

## KAREL JANOVICKÝ

by Dr David C. F. Wright

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Karel Janovický is a pseudonym of Bohuš František Šimsa. He was born on 18 February 1930 in Plzeň (Pilsen), then in Czechoslovakia. His father, Bohuslav Šimsa, born 18 January 1900 and died on 26 August 1974, was a master tailor and, later, an opera singer, a baritone soloist in the Pilsen opera from 1935-1948. He was interested in amateur theatre which led to his career in opera. Karel's mother was born Marie Dobrá on 1 February 1907 and was a dressmaker. She was also interested in opera and the Sokol gymnastics association. She died on 16 September 1970.



At the time of Karel's birth, the family lived at 7 Přemyslova ulice. He attended the primary school at the Pedagogical Institute and then the secondary school, the Reálné Gymnasium where he graduated in 1949.

He was about five years old when he had his first piano and theory lessons with Josef Hásek and, later, had lessons with Oldřich Filipovský and also studied composition with Josef Bartovský. From 1951 to 1954 he studied at the Surrey College of Music in Ewell in England.. His piano teacher was Percy Turnbull and he was tutored in chamber music with Jan Sedivka. Janovický first earned his RAM, RCM and L(Mus)TCL diplomas, and his M. Mus at RCM in 1956.

From a young age, he had accompanied his father in his singing of Lieder and arias and watched opera from the wings from early childhood. Due to growing up during World War II and living under German occupation, he was drawn to Tolstoy's epic novel, War and Peace. He had wanted to enrol at the Prague Academy to study conducting but was rejected as unsuitable because the Communists were now in control and his class and his political origin were unacceptable, and so his exile came about in October 1949.

Because Czechoslovakia was under the Communists from 1948 anyone who were middle class or had capital or a business were not compatible with the ideology of oppressive Communism and were treated with suspicion. This is why Karel was rejected by the Prague Academy and why he was to use a pseudonym so as to prevent any danger or threat to his parents back home in Czechoslovakia. In the 1930s many people fled from the Nazi terror and changed their names to protect themselves, particularly if they were Jewish.

The 1950s in Czechoslovakia was an era of harsh repression and decline as Communist economic policies nearly bankrupted the country. Many people were imprisoned and hundreds were executed or died in prison, often for little more than belief in democracy. The Soviet leaders unable to allow a democratic society had their armies invade Czechoslovakia in 1968 which put down Dubček and his fight for reform.. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia ended communist rule.

But to return to earlier days. One of Karel's first compositions was a Piano Trio in A flat for piano, violin and viola performed at his secondary school in which his arts professor took the viola part.

He developed a wide appreciation of music. He has said that Monteverdi stepped out of the constraints of vocal polyphony and that Mozart was a great influence on Czech music generally. Schubert impressed Karel, particularly the Lieder and the Octet. One of his teachers, Mátyás Seiber, confirmed the mastery of Haydn and Beethoven. Having accompanied many string players in works by Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart and Debussy, Karel grew to know and admire such works particularly in Jan Sedivka's master classes and with the cellist Sela Trau. Janovický admires his compatriot Mahler and values the theatrical works of Britten. But it was Janáček and Bartók who opened new paths of harmony and rhythm for him. Janovický

admires Schoenberg and has read and re read his book on harmony. Martinů was for a long time a puzzle to critics but his music is lovely, original and enjoyable both to sing and play. He finds the Field Mass deeply felt and admires Gilgamesh, the Madrigals and other works.

He is not a smoker and is teetotal. He used to take his family on hiking and camping holidays mostly in the Scottish mountains, the Lake District and Wales. He enjoys gardening. He is fond of animals, especially Tibetan terriers. His present one is called Molly. He takes an interest in politics, economics and the practice of philosophy.

He married Sylva Maiwaldová on 22 May 1950 in Nuremberg while they were refugees for about 15 months. They have two children, Cyril, born 24 January 1960 and Debora born 19 January 1962. Sylva is very knowledgeable on recent Czech history.

After working freelance as a performer and musician for about ten years, Karel took up a post as a producer on the gramophone department of the BBC, and then worked for Czechoslovakian service of the BBC World Service. For about 27 years between 1963 and 1990 he composed little as other demands were made upon him.

In recent years, Janovický has become a committee member of the Dvořák Society and of the Emmy Destinn Foundation and the Emmy Destinn Competition for young singers. He is an instructor for the Fons courses for young people in Czech Republic since 1991. These are voluntary posts. He has written many articles and edited and made a new translation of Jaroslav Vogel's biography of Janáček (Orbis Publishing, London 1981) which has a foreword by Sir Charles Mackerras.

He has given sterling work teaching the BBC Singers and other English singers and groups in the Czech language, particularly in forthcoming productions of works by such composers as Janáček and Martinů. He returned to Czechoslovakia in 1990 for the first time in 40 years.

He is a highly intelligent and very kind man, generous, courteous and self-assuming. Conversations with him are always uplifting.

His works include:

- Trio in A flat for violin, viola and piano (1948)
- Sattassai for narrator and piano (1948)
- Three songs for baritone and piano (1948)
- Third Sonata for piano (1948)
- Two Songs for soprano and piano (1948)
- Praeludium and Fugue for piano, four hands (1949)
- Silver Heron for SATB a cappella (1949)
- Three Songs for SATB a cappella (1949)
- Three Part Inventions for organ (1949-50)
- Spring Sonata for piano and women's voices (1953)
- Canon from Dhamappadam for voices (1949)
- Ej, láska, láska, Czech folk-song for SATB a cappella (1949), revised for SSA (2010)
- Fugue and Canon on a Christmas carol for piano (1950)
- Quartet for strings (1951)
- Ever in my heart have I sought thee, for women's chorus, strings and piano (1951)
- Sinfonietta for strings (1951)
- Sonatina in C for piano (1951)
- Canons for three voices a cappella from the Dhamapaddam (1951)
- Fifth Piano Sonata (1951)
- Sixth Piano Sonata (1951)
- Seventh Sonata for piano (1951)
- Aubade (A song of early morning) for soprano, piano and strings (1951)

Symphony (1951) (dedicated to Rafael Kubelík)  
Nine songs for alto, violin and piano, from Chinese poetry (1952)  
Twelve Sentiments, a suite for piano Op 1 (1952)  
Piano Concerto Op 2 (1952)  
Sonatina for piano Op 3 (1952)  
Sinfonietta for full orchestra Op 5 (1952)  
Piano Trio Op 6 (1953)  
Songs of Czechoslovakia for voice and piano (1953) (to English translation by C.K. Offer)  
Variations on a theme of Brigadier H Smith for piano Op 7 (1953) (Gaudeamus Foundation Prize)  
Sonata for two violins and piano Op 8 (1953) (Placed on Society for the Promotion of New Music recommended list)  
Four Impromptus on Czech Christmas carols for violin and piano Op 9 (1953)  
Sonatina for violin, cello and piano (1953)  
Concerto for violin and strings Op 10 (1954)  
Sonata for cello and piano Op 11 (1954)  
Sonata for viola and piano Op 12 (1955)  
Sonata for violin and piano Op 13 (1955)  
Sonata for piano Op 14 (1955)  
Quintet for flute and string quartet Op 15 (1956)  
Variations on a theme of Robert Johnson for orchestra Op 17 (1956) (winner of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra "Garland for Shakespeare" competition)  
Concerto for organ, brass, timpani and strings Op 18 (1957)  
Terzinas for violin and piano Op 19 (1957)  
Capriccio and Passacaglia for orchestra Op 20 (1957)  
Prometheus, incidental music for voices, flute and timpani (1958)  
Terzinas for two violins Op 21 (1958)  
The Utmost Sail Op 22, a science fiction opera in one act (1958) to a libretto by Karel Brušák  
Twelve Peasant carols from Moravia for voice and piano (1958) to English translation by C.K. Offer  
Quartet for strings Op 23 (1959)  
Music to Marylane Productions (TV documentaries) (1963)  
Terzina for three recorders Op 25 (1963)  
Variations for violin and piano Op 12b based on theme from second movement of Viola Sonata op 12  
Terzina for viola and piano (1978)  
Three Cambridge Songs for soprano and piano (1981) to poems by Cyril Šimsa and Karel Brušák  
Sonata for guitar (Tre Terzine per Chitarra) (1984)  
Sonata for bass clarinet and piano (1984)  
Terzina for violin and piano (1988)  
Sonata for cello solo (1989)  
Duo for two cellos (1990)  
Sonata for bassett horn and piano (1991) (see revision for viola and piano, 2008)  
String Quartet no. 1 (1992)  
Piano Sonata no. 1 (1993)  
Variations on 'For he's a jolly good fellow' for piano: 'Czech composers contemplate their good friend, Graham Melville-Mason' (1993)  
Fantasy for organ (1994) and Fantasy no. 2 for organ (1998)  
String Quartet no. 2 (1995)  
Passages of Flight, five songs for soprano and piano to poems by Richard Robbins (1995) (on CD OLIVERIUS OL 0005-2, 1996)  
Songs of Autumn for SATB to texts by Ivan Jelínek (1995)  
All Kind of Plonkybes, children's pieces for piano (1963-72 revised 1996)

Songs of Eurydice, six songs for mezzo and piano (1996) (in Czech to poems by Olga Štěpánová)  
Tango for time out of mind, concert piece for piano (1996)  
Saxophone Quartet (1996)  
Ave Maria for SATB (1996)  
String Quartet no. 3 (1997)  
In Joyful Freedom, Christmas carol for SATB and organ (ad lib) (1997) to words by Richard Robbins  
A Bed of Roses, seven songs for high voice and piano to poems by Richard Robbins (1998)  
Sonata for alto saxophone and piano (1998) (published by Rosewood Publications)  
Quartet for flute, oboe, guitar (or keyboards) and cello (1998)  
Sonata no. 1 for violin and piano (1999)  
Sonata for harp (2000) (on CD ArcoDiva UP 0081-2, 2005)  
Clarinet Quartet (2000)  
Concerto for strings (2002)  
In Praise of Rossini, Variations on 'Ecco ridente in cielo' for flute and piano (2001)  
The Corner of my eye, six songs for medium voice and piano to poems by Richard Robbins (2002)  
Prelude and double fugue for string quartet or string orchestra on themes from operas by Smetana and Dvořák (2005)  
Symphony (2004)  
Duo for violin and bassoon (2004) and Duo no. 2 for violin and bassoon (2006)  
Sonata for bassoon and piano (2005)  
Piano Sonata no. 2 (2005)  
Piano Trio no. 2 (2005)  
Nine Limericks for speakers and instruments (2006)  
String Quartet no. 4 (2006)  
Piano Sonata no. 3 (2006)  
Sonata for violin and piano no. 2 (2007)  
Sonata for viola and piano (2008) (revised version of bassett horn sonata)  
Tak jsem sobě počal chutně spáti, Czech carol for SATB a cappella and narrator (2008)  
Ballads, Laments and Reels, four impromptus on Scottish airs for violin, cello and percussion (2008)  
Impromptus on old Scottish airs for recorder and harpsichord (2008) (published by Peacock Press 2010)  
Fantasy for piano and string orchestra on motives from Dvořák's Biblical songs (2009)  
Four Wordsworth songs for baritone and strings (2009)  
Angles of Light, four songs for medium voice and piano to poems by George Szirtes (2010)  
Rain Songs for soprano, treble recorder and piano to poems by George Szirtes (2010)  
Bodaj by vás, vy mládenci, Slovak folk-song for SSA a capella (2010)

Interview with the composer in "Czech Music in the Web of Life" by Jana Marhounová, trsl. Deryck E. Viney, Empatie, Prague, 1993.

"Svět hudby na plátně doby" by Jana Marhounová (in Czech), Empatie, Prague, 1993.

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