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JIIÍ DRUŽECKÝ (1745–1819), JAN NEPOMUK VENT (1745–1801), PAVEL VRANICKÝ (1756–1808)
HUNTING MUSIC OF OLD CZECH MASTERS

Collegium Musicum Pragensae / Prague Symphony Orchestra / František Vajnar (conductor)
Supraphon 4228–2, 2018; one disc, 56 minutes

The popularity of *Harmoniemusik* was widespread during the eighteenth century, with distinctive regional traditions developing throughout Europe and in the Moravian pockets of the American colonies. There can be no doubt that central Europe, and the Bohemian and Moravian lands in particular, contributed an outsize share of wind players and music to the *Harmonie* phenomenon. A proliferation of town and village wind bands, united in a high degree of musical literacy, made this region fertile territory for highly skilled professional players. During the ‘golden age’ of *Harmoniemusik*, when many aristocratic households supported wind bands and Emperor Joseph II formed one of his own from the best players available in Vienna, the names of Czech musicians appear prominently on their rosters. Since many of these players also composed, a substantial body of *Harmoniemusik* survives, much of it unpublished and preserved in manuscript parts in libraries all over central Europe.

Such sources began to attract the attention of scholars and players in the 1960s, and in Prague the wind players of the Collegium Musicum Pragensae took a leading role in reviving eighteenth-century *Harmonie* repertoire and presenting it to the public. Their active partner in this was the Supraphon company, founded in 1932, and an important proponent of music by Czech composers. They actually began with the idea of eighteenth-century hunting music as a guiding theme for this project. The presence of horns at the centre of the *Harmonie*, with one or more bassoons laying a foundation below them, and pairs of treble instruments above, helped provide a common link among a great diversity of styles; and the strong association of horns with the hunt meant that a fair amount of this music was intended at least to conjure up hunting culture, if not literally to accompany it. In 1969 Supraphon produced an album featuring the Collegium Musicum Pragensae entitled *Lovecká Hudba Starých Českých Mistrů* (Hunting Music of Old Czech Masters), which offered hunting fanfares and signals, marches, partitas and other music by Koželuh, František Xaver Dušek, Antonín Vranický and others. This was followed by another hunting-themed album under the series rubric *Musica Antiqua Bohemia* in 1970, and a 1972 album called *18th-Century Hunting Music* that was released in the United States by Everest Records. From this period onwards, the Collegium Musicum Pragensae engaged in a quite consistent programme of new releases that brought a great deal of Czech *Harmoniemusik* before the public, as well as such works as the Beethoven Septet and the remarkable arrangement of Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* by Jan Nepomuk Vent.

The subject of this review, *Hunting Music of Old Czech Masters*, was released in February 2018 by Supraphon. It takes us back to the early days of the Collegium Musicum Pragensae project, with recordings of two Czech *Harmonie* pieces that were produced in December 1970 and January 1971 at Supraphon’s Domovina Studio in the Prague 7 district, along with a recording of Paul Wranitzky’s Symphony in D major, *La Chasse*, made in March 1971 by the Prague Symphony Orchestra in the Smetana Hall of Prague’s Municipal House. Producer Miroslav Mareš remastered the original tapes for this CD, and programme notes by Viktor Hruška appear in Czech with English, German and French translations. Unfortunately, a list of the distinguished musicians of the Collegium Musicum Pragensae does not appear in the booklet, but I have found the following names from the group in the 1970s: František Herman, Ivan Séquardt, Jiří Krejčí, Jiří Seidl, Václav Kyzivát, Vilém Horák and Zdeněk Tesař. The respected conductor František Vajnar served as artistic director of the ensemble from 1968 to 1993. The two *Harmonie* works on the CD, by Jiří Družecký (Georg Druschetzky, 1745–1819) and Jan Nepomuk Vent (Johann Went, 1745–1801), are both partitas, or *Parthie*, a loose designation for ‘suite’ that survived in music for wind band long after it had been otherwise supplanted by symphonies and sonatas. The symphony by Pavel Vranický (Paul Wranitzky, 1756–1808) is not exactly a *Harmonie* work, but its final movement



makes a stimulating programmatic contribution to the hunting theme of this long-standing Supraphon project.

Jiří Družecký was a Bohemian oboist who served in a regimental band in the Austrian military just after the Seven Years War; he also emerged as a virtuoso drummer and conductor. After moving to Vienna in the early 1780s he joined the *Tonkünstler-Sozietät*, and he would direct *Harmonien* for both Count Anton Grassalkovics in Pressburg and Archduke Joseph Anton Johann in Budapest. His contribution to the *Harmonie* repertoire was abundant, comprising some 150 partitas and serenades, as well as arrangements of Haydn's *Creation* and *Seasons*, and Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. The short three-movement partita on this recording belongs to a special type of 'rustic' composition calling for toy instruments, or *Berchtesgadner Instrumente*, so named after the town in the Bavarian Alps where such instruments were manufactured. Woven into a brisk, dance-like rhythmic structure are a fanciful variety of piping, bird-like sounds (including a cuckoo's call), sleigh bells and other jingles, and a *Ratsche*, or ratchet. Družecký was not out of the mainstream in writing such a work at the turn of the nineteenth century; on the contrary, as John Rice has shown, even musical connoisseurs like the Empress Marie Therese enjoyed such instruments and commissioned works from Ferdinando Paer and Paul Wranitzky that employed them (John A. Rice, *Empress Marie Therese and Music at the Viennese Court, 1792–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially 140–151). As Rice points out, Berchtesgaden noises are not at all remote from 'Turkish' effects, and both sound quite at home with lively, march-like *Harmoniemusik*. No doubt the bird calls and sleigh bells, with their vivid reminiscence of winter woodlands, are what landed this piece on a hunting-themed album.

Another Bohemian oboist who inhabited Družecký's sphere was Jan Nepomuk Vent, who played with the very well-known band of Count Johann Joseph Pachta in Prague before joining Prince Schwarzenberg's *Harmonie* as an English horn player, just at the time when such bands were expanding to eight or so players. When Emperor Joseph II decided to form an Imperial *Harmonie* in 1782, he enticed Vent into his new ensemble along with other important professionals from the court theatre orchestras, such as the clarinetist Anton Stadler. Vent helped to create an innovative new genre, the large-scale theatrical transcription; over the next nearly twenty years he would produce over fifty major wind-band arrangements of ballet and opera scores, including five of Mozart's. Vent's works became extremely popular during the Napoleonic wars, when regimental *Harmonien* passed his music from hand to hand and used it to entertain a frequently exhausted officer corps. The five-movement partita on this recording demonstrates Vent's facility with wind idioms, and with the skilful deployment of textures and phrasing. While generally featuring a solo oboe part, he creates strong bassoon lines and rippling clarinet counterpoint that always provide perfect balance. In the Romance he adds a bit of pathos, with a minor-key episode and sustained motivic passages between the parts. The Finale opens, as long anticipated, with the hunting horns in full chase, buoyant with all the lightness and agility that really good players can achieve.

Few instrumental composers in the 1790s and early 1800s were as successful in as many public arenas as Paul Wranitzky, whose relationships with the imperial court, aristocracy, theatres and *Tonkünstler-Sozietät* gave him many opportunities to perform new symphonies. His *La Chasse* Symphony was published in July 1793 as Op. 25 by Johann André; since that was also the year Wranitzky joined the *Tonkünstler-Sozietät*, that occasion might have provided the impetus for the creation of so grand a work. It is a fully scored symphony with large wind section, trumpets and timpani. The reason for its inclusion on this CD is its final movement, entitled 'La Caccia', which colourfully demonstrates Wranitzky's predilection for programmatic expression (for examples of Wranitzky's more politically oriented symphonic programmes see David Wyn Jones, *The Symphony in Beethoven's Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 74–97). 'La Caccia' opens with a rousing summons from a pair of hunting horns; the strings pick up the rhythms of the chase, and a crescendo builds as the full orchestra joins the sport. Wranitzky may not make use of toy instruments here, but he certainly evokes bird songs aplenty in various wind instruments, and the urgency of the horn motives even calls forth the hounds. He manages to stir up a small storm with swirling winds to catch the hunters off guard, includes various 'Turkish' motives for excitement and adds some folk-like melodies for



a rustic effect. This is not exactly Beethoven, but it's a very adroit entertainment, and it would have met with a merry response from a great many gentlemen (and ladies, for that matter) who relished a robust hunt in rough weather, and equally enjoyed its evocation in the concert room.

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