



Lure
MORNING
NOVÁK JANÁČEK FOERSTER

D.M.A. RECITAL – BREE NICHOLS, SOPRANO
Program Notes & Translations

Melancholické písně o lásce (Melancholy Songs About Love), Op. 38, 1906

Vítězslav Novák
(1870–1949)

The influential music critic Zdeněk Nejedlý tentatively hailed Vítězslav Novák as an early champion of Czech modernism despite his so-called conservative training under Dvořák, particularly in the realm of large-scale instrumental works.¹ However, Novák did not remain on the forefront of artistic innovation and would become a symbol of conservative style by the end of his career, owing in part to his use of folk elements. But by the same token, Moravian folk style also imbued his music with exotic harmony and distinctive rhythmic patterns; John Tyrrell writes, “What took [Novák] out of a conventional late-Romantic idiom derived from Brahms, Grieg and Tchaikovsky was his encounter with Moravia.”²

Novák penned this song cycle during an extended (and musically productive) trip to the sea. In a departure from his earlier work *Melancholie*, Op. 25, Novák here sought to convey “melancholy in major,” a description that captures the spectrum of emotions depicted in the work just as aptly as the opus itself explores the many facets of love through the words of three poets.³

I. “V svět přišla láska” (“Love came into the world”)

The theme presented at the song’s opening consists of two simultaneous melodies, one rising and one descending; together they depict the advent of love to the earth. The word “love,” *láska*, carries feminine grammatical gender in Czech, which here contributes to the anthropomorphism employed by the poet Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912).

V svět přišla láska, dávno je tomu,
divné to nebylo pranikomu.
Jako když řeka svahem svým běží,
les pláče, vítr hřmí bez otěží.
Jen jedno srdce hledala vroucí
a čistě, pro ni žijící, mroucí.

Love came in the world, long ago;
And it wasn’t strange to anyone at all.
It was like a river running down its slope,
The weeping of the forest, or the unbridled thunder of the wind.
She searched for just one heart that was loving and pure,
That would live for her, and die for her.

Co našla? Hrobu chlad neb sněhy,
neb sobectví pod maskou něhy.
V té chvíli tak jí smutno bylo,

What did she find? The chill of the grave, or snows,
or selfishness beneath the guise of compassion.
In that moment, how sad she was,

¹ Brian S. Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague: Polemics and Practice at the National Theater, 1900-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 59.

² Miloš Schnierer and John Tyrrell, “Novák, Vítězslav,” in *Grove Music Online*, 2001.

³ Jana Kučerová, “Vokální cyklus Vítězslava Nováka *Melancholické písně o lásce* Op. 38” (Thesis, Olomouc, Czech Republic, Palacký University, 2011), 27.

jak děcku, v polích jež zabloudilo.
I chtěla zpět— leč k ráji z trestu,
že vyšla, nemohla najít cestu.

Like a child lost in the fields!
And she wanted to go back; but out of affliction to paradise,
she could not find the way.

A od té chvíle bloudí a hledá,
že najde, naděj vžit' si nedá.
Někdy jen v srdci věřícím, prostém
po léta tichým jest, neznámým hostem.
Někdy jen v básníka mihne se písni,
jako když chudobku rosa potřísní.

And since that time, she has wandered and searched;
Yet she has no hope of finding.
Sometimes, only within the earnest, believing heart,
She dwells for silent years as an unknown guest.
Sometimes she flickers within the song of the poet,
Like when dew flecks the daisy.

To jsou však mžiky, pohádky jara,
staré to vzdechy— a píseň též stará.
A láska chodí od domu k domu,
a divné to není již pranikomu.

These are but glimpses, fantasies of spring,
The old sighs—and the old song;
And love walks from house to house,
And it isn't strange now to anyone at all.

II. “Je láska jako hvězda” (“Love is like a star”)

Novák here loosely reflects the poetic form of Jaromír Borecký's (1869–1951) lines by punctuating through-composed verses with a concise but bold two-line refrain. It opens with an astral dominant ninth chord arpeggiating into the heights, passionately declaiming the likeness of love to a star. But with the sudden shift of tonality to E minor on the word *zhasne* (“it will go out”), we understand the dark nature of the comparison: not that love is like the beauty or brightness of a star, but that it is similar in its ephemerality and the emptiness it leaves behind.

The composer's frequent use of extended dominant chords, secondary dominants, and added sevenths destabilize the tonal center of the piece so that it aurally alternates between B minor and its subdominant, E minor. The piece ends abruptly halfway through the refrain, lingering on the E minor chord, a bitter depiction of the sudden extinguishing of love and the hollowness left in its place.

Je láska jako hvězda: zhasne
a padne citů do moře,
a za okamžik stopy jasné
již nezůstane v prostoře.
Pak v duši hluch, pouští žasne
jen měsíc, smutek nahoře.

Love is like a star: it will go out,
And fall into a sea of passions;
And after a moment, its bright trail
Will no longer remain in space.
And within the desert of the soul,
the moon, that sadness above, only watches deafly.

Je láska jako hvězda: zhasne
a padne citů do moře.
Vír zavře se, tiš roucho řasné
po rudém prostře obzore,
těm klidný úsměv, vrásky časné
těm zase zbyly od hoře.

Love is like a star: it will go out,
And fall into a sea of passions.
The vortex closes, its draped vestment of silence
Cloaking the crimson horizon;
And a calm smile and untimely wrinkles
Remain to them still from the grief.

Je láska jako hvězda: zhasne.

Love is like a star: it will go out.

III. “Kdy láska přilétá?” (“When will love fly hither?”)

The “flight” of love is depicted in capricious triplet motive which is rhythmically developed. Like the poem, penned by Jan Neruda (1834–1891), the song unfolds in a parallel, contrasting two-part structure. Novak further illuminates the textual contrasts through repetitions of earlier material in new key areas and modes, consistently shifting between D and F# as the tonal centers of the piece. This alternation in tonal center reinforces the binary of love's presence and absence described by the poetry.

Kdy láska přilétá?
Když jaro dýchá po horách,
ze země mízu loudí
a labuť, jinde zrozená,
po našich vodách bloudí;
s břehu když do vln bublavých
měkounká pomněnka se dívá
a lidem vonných za nocí
v každinké žilce zpívá.

When will love fly hither?
When spring breathes along the mountains,
Coaxing sap from the earth,
And the swan, born elsewhere,
Meanders upon our waters;
When from the waterside, the downy forget-me-not
Gazes at the frothing waves;
And on fragrant nights,
Love sings within every human vein.

Kdy láska odlétá?
Když nad oblaky nahoře
labuť své mladé volá
a dole vítr v strništích
vzdorná si hvízdá kola;
v zpáteční vodě pod mlýnem,
když žlutavá se stříže točí,
a lidem němým za nocí
i ve snu chladem vlnou oči.

When will love fly away?
When over the clouds above,
The swan calls to its young;
And below, the wind in the shorn fields
Whistles a defiant roundelay;
In the churned water beneath the mill,
When yellowish sheep-shearings spin;
And at night, even in dreams,
The eyes of the mute people weep with cold.

IV. "Ó, lásky moře bezdné" ("O, the fathomless sea of love")

The conclusion of the cycle binds up the ideas of the fleeting joy of love, and the suffering that comes with heartbreak. The final four lines summarize the universality of this experience: that despite the pain brought by love, a person nonetheless throws himself at its mercy. Mirroring the poetic shift, Novák here departs melodically from the preceding material, arcing climatically through an ascending chromatic sequence to, finally, an emphatic arrival at the home key of E major (the same key glorifying the boundless depths of love at the opening of the piece). The conclusion in E major, fixed upon the supertonic of the cycle's opening key of D minor, grants a sense of transcendence of love's melancholy, literally stepping to a "higher" plane. This tonal area also gives closure to the unsatisfying suggestion of E minor in song two that symbolized love's expiration, so that the listener is left with the notion of accepting love's trials and relishing its beauties in spite of them.

O, lásky moře bezdné,
lze k tvému dospět dnu
Lze myšlence neb snu
pít z tvojí číše hvězdné?

O, fathomless sea of love,
Can your depth be reached?
Is it possible, in a thought or a dream,
To drink from your starry goblet?

O, lásky dlouhé pole
lze uvít v kytici
vše kvítí zářící,
jež plá a svítí v kole?

O, deep field of love,
Could one weave into a bouquet
All your shining flowers
That sparkle and gleam in their dance?

O, perly ze dna moře,
o květy z lásky niv,
ať pozděj nebo dřív
z vás v duši padá hoře.

O, pearls from the ocean's floor,
O, flowers from love's meadow,
Sooner or later,
Grief falls from you into the soul.

Ať oklame nás láska,
ať vše nám povolí,
vždy konec zabolí
a čelu zbude vráska.

Let love deceive us,
Or let her grant us everything;
The end will always hurt,
Leaving a wrinkle on the brow.

Nechť člověk žal jen tuší,
vždy srdce svoje rád
v ten květný vrhá sad
a v moře to svou duši.

Though a man feel only sorrow,
He will ever cast his heart gladly
Into that flowering grove,
And into that sea, his soul.

Janáček was the first Czech (and one of the first composers of any nation) to compose operas based on prose texts, beginning with his first mature opera *Její pastorkyňa* (Her Foster Daughter, known by its English title *Jenůfa*).⁴ His choice to compose to text directly from the original play by Gabriela Preissová (1862–1946) was radical not only because it was prose, but also because it was in a strong country dialect. In breaking the bonds of the verse libretto, Janáček also divorced the text from its logical link to symmetrical musical form. It fell to him to shape an entire style based on the music of the Czech language itself (something that began to emerge gradually during the protracted composition of *Jenůfa*); out of this, his study of speech melodies (*nápěvky mluvy*) was born. To Janáček, the semiotic content of speech sounds was so great that the imitation of spoken prosody could bring an emotional and dramatic truth that transcended the text itself. Concerning the success of a German translation of his *Jenůfa* performed in Vienna, Janáček wrote: “It is what has *not* been translated from the Czech that has triumphed: speech melody, the seat of the emotional furnace.”⁵

In this famous scene, Jenůfa has just awoken late in the evening, bleary and confused. Unbeknownst to her, she has been drugged by her foster mother, who is the sextoness (Kostelnička) of the village church. Just days before, Jenůfa had given birth to a son out of wedlock, the child of the handsome but frivolous Števa, who changed his mind about marrying Jenůfa after a harsh reproach from the Kostelnička. Overcome with shame and blaming herself for Jenůfa's disgrace, the Kostelnička locked Jenůfa away for the duration of her pregnancy, until, in desperation, she decides to kill the baby in order to prevent herself and Jenůfa from becoming outcasts. But after she takes the child, Jenůfa awakens; realizing her son Števa is gone, her emotions swing from panic to denial to, finally, urgent and tearful prayer for his safety beneath the portrait of the Virgin Mary.

Mamičko, mám těžkou hlavu, jako samý kámen;
Pomozte! Kde jste, mamičko? To je její jizba...
Já zůstávám v komoře, musím se tam stále skrývat,
ať mne nikdo nespatří.
Mamička mi pořád vyčítají, trním to bodá do duše!

Mother, my head is heavy, as if made of stone;
Help! Where are you, Mother? This is her room...
I stay in the chamber; I must always hide there
So that nobody will see me.
Mother is always reproaching me; it pierces my soul like a thorn.

Už je večer. Smím odbednit okeničky.
Všude tma, jenom měsíček bledným lidem září
a plničko, plničko hvězd,
a Števa ještě nejde, a zase nedejde!
Kdyby tak chlapčoka viděl, jak modré oči otvírá...

It's evening now; I am allowed to open the shutters.
Darkness all around— only the moon shines upon the poor people—
It overflows with stars;
And Števa still has not come, and he will not come again!
If only he could see the little boy as he opened his blue eyes...

A kde je můj Števuška? Kam jste mi ho dali?
Kde je můj Števuška? Pláče a naříká, já ho přece slyším.
Neublížujte mu, dobří lidé, já to všechno zavinila, já a Števa.
Kam jste mi ho položili, spadne tam, ach, spadne!
Zima mu bude, zima ukrutná! Neopúšťte ho!
Dočkejte! Já ho přijdu bránit!

And where is my little Števa? Where did you put him?
Where is my little Števa? He cries and moans, I hear him now!
Don't hurt him, good people; I am the guilty one, I and Števa.
Where did you put him—he'll fall there, ah, he'll fall!
He will be cold, that cruel cold! Don't leave him!
Wait! I'll come to protect him!

Kde to jsem? To je maminčina jizba, dvěře zamknuty.
Že ho šly mamička ukázat do mlýna!
Aha, do mlýna, Števova synka!
Ale modlit se musím za něho tu u mariánského obrázku.

Where am I? This is mother's room... The door is locked.
Perhaps Mother went to the mill to show him off!
Yes, to the mill, Števa's little son!
But I must pray for him, here beside the Virgin Mary's portrait:

Zdravas královno, matko milosrdenství,
živote sladkosti, tys naděje naše.
Bud' zdráva, my k tobě voláme, vyhnání synové Evy,
my k tobě vzdycháme, lkající a plačící v tomto slzavém údolí.
Ach, obrať k nám své milosrdné oči,
a Ježíše, který jest plod života tvého,
nám po tomto putování ukaž,
ó milostivá, ó přívětivá, ó přesladká Panno Maria!

Hail, Queen, Mother of Mercy,
Sweetness of life, you are our hope.
Hail, we call to you, we exiled sons of Eve;
We sigh to you, lamenting and weeping in this vale of tears.
Oh, turn your merciful eyes upon us,
And Jesus, who is the fruit of your life,
Show him to us after our wandering,
Oh gracious, oh kind, oh most sweet Virgin Mary!

⁴ Timothy Cheek, *Jenůfa: Translations and Pronunciation*, vol. III of *The Janáček Opera Libretti* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 15.

⁵ Paul Christiansen, “The Meaning of Speech Melody for Leoš Janáček,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 23, no. 3–4 (July 2004): 244.

- INTERMISSION -

Čisté jitro (Pure Morning), Op. 107, 1914–18

Josef Bohuslav Foerster
(1859–1951)

Foerster was a major figure in the transitional period between the Czech Romantics Dvořák, Smetana, and Fibich and the interwar avant-garde. A Christian humanist, Foerster imbued his compositions with spiritual themes of a highly emotional but complex and sometimes cerebral nature;⁶ his religious themes have been posited as a reason for his works' fading prominence after the Second World War as the Communist era began. Penned during his peak creative period in Vienna, this song cycle supersedes the more traditional harmonic palette of Foerster's operatic works. It exemplifies the fullness of Foerster's intellectual style in its harmonic complexity, bold organ-inspired counterpoint, and Straussian phrasing, featuring intrepid vocal lines that continually drive to new key areas. The extraordinary density and syllabic nature of the text setting in the cycle are partially necessitated by the substantial quantity of text. But the style also bears similarity to the one pioneered by Foerster's contemporary Otakar Ostrčil (1879–1935) in his influential one-act opera *Poupě* (1911), introducing a virtuosic, speech-like declamation in vocal lines nearly independent from the orchestra. This style of text setting would become a distinctive Czech musical feature emulated in Prague for the next few decades.⁷

The intricate texts of the three poets represented in the cycle are representative of the Czech Symbolist movement. Rejecting the external, descriptive nature of realist works, Symbolists sought to express internal states of the psyche by means of evocation. They selected words and images not only for their superficial meaning, but for the rich network of concepts and associations that they drew upon in the conscious and subconscious mind. Natural imagery, for example, is not employed for its own sake but rather to juxtapose and illuminate spiritual and metaphysical meanings that transcend the physical world. The meaning of the poem thus becomes an internal psychological experience exploiting the web of deeper linguistic meanings rather than one of surface-level comprehension. As you read these poems and hear Foerster's sensitive settings thereof, allow the rich series of images to wash over you without trying too hard to follow the narrative; in doing so, you may ultimately grasp a deeper spiritual meaning that is not easily verbalized.

I. "Čisté jitro" ("Pure Morning")

The author of this song's text, Otakar Březina (1868–1929), is widely considered one of the greatest Czech Symbolists. Culminating in his final collection *Ruce* (Hands, 1901) to which this poem belongs, Březina was known for his mystical depiction of the unity of all humankind with the universe.⁸ The lush extravagance of both word and emotion throughout the poem interweaves sensual undertones and religious, quasi-Biblical imagery. It conjures associations between the sacred and the sensual, depicting love as a purveyor of light, salvation, and renewal.

Foerster's musical idiom is the perfect companion to Březina's text, showing the listener how the composer understood the poetry. While there is some use of text painting for "physical" imagery, such as high, flowing arpeggiations depicting the rippling waters, Foerster's main dramatic foci are the emotional-psychological climaxes of the text: on the word *znovuzrození* ("rebirth,") the voice ascends victoriously onto a sustained high A and B. In the final verse, as the density and esotericism of symbols increases, so does articulatory complexity,⁹ most notably in the penultimate line; Foerster likewise escalates the textural density and exploits the entire range of both voice and accompaniment, building energy to its peak at the description of the shining women, visions of wholeness and peace.

⁶ "Foerster [Förster], Josef Bohuslav," Grove Music Online, accessed September 13, 2020.

⁷ Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague*, 85.

⁸ Věra Menclová and Václav Vaňek, eds., *Slovník českých spisovatelů* (Praha: Libri, 2005), 101-2.

⁹ I am indebted to Dr. Haj Ross of the UNT Department of Linguistics for teaching me linguistic methods of poetic analysis.

Když za jitra, snů množstvím zemdleni, jsme vyšli do zahrad,
zem celou, jako duši svou, jsme zřeli v ohni rozkvétat;
i ptali jsme se větrů, vod a stromů, ptáků, včel:
kdo dnešní noci, tajemný, zahradou naší šel?

Hrál písek v zlato změněný, kde svaté stopy ležely,
šuměly vody léčivé, jak rozvlněné anděly,
dech každý sílu žití měl jak na sta žhoucích dní,
a v každém pohledu byl úžas znovuzrození.

Tíž tajemství svých bolestných jsme přijali jak vůli tvou,
před rozlomením pečeti list políbený s pokorou;
a nepřítel, jenž číhaje u našich usnul bran,
jak unavený posel tvůj byl od nás uvítán.

Na nebezpečných samotách, navštěvovaných démony,
sad našich přání jemný květ, jak lilijové záhony,
a nejjáhavější, nejsladší, nejžádoucnější z žen
jsme pozdravili, zářící, jak bílé sestry jen.

When in the morning, sleepy from countless dreams, we went out into the gardens,
The whole earth, like our souls, we saw blossom into flame;
And we asked of the winds, of the waters and streams, of the birds and bees:
What mysterious person walked through our garden last night?

The sand seemed changed into gold, where the holy footprints lay;
The healing waters fizzed, as if rippled by angels,
Every breath had a power of life as unto hundreds of burning days,
And in every sight was the wonderment of rebirth.

We accepted the burden of our painful secrets as your will;
Before even breaking its seal, we kissed the letter in submission;
And the enemy that lurks at our gates fell asleep
Just as your weary messenger was welcomed by us.

In dangerous solitudes haunted by demons,
The delicate orchard of our wishes blooms, like beds of lilies,
And the most ardent, the most sweet, the most desired of women
We greeted, shining, just as those white-glowing sisters were.

II. "Blažené úsměvy mrtvých" ("Blessed Smiles of the Dead")

The poet Antonín Sova (1864–1928) often portrayed death as a peaceful rest, here illuminated with achingly beautiful sensitivity in his description of the blissful smiles of the departed. Sova draws a stark line of contrast between earthly suffering and the release found in the eternal, metaphysical existence after death; he uses silence as a symbol for death and illustrates the spirits of the dead uniting with the eternal cosmos.¹⁰ Foerster's setting raises the emotional content of the text to a fever pitch by a similar contrast: he opens with a bare, placid chordal accompaniment that gradually surges into an intricate, exultant climax rich with celestial color. His prominent use of Lydian mode at the song's conclusion transports the listener to a cosmic plane as the souls of the departed find their eternal resting place among the stars.

To o rodičích svých znají vždy děti
s vroucností mystickou vyprávěti,
jak s úsměvy blažených zřeli je mřít.
Jak uhasli v plamenech života svého
plahočivého a pozemského,
ráj věčný zřevše se otevřít.

A jako by ožili zbaveni tíže
i zápasu, k hroudě jenž tělo víže,
kde rvali se s životem nízkými běsy,
s dnů podloudnostmi a lstivými děsy,
když s blaženstvím věčným v mrtvé líci
tak polobdící, polospící
tu pouštěli navždy zem.

Jak očištěným ohněm shořelo žití,
když jiné se počalo v neznámu dnítí
nad všedností, hnusem i zlem.
Já, dítě, též sníval jsem:

Vždy vody jak šumí a větry jak dují
a oblaka prosvítím větví
sny odvěčné vypravují,
sny o ráji zeleném tiše—

Children always know to recount this of their parents
With mystical ardor:
How they saw them die with smiles of the blessed.
How the flames of their laborious,
Terrestrial lives were snuffed out
Upon seeing eternal paradise open.

And it was as if they had come back to life, relieved of burden
And struggle, to the clay that binds up the flesh,
Where they had fought with life's base demons,
With the betrayals and deceitful terrors of its days,
As with eternal bliss in their dead faces,
Thus half-waking, half-sleeping,
Here they forever forsook the earth.

As this life burned with a purifying flame,
Another life began to dawn into the unknown,
One beyond all mundaneness, filth, and evil.
I, child, also dreamed:

How the waters always murmur, and how the wind blows,
And clouds, with their light shining through the branches,
Tell silently of age-old dreams,
Dreams of a verdant paradise—

¹⁰ Jan Oujezdský, "Interpretace básnických sbírek Antonína Sovy z let 1907–1915" (Thesis, Brno, Czech Republic, Masaryk University, 2018), 40.

dnů vodopády že klesají s výše
a prachem svým blažené smáčejí,
již zproštění těl svých kráčejí
po květech a světlech v rozhoupání,
a po trsech, které se pokorně sklání,
po hvězdných travinách zrosených luk.

A putujících duší shluk
blažených, stoupá k zenitu v klidu
v duhovém obestřený vidu,
sfér neslyšný zpěv
za sebou stopami světla vláčí
a zlatými vlnami proudy své stáčí
u světél nekonečný mír,
let tichý prostorem světlým víří
a jejich kruhy úží, kams míří
souhvězdím Labutí, Orlů a Lyr.

Of days of a waterfall that cascades from the heights
And drenches the blessed ones in its spray;
Already freed from their bodies, they stride
Along flowers and lights in their swaying,
And along tufts of grass which humbly bow
Upon the starry lawns of bedewed meadows.

And a band of blessed, pilgrim souls
Ascends calmly toward its peak,
Strewn with visions of rainbows,
With the unheard song of the spheres
Trailing behind them in streams of light;
And its current coils in golden waves
Around the lights, unending peace;
Their silent flight spins through bright space,
Their circles narrowing as they near
The constellations of Swan, Eagle, and Lyre.

III. "Vítězná píseň" (Song of Victory)

This muscular text from František Xaver Šalda (1867–1937), with its bold verbiage and relentless battery of short, impactful phrases, creates an escalation in tension and complexity throughout the piece. The last few lines nearly abandon grammar entirely, accelerating the pace and throwing out a barrage of synonyms that cast the listener into precisely the state of confusion and incomplete understanding being described at that moment. The entire poem hinges upon the revelation of the final line, revealing the source of the narrator's victory: the omnipotent, omnipresent love of God. All other victories outside of this—whether earthly power or the seeming triumph of the wicked—are mere illusions.

Hluběj a výše bytuje silné mé srdce,
z větší hlubiny, z větších též výší
vrou jeho plameny, tryská i záře i jas:
za tepnou etheru,
za světla říší, jinde,
výše než věřili a než kam měřili
a než kam vetkli šíp kalený zloba a
záští, vražední běsi, podlostí ďas.

Vyš nežli slunce kde hoří,
hloub než v nejhlubším moři
dál nežli kde vesmíru osa a střed,
bytí i nebytí na pomoří,
nežli kam dostihnout může myšlenky let; z veřejí
spíše vyvrátit dovedeš svět,
spíš světlu ulomit křídla,
spíš potoků a řek tok obrátit zpět,
než jeho dostihnout bydla,
všecko snové jsou,
pohádka, klam; všecko příměry, zrcadla,
obrazy, masky, tajemství skutečna,
stan Boha sám v srdci je lásky.

Deeper and higher dwells my strong heart;
From greater depths, from still higher heights
Its flames blaze, and radiance and brightness surge:
Beyond the artery of the ether,
Beyond the light of the realms, to another place,
Higher than they had believed or than they had aimed,
And higher than the place where malice, resentment, murderous demons,
and the evil spirit of wickedness had sunk a hardened arrow.

Higher than the sun in its blazing;
Deeper than the deepest sea;
Farther than the axis and center of the universe,
To be and not to be, on the edge
Beyond where the flight of thought can be apprehended;
Perhaps you could overturn the world from such thresholds,
Perhaps break off the wings of light,
Perhaps turn back the current of streams and rivers,
Before reaching His dwelling place;
All of them are dreams,
Fantasies, illusions; all depictions, reflections,
Images, guises, true secrets;
The only tent of God is in the heart of love.

Alba's Act III Aria "Přes daleká moře" ("Across distant seas") from *Nepřemožení* (The Unconquered), Op. 100, 1917

Josef Bohuslav Foerster

Written during the same period as *Čisté jitro*, Foerster's forgotten opera *Nepřemožení* bears notable stylistic differences from the song cycle, including lesser harmonic complexity and a more lyrical melodic disposition, as the composer's style was undergoing a transformation during this period. Moments of simplicity in harmony and texture correlate with calm, earnest affect in the text, while Foerster imbues more passionate passages with unexpected harmonic turns, dissonant polyphony, and dense orchestration. The result is a highly emotional climax that is a hallmark of Foerster's operatic writing.

Not unlike Wagner in his *Gesamtkunstwerk* conception of operatic creation, Foerster wrote the story, libretto, and music to *Nepřemožení* himself, originally conceiving of the piece as a stage play. Its composition was a long and agonizing process for Foerster, taking over twelve years.¹¹ The story, partially inspired by the life story of Foerster's brother, concerns an "impossible" love between the noblewoman Alba and the poor musician Viktor and stretches across over sixteen years of their lives. Their love, beginning as a young infatuation, is refined through years of suffering and separation due to Alba's loveless marriage to a wealthy man. This aria opens Act III of the opera as an older Alba recalls the light of love in her youth. Soon after, she will receive the news that Viktor is in a foreign country, fallen ill and near death; at last she realizes the call of her heart and forsakes everything to be with him.

Přes daleká moře, přes vrcholky hor,
přes měst hlučný život můj k tobě jde vzdech...
Hledá tebe, tebe jediného, tebe miláčku!

Over distant seas, over mountaintops,
Over the noisy bustle of cities, my sigh goes to you...
It searches for you, you alone, beloved!

Ach, sen mého mládí, ten nadějí květ,
i vzlet mojí duše, kam zmizely teď?
Léta přešla, léta nekonečná, léta sklamaní...

O, the dream of my youth, that flower of hope
And flight of my soul, to where have you now vanished?
Years have passed, endless years, years of disappointment...

Tak dávno je tomu, dávno, tak dávno,
a přece jak tehdy slyším tvůj hlas!
Tvá horoucí, sladká, tvá vroucnosti plná,
tvá vyčítající, vždy drahá mně slova, nezničil čas.

It was so long ago, so long ago,
And yet, as then, I hear your voice!
Your words so ardent, sweet, full of passion—
So reproachful, but ever dear to me—time did not mar them.

Dál plyne mé žití, dál roky se vlekou mlhami dnů...
Já hlas tvůj slyším, a srdce mé prosí:
Ó, vzejdi, sviť znovu slunce, slunce mých snů!

My life drifts on; the years drag onward through a fog of days...
I hear your voice, and my heart begs:
O, arise, shine again, sun of my dreams!

Eva's Act III Death Scene "Sama jsem a opuštěná" ("I am alone and abandoned") from *Eva*, Op. 50, 1895-97

Josef Bohuslav Foerster

Foerster's most famous opera *Eva* was a forerunner to Janáček's *Jenůfa* in many respects, not the least of which are the basis upon a play by Gabriela Preissová (1862–1946) and the verist setting in a Moravian village. An accomplished author in his own right, Foerster set Preissová's play *Gazdina roba* to verse himself. It is the first tragic opera to be set in a Czech village, a locale that was normally idealized in such works as Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*. It is also Foerster's only tragedy. But despite the weighty subject matter, the composer reframed Eva's suicide as a moment of catharsis and purification, in keeping with his belief that music was not meant to manifest negative messages.¹²

The plot of the opera centers around the young couple Eva and Mánek in a village in the Slovácko region. Despite her love for Mánek, Eva is humiliated when his mother rejects her, and out of pride she rashly marries another man. She bears her husband a daughter, who then dies, and her marriage is never the same. Finally, she runs away with Mánek to a better life in Austria, but her dishonor follows her, and she cannot escape her shame. Mánek's mother arrives and tries to convince

¹¹ Ladislav Šjip, "Josef Bohuslav Foerster" in *Česká opera a její tvůrci* (Praha: Editio Supraphon, 1983), 140-141.

¹² *Ibid.*, 135.

him that the people of the village have agreed never to acknowledge the union should he choose to marry Eva. In this scene, which is also the finale of the opera, Eva loses all hope of earthly happiness; in abject brokenness, she prays for God to grant her forgiveness and bring her to heaven. As the scene progresses, she sees glimpses of the afterlife, hearing the voices of her deceased parents and child; finally, the glorious heavens open to her. Eva's final words before she plunges into the Danube, "I see paradise!" are repeated twice upon soaring high notes, the first time realized on a flat major submediant chord, and the second time raised a semitone to the major submediant. Foerster's setting of the entire passage in second inversion (also a favorite device of Richard Strauss) creates a sense of lift, as if Eva's soul has already left the bonds of earth.

Sama jsem a opuštěna! Není naděje ni spásy!
Nikdy více neutiším výčitky, jež se tu hlásí.
Mé spánky hoří, oko se noří v tajemnou noc!
Ty, Všemohoucí, slyš prosby vroucí,
můj Bože, spěj mi na pomoc!

I am alone and abandoned! There is no hope nor salvation!
Nevermore will I quell the regret which here gives voice.
My temples burn, my eyes plunge into mysterious night!
You, Almighty One, hear my fervent prayers;
My God, come to my aid!

Lituji viny, tam ve svět jiný čistou vjít nech!
Ze žití víru k věčnému míru
hříšné již pomoz lítosti vzdech!

I repent of my sin; let me enter pure into another world!
From the turmoil of life into eternal peace,
Let the sigh of contrition now help this sinful one!

Hlas otcův slyším, to zvuk je sladký!
Ne otcův, tichý šepot matky,
ó draží, pojdte, toužím k vám!
I ty, mé dítě, ó chvíle blahá,
tys to, ach, moje dcerko drahá,
ó, štěstí mé, zas tebe mám!

I hear my father's voice; the sound is sweet!
Not father's— it's mother's soft whisper;
O dear ones, come, I long for you!
And you, my child, O blessed moment!
It's you, O my dear daughter,
O my joy, I have you once more!

Hle, tmu již světlo zářepné stíhá,
duhových barev chorovod se míhá,
to andělů jsou zlatotřpytná křídla;
tam prýští záře slunečného zřídla,
v dál rozestřen je čarůplný kraj!
Já vidím ráj! Já vidím ráj!

Behold, now the glorious light chases away the darkness;
A choir procession rushes by in rainbow colors;
Those are the gold-glittering wings of angels;
The radiance of the sun's fountains gushes there;
That enchanted land is unfurled into the distance!
I see paradise! I see paradise!

Acknowledgements

My deepest and most humble thanks to the many people who have made this performance possible, including my voice teacher Dr. Carol Wilson for her constant encouragement and insightful instruction (especially through the times of COVID-19), Warren Kim for the delightful hours spent building this collaboration, Martin Vodrážka for teaching me everything I know about singing in Czech, my teachers Jan Trávníček and Samuel Pavlík for patiently checking my translations, my dear husband Jason for always being my biggest supporter, and each one of you listening.