Beckerman, Michael

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MICHAEL BECKERMAN (NEW YORK)

KLEIN THE JANÁČKIAN

In this essay I take on the work of Lubomír Peduzzi, and in particular his work on Gideon Klein in the book Musik im Ghetto Theresienstat *published in Brno by Barrister & Principal in 2005. The article I quote from at some length in various places is titled "Gideon Klein und seine Monographie." and comprises what I believe to be an unfair attack on Milan Slavický's pathbreaking biography of the composer,* Gideon Klein: A Fragment of Life and Work. *Peduzzi, a composer, educator, critic, and author of an influential biography of Pavel Haas, died in October 2008 at the age of 90. While I strongly disagree with some of his conclusions, he is and was, alive or dead, a worthy adversary, and was deeply passionate about issues related to Terezin, especially the idea of seeing through the myths in order to "get it right." Though most of us no doubt wish that those who write about us after our deaths will treat our works with some reverence, some of us will be glad to be remembered at all, and being argued with is, after all, another way of staying alive.*

This study also honors the continuing vitality of my dear friend and teacher Prof. Jiří Vysloužil, who I celebrate with my contribution even though in the end I could find no clear evidence of Hába's influence in the composition I am exploring.

Finally, just as this article was going to press I received that incredibly sad news that Milan Slavický had died at the age of 62. Once, in discussion with Milan I remarked with sadness about the destruction of Jewish culture in Czechoslovkia during the Second World War. Milan, such a gentle and kind man, pointed out my limited thinking immediately saying: "No, the Nazis destroyed three cultures; the Jewish, the Czech and the German." He was certainly correct, and I can think of no other figure who more carefully and appropriately tried to keep these cultures alive through his work as a recording engineer, composer, teacher and scholar. Let he of blessed memory rest in peace!

All quotes are from the aforementioned book by Peduzzi and appear in my translation.

* * *

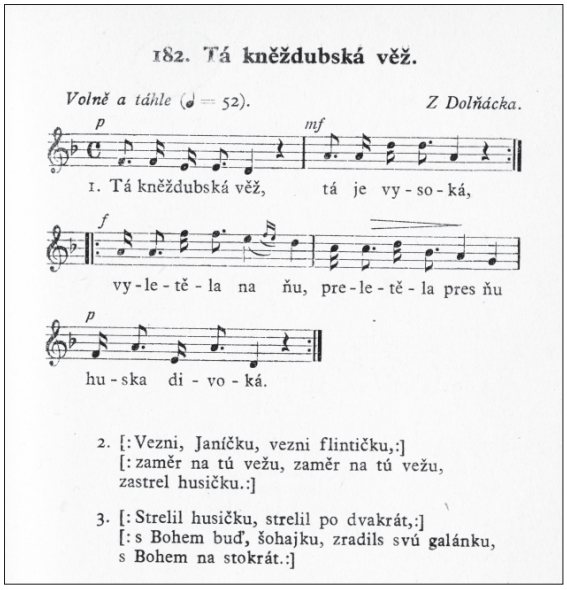
In an in a highly critical review of Milan Slavický's monograph on Gideon Klein Lubomir Peduzzi declares that "Klein's oeuvre as a composer, …does not

rise to the level of Ullmann's, Haas's and Krása's." and further disputes Slavický's assertion that Janáček was a primary model for Klein, especially concerning his use of Moravian folklore: "This reader finds unacceptable Slavický's opinion concerning the 2nd movement of Klein's trio, namely that it distinctly represents the world of Janáček's musical language; for its style is not Janáček's, but Novák's." While Peduzzi is correct to point to Novák (though one would have thought his *Piano Trio* rather than the *Third Quartet* was an influence here) Klein's debt to Janáček is, if anything, even greater than what Slavický suggests.

Of course, despite musicology's continued love affair with the scientific method, there is no way to prove influence, as many others before me have noted. At best one can suggest connections, demonstrate plagiarism or speak of something as "collage." In order to prove that Klein was a Janáčkian we would have to have a precise definition for what it actually means to be a Janáčkian, and as many of us have seen in our own work, making "scientific" stylistic categories is ultimately unworkable: that way you might, for example, create musical parameters for "Czech" music that mysteriously admit Schubert and Aaron Copland while banishing Fibich and Eben. However, there is more to influence than stylistic tics, just as there is more to Czech than Masaryk and ř. If Klein is a Janáčkian, the relationship should be a fractal one, existing not only in certain details, but all the way through the mix. For the purposes of this study I would like to look at one short passage in Klein's work and stake my claim to the importance of Janáček in his work entirely upon it, though I'll draw a few other connections at the end.

Gideon Klein's final work, also probably the last important work composed in Terezín, is a string trio written between the beginning of September and the first week in October 1944. The twenty-four year old composer was transported to Auschwitz about a week after he completed the work and perished at the end of January, 1945. The Trio is cast in three movements, and as virtually all commentators have noted, trades in musical vocabularies related to folklore, thus moving away from the austere atonality seen in some of his earlier works. This stylistic discontinuity, by the way, allows Peduzzi to make the claim that Klein, somehow, did not know who he really was: "the extraordinary circumstances contributed heavily to everyone's conscious realization of who he was and whose side he was on. Was Gideon able to answer this question about himself? Perhaps he never posed it."

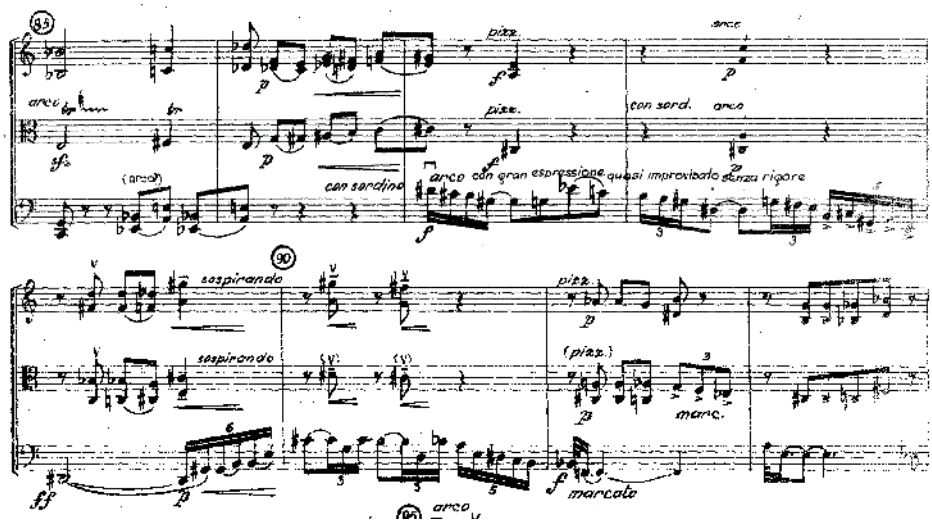
Peduzzi also complains that he does not have enough access to the music to fully judge these questions. This is a pity, because it is precisely in the music that the rebuttal to his argument is found, and the music was certainly available to him. Indeed, even a casual perusal of the Trio reveals some peculiarities that might call for some explanation. The outer movements are brief, and considering the time and circumstances of their composition, appear unexpectedly light in tone. The middle movement is larger than both outer movements combined, and comprises a series of variation on the Slovácko song "Tá kneždubská věž." [Example 1]



Ex. 1

There is a striking passage in the middle of the movement, in fact, in the middle of the fifth variation. After a bluesy ensemble section the cello interrupts. Marked *con gran espressione quasi improvisato senza rigore*, the line plunges down two octaves in a dramatic fashion simultaneously patterning the theme and obliterating it, before reviving in order to articulate most of a descending chromatic tetrachord. [Example 2]

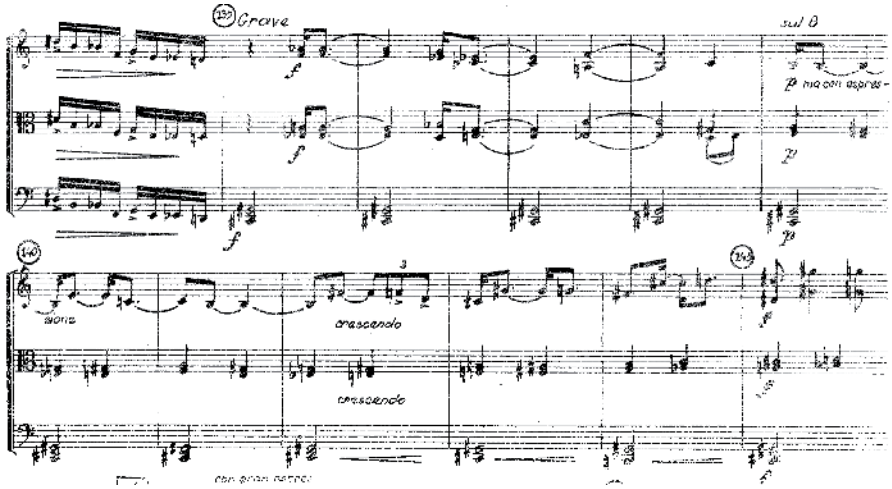
For me, the significance of this moment is inseparable from a larger theory of the Trio. While I believe that the



Ex. 2

work may have started out as a more or less straightforward composition it ended up as kind of message in a bottle. Thus in my view the piece is a reverse Potemkin Village, a statement of extraordinary subtlety and power that lies behind an innocuous facade. And there are external reasons for this. Between the beginning of September 1944 and October 7th of that year everything had changed in Terezín. The camp had been relatively calm following to the infamous Red Cross visit on June 23, and during the summer Kurt Garron

was shooting his hellish propaganda film for the Nazi's. As soon as the film was finished, everything came crashing down and huge transports were announced sometime around the third week of September. An enormous number of long-



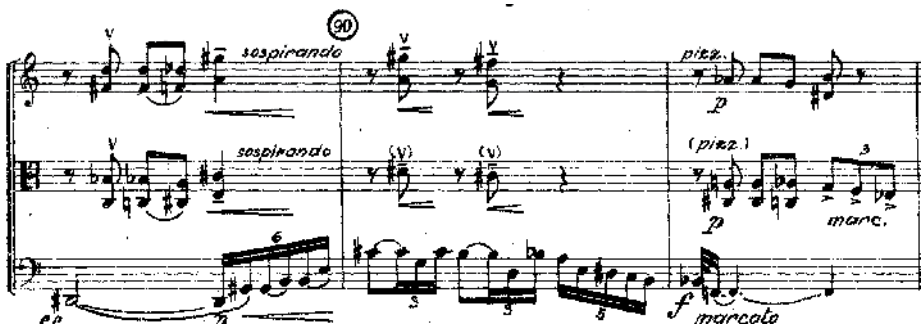
Ex. 3

term inmates were included on these lists.

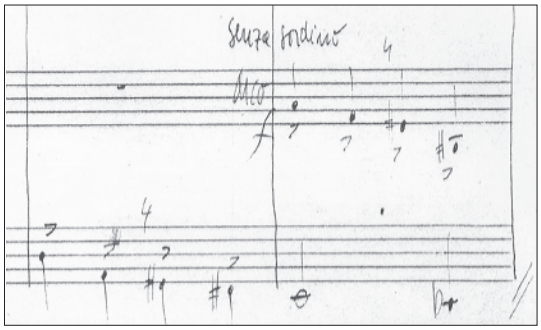
If we simply go according to written documents, we must come to the somewhat anomalous conclusion that Klein may have finished the second movement before the transports were announced. However, if we come to believe, as I do, that musical works are also documents that tell us a great deal about the past, it may be that people in the camp were aware of the transports a bit earlier. However, at some point towards in the last weeks of September Klein probably realized that he was writing his own Requiem and composed accordingly. The second movement is focused around this *cri de coeur* in the cello; it emanates from this core. The traditional rhythm of "Tá kneždubská věž" becomes, at the movement's end, a funeral march.

Reflecting the tumultuous times, the composer returns to the first movement and rewrites a passage to presage the final bars of the variation set, and he fills the seemingly light-hearted finale with references to "Gretchen am Spinnrade," with its "Meine Ruh is hin, min Herz ist schwer." Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*, and Suk's *Asrael* also appear in various guises.

In this spirit, the variations movement may be a specific invitation to consider the song's lyrics where the "huska divoka" represents freedom denied, and the references to towers and shooting the goose are a direct reflection on current events. The movement invokes moments from *Kindertotenlieder*, the Verdi *Requiem* and the Blues to make statements both affective and factual (like: there are dead children here) and it is in this light we should consider the passage I began with. Let us reflect upon it again. It is powerful enough that perhaps you did not pay much attention to the "sospirando" accompaniment:



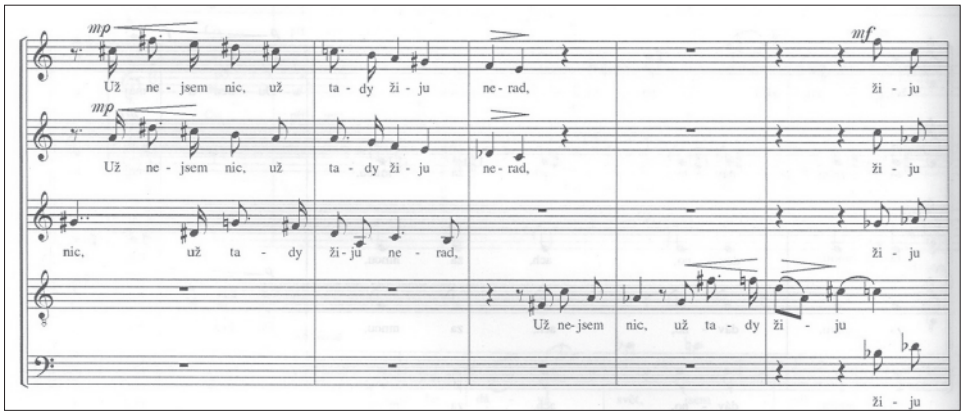
Ex. 4a



Ex. 4b

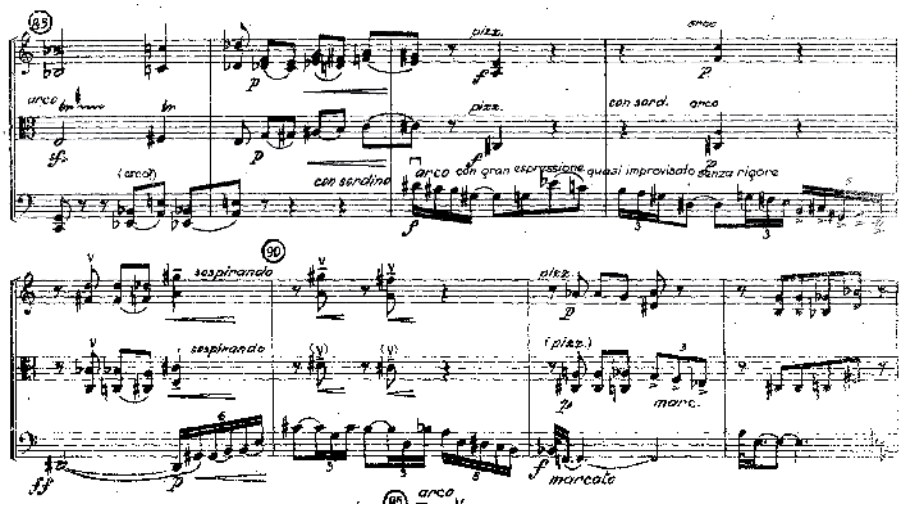
[See example 2]

There is something familiar in those double stops and that triplet. Certainly, in a work that quotes so many other composers we may hear the clear echo of the opening of Janáček's 2nd quartet. Both chamber works have violin double stops at the interval of a sixth, and both go down a semitone and up a fourth. Janáček's fourth is diminished while Klein's is doubly augmented. Two bars later the viola supplies the "missing" triplet from Janáček's quartet, and those odd quadruplets in the Klein are almost surely references to the quartet's *sul ponticello* theme:



Ex. 5

[Example 4a and 4b]

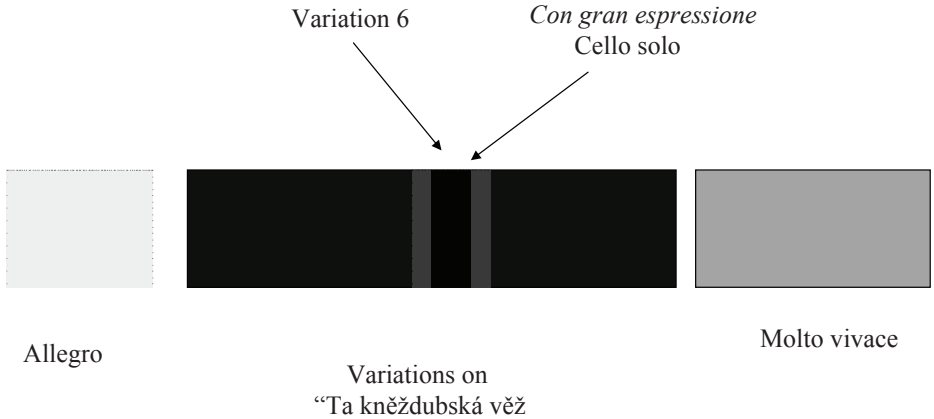


Ex. 6

But what should this mean, and why should I suggest that Janáček deserves any more primacy in some putative chain of influence over Suk, Novák, Schubert, Mahler, or Verdi, all of whom make cameo appearances in Klein's composition?

Let us look at one of the compositions Klein wrote just before this cello work in 1943. This is a madrigal based on a text by Hölderlin. I'd like to look at a moment in the middle of the composition: here an ensemble passage yields to a kind of interruption by a solo voice with the text: "I am no more/už nejsem nic/Ich bin nicht mehr."

Peduzzi asserts that because of Klein's so-called privileged place in Terezín the composer "had no reason to identify with Hölderlin's words." This is a specious argument; one could always say that any day a composer is able to compose is not such a bad day, and therefore no composer is ever capable of writing tragic music. Whatever the case, I believe this passage from the madrigal is another model for



Ex. 7

the moment in the Trio we've looked at, and we might note even the same pitches leading to a "solo utterance."

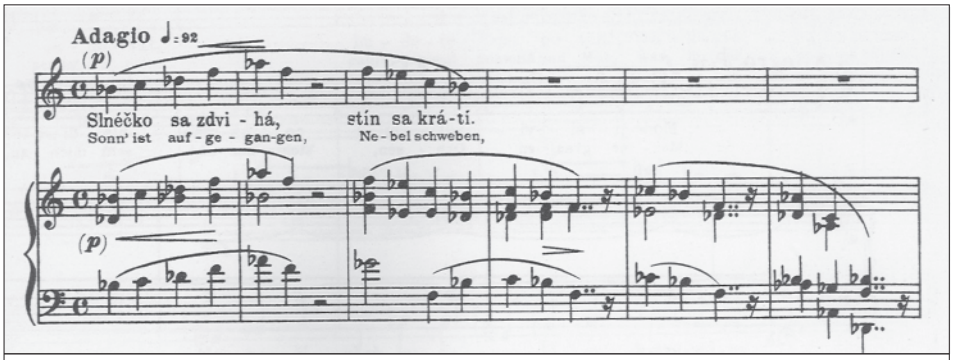
Perhaps we might be forgiven for noting that the crux of our difficulty in discussing music is lies in the difference between these two passages. In the texted one, we somehow "know what the music means," or think we do. Take away the text, however, and one can speak of specificity only at great peril. But let us try anyway, keeping in mind the reference to Janáček in the accompaniment.

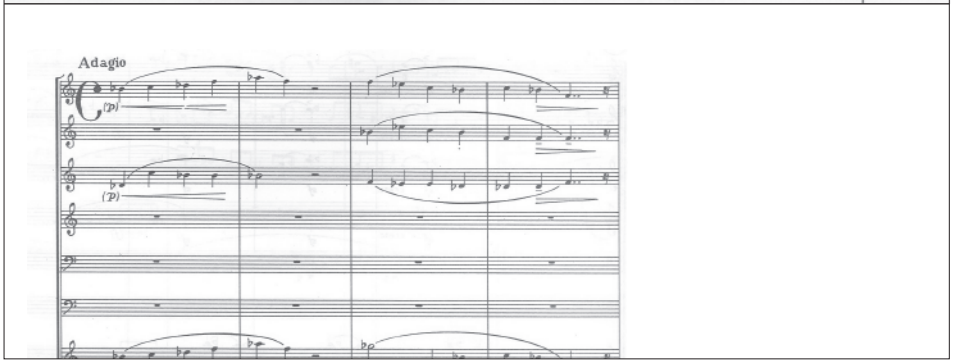
I have a become a great believer in middles. Formal schemes and analyses that automatically privilege the outer parts, or so called "A" sections are surely missing the point. Although it is possible that material placed in the center of a work, movement or passage, finds its way there because it is not worthy of primary attention, the opposite is also true: what is placed in the middle is often what the thing is really about. It is the secret that which is too valuable, too delicate, too dangerous, or too dependent to touch the real world. So in middles we find, basically, sex, drugs and rock n' roll: confessions, erotic tensions, funeral marches, the unaccountable, the delicate and the inscrutable; *expression* writ large.

Note the conspicuous placement of this moment, in the very middle of the middle of the middle.

When we consider the lavish expressive markings, as well as the somewhat paradoxical indication to play both *forte* and *con sordino* it seems clear that this

Ex. 8a





Ex. 8b

is one of those remarkable middles that is precisely the "point" of the piece. We have noted that the Klein's Hölderlin madrigal is interrupted by a single voice crying out in pain, and so I would argue that the cello is here making a kind of speech, declaiming something, serving here as a human proxy. This is reinforced by the expressive markings, for what do *quasi improvisato* and *senza rigore* mean if not: do it with the nuance of a living creature, while the *con gran espressione* mandates intensity. Using Janáček's string quartet as a kind of clue, I would argue that the cello's interruption is a kind of grand *nápěvek mluvy*, and that here, in his most secret places, at the most critical moment of his life, and his life as a composer, Klein found himself to be a complete and utter Janáčkian: music must always be itself, but it must also always reach outside itself.

After this we may safely veer out to other kinds of evidence. We probably begin with the quasi-rhetorical interrogative: how could any young musician growing up in Moravia in the 1920's not be focused on Janáček as *the* Moravian musician who had made it in the big world, the Czech-speaking Moravian who had scored an international success? Klein's activity makes this connection clear. He performed Janáček's keyboard music, both before and after his incarceration, and the extant reviews for his performances of the Sonata and the *Concertino* suggest that they were remarkable renditions. Klein's previous theme and variations movement, composed for his *Divertimento* for 8 wind instruments, was based on song 14 from, *Zápisník* and if one gives Klein the kind of credit one ought to give someone of his brilliance and accomplishment, we might understand that from the beginning Janáček hovered like a star over this Trio and its variation movement.

The question of Janáček's compositional legacy continues to be an open one. Even such a vast and comprehensive resource as John Tyrrell's two-volume biography has little to say on the matter. When I first started studying Janáček's music I was chided by one of my professors who said: "How could he be a really great composer? He had no followers." I believe that by now, Janáček's influence is quite widespread, often in unpredictable places. His legacy extends from Stephen Sondheim to various Hollywood film composers, and even into American popular culture: Bob Dylan introduced his set in Brooklyn with the "Intrada" from the *Glagolitic Mass*. But I think Janáček did have a few special followers. Certainly Pavel Haas, though deeply individual, carried forth some core aspects of Janáček's approach, and in his own last work, the *Study for Strings* paid a final homage to his teacher (Peduzzi seems sure that this work inspired Klein's Trio, but there is no proof of this at all). Though for obvious reasons it is Bohuslav Martinů who is always invoked as a major influence on Vítězslava Kaprálová, surely considering her lineage and her background, the gravitational pull of Janáček was far more profound at a much earlier time, and resonates throughout her work. And, as I have tried to suggest here, at an utterly critical moment in his life, Gideon Klein turned absolutely inward, and so turned to Janáček.

Janáček had his followers, and they were brilliant ones, but they died in wartime, and two were killed simply because they were Jewish.

* * *

In the end, none of us can say precisely what the cello interruption in Klein's Trio means. I have ideas: that it is a setting of one of the lines from Verdi's *Requiem*, which Klein accompanied for dozens of rehearsals and performances, perhaps the *Libera me* with its descent to eternal death; that it represents a nod towards the Jewish *Mourners Kaddish*, in other words, that it a prayer for the dead; that it is a passage that forces the cellist to physically act out the fear and trembling of the times, or even that it is "simply" the ultimate inchoate musical scream of someone being choked and strangled at the very edge of the abyss, as some have called Terezín.

Peduzzi asserts that because of some deep-seated cultural confusion Klein, unlike Ullmann, Haas, and others was "reluctant" to "stand by his national identity." Not knowing who he was, Peduzzi implies, Klein was incapable of creating great musical works. This assertion must be completely rejected. Klein knew exactly who he was, or at least as much as anyone else, and he certainly knew where he was; and Janáček was a critical part of his identity in that time and place. And that is a primary reason why his Trio, mixing elements from so many different worlds, is one of the great works to come out of Terezín, or any other place.