

Michael Beckerman, ed., *Janáček and his World*
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003
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Reviewed by Michael Ewans

Beckerman's collection contains three important essays and some other useful ones, followed by a selection from Janáček's own prose writings. Easily the best chapters are those written by the two major British Janáček scholars, John Tyrrell and Paul Wingfield. Tyrrell, who has always been at his best when editing scores and examining Janáček's working methods, excels in his fascinating account of 'How Janáček composed operas,' describing the process by which Janáček proceeded from the fallow time after each previous opera to the initial ideas and then through to the full score.

When he edited and translated the memoirs of Zdenka Janácková, the composer's wife, Tyrrell strayed less surefootedly into the field of biography. He made remarkable claims about Janáček's marital misdemeanours, and in a newspaper article enlarged on Janáček's allegedly 'appalling cruelty' to his wife. Paul Wingfield comprehensively demolishes these claims, in 'Zdenka Janácková's memoirs and the fallacy of music as autobiography,' a chapter that blends accurate analysis of the historical facts with acute psychological insight into the character of Zdenka to undermine both the veracity and the relevance of her account of life with Janáček.

Third in order of importance is Geoffrey Chew's article, 'Reinterpreting Janáček and Kamila'; the reference is to Kamila Stösslová, the dark-haired beauty who was Janáček's muse in the last eleven years of his life. The real importance of Chew's article lies in its contribution to an earlier phase of the composer's output; Chew deftly places Janáček's expressionist opera *Osud* (*Destiny*) in the context of the motif of Decadence in *fin-de-siècle* Czech literature and music. Here is both the fullest discussion of that neglected but powerful opera since my own 1977 book on Janáček's operas, and the only essay in the volume under review that really places Janáček in his cultural context.

The American contributions are less valuable. There is much to be learnt from Leon Botstein's article, which is supposedly about 'the cultural politics of language and music: Max Brod and Leos Janáček,' but is almost entirely concerned with the multicultural background and intellectual stance of Max Brod, the tireless advocate and German translator of five of Janáček's mature operas. This is a good article on Max Brod, but it does not penetrate the complexities of Brod's relationship with Janáček, for which we must await the publication of Antony Ernst's doctoral thesis. Derek Katz on *The Excursions of Mr Brouček* correctly argues that with this opera Janáček attempted, unsuccessfully, to establish himself as a Czech composer working from the centre (Prague) rather than from the marginal province of Moravia. He also is right to argue that many Czechs were Broučeks during World War I—cowardly, Catholic, German-speaking urbanites, whom Janáček contrasts unfavourably in the second Excursion with the heroic Hussite peasantry who had fought in the fifteenth century for the independence of the Czech nation. As a result, the satire was not well received. I do not agree with Katz's conclusion that 'perhaps now it is time to hear Janáček's *Brouček* as a music-drama that does

not depend on a coherent political message'—its satire does contain a message, albeit one that sits badly with pacifists; otherwise, this is a good study of an opera that deserves to be performed more often.

Diane Paige has not very much to say about Janáček's relationship with Kamila, and Beckerman's own contribution is most disappointing—a whimsical post-modernist piece framed around his own acquisition of one of Janáček's visiting cards.

The translations in the last third of the book will introduce readers to Janáček's curious *feuilleton* style, a heady mix of impressionistic aphorisms whose logic is often impossible to discern. It is fascinating to see Janáček (of all people!) criticising Wagner for the 'harmonic roughness, coarseness and even incorrectness' of *Tristan und Isolde*. He is far more convincing when observing and collecting the rhythms and melodies of speech, which served as the laboratory material for his own work.

'Janáček and his World'? Not really. But there are five good essays, and lots to be learnt from the book, which certainly gives an impression of the healthy state of Janáček scholarship in the English-speaking world today.

Felix Cherniavsky, *The Cherniavsky Trio*
Vancouver, Canada: Felix Cherniavsky, 2001
ISBN 0 9689076 0 1. 176pp., port., bibl., discog.

Reviewed by Bonnie Smart

The history of the Cherniavsky Trio is presented in a self-published book for the first time. Three Russian boys, brothers Leo (1890–1974), Jan (1892–1989) and Mischel (1893–1982) are the protagonists of this tale. Born into a struggling musician's large family, the brothers possessed prodigious musical talents that proved to be their passport from poverty to prosperity. From the time of its debut in Odessa in 1901, the Cherniavsky Trio performed the world over. Interestingly, they made a significant contribution to the concert scene of South Africa, and gave several successful seasons in Australia. Their musical legacy is encapsulated in recordings (made between 1918 and 1928), and in the printed recollections of their students. The author, Mischel's son, Felix Cherniavsky—whose work includes *The Salome Dancer: The Life and Times of Maud Allan* (McLelland & Stewart, 1991)—combines these recollections with family interviews and extensive archival work to create a comprehensive chronicle of the Trio's peregrinations.

The early days of the Trio are presided over by the ambitious Cherniavsky patriarch, Abraham (1856–1938). His meagre earnings from freelance performing at Jewish festivities were barely enough to feed him, his wife Rosa, and their children. Ingenuity and necessity led Abraham to form an income-generating 'act' using the talents of his three middle sons. Abraham's haphazard yet at times ferocious teaching approach, which had previously been