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Musical Contexts and the Habsburg Rehabilitation of Czech Saints

The conversion of the predominantly Protestant population of the Czech lands by the Roman-Catholic victors of the Thirty Years War is the subject of much scholarly enquiry and debate, though the role of music is less frequently discussed. The rehabilitation of Czech patron saints to adhere to Catholic dogma also needed to preserve elements of a Czech character in order to be successful and the music for these new devotions also needed to follow suit. The parallel-Mass phenomenon (see below) provides some evidence that the vernacular itself does not necessarily need to be present in order for vernacular practices (and therefore the styles) to be present. Even during an era when Czech composers were at the forefront of stylistic movements (especially the new Italian style in the early eighteenth century) a different character altogether would be employed not only for works that used the Czech language, but for those that evoked some aspect of Czech character, even in Latin. Liturgical and devotional works on the subject of national saints often fell into this category.

The linking of Czech-language liturgical music during this period with something that might be termed a 'Czech style' was also (largely) a result of Jesuit zeal. They had fostered a rather unusual tradition of what might be term 'parallel Mass', where Mass was said (or sung) in Latin while the congregation sang paraliturgical interpolations. That is, first the Credo was said in Latin and then the congregation responded with a vernacular song roughly paraphrasing the relevant Mass text. This rather bizarre solution (probably unique within the Catholic world) gives evidence of some spirit of accommodation, allowing earlier traditions to continue, provided that they are properly contextualised within a Latin Mass. The physical proximity implied by this scenario could mean that a high style (of the Latin tradition) worked in close alteration with a vernacular style. This is something which deserves special attention—often the use of the vernacular language resulted (or was more likely to result in) the use of a vernacular musical style. One such example is an offertory and a gradual by the Prague-based Šimon Brixí (1693–1735) which contains music in both Latin and Czech; the Latin music is in the high Italian style of the time, whereas the Czech-language mate-

rial is rather more rustic and tuneful in character.¹ It is important to highlight that this is a Christmas piece—and that represents a special category in Catholic music, particularly in Austrian crown lands—but nevertheless it works as an explicit example of a liturgical work that combines Latin and Czech each with their corresponding musical style.

JAN OF NEPOMUK

The cult of Jan Hus (c.1369–1415) was enduring in the Czech lands and provided a major challenge for the Catholic authorities to transform, but the rehabilitation of Neopmuk was to provide a useful diversion to the population as a more acceptable (and Catholic) object of national obsession. The preoccupation with Nepomuk was already noted by foreign visitors in the early seventeenth century.² By the time of the popular *musica navalis* celebrations on the river Vltava in Prague from around 1715, the cult of Nepomuk was recognised by locals and foreigners alike.³ Devotions to the saint were widespread even before his beatification in 1721 and canonisation in 1729. Foreigners, such as the German travel writer and adventurer Baron Pöllnitz, wondered if Nepomuk might even rival Wenceslas as the national saint:

The confidence of the Bohemians in St. John de Nepomucene is so great that they have almost forgotten their old patron St. Wenceslaus. There is no church where St. John

¹ CZ-Pnm, VM 429 (Mělník D 81): ‘O. A: M. D. Gl. // Offertorium / Pro Sacre nocte Nativitatis / Domini proprium / E / Item Pro graduale Pastorella / Narodil Se Krystus Pan. / à 4 voci: / C: A: T: B: / 2 Violini: / Basso Continuo / Cum Lyra Pastorita // Authore Simone Brixy. // De Musica / Joannis Josephi / Brixi Ao 1733.’

² In 1617 the travel writer and MP for Grimsby, Fynes Moryson, noted a number of monuments in Prague devoted to national figures (such as Charles IV and St Václav) that were venerated by locals, though he noted the significance (without mentioning the name of Nepomuk) of one in particular. He describes seeing ‘the Monument of a Bishop, who being the Queens confessor, was cast into the Molda because he would not reveale her confession to her husband Wenceslaus. They doe so reverence the Monument of this Bishop (since made a Saint by the Pope) as they think he shall die with shame, that passeth by it without reverence’. Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary. Containing His Ten Yeeres Travel* (London, 1617), 16. The popular confessional story is now widely discredited and Nepomuk was probably murdered for being meddlesome in the affairs of the crown. See Robert Pynsent, *Questions of Identity—Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (New York, 1994); Robert John Weston Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1700: An Interpretation* (Oxford, 1979), 228–229.

³ The *musica navalis* celebrations on the river Vltava form an important sub-category to Nepomuk devotions. See Vladimír Novák, and Ludmila Mašlanová, *Musicae Navalis Pragensis* (Prague, 1993).

has not a chapel, no bridge without his effigy and everyone, great and small, men and women, wear his picture as if it were the badge of an order, which hangs on a ribbon the colour of fire: you would swear that all the Bohemians were Knights of St. Louis, In short, St. Nepomucene is the only saint in vogue; and he is overwhelmed with presents to such a degree that if it continues in this way, he will be as rich as Our Lady of Loretto.⁴

The making of the Nepomuk legend is especially revealing in that the myth aspect of the story is that he died being tortured for keeping the confessional secrets of the Queen and his body was thrown into the river Vlatva. Most of it was completely fabricated of course, and the reasons for the murder were primarily political.⁵ Although stories of, and devotions to, Nepomuk were common well before the Thirty Years War, it was his rehabilitation following the war that helped lead to his canonisation. Although many continued to believe the Nepomuk myth, it was only a matter of a few decades after his canonisation that publications began to emerge that questioned it. By 1764 Gelasius Dobner (1719–1790) denied that the person of Nepomuk had ever existed.⁶

The rehabilitation of Czech saints such as Nepomuk (d. 1393), Prokop (d. 1053) and Wenceslas (d. 935) presented substantial challenges to the Catholic endeavour.⁷ While Nepomuk was mostly a created myth, the historical person of Prokop was anti-German, advocated the Slavonic Rite over the Latin Rite, and, although he was abbot of the Sázava monastery, also had a wife. Wenceslas was less problematic, but again there are issues of vernacular liturgy and service books; moreover, the Christianity in which he was raised came from Constantinople, not Rome.

⁴ Karl Ludwig Pöllnitz, *Nouveaux mémoire du baron de Pöllnitz, contenant l'histoire de sa vie et les relation de ses premiers voyages*, 2 vols., i (Amsterdam, 1737), 233. 'La confiance des Bohèmes envers S. Jean Népomucène est si grande, qu'ils ont presque oublié Saint Wenceslas leur ancien Patron. Il n'y a point d'Eglise où S. Jean n'ait une Chapelle, point de Pont où son Image ne soit placée ; tout le monde, grands & petits, hommes & femmes, portent son Portrait, en forme d'Ordre, qui pend à un ruban couleur de feu : vous diriez que tous les Bohèmes sont Chevaliers de S. Louis. Enfin, S. Népomucène est le seul Saint à la mode; on l'accable de présens, & pour peu que cela dure, il sera aussi riche que Notre Dame de Lorette'.

⁵ The most recent discussion of Nepomuk in the context of Bohemian conversion is in Howard H. Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁶ Mikuláš Teich, 'Bohemia: From Darkness into Light,' in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds.), *The Renaissance in National Context* (Cambridge, 1992), 154. On the dispute between Dobner and Dobrovský on the subject of the saint, see Josef Haubelt, *České osvícenství* (Prague, 1986), 333–351.

⁷ The subject of the rehabilitation of Wenceslas is far too large to be addressed here in detail.

MUSICAL DEVOTIONS

By the first decades of the eighteenth century no *kancionál* or monastic inventory was complete without a number of devotional or liturgical works on Nepomuk. Even apart from devotional songs and hymns that become popularised in Šteyer (1683) and other *kancionalý* there is an anonymous ‘Missa S. Joannis Nep.^{oni}’ already recorded in the 1693 inventory at Slaný, amongst other early examples.⁸ In literary circles the patriotic narrative of Nepomuk’s story is more conspicuous than in musical ones.⁹ One theatrical work from 1743 features allegorical figures representing ‘the Czech land’ (*Zem česká*), ‘Providence’ (*Prozřetelnost*) and ‘Justice’ (*Spravedlnost*) discussing Nepomuk’s triumph in martyrdom.¹⁰ To the baroque mind, these parallels between devotion and nation are easier to draw on the stage than at the altar, where decorum and Roman law subjugate perceptions of verisimilitude. Nevertheless, there is evidence of these traits in at least some of the surviving musical works.

LITURGICAL WORKS

Vernacular litanies are still fairly rare in the early eighteenth century—even in Protestant circles—but in the Roman-Catholic context they are rare indeed.¹¹ Officially only six litanies were approved by Rome for public recitation: those of the Holy Name of Jesus, the Sacred Blood of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary (Litany of Loreto), St Joseph, and the Litany of the Saints. Many other litanies survive, but were probably only permitted in private devotions. In the case of the Nepomuk litanies, it must be considered that at least some of them were used as part of the *musica navalis* celebrations that marked the Saint’s day, and so don’t fall into the category of liturgical music.¹² There is a fair amount of evidence to suggest that some of the

⁸ CZ-Pnm, no shelfmark, *Inventarium Rerum et Instrumentorum Musicalium Chori Slanensis Schol. Piar.* (1713); hereafter ‘Slaný’. Twentieth-century typescript copy in CZ-Bm G. 293.

⁹ There are examples of similar works for other Czech saints too, but space does not permit their discussion here.

¹⁰ Ludmilla Socherová, *Člověk a lidová kultura: Člověk a lidové divadlo—lidové divadlo v životě člověka* [People and Folk Culture: People and Folk Theatre—Folk Theatre in the Life of People] (Panoráma biologické a sociokulturní antropologie, 22; Brno, 2004), 25.

¹¹ There are a number of notable settings of Luther’s litany in German (1529) by Johannes Rhau (1598), Sigefrid (1602), Vulpius (1604), Michael Praetorius (1610), Hans Leo Hassler (1619), Schein (1627), and Heinrich Schütz (1657).

¹² Novák and Mašlanová, *Musicae Navalis Pragensis*, passim.

works with devotional texts that fell outside of the bounds of Roman acceptability were provided with less contentious alternatives.¹³ It seems that the first litany on the subject of Nepomuk was the result of the *musica navalis* festivities.¹⁴ Structurally, the Czech litanies tend to follow Italian models: a homophonic opening chorus, followed by vocal solos, and concluding with an imitative chorus.¹⁵

MUSICAL TRAITS

In order to achieve success in the transference of national adoration from Hus to Nepomuk, the devotions to the latter needed to carry a similar sort of national zeal.¹⁶ The earliest of the works to be discussed here is the motet *Floscule majalis* (1706) by Jan Ignác František Vojta (c.1660–1725). The text is in Latin and generally strophic in form and this pattern helps give the music a metrical regularity generally associated with later styles (ex. 1). The pattern also reveals evidence of melodic structures associated with folk music—notably the construction of a melody from shorter motifs in an AABA form (or modified version thereof).¹⁷ The motivic construction also results in frequent V–I cadential patterns and combined with the texture of two treble voices in parallel thirds with multiple instruments playing *colla parte* results in a rustic tunefulness that is often associated with vernacular *kanonicál* traditions.

¹³ Amongst others, the 1706 (Jihlava) source of *Floscule majalis* has an alternative text in German for a section of the tenor part; the bass part preserves parts of two other Latin texts, one on St Sebastian and another for the Virgin Mary. Š. Brixí's offertory with a partly-Czech text contains (written on the back of one of the parts) a Latin alternative. F. Brixí's *Litanie in D ad S. am Joannem Nepomucenem* is preserved with an alternative text on the Litany on the Name of Jesus.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Note that the Koutník's Czech litany does not have a final imitative chorus. Perhaps fugal imitation is too courtly/urban a compositional procedure for a rural context? See *Litaniae boemicae de Sancto Joanne Nepomuceno ex G*, CZ-Pnm MČH XID 169 (autograph), composed 1748. Aspects of Koutník's contribution to the genre are discussed in Tomáš Slavický, 'Litaniae de Sancto Joanne Nepomuceno a jejich nejstarší českojazyčná zhudebnění' ['The Litanies of St John of Nepomucene and their oldest Czech-language settings'], *Hudební věda*, 43/29 (1999), 76–84.

¹⁶ Caution is needed here not to diminish the continued influence of the Hussites. As late as 1783 the German traveller Reisbeck comments that the 'Hussites are still very numerous in the country. Some think that a fourth part of the inhabitants are of this sect, which has also spread widely in Moravia.' Johann Kaspar Riesbeck, *Travels Through Germany in a Series of Letters*, trans. Rev. Maty, 2 vols. (Zurich, 1787), ii.127.

¹⁷ This form is associated with Central-European Slav folksong in general.

EXAMPLE 1. Vojta, *Floscule majalis* (1706), 2 sopranos (violins, oboes *colla parte*), b.c., bars 16–23¹⁸

16

Flos-cu-le ma-ja-lis, Ne-po-mu-ce-ne Jo-an-nes, fo-li-is ut a-lis a -

Flos-cu-le ma-ja-lis, Ne-po-mu-ce-ne Jo-an-nes, fo-li-is ut a-lis a -

19

man-tes tra-hes fi-de-les, ah o-les fra-gras sua-vi-ter vir -

man-tes tra-hes fi-de-les, ah o-les fra-gras sua-vi-ter vir -

21

-tu-ti-bus de-co-ris o-do-rem spar-gis lar-gi-ter in his et il-lis o-ris.

-tu-ti-bus de-co-ris o-do-rem spar-gis lar-gi-ter in his et il-lis o-ris.

(O flower of May, John of Nepomuc / You draw your faithful devotees liked winged leaves / And spread the fragrance of your lovely virtues / Near and far in odorous profusion)

These central characteristics continue to be found in devotional works about Nepomuk in the middle of the eighteenth century. A remarkably good Czech-language litany (probably before 1738) devoted to Nepomuk, attributed to Jan Josef Brixí (1719–1762), also employs the unison sonority (violins) with

¹⁸ CZ-Bm MS 361. There is also a copy of this motet in the hand of Antonín Krimer (1740–1797) with a different text on the same subject in the Czech language [‘Jene Nepomucky Magalnj Kwitku’], copied around 1760 (CZ-Bm, A 3864). It is likely that both were copied from a common source because they both reproduce an error in the continuo part—the error was corrected in the 1706 source.

the consequent phrase in parallel thirds, anticipating the vocal duet that follows (ex. 2).

EXAMPLE 2. attr. J. Brixi, *Lytaniae Czeska* (c. 1750), bars 16–31

Andante

Vn 1,2

B.c.

Ot - če, ot - če ne-bes-ký Bo - že, smi - lůj se nad ná - mi,

Ot - če, ot - če ne-bes-ký Bo - že, smi - lůj se nad ná - mi,

The musical character of Tomáš Koutník's (1698–1775) fine *Litaniae boëmicæ* retains the strophic patterns and congregational sonorities and harmonies of older models (ex. 3); and closer to the middle of the century, Černin, organist at the church of Sts Simon and Jude in Prague, has left one offertory which also owes much to its predecessors (ex. 4)¹⁹. Although strings doubling vocal parts *colla parte* is a common trait in music of this time,

¹⁹ Koutník's contribution to this genre is discussed in more detail in Tomáš Slavický, 'Litaniae de Sancto Joanne Nepomuceno a jejich nejstarší českojazyčná zhudebnění', *Hudební věda*, 43, no. 29 (1999), 76–84.

doubling melodic phrases in octaves is less common. Indeed, Tomáš Baltazar Janovká (1701) associates the sonority of a melody in octave doublings with ‘the music of our ancestors’.²⁰ This practice and understanding carries on well into the second half of the century (ex. 5 and 6).

EXAMPLE 3. Koutník, *Litaniae boëmicæ de Sancto Joanne Nepomuceno* (1748), bars 43–54

43

Coro

Sva-tá Ma - ry - a sva - tá Bo-ži ro - dič-ko. Sva-tá Pan-no

Vns 1/2

6

Vc

B.c.

48

pa nen, o - ro - duj za — nás.

Sva-tý Je-ne Ne - po - muc-ký.

6 6 4 3 p

²⁰ This is from his description of the double bass, e.g. ‘violone magno’. Tomáš Baltazar Janovká, *Clavis ad thesaurum magnæ musicæ* (Prague, 1701), 322f.

EXAMPLE 4. Černín, *Offertorium de Sancto Joanne Nepomuceno* (c.1750),
bars 24–31

Trp 1/2

C
A

plau - de ter - ra, ter - ra lau - -

T
B

Vn 1

Vn 2

8 8 8 6 5 6 5

B.c.

24

28

des, lau - -

p *f* *p* *f*

6 5 6 5 6 5

S: T:

EXAMPLE 5. Jiří Linek (1725–1791), *Lytaniae de Sancte Joannes Nepomucene*, bars 1–6²¹

EXAMPLE 6. Linek, *Lytaniae*, bars 63–69

PROKOP

Prokop was more difficult to rehabilitate because of his anti-German attitude and his clear associations with expressions of Czechness.²² This problem was circumnavigated by a general avoidance of most aspects of his personal life, leaving more generic praise for his devotions. This is in sharp

²¹ CZ-Pu 59 R3301.

²² For his rehabilitation see Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 226–227; Alfred Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia. Czech Literature and Society, 1310–1420* [Medieval Cultures, 13] (Minneapolis, 1998), 25.

contrast to Nepomuk, whose gory death is often recounted in varying degrees of detail. In short, the fabricated story of Nepomuk flourished, and the more likely (yet inconvenient) aspects of Prokop's life went unmentioned. Prokop's story follows that of many saints, including the performance of miracles, banishing of devils, and, importantly in this case, the banishing of the German monks and with them, the Latin Rite in favour of the Slavonic. The earliest *vitae* of Prokop reveal these traits in all their patriotic fervour:²³

Let us request him [Procopius] to defend us, drive our enemies from the land, and afford us peace and quiet, for he is our defence and the patron of the Czech land. Close to the German lands, Bohemia would have perished long ago if Saints Procopius and Wenceslas had not protected it.²⁴

Although Prokop never received anything close to the musical attentions paid to Nepomuk, a *Litaniae sancte Procopius* (c.1730) from Mělník reveals similar attributes. It is remarkably galant in style and texture and, once again, this owes much to its Czech character—especially the preponderance of unisons in the texture as well as the triadic vocal writing (ex. 7). Another galant characteristic can be seen in the way the composer uses a single melodic idea to unify the entire work (ex. 8); this theme returns throughout the entire piece and also reveals a brief periodic structure—taken together these are remarkable characteristics for a work of the time (similar can be said for the Vojta work above). The evocation of Czech antiquity is achieved by similar means at the start of the century as it is in the middle (and probably later too); as a result, works of this category sound strikingly similar to each other in stylistic terms, even though half a century separates them.

The circumstances that allowed this unusual repertoire to flourish must be carefully considered. The mixture of antiquarianism with the latest musical styles resulted in a fascinating phenomenon that may have contributed to the continued use of the Czech language and other practices in certain devotional contexts, rather than diminish them, as if often argued.

²³ There are three extant versions of his *vitae* in Latin, the oldest of which is the *Vita s. Procopii antiqua* from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, purported to be based on an earlier version in Old Church Slavonic (now lost); Old Church Slavonic had been the official language at the Sázava Monastery at the time. See Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia*, 77–87.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

EXAMPLE 7. Anon. (Mělník), c.1730, *Litaniae Sancte Procopius*,
bars 46–55²⁵

B. Pa-ter de_ cae-lis, de cae-lis, De-us mi-se-re -

Vns 1/2

Org. re no - bis.

EXAMPLE 8. Anon (Mělník), c.1730, *Litaniae Sancte Procopius*,
bars 135–138

S. Sanc - te Pro - co - pi, o - ra pro no - bis.

Vns 1/2

Org.

²⁵ CZ-Pnm VM 388, old sign Mělník C.59.