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THE HÁBA SCHOOL

Considering what has been written by authors commenting on his life and work, Alois Hába's pedagogical work is an important characteristic of his biography. This activity seems to be almost an extension of his compositional work. Yet nothing seems to contradict the common idea about Hába as much as the possibilities of systematic education of others and handing down general technical procedures and generally usable composition craft. After all, an expression often used in connection with Hába's music is *Musik der Freiheit* (liberated music) or more precisely *Musikstil der Freiheit*.¹ The author himself supports this opinion with statements such as: “*Er [Schüler] soll eigenes freies Kombinieren üben*” or „*Der schöpferischer Musiker ist nicht immer imstande, alle seine Ideen sein Schülern mitzuteilen, besonders diejenigen nicht, die er selbst einmal gestalten will.*”² Right at the beginning it should be pointed out, however, that in spite of the composer's statements, the way to “liberated music” is a process which presupposes a major degree of reflection and planning, since everything traditional and restricting has to be only gradually excluded, consciously and thoughtfully.

What, then, is the so-called Hába school? And is it possible to use this term meaningfully? Is it not, in this case, nonsense? The term “school”, or “compositional school” represents a general effort to create a picture of a continuous tradition. An indispensable part of the term “school” is the notion of handing down certain compositional principles and following appropriate compositional aesthetics and ethics. The didactic part of the term is in similar cases typically emphasized by the founder of the school. Usually, however, it is done *ex post*

¹ This expression appeared for the first time in Hába's article ‘Casellas Scarlattiana – Vierteltonmusik und Musikstil der Freiheit’, 1929 (see *Anbruch*, xi, 1929, 331–334). The phenomenon *Musik der Freiheit* is one that invites connection and comparison with a number of theoretical concepts of the Central European avant-garde that explicitly appeal to forms of aesthetic liberation. If Hába's liberated music is often taken to mean the possibility of free treatment of sound material, its technical side is often associated with the expressions *microtonality* and *athematism*.

² Alois Hába, *Neue Harmonielehre des diatonischen, chromatischen Viertel-, Drittel-, Sechstel- und Zwölftel-tonsystems* (Fr. Kistner & C.F.W. Siegel, Leipzig, 1927), p. xv.

facto by the direct students or external observers who describe the whole situation and place it into the developmental current of history of the relevant type of music among other schools and authors. If we are to examine the history of the term “Hába school”, we cannot overlook a number of texts of various levels and orientations, which confirm the existence of Hába’s composition school. Contemporary official critique since the second half of 1920s has been working with this term. The difference between the label “Hába composition class” and “composition school” often remained unrecognized. One of the first to see the difference was Mirko Očadlík, in the the Key magazine (1930–34), of which he was the main editor and contributor. He spoke about “The Quarter-tone School” and about Hába’s so-called Non-thematicists (Hába’s Pupils)].³

The term “Hába school” was then used as already reputable by Vladimír Helfert in 1936 in the book *Česká moderní hudba* (Czech modern music). When Helfert spoke about compositional importance of Alois Hába, he also mentioned his composition class at the Prague Conservatory. In this context he then spoke about Hába’s composition school. By this claim Helfert confirmed the general opinion concerning Hába’s pedagogical activities which prevailed as early as in the 1930s.

While reconstructing the term “Hába school”, documents, correspondence and notes made by Hába and Hába’s students are important to give us a complex picture. (I would like to point out the existence of the project *Center for Research on the Works of Alois Hába*, which has existed from 2003. The project aims to concentrate on currently available information and knowledge about the work of Alois Hába, as well as to thoroughly catalog sources relating to the composer’s life and works. The largest part of Alois Hába’s effects are located in the *Czech Museum of Music* in Prague, or they are in the possession of the composer’s inheritors. The effects contain correspondence and personal documents, Hába’s compositions, several works by other composers that were dedicated to Hába, iconographic documents, etc.)

A rich supply of material offers new views into Hába’s biography and at the same time it uncovers possibilities of further interpretation use. Victor Ullmann, who studied in 1919 under Arnold Schönberg and in the years 1935 – 37 studied under Alois Hába, contributed with his testimony about the importance of “Hába school”: “*I thank Schoenberg school for its logical architectonics and love of*

³ Mirko Očadlík (signed M.O.), ‘Čtvrttónová škola’ [The Quarter-tone School], *Klíč*, i (1930/31), pp. 308–11.

M. Očadlík, ‘Nethematictí (Hábovi žáci)’ [Non-thematicists (Hába’s Pupils)], *Klíč*, iv (1934/35), pp. 53–4.

The theme of Hába’s composition class was thoroughly discussed by Jiří Vysloužil in his monograph *Alois Hába, Život a dílo* [Alois Hába, Life and Works] (Prague, 1974). The same author then published ‘Hábova škola’ [Hába’s school] in his publication *Alois Hába, Sborník k životu a dílu skladatele* [Alois Hába, An Anthology on Life and Works of the Composer], (Vizovice, 1993), pp. 30–2.

Vlasta Reittererová, ‘The Hába „School“’, *Czech Music*, v (Hudební informační středisko, Prague, 2005), no. 3, pp. 9–17.

adventure in the world of sound. To the Hába school I give my thanks for softening the melodic idea, for a view on new formal values and for liberation from the canon of Beethoven and Brahms.“⁴ Karel Reiner then adds to the characteristics of Hába’s course: “*What is interesting about the Hába school is that it is not a uniform school. Each of his students is different, each developed in another way. They chose what suited them and their talents and style, their social environment as well as their nationality. Even the development of national character of the pupils from different nations was characteristic of his school [...] Hába was good at it, he had a great sense of these things.*“⁵

Alois Hába then confirmed the existence of the school, or rather the effort for its establishment to the director of Vienna Universal Edition, Eduard Hertzka in a letter of 5 November 1925, where he wrote about a desire to create not only a Prague-based, but also European composition school.⁶ The significance of such a statement is clear: Hába intended to create his own composition school, one which would be based in his unique experience with music and with the ways of education which he had undergone in the last few years. In order to be able to assess the level of the author’s experience with new music and education, it is necessary to notice Hába’s own way to individual language of his liberated music.

In this context it will suffice to consider the tradition of the “culture of the centre” which Hába both accepts and rebels against. His journey from the periphery of the Eastern Moravian region, which led him through teacher training college in Kroměříž (1908–1912) and a short period of work as a teacher in Bílovice in Slovácko (1912–1914), took Hába first to Prague (1914–1915), then to Vienna (1917–1920) and to Berlin (1920–1923). In his case the progress through important centres of European culture genuinely corresponded to the artistic “progress” of the young composer on his “journeyman travels”.

Hába’s study under Vítězslav Novák in Prague and in Shreker’s class in Vienna and Berlin certainly were important moments in Hába’s artistic development. Among authors who inspired Hába there are such names as Feruccio Busoni and Arnold Schönberg. In Berlin, the young composer became acquainted with the second remade edition of the work *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music (Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 1916). Later he became an occasional visitor of Busoni’s famous debating societies which took place in the composer’s flat in Berlin. Some pieces which came into being in the given period demonstrate an effort to reflect actual compositional procedures, explored especially by Arnold Schoenberg and the students of the Second Viennese school. Apart from new experience and knowledge, however, what he acquired above all was the hallmark and reputation of a noteworthy innovator and propagator of the new avant-garde trends.

⁴ Jiří Vysloužil, ‘Hábova škola’ [Hába’s school], in *Alois Hába, Sborník k životu a dílu skladatele* (Vizovice, 1993), p. 30.

⁵ Milan Kuna, *Dvakrát zrozený život a dílo Karla Reinnera* (Prague, 2008), p. 29.

⁶ Vysloužil 1993, p. 30.

Hába's apprenticeship years, which culminated in Berlin, were something he could capitalise on at home, where many of his experiences acquired the attractive hallmark of complete novelty. In 1923, therefore, Hába returned to Prague for good. He started to teach at the Prague Conservatory, where from October he was teaching acoustics and music analysis; officially his workplace was named "*Music-Science seminar for experimental acoustics, oriental music and music analysis*". From the academic year 1924–25 Hába managed to persuade the school authorities to allow him to open (to the public) *Courses for Quarter-Tone Music*. In 1934, when Hába was appointed a regular teacher, his class was labelled "*Department for composition of quarter-tone and sixth-tone music*".

Hába's class soon became a world-renowned. In addition to Czech and Slovakian students, it was also attended by Germans, Poles, Turks, Egyptians, Ukrainians, Yugoslavs (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes) Bulgarians, Lithuanians and Danes. Hába brought up several students who also attempted compositions in micro-interval systems, others at least partially took over the principles of non-thematism (from the stand point of micro and macro form) and *tone centrality*. Among the most well-known were his brother Karel Hába, Karel Ančerl, Rudolf Kubín, Václav Dobiáš, Miroslav Ponc, Karel Reiner, Slavko Osterc, Ristič, Iliev, Ljubica Maric, Necil Kazim Akses, Jeronimas Kačinskas and others.⁷ All Hába's students from this period gained composition education from other teachers and were coming to Hába in order to learn about new methods of contemporary music.

Participation in Hába's courses was facultative within the study at the Conservatory and its participants received a certificate of completion. Since the amount of money specified for the running of the department required that a determined number of students frequented the course for a specified period of time, the period of study was determined to be one year. In many cases, however, on Hába's intercession, the period of study was extended. Some students then frequented Hába's class even after having been given a discharge. In his seminars, Hába introduced his students not only to the methods of his own composition work, with the specific poetics of "liberated music", but he also attempted to pass them some of the theoretical points from accomplished masters of central European modernism. Hába's competence in this field is, for that matter, evidenced by the author's theoretical work, especially his two theories of harmony (1927, 1942–43). These show, among other things, the influence of Ferruccio Busoni.⁸ This concerns not

⁷ The list of graduate trainees is mentioned in the appendix to Jiří Vysloužil's book *Alois Hába, Život a dílo* [Alois Hába, Life and Works]. See Vysloužil, 1974, pp. 391–3.

⁸ Ferruccio Busoni (1866 – 1924) is often listed among authors by whom Hába was inspired. The young composer got acquainted with the second reworked edition of *Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (1907, 1916). Later he became an occasional visitor of Busoni's famous debating societies which took place in the composer's flat in Berlin, where he was familiarly called *Ali-Baba* by his host. In the wider musical society Busoni was considered a major proponent of micro-interval music (or new music as such), yet his relation to quarter-tone was very unfavourable. He considered third and quarter-tone systems to be much more natural and suitable. Busoni's conviction then led Hába to composition of the mentioned sixth-tone *String quartet* op. 15.

only the relation towards microtonality, but also the viewpoint on the role of scale in the structure of the work. Some passages from *Neue Harmonielehre* [A New Theory of Harmony] also show that its author was in the year 1927 (or rather 1925) acquainted with the principles of Schönberg's twelve-tone music.⁹ In spite of his knowledge of new theories and despite constant highlighting of the valuable influence of Schönberg's composition, Hába attempted an original conception and simultaneously also his own interpretation of Schönberg's musical thinking.

Also the recently issued *A Theory of Harmony of the Diatonic, Chromatic, Third-tone, Sixth-tone, and Twelfth-tone Systems* can tell a lot about Hába's teaching.¹⁰ If *A New Theory of Harmony* (*Neue Harmonielehre*) from the year 1927 belongs to the basic music-theoretical works of the 20th century, the ambitions of the "second" *Theory of harmony* are considerably more modest. The work which exemplifies Hába's twenty years of pedagogical activities was intended for the students of Hába's composition class at the Prague Conservatory. Even though the work contains the author's individual interpretation of the theory which is hidden behind the much-promising title *liberatet music*, we can find there an organized exposition of phenomena which every beginning composition adept should master. Still, Hába's textbook is different from the practical textbooks of the 19th century, just as it differs from newer historically oriented works. Here Hába did not show how the composers of the past created their music, or how contemporary authors should have done, he wrote about how they *could* compose.

The principles by which such music could be realized were demonstrated with the help of materials gathered in a newly established phonograph archive. After the example of Berlin *Phonogramm-Archiv*, Hába accumulated records of European and non-European music, songs, play or spoken word, records which should have documented the common features of different cultures.

If Jiří Vysloužil reminds us in his monograph that Hába's department had the characteristics of a creative workshop, the statement that Hába's workplace was equipped with instruments suitable for micro-interval music¹¹ and that excep-

⁹ *Neue Harmonielehre des diatonischen, chromatischen, Viertel-, Drittel-, Sechstel- und Zwölfteltonsystems*, Hába's most famous theoretical work, was published by the Leipzig publishing house Kistner & Siegel. The book was written as early as 1925. The author himself translated the original Czech text into German, while Erich Steinhardt edited the translation. In the 1960s, also under the composer's supervision, the book was translated back into Czech by Eduard Herzog, but this version was not published until 2000 under the title *Nová nauka o harmonii diatonické, chromatické, třetinotónové, šestinotónové a dvanáctinotónové soustavy*.

¹⁰ Alois Hába, *Harmonielehre des diatonischen, chromatischen Viertel-, Drittel-, Sechstel- und Zwölftel-Tonsystems (1942–1943)*, ed. Horst-Peter Hesse, Norderstedt 2007.

¹¹ Virtually all the instruments were constructed with active participation of the composer. Hába designed a three-manual console for quarter-tone harmonium and piano. On his suggestion August Förster realized in 1925 construction of a quarter-tone piano. The same company constructed a quarter-tone and sixth-tone harmonium (1927). Then, together with Artur Holas, Hába constructed the mechanics for a quarter-tone clarinet. The firm V. Kohlers Söhne in Kraslice (Graslitz) started to manufacture a quarter-tone clarinet in 1924. (At first it was

tional emphasis is put on interpretation, will seem obvious. The works of Hába and his disciples resounded on concerts, in conservatories, usually in cooperation with the Modern Music Society (since 1927) as well as with *Přítomnost* (The Present), a society for contemporary music (since 1933). Some of these works were then performed at ISCM festival concerts. The trainees of the courses usually became the first interpreters of the works. Some of them then put their experiences into texts which reflect the contemporary state of practice of the new music. This is clearly the case of Karel Reiner, the composer and pianist who studied under Hába in the years 1929 – 32. Even though he did not write any quarter-tone work, he was one of the most important interpreters of Hába's compositions for quarter-tone piano. Other Hába pupils were also interpreters of these compositions – for instance Jiří Svoboda, Arnošt Střížek, Táňa Baxantová and Hans Walter Süsskind, the later conductor of Scottish Orchestra and Victoria Symphony Orchestra in Melbourne and musical director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Outside the circle of Hába's students, Jan Heřman and especially Erwin Schulhoff were among the most important interpreters. Karel Hába, the composer's brother premiered quarter-tone works for violin or viola, accompanied by piano. Violin compositions were popularized in foreign countries by Frank Wiesmeyer, who later took the professional name Georg Whitman. The conductor Karel Ančerl participated as an assistant of Hermann Scherchen from the end of the year 1930 till May 1931 on a study of Munich premiere of Hába's quarter-tone opera *Mother*. Also, on 31 January 1935, Ančerl prepared a Czech premiere of a symphonic fantasy for large orchestra titled *The Path of Life*, op. 46 and later a premiere of *Wallachian Suite* for Orchestra, op. 77 from the year 1952 (both are symphonic works composed in the traditional system).

At the end we can again ask whether the term “composition school” is not, in Hába's case, a mere construct. After all, there is a mosaic of individual acts which were shortly described above and its existence was confirmed by a number of statements.

Still, Hába school seems heterogeneous, internally as well as externally, which may be a reason for doubts about its true existence. The term “Hába school”, therefore, seems to be a result of historical and aesthetic interpretation. The term “Hába composition class”, which testifies about institutional foundation of the group, sounds much more neutral, and perhaps more adequate.

The coming of aesthetic modernism in the beginning of the 20th century supports the reasons for this interpretation which questions the legitimacy of the term “school”, and not only in Hába's case. Affiliation to the school is necessarily associated to a certain pattern of thinking. In the 20th century, however, such a unity ceased to be an advantage. There is a certain notion of danger of imitativeness, connected with the term school. Imitativeness is a value which in the 20s gained

made from German parts, but from 1931 on, it used French parts). At the end of the 20s a Dresden firm Fr. A. Heckel manufactured a quarter-tone trumpet for the performance of the opera *Mother* (op. 35).

a distinctly negative feel. If, according to the expressive canon of the music of the 19th century it represented being “different”, which was a negative trait, it was also overlapping into the position of the “dilettante” in the sense of exclusion from participation on professional assertion. Individualism becomes, for the aesthetic modernism, a new value. To be different means the same thing as to have an exceptional position. The fact of being different becomes a distinctive advantage. In such a case this also implies an expression of a new democratic period, since anybody can claim this advantage without specific necessary talents and social qualification. Novelty and difference then changed into an attribute allowing the participants to get closer together and at the same time it could add another level to their mutual difference. Also, as in the case of Hába’s composition class, it is presented as a collection of distinctive personalities that had a single true goal: a novelty project.

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