

JERNEJ WEISS
**EMERIK BERAN (1868–1940):
SAMOTNI SVETOVLJAN**

[EMERIK BERAN (1868–1940): THE LONELY COSMOPOLITAN]

The migration of Czech musicians to neighbouring lands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a well known but rarely researched historical fact. Slovenian musicologists of the past – in their zealous endeavours to construct autonomous “Slovenian” national art music – focused predominantly on composers of Slovenian birth. Several prominent Czech immigrants who had played an important role in this process were tacitly naturalised. Others, especially those who did not join the Slovenian national movement, were intentionally or unintentionally overlooked. The resulting conception of a Slovenian musical past thus showed a strong bias towards one group of musicians with clearly defined nationalist aesthetics. Present-day Slovenian musicological research is striving to correct this partial image. Several important works dealing with the contributions of musicians born in other parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire have been published in recent years.

Jernej Weiss’s book on Emerik Beran is a continuation of this endeavour. Its somewhat poetic title clearly signals the duality of its topic. Firstly, it deals with the factual coordinates of Emerik Beran’s life and work. In a series of introductory chapters, the author outlines the stages of the composer’s life, spanning from his early childhood in Olomouc and Brno, his study years in Brno (all in the Czech Republic today), to his professional career in Maribor and Ljubljana (Slovenia). The author stresses all the important factors that contributed to Beran’s personal and artistic development. He vividly depicts a life that followed a well-known pattern in Central Europe. It speaks of a music-loving parent, the early discovery of musical talent, the first musical tuition by a local musician, a hesitant decision to pursue a career as a professional musician, a higher musical education in an institution focused primarily on training church musicians, and finally, the daily struggle of a musician in a provincial cultural milieu, his burden of trivial teaching tasks, and his unappeased longing for success and public acclaim.

This part of the book significantly surpasses its merely introductory role. In reality, it provides the first thoroughly written account of Beran’s life and work. The author draws on a vast selection of relevant literature about the persons and institutions that shaped the social and cultural environments of the composer’s creative life. Even more important is his familiarity with archival sources never used before. Snippets of informa-

tion drawn from Beran's private correspondence, as well as his autobiographical writings and diaries, cast new light on his work and personality.

Another distinctive feature of Weiss' book is an extensive list of Beran's compositions. All possible locations of his musical manuscripts both in the Czech Republic and in Slovenia have been considered, comprising both public and private collections. The author has diligently gathered all the information available, and presented it in a thoroughly methodical way. His book enables us to admire the extent and diversity of Beran's creative output, and to deplore the widespread ignorance it encountered in the provincial milieu of early twentieth century Slovenia. Weiss's book will certainly draw attention to the author's excellent compositions unperformed so far.

The second part of Weiss' book concentrates on Beran's correspondence with Leoš Janáček, his former teacher and a composer of international renown. The letters of both correspondents (preserved in Slovenian and Czech archives) are printed in Slovenian and English translations (Janáček's part of the correspondence was recently discovered by Weiss at Maribor University Library and has been published for the first time). It is astonishing how indicative the letters are of their personalities. Janáček's are short and somewhat restrained. In the early years, they clearly manifested the difference in rank between the two men, and were kept strict and formal. The relationship between the two musicians changed in later years, steadily becoming more cordial, though Janáček's writings remain sparing of words. Beran's letters are bursting with a desire to keep in touch with his homeland, and to express the author's profound feelings of loneliness. We can often find grievances about the deficiencies of local musical life, yearning questions about the cultural situation in his home city and – rather enviously – presumptions about the prospects of its further development. Beran's letters are the bitter outcry of a musician with a cosmopolitan outlook, confined in the provincial milieu of a small industrial town.

On many occasions, Beran tried to improve the level of musical life in Maribor by strengthening ties between Czech and Slovenian musical cultures. He informed Janáček about vacancies in Maribor and other Slovenian cities in order to stimulate the influx of well-trained Czech musicians. Reversely, he often attempted to promote the works of Slovenian composers. In doing so, he certainly broadened their dissemination in Central Europe.

Jernej Weiss has broadened our knowledge about the musical past in provincial Slovenia at the beginning of the twentieth century. His book tells us a great deal, not only about Emerik Beran as an individual, but also about the cultural interactions between nations of the former Austro-

Hungarian Empire, between musical centres and the periphery, and between musicians of differing age and social status. In this way it fills a huge gap in our knowledge about Czech musical immigration to Slovenia and its role in the development of Slovenian musical culture.

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