



Novák

In the Tatras
South Bohemian Suite
Eight Nocturnes

Daniela Straková
Carlsbad Symphony Orchestra
Douglas Bostock

alto

My music has always been a reflection of my life. **Vítězslav Novák (1870-1949)**

The phrase ‘undeservedly neglected composer’ is perhaps overused, but, in the case of Vítězslav Novák, seems justified. Together with Joseph Suk, he was the most important Czech composer of the generation after Dvořák. His magnificent cantata, *The Storm* (1910) which, after epic tribulations, arrives at a spiritual catharsis, is one of the highlights of 20th Century choral-orchestral music. He was, I believe, a major figure.

The son of a Southern Bohemian physician, who died when the composer was very young, Novák initially trained as a lawyer at Prague University, before gravitating towards music, eventually attending the composition class of Dvořák. As with Vaughan Williams in England, Novák took an early interest in folk songs – especially those of the Slovak and Moravian regions. This influence can first be detected in both the *Sonata Eroica* Op. 24 of 1900 (ALC 1113) and is developed further in the Symphonic Poem, *In the Tatras* Op. 26 (1903-05).

In the Tatras, an early highpoint of Novák’s compositional career, represents not only his love for the Slovakian countryside and mountains (he made the first ascent of the Ostry peak) but also, perhaps, an assertion of nationalism at a time when, what later became Czechoslovakia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Novák himself provided a programmatic description of the work: *A gloomy atmosphere before a threatening storm. Greyish white mist clings to the ominous, precipitate mountain peaks. The sun still just succeeds in penetrating the clouds and illuminating for a moment this majestically sorrowful stony landscape. But the clouds are gathering, getting thicker and more threatening, and jagged by blinding lightning. The storm bursts. Its anger shatters against the unyielding granite walls of the Tatras...After the bitter struggle, peace reigns again. The setting sun gilds the peaks of the mountain giants, and from afar the evening bells are to be heard. Night with its pearl-studded veil falls on the Tatras...*

The depth of feeling conveyed in Novák’s monothematic musical portrayal of the mountains, before, during and after a storm, suggests a spiritual journey, as well reflecting his love for the *exalted beauty* (Novák’s own description) of the Tatras. The juxtaposition of the violence and tranquillity of the mountains is reflected in the contrasting keys of G minor and E major, which pervade the work. Following further musical and mountain-climbing experiences Novák re-wrote parts of the score in 1907, attending to both structure and tonal colour. The revised version was first performed under the baton of Rudolf Reissig, in Brno on December 7th, 1907.

Thirty years later, the gathering storm which threatened to engulf Czechoslovakia came, alas, not from the Tatra Mountains, but from Nazi Germany, as Hitler's territorially expansionist ambitions extended to the German speaking Sudetenland regions and beyond. It was against this ominous background that Novák composed his *South Bohemian Suite* Op. 64 (1936-7).

[The music] emerged in my mind as some apparition from bygone ages. And also, as the product of my subconscious fear of the times that lay ahead of us. (V. Novak, Memoirs)

The diminutive title *Suite* belies the fact that this is a major work, written for a large orchestra. As with *In the Tatras* the *South Bohemian Suite* expresses Novák's love for the culture and landscape of his homeland, but it may also be seen as a defiantly patriotic assertion of Czech independence in the face of the looming threat from the Nazi state.

The suite's first movement, reflecting the countryside of Southern Bohemia, is a set of variations on a Moravian folk-like melody, played initially on high-pitched strings. The meditative second movement (*Forests and Ponds*) features a folk melody (*U panského dvora*) by the poet Franticek Vacek-Kamenicky (1806-69). If the first two movements are rather in the spirit of Smetana's *Vltava* and *From Bohemia's Woods and Fields*, the mood darkens in the third movement, which more directly reflects Novák's sense of foreboding about the encroaching threat to his homeland. In this movement Novák invokes the spirit of the Hussite armies marching from a distance in defence of the Czech people. The Hussites were followers of John Huss, a Bohemian religious reformer, whose execution at the stake in 1415 provoked a nationwide protest in Bohemia for religious freedom and against German rule. This is the most dramatic movement in the Suite, reminiscent of the Roman columns advancing down the Appian Way in Ottorino Respighi's *Pines of Rome* composed only 12 years earlier. Novák here introduces a repeating four-bar theme based on an old Hussite chorale, *Kdož jste boží bojovníci* (Ye warriors of God). The music arrives at a powerful climax, before dying away, as the Hussite armies of old disappear into the distance. As they do so a solo violin perhaps laments for the future of Czechoslovakia.

As an epilogue, Novák quotes, in a hymn-like sequence, from the opening of the Czech national anthem *Kde domov můj* – a final gesture of defiance. The *South Bohemian Suite* was first performed in Prague on 22nd December, 1937, by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Erich Kleiber. The *South Bohemian Suite* and the despairing but ultimately redemptive *De Profundis*,

Symphonic Poem for Large Orchestra and Organ, Op. 67 (1941), written courageously during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, belie the standard view that all Novak's greatest works were composed before the First World War.

From this earlier period, however, came the *Melancholic Love Songs* Op. 38 and the **Eight Nocturnes for Voice and Orchestra** Op. 39 (1908) in which: *We sense the composer's inner harmony with the poetic model; it is not merely an identification but literally a visionary penetration into the deeper meaning of the poems.* (Vladimír's Lébl's description of *The Valley of the New Kingdom* Song Cycle could equally apply here).

The poems set by Novak, many of which evoke the emotive power of nature, are from the German authors Karl Bulcke (*White in the moonlight, the port lies dreaming...*), Hermann Lingg, Karl Gustav Vollmöller, Oscar Wiener, Richard Dehmel (after Verlaine), Ludwig Uhland and Ludwig Jacobowski, concluding with a hauntingly beautiful setting of the *Christ Child's Lullaby* from Des Knaben Wunderhorn (also set by Gustav Mahler). Once heard, the *Christ Child's Lullaby* is not easily forgotten – music of compassion and consolation from this extraordinarily underrated Czech composer.

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Douglas Bostock was educated at Sheffield University and was one of the last private pupils of Sir Adrian Boult. He has collaborated with almost 100 orchestras and choruses on three continents. From 1991-98 he was Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Carlsbad Symphony Orchestra, one of the leading orchestras of the Czech Republic, with which he made, amongst many others, this recording of *South Bohemian Suite* and this world premiere recording of Novak's *Eight Nocturnes for Voice and Orchestra*. In 1999 he embarked on a collaboration with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (with whom he recorded a highly acclaimed cycle of the Carl Nielsen symphonies), performing with them regularly as a guest conductor. He was the Principal Conductor of the highly acclaimed Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra from 2000-06 and currently serves as its first Principal Guest Conductor. A prolific and versatile recording artist, he has made more than 70 CDs. He is also well known for raising the profile of undeservedly neglected British composers, such as Ruth Gipps, Arthur Butterworth, Gordon Jacob and York Bowen, in the *British Symphonic Collection* for the then ClassicO label.

Daniela Straková studied at the Brno Conservatoire and thereafter in Prague and Italy. In 1987 she won the Second Prize at the Carlsbad International Dvorak Singing Competition. Her career

began at the Opera Studio of the Prague National Theatre and she has subsequently been a soloist in the National Theatre in Brno, where she has sung many major roles, especially from the Italian repertoire. She has been the recipient of prizes in several singing competitions.

Stars in the Water

White in the moonlight, the port lies dreaming
The sound of oars in the distance,
My weary sails sleep,
And the stars stand in the water
Shining with bliss.
Slowly the masts stir,
Silently the waves move to the ocean;
What I have loved, what I have hated
Is drawn from me by the bright,
Shining water.
Only death dissolves all pain,
Only death shatters all the bars,
The stars of your fortune shine
Late at night first on the mirror of
Your soul.

Christ Child's Lullaby

Oh gentle Jesus,
The manager is hard,
Oh gentle Jesus,
How hard is your crib,
Pray sleep, pray close your eyes,
Sleep and grant us eternal peace.

Sleep well, Infant Jesus,
Nothing shall hinder your sleep:
The ox, the donkey and the sheep
All sleep ,
The seraphim sing and the cherubim ring out
The angels in the stable lull you to sleep.

Be still you winds,
Let the child sleep!
May the roar of the wind cease,
Let your Lord sleep.
Sleep, child, and close your eyes,
Sleep and grant us eternal peace.

Nothing moves, not a mouse stirs,
The dear child starts to sleep.
Sleep then and close your eyes,
Sleep and grant us eternal peace!
All singing falls silent, no voice sounds out:
Sleep gentle Jesus, you who are divine!

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Vítězslav Novák

Daniela Straková* (soprano)

Carlsbad Symphony Orchestra / Douglas Bostock

[1] **In the Tatras Op.26** 17:10

South Bohemian Suite, Op.64

[2] I. Pastorale (Obzory). Pastoral (Horizons) 11:13

[3] II. Sneni (Lesy a rybniky). Reverie (Forests & Ponds) 8:21

[4] III. Kdysi (Pochod Táboru). Once Upon a Time (March of the Hussites) 8:51

[5] IV. Bud' zdráv, muj rodný kraj. Epilog (Apotheose)
To My Homeland. Epilogue (Apotheosis) 1:22

Eight Nocturnes for Voice & Orchestra, Op.39*

[6] I. *Sterne im Wasser (Stars in the Water)* Text: Karl Bulcke 3:08

[7] II. *Waldnacht (Forest Night)* Text: Herman Lingg 2:56

[8] III. *Notturmo in G dur (Nocturne in G minor)* Text: Karl Gustav Vollmöller 4:18

[9] IV. *Totentänzen (Little Dance of Death)* Text: Oscar Weiner 2:55

[10] V. *Helle Nacht (Bright Night)* Text: Richard Dehmel, after Verlaine 2:04

[11] VI. *Nachtreise (Nocturnal Journey)* Text: Ludwig Uhland 3:17

[12] VII. *Sommernacht (Summer Night)* Text: Ludwig Jacobowski 6:11

[13] VIII. *Christkindleins Wiegenlied (Christ Child's Lullaby)* 4:08

from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn"

Producer: Jiri Gemrot; Engineer: Ivan Pommer; Recorded in Lazne III, Carlsbad, January 1998
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Vítězslav Novák: South Bohemian Suite
In the Tatras; Eight Nocturnes for Voice & Orchestra*
Daniela Straková* (sop)
Carlsbad Symphony Orchestra / Douglas Bostock

ALC 1199
alto

"In the Tatras is a superb tone poem of the highest hills, glorious sun-dazzling renewal and exalted mystery. Delius's *Song of the High Hills* and Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* are mood-cousins. The first movement of the *Suite* blends Delian luxuriance with Dvořák's naive romantic and sprightly nationalism.

(Eight Nocturnes) These range from the glistening *Stars in the Water* to the *Night Journey* - full of dark and disruptive currents and the dreamy atmosphere of some Bohemian nightride and sunrise. *Christ Child's Lullaby* has the innocent wonder of Canteloube's *Songs of Auvergne*. Utterly treasurable. Straková creamily floats the long vocal lines with an engaging sense of joyous discovery....Do get this disc, made a compulsive purchase by the song cycle." (Rob Barnett, MusicWeb International)

[1] **In the Tatras Op.26**

Time: 76:42

[2]-[5] **South Bohemian Suite, Op.64**

DDD, 1998

[6]-[13] **Eight Nocturnes for Voice & Orchestra, Op.39***

I. *Sterne im Wasser (Stars in the Water)*; II. *Waldnacht (Forest Night)*; III. *Notturmo in G dur (Nocturne in G minor)*; IV. *Totentänzen (Little Dance of Death)*; V. *Helle Nacht (Bright Night)*;
 VI. *Nachtreise (Nocturnal Journey)*; VII. *Sommernacht (Summer Night)*; VIII. *Christkindleins Wiegenlied (Christ Child's Lullaby)* from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn"

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