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# Karel Husa a recepce jeho díla v českých zemích po roce 1989

## Karel Husa and the Reception of his Work in the Czech Lands after 1989

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### Abstract

Karel Husa (1921–2016) is an internationally-acclaimed composer. The relationship of the Czech musical public to Husa was marked by his decision not to return to his homeland in 1948 for political reasons. He remained a *persona non grata* until 1989.

Research into the performance and reception of Husa's work in the Czech Republic over the past thirty years has shown that Husa's orchestral, chamber and solo compositions were played by top artists and nearly all orchestral ensembles. In addition to the most popular *Music for Prague 1968*, the Czech concert audience have been introduced to a sample representing all the phases of the composer's career. Although Husa's work has been enjoying a growing popularity, it has yet to become a staple of concert programs.

### Key words

Karel Husa, exile composers, 20th century composers, Czech lands, 1990–2021, *Music for Prague 1968*, music reception

## Foreword

Last year commemorated the hundredth anniversary of Karel Husa (born 7 August 1921, died 14 December 2016).<sup>1</sup> An internationally acclaimed composer and conductor, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Music for *String Quartet No. 3* (1968), and the author of the symphonic composition *Music for Prague 1968* (1968), which has seen thousands of productions on almost all continents.

The feelings he raised among the Czech musical and cultural public were mixed and ambiguous, however. The decision to stay in France after the totalitarian regime was installed in 1948 made the composer one of the official exiles, unwanted, and criminalized people. Although he kept in touch with family and friends back home<sup>2</sup> and consistently promoted Czech music as a conductor, he and his home country became estranged. His music was little known in Czechoslovakia. Canada-based Václav Nelhýbl or later Jan Novák and Antonín Tučapský all shared a similar fate.

The Velvet Revolution of 1989 brought a lot of good. Similarly to Rafael Kubelík and Rudolf Firkušný, the US-based composer Karel Husa hurried back to the Czech Republic. As soon as February 1990 he conducted the Czechoslovak premiere of his *Music for Prague 1968*. He visited his homeland again in 1991, 1993 and 2000. He was awarded the highest state decoration by former President Václav Havel (1995),<sup>3</sup> as well as a honorary degree by Music and Dance Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and by Masaryk University in Brno (both 2000), and a honorary membership of music associations.<sup>4</sup> Slowly but surely, the renown Czech-American began to win the attention and well-deserved respect of the public. The predictions for Husa's work to sky-rocket in the repertoire of Czech concert artists nevertheless never came true. As Jan Ledec aptly said in 1995: "His music is making its way to the concert halls on tiptoes, in small doses."<sup>5</sup> The trend would not change. In 2016, the Prague Philharmonia dramaturgist, Hana Dohnálková, introduced the all-Husa concert celebrating the composer's ninety-fifth birthday by saying: "Karel Husa – an underrated, resourceful musical giant".

What does the current Czech music public think of Husa's work? Does it remain underrated? What path did the reception of Husa's work take over the past thirty years of freedom? How often was his music staged? Which compositions were most often played and by whom? The commemoration of a great composer and searching for answers to the questions raised above had inspired the current study.

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1 Surprisingly, he has not made it to the Czech online music dictionary yet. For more about the composer, see VYSLOUŽIL, Jirí. *Karel Husa: Skladatel mezi Evropou a Amerikou* [Karel Husa: Composer Inbetween Europe and the United States]. Prague: Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, 2011.

2 He was lifelong friends with composer Jan Hanuš. In 1971, Husa travelled to Prague for a private recording of his *Symphony No. 1* by the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra.

3 Czech State Honour – The Medal of Merit, First Grade – for arts and promotion of democracy.

4 For example the Czech Republic Society for Contemporary Music, The Moravian Composers Club Brno, and the Society of Czech Composers.

5 LEDEČ, Jan. *Pragensia*. Czech Music, 1995, No. 6, p. 1.

## Work

The starting point of Karel Husa's future successful composing career was the Prague Conservatory, where he studied under Jaroslav Řídký (between 1941 and 1945). This student-mentor relationship continued into the masters school (1946–1947, now Academy of Performing Arts in Prague). He studied conducting under Pavel Dědeček. A scholarship in Paris at the Ecole normale de musique de Paris and the Conservatoire de musique de Paris (1947–1949), where he studied under Nadia Boulanger and Arthur Honegger respectively, allowed him to further refine his knowledge and skills.

The opening of Husa's composing and conducting career was already very promising. Following the premiere of his *String Quartet No 1* (1948), praised by Honegger as "a work that deserves the attention of the musical world",<sup>6</sup> Husa was seen as a rising star of the Czech music scene.<sup>7</sup>

When he decided not to return to Czechoslovakia following the 1948 coup, he lived in France and supported himself by giving lessons and conducting. In 1954, he accepted a job offer at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Here he taught composition and conducted the university wind band. He was granted the US citizenship in 1959. After retiring in 1992, Husa moved to Apex, North Carolina, where he spent the rest of his life.

Husa's compositional language was shaped by several different factors. The conductor training and experience with directing a large symphony orchestra contributed to his symphonies, instrumental concerts, and large cantata works. In addition to the varied instrumentation, Husa's scores are marked by a strong sense of rhythm, influenced by his love of swing and jazz big bands. Husa was a big fan of trumpet players like Miles Davis or Louis Armstrong. He also met the legendary Czech-American cornet player Karel Kryl.

Husa found a great source of inspiration for his work in folklore. Much of his music, particularly chamber works were based on the tunes, rhythmic idioms, and modalities of Moravian, Slovak and generally Slavic folk music. The formal construction of his compositions built on classical European principles. "The artists I looked up to and learned from are Leoš Janáček and Béla Bartók," Husa said in the foreword to *Évocation de Slovaquie pour clarinet, viola et violoncello* (1951), which is a stylization of Goral music.<sup>8</sup> Like Bohuslav Martinů, Husa voiced his unfulfilled longing for home by working with folk music. An example is *Four Little Pieces for Strings* (1955), which are variations of *Dobru noc* or *Furiant*; *Twelve Moravian Songs for Voice and Piano* (1956); and *Postcard from Home for Alto Sax and Piano* (1997).

Husa celebrated the greatest success with his symphonic band music. Cornell University had an excellent brass band playing both traditional and less common instruments. Husa's *Concerto for Percussion and Wind Ensemble* (1971), *Concerto for Trumpet and Wind Orchestra* (1973), and *Concerto for Wind Ensemble* (1982) have become classics of the genre.

6 LEDEČ, *ibid.*, p. 3.

7 LEDEČ, *ibid.*, p. 3.

8 Karel Husa's foreword for the jubilee concert held by the Society of Czech Composers on September 22, 2011.

The level of skill they require of the player, which is near impossible, has made them a “touchstone” of ensembles’ art capacities.

The composer’s musical style stemmed from neoclassicism. He began experimenting with twelve-tone technique in the early 1960s. By the turn of the millennium he had switched to the athenatic style. However, he did not fundamentally stick to the above tendencies, on the contrary. He also accepted art commissions (for example *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 1993 or *String Quartet No. 4*, 1990), wrote instructive music literature, re-instrumented or recomposed his earlier works (*Concertino pour piano et orchestre*, 1950, for two pianos) or innovated his old compositions (*Postcard from Home* is the transcription of two parts of *Twelve Moravian Songs*).

Karel Husa’s work is generally characterized by specific instrumental variety and original expressive effects. The search for new sound is evident, for example, in *Les Couleurs Fauves for Wind Ensemble* (1995) and in *Cheetah*, which depicts cheetah hunting. Husa introduced new ways of instrumental playing in solo music. For example *Three Studies for Solo Clarinet* (2007) features a breathy tone, natural tone, hollow tone, and a reedy tone. One of Husa’s favourite idioms was his fascination with bird songs (e.g. *Five Poems for Wind Quintet*, 1994) or chimes (*Music for Prague 1968*).

A number of Husa’s compositions reflected the contemporary social and political events. The composer was inspired by Native American tales (*Cayuga Lake. Memories for Chambre Orchestra*, 1992), sympathized with immigrants in Central America (*An American Te Deum* for baritone, chorus and orchestra, 1976–77), opposed pollution and destruction of the Earth (*Apotheosis of this Earth* for band, 1971), lamented the Lidice massacre (*The Trojan Women* ballet for orchestra, 1980), and celebrated the fall of the Soviet totalitarian regime (*Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra*, 1990 or *String Quartet No. 4*, 1990).

The composer closely followed political developments in Czechoslovakia. Upon composing *Music for Prague 1968* he said: “There comes a time when an artist feels the need for his work to touch upon developments in the world, a war, their nation, homeland et cetera.”<sup>9</sup> He also admitted that the anxiety of the composition evokes both the invasion of the five Warsaw Pact troops into Prague on August 21, 1968, and personal memories of the arrival of Hitler’s troops in Prague in March 1939. *Music for Prague 1968* became a general symbol of protest against violence and injustice. It is also the first part of a free triptych of “manifestos” (along with *Apotheosis* and *The Trojan Women*). In 1969, the author expanded its original instrumentation for wind orchestra with a string section, creating a new version for symphony orchestra.

Karel Husa described his artistic credo as follows: “A contemporary composer may capture the atmosphere and ambition of this century. If they succeed, they create a new work. And in this new art they just may, in the future, rank along the preceding composers. They, however, could never compete with as a Bach, Beethoven, Debussy – even if their work was equally good. That would still be a mere epigonism.”<sup>10</sup>

9 VYSLOUŽIL, 2011, p 58.

10 HUSA, Karel. *Problémy dnešního skladatele* [Problems of a Contemporary Composer]. Opus musicum, 2011, No. 4, p 37.

## Production of Husa's Work and Its Reception in the Czech Lands 1990–2021

The research centred on the music operations of Czech symphonic<sup>11</sup> and concert band<sup>12</sup> ensembles. Namely eighteen orchestras, seven of which are based in Prague. Another area of interest monitored was the Czech Chamber Music Society, the Society of Czech Composers, other music organizations,<sup>13</sup> as well as one-time performances.<sup>14</sup>

Our data shows that Karel Husa's work was performed about 155 times over the past thirty years.<sup>15</sup> In terms of frequency with which his work was put on in each decade, the first two decades saw a similar number of performances, while the frequency increased significantly in the last decade. When averaged, Husa's work was performed about 3 times a year between 1990 and 2010, and more than 9 times a year in the last decade.

A closer look at the specific data reveals that Husa's work was not performed very often on Czech stages. An increased intensity was evident mainly in the first years after the 1989 revolution, caused by efforts to restore the position of Husa's work in the context of Czech musical culture. The other periods were music dramaturgists responding to Husa's birthday milestones (1996, 2001, 2006, 2011), death (2016), and 100th anniversary, in 2021, which produced the highest number of his compositions performed.<sup>16</sup> The composer's visits to the Czech Republic also played an important role. The most intensive year in this respect was 2000, with Husa receiving two honorary doctorates. The Prague ceremony alone was preceded by three concerts held between 16 and 18 October 2000. Last but not least, Husa's music was performed in commemoration of the day the Czechoslovak

11 Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra Zlín, Brno Philharmonic Orchestra, the Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice, Czech Philharmonic, Hradec Králové Philharmonic Orchestra, Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra Olomouc, National Symphony Orchestra, Pilsen Philharmonic (former Pilsen Radio Orchestra), Prague Philharmonia, North Czech Philharmonic Teplice, South Czech Philharmonic České Budějovice, Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra.

12 The Band of the Castle Guards and the Police of the Czech Republic, Czech Army Central Band, and Olomouc Garrison Orchestra.

13 Club of Moravian Composers, Czech Republic Society for Contemporary Music, and Society of Wind Music of Academy of Music Performers and Scholars.

14 Information about the repertoire played was supplied by dramaturgists of the institutions, archivists, and the artists themselves. The rest was retrieved from the daily or music press using the anopress database.

15 A total of 30 works was performed between 1990 and 2000, while it was 32 works from 2001 until 2010, and 93 between 2011 and 2021. The figures are approximate only, as despite her best efforts at obtaining the maximum amount of relevant information, the author is aware she may have not had access to all necessary data. Some institutions have not set up an electronic database of concerts or retrieved data from older computers, etc.

16 In 2021, Husa's music was produced by The Band of the Castle Guards and the Police of the Czech Republic, the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra Olomouc, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, and selected by the dramaturgists of the Bohuslav Martinů Days 2021 festival and chamber concerts of the Society of Czech Composers. Two all-Husa albums saw the light of the day in 2021 (The Band of the Castle Guards and the Police of the Czech Republic, conductor Václav Blahunek, and the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra, conductor Tomáš Brauner). The WASBE Conference Prague 2022 had Karel Husa as its key theme. See ([wasbe2022.com](http://wasbe2022.com)).

Republic was established in 1918, of the beginning of the totalitarian regime in 1948, the occupation of Warsaw Pact troops in 1968, the Velvet Revolution in 1989, etc.

Husa's music in the majority of cases constituted a part of subscription or special concerts, together with the works of other composers. All-Husa concerts were rare. His compositions were also played at a number of music festivals, of which there had been 22.<sup>17</sup>

Husa's most frequently played composition was, whether in symphonic or wind version, *Music for Prague 1968*. Our research has shown that if an orchestra decided to study Husa's work, the choice would usually fall on this particular composition. It is a logical choice. The dramaturgists, musicians, and the audience were naturally curious about the renown work with a strong theme, which used to be composed about in secret in Czechoslovakia,<sup>18</sup> and which had been produced a thousand times around the world. The entire composition was played in the Czech lands at least 24 times in both versions. Its Czechoslovak premiere held on February 13, 1990 was played by the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra in the Smetana Hall of the Prague Municipal House and conducted by the composer himself. The orchestra had been prepared for him by conductor Miloš Machek. Karel Husa subsequently conducted the Czech Philharmonic playing his composition at concerts held on September 16 and 17, 1993. *Music* was (also repeatedly) produced over the last thirty years by all symphonic ensembles excepting the North Czech Philharmonic Teplice and the South Czech Philharmonic České Budějovice (which, however, has only a chamber ensemble). A number of excellent conductors took turns behind the conductor's stand desk.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to *Music*, some symphonic ensembles and their audiences were curious about Husa's other orchestral works: *The Trojan Women*, conducted by Karel Husa, was put on by the Brno State Philharmonic on October 13, 1991, and Jiří Bělohlávek conducted *Symphony No. 1* with the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra (October 18, 2000). *Fresque for Orchestra* (1963) was produced by the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra (9 March 2000, conducted by Otakar Trhlík), *Concerto for Orchestra* by the FOK (21 May 2001, conducted by Serge Baudo), *Concerto for Percussion and Wind Ensemble* by the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra and percussionists František Vlček, Pavel Šumpík, Martin Opršál, Jan Řehák, and Petr Hladík (25 and 26 March 2004, conducted by Miloš Machek), *Concerto for Organ and Orchestra* (1987) by Aleš Bárta and Epoque Orchestra (28 May 2011), *Symphony No. 4* again by the FOK (12 September 2013, conducted by Petr Vronský).

Choirs also sought Husa's work: *An American Te Deum* was produced by the Czech Song Choir with choirmaster Zdeněk Vimr, *Apotheosis of this Earth* by the Moravian Chamber Choir with choirmaster Jiří Šimáček.

17 The most important ones include: Concertino Praga, Days of Bohuslav Martinů Zlín, Dvořák's Olomouc, Leoš Janáček International Music Festival, MusicOlomouc, Moravian Autumn, Hradec Králové Music Forum, Prague Autumn International Music Festival, Prague Spring International Music Festival, Smetana's Litomyšl, and the Pardubice Young Stage Festival of Chamber Music.

18 SMOLKA, Jaroslav. Stínová česká hudba 1968–1989 [Czech Music Banned Between 1968 and 1989]. *Hudební věda*, 1991, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 153–187.

19 For example Jiří Bělohlávek, Tomáš Brauner, Chuhei Iwasaki, Jakub Klecker, Zdeněk Mácal, Tomáš Netopil or Petr Vronský, Serge Baudo, and Otakar Trhlík.

The most active entity by far was the Band of the Castle Guards and the Police of the Czech Republic, mainly thanks to the conductor Václav Blahuněk, who has become a relentless promoter of instrumental groups with all of Husa's "optionals" such as bass saxophone, double bass clarinet, alto clarinet, as well as complete percussion, in the recent years. Especially deep woods according to Karel Husa do not have to be included, but if they are, they bring a unique color palette of the same register in whole range.<sup>20</sup> Blahuněk performs Husa's works often for bank holidays but also includes them, for example, as part of concerts designed for school audiences.<sup>21</sup> The Band produced *Music for Prague 1968* more than ten times between 1998 and 2021, and just its first movement alone more than twenty times.<sup>22</sup> *Smetana Fanfare for Band* was performed three times, *Concerto for Percussion and Wind Ensemble* and *Cheetah* twice, and *Les Couleurs Fauves* once. Blahuněk is a big fan of Husa's compositions, but at the same time, he realises the obstacles when performing them: "Husa's concert band work is generally difficult to choose in the Czech Republic for youth and amateur ensembles... Dissonances must first tune and players must understand the content of the message! We still have a long way to go to Husa, but we will not give up".<sup>23</sup>

Another top-class band orchestra, the Czech Army Central Band, performed Husa's composition only once, particularly in 2002 *Les Couleurs Fauves*. The third existing ensemble of the same type, the Olomouc Garrison Orchestra, has not yet studied any composition by Husa; the reason might be the difficulty level of interpretation of these compositions as well as the lack of suitable occasions to perform them.

The upward trend in the number of Husa's compositions performed over the last thirty years is noted across all Czech orchestral ensembles. An exception is the Czech Philharmonic, which has not put on any of Husa's work since 2000. Apart from two occasions in the 1990s, the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra has not performed Husa since 2004. In contrast, the Prague Philharmonia had not put on Husa until as late as 2016 and 2018. Similarly, the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra Olomouc and the Hradec Králové Philharmonic produced all three/four versions only after 2010. The dramaturgy of the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra and of the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra Zlín seem well balanced, as they "reached" for Husa in every decade.

As for the number of Husa's works performed, it would seem natural for Prague-based orchestral ensembles to feel closer to Husa compared to those outside Prague. Surprisingly, orchestras outside Prague put on Husa as much, if not more than those based in Prague. For example, the Czech Philharmonic performed Husa a total of three times, while the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra, the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra Olomouc, and the Zlín orchestra played his work four times, with the latter orchestra also making two recordings. The ensembles need to be appreciated all the more for their courage to put on works which are very demanding of their audience, a feat much

20 Email from Václav Blahuněk dated 29 May 2021.

21 Email from Václav Blahuněk dated 9 June 2021.

22 Twenty concerts designed for school audiences.

23 Email from Václav Blahuněk dated 29 May 2021.

riskier to do here than in Prague. These orchestras also boast a remarkable dramaturgical diversity. For example the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra Zlín played *Music for Prague 1968* (twice), *Elegie et Rondeau pour Saxophone Alto et Orchestre* (1960), and *Symphonic Suite for Orchestra* (1984), and the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra Olomouc *Pastoral for String Orchestra* (1979).

Soloists and chamber ensembles performed Husa's work at concerts of music associations and societies, as part of subscriptions and at special events, festivals, as well as on their concert tours. Our data show that Husa's compositions had been produced by 23 chamber ensembles<sup>24</sup> and 54 soloists.<sup>25</sup>

Probably the most popular solo composition is *Three Studies for Solo Clarinet*, written as a compulsory competition composition for the Prague Spring 2008. The main incentive for its creation was given by Jiří Hlaváč, to whom the piece is dedicated. A great success, this composition is now part of the essential repertoire of a number of Czech and foreign concert artists. Some of its most ardent promoters in the Czech Republic include Jana Lahodná, Irvin Venyš, and Anna Paulová.

The most popular compositions over the past thirty years are as follows: *Concertino for Piano* adapted for two pianos; *Postcard from Home, Sonata a Tre for Clarinet, Violin and Piano* (1981), *Sonatina for Piano* (1943), *Variations for Violin, Viola, Violoncello and Piano* (1984), *Five Poems for Wind Quintet, Twelve Moravian Songs*, and *Évocations de Slovaquie*. Some of these compositions entered the core repertoire of specific performers (*Concertino for Piano*: Daniel and Marie Wiesner; *Postcard from Home*: Jiří Hlaváč played the saxophone, to which the composition is dedicated, with several pianists and also with Due Boemi di Praga), others had been produced by several chamber ensembles. For example *Évocations de Slovaquie* was performed in the 1990s by Jiří Hlaváč (clarinet), Ivan Štraus (viola) and Evžen Rattay (cello), and in the last decade by Irvin Venyš (clarinet), Kristina Nouzovská Fialová (viola), and Petr Nouzovský (cello). *Five Poems* was on the repertoire of both the Prague Wind Quintet (Jan Machat – flute, Jurij Likin – oboe, Vlastimil Mareš – clarinet, Jan Vobořil – French horn, Miloš Wichterle – bassoon), and Afflatus Quintet (Roman Novotný – flute, Jana Brožková – oboe, Vojtěch Nýdl – clarinet, Radek Baborák – French horn, Jaroslav Řezáč – bassoon).

The string quartets (“zero” to No. 4) were integrated in the repertoire of the Martinů Quartet, the Matys Quartet, the Suk Quartet, the Apollon Quartet and the FAMA

24 For example Afflatus Quintet, Apollon Quartet, Due Boemi di Praga, Ensemble Berg, Ensemble Martinů, FAMA Quartet, Martinů Quartet, Martinů Piano Quartet, Matys Quartet, Praga Camerata (conductor Pavel Hůla), Prague Chambre Soloists (conductor Hubert Šimáček), Prague String Trio, Prague Wind Quintet, Stamitz Quartet, Suk Quartet.

25 Among others: Piano: Igor Ardašev, Renata Ardaševová, Renata Bialasová, Irena Černá, Martin Fila, Jiří Holeňa, Ivo Kahánek, Martin Kasík, Jaromír Klepáč, Jan Petr, Barbora K. Sejková, Jaroslav Šaroun, Lukáš Vondráček, Daniel Wiesner, Zdeněk Zahradník. Flute: Andrea Machová, Roman Novotný, Jiří Ševčík, Václav Šolc. Clarinet: Emil Drápela, Jiří Hlaváč, Jana Lahodná, Anna Paulová, Jindřich Pavliš, Irvin Venyš. Bassoon: Tomáš Špidlík. Organ: Aleš Bárta. Violin: Jan Fišer, Jakub Junek, Silvie Hessová, Markéta Řihová, Ivan Štraus, Jan Talich, Miloš Vrba. Viola: Vlastimil Bukač, Kristýna Fialová, Jitka Hosprová, Jakub Novák, Jan Pěruška, Karel Plocek. Violoncello: Petr Nouzovský, Evžen Rattay, Pavel Šabacký. Singers: Karolína Cingrošová Žmolíková, Zdena Kloubová, Jaroslava Ondrušková, Pavla Vejmelková, Kateřina Kachlíková. Percussion: Petr Hladík, Martin Opršál, Jan Řihák, Pavel Šumpík, František Vlček.

Quartet. Interestingly, a Brno chamber ensemble named itself after Husa's *Sonata a Tre*.

The Czech Chamber Music Society played Husa's work for its audiences six times in the 1990s, four times in the following decade, and never in the last ten years. The Society of Czech Composers, on the contrary, has been steadfast and proactive. Some of its management including Jaromír Dadák, Zdeněk Zahradník, and Daniela Bělohradská celebrated each of Husa's anniversaries and were one of the few to organize all-Husa nights. These were held in 1995, 2011, 2016 and 2021. Daniela Bělohradská in particular has played a major role in popularizing Husa's work since she was appointed manager of the institution in 2010. The composer's work was put on as part of jubilee concerts and specials called *Skladatelé dětem – děti skladatelům* [Composers to Children – Children to Composers] (featuring art school pupils and students). Karel Husa also appeared several times at the annual *Dny soudobé hudby* [Days of Contemporary Music] festival. In 2021 alone, the Society held eight concerts as part of this festival, with one composition by Husa played during each. Another event worth mentioning is its all-Husa night. A remarkable project was, for example, the production and streaming of the complete Czech and complete English versions of *Twelve Moravian Songs*.<sup>26</sup>

As for professional recordings, Czech artists studio-recorded a total of nineteen of Husa's compositions, thanks to Czech Radio and the Supraphon and ArcoDiva publishing houses. The first Husa album was released by Supraphon in 1998. It features *String Quartet No 1, Variations for Violin, Viola, Violoncello and Piano, and Five Poems*, produced by Suk Quartet and Prague Wind Quintet. Two more Husa albums were made in 2021: The first was the CD "Ad Honorem Ed in Memoriam Karel Husa" recorded by The Band of the Castle Guards and the Police of the Czech Republic with conductor Václav Blahuněk. It included *Concerto for Percussion and Wind Ensemble, Music for Prague 1968, Concerto for Trumpet and Wind Orchestra, Smetana Fanfare, and Cheetah*. The other was produced by Supraphon, featuring the Prague Symphony Orchestra and conductor Tomáš Brauner. It included *Music for Prague 1968, Trois Fresques, and Symphony No. 2*.

## Reception and Reflection

Husa's music is not easy listening and its reception requires a certain level of listener maturity. This has been documented with the music-sociological research investigating the opinions of secondary-school and university students regarding music of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Students perceived neo-baroque minimalism and spiritual minimalism combined with neo-classicism much more positively than Husa's free dodecaphony, Penderecki's timbre music or Messiaen's modal technique.<sup>27</sup> The first movement

26 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zR7Wr5i1XE8>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvAhAIWvrlw>.

27 The subject matter included works by Vít Zouhara (*Blízká setkání zběsilostí srdce* [Close Encounters of the Frantic Heart], 2004), Roberta Hejnar (*Elysium*, 2010), Krzysztof Penderecki (*Polymorfia*, 1961), Olivier Messiaen (*Exotic Birds*, 1955–56) and *Music for Prague 1968*.

of *Music for Prague 1968* even reminded some of the students of “a braking train” and “scratching a fork over a blackboard”, and the most commonly invoked feelings were anxiety and madness.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, mature and adult audience is more experienced and tolerant, but the influence of long-term listener habits may result in limiting attitudes or even a priori listener aversion. The reception of Husa’s works is therefore naturally embedded in the context of the societal acceptance of “present-day classical” music as a whole; there is oftentimes a long way for the listeners to its intrigued reception.

If music criticism shall act as a vanguard and “light bringer” of the future societal reception, interesting findings may be obtained from the analysis of reviews published especially in *Hudební rozhledy*, indicating the state of the socio-historical reception and music perception of the professional public. Husa’s works were very popular among expert critics. It was already in the first issue of the year 1990, that Vladimír Štěpánek presented the readers with Husa’s profile.<sup>29</sup> The Czechoslovak premiere of *Music for Prague 1968* on 13 February performed by the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra Zlín and conducted by Husa was evaluated by Wanda Dobrovská. Her review pointed out particularly the societal and political contexts of the composition. Dobrovská also emphasized the formal proportionality of individual parts of the composition, creative instrumentation, balanced sound, as well as work with contrast, gradation, and tension. She, however, saw the actual value of the concert rather on the manifestation plane compared to the exclusively aesthetic one.<sup>30</sup> Several years later, an article by Ilja Šmíd states that the performance of *Music* by the Czech Philharmonic, again conducted by Husa (16 and 17 September 1993) took place in front of an empty auditorium.<sup>31</sup> An article written by Vlasta Reiterrerová from the year 2000 claims that the performance of *Fresque* “which combined young energy with the maturity and experience of the composer and conductor”, performed by Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava with Otakar Trhlík, was the highlight of the evening.<sup>32</sup> Miloš Pokora evaluated three concerts (16–18 October 2000) performed on the occasion of Husa’s visit to Prague and his receiving two honorary doctoral degrees. The reviewer pointed out “the inventive sound and powerful imagination springing from the natural musicality” of *Quartet No. 4* (the Suk Quartet); he was also fascinated by the “fine figurative soundscaping, timbre delays, micro-interval shifts, and echoes of choral intonations” in *Five Poems* (the Prague Wind Quintet), as well as

28 VIČAROVÁ, Eva. Socializace umění v odstupu jednoho století. Hudebně pedagogický experiment [Socialization in Art in the Interval of One Century. A Music-Pedagogical Experiment]. *Aura musica*, 2019, 11, pp. 82–86.

29 ŠTĚPÁNEK, Vladimír. Čeští skladatelé v zahraničí – Karel Husa [Czech Composers Abroad – Karel Husa]. *Hudební rozhledy*, 1990, 43, No. 1, pp. 24–43.

30 DOBROVSKÁ, Wanda. Hudba pro Prahu 1968 [Music for Prague 1968]. *Hudební rozhledy*, 1990, 43, No. 5, pp. 217–218.

31 ŠMÍD, Ilja. Symfonie dechů [A Symphony of Wind Instruments]. *Hudební rozhledy*, 1993, 46, No. 11, p. 501.

32 REITTEREROVÁ, Vlasta. Janáčková filharmonie Ostrava [Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava]. *Hudební rozhledy*, 2000, 53, No. 5, p. 11.

the “Honeggerian move” of *Symphony No. 1* (the Prague Symphonic, Jiří Bělohlávek).<sup>33</sup> Reviews in other magazines and portals commonly also express the great expectations from Husa’s compositions, their dignified reception, and oftentimes also the political engagement of the works and frequent performances of *Music for Prague 1968* abroad. It may therefore be summarized that we have not yet seen any expression of spontaneous enthusiasm or a statement of the extraordinary autonomous artistic value, equalling Husa’s compositions to the greatest Czech composers, on the part of Czech reviewers.

The life and work of Karel Husa was naturally covered even in mass media. The public service Czech Radio presented a number of compositions and programs, particularly on the station Vltava. Husa’s music was played in the music programmes like Mozaika [Mosaic] or Akademie [Academy] and the author was also discussed in the educational cycle Hudební fórum [Music Forum] of the station Vltava. In 2011, the Czech Radio made a five-episode documentary *Osudy hudebního skladatele Karla Husy* [The Fate of Music Composer Karel Husa], where the composer is interviewed by the reporter Renáta Spisarová.

The public service TV station Česká televize [the Czech TV] included Karel Husa in the cycle of documentary profiles of famous Czechs – *Galerie elity národa* [The Gallery of the Nation’s Elites]. In 2001, there was also a time-lapse documentary directed by Olga Sommerová. One year later, the director Ladislav Štos created another documentary profile – *Návraty Karla Husy* [Returns of Karel Husa]. The composer was also discussed in the program *Čeští hudebníci v Americe* [Czech Musicians in America] (2002) and in a report called *Osudová léta 1918 a 1968* [Fatal Years 1918 and 1968] (2018). In addition, *Music for Prague 1968* also appeared in a film mosaic of director Jan Střejcovský called *Za pravdu análem* [For Truth Through the Annals] (2020). All of these projects are of great significance for the popularization of Karel Husa’s music works, even if presented through the life story narrated audio-visually in a documentary manner.

## Conclusion

Research into the reception and reflection of Karel Husa’s work has shown that Czech performers, dramaturgists, music organizers, journalists, and musicologists made a number of efforts to ensure that the music of this great man reached the concert stage after a forty-year absence. The demand for presenting and recording Husa’s work was on the rise over the last thirty years, as was awareness of the author’s outstanding talents and the great social impact of his compositions. Socio-political demand is high, interpretation advanced, and the interest of music subscribers spontaneous. Husa’s compositions had been produced by top artists and almost all Czech orchestras. Despite the unequivocal popularity of *Music for Prague 1968*, the repertoire was relatively varied, and so audiences were able to see a representative range of the author’s works within the period

<sup>33</sup> POKORA, Miloš. Karel Husa znovu v Praze [Karel Husa in Prague Again]. *Hudební rozhledy*, 2000, 53, No 12, pp. 5–6.

of study. The credit also goes to the dramaturgy of orchestras outside Prague, as they included Husa's work as often as Prague ensembles.

Naturally a number of productions were held thanks to a personal intervention of specific artists, whether conductors or performers. Of the Prague-based symphony orchestras the one with the closest ties to Husa was the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra – no doubt partly due to their history; and outside Prague it was the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra. Husa's legacy in symphonic wind music has had its greatest promoter in conductor Václav Blahuněk and his Band of the Castle Guards and the Police of the Czech Republic. The composer's chamber music has been consistently endorsed in the last decade by Daniela Bělohradská, the dramaturgist of the Society of Czech Composers.

And yet, Husa's work has not gained a firm place in concert programs to date. This must partly be due to the high demands it places on its interpreters and audience, and partly by the problematic position classical contemporary music holds in today's culture. The developments of the last ten years decade however indicate that Karel Husa has not been forgotten in the Czech lands.

Czech concert performers, often top artists, and orchestras have done much, perhaps the maximum possible, to highlight Husa's compositions in the context of Czech musical culture. Husa's work has undoubtedly left a substantial mark in the history of Czech musical culture. We will see whether his legacy has survived, as it has for the famous giants of Czech music, only in fifty years.

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