

Anthology of Czech Piano Music containing works by A. Dvořák, B. Smetana (2), B. Martinů, J.V. Voříšek, Z. Fibich, L. Janáček and J. Suk. These will all be reissued 2010/2011 in new boxed editions via Musical Concepts/alto.

He recorded piano and chamber music works by V. Novák for ASV. Also, in 1999, he recorded two CDs on Dvořák's 1879 Bösendorfer piano, containing that composer's piano works (One now on alto ALC 1044, the other to follow in the Anthology). In 2002, he recorded the last three Piano Sonatas by V. Ullmann, and all the Sonatas for Czech Radio.

Radoslav Kvapil has performed in major concert halls throughout the world: in 47 countries and in 26 States of the USA. He has given concerts in the Royal Albert Hall, the Barbican Centre and Wigmore Hall (London), Carnegie Recital Hall (New York) the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the Auditorium du Louvre, Théâtre du Châtelet (Paris), Concert Hall of The Seoul Arts Center (Korea) and the Henry Crown Symphony Hall (Jerusalem), the Rudolfinum and the Smetana Halls (Prague). In both 2001 and 2002 he performed the Dvořák Piano concerto in Chicago, Paris and in London. Also in 2002 he gave a whole Dvořák recital in New York City and performed in the Kennedy Library, Boston.

Renowned as a piano pedagogue, he has given master-classes and lecture-recitals worldwide, including the Juilliard School, Eastman School of Music, North Texas University, and University of Michigan in USA, le Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris and Lyon, the Rubin Academy (Tel Aviv), the Liszt Academy (Budapest), and Royal Academy of Music (London).

In April 2002, the French Government awarded him the title "Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres".

**alto = a label of Musical Concepts: www.musicalconcepts.net
(43-40 Thirty-Fourth St., Long Island City, NY 11101 (USA))**

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Others available:

ALC 1044 Dvořák Piano music played on Dvořák's own Bösendorfer piano/ Kvapil

ALC 1113 Novák Piano Music: Sonata, Winter Songs, Slovak Suite, Dance/ R.Kvapil (new)

ALC 6001 (6CD) Czech Piano Anthology: Dvořák, Janáček, Martinů, Novák, Smetana, Suk

Smetana: Dances and Dreams for Piano / Radoslav Kvapil (Steinway piano)

(From) Tři salonní polky (Three Salon Polkas) (Op.7) (1854)*

[1] Polka in F# major – vivo 4:30

[2] Polka in E major – allegretto ma non troppo 1:49

(From) Tři poetické polky (Three Poetic Polkas) (Op.8) (1854)*

[3] Polka in Ab major – allegro 2:27

Sny (Dreams) (1875)*

[4] Zaniklé štěstí (Bygone Happiness) – vivo - quasi andante - più vivo 4:20

[5] Útěcha (Consolation) – moderato - moderato assai - lento - poco meno allegro 4:45

[6] V Čechách – vsenický příběh (In Bohemia – Country Tale) moderato e rubato - più allegro - più vivo 5:09

[7] V salóně (In the Salon) – allegro comodo 3:51

[8] Před hradem (Before the Castle) – moderato ma energico 5:00

[9] Slavnost českých venkovanů (Festival of Bohemian Country Folk) molto vivace - vivo ed energico - più lento - Tempo I - presto 4:47

České tance (Czech Dances) II (1879)

[10] Furiant 5:47

[11] Slepíčka (Little hen) 3:17

[12] Oves (Oats) 5:09

[13] Medvěd (The Bear) 3:25

[14] Cibulíčka (Little Onion) 4:53

[15] Dupák (Stomp Dance) 3:51

[16] Hulán (The Lancer) 4:55

[17] Obkročák (Stepping Round) 3:21

[18] Sousedská (Neighbour's Dance) 4:38

[19] Skočná (Hopping Dance) 3:38

Producer: Dr. E. Herzog Engineer: A. Sykora Studio Domovina, Prague, Sept 1992

Producer: *Jiri Zobač Rudolfinum Studio, Prague, June 1994

TOTAL TIME 79:50 Remastered for **alto** by Paul Arden-Taylor



Bedřich Smetana (1824–84) is largely remembered for his comic opera *The Bartered Bride*, a number of other operas often revived such as *Dalibor*, *The Kiss* and *Libuše* and of course for the six symphonic poems that comprise *Má Vlast*. It may then surprise the reader to learn that roughly two thirds of his oeuvre consists of works for piano.

Smetana's father František, an itinerant brewer by trade, was an enthusiastic amateur violinist. In 1823 he had taken up a position in Litomyšl (about 100 miles east of Prague and 50 miles north of Brno) as brewer to Count Waldstein. The following year Bedřich Smetana was born, the first son to survive infancy, into a family which had at that time six daughters. Two further sons and another daughter followed, making a better paid post and a move to larger living quarters imperative for the family. Accordingly they moved to Count Czernin's castle in Southern Bohemia in 1831. Czernin had known Mozart and had important cultural contacts in Vienna. Smetana received his first musical lessons from his father whilst very young, and aged five he played violin in a Haydn string quartet. As a boy he was a more than able pianist and at the age of eight he composed a short Galop, the first of many popular dances for piano, a number of which are included in this collection.

When 15 Smetana attended school in Prague and heard Liszt play the following year. Liszt's own compositions were to influence Smetana considerably and the two men became good friends a number of years later. Having decided to make music his career Smetana took lessons with Josef Proksch (a highly respected teacher who, despite being blind, had opened his own school in 1830) and paid for them by teaching piano to the family of Count Leopold Thun. Whilst in service to the Thun family he met Robert and Clara Schumann and (it is thought) Berlioz, who conducted several concerts in Prague in 1846.

In 1847 Smetana took the first steps towards founding his own music school. The following year he became involved with the burgeoning Czech nationalist movement, manning the barricades during 1848 "the year of revolution", despite the fact that Czech did not become his first language for many years (he was brought up as a German speaker). In 1849 he married his long standing girlfriend and for the next few years they lived happily, if under straitened circumstances. Sadly three of their four children died before their fifth birthdays and during the year that Smetana composed the *Three Salon Polkas Opus 7* and the *Three Poetic Polkas Opus 8* (1854) the Smetanas lost their second daughter Gabriela (1854) from tuberculosis. Only in the second dance in each group (neither feature here) was there a sense that life was far from easy for the Smetana family, for the overall temperament of these delightful (but by no means easy to play) polkas is of carefree foot-tapping abandonment.

Smetana's eldest daughter Bedřiška (who had begun to show signs of musical talent) succumbed to scarlet

fever in 1855 and their youngest child Katerina, born later that year, only lived a few months. To cap it all, Smetana's wife Katerina (the dedicatee of the *Opus 7* dances) began showing signs of tuberculosis and Smetana, who was receiving little income from his music school, needed little persuading to try his fortune elsewhere. Accordingly, when a colleague advised Smetana of a vacant post in Göteborg in Sweden he seized the opportunity to make a fresh start. He arrived in Göteborg in late 1856 and rapidly soon settled into the musical and social life of the city. Despite his undoubted love for his wife, he found himself attracted to other women, and one in particular, Mrs Frojda Benecke, was to be the dedicatee of another later set of polkas *Opus 12*. Smetana's wife died in 1859 and he remarried the following year, to his second wife Bettina, also a dedicatee of further polkas (*Opus 13*).

The first major work on this CD *Sny* (*Dreams*) dates from 1875. During the intervening period Smetana returned from Göteborg and had hoped to become conductor of the new Provisional Theatre in Prague, which he eventually did in 1866, four years after originally applying for the post. He became (unwittingly) involved in the internal politics surrounding this prestigious post and although a number of people supported him in the post, as many did not. Smetana held this post until his resignation in 1874. He had found the post very stressful with the internal politicking ruinous to his health; the many cabals against his authority largely concerned his supposed preference for German rather than Italian opera. However in 1874 he also developed the syphilitic illness which caused first his deafness and then his insanity.

Nevertheless, Smetana composed some of his finest music during these final years: between 1872 (when attempts were first made to oust him from his post) and the onset of insanity in 1883. Like Beethoven, Smetana composed much of his finest work after the onset of deafness; much of his symphonic cycle *Má Vlast*, the operas *The Kiss* and *The Secret*, and his *First String Quartet* all date from the initial period of deafness and the *Quartet* even attempts to portray in music the sound of the tinnitus which plagued him day and night.

At the time of *Sny*, Smetana was coming to terms with his deafness. One recognises in these six pieces typical harmonic daring (a former pupil tried to correct what he felt were mistakes, only to receive a withering letter from the composer condemning his lack of understanding of all the possibilities and combinations of harmony) and also a sense of nostalgia. Smetana casts his mind back to the days when he was the darling of the salons and elsewhere incorporates rustic dances as well as more heroic elements.

The two sets of *Czech Dances* (*Book II* features here) also date from this period having been completed in 1877 and 1879 respectively. Compositions for piano form roughly two thirds of Smetana's entire oeuvre and the vast proportion of these are miniatures in the form of dances. It is a commonly held belief that he

composed both sets of *Czech Dances* as a somewhat petulant reaction to Dvořák's recent success with his *Slavonic Dances*. This is however conjecture and it should be noted that the two composers had been on friendly terms since Dvořák had played in Smetana's theatre orchestra in 1866. Smetana did however point out to his publisher when introducing this second set of *Czech Dances* in 1879 that, unlike Dvořák, he would 'show the special names we Czechs give our national dances'. For five of these dances in the second set (*Oves*, *Medvěď*, *Cibulička*, *Hulán* and *Obkročák*) Smetana adapted existing tunes taken from K Erben's published collection. Elsewhere he relied on melodies and dance rhythms demonstrated by members of the local rural community (since 1876 Smetana had been living about 40 miles northeast of Prague on his son-in-law's estate). There is much variety in these dances ranging from the foot-stamping pieces of a type familiar from his opera *The Bartered Bride* to the more lilting and sedate, perhaps more suited to elder, less energetically-minded folk!

These were among the last works completed by Smetana and in 1882 he became seriously ill. On 23 April 1884 he was taken to an asylum in Prague where he died on 12 May. He was given a hero's burial in the Vysehrad cemetery in Prague. 'For me Smetana was always a model of the purest patriotism. When he pronounced the words 'my nation', his voice vibrated and the hearts of those who heard him beat faster'. So said one of Smetana's contemporaries Ladislav Dolansky and the sentiment was echoed by many Czechs after Smetana's death.

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Radoslav Kvapil is considered by many international critics to be the finest exponent of Czech piano music. He has specialised in the performance of the Czech repertoire world-wide all through his life. His knowledge and understanding of these works remains unrivalled (cf. the *Grove Dictionary*, the *International "Who's Who in Music"*, the "Musicians' Directory", the annual *British "Music Year Book"*, the *American Biographical Institute (USA)*, the *European Biographical Directory (Belgium)*.

Kvapil was born in Brno, Moravia and was taught privately from childhood by Dr. Ludvík Kundera, Janáček's successor and Director of the Janáček Academy, where Kvapil later became a graduate. In 1967-69, Radoslav Kvapil recorded Antonín Dvořák's complete piano works for the first time in history. The complete piano works by Leoš Janáček followed and those by J.V. Voříšek in 1975. A second complete Janáček came in 1989, and in 1990, the first two volumes of Bohuslav Martinů's complete piano works (reissue of these to follow).

Between 1993-6, Unicorn-Kanchana released eight volumes of Radoslav Kvapil's comprehensive