is indisputable.

### The masters of Charles University

The main reason for beginning in 1348 is that the foundation of the Prague University marked the formal beginning of music theoretical scholarship in the Czech Lands. As Jaromír Černý writes: “*theoretical musica had undoubtedly long been taught – albeit only at an elementary level – in monastic and chapter schools; a higher standard was then reached in the mid-14th century at the University of Prague, where it was included as a regular part of the masters’ examinations.*”<sup>13</sup>

Works by prominent foreign theorists were studied at the university; these included Johannes de Muris.<sup>14</sup> Master Václav of Prachatic, a musical scholar at the Prague

11 The term is used to refer to the ecclesial community called *Unitas Fratrum* in Latin and *Jednota Bratrská* in Czech.

12 ČERNÝ, J. Středověk. In *Hudba v českých dějinách*. p. 77.

13 ČERNÝ, J. Středověk. In *Hudba v českých dějinách*. p. 77.

14 ČERNÝ, J. Středověk. In *Hudba v českých dějinách*. pp. 76–77.

university alongside Stanislav of Hnězdno and Pavel Žídek (see below) wrote a commentary on de Muris' work.<sup>15</sup>

Musical education is attributed to Master Jan Hus and Master Jerome of Prague,<sup>16</sup> the two prominent Prague university authorities who were later condemned for their heretical views by the Council of Constance. Both were apparently knowledgeable in the music of the time. Their theoretical education, however, probably did not exceed the level corresponding to the *absolutorium in artibus*.<sup>17</sup> Neither of them wrote any music theoretical treatise. Jerome is considered a music theorist by some authors<sup>18</sup> based on the content of his *Recommendatio artium liberalum*, which also includes music. The musical parts of that work are, however, largely unoriginal.<sup>19</sup> The treatises *De cantu vulagris* and *De organo*, which are sometimes attributed to Jerome, are not from his own pen; the latter is probably the work of Martin Lupáč.<sup>20</sup>

From the point of view of the history of music theory, the most interesting figure among the late medieval masters of Charles University is the controversial Pavel Žídek (also known as Master Pavel of Prague, Paulus Pragensis, Paulus Paulirinus, Paulus Judeus). Originally a Utraquist, he converted to the Catholic faith during his studies. His areas of educational interest covered the liberal arts, theology, philosophy and medicine. He worked at the universities of Prague, Vienna, Bologna and Padua, and was ordained a priest in Regensburg.<sup>21</sup>

Besides his undoubted erudition, Žídek's main defining feature was his contentiousness. There is evidence of him having publicly apologised for various social transgressions. Pavel Žídek was eventually employed by King George of Poděbrady.<sup>22</sup> He wrote his greatest work, *Liber viginti artium*, while living in the Catholic town of Pilsen. A copy of this work – most likely the only surviving copy – is in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków. The extant part covers only fifteen of the twenty arts, and the sections on music are not preserved in their entirety – of its five *partitiones*, only the *musica plana*, *musica mensuralis* and an incomplete *musica instrumentalis* are preserved. The two unpreserved parts would have focused on chant and liturgical regulations related to music. Žídek's encyclopaedia is of supreme interest, especially where terminology is concerned. It contains genre names and, in the 'organological' section, what are apparently the first mentions of several instruments: clavicembalo, pedalclavichord, claviorganum ([i]nnportile), trumshayt (tubalcana). Žídek also made a remarkable attempt to make a nomenclatural distinction

15 Ibid.

16 In Czech sources known as Jeroným Pražský.

17 ŠTĚDRŮŇ, M. a D. ŠLOSAR. *Dějiny české hudební terminologie*. p. 27.

18 Namely by Z. Nejedlý and F. M. Bartoš. See the comments in ŠMAHEL, F. *Život a dílo Jeronýma Pražského*, p. 325.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 MUŽÍKOVÁ, R. *Magister Paulus de Praga*, p. 12.

22 MUŽÍKOVÁ, R. *Magister Paulus de Praga*, p. 17.

between the performer on a given instrument (e.g., citarist) and the respective craftsman-instrument maker (e.g., citaredus).<sup>23</sup>

## The Unity of the Brethren

The first two theoretical works written in the Czech language, both identically entitled *Musica*, by Jan Blahoslav and Jan Josquin, both emerged from the environment of the Unity of the Brethren in the middle of the 16th century.

The intellectual community that formed in the Unity circles represented a new and completely fresh impulse for Czech academic life (in a broader sense). The label “Czech” could also be given to the Prague university (see above) – at least after the decree of Kutná Hora – but it was still built on the Latin medieval tradition in language and form. The emergence of intellectuals in the Unity circles was not without controversy, however. Among the Reformation ideals were the simplicity of the Church and, according to some, a certain simplicity of spirit, in the sense of opposition to university-type education and adherence to the original popular character of the movement. Jan Blahoslav was one of the first generation of brethren educated at the Reformed universities in Germany.

The two Czech Renaissance *Musicas* were probably both created in order to provide the community with an instructional text, and both were likely drawn up at the same time as the hymn book *Piesně chval božských*. This also accounts for the genre of both *Musicas*: they are essentially textbooks of contemporary music theory. Thanks to Thomas Sovik, both *Musicas* are available in English translation with an accompanying analysis.<sup>24</sup> In view of this, I will discuss them here only briefly.

Jan Blahoslav was born on 20 February 1523. After studying in his native Přerov and in Prostějov, he went to Goldberg in Silesia and then to Wittenberg, where he became directly acquainted with Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon. He also gained experience in Austria, Prussia and Switzerland. He lived in the Czech lands permanently from 1550 onwards and quickly rose to higher positions within the Unity.<sup>25</sup>

Because of his broad scope, we will not study his biography and works<sup>26</sup> in great detail and will focus on facts related to music theory. Blahoslav was a true intellectual of the Unity, yet some parts of his music-theoretical text clearly demonstrate that his education certainly did not lead him to an unbridled liberalism. The language of his works is often stern and critical, and he made use of the argument that ‘it is not polite to question the meaning and origin of tradition’, on several occasions.<sup>27</sup> Blahoslav probably began his

23 HRUŠKA, Viktor. Pavel Židek. In *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí*.

24 SOVIK, Thomas. *Music theorists of the Bohemian Reformation: Translation and critique of the treatises of Jan Blahoslav and Jan Josquin*. Columbus, 1985.

25 HOSTINSKÝ, Otakar. *Jan Blahoslav a Jan Josquin*, p. VIIff.

26 See e.g., STORCHOVÁ, Lucie, ed. *The Czech lands*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020. Companion to Central and Eastern European humanism.

27 See e.g., BLAHOŠLAV, J. *Musica*, p. 5 (Hostinský’s pagination).

musical education in Bohemia and came into contact with contemporary German music theory during his studies in Wittenberg – which was at that time a centre of German music writing, thanks to Georg Rhau's printing house – and probably during his other travels.

The majority of our knowledge of Blahoslav's *Musica* comes from the edition that was published in 1569 in Ivančice. From its broad subtitle, it is clear that this was preceded by a first edition issued in Olomouc in 1558 – coincidentally, the year in which Gioseffo Zarlino's famous *Istituzioni* were published. Blahoslav's work is an introduction to contemporary music theory to the extent that enables the reader to actively perceive the music, read its notation, master the basic practical issues and advance a little further in the relationship between music and lyrics. In its second edition, *Musica* was expanded by two Supplements: the first addresses singing techniques and the second is dedicated to hymn composers.

The work de facto summarizes the theoretical minimum of the time. When discussing pitches, Blahoslav strictly follows solmization and *octoechos* modes. Traditionally, he interprets the Guidonian hand and the corresponding hexachordal mutations. The following chapters in his treatise present the contemporary system of mensural notation, which does not differ much from today's. The musical metre is also typical of the period: levels *modus – tempus – prolatio*. In addition to binary and ternary divisions, Blahoslav also uses the *proportio sesquialtera*. The last chapter introduces readers to the church modes and discusses the musical ethos of each mode.

Jan Blahoslav knew the work of Coclico, Listenius, Finck and probably other authors printed by Rhau. It is also possible that he was already familiar by that time with the writings of Václav Philomates (see below).<sup>28</sup>

Blahoslav did not trust the innovations of the time very much, nor did he have any reason to be too progressive – he was primarily concerned with introducing laymen to concepts of music theory closely linked to practice. He focuses on simple monophonic singing, which was predominant among the Unity, and does not use the more advanced doctrine connected with the contemporary theory of counterpoint and its related terminology. In view of the instructive (and often borrowed) nature of the basic text of the *Musica*, Blahoslav's personal contribution is greatest in the aforementioned Supplements to the second edition.

The second of the theoretical writings produced in the environment of the Unity of the Brethren was probably written at least in part simultaneously with the first. Not nearly as much is known about its author as about Jan Blahoslav; the name Jan Josquin is certainly a pseudonym, chosen after a prominent composer of the Franco-Flemish polyphonic school, and not much can be said with certainty about its bearer. He was undoubtedly an intellectual from the Unity of the Brethren and matriculated at the University of Wittenberg on 30 April 1563 under the name Johannes Josquinus Boleslaviensis. Otakar Hostinský associates Josquin with the printer Václav Solín (c. 1526-1566)

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28 See HOSTINSKÝ, O. *Jan Blahoslav a Jan Josquin*, p. LXIII and HELFERT, V. *Muzika Blahoslavova a Philomatova*, pp. 122–124.

and the Josquin-Solín identity have been also confirmed by Thomas Sovik.<sup>29</sup> The most compelling argument underlying this interpretation is an incompletely preserved note on the autograph of the source, which suggests a possible discord between Blahoslav and Josquin, who were evidently collaborating on the publication of the hymnal, which could have led to the independence of their theoretical treatises. Indeed, the note on Josquin's source is very likely written in Blahoslav's hand.<sup>30</sup>

Josquin's presentation is far less rigorous and didactic than Jan Blahoslav's. Paradoxically, we can be grateful for this, because the inconsistencies in interpretation, minor terminological errors, and omissions in Josquin's treatise reveal, on careful critical reading, which parts of the contemporary theoretical system had only survived through a certain inertia and were no longer used in everyday practice. It is clear that Josquin's focus was not on building a coherent theoretical system, but rather on presenting a set of graspable lessons (the chapters have very specific topical titles, e.g. "On clefs", "On mutations", "On solmization", etc.). Josquin's *Musica* has not been preserved complete; the missing parts probably addressed the melodic and rhythmic qualities of the liturgy.<sup>31</sup>

For completeness it is necessary to shortly mention Václav Philomathes. He wrote in Latin and his defining music theoretical work, *Musicorum libri quatuor*, was published in Vienna. Chronologically, he is placed before Josquin and Blahoslav, with whom, moreover, he cannot be directly linked; he was a Catholic priest. Thanks to the international nature of Latin, Philomathes' is, along with Tomáš Balthasar Janovka and Pavel Žídek, one of the better known – or the only internationally known – Czech music theorists before Antonín Rejcha. For more details the reader is referred to the commented edition of *Musicorum libri quatuor*.<sup>32</sup>

## From the Battle of White Mountain (1620) to Josephinism (1780s)

In the following period, Czech music theory lagged far behind the rest of the world, perhaps the furthest. It took until the 20th century before Czech scholarship could confidently be said to have caught up. This period could simply be described as the "time of the Counter-Reformation": the decline began in connection with the events following the Battle of White Mountain, and was compounded during the period of Josephinism. At the same time, the reforms introduced by Emperor Joseph II represent a truly significant result of the growth of Enlightenment tendencies, which in our country had been rather limited to the activities of individual personalities.

29 SOVIK, Thomas. Muzika 1561: Autorství určeno. In *Ethnonationale Wechselbeziehungen in der mitteleuropäischen Musik mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Situation in den böhmischen Ländern*. Brno, 1994, pp. 289–291.

30 HRUŠKA, Viktor. Jan Josquin. In *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí* [online]. [cit. 2021-11-23].

31 HOSTINSKÝ, O. *Jan Blahoslav a Jan Josquin*, p. LXXXVI.

32 PHILOMATES, Václav, HORYNA, Martin, ed. *Čtyři knihy o hudbě*. Praha: KLP, 2003. *Clavis monumentorum musicorum Regni Bohemiae*.



A period of modern history spanning more than a century and a half may seem long. However, its length is fully justified by the extremely small number of Czech music theorists active during this time. For a whole century there were virtually no new domestic music theoretical works. In 1626 a textbook by the Italian author Claudio Abbate, which presented Zarlino's counterpoint and was entitled *Regulae contrapuncti* was published in Oslavany. However, due to the Thirty Years' War, it was not disseminated, nor was it preserved in the Czech lands. Some fragments of figured bass exercises by Samuel Zindel, organist of Olomouc Cathedral, have been preserved.<sup>33</sup>

The main providers of musical education for the broader community in the Czech Lands during this period were the Jesuit and Piarist orders. Most of their libraries contained Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia universalis* (1650) and, after the first quarter of the 18th century, Fux's famous *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725). Music manuals that provided instruction in figured bass were widespread, such as *Grund-Regeln zur Singkunst* (1689, attributed to Carissimi), Speer's *Grundrichtiger Unterricht der Musikalischen Kunst* (1689) and Matthäus Gugl's *Fundamenta Partiturae* (1727). From Janovka (see below) we also know that writings by Rhaw, Gumpelzheimer and the practically unknown Reich and Steidlmayer appeared in Prague. How these books, which were written in German, Latin and Italian, were used is, however, not very clear. The surviving copies show no signs of frequent use. Gugl's manual was translated into Czech, but only as late as 1761.<sup>34</sup> The Jesuit Order's tireless missionary activity left a tiny exotic mark on the history of Czech music theory in the form of some notes that Jesuit Karel Slavíček (1678-1735) wrote during a missionary journey in China around 1717, but unfortunately, they have not survived.

Undoubtedly the most important figure in Czech music theory in this period was Tomáš Baltazar Janovka (1669-1741), a graduate of the Prague University and chief organist of the Old Town of Prague, whose famous *Clavis ad thesaurum magnae artis musicae* was published in 1701. Like Židek and Philomates, he did not write in Czech. However, his is one of the founding works of musical lexicography, appearing more than a quarter of a century before Walther's *Lexicon*.<sup>35</sup>

## From the reforms of Joseph II until World War I

### Before professional music education institutions

Not one of the handful of personalities who de facto re-founded Czech music theory in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a music theory specialist within a larger institution dedicated to the education of music professionals. Nor could they have been: the Prague Conservatory was not operational until 1811, and the Organ school only came into existence two decades later.

33 See SEHNAL, J. Pobělohorská doba (1620–1740). In *Hudba v českých dějinách*, p. 207.

34 Ibid.

35 See JANOVKA, Tomáš Baltazar (aut.), MATL, Jiří (ed.), POSPÍŠIL, Michael (ed.) a Jiří SEHNAL (ed.). *Klíč k pokladu velkého umění hudebního*. Praha: KLP, 2006.

The most common genre of music theoretical handbooks in our country was the *fundamentum*: educational literature of a schematic rather than didactic approach, designed to achieve the easiest possible practical implementation of the subject matter, but not necessarily convey an understanding of it. In the period up to 1800, Jitka Ludvová records a total of eight works of this type, which are probably original (i.e. not transcriptions or translations) and it can be assumed that the actual number was higher. Of the eight works mentioned, four represent very simple figured bass manuals and the remaining four are general music teaching textbooks, focusing on the basics of nomenclature, notation, the scale system, etc.<sup>36</sup> We know some of their authors by name (e.g. Martin Leonard Broulík, Jiří Novák) and even in the case of the anonymous ones we have reason to believe that their authors were cantors<sup>37</sup> – the surviving sources are not found in the libraries of castles or monasteries.<sup>38</sup> After 1800, music theoretical works tended to stratify into three layers: transcriptions of older texts, figured bass manuals with an increasing share of more modern harmony teaching, and shorter theoretical chapters in instrumental manuals.<sup>39</sup>

The top personality of this period, whose works clearly surpass the scattered early attempts at music theory by Czech authors, is undoubtedly Jakub Jan Ryba (1765-1815). Ryba was a true Enlightenment scholar who sought education within these ideals, and probably the only author discussed in this chapter who was able to use both classical and relatively recent literature and synthesize both with great didactic skill. This type of musical intellectual was far from common in this country, and given Ryba's partial isolation from the main Prague cultural circles, he cut an essentially solitary figure.

Ryba came from a family of teachers and was educated at the Piarist grammar school in Prague. During his studies in the Czech capital, he was active in musical circles, including as a composer. After a relatively short time, his father called him into the teaching profession, in which he remained until the end of his life, for the most part living and working in Rožmitál pod Třemšínem.

In the mid-1790s, at around the time when he began to compose his famous Czech Christmas Mass, Ryba was preparing a German treatise on figured bass. He later abandoned this project, however, and apparently largely incorporated the material he had prepared into a more general treatise in his native language: *Počáteční a všeobecní základové ke všemu umění hudebnému* (*Initial and General Fundamentals to All the Art of Music*, in this paper henceforth simply the *Fundamentals*), the preface to which is dated 22 November 1800. The result was a work far surpassing previous works of music theory in Czech, and became in effect the founding work of modern Czech music theory.

The seventeen-year delay between the completion of Ryba's work and its publication is due to publishing problems. The publisher Václav Matěj Kramerius, to whom Ryba

36 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie 1750–1850*, p. 24.

37 The term 'cantor' referred to a musically educated individual who, besides leading church music, also taught at the local school. In today's colloquial Czech, this terminus is sometimes even directly used as a synonym for the word 'teacher'.

38 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie 1750–1850*, p. 24.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

had offered his text. Delayed its publication for so long that it had not appeared by the time he died in 1808. His son, Václav Rodomil Kramerius, eventually published an edition of the *Foundations* in 1817, but – as he makes clear in his preface, stating that the work had been updated for contemporary use – that edition was not one hundred percent the work of Jakub Jan Ryba. The name of the editor is not given in print and the original manuscript is missing. Jiří Berkovec hypothesizes that the editor may have been Bohumír Jan Dlabáč.<sup>40</sup> The printed edition of the *Fundamentals* is nevertheless stylistically and terminologically compact. The interventions made, if any, must either have concerned only minor details or, alternatively, have consisted in a significant reworking that altered the overall form of the writing. It is more logical to lean towards the former assumption, especially considering that the editor evidently did not insist that the work bear his name. The work is valuable not least for its overall organization and style of writing. The explanation is conducted didactically, a system is purposefully built, supported by argumentation and illustrative examples. In this respect it is indeed a “modern” textbook. Ryba’s work provides his reader with a full grounding in the art of music, not just a tour of selected practical aspects such as figured bass.

The price the textbook, and hence Ryba himself, pays for this breadth is its depth. If the text was to present the basics of music theory in a comprehensive and digestible way, it could not go into great technical detail for simple reasons of length. Thus, Ryba does not, for example, advance beyond basic terminology in harmony and get into the real theory of figured bass. His treatise does not develop any new theorems, argumentation or speculation. However, this was true of several other contemporary publications too.

The *Foundations* consists of an extensive preface and three books of the treatise itself. Ryba’s own preface explains his reasons for writing the work and describes the problems of music education for his “target group” – mainly young people interested in music education who did not have the opportunity to study in larger towns. The first book sets out general and abstract principles of interpretation, which in Ryba’s case include an introduction to some of the basic laws of musical acoustics, an overview of musical genres, and a few paragraphs devoted to what, in today’s terms, might be described as musical aesthetics. The second book focuses on musical performance: how to read and interpret musical material. The third book is a Dictionary of Music.

Let’s focus on Ryba’s sources. Although Ryba acknowledged that he was aware of the possible existence of previous Czech writing on music, he did not know any of that writing himself and hence (quite rightly) considered his role in writing such a work to be pioneering. He knew the name and title of Tomáš Baltazar Janovka’s seminal work, but stated that he had not had the opportunity to read it. Ryba’s main sources were works by foreign, especially German, theorists of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. References to Athanasius Kircher, Marin Mersenne, Georg Wolf, Johann Friedrich Daube, Martin Gerbert, Johann Georg Sulzer, Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland, and various ancient philosophers are present.<sup>41</sup> It is significant that Ryba continuously supplemented his own education

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40 BERKOVEC, *Jakub Jan Ryba*, p. 156.

41 HRUŠKA, Viktor a Ivana BAŽANTOVÁ. Jakub Jan Ryba a jeho klíčový teoretický spis. *Jakub Jan Ryba: Počáteční a všeobecní základové ke všemu umění hudebnému*, p. 11.

even in his cantorial profession: the somewhat widespread opinion that Ryba absorbed all of his education during the few years he spent in Prague and subsequently lived in virtual isolation is not entirely accurate.

To conclude this part about cantors, it should be noted that several treatises were written in the 1830s, thematically on the borderline between figured bass and harmony, localized in the Chrudim region.<sup>42</sup> Although they were not the work of a single author, the central figure of this regional upsurge can be identified as a cantor from Rosice u Pardubic named Jan Nepomuk Filčík (1785-1837).<sup>43</sup>

If Ryba could be described as a solitary figure in the context of Czech cantors, then Karel Slavoj Amerling (1807-1884) would have to be described as a solitary figure in the whole context of Czech scholarship and education. Amerling was active during a period when the Czech music world were focused around the Prague Conservatory and Organ School, yet he was formally active outside these professional music schools. Such solitaire personalities are often exceptional but also eccentric, and there is much of the latter to be found in Amerling.

His personality and overall thinking was characterized by immense diligence, very broad erudition and a strong desire to reveal the inner connections between things, which sometimes led him in directions that were downright misleading. A typical example is his crystallographic classification of musical keys.<sup>44</sup> His less obscure and more useful works included popularization works, one of which could be said to be among the first “serious” or “informed” ethnomusicological reports in Czech (taken from Fétis): in the form of a travel story, it gives a plausible account of the clash between European tempered chromatic intonation and North African quarter-tone flexions.<sup>45</sup>

Amerling’s most important contribution by far was his part in the preparation of the first Czech textbook of harmony. It was at Amerling’s instigation that Josef Krejčí, who taught organ and harmony at the preparatory institute for teachers, of which Amerling was the director, began work on compiling such a textbook. The recently rediscovered manuscript<sup>46</sup> shows that the book was essentially finished and that its publication must have been hindered by external circumstances. In part, this was doubtless due to the turbulent political developments immediately following 1848, which brought with them financial problems. In addition, however, it is fairly safe to say that Krejčí and Amerling found themselves unable to agree. In his later life, Krejčí was appointed director of both the Organ School and the Conservatory, and gradually became one of the most conservative-minded figures on the Prague music scene. It is not hard to imagine how critically he must have viewed Amerling’s attempts to sneak some of his “distinctive” musical terminology and opinions into the harmony textbook. Amerling himself, moreover, was not sufficiently educated in musical practice to write a harmony textbook on his own.

42 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie 1750–1850*, p. 32.

43 Ibid.

44 See HRUŠKA, Viktor. Karel Slavoj Amerling v kontextu své doby. *Živá hudba*. 2012, 3, pp. 89–95.

45 Ibid.

46 See HRUŠKA, Viktor. Opětný nález jedné nejstarších učebnic harmonie v češtině. *Musicologica Brunensia*. 2015, 50, 1, pp. 195–203.

## The beginnings of Czech music journalism and music dictionaries

In connection with the success of the final phases of the national revival, publishing opportunities for works written in Czech increased. Nevertheless, the readership for music journalism was small, which meant that publishing opportunities were limited and the genre remained in an unenviable position for quite some time. As a consequence, this period is sadly rich in irregularly published periodicals, works abandoned in manuscripts, and low-quality, underfunded publishing projects.

The journal *Krok*, published irregularly between 1829 and 1840, included some relevant articles, as did *Časopis českého muzea* (the *Journal of the Czech Museum*, from 1827), and music-theoretical items also appeared in Urbánek's *Bibliotheca Pedagogica*. The journal *Dalibor* had a complex publication history, stretching from 1858 to the end of the first quarter of the 20th century.<sup>47</sup> We also have the music journals *Slavoj* (Josef Ulm) and *Hudební listy* (*Musical Letters*, Jan Ludevít Procházka, Richard Rozkošný, František Pivoda). *Cecilia* (later *Cyrl*) was dedicated to church music. Leoš Janáček had his own music periodical in Moravia.

The publication of Rieger's dictionary (1860–1874) marked a significant milestone in the history of music theory. Josef Leopold Zvonař wrote many of its music entries, although he died before the dictionary was completed and his work was taken over by Adolf Pozděna and Vojtěch Meyerhofer. The dictionary also included entries on music theory by Václav Brandl, Karel Jaromír Erben, František Gregora, Antonín Vojtěch Hnojek, Otakar Hostinský, Josef Kolář, Josef Kouba and others. The only exclusively Czech musical dictionary was published in 1881 and its author was Jan Malát. Its importance is mainly terminological.<sup>48</sup>

## Professional institutions

It is important to recall that at this time, a substantial body of Czech music theory was communicated in German. Leaving aside the episodic activities of Abbé Vogler,<sup>49</sup> scholarly music theoretical activity primarily centred around the University of Prague where, from the 1860s onwards, lectures that foreshadowed modern musicology began to appear. August Wilhelm Ambros was appointed the first professor in 1869, and later the equally famous Guido Adler (1885–1888) worked there briefly. Music theory was also cultivated among the university's natural scientists, among them the eminent acousticians Ernst Mach and Carl Stumpf. In addition, there were also fairly routine music-theoretical training courses, and the lecturers who taught them had a function analogous to that of German music directors (teaching, leading choirs, etc.). The first such lecturer was František Zdeněk Skuherský. Josef Durdík was also very interested in the science of music, as

47 See e.g., PETŘÍK, Ondřej. *Hudebně-pedagogické texty na stránkách Dalibora*. Olomouc, 2013. Diploma thesis. Palacký University Olomouc.

48 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, p. 71.

49 See e.g., LUDVOVÁ, Jitka. Abbé Vogler a Praha. *Hudební věda*. 1982, 19, 1, pp. 99–121.

was Otakar Hostinský at the beginning of his career. In his dissertation, he explored the links between music theory, aesthetics and acoustics, advocating Helmholtz's monism. As far as we can tell, no original publications on music theory written in Czech appeared in connection with any Czech university during the 19th century, and the first such work was Jan Branberger's *Účast filozofa René Descartesa na hudebním theoretisování* (*Participation of the philosopher René Descartes on musical theorizing*), published in 1904.<sup>50</sup>

As well as dominating in the university environment, German was also dominant at this time in private music education. One prominent figure in this context was Josef Proksch, who ran his own educational institute, where he made the analysis of musical works an integral part of his music teaching at a time when this practice was not common at the Prague Conservatory. He wrote *Allgemeine Musiklehre in Fragen und Antworten* (1843, extended 1852) for use at his school, and he also assigned his more advanced students to read A. B. Marx, who did not otherwise receive much attention in our country.<sup>51</sup> Last but not least, German was abundantly represented at the Prague Conservatory and Organ School, at least during their first decades.

The Prague Conservatory, founded by the *Unity for the Enhancement of Music in Bohemia* (*Jednota pro zvelebení hudby v Čechách, Verein zur Beförderung der Tonkunst in Böhmen*), opened its doors in 1811. Its primary aim was to educate orchestral players, and this was reflected in the composition of the courses taught. The most prominent Conservatory figures, where theory is concerned, are its first directors, Weber and Kittl. Theoretical education at the conservatory was conducted – puns aside – very conservatively. Both Weber and Kittl taught harmony primarily through simple pencil and paper exercises, with a few people gradually working their way up to counterpoint. The aforementioned director Josef Krejčí tried to establish a composition class, but without success. No major reforms in theoretical teaching were made even under Josef Förster. The second of Prague's flagship musical institutes was the *Organ School* (*Varhanní škola*), founded by the *Unity for the Enhancement of Church Music in Bohemia* (*Jednota ku zvelebení církevní hudby v Čechách, Verein der Kunstfreunde für Kirchenmusik in Böhmen*), which operated from 1830, initially offering a ten-month course, which was then gradually extended. Among the theoreticians who worked there were its directors Pitsch, Krejčí and Skuherský, as well as Zvonař, Horák, Kolečovský, Průcha, Förster (the elder) and in particular František Blažek, who taught there for more than half a century.

Although the content of the theoretical subjects taught at the two institutions was very similar in the early years after their foundation, the Organ School enjoyed better results in the long term. A programme of public examinations held in 1841 at the Organ School has survived, showing that the subjects examined included the study of intervals, triads, seventh chords, passages, and playing examples of figured bass. For second-year

50 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, p. 32.

51 Ibid.



students, topics included practical modulation, the basics of counterpoint, imitation, fugue theory, and the fundamentals of organ construction.<sup>52</sup> The Organ School also succeeded in gradually updating its theoretical training in a much more flexible manner than that seen at the Conservatory. Robert Führer's German publications were originally used for training, along with German scripts by Pitsch and Krejčí. František Blažek did not publish his *Harmony* until 1866, but he taught according to its syllabus from the 1840s onwards. František Zdeněk Skuherský significantly reformed the Organ School. The course of study was extended to three years, newly including the study of musical forms and the basics of instrumentation, and with the compositional aspects of teaching generally reinforced.<sup>53</sup> The Organ School subsequently merged with the Prague Conservatory in 1890. The composition class was created from the Organ School's circuit, and its prominent teachers included Karel Knittl, Karel Stecker and, last but not least, Antonín Dvořák. The latter was formally supposed to teach instrumentation and musical forms, but in reality he rather advised his pupils on their attempts at composition.<sup>54</sup>

I will conclude this review by providing a brief list of the most important independent theoretical works of this period. The first published textbook of harmony written in Czech was Josef Leopold Zvonář's *Fundamentals of Harmony and Singing*,<sup>55</sup> published in 1861. After an introduction providing the obligatory explanation of a few points of acoustics and aesthetics, the treatise itself begins with basic musical concepts and moves on to figured bass. The practical section expounds on the creation of cadences, modulation, melody accompaniment, and singing, and ends with an analysis of the song.<sup>56</sup>

This was followed soon after by Jan Nepomuk Škroup's two-volume *Theoretical and Practical School of Music*,<sup>57</sup> both volumes of which were also published in a German edition and which gained approval as an aid for teacher training institutes. Besides providing a general overview, Škroup's work comprises sections on instruments and musical forms, and chapters on organ playing and singing. The whole of the second volume consists of a collection of practical examples, intended to serve for the practice of chord progressions.<sup>58</sup>

The shorter *Doctrine of Instrumentation (Nauka o instrumentaci)* was published in 1864 by Čeněk Vinarš.<sup>59</sup> Blažek's important *Theoretical and Practical Doctrine of Harmony for School and Home*<sup>60</sup> was eventually published in 1866, sixteen years after its completion

52 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, pp. 38–41.

53 Ibid., p. 37.

54 Ibid., pp. 38–39.

55 ZVONÁŘ, Josef Leopold. *Základy harmonie a zpěvu s příslušným navedením pro učitele hudby vůbec a národních škol zvláště*. Praha: Self-published, 1861.

56 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, p. 63.

57 ŠKROUP, Jan Nepomuk. *Theoreticko-praktická škola hudební pro učitele a ředitele hudby kostelní, zvláště pro čekatele učitelské* [2 volumes]. Praha: A. Augusta, 1862 and 1864.

58 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, p. 64.

59 Ibid., p. 66.

60 BLAŽEK, František. *Theoreticko-praktická nauka o harmonii pro školu a dům*. Praha: I. L. Kober, 1866.

(see above). Compared to the content of the previously mentioned textbooks, Blažek adds more soprano harmonization and, in the appendices, examples of songs for practice. In the second edition (1878), notes on the history of music theory and mensural notation were also added.<sup>61</sup>

Another *Doctrine of Musical Harmony*<sup>62</sup> was published in 1876 by František Gregora, written in a popular style using a question-and-answer format. It is consistently based on fundamental bass, and is thus exceptional in the Czech literature.<sup>63</sup>

A separate textbook on musical forms was published in 1879 by František Zdeněk Skuherský.<sup>64</sup> Its interpretation covers forms, types and genres from Gregorian chant to the symphonic poem.<sup>65</sup> A four-volume *Doctrine of Musical Composition*<sup>66</sup> was published by the same author in 1880–1884. The first volume bears the title “On Conclusion and Modulation”, the second sets out single and double counterpoint, the third volume, “On Imitation, Canon and Fugue”, contains a summary of the theory of counterpoint illuminated using examples from the eighteenth century, and the final volume is dedicated to fugue, with its more complex types and derivatives. Skuherský then published his *Doctrine of Harmony on a Scientific Basis*<sup>67</sup> in 1885. Another Czech instrumentation handbook was published in 1883 by Josef Srb-Debrnov.<sup>68</sup> Josef Förster first published his successful *Doctrine of Harmony (Nauka o harmonii)*, which already included altered chords, in 1887.<sup>69</sup> The first Czech textbook on melody, the *Doctrine of Homophonic Composition*,<sup>70</sup> was published by Karel Knittl in 1898.

It is also worth mentioning that the eminent Czech physicist Čeněk (Vincenc) Strouhal clearly demonstrated in his *Acoustics*<sup>71</sup> that he had a very good understanding of music theory. He was able to actively respond to contemporary authors, both foreign (e.g. Helmholtz, Oettingen) and Czech (e.g. Hostinský, Förster).

For reasons of extent, it is not possible to give any more detailed analysis here of the works of Otakar Hostinský, who worked at the intersection of music theory and aesthetics. Suffice it to say that his name symbolically brings this review full circle, since he wrote the first major editorial work in the history of Czech music theory: an edition of the Czech Renaissance *Musics* of Jan Blahoslav and Jan Josquin, with commentary.

61 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, p. 66.

62 GREGORA, František. *Nauka o hudební harmonii*. Praha: F. Urbánek, 1876.

63 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, p. 69.

64 SKUHERSKÝ, František Zdeněk. *O formách hudebních*. Praha: Mikuláš a Knapp, 1879.

65 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, p. 70.

66 SKUHERSKÝ, František Zdeněk. *Nauka o hudební komposici*. Praha: Fr. Urbánek, 1880–1884.

67 SKUHERSKÝ, František Zdeněk. *Nauka o harmonii na vědeckém základě ve formě nejjednodušší se zvláštním zřetelem na mohutný rozvoj harmonie v nejnovejší době*. Praha: Fr. Urbánek, 1885.

68 SRB-DEBRNOV, Josef. *Instrumentace: Stručný návod k poznání nástrojů s dodatkem o hudbě komorní*. Praha: Fr. Urbánek, 1883.

69 LUDVOVÁ, J. *Česká hudební teorie novější doby 1850–1900*, p. 72.

70 KNITTL, Karel. *Nauka o skladbě homofonní*. Praha: Fr. Urbánek, 1898.

71 STROUHAL, Čeněk. *Akustika*. Praha: Nákladem Jednoty českých matematiků, 1902.



## Concluding remarks

In this paper I have traced the early development of Czech music theory through seven centuries. Its characteristic discontinuity, repeated phoenix-like rebirth and considerable number of “founding personalities” should by now be clear. For single striking example, it is worth noting the similarities in the language, grammar and outward motivation of the opening passages of both Blahoslav and Ryba are, despite their being separated by a quarter of a millennium. Only with regard to the developments in the last decades of the 19th century can it be said with some exaggeration that Czech music theory entered the 20th century “definitively founded”.

Unfortunately, it is quite evident that the preceding paragraphs suffer from a certain imbalance in the scope and depth of the material covered. Generally speaking, this is due to two reasons: firstly, we do not have enough sources on some periods (either they have not survived or they did not even come into existence, e.g. in the period after the Battle of White Mountain) and secondly, I myself have tried to concentrate on information that would be hardly accessible to non-English readers (e.g. that is why the end of the 19th century was kept short – information about it is more accessible).

Let me conclude this review with a very apt quote by Martin Horyna, which can be understood as a tribute to many of the key personalities mentioned here: *“In the history of the Czech nation, intellectuals of a certain type, best described as ‘educators’, hold a prominent place. These were versatile popularizers of knowledge: eclectic and mediocre literary figures who worked unobtrusively and for little reward for schools and for the general good, rather than specialist academics with their own original ideas who broadened horizons and lived to be recognized. [...] Where our history is concerned, the cultural heritage of certain epochs cannot be imagined without them.”*<sup>72</sup>

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72 HORYNA, M. *Wenceslai Philomathis Musicorum libri quatuor*, p. IX.

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