

Aspekte der Musik, Kunst
und Religion zur Zeit der
Tschechischen Moderne

Aspects of Music, Arts and
Religion during the Period
of Czech Modernism

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Einleitung/Introduction

These congress proceedings contain the papers from the international colloquia »Prague Musical Life at the Beginning of the 20th Century. Music, Art, Culture and Religion at the Time of Czech Modernism«, held in 1997 and 1998 in Prague and organised by the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation and Bohuslav Martinů Institute.

In Europe at the end of the 19th century there was a many-layered flourishing of intellectual and artistic activity. The established churches began to be joined by new spiritual trends like theosophy, anthroposophy, pantheism and various occult doctrines. In this period artists, too, strove to come to terms with the spiritual legacies of various periods and cultural spheres. Their stance was one characterised by disillusionment with materialism and a loss of faith in science. Heightened spirituality was perceived as a means of fighting for the preservation of civilization and against the threat that industrialization and materialism were then believed to represent.

Prague also, be it directly or indirectly, encountered various spiritual trends in the »fin de siècle« period. Czech society became acquainted with the intellectual force of influential European thinkers: Czech translations appeared of Edouard Schuré: *Secret History of Religion. Great Initiates*, Joris-Karl Huysmans: *Inside Out*, and Josephin Pelladan: *Latin Decadence*. In books by Ernest Renan and David Friedrich Strauss, Jesus was presented as a real being, an ordinary mortal, and Friedrich Nietzsche frankly declared him to be dead. Czech artists and intellectuals explored Oriental religions, the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, and theosophical ideas of Helena Pavlovna Blavatsky. A characteristic feature of the art and thought of the time is syncretism: the combination of elements from diverse religions and different aesthetics.

The Catholic church increasingly came into conflict with modernism. The movement *Katolická Moderna* (Catholic modernism) was founded in an attempt to bring about a renewal of Catholicism. The movement

was responsible for the publication of the review *Nový život* (New life), edited by Karel Dostál-Lutinov and Sigismund Bouška, and counted among its collaborators the leading artistic personalities of the day – František Bílek, Otakar Březina, Zdenka Braunerová, Julius Zeyer and others. An important role in the attempt to reform religious art was played by a group of artists associated with the magazine *Moderní revue* (Arnošt Procházka, Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, Emanuel z Lešehradu).

Musical compositions of the time show the different ways in which composers responded to their spiritual inheritance. Consider, for example, the contemplative spirituality of Antonín Dvořák's *Te Deum* (1892), the pantheism of Vítězslav Novák's piano cycle *Pan* (1910), but also Leoš Janáček's *Glagolská mše* (Glagolitic Mass) (1926) and the transformed folk religiosity of the mediaeval mysteries in Bohuslav Martinů's opera cycle *Hry o Marii* (The Plays of Mary) (1934). It is this highly variegated spirituality that is described and analysed in these congress proceedings.

In addition, the congress proceedings comprise research into hitherto unknown documents dealing with Czech music at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as into the reception of the foremost composers of the time (Dvořák, Janáček, Hába, Schulhoff, Novák, Martinů).

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