

“PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLERS” BY LINDA KEPRTOVÁ: TO THE PROBLEM OF UPDATING THE DIRECTOR'S STYLISTICS ON THE OPERA STAGE

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INTRODUCTION

The 1930s–1940s are a tragic page in the history of music that requires serious consideration. A whole layer of “repressed music” found itself left out of world art. Many composers, such as Arnold Schönberg, Alexander von Zemlinsky, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Paul Hindemith were subjected to political persecution, others became prisoners of concentration camps. Among them are Olivier Messiaen, who ended up in the German prison camp Stalag VIII-A and wrote there his *Quartet for the End of Time* (*Quatuor pour la fin du temps*), Erwin Schulhoff, who died of illness in the German concentration camp Wülzburg. But there are other outstanding composers of Jewish origin who remain little known: Viktor Ullmann ¹,

¹ *Viktor Ullmann* (1 January 1898, Cieszyn – 18 October 1944, KZ Auschwitz-Birkenau) was a Silesia-born Austrian composer, conductor and pianist.

Viktor Ullmann was born in Cieszyn (Teschen), which belonged then to Austrian Silesia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Both his parents were from families of Jewish descent, but had converted to Catholicism before Viktor's birth. At the beginning of 1918 he was accepted in Schönberg's composition seminar. With Schönberg he studied the theory of form, counterpoint and orchestration. Ullmann was an excellent pianist, although he had no ambitions for a career as a soloist. In May 1919, he broke off both courses of study and left Vienna in order to devote himself fully to music in Prague. His mentor was now Alexander von Zemlinsky, under whose direction he served as a conductor at the New German Theatre of Prague until 1927.

In 1923, with the *Sieben Lieder mit Klavier* (7 Songs with Piano) he witnessed a series of successful performances of his compositions, which lasted until the beginning of the 1930s (*Sieben Serenaden*). At the Geneva music festival of the International Society for New Music in 1929, his Schönberg Variations, a piano cycle on a theme by his teacher in Vienna, caused something of a stir. Five years later, for the orchestral arrangement of this work, he was awarded the Hertzka Prize, named in honor of the former director of Universal Edition.

While his compositions of the 1920s still clearly show the influence of Schönberg's atonal period, especially the *Chamber Symphony* Op. 9, the *George Songs* Op. 15 and *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21, Ullmann's compositions from 1935 onwards, like the *String Quartet* № 2 and *Piano Sonata* № 1, are distinguished by a musical development that is more independent of Schönberg's inspiration.

On 8 September 1942, he was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Up to his deportation his list of compositions had reached 41 opus numbers and contained additional three piano sonatas, song cycles on texts by various poets, operas, and the piano concerto Op. 25, which he finished in December 1939, nine months after the entry of German troops into Prague. Most of these compositions are missing.

On 16 October 1944, he was deported to the camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was killed in the gas chambers two days later...

Pavel Haas ², Gideon Klein ³, Zikmund Schul ⁴, Hans Krása.

² *Pavel Haas* (21 June 1899 – 17 October 1944) was a Czech composer who was murdered during the Holocaust. He was an exponent of Leoš Janáček's school of composition, who also combined elements of folk music and jazz. Although his output was not large, he is notable particularly for his song cycles and string quartets.

Haas was born in Brno, into a Moravian-Jewish family. After studying piano privately, at the age of 14, Haas began his more formal musical education and studied composition at the Brno Conservatory from 1919 to 1921 under Jan Kunc and Vilém Petrželka. This was followed by two years of study in the workshop of the noted Czech composer Leoš Janáček. Janáček was by far Haas's most influential teacher, and Haas, in turn, proved to be Janáček's best student.

Out of more than 50 compositions Haas wrote during the rest of his life, only 18 were given opus numbers by the self-critical composer. While still working in his father's business, he wrote musical compositions of all kinds, including symphonic and choral compositions, lieder, chamber music, and scores for cinema and theatre. His opera, *Šarlatán* (The Charlatan), was first performed in Brno to sincere acclaim in April, 1938. He received the Smetana Foundation award for the opera.

In 1941, Haas was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp (Terezín). On his arrival at Theresienstadt, he became very depressed and had to be coaxed into composition by Gideon Klein. Haas wrote at least eight compositions in the camp, only a few of which have survived. They include a set of Four Songs on Chinese Poetry for baritone and piano, a composition for men's choir titled "Al s'fod" (his first and only composition in Hebrew), and the Study for String Orchestra which was premiered in Theresienstadt under the Czech conductor Karel Ančerl and is probably Haas's best-known composition today. When the propaganda project – a film, *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* was over, the Nazis transferred 18,000 prisoners, including Haas and the children who had sung in Brundibár, to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were murdered in the gas chambers.

³ *Gideon Klein* (6 December, 1919 – 27 January, 1945) was a Czechoslovakian pianist, classical music composer, educator and organizer of cultural life at Theresienstadt concentration camp. Klein was murdered during the Holocaust.

Klein was born into a Moravian-Jewish family in Přerov and, showing musical talent early, studied piano with Růžena Kurzová and Vilém Kurz, and composition with Alois Hába (in 1939–40). He was forced to stop his university studies in 1940 when the Nazis closed all institutions of higher learning following their occupation of Czechoslovakia in March, 1939. Since compositions and performances by Jewish musicians were banned, his own compositions could not be performed, though he managed to perform as a concert pianist under several aliases for a time, e.g., under the pseudonym Karel Vránek. Despite those harsh circumstances, Klein managed to continue composing. In 1940, he was offered a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music in London, but by that time anti-Jewish legislation prevented his emigration.

In December 1941, he was deported by the Nazis to Terezín concentration camp, where along with Leoš Janáček's pupil Pavel Haas, Hans Krása, and Schoenberg's pupil Viktor Ullmann, he became one of the major composers at that camp. He gave concerts secretly, but the camp became one of the few in which artistic activity was eventually permitted by Nazis on any scale, if only to deceive the broader public as to their real intentions. His compositions from these years include music for string quartet, a string trio, and a piano sonata as well as others.

Klein was deported to Auschwitz in October, 1944 and then to Fürstengrube, a coal-mining labor camp, in October, 1944, less than two weeks after completing his string trio. Klein was murdered under unclear circumstances at age 25 on January 27, 1945, during the liquidation of Fürstengrube, a subcamp of Auschwitz.

His work was influenced by Alois Hába, Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and particularly Leoš Janáček.

⁴ *Zikmund Schul* (11 January 1916 – 2 June 1944) was a German Jewish composer. Schul was born in Chemnitz, Germany, in an Eastern European Jewish family, and grew up in Kassel.

The lack of interest in the work of composers of Nazi concentration camps after the war is due to the complete destruction of all social ties, the political situation (“Iron Curtain”) and the development of other trends in the art of a new generation of musicians⁵. Their work undoubtedly requires more detailed consideration, especially in the context of the monstrous events of the last two years. The cruel, unjustified and ever-increasing aggression of totalitarian regimes openly overthrows all universal human ideas about the world order. After February 24, 2022, it is as if we have returned to the past a hundred years ago – a time of total fear, madness and despair. That is why it is so important to keep in mind what was created in spite of all chaos and death, driven by love and faith.

An example of such incredible heroism and dedication was the production of a children's opera by Czech composer Hans Krása⁶ *Brundibár* with a libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister⁷. The composition went

Only little is known about his life. He moved to Prague in 1933. In 1937, he started to study composition in Prague, where he was a pupil of Alois Hába. During his time in Prague he became a friend of Viktor Ullmann. In Prague he started also to archive a collection of synagogal songs from the synagogue of Prague (under the direction of Salomon Lieben). Schul married Olga Stern in 1941, and both were deported to Terezin on 30 November, 1941. Schul died in Theresienstadt concentration camp from tuberculosis.

⁵ Nemtsov, J., Schröder-Nauenburg, B. Music in the Inferno of the Nazi Terror: Jewish Composers in the “Third Reich”. *Shofar*. 2000. № 4. P. 80.

⁶ *Hans Krása* (30 November, 1899, Prague, then Austria-Hungary – October 17, 1944, Auschwitz) is a Czech composer. He was born in a mixed family: his father is Czech, his mother is Jewish. He studied piano, violin and composition at the German Academy of Music in Prague. At the Prague State Opera, he met Alexander von Zemlinsky. In 1927, he followed him to Berlin, where he was introduced to Albert Roussel. He made his debut as a composer in 1920 (“Four Songs for Orchestra”, based on a poem by Christian Morgenstern).

On August 19, 1942, he was arrested and sent to the Theresienstadt ghetto. Many of the compositions written in Theresienstadt have not survived. In October, 1944, Hans Krása was sent to Auschwitz, where he soon died. Among the preserved compositions, the most famous are: *Orchestergrotesken mit beglitchender Singstimme* op. 1 (1920–1921, on a poem by C. Morgenstern); *Der Schläfer im Tal* for voice and orchestra (1925, on a poem by A. Rimbaud); *Symphony with voice for a small orchestra* (1925, on a poem by A. Rimbaud); *Verlobung im Traum*, an opera in two acts (1928–1930, based on F. Dostoevsky's novella “Uncle's Dream”), *Zeme je Pane*, a cantata of psalms (1931), *Kammermusik* for harpsichord and seven instruments (1936); poems by A. Rimbaud), *Theme and Variations for String Quartet (Quartet No. 2)* (1935–1943), *Passacaglia and Fugue for String Trio* (1944).

⁷ *Adolf Hoffmeister* (15 August 1902 – 24 July 1973) was a Czech writer, publicist, playwright, painter, draughtsman, scenographer, cartoonist, translator, diplomat, lawyer, university professor and traveller. During the war, he was an editor of the radio station Voice of America, after the war – an ambassador in Paris, since 1951 – a professor at the Academy of Arts and Crafts in Prague. He was a founding member of Devětsil (1920), chairman of the Union of Czechoslovak Visual Artists (1964–1967, 1968–1969), a member of International Association of Art Critics. Hoffmeister represented Czechoslovakia at UNESCO, the PEN Club and other international organizations. Hoffmeister's career was ended by the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, 1968 and the subsequent occupation.

down into history thanks to the performances of children. *Brundibár* premiered on September 23, 1943 at the Theresienstadt (Terezin) concentration camp⁸ in occupied Czechoslovakia and was shown 55 times the following year. Among the involved actors, often-changing children prevailed. The performers were taken away by echelons of death, their place was taken by other minor heroes – for a short time.

Theresienstadt concentration camp had a special purpose. It was created to demonstrate to the German people and the world how merciful Hitler was in giving the Jews a city. The entire intellectual elite, cultural and artistic figures were gathered in Terezin Castle. Due to anti-Semitism in the late 1930s, Jews were prohibited from attending any concerts or performances; they weren't even allowed to have a music player. Much less could they create their own art, which was described as depraved and immoral. They could only participate in those speeches and projects promoted by the Nazis, which were usually used against the Jews themselves. Jews were forced to make music quietly, but in Theresienstadt it was easier. It was advertised as a "paradise for Jews" or a "luxury resort", a gift from the Führer. It was for this reason that the Nazis made a propaganda film: "The Führer Gives the Jews a City", also known as "Terezin: A Documentary Film of the Jewish Resettlement" (*Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt*), which showed the idyllic well-being of the Jews who swim for fun in the pool, play sports, listen to symphonic music and watch the *Brundibár* opera...

A special *Brundibár* performance was organized in 1944 for Red Cross representatives who came to check living conditions in the camp. What the Red Cross didn't know at the time was that much of what they saw during their visit was stage decoration, and one of the reasons the Theresienstadt camp seemed comfortable was because many of the residents had been deported to other concentration camps so that there was no impression of crowding.

As soon as the shooting of the film was finished, all the participants of the performance in Theresienstadt were herded into cattle trucks and sent to Auschwitz. Most of them were gassed immediately upon arrival,

⁸ *Theresienstadt* (The Theresienstadt Ghetto) is a Nazi concentration camp located on the territory of the former garrison town of Terezin in the Czech Republic, on the banks of the Ogrje River. It was created in November, 1941 on the basis of the Gestapo prison. During the war, about 140,000 people were sent to this camp (among them 15,000 children), of whom about 33,000 died, and 88,000 were deported to Auschwitz and were killed. Terezin was liberated on May 9, 1945.

including the children, the composer Krása, the director Kurt Herron⁹, and the musicians.

The theme of children and their global insecurity is one of the cross-cutting ones in the work of the famous Czech director *Linda Keprtová* – director of the F. K. Šaldy Theater (Divadlo F. X. Šaldy, Czech Republic, Liberec). The Russian-Ukrainian war, which led to the tragic death of hundreds of innocent children, exposed this problem with particular urgency and now is mentioned in all her productions. The performance is as a protest, as pain and eternal redemption – this is how one can characterize the ideological essence of the unique author's project by Linda Keprtová, created in 2023. The performance received a symbolic name – Cesta (from Czech – "path, road"). In addition to the ensemble of

⁹ *Kurt Gerron* (11 May, 1897 – 28 October, 1944) was a German Jewish actor and film director. He and his wife, Olga, were murdered in the Holocaust.

Kurt Gerron was born in a well-off merchant family in Berlin, he studied medicine before being called up for military service in World War I. After being seriously wounded, he was qualified as a military doctor in the German Army, despite having been only in his second year at university. After the war Gerron turned to a stage career, becoming a theatre actor under director Max Reinhardt in 1920. He appeared in secondary roles in several silent films and began directing film shorts in 1926.

Gerron's popular cinema breakthrough came with "The Blue Angel" (*Der Blaue Engel*, 1930) opposite Marlene Dietrich. Two years before, Gerron originated the role of "Tiger" Brown in the 1928 premiere production of *The Threepenny Opera* (*Die Dreigroschenoper*) at the Berlin Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, in which he also performed the first public performance of the song, "Mack the Knife". With the show's international success, Gerron's name and recorded voice became well known across Europe.

After the 1933 seizure of power by the Nazis (known today as the *Machtergreifung*), Gerron left Nazi Germany with his wife and parents, traveling first to Paris and later to Amsterdam. He continued work there as an actor at the *Stadsschouwburg* and directed several movies. Several times he was offered employment in Hollywood through the agency of Peter Lorre and Josef von Sternberg, but Gerron refused to leave Europe.

After the Wehrmacht occupied the Netherlands, Gerron and his parents were first interned in the transit camp at Westerbork. His parents were deported on May 5, 1943, and murdered in Sobibor. Gerron and his wife were later sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. There he was forced by the SS to stage the cabaret review, *Karussell*, in which he reprised *Mack the Knife*, as well as compositions by Martin Roman and other imprisoned musicians and artists.

In 1944, Gerron was coerced into directing a Nazi propaganda film intended to be viewed in "neutral" nations such as Switzerland, Sweden, and Ireland, for example, showing how "humane" conditions were at Theresienstadt. Once filming was finished, Gerron and members of the Jazz pianist Martin Roman's *Ghetto Swingers* were deported on the camp's final train transport to Auschwitz, on 28 October. Gerron and his wife were murdered in the gas chamber immediately upon arrival on 30 October 1944, along with the film's entire performing entourage (except for Roman and guitarist Coco Schumann). The next day, Reichsführer of SS Heinrich Himmler ordered the closure of the gas chambers.

All known complete prints of Gerron's final film, which was to be called *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (*The Führer Gives the Jews a City*), were destroyed in 1945. Twenty minutes of footage were discovered in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, and today the film exists only in fragmentary form.

opera soloists and orchestra players, the Children's Opera Studio (*Dětské operní studio*), children's choirs *Severáček*, *Plamínek Severáčku*, *Lesnenky*, *Karolka*, as well as the children's orchestra *ZUŠ Jabloňové* take part in it. According to the director, the musical essence of the production is "three very strong and emotional compositions that resonate with the history of human pain, suffering and dialogue between generations" ¹⁰.

1. The problem's prerequisites emergence and the problem's formulation

"Repressed music" in the Third Reich is a large-scale topic that has become one of the priority areas of world musicology at the end of the XX-XXI centuries. To research it, it was necessary to study a huge amount of scientific literature.

The first group of studies focuses on the music of Theresienstadt. Among them is the English-language article by Y. Nemtsov "Music in the Hell of Nazi Terror: Jewish Composers in the Third Reich"¹¹, an authoritative monograph by the Polish researcher J. Karas, who has been involved in promoting the creativity of Theresienstadt prisoners since 1970 ¹², the dissertation of the American researcher K. L. Uslin ¹³.

The second group of studies concerns directly the personalities of composers. A monograph by the Czech researcher B. Červinková is dedicated to the work of Hans Krása ¹⁴. Articles by foreign authors J. Toltz ¹⁵, T. L. Dobbs ¹⁶, and a thesis work by A. Haumer have been written about the children's opera *Brundibár* ¹⁷. Also, of interest is the

¹⁰ Dandová L. Divadlo F. X. Šaldy propojí dětské a dospělé umělce. URL: <https://operaplus.cz/divadlo-f-x-saldy-propoji-detske-a-dospele-umelce/> (Last accessed: 02.12.2023).

¹¹ Nemtsov J., Schröder-Nauenburg B., Dean Bell. Music in the Inferno of the Nazi Terror: Jewish Composers in the "Third Reich". *Shofar*. Vol. 18, No. 4, Special Issue: Jewish Music (SUMMER 2000), Published by: Purdue University Press. P. 79–100.

¹² Karas. J. Musicin Terezin 1941–1945. New York, 1985. 232 p.

¹³ Uslin K. L. Grasping at Hours of Freedom: Musical Life in the Terezin Concentration Camp: Dissertation for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy. Washington: The Catholic university of America, 2015. 247 p.

¹⁴ Červinkova B. Hans Krasa: Leben und Werk. Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2005. 228 S.

¹⁵ Toltz J. Music: An Active Tool of Deception? The Case of Brundibár in Terezin. *Context*. 2004. No 27-28. P. 43-50.

¹⁶ Dobbs T. L. Remembering the Singing of Silenced Voices: Brundibár and Problems of Pedagogy. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*. Vol. 21. 2013. No 2. P. 156–177.

¹⁷ Haumer A. Musik von und für Kinder im Konzentrationslager Theresienstadt: Diplomarbeit angestrebter akademischer Grad Magistra der Philosophie. Wien, 2009. 125 S.

article by L. Spurna, which discusses some aspects of the influence of the school of L. Janáček¹⁸.

Thus, **the relevance** of the chosen topic of the article is due to the universal human significance of the raised problem of resistance to evil. The images of childhood embodied in the production of *Cesta* by Linda Keprtová act as a universal symbol of the future of the entire planet.

The aim of the research is to determine the specific features of the dramaturgy and composition of the play *Cesta*, which arose at the intersection of three outstanding compositions of musical culture – the children's opera by H. Krása *Brundibár*, the oratorio *Stabat mater* by Antonín Dvořák and the famous song by Leoš Janáček *Kačena divoká*.

In accordance with the chosen aim, the work **tasks** are formulated:

- to study the history of the origin and stage fate of H. Krása's opera *Brundibár*; to analyze modern staged versions of the play in the Czech Republic and beyond;

- to reveal the content and style originality (including the system of hidden symbols and allusions) of H. Krása's opera *Brundibár*;

- to identify the features of Linda Keprtová's directorial style, most clearly expressed in musical and stage projects of acute tragic content (*Dialogues of the Carmelites*, *Cesta*);

- to identify the main figurative spheres of vocal and choral music by H. Krása, A. Dvořák and L. Janáček in the context of the development of the Czech school of composition in the XIX–XX centuries.

Research methodology. The research methodology is based on the combination of various fields of theoretical and historical musicology, and, above all, such as the analysis of musical compositions and music history. The provisions related to opera direction and history turned out to be valuable. This work uses an integrated approach, which includes:

- a systematic method that allows us to identify the connection between the works of Czech composers – Hans Krása, Antonin Dvořák and Leoš Janáček – in various musical genres and directions;

- hermeneutic method in analyzing the libretto of the musical and theatrical composition "Cesta" and identifying the hidden subtexts in them;

- biographical method aimed at studying the composition of Hans Krása, understanding his worldview in the conditions of a concentration camp;

¹⁸ Spurny L. Pavel Haas: "Janáček's Most Talented Student". *Muzikoloski zbornik. Musicological annual*. Vol. 51. 2015. No 2. P. 119–125.

– a musical-analytical method that has found application in the process of studying H. Krása's opera *Brundibár* and A. Dvořák's oratorio *Stabat Mater* and identifying in them the features of the composer's style, genre models, and style dialogue.

2. Genre experiments by Linda Hejlová-Keprtová: collapse or renewal of opera tradition?

Linda Hejlová-Keprtová, a native of České Třebové, is one of the most remarkable opera directors of the younger generation. She graduated from the Academy of performing arts of Janáček (*Janáčkova akademie múzických umění*) in Brno with a degree in choral conducting and opera directing, and was already awarded the Prize of the Foundation of Leoš Janáček (Cena Nadace Leoše Janáčka) for directing the opera *Její pastorkyňa (Jenůfa)* on Janáček Festival in Brno in 2008. The most outstanding works are the productions of the operas of Jules Massenet *Don Quichotte*, awarded the Critics' Prize (*Cenu kritiků*) at the International Opera Festival 2013, *Dialogues des Carmélites* by Francis Poulenc, recognized as the best production of the 2012/2013 season, *La traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi, *Ariadne on Naxos* by Richard Strauss, *Eva* by Josef Bohuslav Foerster, *The Cunning Little Vixen* (original title *Příhody lišky Bystroušky*) by Leoš Janáček, *The Maid of Orleans* by Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

Linda Keprtová has directed performances at the National Theater in Prague (*Národní divadlo*), the National Theater in Brno (*Národní divadlo Brno*), the Moravian-Silesian National Theater in Ostrava (*Národní divadlo moravskoslezské*), the J. K. Tyla Theater in Pilsen (*Divadlo Josefa Kajetána Tyla*), the State Theater in Košice (*Národní divadlo Košice*) and the Slovak Theater in Uherské Hradiště (*Slovácké divadlo Uherské Hradiště*). In 2013, she received the most important theater award in Slovakia – “DOSKY” for her production of the opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* by Francis Poulenc.

Linda Keprtová's performances have repeatedly received top awards at prestigious national competitions, among which the Prague Opera Festival takes first place. Performances such as *Údolí suchých kostí* by Vladimír Franz (2015), *Thaïs* by Jules Massenet, *Francesca da Rimini* and *The Miserly Knight* by Sergei Rachmaninoff (2019) were noted there.

Since 2016, Linda Keprtová has worked as a director of opera performances at Divadlo F. X. Šaldy in Liberec (Czech Republic), and in 2020, she headed the creative team of this theater as director.

An expressive feature of Linda Keprtová's author's method is her passion for genre mixes. The director boldly turns to such complex compositions as the oratorio *Adam a Eva* by Josef Mysliveček, *Stabat*

Mater by Antonín Dvořák, giving them a highly original stage interpretation.

As it is known, transferring oratorical compositions to the opera stage is a problematic process, and there have not been very many successful attempts in the history of the theater. The exception is perhaps the oratorios of H. F. Handel, which in some cases, especially in his later compositions, represent a kind of hybrid form between oratorio and opera. Sometimes oratorios were adapted for stage needs by their own creators (for example, Karel Bendl's adaptation of the dramatic cantata *Švanda dudák* for a performance in 1891 or Dvořák's adaptation of the oratorio *Svatá Ludmila* for production at the National Theater in 1901; F. Liszt also prepared his own stage version of *St. Elizabeth* (Ferenc Liszt *The Legend of St. Elizabeth*). The most successful attempt in the history of music seems to be Berlioz's secular oratorio *The Damnation of Faust* (*La damnation de Faust* by Hector Berlioz), adapted for the first successful performance in Monte Carlo by the composer and opera director Raoul Gunsbourg. And this magnificent opus by Berlioz is included in both the concert and wider opera repertoire.

It is obvious that the performance of oratorios of the XVIII century has objective difficulties associated with the specifics of costumes, stage surroundings, performing style, and finally, the ideological component, which is the core of every composition of the era of Viennese classicism.

Linda Heilova-Keprtová found her own original way of interpreting the classical oratorio by Josef Mysliveček, not only without losing the authenticity of the opus, but also enriching it with relevant semantic accents. The director played the story of modern Adam and Eve, in the modern world and with modern problems (Adam – Maksym Kutsenko, Eva – Jolana Slavíková, Anděl spravedlnosti – Veronika Kaiserová, Anděl milosrdenství – Věra Poláchová). The production is greatly supported by the choreography of Marika Mikanová, which in a harmonious combination of ballet techniques, expressive dance and pantomime action very successfully depicts the conflicts of characters.

The staging of Antonin Dvořák's oratorio *Stabat Mater* was solved by fundamentally different means. The dramatic pathos of the composition in Linda Keprtová's interpretation was further deepened due to the complex and relevant historical context. The production of the oratorio, which was organically woven into the multi-location project *Cesta*, is thoroughly permeated by the theme of tragic childhood. As if continuing to mourn the

death of innocent children following the composer ¹⁹, Linda Keprtová repeatedly enlarges this idea, bringing it to a planetary scale. Children and war are incompatible – it is inhumane, monstrous and unnatural... In such a way was born the idea of an original performance, where the main “hero” is the Human Soul.

3. Hans Krása's opera *Brundibár*: in memory of the singing angels of the “heavenly” ghetto

The production of the play *Cesta*, based on the opera *Brundibár* by Hans Krása, was presented in the Czech city of Liberec in the spring of 2023. The premiere was timed to the 80th anniversary of the first performance of the composition in the Terezin ghetto (1943). "This music was an escape to heaven in the very heart of hell," said the Czech researcher of composer Blanka Červinková ²⁰, about the famous composition of Hans Krása. It was this idea that Linda Keprtová took as the basis of her play *Cesta*.

In 1938, at the very beginning of the Second World War, two Czech cultural figures – Jews – the poet Adolf Hoffmeister and the composer Hans Krása – started to write a children's opera called *Brundibár* (in Czech – "bumblebee"). According to the original plan, the opera was intended for a government competition and was supposed to have an educational value, telling about all-conquering justice and good that defeats evil. Later, the competition was canceled due to the difficult political situation.

Brundibár premiered in 1941 as a holiday gift to Moritz Freudenfeld, the director of the *Hagibor* Jewish Children's Home in Prague, directed by Rafael Schächter ²¹. After Schächter's sudden deportation to Terezin, rehearsals for the play continued under the direction of Rudi Freudenfeld. František Zelenka ²², a theater designer and scenographer of the former

¹⁹ It should be reminded that the emergence of the oratorio *Stabat Mater* was associated with a tragic event in Dvorak's life – the death of his little daughter. While working for 2 years, death claimed another daughter and the composer's four-year-old first-born son.

²⁰ Červinková B. Hans Krása v zrcadle kritiky se zvláštním zřetelem k opeře Zásnuby ve snu. *Hudební věda*. Vol. 32, 1995, 339 s.

²¹ *Rafael Schächter* (25 May 1905 – died on the death march during the evacuation of Auschwitz in 1945), was a Czechoslovak composer, pianist and conductor of Jewish origin, organizer of cultural life in Terezin concentration camp.

²² *František Zelenka* (8 July, 1904, Kutná Hora – 19 October, 1944, Auschwitz) was a Czech functionalist architect, graphic, stage and costume designer. Zelenka studied architecture at the Prague Technical University between 1923 and 1928. He was invited to collaborate on theatre stage set designs with Prague theatres: the National Theatre, the Liberated Theatre, the Estates Theatre, the Municipal Theatre in Vinohrady, the Chamber Theatre and with the Comedy Theatre in Smíchov. He also designed for theatres in Brno, Olomouc and Kutná Hora. He worked together with the greatest of the Czech theatre: E. F. Burián, Jiří Frejka, Karel Dostál and with Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, during the years of 1926–1941. Zelenka cooperated closely with members of the Czech avant-garde movement Devětsil. In 1931, he had one-man exhibition of 39 posters in Krásná jizba gallery in Prague. On 13 July, 1943, he was

National Theater and the Liberty Theatre, took over the direction of the opera and designed the decoration (three large fences made up of various boards on which three posters were mounted. The posters wittily depicted the Sparrow, the Cat and the Dog, the actors who played these characters, had to stick their heads through the posters before appearing on stage for the first time). Since the performance was staged in a small space in the shelter's canteen, with no space or resources for an orchestra, the opera was to be accompanied by only three musicians: a pianist, a violinist and a drummer.

In the winter of 1942, composer H. Krása and scenographer František Zelenka were already deported to Theresienstadt. By July 1943, almost all the children from the first choir and the staff of the shelter also were sent to Theresienstadt. Only the author of the libretto, Adolf Hoffmeister, managed to leave Prague in time. Rudi Freudenfeld decided to secretly transport the piano score of *Brundibár* to Terezin in his allowed 50 kg of luggage. He arrived in Terezin on July 7, 1943. Having reunited with the troupe members in Theresienstadt, Krása played the entire score of the opera from memory. The new orchestration used instruments that were in the camp: flute, clarinet, guitar, accordion, piano, drums, four violins, cello and double bass²³.

The opera *Brundibár* was very popular in the ghetto for three main reasons: prisoners could see their children enjoying theatrical activities; the allegory of this victory over the tyrant could be extrapolated into the existing political situation of the prisoners; the opera's music was understandable, easy to remember and pleasing to the ear. Each melody in this composition has its own motivational style, presenting images of heroes (*Brundibár*, animals) and plots (search for milk, victory march).

deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto together with his family. On 19 October, 1944, together with his wife Gertruda and eight-year-old son Martin, Zelenka was transported to Auschwitz in occupied Poland.

²³ The full history of the opera *Brundibár* cannot be traced from 1944 to 1975. Thanks to the efforts of Jeroz Karas, a Czech violinist originally from Poland now living in the United States, the opera *Brundibár* was introduced to the English-speaking world. The premiere took place in the United States in 1975, and in Canada in 1977. The German premiere of the opera took place in 1985 at the St. Ursula Gymnasium in Freiburg an der Breisgau. Karas and his wife Milada organized the first translation of the libretto into English, which was published in Tempo Prague in 1993 (revised edition in 1998). In 1995, the organization "Jeunesses Musicales Deutschland" founded the "Brundibár Project", which involves connecting generations and attracting eyewitnesses who could tell young actors about their past. In addition, the project produced a CD of Krása's music, a video with interviews with opera performers who survived, and clips of *Brundibár* play. Teachers and students received research materials about Nazi Germany, Terezin and the cultural programs of the ghetto. Since 1999, the *Brundibár* Project has staged hundreds of productions of the opera in Germany and Eastern Europe. Also, over the past decade, performances have been performed in the United States, Great Britain and other countries. A new development in the story of "*Brundibár*" was an alternative English adaptation of Tony Kushner's composition, created for Chicago Opera Production in 2003.

The orchestration is exquisite and complex enough to be appealing to both experienced and casual listeners. The music has little overt dissonance to sound harmonious, but nevertheless incorporates jazz and folk elements in a subtle and charming way. The Czech flavor is evident in the waltz melody, in the organ grinder's solo and in the melody of the first song that children sing when they are trying to earn money.

Brundibár was a symbol of hope in the fight against the Nazi invaders. The main characters of the opera are brother and sister Aninka [Annette] and Pepíček (Little Joe), who grow up without a father. Their mother is sick. The doctor has prescribed milk for her as medicine, so the children go to the market to look for milk. But they don't have money to buy it. Three street vendors sell their wares: an ice cream maker, a baker and a milkman. The children attract the milkman's attention with their song, but he tells them that they need money for the purchase. Suddenly, the children notice the piper Brundibár playing on the street corner. Repeating after him, they also decide to perform in front of passers-by and sing a song about geese, angering the townspeople and Brundibár, who chase the children away. Three little animals – Sparrow, Cat and Dog – come to help the heroes of the opera, all together they call for help from other children from the neighboring street. Night comes, then dawn, children and animals do morning exercise, townspeople start a new day. Meanwhile, the children's plan comes to fruition: the pet and the children force Brundibár to leave. Then they all sing a beautiful lullaby together. The townspeople are moved by the song and give Aninta and Pipichka money. Brundibár suddenly appears and steals this money. All the children and animals give chase and return the money. The opera ends with a victory march, which marks the victory over the evil magician.

The piece has no direct references to the situation in which it was written and staged, but the anti-Nazi orientation of some phrases was obvious to the audience at the time. Although the libretto was written by Hoffmeister before Hitler's invasion, at least one line was reworked by the poet Emil Saudek in Terezin to emphasize the idea of fighting fascism. This is the last line of the opera. If in the original version it was said: "The one who loves his mother, father and his country so much is our friend and can play with us", then in Saudek's version we hear: "The one who loves justice and remains faithful to it, and isn't be afraid, is our friend and can play with us."

The opera *Brundibár* occupies a unique place in the world theater repertoire as the only composition of its time written entirely for child actors (accompanied by an adult orchestra). According to the recollections of the author of the libretto, A. Hoffmeister, the authors were influenced

by such famous compositions as *The One Who Says "Yes"* (German: *Der Jasager*) by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, *We Build a City* (German: *Wir Bauen Eine Stadt*) by Paul Hindemith, *The Child and Charms* (fr. *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*) by Maurice Ravel, *Hansel and Gretel* (German: *Hänsel und Gretel*) by Engelbert Humperdinck, *The Adventures of the Trickster Fox* (Czech: *Příhody lišky Bystroušky*) by L. Janáček. "Our opera is actually Brecht's didactic drama, it was the combined efforts of all the children that made it possible to defeat the organ grinder Brundibár, because they were not ready for open resistance alone," Adolf Hoffmeister, who managed to leave for England in time, recalled after the war²⁴.

The play *Cesta*²⁵, which premiered on June 2, 2023, unfolds across three "stations" locations. The performance begins in the courtyard and then inside one of the garages of the Technical Museum (*Technické muzeum Liberec*), which creates the atmosphere of a Hitler concentration camp. In a cold, unheated room filled with smoke, the children's opera *Brundibár* is performed.

²⁴ Rovit R. The "Brundibár" Project: Memorializing Theresienstadt Children's Opera PAJ: *A Journal of Performance and Art*. Vol. 22, No. 2, Berlin 2000. Published: The MIT Press. P. 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3245896> URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3245896> (Last accessed: 02.12.2023).

²⁵ Production group and performing staff:

Author of the idea, screenwriter and director: Linda Hejlová Keprtová

Conductors: Karol Kevický, Anna Novotná Pešková, Tadeáš Tulach

Scenographers: David Janošek, Luděk Hora

Costume Designers: David Janošek, Taťána Horová

Choirmaster: Lukáš Kozubík

Choreographer: Marika Mikanová

Musical director of the children's orchestra ZUŠ Jablonoř: Ištván Matejčka

Director of the children's choir Severáček: Silvie Langrová

Starring:

Člověk: Petr Jeništa

Pepíček: Matyáš Mikuláš, Matyáš Žák

Aninka: Nina Dědková, Antonie Stella Šourková

Vrabec: Nela Kavková, Sofie Mičjarová

Kocour: Tereza Brunclíková, Samanta Hudcová

Pes: Marie Stejskalová, Karolína Šálková

Zmrzlínář: Eliška Benešová, Alice Poláková

Pekař: Diana Luisa Davydenko, Sofia Estella Davydenko

Mlékař: Emma Kotková, Zuzana Pavelková

Strážník: Ema Bělohávková, Hana Dřilíková, Diana Mohrová, Andrea Pospíšilová

Pocestný: Terezie Fišerová, Michaela Mohrová

Hodinář: Anna Marešová, Anna Sommerová

Spisovatel: Mikuláš Dóša

Švec: Alžběta Schneiderová, Alena Zemanová

Bába Dračka: Tereza Černíková, Marie Zelerová

Then all the spectators, following the main character, who plays the role of a Man, walk to the city center to a paved area. The “Man” rides a bicycle ahead of the audience and shouts: “*Here! Follow me! Quickly! And quietly!*” His words are spoken first in German, then in Italian and finally in Russian – a direct reference to Putin as Hitler's direct successor. The spectators “arrive” at the “second station” – this is the place in front of the Liberec swimming pool (analogous to the swimming pool in the Terezin concentration camp) and a bizarre dance and mimic scene begins, being monstrous in its meaning. Happy girls in identical black suits and with suitcases “decorated” with camp numbers are cheerfully (!) preparing for a new trip. They joyfully anticipate the future journey and dance, trying to take the best place on the train... Meanwhile, the same “Man” appears, but in the role of a prison guard. He is dragging behind him a strange-looking iron stove that looks like a field kitchen. It seems that a treat is planned for the children... But for some reason the German caretaker himself is wearing a gas mask... He energetically “floods” the stove and begins to burn children’s toys with some emphasized excitement. And at some point, the stove opens and multi-colored balloons begin to fly out of it, at which he deafeningly shoots from a pistol. Piercingly quickly, one by one, the souls of the children killed in the gas chamber ascend to the sky... A “reprise” begins: the numbers of the suitcases change, a new queue forms for the train, and again the children joyfully prepare for the next journey towards death...

After such a terrible “picture”, all spectators go on their way. The “Man” is riding a bicycle again ahead. Shocked by what they saw, the entire crowd silently walks along the long Czech streets to the opera house. Divadlo F. X. Šaldy is the “third station” of the route. Random passers-by are unwittingly drawn into this long procession, stretching over a kilometer. All people become participants in the action. And quite a lot of time passes before spectators, depressed by what they have seen and tired from the road, enter the theater hall. This performance completely refutes the usual algorithms of people’s behavior in the theater.

The curtain opens, the audience again sees the children's choir on stage and the famous song *Kačena divoká* by L. Janáček sounds, serving as a kind of leitmotif in the performance:

*Kačena divoká letěla z vysoka
Šohaj dobrý střelec, střelil ju do boka
Levého pod pravú nožičku*

*Ona zaplakala, sedňa na vodičku;
Hořko zaplakala, na Boha zvolala:*

*Ach Bože, rozbože, už jsem dolétala
Ubohá kačica, už jsem dolétala
Už jsem svá káčátka, už jsem dochovala*

*Moje drobné děti nedělají škody;
Sednú na Dunaju
Kalnú vodu pijú, tvrdý písek jed'á*

*Vy drobná káčátka, polet'te vy za mnou!
Šak my poletíme k veľkému Dunaju!*

A Man appears in the center of the stage, against the background of a children's choir. But what happened to him??? Exhausted, repentant, he barely moves, trying to get up from the floor. Children approach the actor, touch the dirt on his body with a clean finger and, surprised, step aside. And his torment becomes more and more unbearable every moment...

Gradually the stage fills with adults, and Antonín Dvořák's famous *Stabat Mater* begins. There is no talk of any concert formation of choir groups – all choir artists are in free movement. A picture of a train station appears, where everyone around is looking for someone. There appear soloists who form two pairs of “parents” – tenor and soprano, bass and mezzo-soprano (soloist parts are performed by Věra Poláčková (soprano), Petra Vondrová (alto), Sergey Kostov (tenor), Ievgenii Gunko (bass). Children, found by an incredible miracle in the middle of the war, come up to them, and over the whole action the cathartic music of Dvořák's oratorio sounds piercingly...

Linda Keprtová chose only certain parts of *Stabat Mater* for her performance, but exactly they created the culmination of a long and dramatic journey. The choral finale of *Cesta* sounds like a grandiose atonement for the sins of all humanity...

At the end of the performance, all the children, the Actor and the adults go into the background. There a carriage (from which it all began in the garage) is shown; all the participants slowly and calmly enter there, but suddenly a little girl runs out and loudly shouts to the whole hall: “We won the war!” What kind of war, everyone understands... Curtain.

CONCLUSIONS

The directorial creativity of Linda Hejlová-Keprtová, clearly manifested in the production of the play *Cesta* by Antonín Dvořák – Hans Krása – Leoš Janáček, the oratorio *Adam a Eva* by Josef Mysliveček, the opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* by Francis Poulenc, is expressive

evidence that the processes that have begun in European theater at the beginning of the XXI century, are directly related to global historical vicissitudes. Creative tasks have come to the fore, the formulation of which is largely determined by the relevance of social and political problems. This creates a special nerve in all of artistic projects of Linda Keprtová. The meaning of her performances can be extended indefinitely in time and space. Mixing genres, blurring geographical boundaries, erasing time frames, deep symbolism of stage design – all this characterizes highly original and distinctive directorial style of Linda Keprtová

The stage interpretation of A. Dvořák's oratorio and H. Krása's children's opera is perceived in a certain sense as a sign of its era. *Cesta* became not only a unique artistic project, but also turned into an encrypted self-portrait of Linda Keprtová herself – an artist with an open soul and a daring fighter for the truth of life in art.

SUMMARY

The article attempts to comprehend the creative experience of a generation of “repressed” composers who, due to the tragic events of the 1930s and 1940s, abandoned themselves to the dungeons of Hitler's concentration camps. One of the most prominent figures was the Czech composer Hans Krása, who died in 1944 in Auschwitz. The article studies the life and creative path of the musician, analyzes his most famous composition – the opera “*Brundibár*” with a libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister. The opera made history when it was performed by children on September 23, 1943, at the Theresienstadt concentration camp in occupied Czechoslovakia. All participants of the performance were soon killed in gas chambers.

This composition became the basis of the unique artistic project *Cesta* (*The Way*) by the Czech director Linda Keprtová – director of the F. K. Šaldy Theater (Divadlo F. X. Šaldy, Czech Republic, Liberec), who combined in one performance not only different compositions (the opera *Brundibár* by Hans Krása, the oratorio *Stabat Mater* by Antonín Dvořák and the song *Kačena divoká* by Leoš Janáček), but also different locations. The work notes the innovative features of Linda Keprtová's dramaturgy, emphasizing the deep symbolism and relevance of the production.

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