

Leopold
KOŽELUCH
Symphonies • 2

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice
Marek Štilec



Leopold Koželuch (1747–1818) Symphonies · 2

As early as 1772 the English musician and music historian Dr Charles Burney described Vienna as ‘the imperial seat of music as well as of power’, drawing his readers’ attention to the presence there of a number of gifted and highly productive composers. Its rise in importance as a musical centre was due largely to a decision made in the late 16th century to transfer the court from Prague to Vienna. Where the court went the nobility followed, and Vienna soon eclipsed Prague as the greatest city in the far-flung Habsburg dominions. Like any imperial city, Vienna was a magnet for talented, ambitious artists and musicians from all over Europe, but one group in particular was unusually successful: the Bohemians. In the middle decades of the 18th century, some of the leading musical figures in Vienna were Bohemians, among them Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787), Florian Leopold Gassmann (1729–1774), Johann Baptist Vaňhal (1739–1813) and Leopold Koželuch, while in other European centres composers such as Josef Mysliveček (1737–1781) and Antonio Rosetti (c. 1750–1792) enjoyed deserved fame as composers of international stature.

Visitors to Bohemia were universally impressed by the high quality of the musicians there. Burney observed that he ‘had frequently been told that the Bohemians were the most musical people of Germany, or, perhaps, of all Europe’, but on visiting there he realised that this apparent musicality was firmly rooted in excellent teaching.

‘I found at length, that, not only in every large town, but in all villages, where there is a reading and writing school, children of both sexes are taught music... I went into the school [in Čáslav], which was full of little children of both sexes, from six to ten or eleven years old, who were reading, writing, playing on violins, hautbois, bassoons, and other instruments. The organist had in a small room of his house four clavichords, with little boys practicing on them all: his

son of nine years old, was a very good performer.’

Koželuch, born in Velvary, a small town northwest of Prague, may have begun his musical training in just this kind of environment, but his advanced education took place in Prague where he studied counterpoint and vocal writing with his cousin, Jan Antonín Koželuh (1738–1814) and piano and instrumental composition with Franz Xaver Dussek (1731–1799). Dussek, a former pupil of Georg Christoph Wagenseil in Vienna, was the leading keyboard teacher in Prague and a highly accomplished composer of instrumental music. Under his guidance Koželuch (who was christened Jan Antonín Koželuh but changed his first name to Leopold to avoid confusion with his older cousin, and added a ‘c’ to Koželuch to make it more manageable in German) developed into an exceptional pianist and a composer of great promise. A flirtation with studying law was abandoned after the successful performance of his first ballets and pantomimes in Prague, and in 1778 he moved to Vienna to pursue a career as a professional musician. Koželuch’s reputation as a pianist, teacher and composer was sufficiently well established by 1781 for him to decline the position as court organist to the Archbishop of Salzburg made vacant by Mozart’s dismissal. He began publishing his own works by 1784 and in 1785 he founded a music publishing house (the *Musikalisches Magazin*) which was later managed by his younger brother, Antonín Tomáš Koželuh (1752–1805). Koželuch also cultivated publishers elsewhere in Europe and his works seem to have been particularly successful in London. It is testimony to Koželuch’s reputation that the Bohemian Estates commissioned him to compose a cantata for the coronation in Prague of Leopold II as King of Bohemia. The success of this work almost certainly played a part in Koželuch’s appointment in June 1792 as Kammer Kapellmeister and Hofmusik Composer at the court of Leopold’s successor, Emperor Franz II.

In 1797, Koželuch received a letter from the Scottish song collector and publisher George Thomson inviting him to take over from Ignaz Pleyel the task of arranging the songs he had selected for inclusion in his ambitious *A Select Collection of Scottish* [sic] *National Airs*. Having agreed on the terms, which also included a commission to write a series of accompanied sonatas incorporating Scots airs, Koželuch set to work with a purpose and proved in short order to be an excellent if at times rather testy collaborator. The scope of the project, which expanded to include Welsh and Irish folksongs, and Koželuch’s teaching and duties connected with his court position, inevitably had an impact on his own work and from around 1804 his productivity as a composer declined.

Koželuch was an influential figure as a pianist and contemporary writers credited him with playing an important role in the development of an idiomatic style of piano playing at a time when the harpsichord was still widely played. Like his compatriot Vaňhal – and to a certain extent Mozart – Koželuch derived a significant proportion of his income from teaching. It was important therefore that his output as a composer reinforced his reputation as a leading exponent of his instrument. Unsurprisingly, he wrote a significant body of works for the piano including sonatas, piano trios and concertos, but he also composed in other instrumental genres. Some of this music has not survived which makes it difficult to assess whether the progressive tendencies seen in some of Koželuch’s piano music and chamber works extended to his operas, only one of which has survived.

Koželuch’s output of symphonies is relatively modest by the standards of the time. Recent research suggests that he composed seventeen symphonies, one of which has not survived, and two symphonies concertantes. All of these works appear to have been composed between c. 1779 and 1787 and therefore belong to the period after the composer’s move to Vienna. These years represent something of a flat period in the history of the symphony in Vienna. Owing to the declining demand for new works due

in part to economic factors, a number of composers in Vienna curtailed their output around this time. The most important of these figures was Vaňhal who seems to have ceased composing symphonies by about 1778, focusing his efforts instead on chamber works and keyboard music. Even Mozart was not immune from this trend. During the ten years he lived in Vienna he composed only a handful of works: a symphony written in Linz, a symphony for Prague and the final three symphonies which may have been intended for a tour to England that did not take place. Mozart had other priorities as a composer and was content to neglect the symphony until such time that a work was required.

With the retirement of Vaňhal from the field, Koželuch became for a time his successor as Vienna’s pre-eminent Bohemian symphonist. His works bear a resemblance to those of the elder composer, sometimes strikingly so, but they differ significantly in many crucial stylistic details. In some respects, they are closer in spirit and technique to the symphonies of Koželuch’s teacher, Dussek, which were widely performed in Prague but do not appear to have been well known in Vienna. The similarities between the two extend to the handling of the orchestra and musical texture and the style of thematic constructions. As the four works on this recording demonstrate, Koželuch’s symphonies are fluent, attractive works; they are well conceived and show an impressive command of the symphonic medium. This is particularly evident in first movements which show great adeptness at using small motivic figures to unify larger musical structures through creating links between thematic ideas. The first movement of the *Sinfonia in F major, PosK I: 4* is most impressive in this respect; its opening section contains two distinct themes, both of which generate new thematic material that shapes the remainder of the exposition. Though the far-ranging development section displays the composer’s fertile imagination to very good effect, his real flair for invention is seen in the recapitulation which reverses the order in which the primary themes appear and is

extensively recomposed throughout. His handling of the orchestra in all four works is also impressive. The addition of a single bassoon in three of the works and a pair in the *Sinfonia in F major*, make a telling difference to the instrumental colour. In the *Trio* of the *Sinfonia in F major*, the first bassoon doubles the unison violins an octave lower, adding an element of warmth to the mellifluous theme that contrasts strongly with the vigorous, and rather angular *Minuet*. Koželuch's deftness in writing for wind instruments is also in evidence at times. In the *Rondo* finale of the *Sinfonia in D major, PosK I: 1*, he scores the second episode for winds alone as if to remind audiences that like the greatest wind virtuosi of his time, Koželuch too was a proud Bohemian.

Echos of a number of composers can be heard in Koželuch's symphonies, including Domenico Cimarosa, in the scoring of secondary themes for strings alone and the

occasional use of the viola to double the first violin at the octave; indeed, the bustling finale of the *Sinfonia in D major, PosK I: D3*, which also includes trumpets and timpani, could have come straight out of one of the Neapolitan master's opera overtures. There are moments that are reminiscent of Dittersdorf's style, including the development section of the first movement of the *Sinfonia in D major, PosK I: 1*, with its extended use of syncopation. Haydn, the greatest symphonist of them all, also lurks in the background of these works as he does in virtually every symphony of the period. But Koželuch's symphonies are no pale imitations of anybody else's works: their freshness, verve and impressive technical finish show him to be a gifted composer whose contemporary reputation was well deserved.

Allan Badley

Marek Štílec

Marek Štílec began his musical studies on the violin at the Prague Conservatory and studied conducting with Leoš Svárovský at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Štílec is an alumnus of the International Järvi Academy and Jac van Steen's Emerging Conductors Series, and has participated in the masterclasses of Michael Tilson Thomas and Jorma Panula, among others. He conducts a wide range of leading orchestras, including the New World Symphony, the Ulster Orchestra, Das Kurpfälzische Kammerorchester Mannheim, the Wiener Concertverein Orchester, the Orchestra of the Swan, the London Classical Soloists, the Berlin Camerata, the Kammerphilharmonie Graz and Sinfonietta Bratislava, as well as the top orchestras in the Czech Republic.

www.arcodiva.cz/en/agency/instrumental-soloists/marek-stilec/



Photo: Darra Kallnovska

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice

The Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice, founded in 1969, is one of the Czech Republic's top orchestras. With a repertoire that includes a large number of compositions from the Baroque era to contemporary music, including many crossover and multi-genre projects, the orchestra is valued for its stylistic interpretations and the extraordinary quality of its orchestral sound. It often performs at the Czech Republic's most important festivals and at many important venues in Europe such as the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, the Salzburg Festspielhaus, the Herkulessaal and Gasteig in Munich, the Musikverein in Vienna, the Brucknerhaus in Linz, the Meistersingerhalle in Nuremberg, and many others. Outside Europe the orchestra has played in Japan and has toured extensively around America. The orchestra has collaborated with many leading conductors, including Jiří Bělohlávek, Marco Armiliato and Mariss Jansons, and soloists including Lazar Berman, Ivan Moravec, Isabelle van Keulen, Vladimír Spivakov, Pavel Šporcl, Gabriela Demeterová, Ángel Romero, Helen Donath and Dagmar Pecková. www.kfpar.cz



Photo: František Renza

One of the most prominent Bohemian composers working in Vienna during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Leopold Koželuch was a prolific composer of instrumental music including seventeen symphonies. They are notable for mellifluous themes, sophisticated structures and, at times, a lyricism that seems to foreshadow the youthful works of Schubert. This unique recording draws on the original sources and corrects a number of mistakes encountered in previously published versions. Volume 1 can be heard on Naxos 8.573627.



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Sinfonia in F major, PosK I: 4		Sinfonia in G major, PosK I: 8	
	21:38		19:35
1 I. Allegro molto	7:16	8 I. Allegro molto	6:33
2 II. Poco adagio	4:30	9 II. Poco adagio	5:14
3 III. Menuetto: Allegretto	4:10	10 III. Menuetto: Allegretto	3:12
4 IV. Presto	5:36	11 IV. Presto con fuoco	4:32
Sinfonia in D major, PosK I: 1		Sinfonia in D major, PosK I: D3	
	12:07		12:09
5 I. Allegro	4:43	12 I. Allegro con brio	4:58
6 II. Andante	2:23	13 II. Andante	3:02
7 III. Rondo: Andantino	4:58	14 III. Allegro	4:06

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Jiřina Dvořáková, Harpsichord
Marek Štílec

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65:45



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