

Interview with music teacher Peter Kunz

Music is the greatest art

(greatly abbreviated [here- https://dennikn.sk/1152436/ucitel-hudby-na-jvacsi-skladatel-bol-bach-moderne-skladby-su-na-jma-pre-odbornikov-pre-rodicov-a-deti-nie/feed/](https://dennikn.sk/1152436/ucitel-hudby-na-jvacsi-skladatel-bol-bach-moderne-skladby-su-na-jma-pre-odbornikov-pre-rodicov-a-deti-nie/feed/))

Why is serious music called serious, because after all there are comic operas to entertain.

The latter music is not called merry, but folk. Popular. It's lighter than the serious one. Entertaining, to refresh the mind. Songs. But there were musicians who worked harder and were able to compose and play larger scale pieces. This went along with perfecting musical instruments, but also with literature and writing down the pieces. This was started in the 11th century by the monk Guido of Arezzo. He is the forefather of our musical notation. He invented the linotype of music notation and this may have started the development of classical music. It was also thanks to notation that classical music was then able to bring lasting value.

But there are also folk or popular songs about serious things. Why serious music Don't we just call it classical, like in other languages? What does that say about us? Aren't we cutting ourselves short on something?

I don't think so. There is also serious literature. Educational.

But the latter doesn't entertain, while classical music is many times entertaining.

Yes, music is not just about the number of notes and bars. There is something more to it. Interpretation is also important. Like when someone tells a joke. It's not just about the words either.

Interesting. In this context, it occurs to me that Milan Lasica used to say that good humour can only come about when you take it deadly seriously. Isn't that also true of the music? That serious music is the music that really needs to be taken seriously?

It may be so. Serious music is also serious because it deserves a certain respect from the listener. For example, to put on appropriate clothing. But in any case I think the term was not coined by the composers themselves, but by someone else. A lot of people are dealing with their songs, dissecting them, numbering them in all sorts of ways, so I guess they invented the idea of calling that music classical.

Music scientists?

Yeah. They started studying music in the 17th century. Mattheson, then Schubart, or others started writing about composers, their compositions, and how they should be interpreted.

You mentioned the enduring values of classical music. Can popular music also bring of lasting value?

It can, but it's more of an exception because popular music is more subject to fashion. Popular music is usually not timeless, like design.

Well, but take a pyramid like that. Its design has endured the longest of any human culture.

I meant something else by design. Something that goes with fashion, or culture. Thus, it is not a timeless philosophical matter.

I do think the Beatles were undeniably a philosophical thing that persists even through changes in fashion or culture. But when did classical music actually separate from popular music?

Popular music, like jazz, originated from folk music. Serious music required and requires more education. It originated more from sacred music - church music.

Speaking of changes in culture or fashion, even in classical music styles have changed. At least here in Europe. Why didn't musicians concentrate on deepening and improving the tradition?

Well, surely Bach's sons must have said to their father - dad, you're 100 years behind, it's out of date what you're writing. They were more modern. After all, his son Christian, that's already classicism.

And why are we here like this? Constantly changing?

In the East, those traditions were kept within families. Here, on the contrary, there were many influences.

And I think it's related to Christian culture as well.

Why?

Christians have always been sympathetic to everything. To all ideas. Christianity is a dialectical religion. It thinks. It's not a command religion that you can do this and you can't do that.

By the way, do you like the songs of Jaroslav Ježek from the Liberated Theatre of Voskovec and Werich?

Of course.

And is it a pop or a classic?

He composed both. He had very difficult compositions for piano. He was a piano virtuoso. Like all jazz pianists. And then he did those songs, that was dance music.

Isn't all music danceable?

I don't think so. Haydn's quartet may have a minuet, but you can't dance to the final presto. The music was made from dances, but also from chorales that were not danced to.

And which of Jezko's things have lasted?

Probably the popular ones.

Well, you see, I got you. You said that classical music is timeless and endures, and popular music is subject to fashion and fades with it.

Absolutely not, it's about quality. His classical music was not as good as his songs. But after all, young people today have no idea who Ježek was, so those songs are forgotten a little bit. Although, at the last concert, one of our pupils sang "Life is just a coincidence". So maybe it's not so bad with forgetting.

I have a similar impression of Paul McCartney. I think his songs are timeless and they will last, but I'm not sure about his serious songs.

Definitely. A classic isn't good just for the sake of being a classic. But on the other hand, Hedgehog needs an orchestra. Those songs, too, so they're kind of classics after all.

How did you get into music?

I come from Brno. My father was from a musician's family, he was a professional musician, and my mother was also a musician. My father played the cello, my mother played the piano. At the conservatory in Brno they were taught some subjects by Leoš Janáček, who was the director there. He actually founded it in 1919. My father was concertmaster of the Brno Philharmonic, and he taught at the conservatory and at the university. I, however, was taught by my mother. But my parents didn't really want us to do music either, because it was hard work.

Were you attracted to classical music or rather popular music?

I'm a classical musician by nature, I'm not a popular musician, but I like to hear the shit. But I used to play operettas.

Who did you learn from?

I studied violin and piano at the same conservatory with professor Remes, he was a disciple of the Shevchiks and the Kocians. Kocian led a master school in Prague.

What music influenced you in your youth?

Moravian and Czech music, Dvořák, Smetana, Suk. Already in primary school we went to concerts where this music was played. I also liked Oskar Nedbal.

You studied in Brno in the 1960s. What was the atmosphere like then?

Back then, the culture there was at a huge level. Example - the Brno theatre performed all of Prokofiev's operas in 1963, because it was the tenth anniversary of his death.

Today it would probably not be possible. It was spectacular.

Were you also interested in popular music?

I didn't play it, but we listened to it a lot. Elvis, the Beatles, but also orchestras from Brno. Especially jazz. Gustav Brom had an orchestra in Brno that was one of the best in the world. And in America, he won 6th place in a jazz orchestra competition. I don't know if any other band of ours has ever done anything like that. Brom's son went to school with me. He was in my class. Otherwise, Brom was not his own name. It stood for the Brno Youth Radio Orchestra. Brom was the absolute top of the world. The trumpeter Hnilicka also did arrangements for him. He also composed the jazz Mass.

Weren't you into jazz?

I didn't control a wind instrument.

How did you get to Slovakia?

I got married. When I was still studying in Brno, I was already employed in the VUS (Military Art Ensemble) in Bratislava. Here I was in the war and here I met my wife. My wife was studying at the Academy of Performing Arts at that time. She also comes from a musician's family, so to speak. Her mother, Maria Sýkorová, was an opera singer. Master Dusík was her accompanist and Oskar Nedbal, who was the first director of the Slovak National Theatre, spoke highly of her.

Did you stay in Bratislava after the war?

After the war we went to Germany for a couple of years, we played in a theatre orchestra there, and when we came back I got a job in the orchestra at the New Stage.

Were you in West Germany?

No, in Eastern. They wouldn't let me go to the Western one because my brother was an emigrant.

Have you played anywhere else in the world?

We were in Turkey for a couple of years under Gorbachev in the 1980s. We were bringing currency in aid to developing countries. We went to Egypt, we went to Lebanon.

Philharmonic?

No, we were so-called free artists. That could be arranged at the Slovkoncert.

How do you remember the New Scene?

We used to do operettas and musicals. There was a permanent orchestra, 50 people, but then it disbanded. I was there from 1978 to 2000.

Would you classify operetta and musical as classical music or rather as popular music?

A good operetta definitely belongs to the classics, even if it is not usually serious. There are huge differences between musicals, but they probably belong more to the popular one already.

Do you remember any performances in particular?

For example, on Full Pockets of Money with Satinsky and Lasic. That was a very good performance. People went to see it because it was fun. Karol Čálik played a beggar there. But there were a lot of good performances. It was a famous theatre, we went all over the world, we played in German.

How did you get into teaching music?

I've always gone to teach. They've always been looking for teachers. Once a girl graduated from the conservatory, got a place at the school as a music teacher. But then she started having one child, another one, so I taught for the ones that were on maternity leave. First a couple of afternoons. At that time I was still playing on the New Stage as well. But when the New Stage closed down, I started teaching full time.

Have you also tried composing?

I've been doing song arrangements and some etudes for the students, but not otherwise. I don't have those Ideas.

The first national Czech opera is comic - The Bartered Bride. The first national Slovak opera is a detective tragedy - Krútnava. What is the source of the difference between such close cultures?

This is the tradition and centralization of culture. Bohemia, and especially Prague, was a centre of culture during the monarchy, along with Vienna. And not only that. Bohemia was rich, it had its famous products, from beer to cucumbers to ceramics. In Slovakia, there was no such centralisation. Those who knew something went to Budapest or Vienna. Or even to Prague. So the culture here was fragmented. Even folklore. Czech folklore is simpler, German folklore too. The simplicity, the clarity of folk songs is closely related with the musical maturity of the nation, because even small children understand these songs, they can interpret them on the drum and learn to play them. That's why German music was at such a high level. In Slovakia it was more complicated. It was fragmented.

Slovak folklore is more varied. A lot of influences were intertwined in folk song.

But where did the humour deficit come from? Do you remember any of our comic opera. It's all tragedy and myth.

It is also a tradition. And in the Czech Republic, it's the chef thing to turn everything into fun.

Where did she come from?

Maybe after White Mountain, I don't know. Maybe Alojz Jirásek would explain it better.

But he rather manufactured myths, didn't he?

Oh, no. He was a historian. He was very knowledgeable. Read what Karel Čapek said, "I would kneel before Jirásek."

I was thinking of the Old Bohemian Tales. But let's get back to the humour. Why didn't humour work for us?

Slovaks are souls who tend to withdraw into themselves. They have not gone through that revival. Sturm und drang. The Enlightenment era did not pass through the common people here. Either they couldn't read or they didn't understand Latin. The Enlightenment passed through Bohemia.

And Moravia?

It's kind of half and half there. There are fewer jokes and it's more into the tragedy. Janáček has only one humorous opera - The Little Vixen.

But that one also ends tragically. The fox dies.

Okay, but it's all humorous. He's making fun of the forester. Janáček, however, was already turning more to Russia, so there's a lot more nostalgia there. The more it goes east, the darker it gets.

It is all the more rare when a humorist is born there. To be a humorist in Russia is life-threatening.

When we were performing in Turkey, I heard a story from my Russian colleagues there about a beautiful church in Moscow. The builder was summoned by the Tsar and asked:

"Could you build anything more beautiful than this church?" The builder replied that he did, and so the Tsar had him blinded so that he would never build anything more beautiful anywhere else.

There have been many composers in the history of music. Many have been forgotten and we don't know their compositions or their names, others we don't know either, but their songs have been preserved - made popular. But there have also been quite a lot of composers who have not been forgotten. They have outgrown the horizons of their region, their country and their time - they are constantly relevant and modern. In your opinion, who are some of the great composers?

There are few that are still played today and around the world. It is a pyramid. What is it based on? First of all, on the size of the creation. There are those who are top in talent and also have great range. They write everything. But there are also those who write just about anything. If we start from the Baroque, for example, in England it was Henry Purcell and Georg Friedrich Handel, even though he was German, but he lived there. In France, Jean-Baptiste Lully. And in Italy, even before them, Claudio Monteverdi. He is the top. He plays everywhere. Only occasionally, but all the time. And in Germany, Heinrich Biber, who is also considered by the Czechs to be one of their own. He was one of the greatest violinists in the world at that time, he wrote sonatas, and it's still being played today. These old composers are coming into vogue today. Maybe it's also because instruments in the old spirit - harpsichords, violins, strings, gambas, wooden flutes - have begun to be produced in large numbers. Get them commonly bought. That wasn't the case before. Well and then, of course, Johann Sebastian Bach. He was perhaps the greatest musician ever. He played a huge number of instruments, he revolutionised the whole technique of playing, his output is amazingly comprehensive, he composed almost 7,000 pieces.

What was so groundbreaking about Bach?

He began to use new instruments such as solo, violin and cello. He introduced thumb playing on keyboard instruments. Until then, the technique was simpler and his compositions required more. To this day, his compositions are considered the most difficult.

To study his fugue means a year of work. But there are also performers who will play his entire piano works by heart.

What about the Classical period?

Well there's definitely Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven. And also Czech composers like Benda, Mysliveček, and the Meiningen School. Those are less played, but I count them among the greats.

Why Haydn?

Haydn is one of the greatest composers. Mozart and Beethoven also drew from him. He has a huge range and there is also a huge quality and depth in his compositions. If a piece doesn't have depth, after a while you start to find it boring. Not so with Haydn. His Seasons, symphonies, quartets, that's the top of the pyramid. There's not a cellist who doesn't play his cello concerto. I consider Haydn to be one

of the largest. My father and his quartet performed all of his quartets in 1957, 87 of them. That was the 150th anniversary of Haydn's death. They played them as Sunday matinees. They played three every Sunday. I don't know if anyone repeated it after that. Amazing enthusiasm for the cause, tremendous power. I still have my father's scores here. Papa Haydn was in the service of the nobility all his life. But he wasn't a lackey. He was Kapellmeister to Prince Eszterházy in Eisenstadt. And thanks to the fact that he had a master who saw his

enormous talent, Haydn was a very wealthy and respected gentleman. He had houses, he had servants, he had everything to be able to fulfil the function of a chaplain. But he also had a sense of humour. When he wanted a holiday, he wrote a symphony called On Leaving. At the end of the last movement of the symphony, the musicians gradually left the stage. The master understood and gave Haydn a holiday. Haydn later freed himself, was in

France and England. In England they wanted him permanently, but he came back. When

Napoleon arrived in Austria with his army, he put four soldiers at Haydn's house in Eisenstadt to make sure that nothing happened to him. Haydn was already seriously ill at the time. He had a guard of honour there. Napoleon held him in high esteem.

Why Mozart?

Mozart had enormous inventiveness, imagination, he is still different. His music enchants you, but the melodies are hard to remember because it's always different, creative, but at the same time very profound. And his range was perhaps the greatest ever. He composed symphonies, chamber music, concertos, songs, operas. He fundamentally changed opera. He gave it drama, depth, humanity and a kind of reconciliation, forgiveness. Every one of his operas ends in B-flat major, which is considered to be the key of the future, optimism, light and goodness.

Mozart was also the first free musician, unlike Haydn, who had a master. He had private commissions. The new conditions were reflected in his work and in his life.

Why Beethoven?

Beethoven was a different character from Mozart or Haydn. He wrote several compositions that have no equal - symphonies, concertos, sonatas and quartets. He went very far there. He revolutionized scoring and revolutionized sound. But he also has some weaker pieces where he repeats himself. But so have others. That's what makes his good stuff all the better. But you won't find weaker pieces with Mozart.

Who do you think stands out the most in the Romantic period?

There are a lot of them. One should mention Italian opera composers such as Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, Puccini. Then there was Brahms, the great symphonist, who had a particular melodicism that not everyone understands. He was a great supporter of another great Romantic, Antonín Dvořák. Brahms always said that Dvořák would casually think of what he thought of as the main idea.

Dvořák was amazing in his melodicism and his treatment of the piece. It is said that he used to listen to trains for inspiration. I have a relationship with locomotives, too. My grandfather was a locomotive engineer on the line Aš - Uzhhorod. Among the greatest composers are, of course, Tchaikovsky, also Mussorgsky and Korzakov, then Debussy, Mahler and Richard Strauss. Chopin too, for sure, although he wrote mainly for piano. And certainly Grieg, that's wonderful music.

And we are already in the 20th century.

I consider Leoš Janáček and Bohuslav Martinů to be the greatest Czech composers. In Slovakia it is certainly Eugen Suchoň and Alexander Moyzes. Of the contemporary ones, although I don't follow it that much anymore, Zeljenka had some excellent stuff, or Godár is also very good. In the north Sibelius, he has very good things, in Russia perhaps Shostakovich and Stravinsky, although the latter was perhaps more American. From France, Ravel and the modernists. Honegger and Hindemith might still belong there.

And of course Bartók. He is one of the most passionate. It has many influences - Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Turkish, Croatian... Quite a unique phenomenon. And certainly among the great composers of the 20th century is Lehár. He was

very rich. He had a huge castle in Bad Ischl in the mountains, where the Empress Sissi used to go for treatment. There's a museum there now. Coincidentally, I came across his rather obscure early operetta *When the Lark Sings*. There's an extraordinary inventiveness, chords. It's simple, but beautiful and unrepeatable. Hats off. It's better than Cole Porter, in my opinion. But overall, it's difficult in the 20th century

determine the greatest composers. You know, the more complex the music is, the more opinions there are about it.

And isn't it so difficult because in the 20th century classical music has become somewhat alienated from the common man?

It certainly does. It's more abstract. Like with paintings.

Yes, but with painters, the laymen are more likely to agree with the experts on Picasso, for example. In music it seems to be more difficult.

You perceive music only by hearing. And besides, music is all the more difficult because it takes place in time. Like when a marathon is shot and run. There's no time to think about how to matriculation.

Why Janáček?

Janáček was amazingly strict with himself. He was brought up in a monastery, where he was taught by Pavel Křížkovský. But he also demanded perfect work from others. He was one of history's greatest artists. In addition to being an amazing composer, he was also a music theorist. He proposed a different way of writing music, but it didn't take off. It's a pity, because maybe children would understand the music better. All the people who tried to compose like him afterwards are no match for him. Janáček is the most played Czech composer in the world today.

And why Eugen Suchoň, after all he doesn't play that much?

Suchoň is very good music. It has depth and amazing compositional technique. His things are fantastic.

Why, then, is he not playing in the world like Dvořák or Smetana?

It's not that close for people to listen to and it's very difficult to play.

You said the same thing about the Slovak floclor. Are they related?

I guess so, because he drew from it. Czech or German songs are so simple, they couldn't be simpler. There's also the problem that, let's say, such a the orchestra at the conservatoire will certainly prefer Smetana's overture, because they find Suchoň difficult. You can go the way of the classics, play Haydn, or from the Romance to take Tchaikovsky's Serenade or Dvořák's Serenade. They are not easy, but nevertheless, they are easier on the ear. But even Suk has a world-class serenade, but it's plays much less because it is much heavier. But with Suchoň, the forms are also changing. He has like that brilliant song Metamorphosis. But there is a huge apparatus, you need bells. The conservatory may have some bells, but certainly not enough to do it in the hour or two they have a week. The simpler old music is more acceptable to them - they grow on it. This means that future musicians already have a better appreciation of that old music and less understanding of the modern one.

The consequence is that contemporary music becomes a topic for a narrow circle of academics.

We were at this modern music concert on the radio. All my colleagues they said - there is something to it, but only for experts. For children and parents

there is not.

Isn't it?

But composers are always trying new things.

But isn't it a dead end? For example, the Greek composer Vangelis. I rank him among the greatest, he is contemporary and yet understandable.

But he belongs to the popular.

I'd say he's more of a melodicist. I have the feeling that all those you have chosen among the great composers have in common that they had the gift of melody. That they were great melodicists. A melodicist is accessible to everyone.

What do you think music would look like without melody?

I had in mind a tune so singable that you could dance to it, not one like that, which is accessible only to the expert ear.

Well sure, without melody there is little music. For example, there is little melody in Schoenberg's 12-tone music, Webern tried to cut it down a bit, but it's more like mathematical music. But Suchoň is melodic, it's just hard to perceive.

And why does such a composer do it this way?

He is looking for new paths. He is getting impulses.

And shouldn't the goal be to process those impulses as simply as possible?

Well for him it's easy. And modern at the same time.

Does every composer have a talent for melody?

Everyone doesn't. This is a gift from God. It cannot be taught. Something can be taught to a certain extent, but what Bizet has in Carmen, for example, cannot be taught. That's the talent.

Why is it important to teach children music?

Music uplifts a person. Whatever. Even natural peoples had and have their rhythms and tones. Music is in the universe - the harmony of the spheres. It is definitely man's needs. Singing. Music, what exists in nature, the cadences of the nightingale, the different sounds, are not enough. Man needs more, and that's why he started creating it from within. Music is the greatest art because it is perceptible only by hearing - abstractly. Every picture has a background, even a sculpture, but music has not. Most of it comes from within the human being. It is the highest creativity. That's why even children want it. Because it liberates them. The right attitude is, not that it shackles you, but it liberates you.

And is there any difference in listening to, interpreting and making music?

There are people who only passively listen to music, but they like to listen to it, watch it, go to concerts. They enjoy it. The atmosphere takes them to another world. That's terribly important. Others listen to the shit on the radio every now and then. But there are also people who listen to music they don't like. There is even a disease called amusia. People with this disorder cannot perceive music, they only hear it as noise. But this is really a disease. There are people who study music progressively and write about it. They also like it. And then there are people who can compose it - create it. Creation is the highest kind of music, because without it, it wouldn't exist. If it weren't for these people, there would be no songs. They give the performers the ability to continue to perform it. Performers play the music - make it active - and introduce it to the audience through their skills. What good would performers be without listeners?

And where does the music teacher have his place there?

The teacher centers the things that have been written and teaches the children to interpret them correctly - both technically and expressively. Those things are equal. The teacher should understand that and have insight. And to teach it takes, as Comenius said, three, - the teacher, the pupil and that teaching substance, he called it instrumental. Without that, it cannot be done. It is that suitably chosen and arranged substance which can move the pupil in a good way and not discourage him.