

**Communicating Meaning in Petr Eben's *Písně nelaskavé*: A Performance
Perspective**

by

Molly Margaret Adams-Toomey

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Signed: Molly Adams-Toomey

(Candidate) ID No.: 937173

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	v
A Note on Translations	vi
Recordings	vi
Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
1.1 Rationale for Research	1
1.2 Literature Review	5
1.3 Cultural Musicology, Musical Meaning and Petr Eben	10
1.3.1 Cultural Musicology and Musical Meaning	10
1.3.2 Communism and Meaning in the Music of Petr Eben	18
Chapter 2 – Biography of Petr Eben	25
2.1 Introduction and Early Life	25
2.2 World War II	28
2.3 The Rise of Communism	32
2.4 Communication in Petr Eben’s Music	36
2.5 Travels and Later Life	38
Chapter 3 – Musical Style and Influences	41
3.1 Form and Structure	43
3.2 The Organ and Improvisation	44
3.3 Gregorian Chant	46
3.4 Czech Folk Music	47
3.5 Melody	48
3.6 Harmony	49
3.7 Rhythm	50
3.8 Text	51
3.9 Conclusion	54

Chapter 4 – <i>Písně nelaskavé</i>	55
4.1 Overview	55
4.2 Musical Analysis and Performance of <i>Písně nelaskavé</i>	64
4.2.1 Zed'	64
4.2.2 Ròzchod	76
4.2.3 Na příklad	86
4.2.4 Když mrtví se setkáme	99
4.2.5 Anno Domini MCMXXI	106
4.2.6 Stesk	118
Conclusion	125
Bibliography	130
Discography	133

Abstract

Czech composer Petr Eben (1929-2007) was an important contributor to art music of the Czech Republic. He was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp during World War II and lived under an oppressive Communist government thereafter until 1989. Eben was Catholic, and his desire to express spiritual concepts in his music despite the government's restriction on the expression of religion led to his belief that music must communicate a message.

Due to the past difficulty of musical exchange between Western countries and Eastern Europe as a result of Communist censorship, Eben as a composer is not as well-known in Western countries as he is in the Czech Republic. Much of the published material on Eben originates in the Czech Republic and is available in Czech or German. However, there is rising interest in Eben scholarship in Western countries, and several recent dissertations and articles have been written in English on his works. The majority of these focus on Eben's compositions for organ, the instrument with which he is most associated. Of those that focus on his vocal works, only one analyses a composition by Eben for solo voice.

This dissertation addresses the lack of scholarship on Eben's solo vocal works by discussing the communicative nature of Eben's song cycle *Písně nelaskavé* (*Loveless Songs*). It does this by first describing the contextual circumstances in Eben's life which shaped the composition of *Písně nelaskavé* and influenced the musical messages that can be found in the cycle. It then discusses *Písně nelaskavé* from a performance perspective and provides an analysis and performance interpretation of the song cycle. It demonstrates the way in which Eben's musical style facilitates

clarity in communicating meaning through a performance interpretation, promoting accessibility to varied audiences.

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A Note on Translations

All of the translations in this dissertation are the author's own, save where otherwise noted. These include translations from both Czech and German. This applies to the translation of the Czech foreword to Petr Eben's song cycle *Písně nelaskavé*, the translations from the Czech lyrics of each song in *Písně nelaskavé* (some of which were themselves translations from other languages), translations from Kateřina Vondrovicová's biography on Petr Eben which was written originally in Czech, and the translations from German of Petr Eben's speeches in Darmstadt (1993) and at Charles University (1994). These speeches were included in German in Johannes Landgren's dissertation 'Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben's Organ Works.'

Recordings

The recordings of Petr Eben's song cycle *Písně nelaskavé* included to supplement this dissertation were recorded at the Royal Irish Academy of Music on 6 April 2022.

Mezzo-Soprano: Molly Adams-Toomey

Piano: Grainne Dunne

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale for Research

Petr Eben (1929-2007) was a Czech composer whose unique and passionate musical language marked him as a distinctive figure in art music of the Czech Republic. His compositions include music of several genres, ranging from organ works to choral music, Czech folk song arrangements, song cycles for solo voice, oratorio, ballet, and a church opera. A driving force behind Eben's compositions was his desire to communicate specific messages to his audiences, messages which often revolved around spiritual or philosophical themes. Eben's conception of music as a means of communication arose from his experience of the difficult political circumstances in former Czechoslovakia, circumstances in which he lived for the majority of his life. The political situations in his home country caused Eben to face severe hardship throughout his life and career. He endured isolation as a child due to his Jewish heritage during a time of Nazi occupation in former Czechoslovakia. He was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp, and survived hard labour and the constant confrontation of death. He then subsequently lived under the oppressive Communist government which gained a hold in Czechoslovakia following the fall of the Nazi regime. Rather than stifling Eben's musical creativity, these experiences solidified in Eben the drive to embed messages in his music on themes which were often condemned or forbidden by the Communist government. Foremost among these themes were references to spiritual thought and the Catholic faith, a faith which was a strong motivator for Eben's composition. He would also use his music as a means of empathising with and connecting with others of his country who were enduring the same political circumstances.

It follows that any performance of Eben's works must take into account the messages and themes he strove to convey through his music. It is therefore necessary for a performer of Eben's works to consider the methods in which such messages may be expressed when crafting an artistic interpretation of the music. This dissertation focuses on the ways in which Eben's messages are expressed through his compositional methods, and how these methods facilitate ease for the performer in creating a comprehensible and meaningful interpretation of these messages. Eben created a musical language which emphasises clarity of meaning and intensity of emotion. This aids the performer in creating an interpretation which conveys Eben's intended themes in ways that are easily coherent to a given audience. Eben's compositional methods are described and analysed within this dissertation. This highlights how a thorough understanding of his specific musical language aids a performer in gaining an insight into Eben's use of music as a communicative medium. Eben's use of music to communicate messages is here explored specifically through one of his solo vocal song cycles: *Písně nelaskavé* or *Loveless Songs*, composed in 1963. As the author is a singer, the performance interpretation that is described is the author's own. While this means that the interpretation of Eben's music offered is subjective, it is intentionally so. The description of the author's experience in interpreting *Písně nelaskavé* is presented as indicative of the fact that a performer's individual perspective can build upon Eben's musical guidance to create a unique and dynamic performance that remains faithful to his intent.

An additional factor in the choice of the song cycle *Písně nelaskavé* as the focus of this dissertation is the relatively small amount of scholarship in the English language on Eben's works. While Eben is recognised as a vital contributor to Czech art music in his own country, his work is less well-known in Western countries. This is due in

no small part to the fact that Eben spent much of his life under a restrictive Communist government. Eben, a devout Roman Catholic, had refused to become a Party member as this would have meant giving up his faith. Consequently, his music was often withheld from publication outside of former Czechoslovakia. Copies of Eben's music often proved difficult to obtain. In addition, Eben's ability to travel abroad and hold concerts outside of his home country was heavily restricted by the Party authorities. It was only after the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the Communist regime's loss of power in Czechoslovakia that Eben was able to travel easily and to promote and publish his music freely. This meant that only recently have performers and scholars outside of the Czech Republic become more familiar with Eben's music. After Eben's death in 2007, his friends and former colleagues have worked to promote his music, causing a growing interest in his compositions by scholars and performers alike. More studies of his works are now being made and Eben scholarship is a growing field. This dissertation intends to contribute to knowledge of and appreciation for Eben's music in countries outside of Eastern Europe. By providing insight into one of his song cycles, this analysis of his music will promote the performance of his works to a wider audience.

As Eben was largely known for his organ works, Eben scholarship tends to focus on his compositions for that instrument. The majority of studies thus far on Eben's vocal works focus on either his choral compositions or his large-scale vocal works and cantatas. Eben has been acknowledged as a gifted and sympathetic composer for the human voice, and song cycles for solo voice and piano make up a significant portion of his output. However, scholarship on Eben's solo vocal works is currently lacking. At the time of writing, there are only two studies in the English language which devote any detailed attention to Eben's works for solo voice. This gap in Eben

scholarship is here addressed by the provision of an analysis and discussion of Eben's song cycle *Písně nelaskavé*. This song cycle was selected due to its emotional complexity and political subtext. Because of these factors, it exemplifies the way in which Eben used his music to express commentary on society as well as spiritual philosophies. By investigating this cycle, this dissertation attends to the lack of scholarship on Eben's solo vocal works, and provides a valuable resource to those interested in Eben's song cycles.

In describing the creation of a vocal performance which expresses the musical messages Eben included in *Písně nelaskavé*, consideration is given to the fact that varying audiences will experience and interpret these messages in different ways. Eben included such things in his music as quotations from specific Gregorian chants, musical references to Catholic liturgy and spiritual texts or concepts, characteristics of Czech folk music and the setting of texts with political themes. In this way, the meaning to be found in Eben's music is strongly tied to the context in which it was composed, and the context in which it was performed and received by listeners contemporary to Eben. The question then arises of whether Eben's music can be fully understood and appreciated in countries outside of the Czech Republic, and by those who may not immediately recognise references to the Catholic liturgy.

Despite these factors, the author asserts that Eben's music can indeed be fully appreciated outside of the Czech Republic, and can in fact be enriched by new interpretations from a growing variety of performers and listeners. The author demonstrates that contextual knowledge of Eben's life, of the circumstances in the Czech Republic at the time he composed and of the philosophies behind his composition are necessary to the fullest and most in-depth understanding of his music.

Such contextual knowledge is particularly necessary for the performer in order to create an artistic interpretation that faithfully expresses the messages Eben sought to convey. However, Eben intended his musical language to be comprehensible to any audience, and to communicate a meaningful message to listeners regardless of background, nationality or religion. Therefore, his music facilitates ease of communication and clarity of expression for the performer, which in turn allows his compositions to be appreciated even by those with no prior knowledge of his life. This dissertation proves that the ingredients for the most successful outcome of a performance of Eben's work are a combination of contextual knowledge on the part of the performer with an interpretation coloured by the performer's individual perspective and artistic choices. If the performer takes time to research the context of Eben's work, and understands and is open to the guidance Eben provided in his music, his messages should be easy to express clearly in performance. This allows audiences new to his works to comprehend the meaning in them, as well as to interpret that meaning from their own perspectives. What then results is a performance experience of Eben's works that is nuanced and meaningful, and which benefits from new interpretations and performance settings while remaining grounded in the messages Eben intended to convey.

1.2 Literature Review

As awareness of and interest in the music of Petr Eben grow outside of the Czech Republic, so too does the body of Eben scholarship. This trend is encouraged and aided by such organisations as The Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak Music, located in Waterloo, UK (the former chairperson of which was Eben's friend, the late Professor Graham Melville-Mason) as well as by Eben's own family, friends, and past colleagues.

In terms of general Eben scholarship, including biographical detail, the four most readily available sources are the section on Eben in *Czech Music in the Web of Life* by Jana Marhounová,¹ *Petr Eben* by Kateřina Vondrovicová,² *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year*, edited by Graham Melville-Mason³ and *Petr Eben: sedm zamyšlení nad životem a dílem* (*Petr Eben: Seven Reflections on Life and Work*) by Eva Vítová.⁴ *Czech Music in the Web of Life* examines several Czech composers and their influence on the musical identity of the Czech Republic. Both the book by Vítová and that by Vondrovicová are biographies on Eben's life. *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year* is a compilation of essays and testimonials on Eben written by his friends, colleagues and performers of his works. These were collected and published by The Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak Music. The topics of these essays range from detailed analyses of one or more of Eben's works, to studies on his musical influence and creative philosophy, and to personal recollections of interactions with Eben himself.

Due to the fact that in Western countries Eben is primarily recognised for his organ music, the majority of more specified Eben scholarship is focused on examining his works for organ. Janette Fishell is a professor of music and chair of the organ department at Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University. She was also a friend and colleague to Eben during his life. She has published several studies on Eben's works for organ. These include her dissertation 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben',⁵ as well as several journal articles and essays including 'Petr Eben's *Faust* for Organ' and 'God's

1 Jana Marhounová, *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, trans. Deryck Viney (Prague: EMPATIE, 1993).

2 Kateřina Vondrovicová, *Petr Eben* (Prague: Panton, 1995).

3 Graham Melville-Mason (ed.), *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year* (Garstang: Colin Cross Printers, 2000).

4 Eva Vítová, *Petr Eben: sedm Zamyšlení nad životem a dílem* (Prague: Baronet, 2004).

5 Janette Fishell, 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben' (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1988).

Gesamtkunstwerk: Petr Eben's *Faust*'. Each of these studies approaches Eben's organ works from the perspective of a performer intimately knowledgeable on each work's practical realisation, as well as its conceptual and thematic weight. Other studies of Eben's works for organ include several dissertations: 'Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben's Organ Works' by Joahannes Landgren,⁶ 'Job for Organ: Programmatic Implications Drawn from Petr Eben's Musical Language' by Lawrence Vinyard⁷ and 'The Organ Works of Petr Eben (1929-2007): A Hermeneutical Approach' by Mario Daniel Nell.⁸ As their titles imply, each of these dissertations examines a particular aspect of one or more of Eben's organ works. For example, Landgren's dissertation focuses on Eben's use of improvisational techniques, and how these combine with a performer's interpretation of Eben's organ music, and Nell's dissertation links theories of hermeneutics as laid out by figures such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Lawrence Kramer to Eben's organ music. In addition, several articles have been written on Eben's organ works for various academic journals. These include 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben' by Susan Landale,⁹ 'Petr Eben: *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* for Organ and Reciter' by Luboš Stehlík¹⁰ and a four-part series of articles entitled 'Pedagogical and Performance Insights into Petr Eben's *Nedělní hudba*' by Janette Fishell (The English title of *Nedělní hudba* is *Sunday Music*).¹¹

6 Johannes Landgren, 'Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben's Organ Works' (PhD dissertation, Göteborg University, 1997).

7 Lawrence Vinyard, 'Job for Organ: Programmatic Implications Drawn from Petr Eben's Musical Language' (PhD dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2010).

8 Mario Daniel Nell, 'The Organ Works of Petr Eben (1929-2007): A Hermeneutical Approach' (PhD dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2015).

9 Susan Landale, 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben', *The American Organist*, 13 (1979), 40-43.

10 Luboš Stehlík, 'Petr Eben: *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* for Organ and Reciter', *Czech Music*, 4 (2008), 48-49.

11 Janette Fishell, 'Pedagogical and Performance Insights into Petr Eben's *Nedělní hudba*', *The American Organist*, Part I 'Moto ostinato', 44/9 (2010), 64-47, Part II 'Fantasia I', 45/5 (2011), 62-63, Part III 'Fantasia II', 46/1 (2012), 70-73, Part IV 'Finale', 46/5 (2012), 52-55.

While less numerous than studies on Eben's organ works, there exist a number of studies on his works for other instruments. Such studies include two dissertations: 'Time Versus Space: A Relationship between Music and the Visual Arts as revealed in Petr Eben's *Okna* and Marc Chagall's *Jerusalem Windows*' by Paula Swartz¹² and 'The Chamber Music by Petr Eben' by Jung-A Lee.¹³ The English title of *Okna* is *Windows*.

Studies on Eben's choral works and large-scale vocal works include several dissertations: 'The Choral Music of Petr Eben' by James L. Evans,¹⁴ 'Constancy and Changes in Petr Eben's Sacred Choral Works: An Overview' by Hyungmin Cho,¹⁵ 'Petr Eben's Oratorio *Apologia Sokratus* (1967) and Ballet *Curses and Blessings* (1983): An Interpretive Analysis of the Symbolism Behind the Text Settings and Musical Style' by Nelly Matova¹⁶ and 'Choral Works of Petr Eben Focused on Ancient Themes' by Solon Kladas.¹⁷ Each dissertation focuses either on works from Eben's choral output or approaches his choral works from a specific perspective. For example, Kladas' dissertation focuses on Eben's fascination with archaic languages and musical styles and explores his use of archaic texts and musical methods in certain of his choral works in order to communicate a specific message. Matova's dissertation focuses on Eben's interest in the dichotomy of human emotion and the way in which he explores this interest in two of his works. Several essays and articles

12 Paula H. Swartz, 'Time Versus Space: a relationship between music and the visual arts as revealed in Petr Eben's *Okna* and Marc Chagall's *Jerusalem Windows*' (DMA dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2005).

13 Jung-A Lee, 'The Chamber Music by Petr Eben' (DMA dissertation, Boston University, 2008).

14 James L. Evans, 'The choral music of Petr Eben' (MA dissertation, University College Cork, 1995).

15 Hyungmin Cho, 'Constancy and Changes in Petr Eben's Sacred Choral Works: An Overview' (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2007).

16 Nelly Matova, 'Petr Eben's Oratorio *Apologia Sokratus* (1967) and Ballet *Curses and Blessings* (1983): An Interpretive Analysis of the Symbolism Behind the Text Settings and Musical Style' (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010).

17 Solon Kladas, 'Choral Works of Petr Eben Focused on Ancient Themes' (PhD dissertation, Charles University in Prague, 2014).

also focus on an analysis of Eben's choral works or his large-scale vocal works. These include 'Apologia Sokratus, dílo o moudrosti a pravdě (*Apologia Socrates*, a Work about Wisdom and Truth)' by Ratibor Budiš,¹⁸ 'Pragensia Petra Ebena' by Oldřich Pukl,¹⁹ 'The A Capella Music of Petr Eben' by Timothy Koch²⁰ and five articles written by Stanislav Pecháček for the journal *Cantus* under the heading 'Petr Eben'.²¹

At the time of writing, there exist only two studies in the English language which focus on Eben's solo vocal work, both of which are dissertations. These are 'The Chamber Music by Petr Eben' by Jung-A Lee and 'A Study of *Písně z Těšínska* of Petr Eben' by Matthew Markham.²² Lee's dissertation devotes only one section of its focus to Eben's solo vocal works, and Markham's dissertation focuses specifically on Eben's song cycle *Písně z Těšínska* or *Těšín Songs*, and Eben's interest in and relationship to the folk music of the Těšín region in the Czech Republic.

This concludes the current available scholarship on Eben's works. This dissertation on Eben's *Písně nelaskavé* is the first study in the English language to focus on the song cycle, and will provide a vital addition to scholarship on Eben's compositions for solo voice.

18 Ratibor Budiš, 'Apologia Sokratus, dílo o moudrosti a pravdě (*Apologia Socrates*, a Work about Wisdom and Truth)', *Hudební Rozhledy*, 21 (1968), 481-483.

19 Oldřich Pukl, 'Pragensia Petra Ebena', *Hudební věda*, 12 (1985), 24-38.

20 Timothy Koch, 'The A Capella Music of Petr Eben', *American Choral Review*, 40 (1998), 3-5.

21 Stanislav Pecháček, 'Petr Eben', *Cantus*, Part 1 'Folklórní inspirace', 72 (2007), 16-19, Part 2 'Dětské sbory', 73 (2007), 17-19, Part 3 'Sbory s duchovní tematikou', 74 (2007), 16-19, Part 4 'Kantáty a oratoria', 75 (2007), 18-21, Part 5 'Starozákonní, antické a středověké inspirace', 76 (2008), 16-18.

22 Matthew Markham, 'A Study of *Písně z Těšínska* of Petr Eben' (D.M.A. dissertation, Florida State University, 2009).

1.3 Cultural Musicology, Musical Meaning and Petr Eben

1.3.1 Cultural Musicology and Musical Meaning

To think of a musical work is to think of more than simply the music itself. When people think of music, they might think of the place they first heard that work. They might think of the country the work's composer came from. They might think of a church service, or a call to arms, or a funeral. When music is heard, it can summon a myriad of associations such as these. It may seem an obvious statement of fact that music is connected with such extra-musical associations. Yet it is only in the latter half of the twentieth century that a perspective on the field of musicology has arisen which places the study of music within the context of culture, society, politics, language, gender and other such factors. This approach to the field of musicology came to be termed 'new musicology'. 'New musicologists' tend to espouse a subjective perspective on music, rather than an objective one. In addition, 'new musicology' disagrees with the concept of music as a timeless autonomous entity, an idea advocated by many musicologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather, 'new musicologists' assert that music cannot be entirely separated from the extra-musical factors of the context in which it was composed.

Currently, the concepts put forth by 'new musicologists' are widely accepted, and the field of musicology has shifted to trend in their favour. In fact, 'new musicology' has become so firmly established that musicologist Lawrence Kramer deemed the term 'new musicology' as no longer relevant. He has offered the term 'cultural musicology' in its place, a term which he asserts far better describes the perspective and focus of this field of musicology.²³ Music has increasingly become thought of as a part of

23 Lawrence Kramer, 'Musicology and Meaning', *The Musical Times*, 144/1883 (2003), 6.

culture, nationality, society, politics and other such factors, rather than as having developed apart from them and having been influenced by them as a separate entity.

The question of the meaning to be found in music has been a subject of debate among musicologists for some time. It is generally agreed that the impact a given musical work has upon a performer or listener is derived from the meaning that person takes from it, and the meaning the composer imbued within it. Yet the concept of meaning in music can be difficult to concretely articulate, partly because of the subjectivity of its nature. The meaning to be found in a musical work may vary greatly with different performers, listeners or interpreters. One interpretation of musical meaning places emphasis on the composer's intent as the source of the meaning to be found in a score. If this concept of meaning is taken to be true, then the success of a performer's interpretation of that score is judged by how well that performer expresses the composer's intent. However, this veneration of the composer's intent can at times treat that intent as an autonomous entity. This has the effect of pulling the composer from the context of his or her own life, and treating the composer's mind as something separate from and unaffected by extra-musical influences.

Cultural musicologists assert that this way of thinking about meaning in music and the composer's intentions breaks down upon scrutiny. Every composer has lived within a certain historical period, in a particular country, surrounded by a specific culture and society which has been affected by politics and institutions. All of these factors must necessarily have affected the way that composer thought, whether or not the composer was consciously aware of their effect. As the music the composer wrote came from that composer's mind, then the score too was affected by the extra-musical factors in the composer's life. This means that the composer's intentions in writing that music

were influenced in some way by these extra-musical factors. Composers and their music were products of the culture and society around them. If the composer's intent is taken to be a significant part of the meaning to be found in the score, then it follows that this meaning must be affected by the socio-historical context in which the composer wrote the score.

To aid in articulating the performer's or listener's relationship with the musical score and the meaning to be taken from it, musicologists have at times turned to hermeneutics and the work of such figures as Hans-Georg Gadamer. While Gadamer's concept of hermeneutics as laid out in his work *Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method)* focuses on the interpreter's relationship with a text,²⁴ Gadamer's methods can easily be applied to a performer's or listener's relationship with a score. Mario Daniel Nell does exactly this with Eben's organ music in his dissertation 'The Organ Works of Petr Eben (1929-2007): A Hermeneutical Approach' by applying Gadamer's concepts of textual interpretation to Eben's works. In doing so, Nell concludes that 'meaning is established through the drawing of a relationship between textual and extra-textual elements, as well as between the former and the aspects of performance therein implied.'²⁵ Nell takes the further step of relating the performer's interpretation to that of the musicologist, stating: 'The actual performance of the musical work must be regarded as an equally valid interpretation as that of the musicologist, art critic or philosopher. That is wherein the true value of practice-based research lies.'²⁶

When the performer's interpretation of the score is treated as equally vital to that of the musicologist, then the question of contextual extra-musical factors surrounding a

24 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960).

25 Nell, 'The Organ Works of Petr Eben', 11.

26 Ibid., 15.

musical work becomes unavoidable. This is because a performer must necessarily confront these factors at the very least on their most pragmatic level in regards to performance practice. An example is the movement of Historically Informed Performance that has become prevalent in the world of Early Music. Historically Informed Performance emphasises taking into account the performance practices of the time period in which a given work was composed. Such considerations can extend beyond performance practices in the score to include the type of instrumentation used, the venue in which the work is performed and other such factors. In effect, this is contextualising a musical work within its original historical and cultural setting in the most practical of ways. The performer, as the means through which the musical work is expressed, must be particularly aware of such factors.

Cultural musicologists cite Historically Informed Performance and other such perspectives to draw the conclusion that music is inextricable from its socio-historical context, and that to understand the composer's intention is to understand something of that context. However, the question remains of whether the composer's intent is the ultimate source of meaning to be found in a musical work.

Those who have listened to a piece of music and been moved by it without knowing anything about the composer would easily refute the claim that all meaning is to be found in the composer's intent. Similarly, a performer can create an effective and moving artistic interpretation of a musical work without knowing every aspect of that work's socio-historical context. The experiences of a musical work between a person with contextual knowledge and a person without it may differ, but one does not have less validation and meaning than the other. Musician and anthropologist John Blacking describes this ability of music to affect people with all levels of contextual

knowledge:

Music that was exciting to the contemporaries of Mozart and Beethoven is still exciting, although we do not share their culture. The early Beatles' songs are still exciting, although the Beatles have unfortunately broken up. Similarly, some Venda songs that must have been composed hundreds of years ago still excite me. Many of us are thrilled by Koto music from Japan, sitar music from India, Chopi xylophone music, and so on. I do not say that we receive music in exactly the same way as the players (and I have already suggested that even members of a single society do not receive their own music in the same way), but our own experiences suggest that there are some possibilities of cross-cultural communication.²⁷

Music holds meaning for people regardless of their understanding of its cultural, historical or political background. According to Blacking, it is because music can affect people across cultural and temporal boundaries, that it can provide a powerful tool for cross-cultural understanding. Blacking goes on to suggest that the reason for this is an innate predilection toward music in the human psyche.²⁸ While such considerations are beyond the scope of this study, the acknowledgment that the human mind is affected by music with or without socio-historical context proves that meaning in music is not wholly dependent on this context.

Though a musical work can be enjoyed and interpreted with little to no knowledge of its socio-historical context, it is equally true that an understanding of this context will in fact change the performer's and listener's interpretation of that work, sometimes radically. Archeologist Steven Mithen explains, with reference to Blacking, this difference in interpretation:

27 John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 108-109.

28 Blacking, *How Musical is Man?*, 109.

As Ian Cross has recently stated, ‘one and the same piece of music can bear quite different meanings for performer and listener, or for two different listeners; it may even bear multiple disparate meanings for a single listener or participant at a particular time’. This is most evidently the case with religious music; I am an atheist, so when I listen to the great eighteenth-century choral works that were written to glorify God, such as Handel’s *Messiah* or Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, they ‘mean’ something quite different to me than they would to someone of religious faith. As John Blacking has explained, the music of Handel and Bach cannot be fully understood without reference to the eighteenth-century view of the world – just as northern Indian music cannot be fully understood outside of Hindu culture. So I, with limited knowledge either of eighteenth-century European culture or of Hindu culture, will inevitably gain something quite different from those musics from people listening to them within those respective cultures.²⁹

Mithen acknowledges in this statement that the experience of a listener who understands a musical work’s context and the experience of a listener who does not are fundamentally different. Knowledge of the socio-historical context of a musical work has the power to change the meaning that a performer or listener finds in that work. While all meanings read into a musical work hold validity, knowledge of the context surrounding it provides the performer or listener with more points of connection and a wider framework of references from which to draw when seeking to understand the music. Indeed, some aspects of the music may not be recognisable or accessible to the performer or listener without contextual knowledge. Such knowledge also allows the performer or listener to gain a fuller understanding of the composer’s possible intent, or at the least the composer’s influences and frame of mind when composing the work. What can be concluded from this is that while socio-historical

²⁹ Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 18.

context is not strictly necessary to finding meaning in a musical work, it vastly enriches and provides greater depth to the meaning to be found in the music.

The last idea to consider concerning interpretation of the score is that performers and listeners bring their own perspectives to bear on the music they interact with. The perspective of the performer or listener adds a new dimension to the meaning in the music. The perspectives of the performer and listener may be very different from that of the composer. Simply by interacting with the music, the performer or listener contributes his or her perspective to a given performance of the work, and that perspective becomes a part of the meaning to be taken from it.

In the case of the performer, his or her perspective can have a profound impact on the form the musical work takes in performance. As Nell states (using Gadamer's term 'horizon' to refer to the term 'perspective'): 'Because one's own horizon and own prejudices or prejudgements cannot be ignored or denied, they should be incorporated productively into the hermeneutical activity'.³⁰ The performer's interpretation of the score is informed by his or her perspective. Rather than attempting to ignore or set aside the performer's own perspective in favour of that of the composer, it is more effective for the performer to accept his or her own perspective and incorporate it into the artistic interpretation. However, this does not mean that the performer should dismiss the composer's intent in favour of his or her own perspective either. The most rewarding artistic interpretation of a score takes place when the performer's perspective interacts with that of the composer, and builds upon contextual knowledge and knowledge of the composer's intent.

Because the listener receives the music through the performer, the artistic choices the

30 Nell, 'The Organ Works of Petr Eben', 17.

performer makes as informed by his or her perspective directly affect the way the listener receives the music. This in turn may have an impact on the meaning the listener finds in the musical work. Therefore, the performer's perspective directly interacts with and affects the listener's perspective. If the performer's perspective is informed by the composer's perspective, then the composer's perspective also interacts with that of the listener through the performer. In addition, the listener may have knowledge of the composer before listening to the musical work, and so may directly interact with the composer's perspective through the listener's own knowledge as well. It becomes clear that the interplay between composer, performer and listener is multilayered. There is a constant exchange of information, perspective, and emotional engagement between all three, even if the composer is not present or alive. Eben scholar Johannes Landgren sums up this relationship of exchange by stating: 'The chain of communication between composer, performer, and listener is a complex one, and although the piece of music necessarily consists of certain intrinsic structural relationships, its identity will change according to contextual conditions.'³¹ Landgren makes clear in this statement that the musical work is not a static entity. Rather, it is dynamic, it changes and adapts to different performance contexts and different performers and listeners. While the composer remains the same, the composer's communicative relationship with the performer and listener is different with each new performer, audience and performance setting.

If the way in which music is interpreted in a performance setting is dynamic, then the meaning to be found in the music also is dynamic and mutable. This means that the meaning to be found in the music is not synonymous with the composer's intent. Rather, meaning in music has its root in the composer's intent and in the culture and

31 Landgren, 'Music – Moment – Message', 11.

society in which it was first conceived, but it evolves with each new performance and each new perspective that interacts with it. In this way, music is much like language in its ability to carry meaning that evolves and adapts. What can ultimately be concluded is that the most successful interpretation of a musical work integrates socio-historical contextual knowledge, knowledge of the composer and his or her intentions, the context of the current performance event, and the performer's and listener's perspectives. When all these factors are taken into consideration, a rewarding communicative exchange occurs between composer, performer and audience. This concept is highly pertinent to the music of Petr Eben, as he was a composer who placed great emphasis on the communicative dialogue between composer, performer and audience.

1.3.2 Communism and Meaning in the Music of Petr Eben

The rise of Communism in former Czechoslovakia was not immediately met with hostility by musicians and composers. In fact, not only the working-class, but democratic officials and intellectuals at first embraced its ideologies as a salvation from the oppressive fascism of the Nazi occupation during World War II.³² In general, members of the public were at first not aware of the more extreme methods of political advancement espoused by Stalinist ideologists.³³ The Communist State supported art schools, theatres and orchestras and created a Czech Music Foundation in 1953.³⁴ However, this generosity and seeming democracy was underscored by political motivations. It was to the Communist Party's advantage to support the arts, in order to advance its ideology and create propaganda. Musicologist Miloš Jůzl

32 Miloš Jůzl, 'Music and the Totalitarian Regime in Czechoslovakia', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 27/1 (1996), 32-33.

33 Ibid., 32.

34 Ibid., 34.

describes the intent behind the Czechoslovak State's support of the arts:

These basically positive *organizational changes* to the cultural life of the nation were, however, to a large extent *devalued by ideological requirements and interventions*. The regime gave straightforward support to the works bound up with the current ideology as if this would, in effect, guarantee their inherent artistic value. Considering, then, that after February 1948 the publishing houses were controlled by the State, it became possible to publish only the books, music, materials or records that the regime considered desirable ... Writers or composers who did not conform with the current requirements found it hard, if not impossible, to become established. Those artists that became undesirable were silenced.³⁵

As time progressed, the agenda and motivations of the Soviet State became more explicit and artistic culture became increasingly more inane and numbed by its inundation of Soviet ideology. By the latter half of the Communist regime's control of the Czechoslovakian government, its oppression was keenly felt and recognised for what it was. As Jůzl describes: 'In the second stage, from 1968 till 1989, all cultural life became paralysed. Any hope of the reform of socialism was gone, being replaced by the hope of destroying this lifeless system.'³⁶

This is the artistic climate in which Petr Eben lived and worked and built his career. Eben remained opposed to Soviet ideology for his whole life, and refused to join the Party even when doing so would have been in his best career interests.³⁷ This was in no small part due to his profound dedication to his Catholic faith. Religion was a forbidden subject under Soviet ideology, and works of art with religious themes were censored.³⁸ For Eben, however, religious themes were of utmost importance, and a

35 Ibid., 35.

36 Ibid., 31.

37 See Chapter 2, page 34.

38 See Chapter 2, pages 32-35.

powerful source of inspiration for his compositions. The censorship of religious themes by Party authorities had the effect of, rather than dissuading Eben from such themes, instead reinforcing his desire to communicate religious themes to other people who might identify with them. This led Eben to create a musical language that allowed him to express religious or spiritual themes without the Party authorities recognising them. He accomplished this by including quotations of Gregorian chant, musical references to the Catholic mass and specific musical motifs and figures to suggest the sacred.³⁹ He found that Czech listeners were eager to ‘read between the lines’ and quick to understand the messages he was trying to communicate. He explained the way in which this led to his personal philosophy that music should be a message to his listeners:

People expected the cultural scene to give them something they normally missed – some truth, or some suggestion, hidden symbol, double meaning, allusion ... They used to go to the little theatres in the hope of catching the odd message, and they were so wise to everything that they would put their own interpretation on words, whether they were meant like that or not. I had the feeling that people expected music to impart a message of some kind, a message that might be even more intense than in literature, where the censors would spot it right away and ban it, or than in the fine arts, where even a communist connoisseur could tell whether a work had any religious side to it. Whereas music was so abstract that you couldn’t immediately tell – so there was room for a deeper meaning.⁴⁰

Music, in Eben’s thought, was a means of connection with the rest of humanity during a time in his country when such connection was deeply strained. Through music he could freely express thoughts and ideas that he could not otherwise, and share these

39 See Chapter 2, pages 36-38.

40 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, trans. Deryck Viney (Prague: EMPATIE 1993), 228.

with both performer and listener. His desire to form a communicative exchange with performer and listener was explicit, and something he actively sought.

To Eben, this communicative exchange was an important part of what gave music meaning. It was the connection between those interacting with the music that enriched the message to be found in his compositions. It was therefore of utmost importance for Eben that his music be comprehensible to those with whom he wished to communicate. He believed that music should ‘have a function to serve people.’⁴¹ In this way, Eben could express to others the spiritual themes that were of such importance to him:

For Eben there is no conflict between the imperatives of individual artistic expression (itself pervaded by religious belief) and the necessity of comprehensibility to listeners. Thus the “serving function” seems to be an expression of a symbiosis between Eben’s religious beliefs and a necessity to communicate this faith, where the artistic activity and the urge for technical perfection work in the service of musical communication.⁴²

When interpreting Eben’s music, the performer must be aware that Eben was actively seeking to establish communication with the performer. He encouraged the performer to ‘read between the lines’ and seek out the messages in his music, and so used such musical language as would make these messages clear. When Eben’s works were performed in former Czechoslovakia, the necessity to simultaneously conceal these messages from a totalitarian government created a special relationship between Eben, the performer and the listener. They were in effect sharing a dialogue in a secret

41 Petr Eben, interviewed by Johannes Landgren, ‘Music as Message and the Ruling Principles of Petr Eben’s Music-Making’ in Graham Melville-Mason (ed.), *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year* (Garstang: Colin Cross Printers, 2000), 11.

42 Ibid.

language that they understood, but that the government did not. This enhanced the communicative exchange between Eben, performer and listener due to the fact that it was an act of defiance. This imbued the communicative relationship with another level of intensity and meaning.

What is clear about Petr Eben's music is that it cannot be separated from the socio-historical or political context of its composition. Its history and associations come with it whenever and wherever it is performed. Eben's dedication to his Catholic faith was the motivational force behind the messages in his music. Therefore his works possess a religious element that is part of their very musical language, and without which they lose a vital aspect of their meaning.

It follows that a performance of Eben's works by a Czech performer to a Czech audience is a different communicative exchange than that by a non-Czech performer to a non-Czech audience. A Czech performer and audience may have more mental access to the socio-historical context of Eben's works. There may be those in a Czech audience who have experienced the same political circumstances as Eben. An implicit understanding of Czech cultural identity and the history behind it can be felt and exchanged between a Czech performer and a Czech audience. Eben's music also has particular meaning for a Catholic performer or audience, as those who share Eben's faith may more easily and immediately recognise quotations of Gregorian chant or references to the Catholic mass in his music.

The question then arises of whether Eben's music can be successfully performed by a non-Czech or non-Catholic performer to a non-Czech or non-Catholic audience. If the meaning to be found in Eben's music is so intimately tied to his cultural and political circumstances, as well as to the Catholic faith, then it might seem as though those

who do not share a cultural or religious connection with Eben are at a disadvantage in interpreting his works. However, one of the defining aspects of Eben's music is its communicative nature. His musical language, though it uses quotations of Gregorian chant and Czech folk song and is layered with implicit references, is nevertheless clear in its expression of themes and emotions. A listener who is not familiar with Eben's life or the socio-historical context of his work can still find profound meaning in it simply through the communicative expressiveness of his musical language.

For the non-Czech performer, the fullest understanding of the meaning to be found in Eben's music can be achieved by taking the time to research his life and the socio-historical circumstances in the Czech Republic. While Eben's music is fundamentally communicative and comprehensible, the removal of any barriers to understanding between the performer and Eben yields a far more profound conception of the meaning in his music. If the performer's interpretation is informed by a deeper understanding of Eben's intent through contextual knowledge, then a non-Czech audience is likely to have a richer listening experience. In this way, the performer can combine socio-historical knowledge and knowledge of Eben with a receptivity to the guidance of his communicative musical language to create the most fulfilling artistic interpretation. As the context in which Eben's works are performed changes, so too can the meaning evolve. The way in which it does so is dependent on the communicative relationship between Eben, the performer, and the listener.

In order to gain the fullest comprehension of the themes in Eben's music and the influences by which these themes were affected, it is necessary to understand the aspects of Eben's life that led to the formation of his unique musical language. Eben's life was eventful and often difficult. It profoundly impacted the motivations behind

his compositions and the shape taken by his musical style.

Chapter 2

Biography of Petr Eben

2.1 Introduction and Early Life

Petr Eben's life was marked by difficulty, yet despite this he emerged from the challenges he experienced with a powerful optimism and a belief in the importance of human connection. His Catholic faith became a guiding force in his life, and shaped his philosophy of communication through music. Whenever he was asked about his life, Eben always stressed the good that came of the challenges he faced and was insistent that he was able to grow musically and spiritually from the hardships he endured. He believed that the good in his life balanced out the difficult. As he described in an interview with Martin Anderson for *Fanfare Magazine*, 'some plus, some minus'.¹ Eben elaborated on this in an interview with Jana Marhounová:

The crisis came when I was ten – after that I spent practically my whole life in a kind of serfdom. Yes, I can honestly say I spent the whole fifty years under constant pressure, in danger, without freedom, unable to develop as I would have liked, barred from any information or contact with contemporary music, and so on. For a composer, then, a quite catastrophic sort of life. Yet ... I came to a very paradoxical conclusion. I had to tell myself that, despite all the problems, the life I lived was in fact ideal for my musical and spiritual growth.²

Petr Eben was born on 22 January, 1929 in Žamberk, a small town in eastern Bohemia. His family, however, moved soon after to the medieval town of Český

1 Petr Eben, interviewed by Martin Anderson for 'Fifty Years of Plus and Minus: The Czech Composer and Organ Virtuoso Petr Eben Talks to Martin Anderson', *Fanfare Magazine*, 19/6 (1996), <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

2 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, trans. Deryck Viney (Prague: EMPATIE, 1993), 221.

Krumlov in southern Bohemia, which was to be where the young Petr Eben grew up.³ His parents were both schoolteachers. His father, Vilém Eben, was Jewish, while his mother, Marie Kahlerová, was of Polish-Austrian descent and was Roman Catholic. Eben's father, however, did not actively practise his faith, while his mother was devoutly religious. This meant that Eben went to mass with his mother every Sunday at the church in Český Krumlov and was raised Roman Catholic, the religious identity which came to be such a deep and integral part of his life and work.⁴ Eben also had an older brother, Bedřich, five years his senior, who would prove a great support to Eben through the difficulties his family faced.⁵

As schoolteachers, Eben's parents were well learned and encouraged a rich education for Eben and his older brother Bedřich. This included learning multiple languages: Eben learned Czech and, because Český Krumlov was largely German-speaking, he learned German as well. Both his parents spoke French and Eben learned English, Greek and Latin at the school in Krumlov.⁶ Eben described how he and his family would have 'foreign-language lunches where we could not speak otherwise than in the assigned language.'⁷ This understanding of and fluency in multiple languages would later have a large effect on Eben's compositions, particularly his vocal works.⁸

Eben often highlighted the architecture of Český Krumlov as having been an inspiration for him musically later in life. The medieval structures of the town

3 Petr Eben, interviewed by Martin Anderson for 'Fifty Years of Plus and Minus', <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

4 Nelly Matova, 'Petr Eben's Oratorio *Apologia Sokratus* (1967) and Ballet *Curses and Blessings* (1983): An Interpretative Analysis of the Symbolism Behind the Text Settings and Musical Style' (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010), 1-3.

5 Solon Kladas, 'Choral Works of Petr Eben Focused on Ancient Themes' (PhD dissertation, Charles University, 2014), 15-16.

6 Matthew Markham, 'A Study of *Písň z Těšinska* of Petr Eben' (DMA dissertation, Florida State University, 2009), 1.

7 Petr Eben, interviewed by Kateřina Vondrovicová for *Petr Eben* (Prague: Panton Ltd., 1995), 67.

8 See Chapter 3, pages 52-53.

contributed to a love of archaic sounds and musical techniques in his compositions, as well as a predilection towards ancient texts and literature.⁹ However, Eben noted that ‘on the musical side, there was nothing going on at all. It was a pretty provincial community, there were no concerts and we didn’t have a gramophone – only a radio, and the Nazis confiscated that.’¹⁰ However, despite the dearth of music in Krumlov, Eben received quite a bit of musical stimulus from within his own family. Eben’s entire family was musical: his father played the violin and his mother played the guitar.¹¹ While his brother learned to play the cello, Eben began taking piano lessons when he was six, as well as cello lessons.¹² Eben described the way in which his family’s musical talents spurred him to take a proactive approach to learning music from an early age:

My brother and I went through everything we could find for four hands – symphonic stuff, chamber works, Haydn symphonies, Mozart, Beethoven, even Mahler and Brahms. We had a family trio, too, with my father on the violin, my brother on the cello and me at the piano. That was how I acquired a practical approach to music.¹³

It was for this family trio that Eben first began composing music:

It led me into an active approach to music, not just performing it but creating it, too. Since we didn’t have that much part music ourselves, I started composing things for the family threesome. Again, my brother and I used to play recorders, so I wrote a piece for piano and recorders. In short, it was the situation itself that started me composing, which I don’t think I would have embarked on so early under normal circumstances. I was driven on by this great need: no music, so write your own! And

9 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jan Dehner for ‘Eben, Petr’, in Pamella Collins and Brian Morton (eds.), *Contemporary Composers* (Chicago: St. James Press, 1992), 258.

10 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 221.

11 Petr Eben, interviewed by Janette Fishell for ‘The Organ Music of Petr Eben’ (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1988), 22.

12 Kladas, ‘Choral Works of Petr Eben Focused on Ancient Themes’, 16.

13 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 221.

what a joy when we could play it together! That was a corrective process that one doesn't usually have as a youngster. No sooner had I written something than I could hear what it sounded like.¹⁴

Eben acknowledged the enduring influence these early musical experiences would have on his later compositions, remarking, 'Childhood is like the core of the seed, from which the tree of life grows. I find all the sources of inspiration for my compositions in the Krumlov stage of my life.'¹⁵

2.2 World War II

When he was nine years old, Eben's life was transformed due to the German occupation of former Czechoslovakia in 1938.¹⁶ Because of the antisemitic sentiments encouraged by the new Nazi regime, the Eben family members found themselves suddenly targeted by Nazi authorities and shunned by their neighbours in part due to the fact that Eben's father Vilém was Jewish:

It was a combination of things. For one thing we belonged to the Czech minority in the town – most of the Czechs had managed to get away in time, but we'd stayed put. Then again it was border country, full of Germans. And there were racial reasons too. Father was Jewish, mother Aryan, making me fifty per cent Jewish.¹⁷

Eventually, the Eben family's ostracisation became such that young Petr Eben was expelled from his secondary school. His father, who had a job as the school inspector, was fired. Both Eben and his father were made to do manual labour. Eben first

14 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 222.

15 Petr Eben, interviewed by Kateřina Vondrovicová for *Petr Eben*, 67.

16 Petr Eben, 'Zum Thema "Aufstieg" – Wandlung und Aufbruch/Eröffnung neuer Lebensmöglichkeiten', Speech in Darmstadt (1993) in Landgren, 'Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben's Organ Works' (PhD dissertation, Göteborg University, 1997), 125.

17 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 223.

worked as a trainee in a printing shop, then was made to go into building work.¹⁸ Eben recalled this as being a pivotal moment in his life which affected his outlook and opened his eyes to the influence of ideology on social behaviour:

After supper each day I tried to fill the gaps in my education, with my father's help. I used to try and find out what my class was doing, and I have to say that my old schoolmates didn't even dare stop on the road to tell me what topics they were on to. This was pretty much of a shock to me ... my father had been a school inspector, and my class teacher had consequently been very nice to me. And now suddenly I was a non-person, overnight! ... And our neighbours changed their behaviour overnight, too. The only one who didn't was the shepherd dog next door; he always knew my voice, because Nazi ideology hadn't got through to him! This sort of experience is terribly vital for a young man. I think this is when he begins to understand important values. He stops relying simply on people in general, he begins to appreciate his family and his inner world, and values that are not susceptible to human fickleness.¹⁹

This understanding early in his life of the ambivalence of human morality was a theme with which Eben became increasingly preoccupied, and which would manifest often in his later compositions. Eben acknowledged this part of his life as the point at which he turned to the church in Krumlov he attended with his mother as a source of stability and comfort. He stated that it was the only place where he 'could feel worthy and equal.'²⁰ The closeness Eben felt to his family became the force that sustained him through the difficulties of isolation. The music his family played together as a trio reinforced this bond.²¹

18 Ibid., 223.

19 Ibid., 223-224.

20 Petr Eben, 'Zum Thema "Aufstieg" – Wandlung und Aufbruch/Eröffnung neuer Lebensmöglichkeiten' Speech in Darmstadt (1993) in Landgren, 'Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben's Organ Works', 125.

21 Petr Eben, interviewed by Martin Anderson for 'Fifty Years of Plus and Minus', <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

Paradoxically, the circumstances of war led to another positive factor in Eben's musical development. This was his introduction to the organ, the instrument with which he became most closely identified and which became a strong influence on his musical style. As most young men had been called for military service during the war, including church organists, the church at Krumlov found itself without an organist. The curate of the church was aware that Eben, who was ten years old at the time, knew how to play the piano. The curate then asked Eben to play the organ for the church.²² His time playing the organ for the church in Krumlov further honed Eben's musicianship, and very importantly allowed him to practise improvising. Eben's skill at organ improvisation became an important factor in his compositions.

During this time, Eben also became a choirmaster at the Cistercian Schlierbach Abbey in Austria. It was through this and his work as an organist accompanying mass that he became exposed to Gregorian chant, an influence that had a profound impact on his musical language.²³

The threat of separation that loomed over Eben's family soon became a reality when Eben's father Vilém was taken to Schergenhub concentration camp by Nazi authorities because of his Jewish heritage. In due time, Eben and his brother Bedřich were also taken away by the authorities to Buchenwald concentration camp to work in a quarry. It was there that Eben was faced with death on a daily basis and was confronted at a young age with profound questions of faith, human morality and mortality. Yet despite the daily inhumanity Eben was forced to witness and to experience, he recalled his sense of spirituality and belief in his Catholic faith as being strengthened rather than destroyed. In many interviews, Eben spoke of a

22 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 222.

23 Kladas, 'Choral Works of Petr Eben Focused on Ancient Themes', 12.

particular experience in the camp as crystallising his sense of spirituality. This moment proved to be another pivotal point in his life that would help form his outlook and philosophy:

There was one minute which was very important for me. We were taken to one building where we hadn't been before. They said that it was for *Entlausung* – delousing – and we really did need it. We had to take off our clothes and they brought us into a room where there were about twenty showers. We didn't know what would come out of them. I took the hand of my brother and we had to wait for one minute. We knew that if it wasn't going to be water, if it was gas, we would have to breathe as quickly and as deeply as we could so that it would be over as soon as possible. And in this one minute I had to decide if the whole of life had some sense, or if it was just bad luck that I was born at that time, in that family, and also to realize what there would be after death – would life continue or was it a wall with nothing behind it? It was for me the most important minute in my life because suddenly I was quite sure that there must be something continuing. Then the water came out, of course, or I wouldn't be here. And although I wouldn't want any of my sons to have this experience, seen from my viewpoint it was very important. Before, I was religious as a boy is, without really thinking deeply about it – it's more a question of custom – but during the war the church was the only place where I felt I was taken as a normal person.²⁴

Eben's experiences in the war helped shape his identity: his identity as Czech, his identity of self in the world around him, his identity as an artist and his spiritual identity. His need to express the sense of spirituality and gratitude for life he described feeling in the showers at Buchenwald became the inspiration and driving force of much of his music. His experiences of the many moral shades of which humanity is

24 Petr Eben, interviewed by Martin Anderson for 'Fifty Years of Plus and Minus', <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

capable: the warmth and tight bond of his family contrasted with the sudden coldness of his neighbours and the outright cruelty of the Nazi authorities, caused him to often return to the theme of human morality in his later compositions.

2.3 The Rise of Communism

After the end of the war, Eben, his brother and his father all managed to return safely and the family was reunited in Český Krumlov.²⁵ Eben at last returned to school, and had the opportunity to study piano and cello formally at the Jeremiáš Music School in České Budějovice. It was here that he began to learn composition with Ladislav Vrchota.²⁶ When he was nineteen, he attended the Prague Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts where he studied piano under František Rauch and composition under Pavel Bořkovec.²⁷

However, Eben soon found himself living once again under authoritarian oppression with the arrival to power of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) in 1948. With the Communist government came extreme censorship and regulation of all the arts. The Party authorities also suppressed religion in all forms, promoting the Communist ideology of a secular working life. The terror trials in Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1954 left in their wake an atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion among the Czech population.

The censorship of the KSČ swept through and altered Czech music circles. Eben recalled the sudden limitations placed on Czech composers and musicians coming up in the Prague Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts at the time:

25 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 226.

26 Kladas, 'Choral Works of Petr Eben Focused on Ancient Themes', 16-17.

27 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 227.

In the 50s when I started to compose, the avant-garde was starting up in Darmstadt. That was when Messiaen wrote his *Étude de rythme* and the *Modes des valeurs*, where he used a way of composing that was adopted by Boulez and Stockhausen and Nono for several years. We were totally isolated from this sort of experiment; here it was only socialist realism which was pushed – they wanted us all to write as Smetana did. The moment you wrote a dissonant note, you were an enemy of the people. Even the president gave a speech to all the composers in which he said we need a music of the day, which will help the day, which will help the future, it was a human goal of working, that he didn't see why music should be for some hundred specialists, that it must be for the whole people, and so on. It was not easy: we had no access to Schoenberg, to Berg, to Webern. Every so often one of us would get a recording and we'd lend it around our colleagues so that we could listen to it. But it couldn't be performed.²⁸

Despite the restrictions on creative liberty, several highlights in Eben's life occurred while living under such totalitarianism. While he was still at the Prague Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, Eben met Šárka Hurníková, the sister of Eben's classmate Ilja Hurník. Šárka was an English and Philosophy student at Charles University in Prague. The two married in 1953 and Šárka would prove both a great support and a source of consultation for Eben on his compositions.²⁹ They later had three sons: Kryštof (born 1954), Marek (born 1957), and David (born 1965).³⁰

Eben had little time to settle into married life before he was once again faced with the

28 Petr Eben, interviewed by Martin Anderson for 'Fifty Years of Plus and Minus', <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

29 Kladas, 'Choral Works of Petr Eben Focused on Ancient Themes', 18.

30 Kryštof Eben went on to join the Czech Academy of Sciences working in mathematics. Marek Eben became an actor and television host known for his genteel manner in interviews. David Eben became a musicologist at Charles University and founded the *Schola Gregoriana Pragensis*, which specialises in Gregorian and Bohemian chant. All three brothers are musical and together formed the Bratři Ebenové or 'Eben Brothers', a musical group in which all three play instruments, sing, and for which they compose music, and which is active today.

oppression of the authoritarian government. In a speech in Darmstadt in 1993, Eben recounted an event which proved to be another important moment in his life:

I regularly allowed an illegal Catholic group to hold their meetings in my student room, which I let my cousin who worked in the group borrow, who had been in the concentration camp in Teresienstadt for six years. Then this group was discovered by the secret police and the members were sentenced to twelve years in prison. It was just two months after my wedding when I was called to an eight-hour non-stop interrogation, and this placed me even more clearly and prominently in opposition to the regime and led me to the conscious tendency to constantly express this attitude in my compositions.³¹

Eben noted this experience as one which brought to his attention the fact that not only was his ideology in opposition to that of the KSČ, but he felt compelled to express this opposition through his music. He felt the repercussions of his dissent when, after he received his diploma in piano and composition from the Prague Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, he went to teach at Charles University in Prague. He was never allowed to move past the rank of a low-level teaching position at the university. This was due to the fact that the board was made up of Communist Party members and Eben refused to join the Party and give up his Catholic faith.³²

The organ was Eben's main and most beloved instrument. It was also the instrument for which he had composed much of his music. However, under the Communist government, composing for the organ proved a great risk for Eben. This was due to the fact that the organ was seen by the authorities to represent the Catholic faith.

31 Petr Eben, 'Zum Thema "Aufstieg" – Wandlung und Aufbruch/Eröffnung neuer Lebensmöglichkeiten', Speech in Darmstadt (1993) in Landgren, 'Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben's Organ Works', 126.

32 Lawrence Vinyard, 'Job for Organ: Programmatic Implications Drawn from Petr Eben's Musical Language' (PhD dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2010), 16.

Socialist ideology was atheistic, and religion in all forms was considered antithetical to the progression of Communist society. The organ was seen as an instrument that would encourage listeners toward religious thought, and therefore was ‘dangerous’.³³ For Eben, this meant that the faith in which he held such strong belief, the sense of spirituality which had sustained him through his experiences in the Buchenwald camps, and the instrument that represented those things for him and for others, were all the targets of authoritarian repression. He recalled: ‘The persecution of religion in our country was very strong, which meant that the only people who played the organ were those who had nothing to lose.’³⁴

Simply by composing for and playing the organ, Eben was declaring himself opposed to the ideology of the Communist government. His choice to continue doing so despite the fact that it made publishing his music very difficult and put his safety at risk was a testament to his belief in the importance of the musical messages he was conveying. Undeterred by his experience with the secret police after hosting Catholic meetings in his student room, Eben continued to attend mass and participate in Catholic gatherings. One such gathering was held by the Czech artistic group Lyra Pragensis, which held regular meetings in which literature banned by the Party authorities was read publicly by Czech actors, with accompanying music. The literature banned by the Party included the Bible. During one of the Lyra Pragensis gatherings, excerpts from the Bible were read by Czech actor Milan Friedl. Eben improvised accompanying music on the organ to these readings. Over subsequent years, Eben would eventually develop these improvisations into his organ cycle *Job*.³⁵

33 Jan Hora, ‘Personal Tributes to Petr Eben’ in Graham Melville-Mason (ed.), *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year* (Garstang: Colin Cross Printers, 2000), 164.

34 Petr Eben, interviewed by Martin Anderson for ‘Fifty Years of Plus and Minus’, <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

35 Landgren, ‘Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of

Eben's participation in the *Lyra Pragensis* readings would not only yield one of his most well-known organ works, but it stands as a reminder of his unswerving commitment to his faith, and to his dedication to communicate that faith musically to others.

2.4 Communication in Petr Eben's Music

In order to convey the messages he intended for his listeners, Eben turned to something that had been a source of interest and inspiration for him since his days in the church in Krumlov and as choirmaster at the Schlierbach Abbey: Gregorian chant. In 1966, Eben had also had the opportunity to travel to France to study Gregorian chant in the Benedictine monastery of Solesmes, though he had to obscure the religious nature of his trip by using an invitation from the Paris Conservatoire as his reason for travel.³⁶ He found strong inspiration in chant both musically and as a way of embedding hidden references in his music to other Catholic listeners who would recognise the chant quotations:

I used to compose Sunday music, for example, and see how people reacted, what they saw in it; some would recognize a plainsong quotation if *Kyrie* came in the first movement, or *Salve regina* at the end of the last ... a lot of people knew these things and immediately cottoned on to the message – prayer for deliverance and trust in victory.³⁷

Eben used specific chants to make particular references to those who would understand them, as a sort of musical code that other Catholics would recognise. Eben's chant quotations would immediately signify to a Catholic listener that the

Petr Eben's Organ Works', 36-37.

36 Matova, 'Petr Eben's Oratorio *Apologia Sokratus* (1967) and Ballet *Curses and Blessings* (1983)', 20.

37 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 228.

work was a spiritual one. Additionally, a given chant would represent a relationship to a certain part of a mass, or the themes and emotions that part of a mass represented. In this way, Eben could layer multiple levels of meaning and hidden nuance into a single musical quotation. Eben's use of liturgical references in music was not confined only to quotes of chant and Catholic mass, however. He quoted Protestant chorales as well as chant when he felt these would best convey his message or sense of spirituality in the work. He also often quoted chorales from the Bohemian Brethren.³⁸ Even if Eben did not quote the text of a chorale, the lyrics were implicit to the listener, and anyone familiar with the chorale was able to understand the intended message. Very often, Eben would have to conceal the spiritual nature of a work by giving it an innocuous, non-liturgical, title. After the Velvet Revolution, Eben changed many of these titles to reflect the true religious nature of the work.³⁹

In his vocal works, Eben could include another layer of communication through the use of text. This was an additional method in which he could enhance the comprehensibility of his works:

... and here the poetic word comes in ... it will enable the composer to make the musical content in the composition unambiguous, unmistakable, and completely comprehensible. These are the two reasons – inspiration and communicability, why I always turn gratefully to the word, whether I put it in the mouth of a solo singer or the whole choir.⁴⁰

Eben was extremely well read and versed in literature of several different

38 The Bohemian Brethren were an evangelical Christian group founded on the ideology of John Wyclif, whose ideas were supported and spread in Czechoslovakia by Jan Hus.

39 Matova, 'Petr Eben's Oratorio *Apologia Sokratus* (1967) and Ballet *Curses and Blessings* (1983)', 18.

40 Petr Eben, interviewed by Kateřina Vondrovicová for *Petr Eben*, 85.

languages.⁴¹ He had a particular love of archaic texts, partly inspired by his childhood in the medieval town of Český Krumlov, but also was very up to date on modern literature and the important writers of the day. These included writers whose works were banned or censored by the KSČ for being subversive to Socialist ideology. These, along with any religious texts, were very difficult to obtain due to the government's censorship. However, Eben would have been exposed to several banned texts in the Pragensia Lyra concerts, and was able to procure texts himself despite the difficulty:

There didn't appear a single theological book for forty years here, whereas in East Germany they simply took theological books from West Germany and sold them at a very low price and you could buy whatever you wanted. So sometimes I smuggled in books from East Germany. It wasn't easy: if there was a cross on the book, you had to hide it in some newspapers.⁴²

Simply by electing to use subversive texts in his works, Eben was making a statement which his audiences would have understood. In addition, Eben could layer and interweave messages by doing such things as setting a phrase of text to a particular chant or chorale melody, thus connecting the meaning and implicit text of the chant to that of the actual words being sung. In this way, Eben could add depth to the text, or even use such a technique to create irony, juxtaposing contrasting meanings between text and chant melody.

2.5 Travels and Later Life

It was difficult during this time for Eben to travel abroad in order to make contact

41 Ibid, 87.

42 Petr Eben in Martin Anderson, 'Fifty Years of Plus and Minus', <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

with performers of his works or to promote his music, due to the strict regulations of the KSČ.⁴³ Not only this, but it was challenging for performers from Western countries to obtain scores of his works. This was partly because Eastern European countries were isolated behind the Iron Curtain, and partly because the Party authorities did not approve of many of Eben's compositions due to the fact that Eben was not a Party member.⁴⁴ However, Eben still managed to make a few trips abroad despite the restrictions. This included a trip to the UK to lecture for a year at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester as Visiting Professor of Composition.⁴⁵ During his time in England, he met and made connections with many musicians and professors, including Professor Graham Melville-Mason and Karel Janovicky, a Czech composer and great promoter of Czech music in the UK.⁴⁶

After the Velvet Revolution of 1989, Eben was at last able to express his faith freely through his music, and could travel and give concerts abroad without fear of political repercussions. Once the restrictions on his travel were lifted, he could comfortably visit and communicate with his UK connections and became a patron of the Dvořák Society for Czech and Slovak Music based in the UK. He gained the position of tenured professor of Composition at Charles University in Prague that had for so long been denied him, before retiring in 1995.⁴⁷ He received several prestigious awards in subsequent years and was additionally named president of the Prague Spring Festival.⁴⁸ However, he was forced to cease his travels and public appearances due to

43 Peter Stadtmüller, 'Personal Tributes to Petr Eben' in Graham Melville-Mason (ed.), *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year* (Garstang: Colin Cross Printers, 2000), 180.

44 Gerd Augst, 'Personal Tributes to Petr Eben' in Graham Melville-Mason (ed.), *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year* (Garstang: Colin Cross Printers, 2000), 146.

45 Markham, 'A Study of *Písně z Těšínska* of Petr Eben', 7.

46 Ibid., 7.

47 Matova, Petr Eben's *Apologia Sokratus* (1967) and Ballet *Curses and Blessings* (1983)', 21.

48 The Prague Spring Festival, started in 1946, is an annual showcase of artists, composers, and ensembles, both Czech and international. It is usually held in the Rudolfinum Hall and the Municipal Hall near the Vltava River. It traditionally commences on 12 May, the anniversary of the

what seemed to be a series of undiagnosed strokes. He died on 24 October, 2007.⁴⁹

death of Bedřich Smetana.

49 Kladas, 'Choral Works of Petr Eben Focused on Ancient Themes', 9.

Chapter 3

Musical Style and Influences

What emerged from the influences Eben experienced throughout his life was a musical style both unique and captivating. Eben's musical style was notably unaffected by the prevailing trends of the Darmstadt School during the 1940s and 1950s: the dodecaphonic, serialist and atonal music of Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern. Neither was Eben swayed to compose the banal propagandist 'music for the masses' that the Czechoslovak Communist government pressured Czech composers to create. Eben noted the singularity and authenticity of his musical style in an interview with Janette Fishell:

I knew composers who, after a visit to the Darmstadt-Ferienkurse, completely changed their style. I have the impression that I always went quite steadily on my own way, in a persistent faithfulness to my style, which I of course gradually (hopefully!!!!) enriched by more sophisticated harmonic elements. I found for me the use of bitonal and bimetric techniques but I think that in my evolution I never 'turned somersaults' because my first principle was always to be absolutely sincere and true to myself, whatever might happen in various fashionable trends in our country or abroad.¹

Eben was clear that his musical style was something unique to him, unchanged by prevailing trends on one side or governmental pressures on the other. He attributed this in part to the circumstances surrounding his musical education at the Music School in České Budějovice and then at the Prague Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts: the Party authorities in former Czechoslovakia advocated a style that was

¹ Petr Eben, interviewed by Janette Fishell for 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben' (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1988), 24.

‘traditionally’ Czech, easily comprehensible and broadly appealing to a wide public. Therefore, young Czech composers like Eben were cut off from any musical influences that were seen as being in opposition to this ‘correct’ style.² Yet Eben, with optimism typical of his perspective, considered this as paradoxically one of the reasons why his musical style developed the way it did:

I think this is a very important advantage that isolation brings. My colleagues in the West have sometimes regarded music as experimentation – non-committal experimentation! – as self-fulfilment and even – well, they too were subjected to pressures, when you think of the twelve-tone dogma that prevailed at one time, so that if you didn’t toe that line you didn’t get performed – but we actually grew up in the middle of the debate about Music as a Personal Creed, or Music as a Message to Mankind. And I could never have had that experience elsewhere! So to repeat myself, though that period, when I look back on it, judged from the outside, was one of limitation, chicanery, isolation, lack of contact with world music, nevertheless it led us to the wellsprings of music, to the meaning of music and of art in general.³

What emerged from this isolation was a style that was very much Eben’s own. It is a style that has a strong sense of Czech identity from Eben’s use of characteristics found in Bohemian and Moravian folk song, as well as a powerful sense of the sacred from his quotations of Gregorian and Bohemian chant and use of church modes. It can sound simultaneously both archaic and very modern. Janette Fishell uses the term ‘stylised archaism’ to describe his music.⁴ Most importantly, despite Eben’s use of complex musical techniques and references to liturgy and Czech folk music, his style of composition remains emotionally expressive and easily accessible. Because of this,

2 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, trans. Deryck Viney (Prague: EMPATIE, 1993), 227.

3 Ibid., 228.

4 Janette Fishell, ‘The Organ Music of Petr Eben’ (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1988), 17.

his musical language is a powerful communicative medium. An in-depth examination of the characteristics of Eben's musical language, as well as of the influences which played into his musical development, will provide a fuller understanding of how such characteristics contribute to the communicative nature of his works.

3.1 Form and Structure

Eben's musical style owed its sense of form and structure in no small part to the teachings of Pavel Bořkovec, with whom Eben studied composition at the Prague Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts.⁵ Despite Eben's freedom of tonality and expressive rhythms and phrasing, all his music is built upon clear structural progression. In earlier works, Eben often uses sonata form, but as his musical style developed he became less bound to traditional structure and, instead, gave form to his music by other means. Fishell describes the tonal structure on which much of Eben's music is built as 'harmonic 'arch forms''. She also makes note of Eben's tendency towards thematic development of motifs as another method in which he gives his music a sense of structure.⁶ In his vocal works, Eben often allows the text to give the composition shape and his music follows the progression of thought in the text. Additionally, in a method related to the harmonic 'arch-forms' of which Fishell wrote, in his song cycles Eben tends to link songs together either tonally or by shared motifs, thus creating harmonic and thematic threads through the cycles that give them a larger unified form. Importantly for Eben, formal structures were a method of keeping his music coherent. As Landgren notes: 'For Eben, without form there can be no communication.'⁷

5 Petr Eben, interviewed by Jana Marhounová for *Czech Music in the Web of Life*, 227.

6 Fishell, 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben', 42.

7 Johannes Landgren, 'Music as Message and the Ruling Principles of Petr Eben's Music-Making' in Graham Melville-Mason (ed.), *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year* (Garstang: Colin Cross Printers, 2000), 22.

3.2 The Organ and Improvisation

Eben was most prolific in writing for the organ, his favourite instrument. From his work with and for the organ, Eben developed an acute sense of instrumental colour and timbre. These aspects are integral to the organ with its different registrations and stops. Eben's fascination with colour and registration began early for him when practising on the organ alone in the church in Krumlov.⁸

Eben's process of composition was often tightly intertwined with the capabilities of the instruments for which he was composing. This stems from his perspective as an organist: he often composed pieces to be performed in churches with specific organs in mind. He therefore always thought of the space in which the piece would be performed as well as the capabilities of the organ in that space. Eben tended to naturally think in terms more concretely tied to the instrument in question for which he was composing. This kind of thinking led Eben to specify certain registrations in his organ compositions or to request specific colours. Eben described this tendency:

It was the modern aspect of colour. In symphonic music, as well as in chamber music, the element of colour gained the same importance as the component of melody, harmony or form. Composers of earlier times often wrote for the organ or music of abstract voices and left it up to the performers to make the choice of the organ stops. For me, I must admit that, in the same way as I don't invent abstract music for orchestra and reflect afterwards which instrument I would entrust with the various motives and themes, analogically, I have no abstract ideas for the organ ... That is the reason why I write all my compositions sitting at and playing the organ and why I prescribe all the suggested stops in my music, as I feel that they are really

8 Petr Eben, interviewed by Martin Anderson for 'Fifty Years of Plus and Minus: The Czech Composer and Organ Virtuoso Petr Eben Talks to Martin Anderson', *Fanfare Magazine*, 19/6 (1996), <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

a part of the composition.⁹

The organ directly influenced Eben's process of composition and Eben stated that his process was the same for orchestral instruments. When he thought of themes and motifs, he associated specific instruments and colours with them. This was also true of Eben's compositions for the human voice. He explores vocal colour in his works for voice in much the same way as he explores timbres and registrations on the organ. He was unafraid to exploit the more unusual colours of the voice, and seemed to have an instinctive understanding of how to manipulate vocal colour to express strong emotion. He often uses specific *tessitura* and colours symbolically to represent certain ideas or emotions. Eben's son David, in an interview with Matthew Markham, explained that Eben 'loved the human voice, particularly mezzo-sopranos and baritones'.¹⁰

In addition to influencing his use of colour, perhaps the biggest aspect of Eben's composition that the organ contributed was his incorporation of improvisation. Eben was well known to be extraordinary at techniques of improvisation on the organ. Indeed, he considered improvisation to be his other branch of expertise of equal importance to composition, both of which were inextricable from the other for him. Eben described this symbiotic relationship in his speech on receiving his Honorary Doctorate at Charles University:

Every organist moves in two areas: on the one hand he interprets finished compositions, on the other hand he improvises. And I have to admit that I was fascinated by improvisation; one can move freely in the space of unlimited

9 Petr Eben, interviewed by Janette Fishell for 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben', 23.

10 David Eben, interviewed by Matthew Markham for 'A Study of *Písň z Těšínska* of Petr Eben' (DMA dissertation, Florida State University, 2009), 7.

imagination. And it is the beginning of any music at all. But all art strives towards perfection, it strives to be rid of everything accidental and find its definitive form. It can work a long time on different versions of the same piece, until it discovers the best, the truest, the most convincing; very often it will also be the shortest. But this must be fixed and written down, transformed into a definitive work. And that's how I got from that stage to the finished composition.¹¹

Eben made it clear that improvisation for him was part of the process of composition. The contribution of improvisation in his works can be seen in the way in which he develops themes and motifs, the tonal ambiguity of much of his output, fluid modulation, sections of rhythmic freedom and aleatoric passages.

3.3 Gregorian Chant

The religious and political implications of Eben's use of chant were of utmost importance in his compositions. However, chant also played a large role in Eben's musical language in terms of its modality, its use of unison sonorities and its rhythmic freedom.¹² In addition to these features, Gregorian chant is based in the traditional Church Modes, of which Eben makes great use in his works both melodically and harmonically. At times Eben would quote Orthodox chants as well as Gregorian chants, but the majority of his quotations are Gregorian. Eben either directly quotes specific chants, or draws on their characteristics for melodic inspiration. When quoting a chant, Eben tends to alter, fragment and develop it for expressive purposes. Fishell notes that when Eben develops a chant, 'its own harmonic, melodic and rhythmic characteristics influence other thematic material.'¹³

11 Petr Eben, Speech at Charles University (1994) in Landgren, 'Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben's Organ Works', 130.

12 Petr Eben, interviewed by Johannes Landgren for 'Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben's Organ Works' (PhD dissertation, Göteborg University, 1997), 23.

13 Fishell, 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben', 37.

3.4 Czech Folk Music

Similar to Czech composers such as Dvořák, Janáček and Martinů, in 1952 Eben took a trip to the Těšín region and to the Silesian Mountains to collect folk song while he was a student at the Prague Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts.¹⁴ On his trip Eben became familiar with the individual characteristics of folk music from those areas.

The folk music of the Bohemian region differs in certain aspects from the folk music of the Moravian region, and music from the Moravian-Silesian region also has its own specific characteristics. Janette Fishell explains the differences between Bohemian and Moravian-Silesian folk music in an organised table in her dissertation on Eben's organ music.¹⁵ A perusal of this table reveals that the characteristics of Moravian-Silesian folk music are clearly those that had the greater influence on Eben's compositions. Fishell describes the characteristics of Moravian-Silesian folk music as: having a strong sense of rubato, having a preference for intervallic leaps of a fourth or fifth in the melody, having frequent melodic ornamentation, having asymmetrical or changing metres, based on highly accented and syncopated rhythms which include *recitative*-like sections, dominated by the minor mode, frequently using augmented and diminished intervals, often using the tritone or the flattened seventh as well as microtones, often harmonised in parallel thirds or seconds, having an ambiguous or shifting tonal centre, built on the repetition of motifs and having irregular phrase lengths.¹⁶ A particular characteristic of Moravian folk music is the presence of what have been termed 'gypsy scales', a term which today may seem dated. These are scales which contain augmented intervals not usually found in Western music, and

14 Matthew Markham, 'A Study of *Písň z Těšínska* of Petr Eben' (DMA dissertation, Florida State University, 2009), 13.

15 Fishell, 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben', 8-10.

16 *Ibid.*, 8-9.

which have traditionally been associated with the Romani people. They have a distinctive sound unlike the tonality found in the music of Western Europe.

3.5 Melody

When composing melodies, Eben prefers to establish melodic motifs and then develop these over the course of his compositions. This is a technique which arose in part from his penchant for improvisation. He often states the motif in full, then explores it by fragmenting it, inverting it, stating it in retrograde, transposing it or altering intervals, or changing its tonality/modality. Some of the techniques Eben employs, such as inversion and retrograde statements, are reminiscent of serial music or twelve-tone technique. However, the ways in which Eben developed and altered motifs was always done with a purpose, and always with the intent of expressing an idea or sentiment rather than as a cerebral exercise. In addition, Eben's use of these techniques did not arise from the practice of serial methods but rather from his own process of creating effective improvisations and of using improvisation as inspiration for his composition.¹⁷

The influences of both Gregorian chant and Czech folk music can often be seen in Eben's melodies. At times Eben directly quotes a chant or a part of a chant as a melodic motif which he then develops. Characteristics of chant such as the use of the Church Modes, use of melisma, or stepwise motion are present in the melody. Signatures of Moravian folk music can be seen in his melodies.¹⁸

17 Petr Eben, interviewed by Martin Anderson for 'Fifty Years of Plus and Minus', <http://dev.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/19_6/1960050.aa_Fifty_Years_Plus_Minus.html> [accessed 12 January 2021].

18 See Chapter 3, pages 47-48.

3.6 Harmony

Eben's harmonic language is unusual, often chromatically colourful and tonally ambiguous, yet always comprehensible. One of Eben's most recognisable harmonic signatures is his use of polytonality and bitonality. Eben pointed out that he usually tended toward the latter, stating: 'Mostly I just use the combination of two tonalities – this combination is still 'readable' for the listener.'¹⁹ This was a rare balance Eben was always careful to strike: he did not sacrifice his musical style or sophistication for accessibility, neither did he sacrifice accessibility for style and technique.

Eben often establishes the contrasting tonal centres of separate keys in different voices, then develops the relationship of the two (or more) tonalities by building intervallic structures and superimposing chords and sonorities against one another. He contrasts triads with each other, then subtly shifts tonality so that they fall into consonance. Tonal centres fluctuate, but always emerge clearly as 'signposts' for the listener in order to make the music comprehensible. In this way, Eben continually plays with and builds upon the relationship of tonalities with each other, without losing tonal structure or a sense of harmonic progression through the piece. Fishell notes that 'it is typical for the composer to place primary thematic material in a key other than that found in the accompanimental voices'.²⁰ This is particularly apparent in his vocal music and easily discernible in his solo vocal music, where the single vocal line in one tonality is juxtaposed against the accompaniment in another tonality. In Eben's solo vocal works this can make for an interesting exploration of the relationship between voice and accompanying instrument and can be used as an

19 Petr Eben, interviewed by Janette Fishell for 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben', 29.

20 Fishell, 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben', 30.

effective tool in expressing certain texts. The influence of folk music, particularly Moravian-Silesian folk music, can be heard in Eben's harmonic language.²¹

In addition to folk influences, Eben's harmonic language draws from jazz elements. These can be heard in his frequent use of heavy chromaticism, fondness for quartal and quintal sonorities, altered notes and 'blue' notes and improvisation-inspired passages.²²

3.7 Rhythm

Of all the aspects of Eben's music, perhaps the element that strikes the listener most immediately is the strong sense of a rhythmic presence throughout his works.

Musicologists have highlighted rhythmic vitality as a key element distinctive to Czech art music.²³ Indeed, when asked by Janette Fishell during an interview what aside from folk music influences gave Eben's music its Czech identity, Eben replied: 'Maybe it is in a certain spontaneity; the music is perhaps coming more from the heart than from the brain. And then probably a taste for rhythm, which I apply to the organ.'²⁴

Eben's propensity for rhythm was something which arose in part from his technique as an organist. Perhaps the most immediately obvious of his rhythmic techniques is his frequent use of *ostinato* figures. These are so prevalent in Eben's music that they have become one of his signature techniques. At times the *ostinato* is a gentle pulse underneath the thematic material, at other times Eben uses the *ostinato* more aggressively to express agitation and strong emotions. There are passages when the

21 See Chapter 3, pages 47-48.

22 Landgren, 'Music – Moment – Message', 29.

23 Michael Beckerman, 'In Search of Czechness in Music', *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 10 No. 1 (1986), 64.

24 Petr Eben, interviewed by Janette Fishell for 'The Organ Music of Petr Eben', 23.

ostinato is confined to the accompaniment and other points in his music where the main thematic material itself becomes an *ostinato*. The use of *ostinato* in Eben's music creates a forward drive and motion, which lends his works a sense of vitality.

The other common rhythmic techniques Eben uses in his music are asymmetrical phrases, sharply accented rhythms, syncopation, rapidly changing metres, *recitative*-like passages (especially in his vocal music), and aleatoric passages. Many of these techniques are found in both Moravian-Silesian music and Gregorian chant. Eben also often employs polyrhythms. It is common for Eben's rhythms to change and shift with changing tonal centres, so that the rhythmic and harmonic aspects of his music are often closely related. Like other aspects of his music, many of these techniques arose from Eben's skill at improvisation.

3.8 Text

Eben was a great lover of literature, and very sensitive to texts in his vocal compositions. Eben chose his texts with care and had a deep understanding of the authors whose texts he set. Kateřina Vondrovicová confirms his penchant for literature:

Petr Eben reads a lot of poetry ... he will write down what he is interested in reading. To this end, he has a kind of 'stockpile' of lyrics at home. He started this stockpile in his youth, and today it has grown into several formidable manuscript notebooks, written in small, dense letters. These contain not only poetry, but also extracts from prose or published literature, quotes – a variety of material that is largely foreign-language and demonstrates the composer's ability to read the original texts and his personal interest in foreign languages.²⁵

25 Kateřina Vondrovicová, *Petr Eben* (Prague: Panton Ltd., 1995), 87.

Eben's love of and fluency in multiple languages gave him an innate understanding of the ways in which different languages interact with music. It also gave him a certain sensitivity to the way in which vowel sounds and consonant combinations differ between languages. To Eben's thought, the different sound and shape of words in particular languages could affect the way in which they were sung as well as their impact on an audience:

I am often charmed by the phonetic side of speech itself. I don't remember any text being set to music as well as the Greek in Socrates' Apology. I will give two examples: the word 'smrt' ['death'] sounds in Czech faintly suggestive perhaps precisely because of its quietness, but it cannot be sung. The German 'Tod' is far more sonorous, but how far it is from the power of the Greek 'thanatos'! Or another word: 'peníze' ['money'] – 'Geld' has the sound of mere commerce. But only the Greek word retained for me the ominous power of greed in the sound of 'chrematon'. Not only does the number of vowels in Greek directly encourage singing, but individual words can also stimulate musical imagination.²⁶

Additionally, if Eben was not familiar with a language, he took pains to understand it.²⁷ For Eben, the words themselves held a certain music in the sonority of their vowels, the accent of their syllables and the percussion of their consonants. Combined with the colours of particular human voices, the musical qualities of words took on even more nuances, a phenomenon with which Eben was fascinated.²⁸

In addition to the sonority of words, Eben was very adept at setting the syntax of a sentence to a musical phrase. Eben's music tends to follow the natural flow and intonation of a sentence of text in any language. If the music is at odds with a

26 Petr Eben, interviewed by Kateřina Vondrovicová for *Petr Eben* (Prague: Panton Ltd., 1995), 88.

27 Vondrovicová, *Petr Eben*, 89.

28 Nelly Matova, 'Petr Eben's Oratorio *Apologia Sokratus* (1967) and *Ballet Curses and Blessings* (1983): An Interpretative Analysis of the Symbolism Behind the Text Settings and Musical Style', trans. Nelly Matova (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010), 76.

linguistic sentence, it is a conscious choice on Eben's part for expressive purposes. Rhythmically, Eben follows but emphasises and on occasion even exaggerates the natural rhythm of the words, at times creating rhythmic motifs out of the linguistic rhythm. If Eben departs from this, it is for expressive purposes, or perhaps symptomatic of a chant or chorale quotation. Eben very frequently alters the metre of a work several times in order to fit the linguistic syntax. He also makes use of *recitative*-like passages or sections of *Sprechgesang* which are juxtaposed against more melodic or heavily rhythmic segments.

Eben described his musical ideas as emerging directly from the text, rather than the other way around:

If I read good poetry, one that touches me personally, then the music comes completely unintentionally to me, without trying to summon it, it's just there, as if it belongs to the poem. It is created from the mood of the poem, develops with it, works with it, and when the poem ends, the music still echoes from it for a while, I don't even have to look for music, I just bring it out and write it in. Sometimes it happens that I have a beautiful text in front of me, and yet it won't cut that string in me. And neither taste nor goodwill will help me, and I have to give up on the text, no matter how sorry I am.²⁹

The texts which most inspired Eben were those in which the music seemed to arise naturally from the words. This is perhaps part of the reason why his music fits the contour of the lyrics so comfortably, and music and word work in tandem to such an extent in order to express his message.

29 Petr Eben, interviewed by Kateřina Vondrovicová, *Petr Eben*, 87.

3.9 Conclusion

An understanding of Eben's life makes it immediately clear that both his musical style and the philosophy behind his compositions were very directly influenced by his specific experiences. His childhood in Český Krumlov led to a love of archaic texts and musical influences. His time playing trios with his family as a child, coupled with their isolation due to the Nazi occupation were influences on his early development as a composer and pianist. The circumstances of World War II led to his mastery and love of the organ and his exposure to Gregorian chant. His experiences in Buchenwald concentration camp gave rise to his preoccupation with human morality as a theme and his dedication to his Catholic faith. His travels in the Těšín region and Silesian mountains while at the Prague Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts inspired his interest in Czech folk song. His time living under Communist oppression resolved Eben to express spirituality through his music, and to use his music to communicate to others. All these experiences and musical influences resulted in the uniquely archaic yet contemporary, technically sophisticated yet passionately expressive, spiritual yet relatable, musical style that has become Petr Eben's signature. What emerged was a musical language that was unapologetic in its expression of emotion and which served as a powerful medium of communication for Eben. The way in which a performer might engage with this communicative medium bears further consideration. Doing so reveals the way in which Eben's musical language interacts with the performer to create a moving interpretation which communicates the composer's intent. An excellent example of Eben's work with which to consider this interaction of performer and Eben's music is the song cycle *Písně nelaskavé* or 'Loveless Songs'.

Chapter 4

Písně nelaskavé

4.1 Overview

Petr Eben composed his song cycle entitled *Písně nelaskavé* or *Loveless Songs* in 1963, when the Communist government had been fully established in former Czechoslovakia for some time. In previous song cycles for solo voice such as *Šestero písně milostných* (*Six Medieval Love Songs*) and *Písně nejtajnější* (*Most Secret Songs*), Eben had explored the theme of love and the many ways it can manifest through the different songs of each cycle. These previous cycles also related the concepts of human love and divine love, sometimes contrasting and sometimes merging the two. *Písně nelaskavé* focuses on the lack or loss of love, on broken relationships and the idea of hatred. Eben had reason for choosing such a difficult theme on which to base his cycle, and stated his concept of the cycle in the foreword to the printed score:

Love themes were the strongest incentive for me to create song cycles. The same was true this time; however, I felt that I would only get a very narrow snippet of reality if I only stuck with celebratory love verses; there are too many painful relationships around us, misunderstandings, mistakes, but also emptiness and delusion. So I found myself moving to the other, opposite pole of this subject, where the loving relationship has become empty, where it is a painful wound, where love has turned into hatred and the relationship has failed. And so I wrote this cycle as a kind of consolation to those affected by this disaster, but also as a warning to those who can still prevent it. For this bitter content of the songs, I chose the unusual combination of alto and viola: by the emptiness created by the isolation of these two voices, and the bitterness of the viola sound, I wanted to characterise the bleak solitude of these relationships, sounding throughout the cycle from the beginning through to the poem

by Anna Achmatová, but a new possibility of reconciliation is opened in the Nezval poem *Stesk*. The cycle was first performed in the Prague House of Artists during the Prague Composers Week on November 17th, 1964 by Věra Soukupová and the viola group of the Czech Chamber Orchestra.¹

Eben's interest in the dichotomy of morality and the extremities of emotion in humanity is apparent in this cycle. Though the emotions expressed in *Písně nelaskavé* are negative ones, Eben states in his foreword that he composed the cycle partly as a consolation for those who have experienced such painful emotions. The difficult sentiments expressed in the songs are meant, as with all of Eben's work, as a way of connecting and empathising with the performer and listener. Eben explained in a speech in Darmstadt in 1993 that he conceived of the song cycle as a progression through varying degrees of emotional separation between people. However, at the climax of the bitter feelings expressed, the last song emerges as a message of hope for unity:

The song cycle *Loveless Songs* follows a similar course [to *Blessings and Curses*]. I've written a few cycles of love songs before, but seeing so many breakups around me and painful circumstances, I felt the need to express this, and chose the two solo voices: alto and viola (without piano accompaniment), which reflect the harsh emptiness of this state and symbolise human disconnection. [In this cycle] I followed a progression of dismissive cool relationships, beginning with the description of strict separation in the poem 'The Wall' by Polish poet T. Różewicz; the third song shows – in the text of the same poet – the violent quarrel of both partners, the fourth song sets to music the magical text by the Hungarian poet Endre Ady 'Til Death Do Us Join,' and the climax of the cycle is a dramatic poem by the Russian poet A. Achmatová, which begins with a shrill exclamation "Be cursed." But I would never have written this cycle if I would not have been convinced that there was a possibility that people

1 Petr Eben, Foreword to *Písně nelaskavé* (Prague: Panton International Mainz Praha, 1963), 2.

would come back together, the hope that reconciliation can come about and end like this cycle with a Czech poem by V. Nezval, which after this escalation from rejection to hatred at the end expresses the beginning of love. The title means ‘Yearning’ and speaks of: ‘When the longing fills you, then come...’ and the song ends: ‘a new day dawns, you come.’²

Eben’s philosophy, which placed faith in the ability of humanity to unite, and his deep belief in human connection, are represented strongly in this cycle. This is due to the very fact that it explores with agonising thoroughness the consequences of disconnection and separation yet still ends with a message affirming connection and love. Eben’s belief in the ability of humanity to overcome its struggles and failures was a conviction he often wished to convey through his music, usually in connection to spirituality.

Eben mentions in his foreword that one of the reasons he chose to compose *Písně nelaskavé* was his observation that there are ‘too many painful relationships around us, misunderstandings, mistakes, but also emptiness and delusion.’ This statement could be referring to the general hardships he witnessed people encounter in their lives. However, when consideration is given to the fact that he composed this cycle in 1963, when the KSČ had been in power in Czechoslovakia for many years and he had fully experienced the reality of living under its ideology, this statement could take on another meaning. During the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, the terror trials and close monitoring by Party authorities of anyone who showed signs of opposition to the government led to a pervading sense of paranoia, fear, and mistrust among Czech citizens, both those in and out of the Party. Relationships and trust among

2 Petr Eben, ‘Zum Thema “Aufstieg” – Wandlung und Aufbruch/Eröffnung neuer Lebensmöglichkeiten’, Speech in Darmstadt, (1993) in Johannes Landgren, ‘Music – Moment – Message: Interpretive, Improvisational, and Ideological Aspects of Petr Eben’s Organ Works’ (Göteborg University, 1997), 128.

neighbours were undermined by the fear of being informed upon to the government.

This had a lasting effect on the psyche of many Czech people, including Eben.³

When viewed in this context, Eben's desire to compose a song cycle about broken relationships and mistrust seems understandable. So too are his words in the foreword to the cycle, perhaps made deliberately vague so as not to arouse political suspicion. Not only did Eben live with the paranoia of the Communist government, he had also already experienced forced isolation and the sudden coldness of his friends and neighbours when he was a child in Český Krumlov.⁴ He was well aware of humanity's struggle with morality and with the ability to connect to one another. His statement regarding *Písně nelaskavé* as representing both a consolation to those going through such difficult emotions, and a warning to those who can prevent it, can be interpreted to carry greater weight when placed in this context.

There are certainly those who have noted a possible political subtext to *Písně nelaskavé*. Michael Oliver reviewed the recording of three of Eben's song cycles made by mezzo-soprano Dagmar Pecková, baritone Ivan Kusnjer, violist Jan Pěruška, and with Eben on the piano. In this review Oliver states:

The *Loveless Songs* for voice and viola and the six Rilke songs ... are much bigger although not much longer [than Eben's song cycles *Šestero písní milostných* and *Písní nejtajnější*]. The former are so intense, at times so angry or obsessive that one suspects a personal, maybe even a political subtext. Some (a bitter setting of Anna Akhmatova, the painful 'Till death do us join') are clearly about people suffering from sundered or loveless relationships; the furious 'For instance' and 'The wall'

3 Andreas Kempin, 'Personal Tributes to Petr Eben' in Graham Melville-Mason (ed.), *A Tribute to Petr Eben to mark his 70th Birthday Year* (Garstang: Colin Cross Printers, 2000), 166.

4 See Chapter 2, pages 28-29.

sound more like condemnations of society.⁵

The texts Eben chose to set for *Písň nelaskavé* give credence to the idea that there is a political subtext to this cycle. Eben, who at all times chose his texts with the utmost care and consideration, selected for this cycle texts by the poets Tadeusz Różewicz, Endre Ady, Anna Achmatová and Vítězslav Nezval. There is also included a text by an unknown author. The poets Eben chose wrote works which explored the emotional and psychological impact of war, political oppression, or both in their respective countries of origin.

Różewicz was a Polish modernist poet and playwright who served in the Polish underground Home Army during World War II, and whose brother was tortured and executed by the Gestapo for serving in the Polish Resistance Movement. After serving his time in the Home Army, Różewicz became involved in the Polish neo-avant-garde collective Grupa Krakowska.⁶ Różewicz's work centred on a raw, unvarnished expression of the horrors he witnessed during the war, and the sense of meaninglessness many felt in the wake of World War II.⁷ In 1950, Różewicz fled to Hungary to escape the Communist regime in Poland, though later returned to his home country.⁸

Endre Ady was a Hungarian poet and journalist, and was considered the first modernist poet of his country. Later in life, he became part of the radical intellectual group Huszadik Század in response to the approach of World War I. Additionally, he

5 Michael Oliver, 'Eben – Songs' <<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/eben-songs>> [accessed 17 February 2022].

6 Janusz R. Kowalczyk, 'Tadeusz Różewicz' <<https://culture.pl/en/artist/tadeusz-rozewicz>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

7 Douglas Martin, 'Tadeusz Rozewicz, Fierce Poetic Voice of Postwar Poland, Is Dead at 92' <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/21/arts/tadeusz-rozewicz-fierce-poetic-voice-of-postwar-poland-is-dead-at-91.html>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

8 Kowalczyk, 'Tadeusz Różewicz'.

was one of the founding members of A Holnap, a Hungarian literary group. His work often centred on Hungarian identity and the struggle of living in modern Hungarian society.⁹

Anna Achmatová was a pen name for Anna Andreyevna Gorenko, one of the most significant Russian poets of the twentieth century. Her work shifted over time from a focus on themes of personal dissatisfaction in relationships and abandonment to dwelling on the defiance of remaining in Russia while others fled. Achmatová frequently condemned the revolution and its ideals in her poetry. Her work was eventually censored by Soviet authorities for this very reason, and all publications of her poetry were banned. Much of her work from this period of censorship is collected in the volume entitled *Anno Domini MCMXXI*, from which Eben drew the text he chose for *Pisně nelaskavé*. Later, throughout World War II and the rise of Stalinist Russia, Achmatová faced poverty due to several government attacks on her reputation and career. Despite this, she composed such works as *Rekviem* or ‘*Requiem*’, a memorial to Stalin’s victims during the years of terror. Her later works reflected the bleakness of the Soviet State and her pain at the loss of friends and the life and artistic freedom she once knew.¹⁰

Vítězslav Nezval was a member of the group Devětsil (‘Nine Forces’), a collection of some of the most prominent young avant-garde artists in former Czechoslovakia. Nezval, like many young Czech artists and intellectuals of his generation, espoused himself to Communism and to Socialist ideologies partly in response to the devastation of World War I. He later vocally opposed the rise of fascism and the Nazi

9 ‘Endre Ady Bio’, *My Poetic Side* <<https://mypoeticside.com/poets/endre-ady-poems>> [accessed 3 March 2022].

10 Poetry Foundation, ‘Anna Akhmatova’ <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/anna-akhmatova>> [accessed 3 March 2022].

occupation of Czechoslovakia during World War II, and much of his subsequent literary work was not subtle in its condemnation of fascist oppression. Nezval also founded the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia in 1934 and became one of the leading Czech surrealist poets of his generation.¹¹

When the lives and histories of the poets Eben chose for his texts are taken into account, as well as the thematic context of the poems themselves, it seems very likely that the themes of *Písně nelaskavé* contain some level of political subtext. Eben would likely have known the political associations of these poets, and chosen their texts deliberately. Banned texts were extremely difficult to obtain during the Communist regime in former Czechoslovakia, therefore Eben's use of Achmatová's censored poetry in particular was a strong statement.

Whether or not the audience interprets *Písně nelaskavé* as possessing a political subtext, the difficult emotions expressed in the songs are universal, and the call to examine and recognise such emotions for what they are is one to which any audience can relate. This is a song cycle which forces the audience to confront the uglier and more painful side of the human emotional spectrum, therefore the performing and listening experience of it may not be pleasant in certain aspects. However, Eben was clear in his statements that confronting this side of the emotional spectrum is necessary to understanding the human condition. If the audience is able to understand this cycle as an expression of pain and frustrated anger in the face of fracturing relationships, then a performance of it will have at least in some part succeeded in communicating the emotional themes Eben sought to convey. However, a full understanding of the political subtext in this cycle provides both audience and

11 'Vitezslav Nezval Bio', *My Poetic Side* <<https://mypoeticside.com/poets/vitezslav-nezval-poems#block-bio>> [accessed 7 January 2022].

performer a far richer and deeper experience of it. A reading of the cycle which takes a political subtext into account may completely change the singer's interpretation of Eben's musical choices, and therefore the audience's experience of the songs. When provided with the historical and political associations of the cycle, listeners are invited through the performer to relate the themes presented in them not only to their personal emotions and lives, but also to a broader context. A Czech audience who experienced former Czechoslovakia under the Soviet regime may have a more immediate and visceral response to the themes and emotions expressed, and the messages Eben intended in this cycle might seem clear and direct to such an audience. However, an audience from another country that did not have the same experiences might not have quite the same immediate reaction. Yet, as with all his works, Eben intended the themes of *Písňe nelaskavé* to be relevant to any audience. His musical language in this song cycle is so clear in its communicative properties and so explicit in its navigation of extreme emotion that the performer's task of interpreting the songs can be accomplished with ease. However, if the performer possesses an understanding of Eben's life and the political context of this song cycle, the task of interpretation becomes still easier, as Eben's musical messages are made clearer and more profound. The performer's interpretation in this case can become more nuanced, and provide a richer and more thought-provoking experience for the audience.

In order to understand the way in which Eben's musical language guides the singer in communicating his messages in *Písňe nelaskavé*, a musical analysis of the song cycle is necessary. What follows is an analysis of each song in the cycle, highlighting examples from the songs which best demonstrate Eben's use of his musical language to guide the singer. The analysis of each song is followed by a description of the author's artistic interpretation in performance. The inclusion of the author's

interpretation demonstrates one example of the way in which Eben's musical guidance may be implemented practically to communicate his intent. The author's perspective on each song is highlighted, to demonstrate the way in which the performer's perspective may interact with Eben's and build upon his intent to create a rich and rewarding performance experience. The analysis and performance interpretation of each song are supplemented by a recording of the author's performance of the relevant song in the cycle. The recordings are included to demonstrate aurally those aspects of the songs that are highlighted through analysis and description of performance interpretation.

It is here pertinent to include a note regarding the recorded tracks of *Písně nelaskavé*. The cycle was originally composed for solo low mezzo or contralto voice and solo viola; this was the ideal pair of voice and instrument for the cycle in Eben's conception. He noted in his foreword and multiple times in speeches and interviews that he chose the low mezzo voice and the viola specifically for the unique combination of timbres and qualities they would produce together. He also directed that the voice and viola should be unaccompanied by piano to emphasise the loneliness and isolation of the text. However, he did include piano accompaniment in the cycle and noted in the score published by Panton International that it was acceptable to perform *Písně nelaskavé* with the piano accompaniment should no viola be available. This is the form in which selections from the cycle will be heard on the recordings accompanying this dissertation.

4.2 Musical Analysis and Performance of *Písně nelaskavé*

4.2.1 Zed'

Zed'	The Wall
Zed', tu zed', kterou jsme stavěli spolu, den ze dne přidávajíc slovo k mlčení, tu zed' rozrazit nemůžeme. Zazdění vlastníma rukama zmíráme žízni, slyšíme jak vedle hne se ten druhý, slyšíme povzdech, voláme o pomoc, i slzy stékají do hloubky našich těl. Lidi, lidi, co bylo skryto, je odkryto. Dáváme představení pro dospělé i děti, vojáky, studenty i ženy i z domácnosti. Ty sis nasadil rohy, tesáky, drápy, já dlouhý a ostrý jazyk, ty v prsa se biješ, polykáš nože, řetězy škubeš, droliš mé srdce. Stojíme na hlavách, chodíme po rukou, žena se zlatým srdcem, muž s očima děcka, žena i muž v jedné osobě, lidi, lidi, divy se vidí zde u nás lidí. Lidi, lidi, lidi smilujte se, hod'te drobitek lásky.	The wall, the wall, that we built together, day by day, adding our words to silence, we cannot break down the wall. Walled in with our own hands, we are dying of thirst. we hear the one next door breathing, we hear him sigh, we call for help, and even tears flow down into the depths of our bodies. People, people, what was hidden is being exposed. We give performances for adults and children, soldiers, students, women and household servants. You wore horns, tusks, and claws, I a long and a sharp tongue, you beat your chest, you swallow knives, you pull the chains, you crush my heart. We stand on our heads, we walk on our hands, a woman with a golden heart, a man with a child's eyes, woman and man in one person, people, people, wonders are seen here among our people. People, people, people have mercy, throw us a crumb of love.

Analysis

The text of Zed' is by Polish poet Tadeusz Różewicz, translated to Czech by Vlasta Dvořáčková. It is the first song in the cycle and therefore represents the beginning of the breakdown of the relationships depicted in the cycle. It describes the separation of people and the moment of division in relationships. It is also about the feeling of being exposed to the judgment and ridicule of others for having failed in a relationship. It explores the idea of people's struggles as being painfully on display for all to see.

The poem is immediately striking and blunt, starting abruptly with the word 'zed' or 'wall' and then forcefully repeating it as though right away establishing a harsh

boundary. Eben captures this blunt forcefulness musically by starting off the piano or viola accompaniment in repeated, *forte* octaves on G. The viola is instructed to down-bow these octaves, while the piano is instructed to play them without pedal. This reinforces the terse quality of the opening lines of the poem. The voice only has a bar before it enters, reflecting the immediate impact of the poem. When the voice enters, it is on the single word 'Zed', also on a G, followed by four beats of silence before the voice re-enters only with 'tu zed', reinforcing the concept of the wall much in the way the characters reinforce the wall between them. The relentless repetition of the G from both piano or viola and voice suggests the reinforcement of the unmoving wall. In the piano (though not the viola) a syncopated rhythm of dissonant chromatic chord clusters begins in the left hand, offsetting the rigid $\frac{3}{4}$ time of the right-hand octaves and further creating an aggressively forceful atmosphere. This is one of the songs in which Eben never changes the time signature, something he is often inclined to do in order to fit the syntax of the text. Here, the text is forced to fit the unchanging time signature, even when it is an uncomfortable fit. This is a stylistic choice made to suggest the inability of the characters in the poem to break down the wall they have created.

Against this 'wall' of G octaves, the vocal line creates a motif built on jagged, uncomfortably chromatic intervals, dissuading any attempt at a *legato* line. It feels as though the singer is making an awkward attempt at creating a melody but must inevitably return to the all-encompassing G tonal centre. The stiff and chromatic vocal line, the relentless rhythm and the constant reinforcement of the G establish the rigidity and immovability of the metaphorical wall that the characters in the poem have built between them. It is a poetic symbol of human disconnection that Eben

represents musically (Example 1).¹²

Example 1: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Zed’, bars 1-7

Agitato $\text{♩} = 84$ Petr EBEN

VIOLA *f simile*

CANTO *poco f poco f*

PIANO*) *f Con P* *poco f (sopra)*

Zed, tu zed, kte-rou jsme sta - vě - li spo-lu,
Da, die Wand, die wir ge - mein-sam er - bau-ten,

The texture of the song changes dramatically on the words ‘slyšíme jak vedle hne se ten druhý, slyšíme pvzdech, voláme o pomoc’ or ‘we hear the one next door breathing, hear him sigh, we call for help’. The vocal line suddenly ceases to move in jagged leaps and instead moves along a C-sharp major scale which rises and falls in stepwise motion. This encourages a *legato* line in contrast with the opening bars of the song. The motif created then rises a minor third to repeat the music in E minor. Over each rise and fall of this motif, Eben places a *crescendo* and *decrescendo*. The effect emulates a person breathing in and out, reflective of the text ‘we hear the one next door breathing’. The viola part doubles this exactly, as does the piano for the most part, creating a sudden and stark unity of sound. However, in the piano part, the left hand also doubles the voice and right hand, but in G minor. This creates an implicit tritone interval with each note of the vocal line and right hand. This tritone is excruciating to the ear and representative of the pain of the person breathing who is cut off from other human contact. Eben had a general predilection towards the use of the tritone, yet in addition this interval has a reputation as *diabolus in musica* and is

12 Track 1.

notorious for representing either infernal forces in music, or representing difficult emotions and painful circumstances. It comes as no surprise then that the tritone appears very often throughout *Písně neláskavě*. It indicates the sense of pain that permeates the whole cycle.

This section is an example of Eben’s use of bitonality. Over these bars, Eben directs both singer and viola or piano to sing and play this section *stringendo e crescendo*.

This creates a sense of building tension as the dynamic increases, until the tension bursts out on the words ‘o pomoc’ or ‘call for help’. Eben repeats this word twice and accents the first beat each time, emphasising the desperation of the call. The piano and viola are completely in unison with the voice here, the piano reinforcing the cry with shrill octaves in the right hand (Example 2).¹³

Example 2: Eben, *Písně neláskavě*, ‘Zed’, bars 31-38

Following this, Eben sets the words ‘i slzy stékají do hloubky našich těl’ or ‘and even tears flow down into the depths of our bodies’ to a repeated three-note descending motif on a modal scale based around E. Eben directs the singer to accent the first beat of two of these repetitions and to *decrescendo* on each as well. He then instructs the

¹³ Track 1.

singer to continue to *decrescendo* throughout the rest of the phrase and to end it *piano*. This has the effect of emulating sobs, which trail off as the ‘tears flow down into the depths of our bodies’. Accompanying this, the viola or the left hand of the piano doubles the descending motif in the voice but with the tonal centre of B-flat instead. Bitonality is here at play, and the intervallic difference between accompanying instrument and voice is that of a tritone. The prominence of tritone intervals already evident in this song drives home the painful nature of the text. The viola or piano left hand continues the motif after the vocal line ceases, descending as the tears do in the text. It is as if the voice has run out of words, but the tears continue to flow down (Example 3).¹⁴

Example 3: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Zed’, bars 39-47

o pomoc, i sl - zy sté-ka-jí do hloubky na - šich těl.
 Hil - fe, und Trä - nen fließen in un - se - re Herzen hin - ab.

The viola or piano descends into single, held notes, diminishing the texture to almost nothing. Over this the voice, softly and with a *decrescendo*, calls out twice on a minor third ‘Lidi’, or ‘People’. The viola or piano then disappears entirely as the voice sings: ‘co bylo skryto’ or ‘what was hidden’. This is an extraordinarily vulnerable moment, in which a sense of secrecy and fear is felt in the complete absence of an accompaniment and in the whispered *pianissimo* of the vocal line. The voice then

¹⁴ Track 1.

suddenly exclaims on a major third ‘je odkryto’ or ‘is being exposed’, accompanied by a *sforzando* chord in the piano or viola which includes a jarring augmented fifth. This is followed by an entire bar of silence to allow the exclamation to ring. It is a wonderful moment of word-painting, the sudden vehemence of the voice and viola or piano surprising the listener and capturing a sense of uncomfortable revelation (Example 4).¹⁵

Example 4: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Zed’, bars 48-59

The musical score for Example 4 consists of two systems. The first system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a circled number 5 above the first measure. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a more complex accompaniment in the left hand. The lyrics are: 'Li-di, Li-di, co by-lo skry-to, / Leu-te, Leu-te, was wir ver-bar-gen,'. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics: 'je od-kry-to. / wird auf-gedeckt.' and includes a *pizz.* marking above the piano accompaniment.

Eben then launches into a C-major waltz-like section on the words ‘Dáváme představení pro dospělé i děti’ or ‘We give performances for adults and children’. The wild, waltzing accompaniment figure in the viola or piano, based on open fifths, is reminiscent of a kind of ‘*Danse macabre*’, or ‘The Organ-Grinder’s Song’ from

¹⁵ Track 1.

Eben's *Faust*.¹⁶ The voice declaims a boisterous but simple melodic line over this. On the words 'Ty sis nasadil rohy, te sáky, drápy' or 'You wore horns, tusks, and claws', the vocal line suddenly descends into a lower part of the mezzo voice, singing a motif based around the leap of a tritone. The uncomfortable interval and the sudden drop to the chest register of the mezzo voice create a threatening effect. Eben raises this motif by a step on the next line of text, which creates a sense of increasing tension and aggression. Underneath this, the viola or piano continues the waltz figures, now built on the incredibly tense combination of major seventh and tritone intervals (Example 5).¹⁷

Example 5: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, 'Zed', bars 71-76

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the voice, starting with a circled '7' above the first measure. The middle staff is for the piano, and the bottom staff is for the viola. The tempo and dynamics markings are *mf* and *poco a poco cresc.*. The lyrics are in Czech and German.

no - sti. Ty sis na - sa - dil ro - hy, te - sá - ky, drá - py,
Hälf - te. Dir sind Hör - ner ge - wach - sen, Hau - er und Kral - len,

The tension continues to build. The music illustrates in its dance-like figures and declamatory vocal line the grotesque 'circus' of the text in which the characters of the poem feel they are performing a horrible circus of spite for those witnessing. This build of tension suddenly halts, however, on the text 'žena se zlatým srdcem, muž s očima děčka' or 'a woman with a golden heart, a man with a child's eyes'. The vocal line is instantly *piano*, gentle and *legato* in stark contrast with the wild leaps of the

¹⁶ Petr Eben, *Faust* (London: United Music Publishers Ltd., 1983).

¹⁷ Track 1.

‘circus music’. Under this, the viola is instructed to execute a series of *tremolos* on G-flat, A, and B-flat, creating a tense cluster of trembling, tonally ambiguous seconds. This cluster halts the waltz and suspends the moment eerily. In the piano, this manifests as *ostinato* figures built around the same pitches in the left and right hands. The entire effect suggests the narrator breaking out of the misery of the ‘circus performance’ for a moment of melancholy contemplation (Example 6).¹⁸

Example 6: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Zed’, bars 93-102

The musical score for Example 6 consists of two systems of music. The first system (bars 93-102) features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a circled '9' above the first measure. The lyrics are: 'cho - dí - me po ru - kou, že - na se zla - tým srd - cem, ge - hen auf Hän - den auch, Frau mit gol - de - nem Her - zen,'. The piano accompaniment includes a tremolo in the viola part and ostinato figures in the piano. Dynamic markings include *sub. p* and *f*. The second system (bars 103-108) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'muž so - či - ma děc - ka, že - na i muž Mann, Sanft - heit im Blik - ke, Frau und Mann,'. Dynamic markings include *f*.

Following this, the ‘waltz’ resumes, until it climaxes in a *fortissimo* cry of ‘lidí’ or ‘people’ from the voice as though the characters of the poem are calling desperately to the surrounding people. At the end of the song, Eben dramatically changes the texture,

¹⁸ Track 1.

with a climbing, *tremolo* chromatic scale in the viola or alternating treble octaves and augmented sixths in the piano. This obscures the rhythm, creating a moment of suspension. The high placement of the pitches creates a sense of intimacy and a tremulous quality. Over this, the vocal line pleads to the people to ‘throw us a crumb of love’ in a plaintive *legato* phrase (Example 7).¹⁹

Example 7: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Zed’’, bars 115-121

9

Performance

In his review of Pecková’s and Pěruška’s recording of *Písně nelaskavé*, Michael Oliver mentioned ‘Zed’ as one of the songs which he felt to be more of a commentary on society than a depiction of two individuals in a broken relationship. It would

¹⁹ Track 1.

certainly be characteristic of Eben's ethos to comment on the state of humanity, and to thinly veil criticisms of the society around him behind an apparent focus on personal relationships. It may not be a coincidence that Eben composed *Pisně nelaskavé* in 1963, only two years after the Berlin Wall had begun to be erected in 1961. There is the possibility that Eben intended this song partially as a reference to the Berlin Wall, and the divide of culture, families, relationships, and ideology it represented.

However, if this was the case, Eben did not comment on it in any interview or speech.

When considering my own performance interpretation, Eben's music led me to characterise myself as part of a group, part of the audience, rather than as one individual speaking to another. I wished to create the effect of speaking to a larger group. The main concept I wished to communicate to the audience was the sense of desperation I took from the song. When taking contextual knowledge into account, this song felt to me like Eben's musical plea to humanity to connect and understand one another again.²⁰

To express such a plea, I leaned as heavily as I could into Eben's word-painting. I wanted to project the brutality of the word 'zed', and therefore strongly articulated the consonants of the word. I wanted the opening section of the song to be slightly accusatory, and therefore continued to strongly articulate consonants and emphasised the jagged, disconnected quality of the vocal melody. I chose to allow my voice to be 'rougher' and less refined. To achieve a slightly darker colour and more robust sound, I involved my chest register technique further up in my range than I normally would allow it. Physically, I kept myself held as rigid as I could while still allowing proper vocal production. My intent was to project a sense of being closed off to the audience

²⁰ Track 1.

for the first part of the song.

I contrasted this with the vocal line on the words ‘Zazděni vlastníma rukama zmiráme žízní’ or ‘Walled in with our own hands, we are dying of thirst’. I made sure to connect my breath and maintain the *legato* quality of these lines. I also changed the colour of my voice to be slightly sweeter, as I wished to change the mood from accusatory to sorrowful. In terms of physicality, I allowed my body to become more fluid and relaxed, more open to the audience.

In the next section describing ‘the one next door breathing’, I wanted to communicate the desperation I sensed behind the text. Eben almost forces the singer to become short of breath here due to the rapid articulation of words and the quick succession of *crescendo/decrescendo* effects. I allowed the line of breath to become broken, and chose not to fully adduct my vocal folds so as to allow a ‘breathy’ quality through into the voice, to better represent a person desperately gasping for breath. On the line describing tears flowing down, I chose to open slightly more pharyngeal space behind my sound in order to darken my voice. The darker colour I felt helped represent the ‘sobs’ Eben wrote into the music.

I particularly wanted the calls of ‘lidi’ at bars 51 and 53 to sound small and helpless and therefore kept my voice light with little vibrato. The next line of text, ‘co bylo skryto’, or ‘what was hidden’, I wanted to sound almost like a whisper, as though I were sharing a secret. I once again did not fully adduct my vocal folds to allow a breathiness into the voice. Physically, I chose to engage the audience members conspiratorially, as though warning them that others know of our shared secret.

When I reached the ‘circus’ section of the song, I opened up my posture much as a

ringmaster would addressing a crowd. I allowed my voice slightly more into nasopharyngeal space to create a strident quality. I wanted most of all, however, to project an intensified sense of desperation. To do this, I allowed my voice to be slightly 'rougher,' strongly articulating consonants and employing more chest technique than I would normally in the middle of my vocal range. On the lines describing the characters wearing 'horns, tusks, and claws' and 'a long and a sharp tongue', in which Eben deliberately causes the voice to employ chest register or chest mix, I fully embraced the chest register and allowed my voice to darken in colour. In this way I strove to capture the sense of threat and anger I felt from Eben's vocal line.

On the lines describing 'a woman with a golden heart, a man with a child's eyes', I sweetened and lightened my voice by not using quite as heavy a breath mechanism, and minimised my vibrato. In this way I intended to capture the suspended wistfulness of these two lines. I also chose to engage the audience with direct eye contact, to signify that this was a more intimate, vulnerable moment to be shared directly.

At the end of the song on the repeated cries of 'lidi', I chose to sweeten my vocal colour and to keep the *legato* line of the phrase. I wanted these cries to sound more plaintive and melancholy than the previous calls of 'lidi'. I then allowed my voice to *decrescendo* as softly as I could for the last line of 'hod'te drobítek lásky' or 'throw us a crumb of love'. I minimised vibrato and allowed a slight breathiness into the voice to signify a sense of both pleading and hopelessness.

4.2.2 Ròzchod

Ròzchod

Vzpomínáš, vzpomínáš,
v únoru mrzlo,
vzpomínáš, vzpomínáš,
padal sníh.
Schouleni u zídky jsme říkali –
kdyby byl červenec... ah!
Je červenec, je červenec
a říkáme si:
Mrazí nás, mrazí,
ach, jak nám bývalo v únoru teplo.
Vzpomínáš, vzpomínáš? Ah!

Separation

Do you remember, do you remember,
it was cold in February,
do you remember, do you remember,
the snow was falling.
Huddling against the wall we said –
'if only it were July... ah!'
It is July, it is July
and we say to ourselves:
'We are freezing, we are freezing,
ah, how warm we used to be in February.'
Do you remember, do you remember? Ah!

Analysis

The text of 'Ròzchod' is the only poem in the cycle by an unknown author. Eben explained that he searched for a text for this placement in the cycle with certain preconditions in mind:

When I conceived of my Loveless Songs in 1963 as a statement about failed or painful relationships, I composed it with the view that the cruel content would progress from the first to the fifth [song], which was supposed to culminate in a curse – and then create a place for hope in the Nezvalová [Nezval] poem Stesk. However, such a progression cannot be straight. While I had excellent dramatic texts by Tadeusz Różewicz for the first and third songs, I needed some respite for the second song: a poem that was about a broken relationship and was sad, but not dramatic, and did not end the sense of hope (which I wanted to keep through the whole cycle), but was resigned, was short, because the text of the third song is long – and of course had to have value, be expressive, and deeply poetic! So the poem sometimes has to meet many preconditions, and then you can imagine how long I have to search.²¹

Eben chose a text that would fit into his conception of the progression of the song cycle. This further solidifies the unity and coherence of *Písně nelaskavé* and

21 Petr Eben, interviewed by Kateřina Vondrovicová for *Petr Eben* (Prague: Panton, 1995), 86.

reinforces the fact that the cycle is best experienced in its entirety to understand the full impact of Eben's message.

As Eben noted, the text is much shorter than 'Zed' and serves as a moment of introspection between two of the more dramatic songs of the cycle. If 'Zed' was an expression of the moment people separate, when they begin to build the metaphorical wall, then 'Ròzchod', as its title suggests, is the point at which the characters are fully separated from one another. There is a sense of loss and a bereft quality that permeates the poem, which Eben captures masterfully in his setting of it. The atmosphere Eben creates musically for this song is very different from that of 'Zed'. Where 'Zed' has only one bar of music before the voice enters, 'Ròzchod' has an intricate five-bar long introduction from the viola or piano. The melodic material of this introduction is built around the opening three-note motif of the vocal line, a motif which reoccurs multiple times throughout the song. When the motif is first heard in the voice, it is set to the word 'Vzpomínáš' or 'Do you remember'. As it is constantly associated with this word, it will here be referred to as the 'Remembrance Motif'. The Remembrance Motif consists of an upward leap of a major seventh, followed by a wide intervallic descent to the third note. The interval by which the motif descends varies. This variance is one example of Eben's predilection towards taking a motif, then altering, fragmenting, inverting and otherwise developing it.²² Eben uses a few of these techniques with the Remembrance Motif as the song goes on. What remains consistent about the Remembrance Motif is that it always begins with a rising major seventh interval. In the viola's or right-hand piano's opening melody, the Remembrance Motif sounds as a rising major seventh followed by a descending tritone. Both these intervals were prominent in 'Zed' and signal that the painful

²² See Chapter 3, page 48.

feelings of this song are a continuance of those in ‘Zed’. In the piano accompaniment, Eben has the left hand echo the melodic material of the right hand but with a different tonal centre. The viola is instructed to play with a mute, while the piano is instructed to play *legatissimo* and *piano*, immediately creating an atmosphere of gentle, wistful melancholy.

The melodic material of piano and viola then moves into an undulating pattern built around a harmonic minor scale starting on shifting tonal centres. This pattern becomes an *ostinato* figure over which the voice enters on the Remembrance Motif. However, the singer’s version of the Remembrance Motif descends by a perfect fifth rather than a tritone. The murmuring rise and fall of this *ostinato* pattern sound much like endless sighs and weeping, as the narrator reminisces about a time past in February when the narrator was not separated from other people. The singer is instructed to sing *piano* and, in contrast to ‘Zed’, the vocal line is *legato* with long held notes allowing the line to breathe. The rising major seventh of the Remembrance Motif causes the singer to move quickly between notes that are far apart in the vocal range. This can cause the singer to change register or to have a different vocal colour on the two notes. This creates the effect of a broken sob, moving quickly from a more chest-connected sound to something higher and more tremulous (Example 8).²³

23 Track 2.

Example 8: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Ròzchod’, bars 4-9

The second time the vocal line states the Remembrance Motif, the third note descends by an augmented fifth, though the word is the same, ‘vzpomínáš’. The larger descent on the more dissonant interval colours the word differently. It signals that as the narrator becomes more caught up in reminiscing, the narrator is also becoming more melancholy. The third time the Remembrance Motif appears, it is on the words ‘kdyby byl červenec’ or ‘if only it were July’. This is a moment in which the narrator is describing what the people said in February, wishing that it were July instead. Though it is on different words, the Remembrance Motif signals that same sense of longing and wistfulness. This time it represents the longing of the people for it to be July and for the warmth of summer. However, Eben transposes the Remembrance Motif to begin lower in the singer’s voice on a D. This creates a darker vocal colour, which indicates a sense of desperation from the people wishing it were July. It also

foreshadows that the outcome of this story may not be a good one. Eben follows the Remembrance Motif with a repeated wordless sighing figure from the singer in bars 21 and 22, which mimics the *ostinato* pattern that the piano and viola have been maintaining. Over this figure, the viola or piano plays the Remembrance Motif in a reversal of the vocal and instrumental roles in the previous two bars. (Example 9).²⁴

Example 9: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Ròzchod’, bars 19-22

The image displays a musical score for three parts: vocal line, piano accompaniment, and a detailed view of the vocal line. The vocal line is in Czech and German, with lyrics: 'kdy - by byl čer - ve - nec... a' and 'Wenn es doch Ju - li wär! a'. The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with a *mf* dynamic. The detailed view shows the vocal line with a *f* dynamic and a descending chromatic line.

The musical texture changes on the words ‘Je červenec’ or ‘It is July’. The voice is instructed to sing *mezzo-piano* and sings a descending chromatic line. The change in contour of the vocal line coupled with the inherent tension of its chromaticism create a sense of increased agitation. This agitation is reinforced by the piano and viola,

²⁴ Track 2.

which set up a pulsating semiquaver figure. This figure establishes a pedal point while the melodic line parallels the vocal line a minor third below (or a major sixth above, in the case of the piano). The piano additionally juxtaposes different tonalities in the chords of the left and right hands. This suggests to the listener that there is something troubling about the fact that ‘it is July’ (Example 10).²⁵

Example 10: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Ròzchod’, bars 22-29

The musical score for Example 10 consists of three systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a fermata on the note 'a' (sol-fa 'a'). The piano accompaniment features a pulsating semiquaver figure in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *ff*, *rit.*, *mp*, and *a tempo*. A circled number '3' is placed above the piano part. The lyrics are in Czech: 'Je čer - ve - nec, je čer - ve - Ju - li ist da, Ju - li ist'. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: 'nec a ři - ká - me si: da und nun sa - gen wir:'. The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings. The third system shows the final part of the piano accompaniment, ending with a *p* marking.

Following this comes the fourth statement of the Remembrance Motif on the words ‘Mrazí nás’ or ‘We are freezing’. This time, however, the Remembrance Motif is inverted, first descending a major seventh before rising by a major third. Vocally, this has the effect of causing the singer to quickly change vocal register and colour,

²⁵ Track 2.

moving from a B-flat in the middle of the singer's range to the C-flat below. Some singers may even break fully into chest voice for the lower note. This creates the effect of broken sobs, but the low register provides a darker colour suggestive of greater misery. The voice then sings a chromatic phrase that moves largely in semitones on the words 'ach, jak nám bývalo v únoru teplo' or 'ah, how warm we used to be in February'. The phrase never resolves to a comfortable tonality. This creates the effect of longing, of discomfort and dissatisfaction. Underneath the vocal phrase, the piano and viola play another *ostinato* figure, developed out of the descending major seventh of the inverted Remembrance Motif and peppered with several tritones. This *ostinato* figure is played *pizzicato* by the viola and *staccato* by the piano. The effect is one of stiffness after the agitation of the previous section and the continuous sighing of the earlier *ostinato*. The accompaniment here sounds almost like cracking ice, reflecting the words 'we are freezing'. The tritones provide a jarring dissonance that emphasises the unhappiness of the narrator's emotions at realising the depth of isolation the people are now experiencing (Example 11).²⁶

Example 11: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, 'Ròzchod', bars 30-36

13

4 *pizz.*
mf *poco rit.*

p *poco rit.*

Mrazí nás, mra-zí, ach, jak nám bý - va-lo v ú - no - ru te - plo.
Es ist kalt, kalt ist's, ach, wie war da - mals so warm uns im Fe - ber.

p secco *poco rit.*

The 'sighing' *ostinato* then begins again in the viola or piano. The vocal line ends

²⁶ Track 2.

with a final, wistful call of ‘Vzpomínáš’, this time starting on B-flat, the lowest it has been yet in the range of the mezzo voice. This creates an even darker, more chest-heavy timbre, which suggests a greater sense of grief. This is reinforced by the fact that the voice peters out on a wordless sigh, as though too pained to sing words any more (Example 12).²⁷

Example 12: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Ròzchod’, bars 41-46

The musical score for Example 12 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, the middle staff is the piano accompaniment, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: 'Vzpo-mí-náš, vzpo-mí - náš? a' and 'Weißt du noch, weißt du's noch? a'. Performance markings include dynamics (p, mf, pp, ppp) and tempo changes (poco rit.).

Performance

To comply with Eben’s stated intentions for this song, I wanted to contrast the mood of ‘Ròzchod’ with what came before. What I most wanted to communicate was the sense of loss that is palpable in this song. Musically, Eben slowly builds the sense of grief throughout ‘Ròzchod’ until it is at its strongest at the very end. Therefore I wanted to vocally capture this progression, allowing the changes in my vocal colour to tell the emotional story as it unfolded. As with ‘Zed’’, this song could be interpreted to be about two individuals, but also could be a commentary on society at large. I interpreted the song on a more societal rather than on an individual level. The narrator of the poem in the text Eben chose continually uses the word ‘we’, as though speaking as part of a group. When read this way, the song could be seen to be about a group of

²⁷ Track 2.

people's longing for the past after facing a terrible present in which they are separated from one another.²⁸

On the first statement of the Remembrance Motif, I chose to maintain the line of breath through the major seventh leap and to ensure my voice did not break or disconnect. I wanted the first statement to be wistful in the most 'neutral' sense, not as full of grief as the later statements. I kept my vocal production light on the first phrase, and minimised my vibrato, as I wanted this phrase to sound longing and introverted.

On the second statement of the Remembrance Motif at bar 11, I was sure to lean into the *crescendo* and to articulate the consonants of the word 'vzpomínaš' ('do you remember') slightly more. I wanted to add a sense of desperation to the motif, as though I was pleading with the audience to remember with me.

On the third statement of the Remembrance Motif at bar 19, I chose to colour the lowest and highest note of the motif quite differently, darkening the lowest note. I also chose to place a stronger emphasis on the consonants. I wanted this statement of the motif to sound more sorrowful and broken than the previous statements. I also chose to differentiate the two wordless sighing figures, darkening the first one more and singing it slightly more loudly to emphasise the sense of grief behind it. The second sighing figure I chose to sing more softly, with a lighter colour to sound more wistful.

For the falling chromatic phrase on the words 'Je červenec' or 'It is July' at bar 25, I chose to add a slight nasality to my vocal timbre and to further emphasise the consonants. I did this to project a sense of irony or sarcasm, as though the narrator is

28 Track 2.

bitter about ever wanting so badly for it to be July.

At bar 30 on the inverted statement of the Remembrance Motif on ‘Mrazí nás’ (‘We are freezing’), I wanted the motif to sound at its most sorrowful and broken. Therefore I allowed a full break between my middle register and chest voice. I also elected to sing the lowest note fully in my chest register, to further emulate a sob. I wanted the following phrase on the words ‘ach, jak nám bývalo v únoru teplo’ (‘ah, how warm we used to be in February’) to sound tentative and pained. Therefore I kept the dynamic changes subtle and minimised my vibrato. I also observed the *decrescendo* Eben placed over the end of the phrase, allowing the phrase to diminish as much as I could vocally sustain. My goal was to represent vocally the frozen stillness depicted in the words and music and to emphasise the bereft misery of the narrator.

I wanted the last statement of the Remembrance Motif to sound like a yearning and completely grief-stricken call. I allowed my chest register to colour the entire phrase to create a darker timbre. On the last wordless call, I observed Eben’s *crescendo* to *mezzo-piano* but did not allow my voice to become too ‘big’ as I wanted this to sound like a yearning sigh.

4.2.3 Na příklad

Na příklad	For Instance
Když začnou mluvit, mluví na příklad takhle: 'Jestli ty peníze došly –' 'peníze, jaké peníze –' 'ty, které poslali –' 'o jakých penězích mluvíš –' 'dobře víš, dobře víš –' 'nevím, dej pokoj –' nic jsi mi neříkal –' 'něco jsi dostala –' 'o čem to mluvíš, copak vím, copak vím, nech mě!' Slyší své hlasy a neslyší nic. Dělají, jako by zapoměli, že jejich těla jsou podrobena smrti, že lidské vnitřnosti podlehnou snadno zkáze. Bezohlední k sobě jsou slabší nežli rostliny, zvířata, může je usmrtit slovo, usmání, pohled.	When they begin to talk, they talk, for instance, like this: 'If the money has gone –' 'the money, what money –' 'the money they sent –' 'what money are you talking about –' 'you know well, you know well –' 'I don't know, leave it be –' you didn't tell me anything –' 'you got something –' 'what are you talking about –' how do I know, how do I know, leave me!' They hear their own voices but they hear nothing. They act as if they have forgotten that their bodies are subject to death, that human vitals will succumb easily to destruction. Heedless of themselves, they are weaker than plants, animals, a word, a smile, a look can kill them.

Analysis

'Na příklad' is another poem by Tadeusz Różewicz, translated into Czech by Vlasta Dvořáčková. This is one of Różewicz's more visceral texts, and Eben sets it in an appropriately dramatic fashion. At this point in the progression of the cycle, the people have lost complete sight of their connection to one another and all communication has broken down. This is one of the songs in *Písně nelaskavé* in which Eben goes the furthest in terms of exploiting the vocal capabilities of the singer. There is something almost operatic about 'Na příklad': there are *recitative*-like passages which alternate with more sung-through passages. The singer is asked to embody three different characters: a narrator and two characters arguing with each other.

The song begins in an immediately jarring fashion, with alternating chords in the viola or piano. The first chord is built on wide intervals of major sevenths and perfect fifths

on C, B and G (with an E-flat added in the piano, contributing a dissonant minor second into the chord). The second chord is a clashing combination of tonalities. In the piano this manifests as a G natural octave in the left hand and an E-flat minor seventh chord in the right hand. In the viola, these tonalities are represented by a G natural, an enharmonically spelled G-flat and an E-flat. What this immediately creates is a dissonant, uncomfortable atmosphere, setting up the tension of what is to follow.

When the voice enters, it enters on silence, and is instructed to sing *quasi recitativo parlando*. This is the first time in the cycle that Eben has used one of his favoured *recitative*-like passages in one of the songs, and it serves as an appropriately arresting technique here.²⁹ Eben chooses a g' as the note on which the singer intones, much like the opening section of 'Zed'. This could be because the note sits comfortably in the middle of the mezzo range and close to the natural speaking voice of the mezzo. This makes it easy to use a speech-like technique on these lines and perhaps displays Eben's understanding of, and sensitivity to, the human voice and the different vocal ranges. After another interlude of the same opening chords from the viola or piano, the voice intones another *recitative*-like phrase. Both these phrases are on the words 'Když začnou mluvit, mluví na příklad takhle' or 'When they begin to talk, they talk, for instance, like this'. Eben changes the metre of the song to suit the syntax of these phrases, from $\frac{4}{4}$ at the start of the song, to $\frac{5}{4}$ at bar 4, to $\frac{3}{4}$ at bar 5. This places emphasis on the speech-like quality of the vocal phrases. These are only the first of many more changes of metre throughout the song, which are indicative of Eben's desire to highlight the text as well as the spoken quality of the first section of this song (Example 13).³⁰

29 See Chapter 3, page 53.

30 Track 3.

Example 13: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Na příklad’, bars 1-5

A piacere

mf *p* (*quasi recitativo parlando*) *p*

Když začnou mluvit, mlu-ví na pří-klad
 Und wenn sie re - den, re-den sie zum Bei-spiel

mf *mf*

tak-hle:
 so:

These first two vocal phrases are the words of the narrator. In this first section of the song, Eben musically characterises the narrator as objective and neutral, intoning phrases mostly on one note.

Starting at bar 6, the next section begins an argument between two characters over money. Eben signals the change in mood and the change of character by an agitated, semiquaver figure in the viola or piano. This figure directly mimics the following vocal line, sung on the words ‘Jestli ty peníze došly’ or ‘If the money has gone’.

These are the words of the first character in the argument. Eben musically represents this character with a lower *tessitura* and with largely stepwise movement in the vocal melody. In a demonstration of his sensitivity to the Czech language,³¹ Eben breaks the

31 See Chapter 3, pages 52-53.

phrase up into triplets, which places stress on the first syllable of each word, where it usually falls in Czech.

The piano and viola follow in the next bar with another agitated semiquaver figure. This alternation between voice and instrument sounds like an exchange or argument in and of itself, as though the viola or piano is a third participant in this argument, or a mocking echo of the voices.

The voice enters on the words ‘peníze, jaké peníze’ or ‘money, what money’. This is the voice of the other character in the argument. Eben musically characterises this voice with a generally higher *tessitura* and wider intervallic leaps (Example 14).³²

Example 14: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Na příklad’, bars 5-9

① *Concitato* ♩ = 132

mf sul ponticello

mp

tak, hle:
so:

Jest-li ty pe-ní-ze do-šly—
Wo ist das Geld nur ge-blie-ben—

pe-ní-ze, ja-ké pe-ní-ze—
wel-ches Geld, hörst du, wel-ches Geld—

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for bars 5-7. The second system shows bars 8-9. The piano part features a prominent semiquaver figure with sextuplets and triplets. The vocal line includes lyrics in both Czech and German, with stress marks on the first syllable of each word.

32 Track 3.

The argument between the two characters continues in this fashion, alternating with the semiquaver figures in the piano or viola. At first, there is a full bar of instrumental interlude between each vocal entrance of the two arguing characters. However, as the argument continues, this reduces to the vocal characters alternating every bar, the bars being of varying lengths due to Eben's metrical changes. The vocal lines stop alternating with the instrumental figures. Instead, the piano or viola falls into an accompanying role, punctuating the exclamations of the vocal characters with dissonant, strident chords and figures. This represents the growing tension of the argument and the characters interrupting each other as they grow more heated. In addition, the range of the vocal melodies for both characters becomes wider. At one point, the character with the lower *tessitura* reaches down to a b, prompting a darker colour from the voice that can sound threatening. As the character with the lower *tessitura* is the more aggressive, questioning and probing the other character suspiciously, this is an example of Eben using vocal qualities and colour to establish a character's personality or mood. In contrast, the other character's *tessitura* becomes higher and *forte*. Eben places accents on the first syllables of this character's words to further stress them. This has the effect of making this character come across as shrill and defensive, almost shouting (Example 15).³³

33 Track 3.

Example 15: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Na příklad’, bars 13-17

o ja - kých pe - ně - zích mlu - víš - do - bře
 ich ha - be gar kei - ne Ah - nung - du weißt

viš, do - bře viš, - ne - vim, - dej po - koj -
 gut, was ich will - laß mich, - ich weiß nicht -

The argument continues to escalate, the *tessitura* of both voices rising as the tension increases, until it explodes dramatically on a half-sung, half-shouted *fortissimo* ‘nech mě!’ or ‘leave me!’ from the defensive character. The viola or piano punctuates this with a dominant thirteenth chord in the piano and the viola, though the density of the chord is reduced in the viola. However, in both the piano and viola chords, the tritone within the dominant thirteenth is prominent. The intensity of the tritone creates a grating, jarring effect which emphasises the explosive anger of the vocal exclamation (Example 16).³⁴

34 Track 3.

Example 16: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Na příklad’, bars 21-24

③ Rubato

co - pak vím, ——— co - pak vím, nech mě!
 laß mich gehn, ——— laß mich gehn, schweig doch!

Eben follows this exclamation with two beats of silence to allow it to ring. The same chords in the viola or piano from the beginning of the song then herald the return of the narrator who, once again, intones in quiet *parlando* style a commentary on the argument that has just occurred. Eben ends this section with a minim rest, allowing the condemning words of the narrator to sink in.

The next section of the song is a complete change in mood and musical style. The time signature changes to a steady $\frac{3}{4}$, and the viola or piano begins to play an entirely tonal melody in E-minor. Eben instructs both viola and piano to play this *quasi uno corale*, and indeed the melody is very much like a Lutheran chorale. In fact, the opening few bars of this melody bear a slight similarity to the chorale ‘Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten’, which Eben had previously quoted in his work *Job*.³⁵ However, the melody also sounds very much like a funeral dirge. This chorale-like sound is emphasised further by the piano, which plays the harmony in block chords. The viola part does not have this harmony but it is instructed to play *marcato* and *sine vibrato*, most likely to emphasise the dirge-like quality of the melody.

³⁵ Petr Eben, *Job* (London: United Music Publishers Ltd., 1989).

Over this, the vocal line also enters in E-minor, on a winding *legato* melody that seems clearly inspired by Orthodox chant. The effect is arresting: the combination of chant and chorale influences creating an immediately solemn and sacred atmosphere. This funeral dirge begins as the narrator speaks about how the earlier arguing characters have forgotten their own mortality in their petty arguments over money. The text-painting could not be clearer (Example 17).³⁶

Example 17: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Na příklad’, bars 29-35

17

④ Poco andante ♩ = 104
arco
quasi uno corale (sine vibrato)

mp marcato

p

Dě - la - jí, ja - ko by za - po - mně - li, — že
Sie tun, als hät - ten sie tü - richt ver - ges - sen, daß

mp quasi uno corale

As the chant melody of the vocal line continues, however, it begins to break away from the tonality of the funeral dirge and to wind chromatically upwards on the words ‘jejich těla jsou podrobena smrti’ or ‘their bodies are subject to death’. As the voice climbs upwards, the funeral dirge in the viola or piano marches relentlessly onward, resolutely tonal and rhythmic. The vocal melody begins to clash more and more with the funeral dirge, increasing the tension. In addition, Eben places a long *crescendo* over the vocal melody to further increase the sense of building tension. The voice becomes louder and more dissonant until, at last, the tension peaks high in the mezzo’s voice on the words ‘že lidské vnitřnosti podlehnou snadno zkáze’ or ‘that human vitals will succumb easily to destruction’. The effect of this section is to show

³⁶ Track 3.

the narrator losing composure and becoming more and more frustrated and angry with the arguing characters for being so blind to their own human condition (Example 18).³⁷

Example 18: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Na příklad’, bars 36-41

je - jich tě - la jsou po - dro - be - na smr - ti, že lid - ské vnitř - no - sti
ih - re Lei - ber sind dem To - de ver - fal - len, daß sie gar leicht dem Ver -

The frustration that has burst forth from the narrator carries on into the next section of the song as the vocal line cries out with a plaintive, *legato*, *forte* melody on the words ‘Bezohledni k sobě jsou slabší nežli rostliny, zvířata’ or ‘Heedless of themselves, they are weaker than plants, animals’. This melody shifts between modes, finally landing in F-Lydian as the voice decrescendos sorrowfully. Underneath this, the viola or piano plays a fragmented version of the rising chromatic melody that the voice had sung in the previous ‘chant’ section, which continues to climb even further until it is very high in both the piano’s and viola’s range. This creates yet more building tension underneath the vocal line. The combined effect represents the narrator loudly lamenting the state of humanity, while the viola or piano represents the continuing frustration of the narrator’s emotions. (Example 19).³⁸

37 Track 3.

38 Track 3.

Example 19: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Na příklad’, bars 48-52

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics in Czech and German. The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, and the bottom staff is the viola accompaniment. Dynamics include *f* and *decesc.*

hled - ní k so - - bě jsou slab - ší než - li
 ge - gen ein - an - - der sind sie doch schwä - cher, als

The dynamic reduces as the viola or piano returns to the ‘funeral dirge’ material. Over the unwavering march of the dirge, the vocal line sings sob-like three-note figures on the words ‘může je usmrtit slovo, usmání, pohled’ or ‘a word, a smile, a look can kill them’. Eben chooses to break up this sentence into melodic fragments separated by several beats of silence. These melodic fragments are an altered version of the rising three-note feature of the ‘chant’ melody from the earlier section. Eben had earlier fragmented this three-note figure in the piano and viola accompaniment of the ‘lament’ section; he now fragments and alters it to appear again in the voice at the end of the song. This figure provides a through-line of the narrator’s frustration and despair. It is also telling that this figure began as part of the ‘chant’ melody, as something solemn and sacred. It then became something chromatic and distorted, representative of frustration. It was distorted yet more by the viola or piano as the narrator’s emotions intensified and it now has become a hesitant, broken sob in the voice as the funeral dirge returns. Simply by taking and transforming a melodic fragment, Eben has told a compelling story musically that adds rich subtext to the poem (Example 20).³⁹

³⁹ Track 3.

Example 20: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Na příklad’, bars 53-58

6

mf (*sine vibrato*)

mp

rost - li - ny, zvi - řa - ta, mů-že je u-smrtit slo - vo,
Pflan - zen und Tie - re, denn es kann tö-ten sie ein Wort,

mp

The last of the singer’s melodic fragments ends *pianissimo*. The funeral dirge is left in the piano and viola to fade into the distance on a *decrescendo*, to end in a final ‘bell toll’.

Performance

If ‘Zed’ represents the separation of people from one another, and ‘Ròzchod’ represents the grief of isolation, then ‘Na příklad’ represents the ‘death’ of communication. The two arguing characters in the song ceaselessly talk over each other and build in anger without truly hearing each other. The ‘funeral dirge’ of the second half of the song signifies both the inevitability of their mortality, to which they are blind, and the ‘death’ of their ability to understand one another. Much like the previous two songs, ‘Na příklad’ can be interpreted to be a metaphor for societal struggles. It could be seen to express, in the microcosm of two individuals, the pettiness and arguments that take place on a societal and global scale.⁴⁰

‘Na příklad’ presents a unique challenge for the performer, in that the performer must rapidly embody three different characters, two of whom are in a quick-fire argument with each other. To help represent these characters, I chose to slightly alter my

40 Track 3.

physicality for each, as well as vocal colour. Eben assisted in this by differentiating the characters by *tessitura* and melody. I wished for the narrator character to represent an objective perspective at the start of the song and therefore faced directly towards the audience with a neutral expression. However, I chose to allow a slight sense of bitterness to creep into the narrator's demeanour. To accomplish this, I used the speech-like quality of the narrator's opening lines to add a certain percussive, 'rougher' quality to my voice. I also emphasised consonants in order to project a sense of contained frustration.

When the two arguing characters enter, I faced a slightly different direction for each, to give the impression that they were facing each other and arguing. Eben had musically represented one character as having a low *tessitura*, and the other as having a high *tessitura*. Because of this, I interpreted the two characters to be a man and a woman and I further interpreted them to be in a relationship. This may not be the interpretation created by every performer who approaches the song, as it is not made explicit in the text. However, Eben's musical characterisation caused me to make such an artistic choice. I also felt that this interpretation furthered Eben's message of close relationships being lost due to a breakdown of communication.

To represent the male character, who was the accusing character, I leaned forward just slightly in my posture and allowed my gestures to be more direct and aggressive. I allowed my vocal colour to be darker and employed more of my chest mechanism. To represent the female character, who was the defensive character, I leaned back a little protectively in my posture and allowed my gestures to be wilder and less controlled and direct. I lightened the timbre of my voice by employing more head voice and less chest mechanism. The challenge presented by these two physicalities and vocal

colours was that I had to rapidly alternate between them; this took some practice.

For the 'argument' section, Eben wrote into the music those articulations which are needed to successfully represent the anger of the arguing characters. This is another example of Eben's sensitivity to the capabilities of the human voice. At the climax of the argument on the words 'nech mě' or 'leave me,' I chose to nearly shout the words in head voice rather than keep them on pitch, as I felt this was more impactful, and more representative of the wildness and defensive anger of the female character's emotional state.

I changed my posture to face forward towards the audience for the return of the narrator's *recitative* lines and allowed my physicality to soften into a neutral state. However, at the start of the 'funeral dirge', I shifted this physicality to become more rigid and statuesque to project an air of solemnity.

On the entrance of the vocal line to the 'chant' melody, I kept my vocal colour quite dark to represent the funereal quality of this section of the song. I maintained the *legato* line of the chant melody and kept it neutral and even in tone at the start, as though it were being sung ceremonially at a procession. However, as the vocal line began to spiral away from the 'funeral dirge' and become more dissonant, I gradually changed the colour of my voice from darker and fuller to more nasal and strident as the narrator's frustrations took over. I also slowly changed my physicality as the sense of frustration increased, gradually clenching my fists, squaring my posture and allowing my facial expression to become angrier.

I wanted the next section to sound almost like a wail, as though the voice was so angry and despairing that it could barely restrict itself to the melody. To achieve this, I

allowed the dynamic to ebb and flow subtly within Eben's own dynamics, and I over-emphasised certain consonants. As the vocal line diminished in dynamic to the word 'zvířata', or 'animals', I chose to allow much of my breath support to fall away on purpose towards the end of the phrase. This is because I wanted the word 'zvířata' to sound tired and broken as the narrator's anger has ebbed away and left an exhausted despair in its wake.

I continued this sense of tired despair through the last fragments of melody towards the end of the song. I wanted these to sound small and desperate, as though the narrator's realisation at what has happened to the arguing people has made the narrator go from angry to pleading. In the last two statements of the melodic fragment on the words 'usmání, pohled' or 'a smile, a look', I wanted to add a slight sense of fear, as though the narrator is afraid of what people are capable of and what might happen to them. To do this, I minimised my vibrato and kept my breath support light to allow a slight tremor into the voice. The low *tessitura* and *pianissimo* dynamic that Eben wrote into the score naturally helped project a sense of fear and smallness.

4.2.4 Když mrtví se setkáme

Když mrtví se setkáme

Požehnej, nežli mě opustíš,
žehnej, i když jsem býval zlý.
Nemůžem zřít si do očí,
až teprv umrlí, až teprv umrlí.
Ty mrtvé oči planoucí ptají se,
noc je zářivá,
proč dobří jsme k sobě
nebyli zaživa!

Till Death Do Us Join

Bless me before you leave me,
bless me even if I used to be wicked.
We won't be able to look into each other's eyes
until after death, until after death.
The dead blazing eyes ask,
the night is radiant,
why we were not good together
when we were alive!

Analysis

The text of this song is by Hungarian poet Endre Ady, translated into Czech by František Halas. This is the point in the cycle at which the characters are at their most

despairing, lamenting the loss of their relationship. This song is also more intimate in nature and seems to be more clearly directed from one individual to another rather than a broader commentary on society. However, as with all of the songs in *Písně nelaskavé*, individual relationships are used as an example of and metaphor for the broader state of humanity.

The intense, strung-out frustration and tension of 'Na příklad' gives way to turbulent misery in 'Když mrtví se setkáme'. This song has the longest instrumental introduction of all the songs in *Písně nelaskavé*, and the viola or piano plays for sixteen bars before the voice enters. The melodic material that the viola or piano plays is based on the opening melody of the vocal line at bar 17 but developed and fragmented throughout the introductory section in a manner typical of Eben. Eben instructs the viola or piano to play this material *dramatico e affettuoso*, which immediately creates an atmosphere of turbulence and agitation. The metre also shifts several times, adding to the unsettled sense of discontent. In between altered statements of the main melodic theme, the melodic material continually rises and falls in figures that sound like wails and cries. The material of this introduction is perhaps the most Romantic in nature of all the songs in *Písně nelaskavé*. It wordlessly expresses the turmoil of the emotions the characters in the poem are experiencing before the singer enters with the poem's text.

Towards the end of this introduction, Eben instructs the viola or piano with the direction *decrescendo e calmando* as it plays an ascending D harmonic minor scale to lead into the vocal entrance. The accompaniment then diminishes for the entrance of the voice at bar 17. It is as though Eben was providing a glimpse inside the narrator's head to witness the narrator's emotions through the introduction, and now the narrator

is presented only from the ‘outside’ through spoken words. The vocal melody is the same as that heard in the viola or piano at the start of the introduction and includes both an ascending leap of a minor seventh and a descending leap of a major seventh. In addition, the lowest note of the descending major seventh leap is an A-flat below middle C, a note fairly low in a mezzo’s range. Eben is once again using the unresolved quality of seventh intervals and the colours provided by the singer’s chest range to express strong emotion. This is appropriate for the words ‘Požehnej, nežli mě opustíš’ or ‘Bless me before you leave me’ (Example 21).⁴¹

Example 21: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Když mrtví se setkáme’, bars 15-19

20

Po-žehnej, než-li mě o - pu - stíš,
 Seg-ne mich, e - he du mich ver - läßt,

The musical texture changes at bar 23 as the viola or piano switches to agitated, climbing trill figures. Over this accompaniment, the voice intones the same melodic fragment over and over, an effect which has almost a chant-like quality to it in the limitation of its movement. The rising trill underneath clashes with the E-flat-centric vocal melody, creating a drawn-out sense of rising tension on the words ‘Nemůžem zřít si do očí, až teprv umrlí’ or ‘We won’t be able to look in each other’s eyes until after death’ (Example 22).⁴²

41 Track 4.

42 Track 4.

Example 22: Eben, *Pisně nelaskavé*, ‘Když mrtví se setkáme’, bars 24-28

do o - čí, až te-prv u - mr - lí, až te-prv u - mr - lí.
 wir uns nicht früher, als nach dem Tod, früher, als nach dem Tod.

The tension created in these lines bursts into another statement of the introductory material from the viola or piano, this time transposed higher to reflect the intensification of the narrator’s emotions. The texture then dramatically changes again at bar 36. The metre changes to a steady $\frac{3}{4}$ while the viola or piano begins a drawn-out altered version of the opening melodic motif in crotchets, but stated in trills in the viola’s case and in undulating demisemiquaver figures in the piano’s case. The dynamic is now *piano*. Over this, the vocal melody is *legato*, drawn out over crotchets and minims, and more consistently tonal, generally staying in E-flat minor. The melody is soft and plaintive, a gentle lament on the words ‘Ty mrtvé oči planoucí ptají se, noc je zářivá’ or ‘The dead blazing eyes ask, the night is radiant’. There is a surreal quality to this section, a sense of suspension as though the narrator is speaking from some sort of limbo or the afterlife (Example 23).⁴³

43 Track 4.

Example 23: Eben, *Písň nelaskavé*, ‘Když mrtví se setkáme’, bars 36-39

⑤ Poco più animato ♩ = 104

p marc.

p

Ty mrt - - - vé
Die to - - - ten

p

o - - - - - či pla - nou - cí
Au - - - - - gen seh'n sich an,

However, tension begins to creep into the vocal melody at bar 48 on the words ‘proč dobří jsme k sobě nebyli’, or ‘Why we were not good together’. The vocal melody rises in *tessitura* and repeats the word ‘nebyli’ meaning ‘we were not’. The repetition of the word suggests a sense of desperation. In addition, Eben gradually increases the dynamic as the vocal melody rises, placing a long *crescendo* on the second repetition of ‘nebyli’.

This rise in tension explodes on a strident *forte* E-flat in the vocal line on the word ‘zaživa’ or ‘alive’, accompanied by rough quartal and quintal sonorities in the viola or piano. Eben instructs both viola and piano to play these with emphasis and directs the singer to sing the vocal melody with heavy emphasis. The singer repeats the word

twice and, tellingly, on the second repetition the viola and piano figures centre around E-minor, which makes the E-flat in the vocal line sound as a D-sharp in the new tonality. This is a masterful example of Eben’s use of surrounding tonality to transform the meaning and colour of a single note in the vocal line. By doing so, he transforms the emotion behind the word being sung. The word ‘zaživa’ is the same each time, and the note to which it is sung is the same, but the second repetition of ‘zaživa’ sounds more desperate and despairing because of the surrounding tonality (Example 24).⁴⁴

Example 24: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Když mrtví se setkáme’, bars 55-61

The musical score for Example 24 consists of three systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a circled number 7 and the instruction *con enfasi*. The piano accompaniment starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The lyrics are: *za ži - va, za ži -* / *auf der Welt, auf der*. The second system continues the vocal line with the instruction *f con enfasi pesante* and the lyrics *val* / *Welt!*. The piano accompaniment features a trill and ends with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third system shows the piano accompaniment concluding with semiquaver figures that trail down into a final held G note.

The viola or piano finishes the song with semiquaver figures that trail down into a final held G.

⁴⁴ Track 4.

Performance

This song is about despair and regret at the loss of a relationship. It captures the sense of sorrow felt when everything that has been done to repair a relationship has failed. It also expresses the helplessness felt at wondering why this relationship could not work. It is another exploration of the loss of communication and breakdown of connection that runs through this cycle and which is applicable on both a small and large scale.⁴⁵

The first section of the song is the most bitter, but also carries a sense of desperation. The narrator here is speaking directly to a loved one. I therefore enunciated consonants more strongly, and put a greater stress on the first syllable of words, to instill a certain passive-aggressive quality to the opening melodic lines. I kept the vocal timbre darker, and particularly exploited Eben's major seventh descent to the low A-flat to fully use my chest register for an even darker colour.

On the chant-like repetition of the melodic fragment on the words 'Nemůžem zřít si do očí, až teprv umrlí' or 'We won't be able to look in each other's eyes until after death', I exploited Eben's rising and falling dynamic changes to create the sense that the narrator's emotions can barely be contained. I also wanted to add a slight sense of fear to this line, as though the idea of facing each other after death is a little terrifying to the narrator. To do this, I allowed a 'breathiness' into the voice to create a whisper-like effect, and emphasised the sound of the 'ž' consonant in 'až'.

In the $\frac{3}{4}$ 'lament' section on the long *legato* melody, I kept the breath as connected and even as possible. I sang this line with a fair amount of head voice and no chest mechanism, to suggest an 'ethereal' quality. I also strove to keep my vibrato from

⁴⁵ Track 4.

becoming too pronounced as I wanted the lamenting quality of the vocal line to remain poignant and effective without becoming overblown or too ‘dramatic’. This meant I had to regulate my breath carefully in this section, particularly to navigate the long *crescendo* Eben placed toward the end of the section, and to hold the long note from bars 43 to 47 without my breath support failing. Eben asks the singer to decrescendo on this long note, something I needed to do carefully and gradually to again maintain an even tone.

In the last section, I used more breath support and a fuller sound so that there was no longer an ‘ethereal’ quality to the tone colour. This also aided in the creation of a sense of urgency and desperation. On the last exclamation of ‘zaživa’, I allowed a slight nasality into my voice to make it more strident. I also strongly emphasised the ‘z’ consonant at the start of the word, and stressed each syllable to create a sense of desperation and misery.

4.2.5 Anno Domini MCMXXI

Anno Domini MCMXXI

Tys myslil, že jsem jednou z mnohých,
co zapomínáš rád,
že vrhnu se pod koně tveho
a budu naříkat?
Či vědmu že prosit půjdu
o koření kouzel a čar,
a šáteček svůj vonný
ti pošlu co osudný dar?
Bud’ proklet!
Tvé duše se netknu
už stonem jediným,
zaklínám se ti peklem i rájem
i obrazem posvátným,
i nocí našich plamenným žářem,
tím žářem plamenným,
že k tobě se nevrátím.

Anno Domini MCMXXI

You thought I was one of the many,
that you could gladly forget,
that I would throw myself under your horse
wailing and weeping?
Or that I’d beg the alchemist
for some magic spell or potion,
and send my perfumed scarf
to you as a fearful gift?
Curse you!
Never again will I touch your soul
with a single groan,
I swear to you by heaven and hell,
and by the sacred icon,
And by the fiery heat of our nights,
the fiery heat,
I will not return to you.

Analysis

This song sets a text by Russian poet Anna Achmatová, translated to Czech by Marie Marčánová. As Eben stated, it represents the climax of the cycle. It is the point at which the relationship is at its most sundered and feelings of anger and betrayal are at their most vicious. There is a sense of unrelenting aggression and bitterness that permeates the song from beginning to end and which has the ability to leave both performer and listener emotionally exhausted.

This bitterness is immediately felt from the instrumental introduction of the viola or piano, which plays a murmuring, growling motif built on rising fifth intervals and a falling major seventh. Each of these intervals begins on the note a half-step above or below the previous note, which makes for an uncomfortable shifting of tonalities and a sense of dissonance. The viola executes these intervallic leaps as *glissandi*, while the piano is given a demisemiquaver figure in the left hand which mimics the effect of a *glissando*. This *glissando* makes both viola and piano sound almost snide and mocking, mimicking the melodic material of the vocal line. Eben instructs both instruments and voice to play and sing *Con odio e amarezza* or 'With hate and bitterness'.

After a series of descending trills in the viola, or semiquaver figures in the piano, the voice enters on the words 'Tys myslil že jsem jednou z mnohých, co zapomínáš rád' or 'You thought I was one of the many that you could gladly forget'. Though Eben does not instruct the singer to sing *quasi parlando* this time, he writes the vocal line in such a way that it creates a speech-like effect. The voice intones each word on repeated notes, fairly low in the vocal range, and each syllable is given a note mostly of even length. The intervallic leaps in the vocal line are two that Eben has used often

Following the opening two ‘questioning’ vocal lines, the voice then begins a series of melodic motifs based around alterations and developments of the motif which the viola and piano played in the introduction. These motifs in the voice occur on the words ‘Či vědmu že prosit pŕjdu o koření kouzel a čar’ or ‘Or that I’d beg the alchemist for some magic spell or potion’. On certain words that he wishes to emphasise, Eben deploys grace notes which proceed up or down by fifths, sixths and sevenths as *glissandi*. This places a strong stress on the first syllable of words like ‘vědmu’, ‘prosit’ and ‘pŕjdu’, lending a certain viciousness to their delivery and almost forcing the singer to spit them out. The use of *glissando* also continues the mocking quality heard from the viola or piano, lending the vocal line an air of biting sarcasm. In addition, the downward intervallic leaps are each a major or minor seventh, which causes the mezzo voice to move rapidly from the middle to quite low in its range. This means that the colour of the voice shifts rapidly, with sudden, dark, chest-register low notes standing out in a jarring manner. This creates the effect of seething anger, the wide register changes giving the impression that the narrator can barely hold back the feeling of hate. Throughout this section, the viola or piano plays a transposed statement of its opening melodic material, centred around tonalities that jar against the tonality of the vocal line (Example 26).⁴⁷

47 Track 5.

Example 26: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Anno Domini MCMXXI’, bars 10-15

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system includes a vocal line (soprano clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The vocal line begins with a circled '1' above the first measure. The piano accompaniment features a tremolo major seventh chord in the right hand and a semiquaver figure in the left hand. The lyrics are: 'tvé - ho a bu-du na-ří - kat? Či věd - mu že pro - sit' (Czech) and 'Pfer - de dir klagt ihr bitt-res Leid? Und die ei - ne He - xe' (German). The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line ends with a melodic line based on two tritone intervals. The piano accompaniment continues with the same tremolo and semiquaver figures. The lyrics are: 'pů - jdu o ko - ře-ní kou - zel a čar, bit - tet um Zau - ber und Lie - bes-ge - tränk,'.

The voice ends this section on a melodic line based on two tritone intervals. This line is unaccompanied, with Eben instructing the singer to incorporate a slight *ritardando*, as well as a *decrescendo*. This line ends a vocal phrase in which the narrator describes the possibility of sending a ‘perfumed scarf’ as a ‘fearful gift’ to the one being addressed. The exposed quality of this line with no accompaniment, along with the tritone intervals and decrease in dynamic and tempo, gives the words a sense of sinuous threat.

The viola and piano abruptly switch to either an accented, *tremolo* major seventh on D and C-sharp in the viola, or a semiquaver figure on the same major seventh in the piano, also accented. They are further instructed to play this *fortissimo*, and the viola is instructed to play *arco*. This startling entrance heralds an abrupt change of tone for

the next vocal phrase. The voice enters exclaiming the curse on which the song centres: 'Bud' proklet!' or 'Curse you!' The voice sings this *fortissimo* on a rising augmented fifth interval followed by a minor third. Eben also accents each syllable of 'proklet' ('curse') and additionally separates each syllable by a quaver rest. The effect is a harsh and percussive emphasis on every syllable of the curse. Eben has the singer exclaim the curse over silence, further emphasising it as a focal point of the song. After more tremolo or semiquaver major sevenths from the viola or piano, the voice sings the next words of the poem: 'Tvé duše se netknu už stonem jediným' or 'Never again will I touch your soul with a single groan'. The voice sings the first part of this text to the same notes as the 'curse', the rigidity of the line and the strangeness of the augmented fifth and minor third intervals creating a sense of tense aggression. On the words 'už stonem jediným', the vocal melody crescendos up to a *fortissimo* f' on 'stonem', ending the phrase on an accented E on the last syllable of 'jediným'. The effect is one of a wild, shrill exclamation, the narrator's anger has completely overtaken any other emotion (Example 27).⁴⁸

48 Track 5.

Example 27: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, 'Anno Domini MCMXXI', bars 19-28

27

un pochettino ritard. pizz. *arco*

un pochettino ritard. *p* *sub. ff a tempo*

p *pp* *a tempo* *ff*

po - šlu co o - sud - ný dar? Bud'
sen - det als Schick - suls - ge - schenk? Ver -

un pochettino ritard. *a tempo*

pp *sub. ff*

pro - klet! Tvé du - še se ne - tknu už
flucht sei! Für e - len - de See - len hab'ich

ff *5* *f* *5* *f* *5*

stridente (drsné, při strundch)

ff *ff*

sto - nem je - di - ným,
kei - nen einz' - gen Blick.

Following this, the metre switches to $\frac{4}{4}$ and the viola or piano begins a percussive, rhythmic semiquaver figure on the first and third beats. This figure is made up of the ever-present major seventh intervals, still on D and C-sharp. The first note of each of these figures is accented, and the piano is asked to play each note *staccato*. The viola is asked to play *stridente* and Eben adds 'roughly' to the direction. The effect is one of

a relentless heartbeat or, alternatively, a war drum. Perhaps Eben intended for both to be plausible. Over this drum beat, the voice begins a chant-like *piano* melody in F harmonic minor on the words ‘zaklínám se ti peklem i rájem i obrazem posvátným’ or ‘I swear to you by heaven and hell, and by the sacred icon’. The voice repeats this melody twice, the second time a fourth higher. The chant-like quality of the melody, its now clear minor tonality, and its repetition, make it come across almost as a sort of incantation. Eben instructs the singer to get louder little by little and gradually increases the dynamic throughout this section. This creates the effect of a seething, simmering rage, which grows steadily and steadily stronger as the narrator intones vengeful vows (Example 28).⁴⁹

Example 28: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Anno Domini MCMXXI’, bars 29-34

28

3

p *poco a poco cresc.*

p *poco a poco cresc.*

za - klí - nám se ti pek - lem i rá - jem i ob - ra - zem
Dir schwö-re ich bei Him - mel und Höl - le, bei - Gott und bei

p *poco a poco cresc.*

mp

mp

po - svát - ným, za - klí - nám se ti pek - lem i rá - jem
mei - nem Glück, dir schwö-re ich bei Him - mel und Höl - le,

49 Track 5.

This section grows in intensity, until the singer breaks out of the chant-like melody and into D major. The singer now begins a melody based on leaps of a fifth to the words 'i noci našich plamenným žárem' or 'and by the fiery heat of our nights'. The vocal melody becomes wilder and less contained as the viciousness of the cursing becomes more personal. Heralded by a *fortissimo* tremolo major seventh in the viola and a semiquaver major seventh figure in the piano, the rage of the narrator bursts forth in a shrill exclamation of 'že k tobě se nevrátím' or 'I will not return to you.' This line is sung *fortissimo* to a jagged melody which begins on a tritone and reaches up to g". Additionally, Eben places a *tenuto* mark over each note, a triplet over the notes on the words 'k tobě se', a *crescendo* over the first part of the phrase, and accents the last three notes of the phrase. All of these articulations reinforce the aggression with which this phrase is to be sung. To further emphasise this aggression, Eben provides the singer with the instruction '*pesante*', and isolates this vocal phrase with no accompaniment. Eben is here very clear in his intention for this phrase to represent the absolute climactic outpouring of the rage and hate that have been building through the whole song. The words 'I will not return to you' are the moment of greatest distance and disconnection from another person in the entire cycle. The singer then holds the last note of the phrase for the duration of the piano's or viola's final aggressive open fifth figures (Example 29).⁵⁰

50 Track 5.

Example 29: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Anno Domini MCMXXI’, bars 43-47

no - cí na - šich pla - men-ným žá - rem, že
 uns' - rer Näch - te lo - dern-den Flam - men: zu

kto - bě se ne - vrá - tím.
 dir kehr ich nie zu - rück.

Performance

Eben stated that he viewed this song as the climactic statement of separation and bitterness in the cycle, and therefore I wanted in my performance to capture the sense that this song is a culmination of what has come before. This song is about feelings of betrayal and rage. It is the point in the severing of a relationship where the divide between the two people involved seems insurmountable. As in ‘Když mrtví se setkáme’, the individual relationship between the characters in this song can be seen as representative of humanity’s ability (or inability) to relate to one another on a larger scale.⁵¹

⁵¹ Track 5.

In my performance, I needed to regulate the level of anger I was expressing and find different shades of rage to portray. A sense of anger runs through the entire song, but if the level of anger remains intense and unchanging throughout the entirety of ‘Anno Domini MCMXXI’, the song loses its potency, and the message is lost. Eben expresses through the music the different ways the narrator expresses anger, so his music and the articulations he added served as an excellent guide as to the intent behind each phrase.

Eben seems to have deliberately written the first two vocal lines to follow the contours of speech. Because of this, I allowed my vocal timbre to be close to that of my natural speaking voice. I wanted these lines to sound as though I was spitting out the words. To accomplish this, I strongly enunciated consonants and exaggerated the stress on words at places in the sentence where the stress naturally fell. I particularly emphasised the consonant at the end of each phrase.

During the next section beginning on the words ‘Či vědmu že prosit pŕjdu’, in which the narrator asks alchemists for a magic potion, I emphasised the consonants on each of the syllables where Eben placed a grace note and *glissando*. On each major seventh descent to a note lower in my voice, I elected to drop fully into chest voice to utilise the dark colour and ‘rougher’ vocal quality. Throughout the first part of the song, I wanted to project the sense of bitter, ironic sarcasm I felt from the music and text. I wanted to hint at the extent of the anger behind it, without letting that anger overtake the melody too soon. On the words ‘vonnŕy ti pošlu co osudnŕy dar’ describing the ‘fearful gift’ of the ‘perfumed scarf’, I chose to use slight *glissandi* between the tritone intervals in the melody. I did this to make the phrase come across as mocking, and as ‘poisonous’ in tone as the scarf described in the text.

On the section beginning with the ‘curse’ of ‘Bud’ proklet!’ at bar 21, I wanted to display the first moment that the narrator’s anger fully breaks free. I desired a certain ‘wildness’ to the vocal sound. To achieve this, I very strongly emphasised the consonants. I also chose to take my chest mechanism higher than I normally would to create a ‘rougher’ sound, as I had done in earlier songs in *Písně nelaskavé*. If my voice cracked or broke slightly because of this, I embraced that as part of the expressive intent of displaying the narrator’s extreme anger. On the last syllable of ‘jediným’ at the end of this section, I exploited the closed quality of the vowel ‘ý’ and allowed a degree of nasality into my voice, to make it sound shrill and accusatory.

During the ‘incantation’ section on the words ‘zaklínám se ti peklem i rájem i obrazem posvátným’ or ‘I swear to you by heaven and hell, and by the sacred icon’, I wanted to project a sense of barely contained rage. To do this, I did not fully adduct my vocal folds to create a ‘breathy’ quality. I also deliberately did not create much space in my mouth or with the raising of my soft palate. Instead, I chose to allow some tension into my jaw for the first two lines of the ‘incantation’, largely articulating the words with my lips and tongue. This was to create the impression of singing through clenched teeth. I did this only for the first two lines so as not to sacrifice vocal quality for a prolonged period of time.

At the end of the song, on the final exclamation of ‘že k tobě se nevrátím’ or ‘I will not return to you’, Eben wrote into the music all of the articulations that the singer needs to make this phrase explosive and vicious. To these articulations I added a degree of nasality into my voice to make it more shrill. I also chose to close the ‘í’ in the last syllable of ‘nevrátím’ even further to make it ‘uglier’ and more piercing. I wanted to leave the listener with a final sense of extreme aggression and accusation.

4.2.6 Stesk

Stesk

Až se ti zasteskne, přijď.
Až se ti slzy v oku zableskne,
ty přijdeš, vid'!
Z té noci přesteskne nezbude ani hvězda,
ani rybářská síť
a nový den se rozbřesne.
Ty přijdeš. Přijď, přijď, přijď!

Nostalgia

When you feel like weeping, come.
When tears flash in your eyes,
you will come, see!
From this lonely night not a star will remain,
nor even a fishing net
a new day is dawning.
You will come. Come, come, come!

Analysis

‘Stesk,’ the final song in the cycle, sets a text by Czech poet Vítězslav Nezval.

Though ‘Stesk’ is the shortest song in *Písně nelaskavé*, it is also the most important.

Until this point in the cycle, the songs have followed a progression of division and disconnection between people, culminating in the angry vow never to return in ‘Anno Domini MCMXXI.’ ‘Stesk’, however, represents the hope that despite all the pain and difficulty in human relations, people can still reconnect with one another. This reflects Eben’s stated beliefs that humanity can learn and communicate and that division and anger are never the final answer.

Eben stated many times that he would not have composed *Písně nelaskavé* if he had not included Nezval’s text. He had the following to say about the inclusion of ‘Stesk’ in the cycle and the way in which he chose to musically express the text:

I couldn’t close the cycle skeptically and harshly. I would never have written it if I hadn’t been sure that there are no dead ends in human relationships. Nezval’s beautiful poem necessitated a completely different [form of] expression and a different structure from the previous texts. Along with the words ‘When you feel like weeping’ sound only high, distant tones above the singing – flageolet viola. This leaves [a] solo space for the voice that becomes a persuasive silence [for the phrase] ‘You will come, see’. And then the viola is placed warmly and harmoniously under

the line of singing and a united gradual build begins – the constant rising of the melody and the accompaniment to the radiant peak ‘A new day is dawning’.⁵²

‘Anno Domini MCMXXI’ has the ability to leave both performer and listener emotionally exhausted by the end. It is in this state of emotional exhaustion that the first notes of ‘Stesk’ are heard, which lends them incredible poignancy. The viola or piano plays a three-note motif, very high in their registers, *piano* in the viola’s case and *pianissimo* in the piano’s case. The listener might recognise this motif and the intervals it consists of: it is the Remembrance Motif from the second song in the cycle, ‘Ròzchod’. It is the version of this motif stated with an A-flat. It is appropriate that Eben would start ‘Stesk’ with this motif, as the narrator is once again recalling a time when things were better, and is feeling the same sense of longing that permeated ‘Ròzchod’. The viola is provided some additional directions to add to this sense of wistfulness: Eben instructs it to play with a mute, *ad libitum* and sweetly, with a little vibrato. The opening viola or piano figure is melody only, without harmonisation. The effect is that of a far away, faint memory, as though the narrator is recalling something thought forgotten. The voice then enters *pianissimo* in silence, on the single word ‘Až’ or ‘when’. Eben directs this to be sung ‘warmly’.

The viola or piano then plays a tremulous, descending chromatic melody, painfully simple, at the end of which the voice enters again. The vocal melody too is simple, *legato* and composed of small intervals on the words ‘se ti zasteskne přijd’ or ‘[when] you feel like weeping, come’. Eben chooses to break up this sentence by placing an instrumental interlude between the word ‘Až’ (‘When’) and the rest of the sentence, and placing a crotchet rest between ‘zasteskne’ and ‘prijd’. This has the effect of

52 Petr Eben, interviewed by Kateřina Vondrovicová for *Petr Eben*, 86.

making the vocal line sound tentative and broken, as though the emotional exhaustion left by the previous song has bled through into the vocal line of this song. The effect of the whole opening section is one of painful intimacy and uncertainty (Example 30).⁵³

Example 30: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Stesk’, bars 1-7

Allegretto dolente ♩ = 88
con sord.
p dolce (poco vibr.)
pp con calore
p
p
p
p
pp
pp
 Až se ti za-stesk-ne, přijď.
 Bis dich die Sehnsucht weckt, komm...

Following this, the viola and piano again play the Remembrance Motif, after which the voice enters again on the single word ‘Až’. When the voice next enters on the words ‘seti slza v oku zableskne’ or ‘[when] tears flash in your eyes’, the melody reflects the text in sob-like, three-note figures. Eben additionally places a *decrescendo* over each of these to emphasise the weeping quality of the vocal line (Example 31).⁵⁴

Example 31: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Stesk’, bars 16-23

p (poco vibr.)
p
p
p
mp
mp
 sl - za vo - ku za-ble-sk-ne, ty při - jdeš, vid!
 Trü - ne dich im Traum-geschreckt, ver - giß und komm...

53 Track 6.

54 Track 6.

The next section of the song changes texture. The viola or piano begins a slow, gentle *ostinato* figure in A-flat major, with an E-flat pedal. The dominant pedal creates a haunting quality to this section. Over the steady pulse of this *ostinato*, the voice sings a melody based on a modal variant of F harmonic minor. This melody is placed on the words ‘Z té noci přeteskné nezbude ani hvězda’ or ‘From this lonely night not a star will remain’. The juxtaposition of the vocal tonality with that of the viola or piano produces moments where notes clash with each other but, where in previous songs this dissonance would represent pain or aggression, here it creates an aching sense of unresolved yearning. The atmosphere of the still night is captured by the ethereal ambiguity of the instrumental *ostinato* and the winding vocal melody (Example 32).⁵⁵

Example 32: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Stesk’, bars 24-30

The musical score for Example 32 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a circled '2' above it. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *poco cresc.* marking. The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, also starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *poco cresc.* marking. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *poco cresc.* marking. The lyrics are written below the vocal staff.

Z té no-ci pře-tesk - né ne-zbu-de a - ni hvě - zda,
 Aus die - ser we - hen Nacht leuchtet kein Stern mehr, tief nur

Over this entire section, Eben places a long *crescendo*, which builds until it reaches a long held D-natural in the voice on the words ‘ani rybářská síť’ or ‘nor even a fishing net’. The dynamic then climaxes into *mezzo-forte* on the words ‘a nový den se rozbřeskné’ or ‘a new day is dawning’. At the same time, the music bursts into F-sharp major. Both voice and instrument are at last united in the same tonality. The effect of this section could be seen to express the sun slowly rising from the ‘lonely

⁵⁵ Track 6.

night’ as the dynamic increases until it at last reaches a peak on the words ‘a new day is dawning’. In addition, Eben deliberately composed *Písně nelaskavé* in such a way that the resolution here of both instrument and voice into F-sharp major is the first time in the entire cycle that the two have come together in a completely tonal major key. It could easily be interpreted that this represents the moment of reconciliation between people who have been estranged (Example 33).⁵⁶

Example 33: Eben, *Písně nelaskavé*, ‘Stesk’, bars 31-37

The musical score for Example 33 consists of three systems. The top system is the vocal line in treble clef, with lyrics in Czech and German. The middle system is the piano accompaniment in treble clef, and the bottom system is the piano accompaniment in bass clef. Dynamics are marked as *mp* and *mf*. A circled number '3' is placed above the vocal line in the fifth measure. The lyrics are: 'a - ni ry-bář-ská síť a no-vý den se rozbřesk-ne. / trei-ben Net-ze im Strom. Ein neu-er Tag ist auf-er-wacht.'

The voice then exclaims the words ‘Ty přijdeš’ or ‘You will come’ on a descending major seventh on G, the interval that has permeated so much of *Písně nelaskavé* as a symbol of pain. However, here it represents the ache of yearning rather than the pain of separation. In a beautifully still, suspended moment, the voice three times sings the word ‘přijď’ or ‘come’ to a rising half-step. The viola and left hand of the piano simply hold single notes, while in the piano the right hand doubles the vocal melody. This sparse texture creates space for the listener’s focus to be drawn entirely to the voice. The voice finishes on a final, long held D-natural on the last ‘přijď’, which decrescendos to almost nothing. The viola or piano finishes with a final fourth on F-sharp and B forming, along with the voice, a B minor chord. Eben’s choice to end the

⁵⁶ Track 6.

song, and thus the entire cycle, in a minor key and with such sparse musical texture leaves the listener with the sense of nostalgia suggested by the song's title.

Performance

'Stesk' is a testament to Eben's confidence in the ability of humanity to overcome its own failings and struggles. It is a distillation of Eben's philosophies on human relations. It is not a naïve statement of the triumph of 'goodness' and understanding in the face of bitterness and disconnection. Rather, in the way Eben musically represents the text, it is about choosing hope even after having experienced anger and pain, either received or inflicted. Stesk sends the message that if failure is acknowledged, healing can be achieved by re-learning how to connect with others.

I wanted in my performance to maintain the ethereal state of stillness Eben creates musically. I wanted to capture the fragile sense of yearning that weaves throughout this song. It was vitally important to set the correct atmosphere, as this is the last song of the cycle and the last impression with which the audience is left. I kept my posture and body language very still throughout this song, and maintained my focus on the audience. I wanted those present to feel the sense of intimacy I felt from 'Stesk', as though I were having a personal conversation with each of them.

On the first note on the word 'Až', I kept my vibrato light, and used the aspirated sound of the 'ž' consonant to create a lingering, whisper-like effect. I kept the following melodic line very *legato*. I also allowed the colour of my voice to be relatively dark and round, to create the 'warmth' that Eben asked for in his directions. On the second line of text, I chose to slightly stress the first syllable of 'slza' and 'oku' ('tear' and 'eye') to create a sob-like effect. On the last word of the following melodic phrase, I chose to descend to the last note with a slight *glissando* on 'vid', to

suggest a yearning sigh.

In the next section on the words ‘Z té noci přeteskné nezbude ani hvězda’ or ‘From this lonely night not a star will remain’, I strove to keep my voice as even and *legato* as possible, maintaining the line of my breath. I minimised my vibrato, as I wanted to keep the atmosphere still and tremulous. I chose to lean slightly into those notes that clashed particularly with the instrumental accompaniment. I was careful to keep the build in dynamic gradual, as I did not want my voice to become too ‘big’.

On the held D-natural at the end of the sentence ‘ani rybářská síť’ or ‘nor even a fishing net’, I increased the dynamic of the note only slightly. Instead, I chose to express the growth of the note by opening more space behind it to create a fuller, richer sound, and by increasing my vibrato. This was to ensure that the quality of sound did not become too harsh and forceful. I maintained this open space, increased vibrato, and fuller sound for the following melodic line on the words ‘a nový den se rozbřeskne’ or ‘a new day is dawning’.

On the major seventh descent on the words ‘Ty přijdeš’ or ‘You will come’, I chose to decrescendo to a near whisper on the lower note, to express ‘breathlessness’ from the character at the possibility of hope. I then kept the last three statements of ‘přijď’ as small and ‘pure’ in sound as possible. I strove to achieve a purity of tone by singing mostly in my head voice and directing the sound high and forward in my resonating space. I minimised my vibrato, and used the ring of the ‘i’ vowel in ‘přijď’ to my advantage. I strove on the very last held D-natural to achieve a pure tone and a ‘ring’ on the sound, again by directing it high and forward in my resonating space. I wanted it to sound tremulous, hopeful, and gentle.

Conclusion

Petr Eben's music is richly rewarding to the performer who is willing to take the time to research the context of his works. Eben's musical language is complex, tonally ambiguous, and intellectually stimulating with multiple levels of meaning and subtext. However, it is also fundamentally accessible and comprehensible by Eben's own conscious design. This comprehensibility guides the performer in crafting an artistic interpretation that can communicate Eben's intended messages to any audience. The song cycle *Pisně nelaskavé*, with its political subtext and difficult subject matter, is an excellent example of the way in which Eben's musical language interacts with the performer in communicating a powerful and moving message. There is currently no previous scholarship on the song cycle *Pisně nelaskavé*, therefore this dissertation provides a vital contribution to Eben scholarship by including a detailed analysis and performance interpretation of this cycle. It additionally serves as an example of the way in which scholarship on Eben's music may be approached from a performance perspective. As communicative exchange with the performer was a priority for Eben and an important aspect of the expression of the meaning in his music, the performer's perspective is a valuable one in approaching his works.

Meaning in music can be difficult to articulate and prove a subject of debate, yet in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the rise of cultural musicology has shifted the way in which meaning in music is considered. Cultural musicologists have advocated the perception of music and the composers who created it as part of, and interactive with, the time period, culture, society and political and religious context in which it was conceived. Cultural musicologists conclude that the meaning to be found in music must be affected by such 'extra-musical' factors. In

addition, cultural musicologists assert that it is not only the historical context of a musical work that affects its meaning, but the context of every performance in which that work is given across time periods and cultural, social and political settings. The incorporation of hermeneutical thought can lead to the conclusion that musical meaning is informed not only by the composer's intent, but also by the perspectives of the performer and listener.

Petr Eben composed his music during much political upheaval and difficulty. He lived through both the Nazi occupation of World War II in former Czechoslovakia, and the rise of the Czechoslovakian Communist government subsequently until 1989. Due to Communist censorship of any art works which contradicted Soviet ideology, Eben's music was directly affected by the political circumstances in which he composed.

Eben's Catholic faith was of deep importance to him, and led to his desire to communicate religious themes in his music. This in turn led to his philosophy of music as a medium with which to impart messages. Because Eben's music was directly affected by, and partly a response to, the social and political circumstances in former Czechoslovakia, his music cannot be separated from these circumstances.

Because Eben's music is so intimately connected to his life experiences and personal beliefs, his music is best comprehended to its full depth with an understanding of Eben's life.

Eben as an individual had a particularly difficult relationship with the political landscape of former Czechoslovakia. This is due in part to his Jewish heritage on his father's side. Because of this heritage, Eben was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp. His experiences at the concentration camp solidified his dedication to the Catholic faith instilled in him by his mother. During the Communist regime in former

Czechoslovakia, Eben decided to persist in composing music on religious themes, as he felt such themes were important to communicate to others. He also chose to continue composing for the organ, the instrument with which he became closely associated, despite the fact that the organ was a banned instrument under the Communist government. Because religious topics were among those censored by the Party authorities, Eben put himself at risk by composing music on such themes.

Eben's musical language draws on several influences including Gregorian chant, Lutheran chorale, Bohemian and Moravian folk music, organ improvisation and jazz elements. Such influences are combined with Eben's own unique musical dialect which embraces bitonality and polytonality, a strong rhythmic drive and dissonant intervals such as tritones and major sevenths. Eben's musical language, while intellectual in its structure, allies most closely with Romanticism in its expressive nature. Despite the complexity of Eben's musical language, it is easily comprehensible and clear in its passionate expression of emotion and thematic content.

The accessibility of Eben's musical language aids the performer in creating an effective artistic interpretation. Communicative exchange between himself, the performer and the listener was of central importance to Eben. This means that he actively sought such an exchange with the performer. This resulted in a musical language which is clear in its guidance of the performer toward Eben's intended meaning. The interaction of the performer's perspective and Eben's musical guidance can create the most rewarding experience of his music for the audience.

Písně nelaskavé or *Loveless Songs* is a song cycle which Eben composed in 1963 during the time of Communist government in former Czechoslovakia. It is an example

of Eben's composition that focuses on expressing difficult emotions, which may be representative of the sentiments in his country at the time of the song cycle's conception. It also can be interpreted as possessing a political subtext. Such a claim is reinforced by the fact that Eben selected works banned by the Party authorities and works by poets with political associations for the texts of the songs in the cycle. A contextual understanding of *Pisně nelaskavé* allows the performer to link the musical language and the emotions expressed with a possible political motivation. When viewed from this perspective, the song cycle can be interpreted as a larger scale commentary on society as well as a representation of the failing relationships between individuals.

Eben's musical language is explicit in communicating the intensity of emotion in each song and clear in representing the mood Eben wished to express for each text. This clarity allows the singer to easily comprehend and craft an effective artistic interpretation. An analysis of *Pisně nelaskavé* reveals the many ways in which Eben communicates the emotional content of the texts. The author's artistic interpretation was directly informed by the coherence of Eben's musical language. This artistic interpretation provides an example of the way in which the performer's perspective may interact with Eben's intent as revealed by his music to create a richer and more nuanced experience of the song cycle.

Eben's music was a response to the political atmosphere in his country, and it was influenced by several cultural factors. Therefore, the perspective Eben presents in his music is intimately tied to the circumstances in which he lived and composed. A performer approaching Eben's works, particularly a non-Czech performer, must take the time to research Eben's life and the cultural and political history of the Czech

Republic to fully understand the meaning in Eben's music. *Písně nelaskavé* is one such example of Eben's works that only reveals the true depth of its meaning on closer study. However, in order to encourage communicative exchange with the performer, Eben composed music that is at all times comprehensible. The performer's own perspective is a vital contributor to the artistic process in interpreting one of Eben's works such as *Písně nelaskavé*. So too is the listener's perspective. When the performer's perspective and the listener's perspective interact with Eben's intent, the meaning to be found in a work such as *Písně nelaskavé* is able to take on new semantic aspects. This makes his music relevant and relatable to performers and audiences outside of the Czech Republic as well as those from Eben's country. When the meaning in Eben's music is given dynamic life through communicative exchange between Eben, the performer and the listener, it may continue to evolve and gain valuable facets with each new performance.

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