

**Vlasta Reittererová, Lubomír Spurný**

## **Alois Hába: A Poet of Liberated Music**

Alois Hába (21 June 1893, Vizovice–18 November 1973, Prague) entered Czech musical culture at a time when the “lived inheritance of folklore” had come to be recognized as something of genuine potential value for high culture. Attempts at the authentic expression of musical roots no longer meant a degrading provincialism, as had still to some extent been the case when the Czech musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) expressed highly critical views of the work of Leoš Janáček and Vítězslav Novák. When another Czech musicologist, Vladimír Helfert (1886–1945) in his book *Česká moderní hudba* (Czech Modern Music) (1936) tried to define Hába’s place in the evolution of Czech music, he praised the positive significance of the composer’s folklore inspirations. Helfert believed that in Hába, after Janáček, the Czech musical scene had acquired a composer whose starting point was not romanticism and whose sensibility was partly defined by his origin. Some passages in Hába’s music have an undeniable similarity with Eastern Moravian melodic types, but Hába does not falsify folklore or demean himself by trying for the required “folky” effect, that is, the admixture of the “folk” remains something more essential than contrived. Although regional roots play an important role in Hába’s music, the composer never imitates or parodies folk music. As one of the most radical representatives of the Central European aesthetic avant-garde between the wars, Hába expressed his individual style by drawing on the well-springs in the sense of his own lived experience of folklore but then reformulating this inspiration at the most universal levels – microtonality, athematism, and modality.

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Alois Hába was born in Vizovice in Moravia into the family of a folk musician. In this region he was able to experience folksong and music in its authentic forms, and his theoretical and biographical writings often allude to folk inspirations as a unique and major source of his original work as a composer. In the autobiographical sketch *Můj lidský a umělecký vývoj* (My Human and Artistic Development), which by his own dating was written at Christmas in 1942 (printed in 1993), and later in the text *Mein Weg zur Viertel- und Sechsteltonmusik* of 1971, he stresses the importance of inherited musicality, gradual acquaintance with the traditions of artificial classical music and

then the further development of his own original musical language, that of “liberated music.”<sup>1</sup> With the caveat that this is a necessarily stylized picture of his own search for artistic identity, we have no reason not to believe him. We can also take his account of his life as a more general contextual commentary on the advantages and shortcomings of “peripheral” culture in relation to the culture of “the center.” Wallachia and Slovácko, which by his time were permeated by various different levels of musical culture, provided the necessary dose of authenticity but at the same time the necessary degree of knowledge of “serious” artificial music. As Hába himself insisted at many points, practical “music-making” in his father’s ensemble and his first-hand contact with folk music was of essential value for him. For example, he recalls that:

At dance entertainments and folk festivals we used to play not only composed dances but also dance songs that the dancers would sing for us to copy and follow immediately. Some of the folk musicians still knew how to perform in the old-fashioned way, that is, to sing with ornaments deviating from the usual semitone system. These people would want us to play them just as they sang them, which meant we had to “catch” unusual intervals, mainly on the violin. My perfect pitch made it easier for me, but it didn’t always work to the full satisfaction of the singer-dancers. Once, in Vsacko I think it was, the singer, a lad built like a mountain, wanted to smash our bass with a two-liter glass because I didn’t manage to play his song on the violin the way he sang it. He really scared us. Afterwards at home we learned the different intonation deviations of the folk singers. (Hába 1942 in Vysloužil 1993, 50)

If we want to explain the principle of the qualitative transformation of folklore roots in Hába’s life, however, we need to find the point at which he started to cultivate and develop this inherited element. In this context it will suffice to consider the tradition of the “culture of the center” which Hába both accepts and rebels against. His journey from the periphery of the Eastern Moravian region, which led through teacher training college in Kroměříž (1908–1912) and a short period of work as a teacher in

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1 This expression appeared for the first time in Hába’s article “Casellas Scarlattiana – Vierteltonmusik und Musikstil der Freiheit” (Hába 1929). The phenomenon *Musik der Freiheit* is one that invites connection and comparison with a number of theoretical concepts of the Central European avant-garde that explicitly appeal to forms of aesthetic liberation. If Hába’s liberated music is often taken to mean the possibility of free treatment of sound material, its technical side is often associated with the expressions *microtonality* and *athematism*.

Bílovice in Slovácko (1912–1914), took Hába first to Prague (1914–1915), then to Vienna (1917–1920) and to Berlin (1920–1923). In his case the progress through important centers of European culture genuinely corresponded to the artistic “progress” of the young composer on his “journeyman travels.” Studies with Novák and Schreker in Prague and his Berlin meeting with Ferruccio Busoni were undoubtedly important moments in Hába’s artistic growth. Apart from new experience and knowledge, however, what he acquired above all was the hallmark and reputation as a noteworthy innovator and propagator of the new avant-garde trends. In the spirit of the collective creed of the young avant-garde generation, Hába both joined the current of the most contemporary modern movement and at the same time increasingly developed his specific creative identity.

Hába’s first real teacher of composition was Vítězslav Novák (1870–1949). Hába joined Novák’s master course in 1914 without having graduated from the conservatory. Hába studied with Novák for just under a year. In this short time, he mastered the rules of compositional technique and crowned his studies with the composition Sonata for violin and piano, Op. 1. Successful completion of his studies paved the way for the young Hába to enter Prague cultural life, but on the day of his twenty-second birthday he had to give up this promising prospect and join the Austro-Hungarian army. He spent the first years of the war on the Russian front, from where he was recalled to Vienna to organize a collection of military songs for army purposes with Felix Petyrek (1892–1951) and Béla Bartók (1881–1945) (more see: Andreska et al. 2015).

His first contact with radically innovative ideas in new music can clearly be dated to January 1917, and in this case precise dating has considerable explanatory value. Towards the end of January Hába, as a student of the Vienna Officers’ School, attended a performance of the opera *Die Schneider von Schönau* (1916) by the Dutch composer Jan Brandts-Buys (1868–1933) and at the same time read in the Viennese press about a showcase evening of quarter-tone music by the German composer Willy von Möllendorf (1872–1934) held in the *Tonkünstlerverein* in Vienna. Immediately after the opera visit, Hába, keen to compose similar music, wrote to Brandts-Buys asking for lessons in composition. Brandts-Buys was too busy to agree, but on his recommendation Hába was taken on for a while as a pupil of the important Viennese musical theorist Richard Stöhr (1874–1967), who trained him in harmony and strict counterpoint.

The encounter with quarter-tone music was fateful for Hába's future orientation as a composer despite the fact that he only learned of the Möllendorf evening second hand through a newspaper article:

In 1917 I read in the German music magazines that W. Möllendorf was campaigning for the introduction of the quarter-tone system. It was the most progressive idea for the further development of European music. I realized that with my experiences of Eastern Moravian folk singers I had a firm melodic foundation for the creation of quarter-tone music. (Hába 1993, 51)

In Hába's case the desire for originality was combined with the attempt to preserve the riches of the culture from which he came. Hába first tried out his idea of "unusual music" in February and March of 1917 in his unfinished *Suite* in the quarter-tone system in three parts. The piece remained incomplete in a piano part. In the same year he also composed the orchestral *Ukrainian Suite*. He included neither in the numbered list of his works. In 1918 Hába entered the Vienna Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst as a private student in the class of Franz Schreker (1878–1934). Under Schreker's expert supervision, he composed his first numbered works, Sonata for piano, Op. 3, String Quartet No. 1, Op. 4, Overture for large orchestra, Op. 5, and Six Piano Pieces, Op. 6. The last two pieces in particular are excellent demonstrations of how perfectly Hába mastered the traditional craft of composition. The piano pieces also reveal an attempt to use the up-to-date compositional techniques expounded, above all, by the Schoenberg School. In the spring of 1920, Hába presented his teacher with his first quarter-tone String Quartet, Op. 7. Schreker greeted the work with amazement<sup>2</sup> but recommended the piece for publication by the renowned Vienna publishing house Universal Edition. The new work was then rehearsed under Hába's direction by the Havemann Quartet and presented in Berlin in the autumn of 1921.

In the autumn of 1920, Franz Schreker left for Berlin to take up the position of director of the Berlin Staatliche Hochschule für Musik. His most faithful students followed him, including Alois Hába as well as, for example, Ernst Křenek (1900–1991), Max Brand (1896–1980), Karol Rathaus (1895–1954), and Jascha Horenstein (1898–1973). Berlin, where Hába lived from mid-1920 to Easter 1922 and with intervals until the summer of 1923, was another decisive stage in Hába's life.

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2 Franz Schreker: "Was? Vierteltonstreichquartett? Mensch, sind Sie verrückt geworden?"

He arrived in Berlin as a self-confident composer already beginning his career but nonetheless still in the process of finding his own expressive language. Although he faced financial problems in Berlin, a major center overflowing with important protagonists of the avant-garde in all branches of culture, it offered him a golden opportunity for contact with the latest artistic movements.

Here Hába found another element that was to be one factor determining his “liberated music” in the future: this factor is athematism. The first of his works using this technique are the quarter-tone *Fantasia* for solo violin, Op. 9a, and *Music* for solo violin, Op. 9b, the quarter-tone String Quartet, Op. 12, *The Choral Suite*, Op. 13, the quarter-tone String Quartet, Op. 14, and the sixth-tone String Quartet, Op. 15. Their experimental quality apart, even after many years these works remain a clear confirmation of the composer’s exceptional creative powers. A striking feature of this period is his attempt to exploit the new tone systems to their fullest potential. Hába embarked on new music with panache and enthusiasm, and if some attributes of his style were later to be singled out as typical of his work, they originated in this period. In the years 1923–1927 he wrote the majority of his pieces for quarter-tone piano, among them five suites and ten fantasias. The character of this period as one of maximum technical innovation is underlined by the fact that between the Suite for piano, Op. 10 (1923), and his *Fantasia* for cello and quarter-tone piano, Op. 33, with one exception, Hába wrote no pieces in semitones. Hába also contributed to the invention of new instruments. For example, he designed a three-manual keyboard for quarter-tone harmonium and piano. On his suggestion the company August Förster realized construction of a quarter-tone piano in 1925. The same company constructed a quarter-tone and sixth-tone harmonium (1927). Then, together with Artur Holas, Hába constructed the mechanics for a quarter-tone clarinet. The firm V. Kohlers Söhne in Kraslice (Graslitz) started to manufacture a quarter-tone clarinet in 1924. (At first it was made from German parts, but from 1931 on, it used French parts.) At the end of the 1920s the Dresden firm Fr. A. Heckel manufactured a quarter-tone trumpet for the performance of the opera *Mother*, Op. 35.

In Hába’s case we can clearly identify the motives that led the young composer to consider athematism or microtonality to be important compositional techniques. Berlin offered Hába a wide range of opportunities to pick up new ideas that would then form part of the theoretical background of his liberated music (*Musik der Freiheit*). Among the composers who inspired him, one frequently mentioned in the literature is Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924).

In Berlin Hába encountered Busoni's ideas in the second, reworked edition of his book *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music* (*Entwurf einer neuen Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 1907, 1916). In wider musical circles, Busoni had the justified reputation as a leading supporter of microtonal music (and new music in general), but in fact he was extremely hostile to quarter-tone music, seeing the third-tone and sixth-tone system as far more natural and promising for future use. Busoni's views eventually inspired Hába to compose his sixth-tone String Quartet, Op. 15.

Hába's apprenticeship years, which culminated in Berlin, were something he could capitalize on at home, where many of his experiences acquired the attractive hallmark of complete novelty. In 1923, therefore, Hába returned to Prague for good. He started to teach at the Prague Conservatory in the same year and in 1925 managed to persuade the school authorities to allow him to open a class in quarter-tone and sixth-tone composition. In 1934 he was made a regular professor there.<sup>3</sup>

Hába's class soon became world renowned. In addition to Czech and Slovakian students, it was also attended by Germans, Poles, Turks, Egyptians, Ukrainians, Yugoslavs (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), Bulgarians, Lithuanians, and Danes. Hába nurtured several students who also attempted compositions in micro-interval systems, while others at least partially took over the principles of non-thematism (from the standpoint of micro and macro form) and tone centrality. Among the most well-known were his brother Karel Hába (1898–1972), Karel Ančerl (1908–1973), Rudolf Kubín (1909–1973), Václav Dobiáš (1909–1978), Miroslav Ponc (1902–1976), Karel Reiner (1909–1979), Slavko Osterc (1895–19419), Milan Ristič (1908–1982), Konstantin Iljev (1924–1988), Ljubica Marić (1909–1993), Necil Kazim Akses (1908–1999), and Jeronimas Kačinskas (1907–2005). All Hába's students from this period gained composition education from other teachers and came to Hába in order to learn about new methods of contemporary music.

Participation in Hába's courses was facultative within the study at the conservatory, and its participants received a certificate of completion. Since the amount of money specified for the running of the department required that a determined number of students frequent the course for a specified period of time, the period of study was determined to be one year. In many cases, however, on Hába's intercession, the period of study was extended. In his seminars, Hába introduced his students not only to the methods of his own

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3 About the "Hába 'School'" see Očadlík 1930/31, 308–11 & 1934/35, 53–4. The theme of Hába's composition class was thoroughly discussed by Vysloužil 1974. The same author then published also in 1993, 30–2. See also Reittererová 2005; Spurný 2010.

composition work, with the specific poetics of “liberated music,” but he also attempted to pass them some of the theoretical points from accomplished masters of central European modernism. Hába’s competence in this field is, for that matter, evidenced by the author’s theoretical work, especially his two theories of harmony (Hába 1927 and 1942–43).

The first years following Hába’s return to Czechoslovakia were by no means easy. Probably the most serious difficulties were associated with the reception of his microtonal work. While in the Prague German Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen (Association for the Private Performance of Music) he found important support and facilities, thanks to which several of his quarter-tone pieces reached the Prague festivals of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM; 1924, 1925), the Czech section of this organization showed no interest in his work (the same syndrome was behind the fact that in 1925 at the Prague ISCM festival Bohuslav Martinů was classified as a member of the “foreign” French school). Quarter-tone and athematic music was felt to be a symptom of the stalemate in avant-garde art. Not even Hába’s introductory lecture before each concert could change this opinion. The untrained listener heard such music primarily as chaos and “rough, naturalized expression.” In the eyes of critics, Hába’s “liberated music” was part of the destruction of the organic unity of the work, and the author’s theoretical ideas were often considered symptomatic of a crisis of values and essential negation of traditional culture. Furthermore, for an important group of Czech critics Hába’s music failed to fit well into their concept of the evolution of Czech music, because it sounded calculated and “un-Czech.” The feeling that Hába’s music did not suit the native scene was aggravated by his supposed and real ties to German music, and implicitly to the compositional techniques of the Schoenberg School. Many of the polemicists exploited a tried and tested smear technique, consigning the condemned to the categories of “alien,” “speculative,” “inappropriate” or “emptily artistic” as against idealist art, against music that respected the native and authentic (unutilized) tradition.

The prospects for the performance of Hába’s and his pupils’ compositions were transformed in 1927. In this period Hába, together with the music critic Mirko Očadlík (1904–1964), took up leading positions in the *Spolek pro moderní hudbu* (Modern Music Club). One crucial factor here was the affiliation of the club to the ISCM, in which Hába could now exercise a major influence. The club’s publicity organ was the magazine *Klíč* (Key), in which he published critical articles on modern music. In 1935 he transferred his activities to the Association for Contemporary Music *Přítomnost* (Present) and was elected

its chairman. He also published in the magazine *Rytmus* and helped to create its profile. He took an important part in the organization of the ISCM international festival in Prague in 1935, when he sat on the international jury, as he was later to do in 1932, 1938, 1958, and 1961. (In 1957 Hába was made an honorary member of the ISCM for his services, an honor previously granted to his teacher V. Novák.) Hába's name appeared on the international scene in other ways as well. With his assistant, the composer and pianist Karel Reiner (1910–1979), he accepted an invitation to the International Congress of Arab Music in Cairo in 1932 to give lectures and demonstrations of quarter-tone music. (Others who attended this conference included Béla Bartók, Paul Hindemith, and the ethnomusicologist Erich von Hornbostel.) Hába also took an active role in musical education. He realized that it was not enough just to train a new generation of composers when an adequately educated public was just as essential to musical life. In any case, Hába believed that music cultivates the human being and that – in line with Steiner's anthroposophy – it helps a person to achieve the true spiritual experience of humanity. He was also convinced that music's educational effect would protect music itself from degradation into "mere entertainment" or a "technical game." Education for music and by music was the theme of a number of Hába's lectures. Hába, with Leo Kestenberg (1882–1962), helped to found the Society for Music Education (Prague 1934) and later to plan the first International Music Education Congress (Prague 1936). (The Society for Music Education was the precursor of the International Society for Music Education, which was formed in 1953.)

Hába sought to embody his notion of a new "liberated music" in a genre with a sufficiently high profile to publicize an emergent style; opera would be a demonstration of the viability of quarter-tone and athematic music. In the period 1927–29 he composed the quarter-tone opera *Mother* on his own libretto. The work was first performed in German on May 17, 1931 in Munich with Hermann Scherchen conducting. (The opera was not presented in Czech until 1947 and then 1964 in Prague).

Hába composed this opera after several earlier opera sketches. *Mother* is a realistic work, with "realist" understood in the widest sense. The story is set in the composer's native Wallachia. The text of the libretto is written in the Moravian dialect. The local color is then enhanced by a number of folk scenes (funeral weeping, a lullaby, a wedding song). Despite this, as is the case with other important operas in the same vein (for example, Janáček's *Jenůfa* or in Burian's *Maryša*) Hába did not compose a "folklore opera." Although the work has clear references to folk setting, this is supposed to enhance the raw



reality of the work. The plot of the opera is simple. After the death of his first wife, the peasant Křen finds a new bride. This is Maruša, a girl from the neighboring village, who has to take on a great deal of work in the cottage and the care of her step-children and own children, just like the peasant's first wife. For the composer, Maruša Křenová seems to represent his spiritual and sensual ideal of the rural woman and mother. While the practical and energetic farmer brings up all his children to work in the fields and the household, the mother takes care of their emotional and spiritual development. She wins for the most talented a right to higher education, while her youngest son, the future farmer, stays at home to support her. The twenty-three years that the opera covers are divided into ten scenes – scenes of ordinary, everyday life. They are stripped of all the contrasts, stylizations, and paradoxes usually employed to create dramatic tension and movement towards a denouement. Hába's style of opera might be compared to reportage. Instead of stylized focus, Hába enlarges the sphere of his work to cover the entire field of life, thus cancelling out the difference between "ceremonial/festival art" and the "art of the everyday." The lack of theatricality is sometimes interpreted as deliberate and innovative, but in many respects the work perhaps aims wide of experiment. Moreover, while the use of the quarter-tone system on the one hand secures the opera *Mother* a special place in world opera repertoire, on the other its specific requirements make it a piece for which few companies would have the resources.

Two further stage works show that Hába was thorough and consistent in his aims here. In neither is the epic pathos of building a new world stylized, but in both it is to be discovered in daily reality. Hába devotes himself to progressive social issues in his (semitone) opera *Nová země* (New Land) (1935–1936; libretto written by Ferdinand Pujman based on the book by Soviet author Fyodor Gladkov). After the premiere of the opera overture, in which there was a quotation from the Internationale, preparations for the staging of the opera in the Prague National Opera were halted. The official reason given was the threat of worker demonstrations. The struggle for a better future, linked with the coming of Christ in the framework of the anthroposophical ideas of Rudolf Steiner, is an idea presented and developed in the author's last opera, composed in the sixth-tone system, *Přijď království Tvé. Nezaměstnaní* (The Kingdom Come. The Unemployed, 1937–1942). This work was likewise never staged.

The lack of positive response to Hába's stage works was not accidental. What it was about the composer's approach that was behind these failures? First, Hába's stage works do not observe the conventions typical for the genre.

Although Hába's *Musik der Freiheit* would be hard to imagine without the strong inspirational influence of the theoretical work of Ferruccio Busoni, Hába seems to have taken no notice at all of his views on opera. Busoni saw opera as a stage genre in which play was the central issue. It was an idea later to be brought to life by Igor Stravinsky in *Histoire du soldat* and by Bohuslav Martinů in several of his works. It seems to have bypassed Alois Hába. Although the expression *Musik der Freiheit* might suggest a notion of the fortuitous and the playful, this is not entirely the reality. Hába's understanding of opera was clearly quite different from Busoni's. The world of Busoni's operas in contrast to Hába's opera aesthetics is modified, stylized to the point of unlikelihood, which is why it retains harmony, order, balance, and organic coherence. Hába, on the other hand, abandons the ground of "operatic fiction" and lets himself be carried away by the idea of a return to authentic representation of lived reality. Ideas that in their time must have sounded provocative (and are still just as provocative today), express a faith in reality, in revolutionary social change, which necessarily leaves its mark on art. While this is an over-simplification, we are clearly dealing here with notions taken from interwar proletarian art, heavily spiced with the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. Hába formulated his own philosophy of opera in the article *Zvukový film an opera* (Sound Film and Opera):

What sort of life content should modern opera express? The different elements of the internal and public struggle of mankind today for a new style of life on earth. Fairytale and historical subjects must give place to new themes. There is a need to see and depict the moving forces of social struggle, which is the greatest drama involving many personal tragedies and comedies. There is a need dauntlessly to announce with artistic deeds as well as others that Christ has risen from the dead in the will of the world proletariat. There is a need to read 'the signs of the times' and draw the right social and artistic conclusions. (Hába 1931, 60)

In the course of the 1920s and 1930s, Hába earned a reputation for himself in broader cultural consciousness as an original composer, teacher, and tireless organizer. This creative growth was interrupted by the fascist occupation, when he was classified and banned as an exponent of "entartete Kunst" (degenerate art) along with many other avant-gardists.

After World War II, he was appointed head of the Great Opera of the 5th of May (1945–1948) and became a professor of composition at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (1946–1949). Towards the end of the 1940s,

however, a spontaneous reaction against the First Republic and to the recent war created a new social situation. Following the communist coup of 1948, Hába was exposed to the attacks of the ideological spokesmen of Socialist Realism, and in 1951 his composition class was dissolved. The post-war social elite, which decided on the character of production, no longer had any interest in work that was full of elemental revolutionary unrest, apparently incomprehensible, resistant to rules and guidelines. Hába's refusal of an offer to join the Communist party contributed to his exclusion from social and cultural life. His own concept of socialism derived from Steiner's anthroposophy had nothing in common with the Soviet vision of (real) socialism. Anthroposophy, a doctrine that found many supporters and passionate opponents throughout the century, was of enormous importance for Hába, providing him with spiritual and moral support in times of crisis. He followed its principles in his readiness to interact with people of all religions and convictions, and anthroposophy also provided inspirations for his musical theory and practice. (Hába had been introduced to anthroposophy by Felix Petyrek (1892–1951), who took him to the Goetheanum, the headquarters of the Anthroposophical Society in Dornach in Switzerland, in 1926. From 1927 Hába was an active member. He lectured regularly at the Dornach Free University for Spiritual Science, and several of his works were premiered in the Goethenau.)

In the years 1949–1953 Hába's works were not performed or published, but he himself continued to compose, writing both semitone and quarter-tone music. He was rehabilitated in 1953, and thereafter worked only as a composer. The last twenty years of Hába's life were an extraordinarily fruitful period. Many musicians were ready to perform his earlier and new works, above all the Hába Quartet under its leader Dušan Pandula. Hába's pieces were abundantly published and the composer was invited to lecture and to attend the performances of his works abroad. His name appeared again at the ISCM international festival in Prague in 1967. He used his influence and contacts to help young composers who often identified themselves with his legacy, although they took a cautious attitude to some of his aesthetic conclusions. In the final phase of his career, Hába composed as many as 40 new works. These were mainly chamber pieces, and when he wrote larger-scale works, concertos. Hába continued to write in various different tone systems, whether traditional (e.g. String Quartet No. 7 *Christmas*, Op. 73, 1951), quarter-tone (String Quartet No. 14, Op. 94, 1963), fifth-tone (String Quartet No. 16, Op. 98, 1967), or sixth-tone (String Quartet No. 11, Op. 87, 1957). Even at this late stage Hába

never gave up an experimental and open-minded approach, and he repeatedly tried to get to respond to revived impulses of twelve-tone music and Webernian serialism.

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After surveying his career, we may tentatively suggest some conclusions about Hába's place in the context of Czech and Central European music. First and foremost, it is clear that he was a composer who became involved in the Central European musical avant-garde very much "from the outside," from a Moravian region with a predominantly folk tradition. The strong individuality and originality that he began to show during his stay in Vienna became a respected reality in Berlin. In terms of the expressive canon of nineteenth-century music the position of "other, outsider" had been negative, a pure liability, a status overlapping with that of "diletante" in the sense of exclusion from professional advancement. Now the situation had turned around – at least in Berlin if less in Vienna – and the position could be one of special privilege. (Vienna is generally regarded as a place with great respect for tradition and conservative views.) To be different was now to have an exceptional status. Suddenly the attribute of otherness became an undeniable advantage. In a sense the change reflected the new democratic era, since it was a status that could be claimed by anyone, regardless of social background. Novelty and difference were transformed into attributes that could bring participants in the common "project of the new" closer together while at the same time representing another scale by which they could define their distinct identities and differentiate themselves. Hába was sensitive to the various individual developmental trends but did not identify himself wholly with any one of them. Despite his sympathy and affinity for the new theories and his repeated stress on the value of the influence of Novák, Busoni, and Schoenberg, Hába sought to create a style all his own. For Hába art was undoubtedly a field of creative freedom, where a work was born as the result of the active activity of a unique, irreducible individual. Nonetheless, Hába shared with the rest of the Central European avant-garde the striving for an explicit definition for the principle of redundancy. It is clearly a striving to render musical language more precise, to rid it of the last trace of the decorative and the rhetorical. Hába's project was also characterized by a distinctively sharp struggle against traditional ways of treating material that forced the composer to surrender his own individuality. Another feature of Hába's type as a composer was that fact that he shared only marginally in the future development of European new music; from the point of view of the

“culture of the center” as a historical rather than only geographical concept he ultimately remained at the periphery. The character of his work excludes him from the community of “established composers” and makes him once again an “outsider.”

There are a several different reasons why this should be so. Hába’s “liberated music” is known only through a few theoretical works that came out mainly in German, a few recordings, and relatively inaccessible scores. This has naturally limited an understanding of the whole Hába phenomenon. Usually, Hába is characterized as a tireless propagator of microtonal and athematic music. These mere assertions, however, do not of themselves have any precise content and problematize any proper conception of Hába’s music; for example, pieces composed with microtones, in fact, represent less than a third of Hába’s output as a composer. Of course, it remains an open question whether the change in the conditions for the reception of Hába’s music will make for a major change in the way he is viewed. While in the 1920s Hába took significant steps beyond the canon of traditional music in his works by using unconventional sound material, in the period after WWII the leaders of the modern movement of the time rejected him for alleged traditionalism (and in some cases for technical inadequacy). Here the criterion of musical value was, above all, the developmental novelty (innovativeness) of Hába’s music between the wars, which perfectly corresponded to the “spirit of the time.” His retreat from his well-known position was then interpreted as an inability to express that “spirit of the time” in an appropriate way. Hába, therefore, came to occupy only a marginal position among the “classics” of modern music who made major contributions to the “artistic values” of European music and helped to create the main stylistic trends. The rationale of assertions of this kind is based on the historical conception of the rise of the modern. If we focus our attention on important moments of development (athematism, microtonality), we necessarily push everything else about this music into the background. Such music becomes a mere signpost for future development. Thus, just like technical discoveries, Hába’s music necessarily becomes obsolete for future generations. Not even the ideas of “liberated music” could escape this process of ageing and Hába’s name was reduced to a mere encyclopedia heading, becoming a synonym for microtonal and athematic music.

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