



# Alois Hába and Slovene Students of Composition at the State Conservatory in Prague

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In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, with Czech–Slovene cultural and political connections having grown increasingly strong over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Prague became the most important centre of university education for Slovenes.<sup>1</sup> A consequence of this was that the State Conservatory in Prague, an institution founded more than a century earlier, also became increasingly attractive to Slovene students in the new cultural and political reality of the Little Entente, despite the fact that this same period saw the establishment of the conservatory of the *Glasbena matica* music society in Ljubljana (in 1919).<sup>2</sup>

For students from Slovenia, the names of illustrious teachers such as Josef Bohuslav Foerster, Vítězslav Novák, Josef Suk and Václav Talich represented a guarantee of a good musical education, while they saw greater opportunities for practical music-making in Prague, at that time unquestionably a musically more stimulating environment. Annual reports for individual academic years show that students from southern and eastern European countries predominated at the State Conservatory in Prague in the interwar period. Students came from Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria,

1 Vasilij Melik, “Češko-slovenski odnosi,” in *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, ed. Dušan Voglar (Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga, 1988), 126.

2 Tatjana Dekleva, “Ljubljanska univerza od ustanovitve do začetka devetdesetih let,” in *90. let Univerze v Ljubljani: med tradicijo in izzivi časa*, ed. Jože Ciperle (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, 2009), 36–39.

Romania, Italy, Hungary, Turkey, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later known as Yugoslavia) and of course Czechoslovakia.<sup>3</sup>

If we disregard a few individuals such as Fran Gerbič, it is not until shortly before the outbreak of the First World War that we find the first Slovene students enrolled at the State Conservatory in Prague. One of the first female Slovene concert pianists, Dana Kobler, studied at the conservatory between 1910 and 1915. Three members of the Ravnik family (Janko, Anton and Bonita) studied piano there with Josef Jiránek in roughly the same period. The names of a number of other Slovene musicians appear on the roll of the Prague conservatory during and directly after the First World War.<sup>4</sup> Notable among them are the violinists Taras Poljanec and Leon Pfeifer – the latter would later become a professor of violin at the conservatory in Ljubljana. Slovene students increasingly began to be drawn to the study of composition alongside other musical disciplines.

The first Slovene composer to study at the State Conservatory was *Slavko Osterc*, who in the decade or so following his return from Prague acted as a “bridge” between the Slovene and Czech capitals for the next generation of important Slovene composers. On arriving in Prague, he was admitted to the third (penultimate) year of the intermediate level of the State Conservatory. He was taught composition by Karel Boleslav Jiráček, instrumentation by Vítězslav Novák, musical form by Jaroslav Křička, conducting by Otakar Ostrčil, aesthetics by Václav Štěpán, and so on.<sup>5</sup> In other words by some of the leading composers of the Czech *Moderna*. From Jiráček in particular, Osterc acquired a thorough grounding in compositional technique that covered a great diversity of styles. In terms of ideas, there is no doubt that Alois Hába was the biggest influence during the period of his studies.

Like almost all composers of the interwar period, Hába resists easy classification when it comes to discussing his artistic focus or “poetics”. Nevertheless, he is remembered above all as a pioneer of microtonal mu-

3 Vlastimil Blažek, ed., *Sborník na paměť 125 let Konzervatoře hudby v Praze* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1936).

4 Josef Šebesta, “Slowenische Studenten am Prager Konservatorium in der Zeit der ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918–1938,” in *Stoletja glasbe na Slovenskem*, ed. Primož Kuret (Ljubljana: Festival Ljubljana, 2006), 168–179.

5 Danilo Pokorn, “Slavko Osterc (Prispevek za biografijo),” in *Varia musicologica*, ed. Katarina Bedina (Ljubljana: Oddelek za muzikologijo Filozofske fakultete in Slovensko muzikološko društvo, 1995), 133.

sic. The beginnings of Osterc's acquaintance with Hába coincided with the period of the latter's affirmation as a composer, when together with the pianist Erwin Schulhoff (and with the considerable assistance of the Förster company, one of the first piano makers in Czechoslovakia to build a quarter-tone piano), he gave concerts of quarter-tone music in Prague.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1920s Hába was considered a relatively marginal avant-garde figure, whose propagation of athenatic music free of motivic and thematic repetitions should, in theory, have set him far apart from the compositional approaches of the leading Czech composers of the day – Janáček, Suk, Novák and, increasingly, Martinů.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, his ideas were slowly gaining increasing attention. In 1920 he completed his first microtonal composition, the *String Quartet No 2* (op. 7), which received its premiere performance on 28 November 1922 at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. Hába returned to Prague in 1923, his head full of the ideas of Schreker and Busoni, and in September 1924 began to teach a course in quarter-tone and six-tone composition at the State Conservatory. As Lubomír Spurný notes in his foreword to the catalogue of Hába's music and writings, Hába had already published *Harmonické základy čtvrttónové soustavy* (The harmonic principles of the quarter-tone system) in Prague in 1922. This work represented the theoretical basis for his most influential work, the harmony textbook *Neue Harmonielehre des diatonischen-, chromatischen-, Viertel-, Drittel-, Sechstel- und Zwölftel-Tonsystems* (A new theory of harmony of the diatonic, chromatic, quarter-tone, third tone, sixth tone, and twelfth tone systems) published in Leipzig in 1927.<sup>8</sup> Osterc was thus one of Hába's first pupils, attending his quarter-tone composition course in as early as 1926 and 1927, in other words even before Hába was appointed a professor at the conservatory in 1934, the moment that marked the official opening of his composition class, which then continued until 1949. It would thus appear that Osterc did not have the opportunity to get to know Hába's harmony textbook during his time in Prague, and was only acquainted with it later, via his own pupils. It was a similar story with the musical poetics of Josef Suk, with whom Osterc never studied, unlike his pupils.

6 Horst-Peter Hesse, ed., *Alois Hába. Harmonielehre des diatonischen, chromatischen, Viertel-, Drittel-, Sechstel- und Zwölftel-Tonsystems (1942–1943)* (Nordstedt, 2007), 557–558.

7 The apparent polarisation between these composers and Hába is discussed in 1923 by the Czech musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý. Zdeněk Nejedlý, "O čtvrttónové hudbě," *Smetana* 13 (1923): 17–20.

8 Lubomír Spurný and Jiří Vysloužil, *Alois Hába: A Catalogue of the Music and Writings* (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press, 2010), XI.

Hába never studied with Schönberg either, although he was certainly influenced by the latter's ideas. Although in his teachings Hába constantly stressed the importance of independence, like Schönberg he developed his own micro-intervallic systems exclusively in order to develop and expand his range of expression, and in doing so "strove for the maximum and most appropriate use of the expressive possibilities of different tone systems."<sup>9</sup> He therefore went a step further in the development of the semitone system, to which he added quarter-tone, fifth-tone and sixth-tone intervals. Jiří Vysloužil explains that the period in which Arnold Schönberg and his pupils were losing the right of domicile in Austria and Germany coincided with the arrival of their music in Prague.<sup>10</sup> It could be heard at concerts and on the radio. Thanks to Hába, it was also discovered by students at the conservatory. Hába's lessons soon gained an international dimension and reputation, since as well as Osterc his students included a number of other soon-to-be highly influential composers: the Czechs Karel Reiner, Jaroslav Ježek and Karel Ančerl, the Serbs Milan Ristić, Ljubica Marić, Vojislav Vučković and Stanojlo Rajičić and the Bulgarian Konstantin Iliev. These and many other attendees of Hába's course went on to form some of the leading avant-garde movements around Europe.

In this connection, it is worth highlighting Hába's particular fondness for his Yugoslav colleagues, a fondness that was in fact shared by the majority of the Czech cultural and political community in this period. A special issue of music periodical *Tempo*, formerly *Listy Hudební matice* (produced by the Hudební Matice music publishing company) dated 16 October 1927 was entirely devoted to the music scene in Yugoslavia and included a Slavophile poem by Aleksa Šantić entitled *Nové pokolení* (New Generation).<sup>11</sup> The same issue also included a brief report on the most important Slovene composers working at that time, among them Anton Lajovic. The report ends with a mention of the fresh creative potential of Slavko Osterc, a student at the Prague conservatory. It was Lajovic, the true *spiritus agens* of Slovene music in the immediate post-war years, who intervened with Václav Talich – the first conductor of the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra – regarding Osterc's enrolment at the conservatory in Prague (where Talich taught).

In contrast to Osterc, who in the late 1920s was just beginning his career as a professional music teacher at the conservatory of the *Glasbena*

9 Jiří Vysloužil, "Alois Hába Heute," *Muzikološki zbornik* 20 (1984): 62.

10 Ibid., 57.

11 Aleksa Šantić, "Nové pokolení," *Tempo – Listy Hudební matice* 7, no. 2 (1927–28): 55–56.

*matica* in Ljubljana, Hába was increasingly establishing himself as one of the leading representatives of the Czech interwar avant-garde. He was the head of the Czech section of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) with a wide network of influential composer friends. He was also the head of the music society *Přítomnost* (The Present), which had taken the place of Novák's earlier *Spolek pro moderní hudbu* (Society for Modern Music), and an active writer who, with an enthusiasm that matched that of Osterc, wrote about the need for new musical perspectives in Prague periodicals such as *Tempo* and *Klíč* (Clew).

In the field of music education, too, Hába successfully presented a thoroughly grounded new view of old, historical facts in the textbook mentioned earlier, *Neue Harmonielehre*. This was almost literally compiled from the findings of a range of theorists. Hába believed, and admitted with total frankness, that his most important contribution lay in the “synthesis and expansion of their findings.”<sup>12</sup> He was, then, as capable and fruitful a theorist as he was a composer – something we could not claim for Osterc. In as early as 1936 Vladimír Helfert was able to talk, with justification, about a “Hába School”<sup>13</sup> in his essay *Česká moderní hudba* (Czech Modern Music), although it should be emphasised that as a teacher Hába allowed his students considerable creative freedom, and did not impose his own views of compositional technique on them. The concept of a “Hába School” may be taken on the one hand to mean a set of guiding principles of compositional technique supported by theoretical considerations, and on the other, aesthetic and ideological perspectives supported by more or less specific compositional solutions. Both were available to Hába's students – among whom, interestingly, he considered Osterc one of the most important, alongside Dragutin Čolić and Vojislav Vučković – even before the department for quarter-tone composition at the Prague conservatory officially opened in 1934. Hába's ideas about composition received particular international attention on 17 May 1931 following the Munich premiere of his quarter-tone opera *Matka* (The Mother), conducted by Hermann Scherchen.<sup>14</sup> Just three weeks later the Society for Modern Music organised a concert of quarter-tone music in Prague, at which the pianist Karel Reiner

12 Alois Hába, *Neue Harmonielehre des Diatonischen, Chromatischen, Viertel-, Drittel-, Sechstel und Zwölftel-Tonsystems* (Leipzig: F. Kistner & C.F.W. Siegel, 1927), 12.

13 Vladimír Helfert, *Česká moderní hudba: Studie o české hudební tvořivosti* (Olomouc: Index, 1936), 155–158.

14 Vlasta Reittererová and Lubomír Spurný, “»Musik am Rande«. Einige Bemerkungen zur Typologie der Musik von Alois Hába,” *Muzikološki zbornik* 47, no. 1 (2011): 161.

performed Osterc's *Preludij za četrttonski klavir* (Prelude for quarter-tone piano), among other works.<sup>15</sup> An indication that quarter-tone composition was never at the forefront of Osterc's compositional endeavours but was instead a more or less academic or occasional pursuit, much as it was with other composers of quarter-tone music, comes from the fact that Osterc only composed two other works using this system: *Štiri Heinejeve pesmi za glas in godalni kvartet* (Four Poems by Heine for voice and string quartet, 1931) and the cantata *Cvetoči bezeg za alt, zbor in devet instrumentov* (The Blossoming Elder for alto, choir and nine instruments, 1936).

Despite the increasingly evident honing of his compositional style following his return from Prague, where it was "Hába who played a decisive role in the final stylistic transformation of Osterc the modernist,"<sup>16</sup> we could analyse in detail practically any of Osterc's constructs from his Ljubljana period, including the most radical, namely the central movement of his *Koncert za klavir in pihala* (Concerto for piano and wind instruments), written in 1933 and dedicated to Hába, and discover in every case that in compositional terms he was building from what we might call consistent inconsistency. Although Hába praises Osterc for the "fine concerto", which he listened to and which was even analysed at school, he simultaneously exhorts him to write sequences in an athematic style and advises him to compose a uniformly atonal and athematic piece of a kind he has not yet written, but which he is capable of writing.<sup>17</sup> Yet even Osterc's works continued to show, rather than a consistent athematic and atonal style, a tension between neoclassicist technique and expressionist language that became quite typical of his work in the 1930s. For this reason, many researchers draw attention to the composer's inability to "elaborate a solid compositional system".<sup>18</sup> From this point of view, it would therefore be difficult to credit him with having attended the "Hába School". Even as a teacher or music theorist, he limited himself to merely indicating certain new developments, for example in his correspondence school with Pahor or in his unpublished *Kromatika in modulacija* (Chromatics and Modulation), despite the fact

15 The original title of the work was *Tri skladbe za četrttonski klavir* (Three pieces for quarter-tone piano). Osterc then renamed it *Preludij in fuga* (Prelude and Fugue) but never completed it, with the exception of the prelude. NUK, Glasbena zbirka [National and University Library, Music Collection].

16 Gregor Pompe, "Glasba slovenske poveljne moderne (1918–1927)," *De musica disse-randa* 12, no. 2 (2016): 42.

17 Dragotin Cvetko, *Fragment glasbene moderne: iz pisem Slavku Ostercu* (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1988), 189.

18 Leon Stefanija, "Osterc in Hába," *Muzikološki zbornik* 31 (1995): 33.

that his conception of study was as free as possible. The syllabus and traditional forms were, for him, merely a framework which he filled in with his own judgements. He did not even teach his students detailed rules of composition, preferring to give free rein to their individual creative fantasy.

It is the systematic nature of justification that thus appears to be one of the principal differences between Hába and Osterc, reflected both in their compositions and in their writings. Hába was not, of course, Osterc's only model. Even after his return from Prague, Osterc frequently emphasised his ideological orientation based on "creative intuitions" or "free expression" that would not allow him to follow any kind of authority: "Now it is the duty of the young generation to break with Petrushka, when the ideology of Schönberg, Berg and Hába is already getting old, and it is the duty of the youngest to break with Schönberg and the others." And further: "Music has even greater possibilities of development!"<sup>19</sup> It is evident from these quotations that for Osterc the most important signpost in creative work was the retreat from the existing or the "new", although he never succeeded in defining it entirely unambiguously, either compositionally or theoretically. He was thus above all someone who spoke about the new, and less a creator of the new – something pointed out by Leon Stefanija in his article *Osterc in Hába* (Osterc and Hába).<sup>20</sup>

Shortly after his return from Prague in 1927, Osterc succeeded in gathering around himself a generation of younger composers who, as a result of his later contacts with Hába, would go on to study in Prague. They have become known as the "Osterc School", although apart from a commitment to predominantly instrumental music, it would be difficult to attribute a common artistic focus to them.

Osterc's first successor in Prague was *Srečko Koporc*, who graduated in composition under Rudolf Karel, a former student of Dvořák's, in 1929. Although Koporc did not compose even a single quarter-tone piece, he clearly became very familiar with Hába's teachings in Prague, as demonstrated by his exact description of Hába's teaching in an article entitled *Alois Hába in njegova četrttonska teorija* (Alois Hába and his quarter-tone theory) published in *Cerkveni glasbenik* (Church Musician) in 1928.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that, following his return from the Czech capital, Koporc produced a

19 Slavko Osterc, *Zvuk* 3, no. 6 (1935): 191.

20 Stefanija, "Osterc in Hába," 33–41.

21 Srečko Koporc, "Alois Hába in njegova četrttonska teorija (Črtica ob priliki izdane knjige: Neue Harmonielehre)," *Cerkveni glasbenik* 51, no. 7–8 (1928): 111–112.

considerable body of theoretical writings based on his studies in Prague. Among other things this includes notes on dodecaphonic composition under the significant title *Skrivnost dvanajstih tonov* (The secret of the twelve notes),<sup>22</sup> which demonstrates Koporc's familiarity with the most modern foreign music theory literature of the day. In these notes Koporc even cites Hába's *Neue Harmonielehre*, despite having been quite critical of it in his earlier *Cerkveni glasbenik* article, published immediately after completing his studies in Prague, in which he describes Hába's theory as "primitive"<sup>23</sup>. Though he provides no argument at all to support this label, Koporc's rich legacy of writings on music theory is evidence that – thanks to his studies in Prague – he was among the more broad-minded Slovene authors working in the field of music theory in the period between the wars.

*Marijan Kozina* studied at the conservatory in Prague in almost the same period as Koporc, although unlike the composers mentioned earlier, he did not attend Hába's course. Predominantly bound to the Romantic tradition, Kozina studied composition with Josef Suk from 1930 to 1932.<sup>24</sup> Alongside Hába, Suk was the biggest influence on Slovene students of composition in Prague. All Osterc's later students studied with Suk, who – unlike Osterc – put the artistic value of a work ahead of everything else. This, of course, contrasted with Osterc's avant-garde endeavours advocating the radically new in the composition without logical connection and coherence. Suk's teaching and theoretical work deserve more attention if we are to obtain a more complete picture of the influences of the "Prague School" in terms of ideas and compositional techniques.

One of the first students to attend Hába's course in quarter-tone composition at the State Conservatory in Prague was the pianist and composer *Marijan Lipovšek*, who enrolled in the master's course at the conservatory in 1932, studying composition with Josef Suk and piano with Vilém Kurz (as a private student), at the same time as attending Hába's lessons on quarter-tone composition and reporting on them periodically to Osterc. It is worth emphasising that Lipovšek, after completing his single year of studies in Prague, did not adopt the ideological views of the "Hába School" as

22 Srečko Koporc, *Skrivnost dvanajstih tonov* (Ljubljana: ms., 1957), NUK, Glasbena zbirka [National and University Library, Music Collection].

23 Koporc, "Alois Hába in njegova četrtonska teorija", 111.

24 For the diploma examination, he submitted his *Suita za veliki orkester* (Suite for large orchestra). He did not, however, officially complete his training at the conservatory and too many absences meant that he had to leave. Šebesta, "Slowenische Studenten am Prager Konservatorium," 176.

Osterc's later students did, nor did these cause significant stylistic changes in his work following his return to Ljubljana.<sup>25</sup>

One composer who more closely approached Hába's views in some of his post-Prague works was Osterc's first graduate, *Pavel Šivic*. Šivic was said to have "adopted expression in Prague",<sup>26</sup> where he studied between 1931 and 1933. Certain structural changes in Šivic's compositional style following his studies in Prague would appear to confirm this thesis. Another consequence of his Prague studies would appear to be what, in the Slovene music of the time, was a more or less isolated example of the use of the dodecaphonic technique in the form of a series of twelve-note studies entitled *Mala klavirska suita* (Little Piano Suite), written in 1937. Even here, however, we can only really talk about an attempt at twelve-note composition. The work that most recalls the twelve-note approach, albeit somewhat ironically, is his *Romantična fantazija* (Romantic Fantasia) for piano. It seems important to underline the fact that in 1933, as well as attending Hába's course, Šivic also completed his composition studies with Josef Suk<sup>27</sup> and his piano studies with Vilém Kurz.<sup>28</sup>

Osterc's "favourite" student *Franc Šturm* also studied with Josef Suk and Alois Hába at the conservatory in Prague from 1933 to 1935, following three years of study with Osterc. He was the only Slovene composer who continued to apply Hába's quarter-tone solutions in his own compositions following his return from Prague. Šturm's work in fact reveals a new kind of creative desire, already evident in his 1934 *Fantazija za orgle* (Fantasia for organ) and supported by a series of works composed during his two years in Prague, several of them written using the quarter-tone system. These early works of Šturm's are characterised by athematism and an atonality that is more consistent than Osterc's. Even in the *Fantasia for organ*, which begins with a veritable explosion in the form of eleven different notes (with repetitions) over a dissonant chord, he uses the characteristic technique of adding an accidental for each note as it occurs, without natural signs. It is, then, a kind of attempt at a dissonant honing with a filling of the chromatic

25 Lipovšek is described as being "focused on the objectivity of neoclassicism and, initially, even a narrower neo-baroque" right up until the start of the Second World War. Ivan Klemenčič, *Slovenski glasbeni ekspresionizem* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1988), 119.

26 *Ibid.*, 145.

27 For the diploma examination, he submitted his *Godalni kvartet* (String Quartet). Šebesta, "Slowenische Studenten am Prager Konservatorium", 171.

28 For the diploma examination, he performed Liszt's *Piano Concerto No 2 in A major*. *Ibid.*

space, although again without Schönberg's dodecaphonic system. In a letter to Osterc dated 25 March 1934 Šturm himself writes: "Hába said that I have [...] arrived at a composition that resounds, and that I am to be congratulated."<sup>29</sup> He admits that he struggled for an entire year with this composition, without achieving much else. Hába's influence is also evident in numerous quarter-tone compositions, among them the *Četrtrttonski godalni kvartet* (Quarter-tone String Quartet) that he submitted for his diploma examination.<sup>30</sup> Another interesting work written in Prague is his suite in four movements for quarter-tone piano entitled *Luftballon*, to which he gave the opus number 3. In Šturm's case, just as with Osterc, it is possible to detect an intention to renounce his pre-Prague works.

Another factor that seems extremely important with regard to the continuity of Šturm's later focuses as a composer is that his creative ideals were more or less clearly developed during his time in Prague. If in the aforementioned letter to Osterc he had expressed a negative view of the neo-classicism he previously espoused, in the article *Glasba kot socialni činitelj* (Music as a social factor), which appeared in *Sodobnost* (Modernity) in 1935, he is an adherent of anthroposophy – something Hába had constantly promoted – and claims, with the system's founder Rudolf Steiner: "Music is the inner image of man."<sup>31</sup> Thus he accepts the view of living and organic music that the listener primarily experiences at the emotional level, where it "configures his soul."<sup>32</sup> Like Steiner, he is aware that all social, existential and spiritual processes of the age are reflected in art, so the social aspect is important to him – hence the need for such music to be addressed to "the broad masses."<sup>33</sup> In accordance with his left-wing views, which were incidentally shared by Osterc, he aimed at a working-class audience, while the bourgeois audience was considered less than ideal in that it was "burdened by the partial, frequently inadequate knowledge of music theory and [...] a mass of personal prejudices."<sup>34</sup> Subjectivism is thus no longer the exclusive basic emotion. Here Šturm distances himself from Schönberg, in whom the idea and execution of a composition was a matter of intuition and inspira-

29 Cvetko, *Fragment glasbene moderne*, 337.

30 At the end of the year he was given the overall assessment "highly capable". Šebesta, "Slowenische Studenten am Prager Konservatorium," 171.

31 Franc Šturm, "Glasba kot socialni činitelj," *Sodobnost* 3, no. 11–12 (1935): 581.

32 Ibid., 582.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

tion, and only realised with the help of compositional technique as a craft and a mental process.

Hába's views were presented more comprehensively to the Slovene public in 1935 by *Ivan Pučnik*, at that time a student of Hába's, in a special interview with the composer published in the newspaper *Jutro* (Morning).<sup>35</sup> He portrayed Hába as an advocate of the radically new and, at the same time, as a sensitive artist who, as such, was aware of his special task. Almost entirely overlooked in writings on the history of Slovene music, Pučnik is today better known as an agitator than as a composer. Unlike his fellow composers in Prague, Pučnik had received no formal musical training, and was thus unable to enrol in Osterc's composition class. Having enrolled as a law student in Prague in 1934, he later studied composition with Alois Hába, who had previously prepared him privately for the conservatory entrance exam. As he writes in one of his letters to Šturm: "I tell you frankly that I hate all schools and the only thing that is keeping me in Prague and at the conservatory is Hába, who gives me something immense with every lesson."<sup>36</sup> During his years in Prague he formed close friendships with Franc Šturm and Demetrij Žebre, both of whom were studying there in the same period. Despite the reverence he had for Osterc, he believed that the time had come for radical changes. Together with Šturm he even planned to found an independent group of composers that would mark a new direction and stir up the Slovene music scene.

Pučnik completed several compositions while studying in Prague, including settings of three poems from Kocbek's first poetry collection *Zemlja* (Earth). In 1936 he completed a fantasia for chamber orchestra entitled *Živim z zemljo* (I live with the Earth) in a more or less consistently atonal style. He is also believed to have written his *Četrtrtonski kvartet s sopranom* (Quarter-tone Quartet with soprano) and *Šestinotonska fantazija za solo violo* (Sixth-tone Fantasia for solo viola) in this period.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, the fate of the remainder of the composer's legacy is unknown. The years of Pučnik's big musical plans and revolutionary ideas were eventually substituted, at the instigation of his parents, by medical studies in Zagreb, after which he enjoyed an enviable career as a pulmonologist at Golnik Hospital.

35 Ivan Pučnik, "Alois Hába," *Jutro*, no. 135 (13. 6. 1935): 7.

36 Katarina Bedina, "Nova najdba iz pisem Francu Šturmu," *Muzikološki zbornik* 21 (1985): 93.

37 *Ibid.*, 90, 92.

The last of Osterc's students to go on to study at the master's level at the State Conservatory in Prague was *Demetrij Žebre*. Interestingly, Žebre arrived at his short-lived but surprisingly early and radical beginnings in a distinctively expressionist style in 1928, a full year before he began studying with Osterc. Where he found the inspiration for such a highly contemporary sound world characterised by harsh dissonance and extratonal effects, for example in early songs such as *Tepežnica* (Holy Innocents' Day), written in 1928, and *Trije samospevi* (Three Lieder), settings of texts by Župančič written a year later, remains an open question. Few of Žebre's works, however, are susceptible to easy stylistic definition, even if we know that he studied with Slavko Osterc (1929–1934), Josef Suk (1934–1935)<sup>38</sup> and Alois Hába<sup>39</sup>, while also studying conducting with Václav Talich. Uniformity of style may most easily be identified in his predominantly expressionistically conceived quarter-tone compositions, lieder and chamber works, and in the clearly impressionistic *Tri vizije za simfonični orkester* (Three Visions for symphony orchestra).

One of the two central branches of the Slovene avant-garde movement between the wars was thus far from being clearly categorisable, either in compositional terms or in terms of ideas. Lipovšek can certainly not be included in it. Šturm and Pučnik, influenced by Hába's most advanced ideas, later wished to liberate themselves from Osterc, the movement's central figure, to form an independently functioning group, although because of Šturm's reservations this did not actually happen.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand Marijan Lipovšek, Pavel Šivic, Franc Šturm and Demetrij Žebre all studied with Osterc when the latter was still largely oriented towards the neo-baroque, neoclassicism and new objectivity. This means that more decisive artistic and technical stimulations can only have come from their studies in Prague, particularly with Hába, who, like Osterc, allowed his students a relatively large degree of creative freedom.

It is worth emphasising here that the majority of compositions written by Slovene students in Prague do not use the quarter-tone system, although a gradual sharpening of musical language is nevertheless observable in

38 For his diploma, he submitted his *Godalni kvartet* (String Quartet) to Suk. Šebesta, "Slovenische Studenten am Prager Konservatorium," 171.

39 He is thought to have submitted one of his quarter-tone compositions to Hába for his diploma examination. At the end of the year he was given the overall assessment "highly capable". Ibid., 172.

40 Klemenčič, *Slovenski glasbeni ekspresionizem*, 119, 141.

them. Musical composition thus arrives at the limit of traditional means of expression, which are intensified to their extreme point, although it rarely crosses the threshold of atonality and hardly ever subordinates itself to consistent constructivist logic. Like the majority of their contemporaries, Slovene composers adapted constructivist procedures in a fairly original manner, and like them did not feel the need for a consistent use of atonality. Accordingly, it was perhaps above all Josef Suk's extremely liberal "systematic openness" that influenced the still prevailing polystylistic synthesis with various characteristic emphases. The fact that Suk's composition class, unlike Hába's optional one-year course in quarter-tone composition, took place at the master's level of the conservatory, which all of Osterc's former students with the exception of Pučnik attended for least two years, should certainly not be overlooked. The possibility of other influences, in terms of ideas and techniques, on the creation of individual works should certainly also be admitted. One less known and certainly overlooked influence is the composition by Karel Boleslav Jiráček and Otakar Šín, with which Slovene students in Prague were undoubtedly very familiar, like practically all students of composition. Whatever label we might be tempted to give to individual compositions by Slovene students in Prague, it would probably soon become apparent that when describing their compositions we need to treat individual structural elements separately, since they are usually a combination of diverse elements of compositional technique and only contribute to a single whole when put together.

To what extent, then, when considering later works by Slovene composers who studied composition in Prague, is it even possible to talk about a "Hába School"? In what aspect of these works is this apparent? Or is this not perhaps something that only really exists on paper, even when it comes to the works of some of Hába's other students, as Lubomír Spurný demonstrates in his article *Hába School – Reality or Myth?*<sup>41</sup> Be that as it may, it would be hard to deny that a certain influence of Hába is perceptible in individual post-Prague works by Slovene students from the State Conservatory in Prague, an influence that is apparent above all in the more or less consistent athematism and atonality of individual compositions – as well as in the honing of ideological views and in individual studies and other occasional works using the quarter-tone system.

41 Lubomír Spurný, "Hába School - Reality or Myth?," in *Spaces of Modernism: Ljubica Marić in Context*, ed. Dejan Despić and Melita Milin (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and the Arts, 2010), 135–142.

Only with the help of a more precise definition of the individual structural elements and techniques that condition the style of the compositions in question (and not vice versa), the emphases of which then changed following the return of their composers from Prague, under the influence of time and environment, will we succeed in arriving at some more relevant conclusions. Until then, discussion of the works of the composers in question will probably continue to be dominated by unhelpful stylistic generalisations and comparisons with more or less incomparable or even non-existent pinnacles of contemporary European musical creativity which are the origin of that myth – so characteristic of Slovene musical historiography – of the eternal backwardness or reactionary nature of musical creativity in Slovenia.

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