

From Prague to Vienna via Bratislava. Reflecting on Novák's Operas *The Zvíkov Imp* and *The Lantern*

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Abstract: The study focuses on the reflexion of Vítězslav Novák's operas *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] and *Lucerna* [The Lantern] by music criticism in Prague, Bratislava and Vienna in between 1915 – 1929.

Key words: Vítězslav Novák, opera reception, *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp], *Lucerna* [The Lantern], Prague, Bratislava, Vienna

Vítězslav Novák (1870 – 1949) was considered one of the leading figures of the so-called Czech musical modernity generation and a respected Central European composer at the beginning of the twentieth century. Towards the end of 1913, however, his hitherto extremely successful career entered into a period of crisis. This came after his new cantata, *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt] Op. 48 – a composition that, like Antonín Dvořák's *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt], Op. 69, was based on the text of a ballad by Karel Jaromír Erben (1811 – 1870) – was first performed in Prague by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and the Prague Hlahol Choir. The main issue of the work, one that was noted by the critics at the time, was the incongruity of the dramatic story and a certain sense of artistic emptiness (in comparison to his prior works). As Vítězslav Novák's biographer Vladimír Lébl later expressed: "(...) his [Novák's] compositional virtuosity often had to come to the aid of the parts that had no natural initiative of their own."¹ Three years after the successful Brno premiere of Vítězslav Novák's cantata *Bouře* [The Storm], which was viewed as a confident demonstration of modern Czech music, Novák's position on the pedestal of Czech music became unstable.

1 LÉBL, V. *Vítězslav Novák: Život a dílo* [Vítězslav Novák: His Life and Work]. Praha : ČSAV, 1964, p. 162.

Criticism came not only from his opponents, centred around the musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878 – 1962), but also from his supporters and friends. Vítězslav Novák accepted some of the criticism and reworked certain parts of the work, but was strongly affected by the failure, both as an artist and as a person. Nevertheless, just a few months after completing *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt], he began working on his first opera. Although he had long considered writing an opera, the cantata's failure likely hastened this decision – he wanted to write a composition in the traditionally most highly regarded field of music as a way to convince his critics that his skills as a creator were still developing rather than stagnating. Over the following nine years, (1914 – 1923) he would compose four operas: *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] (Ladislav Stroupežnický), *Karlštejn* (Otokar Fischer, based on the play by Jaroslav Vrchlický), *Lucerna* [The Lantern] (Hanuš Jelínek, based on the play by Alois Jirásek) and *Dědův odkaz* [Grandfather's Legacy] (Antonín Klášterský, based on the poem by Alois Heyduk). In contrast to his chamber and orchestral work from the period before the First World War, for which he was considered a progressive composer and a continuator of the German or, to be more exact, Brahmsian approach to music, he turned out to be rather conservative when it came to his operas. The lyrics that Vítězslav Novák worked with were – with the exception of the text of Ladislav Stroupežnický's play *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp], which was lifted nearly verbatim – rather poorly adapted by their librettists for the purposes of opera. Most of his operas were historical in nature – those where Novák sought to adapt a 'modern setting' into opera, such as in *Dědův odkaz* [Grandfather's Legacy]', come off as very amateurish.² His operas are almost devoid of ensembles and choirs³ and even when taking into account Vítězslav Novák's reputation as an excellent orchestral composer, the orchestral elements of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] and *Lucerna* [The Lantern] are surprisingly forced into the background. (This is not the case for *Karlštejn* and certainly not for Novák's last opera, *Dědův odkaz* [Grandfather's Legacy]', in which he returned to symphonic interludes, postludes and, most no-

2 John Tyrrell suggests that this aspect becomes visible when contrasted with Leoš Janáček's musicalisation of Karel Čapek's *Věc Makropulos* [The Makropulos Affair]. See TYRRELL, J. *Czech Opera*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 97 – 98. Similar 'amateurishness' or awkwardness can be observed in Foerster's *The Invincible Ones*.

3 J. Tyrrell is also surprised at the absence of ensembles in Novák's operas, even in places where the subject matter required it (for example in his *Karlštejn*). See TYRRELL, J. *Czech Opera*, p. 92.

tably, choirs.)⁴ Novák's goal was to promote his operas similarly to how he promoted his chamber and orchestral works, in a German-language setting. The time after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not particularly favourable, however, towards this and foreign opera houses were not all that interested in producing operas with strictly Czech subject matter. The recently-established Slovak National Theatre produced two of the composer's operas – *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] and *Lucerna* [The Lantern] – several times during his lifetime. Both operas were also included in the Slovak National Theatre's representative tour show in May 1929, which also included performances of other operas by Czech composers at the Viennese Stadttheater (Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride], Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa/Její pastorkyňa* [Jenůfa/Her Stepdaughter], Antonín Dvořák's *Dimitrij* and Karel Boleslav Jirák's *Žena a Bůh* [The Woman and the God]). Vítězslav Novák's desire to present himself as an opera composer in the former Austro-Hungarian capital was at least fulfilled through the Czechoslovak ensemble. In this study, I will attempt to interpret the contemporary reception of Vítězslav Novák's operas *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] and *Lucerna* [The Lantern] from their premieres to their infrequent foreign productions.⁵

Premieres in Prague

Zvíkovský rarášek [The Zvíkov Imp]

Vítězslav Novák began working on his first opera convinced that his compositional and orchestration technique allowed him to “compose an opera over the text of the original, without any changes or abridging,”⁶ that is, compose it over prose. In the history of Czech music, this was the third ‘literaturoper’, after Janáček's *Jenůfa* (1903) and Otakar Ostrčil's comedic one-act opera *The Bud* [Poupě] (1911), to which *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] was often compared. For Novák's contemporaries, it was surprising that he chose the cheerful subject of Ladislav Stroupežnický's 1883 play of the same

4 Novák was criticised for not adhering to the rules of opera. K. B. Jirák, for example, notes that his operas, rather than being dramatic musical works, are – formally and structurally speaking – symphonies. See JIRÁK, K. B. Die moderne tschechische Oper. In *Der Auftakt*, 1930, Vol. 10, Issue 7 – 8, p. 183.

5 *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was performed as late as 1931, in Ljubljana.

6 NOVÁK, V. Jak jsem se stal operním skladatelem [How I Became an Opera Composer]. In *Divadlo*, 1940 – 1941, Vol. 27, p. 29.

name, as humour was nowhere to be found in his prior, predominantly serious, work. The choice of genre may have also been surprising considering his then-recent artistic failure, which, as Novák himself admitted left him deeply wounded. On the other hand, it made sense for a composer with no prior experience in large-scale musical theatre to choose a one-act comic opera. Additionally, the familial theme of the play matched Novák's life at the time, as, after his marriage to Marie Prášilová, he was awaiting the birth of his son. Ladislav Stroupežnický's intimate, conversation-based play which is devoid of any major narrative development and which, at its core, is built on the shaky premise of a conjugal jealousy plot initiated by the mischief of the couple's son, Petřík (the titular "imp"), did not provide much artistic potential to Vítězslav Novák. Novák musicalised the play's naïve (perhaps even dull) dialogue, presented in awkward pseudo-archaic Czech, verbatim. He provided musical illustration to the comic scenes and responded to the on-stage events and dialogue using various motifs, adapted to suit the current situation. The music is mostly made up of minor motifs that underline the conversation without ever playing directly over it. Although the composer uses several leitmotifs for some of the characters or situations, including a periodically recurring tone painting of pouring wine, this is not a consistent application of Wagnerian leitmotifs – instead, the leitmotifs follow Brahmsian approaches of motivic development, which Vítězslav Novák had previously mastered in his chamber or orchestral works.

Zvíkovský rarášek [The Zvíkov Imp] was first performed on 10 October 1915 at the Czech National Theatre in Prague, in a rendition from the head of the opera, Karel Kovařovic, and with a cast that included some of the leading Czech singers of the time.⁷ Václav Štěpán⁸ noted the weaknesses of the original play in his paper, published in the journal *Hudební revue* after the opera's premiere.⁹ Although watching the original play gave him the "impres-

7 The original cast of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] at the Czech National Theatre was: Kryštof of Švamberk – Emil Pollert; Eliška – Gabriela Horvátová; Petřík – Ema Miřiovská; Salomena – Věra Pivoňková; Markéta – Marie Šlechtová; Mikuláš Dačický of Heslov – Antonín Lebeda; Michálek – Marie Rysková.

8 Václav Štěpán (1889 – 1944) studied composition under Vítězslav Novák between 1904 and 1909. He is the author of a number of analytical studies, mainly of the works of Vítězslav Novák and Josef Suk, which were later published in ŠTĚPÁN, V. *Novák a Suk* [Novák and Suk]. Praha : HMUB, 1945. He also paid great attention to Novák's work as a pianist.

9 ŠTĚPÁN, V. *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp]. In *Hudební revue*, October 1915, Vol. 9, Issue 1, pp. 32 – 36.

sion of awkward naïveté,” he praised Vítězslav Novák’s music, which is “so perfect, so thrilling, that it made the characters sympathetic and the situations engaging.”¹⁰ The music covered up the shortcomings of the libretto, and, according to Václav Štěpán, Vítězslav Novák achieved this by being able to musically capture the personality of each character, every minor shift in the mood and situation much better “than the generally clumsy text.”¹¹ Václav Štěpán was convinced that Vítězslav Novák did an excellent job with his first opera, both on the dramatic and the theatrical level, noting the excellent declamation and intelligibility of each word. The fact that this conversational play only enabled Vítězslav Novák to demonstrate his masterful musical development “in punctuation pauses,” that the harmony was much simpler in comparison to his symphonic works and that the polyphonic setting is almost absent, came as a result of the simple nature of the original. In spite of this, the orchestra “shines and glows” in places. Václav Štěpán remains loyal in his sympathy towards Vítězslav Novák’s work and applauds his first foray into the opera world. “Zvíkovský rarášek [The Zvíkov Imp] is the first major Czech opera to grace the stage of the National Theatre in recent times and its dramatic qualities make it a contender to be one of the best Czech operas of all time.”¹² Václav Štěpán (much like Vítězslav Novák) praised Karel Kovařovic’s rendition. His criticism was reserved for the direction and the set design, which was all over the place in terms of form and colour and which, according to Václav Štěpán, could not meet the high demands of the time.

Zvíkovský rarášek [The Zvíkov Imp] (as well as Vítězslav Novák’s following operas) came under sharp criticism from the musicologist and historian Zdeněk Nejedlý,¹³ who was convinced that Novák’s decision to write operas came as a result of his growing desire for praise. In reality, however, these operas represented a decline in Novák’s oeuvre, already foreshadowed by *Svatební košile* [The Wedding Shirt] cantata, and they brought essentially no substantial change in Novák’s compositional style: “Novák, in his turn to op-

10 Ibid., p. 33.

11 Ibid., p. 34.

12 Ibid., p. 35.

13 Nejedlý’s critique of the premiere of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] was published in the journal *Smetana* (NEJEDLÝ, Z. Vítězslava Nováka “Zvíkovský rarášek” [Vítězslav Novák’s “The Zvíkov Imp”]. In *Smetana*, 19 November 1915, Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 1 – 5, 19 November 1915), and was later included in a collection of papers about Novák’s work (NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Vítězslav Novák: Studie a kritiky* [Vítězslav Novák: Studies and Reviews]. Praha : Melantrich, 1921).

era, has not been able to say anything new that we have not yet encountered in his preceding works.”¹⁴ Zdeněk Nejedlý particularly reproached Vítězslav Novák for not taking inspiration from Bedřich Smetana, who provided Czech music with a true model of what comic opera should be. While Václav Štěpán praised Vítězslav Novák’s ability to musically express the essence of the characters and dramatic situations, Zdeněk Nejedlý talks about a faulty “descriptive method” through which the composer “illustrates everything that is spoken about in the text – not the psychic content of what is said, merely the total externalities.”¹⁵ In his view, Novák merely provided a basic musical illustration of Ladislav Stroupežnický’s text, to which he attaches some of his musical ideas. Zdeněk Nejedlý found *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] devoid of any musical architecture and felt “a severe lack of real music.”¹⁶ Zdeněk Nejedlý also observed a decline in the compositional technique, saying that, in the score, he cannot hear the author of the symphonic works that he had praised before. He is aware that the musical expression had to be simplified by Novák to fit the genre of the comedic opera, “but that should not be a reason for this simplicity to turn in places into outright poverty.”¹⁷ He thought that Novák could not distinguish between musical expression and mere tone painting. He also criticised the fragmentary character of the whole of the opera, noting the absence of dramatic polyphony. Zdeněk Nejedlý, who was also a strong critic of Antonín Dvořák’s dramatic work, argued that Novák’s compositional approach is even worse than the already unacceptable approach of Antonín Dvořák: “in his [Dvořák’s] operas, we feel that he wanted to express the dramatic situation with music, which tried to be dramatic in its mood (...). Dvořák, in short, at least had the goal of making real dramatic music, whereas Vítězslav Novák in ‘*The Zvíkov Imp*’ does not share this goal. Instead, he merely illustrates the words (...).”¹⁸ Soon after its creation, Zdeněk Nejedlý already considered Vítězslav Novák’s first foray into opera to be the weakest of the composer’s longer works, noting also that Novák should not give much credence to the potentially positive responses from other critics and the public – the “modern and cheap clamour for Novák” may only serve to confuse the

14 NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Vítězslav Novák: Studie a kritiky* [Vítězslav Novák: Studies and Reviews], p. 181.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 187 – 188.

composer.¹⁹ He almost considers it a slight that it was Novák's opera, rather than any other work presented at the National Theatre that received the exceptional orchestral performance under the direction of Karel Kovařovic. Despite his previous claims about the musical simplicity of the work, he praised Kovařovic's diligent rendition of all the sound and motivic details that "the score of 'The Imp' is full of."²⁰ Thus, the shortcomings of the score were "covered up" by the "sophisticated orchestra," although the singers had to manage Vítězslav Novák's problematic declamation in the singing parts – "instead of musical melodic phrases, we often hear sharp syllables that correspond to the word's stress pattern (...)." ²¹ Zdeněk Nejedlý eventually actually degrades Vítězslav Novák's opera to being mere stage music accompanying a theatrical performance when he calls it a one-act play by Ladislav Stroupežnický accompanied by the music of Novák: "If we laugh at something, we laugh at Stroupežnický's writing, but not Novák's composition, because his jokes (...) are difficult to discern and lacking in warmth."²²

Although Vladimír Lébl argues in his monograph on Vítězslav Novák that "the criticism was entirely negative and, at best, ambivalent," there were other figures of the Prague music scene (beside Václav Štěpán) who supported Novák's first opera. From today's perspective of sober and detached art criticism, the review from one of the most influential Prague-based music critics of the time, Emanuel Chvála, appears particularly interesting. In contrast to Zdeněk Nejedlý, he considered the disciples of Antonín Dvořák (especially Josef Suk) to be the future of Czech music, an opinion for which he became the target of many diatribes from the much younger Zdeněk Nejedlý.²³ His

19 Ibid., p. 189.

20 Ibid., p. 190.

21 Ibid., p. 190.

22 Ibid., p. 191.

23 Emanuel Chvála (1851 – 1924) was a contributing critic to the journals *Lumír*, *Posel z Prahy* and *Dalibor* – between 1880 and 1921 (under the signature -la) he wrote for the journals *Politik*, *Národní politika* and *Union*, which began to be published in 1907 following the cancellation of the German-language *Politik* (KARLÍK, F. – KOPECKÝ, J. (eds.). *Emanuel Chvála: Z mých hudebních pamětí* [Emanuel Chvála: My Memoirs of Music]. Olomouc : VUP, 2019, p. 10). Emanuel Chvála was praised for his unbiased criticism of the Czech musical scene in his German-language articles. He impartially placed himself between the Smetana camp and the Dvořák camp, which did not win him many supporters from either side. In 1912, however, Emanuel Chvála signed the so-called Protest, in which Dvořák's disciples and other important figures of Czech music strongly came out against the growing attacks of the "Smetana camp," headed by Zdeněk Nejedlý, on the personality and oeuvre of Antonín Dvořák.

review of the premiere of *Zvukovský rarášek* [The Zvukov Imp] found no issues with the opera – Emanuel Chvála found it surprising “that an artist who was previously mainly preoccupied with the pressing issues of living, feeling and desiring, that a musician who struggles and fights inside his soul” would choose the genre of comic opera. In this sense, Emanuel Chvála considers Vítězslav Novák’s one-act opera to be a “musical comedy in its truest sense” and Novák’s musicalisation an “unwavering success” in terms of how he was able to dramatically underscore the text without getting in its way. In contrast to Zdeněk Nejedlý, he does not think that Vítězslav Novák held back his musicality. He sees Novák’s creativity even in this work, “from his artistic intelligence, (...) from the uniqueness of his musical expression, which adorns the words with beautiful-sounding frills, from his witty musical archaisms, (...) from his sweet-smelling lyrical blossoms sprouting anywhere where the soil is conducive to lyricism.” In his musical capturing of the characters and individual scenes, Emanuel Chvála considers Vítězslav Novák a “genuine dramatist”. Unlike Zdeněk Nejedlý, he appreciates the declamation of the sung word, and that, in pursuit of total clarity, Novák can suppress his natural “symphonic lavishness,” “he conducts himself with decorum, sparingly applying his bright and mixed colours (...).”²⁴ In his memoirs, which Emanuel Chvála wrote years later and into which he incorporated his older critical articles, he mentions the criticism of Vítězslav Novák’s tone painting from his opponents (“the parties opposing him”), which, he wrote, the composer did not need to feel bad about – in fact, Emanuel Chvála notes, Vítězslav Novák’s art of musical characterisation contributed to the work’s dramatic qualities.²⁵

One month after *Zvukovský rarášek* [The Zvukov Imp]’s Prague premiere, the German magazine *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* published a review from their Prague contributor, Dr. Viktor Joss,²⁶ in which he applauded the premiere of Vítězslav Novák’s opera as a true artistic experience, if only because Novák is the most prospective composer in Czech music who masterfully employs modern techniques. He describes Vítězslav Novák in superlatives, call-

24 -la [Emanuel Chvála]. *Zvukovský rarášek* [The Zvukov Imp]. In *Národní politika*, 1915, Vol. 33, Issue 283, p. 3, 12 October 1915. Emanuel Chvála simultaneously published his review of the opera in the German-language newspaper *Union*, 12 October 1915.

25 KARLÍK, F. – KOPECKÝ, J. (eds.). *Emanuel Chvála: Z mých hudebních pamětí* [Emanuel Chvála: My Memoirs of Music], p. 487.

26 Viktor Joss, sometimes written as Joß (1869 – 1942?) was a Prague German of Jewish descent, cultural columnist and litterateur.

ing him an orchestral virtuoso, excellent colourist and genius impressionist, the most qualified representative of absolute music who is also capable of respecting the original literary text. The reviewer particularly enjoyed the fact that the orchestra emphasised what was being sung rather than playing over it, as was (according to him) sometimes the case with modern composers. Joss views *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] as a landmark in Novák's artistic development and hopes that more large-scale dramatic works would follow this highly-promising one-act opera.²⁷

Lucerna [The Lantern]

Vítězslav Novák's second opera, *Karlštejn*, suffered an even greater rejection from Zdeněk Nejedlý. The work, composed during the war, was conceived by Novák and its librettist Otokar Fischer, who adapted the text of Jaroslav Vrchlický's play *Noc na Karlštejně* [A Night at Karlstein Castle], as a Czech national opera. Zdeněk Nejedlý questioned the sincerity of Vítězslav Novák's artistic display of patriotism, denied his ability to create "values as generally human as is that of nationality" and labelled the opera an artistic forgery.²⁸ Nejedlý claimed that Novák took advantage of the tense period of war to present himself as a national artist. He considered Novák's choice of Vrchlický's play immoral: "Can an artist use the popularity of someone else's work for the benefit of his own art, warming himself against someone else's fire?"²⁹ He entirely panned the musical component of the work, which he considered below even that of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp], saying that "Novák has never before written music so bland."³⁰ He criticised the lack of stylistic unity, as a result of which Zdeněk Nejedlý considered *Karlštejn* "another point in the chart of Novák's decline (...)."³¹

In the introduction to his detailed analysis of the *Lucerna* [The Lantern], published in the journal *Listy hudební matice*,³² the Dvořák scholar Otakar

27 JOSS, V. "Der Burgkogold." In *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*, 12 November 1915 (only a clipping is available).

28 NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Vítězslav Novák. Studie a kritiky* [Vítězslav Novák: Studies and Reviews], p. 198.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

32 ŠOUREK, O. Novákova "Lucerna" (několik poznámek o povaze díla) [Novák's "The Lantern": Some Notes on the Work]. In *Listy hudební matice*, 1923, Vol. 2, Issue 8 – 9, p. 189.

Šourek emphasised that Vítězslav Novák chose Alois Jirásek's play *Lucerna* [The Lantern] towards the end of the First World War not for its popularity, but rather for its Czech theme.³³ This was likely done out of the desire to prevent similar accusations to the ones Nejedlý hurled at him in the context of *Karlštejn* – that he was 'leeching off' of successful theatre plays. Novák only managed to secure Alois Jirásek's permission to musicalise his 1905 play on the second attempt, in 1918. Based on Jirásek's recommendation, the composer commissioned the creation of the libretto from Jirásek's son-in-law, Hanuš Jelínek. While Vladimír Lébl considers Hanuš Jelínek's adaptation of Alois Jirásek's play a success,³⁴ John Tyrrell is more critical, stating that, in places, it comes off as "singsong rhythmic periods", which is difficult to disagree with.³⁵ In Alois Jirásek's *Lucerna* [The Lantern], Vítězslav Novák was to musicalise a fairy-tale story set in the Czech past, which features not only stock fairy-tale characters, but also the social themes of material poverty and rebellion against the aristocracy. Vítězslav Novák composed *Lucerna* [The Lantern] in an unusually short time – it was written between Christmas 1921 and 6 February 1922 and by the end of June of the same year, he had instrumented the opera. *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was described by Otakar Šourek as a work of "rapid, fresh inspiration and sunny inner cheerfulness" that shared similarities with a number of smaller works that were created in close proximity to it. "It is not a drama in the general sense, redeemed by crises and struggles, but a happy line-up of several fabulously warm and adorable images (...)." ³⁶ Even in this opera, Vítězslav Novák employed the technique of motivic development, which he perfectly controlled (and never truly abandoned) to create organically-built musical spaces, occasionally broken up by individual songs. The kaleidoscopic order of the individual situations is underlined by the changing vocal forms – ariosos are followed by declamations and there is even space for melodrama.

Vítězslav Novák's compositional method, which Zdeněk Nejedlý pejoratively described in his reflections on *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] as "musical colouring," is considered by Otakar Šourek to be an excellent instru-

33 Otakar Šourek's four-volume monograph *Život a dílo Antonína Dvořáka* [The Life and Work of Antonín Dvořák] was published by Hudební matice Umělecké besedy between 1922 and 1933.

34 LÉBL, V. *Vítězslav Novák: Život a dílo* [Vítězslav Novák: His Life and Work], p. 206.

35 TYRRELL, J. *Czech Opera*, p. 91.

36 ŠOUREK, O. Novákova „Lucerna“ (několik poznámek o povaze díla) [Novák's "The Lantern": Some Notes on the Work], p. 189.

ment for masterful musical depiction of the moods, words and actions on stage, a “well-fitting drawing” which is developed in *Lucerna* [The Lantern] into its own creative theme.³⁷ Otakar Šourek marvels at the “varied and complex” interplay of leitmotifs, the variety and diversity of which is notably richer compared to the composer’s first opera. He praises the structural logic of the musical aspect, which is organically developed through the motifs and leitmotifs. A distinctive feature of the opera is its striking plainness, which, according to Šourek, is also “an extraordinary advantage of the work.” This simplicity is only superficial, however, as he demonstrates through his analysis of Vítězslav Novák’s daring harmony, and even observing polytonality.³⁸ Šourek truly believed in Novák’s abilities as an opera composer. He considered *Lucerna* [The Lantern] to be a boon to Czech opera and lamented the underappreciation of the composer’s earlier operas.

Similar to *Karlštejn*, Vítězslav Novák thought of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] as a national opera, which is why it often musically evokes the opera tradition of Bedřich Smetana and, more explicitly, Antonín Dvořák’s *Rusalka*. Vladimír Lébl speculates about Novák’s demonstrative turn towards the past, showing the interconnectedness of the national tradition, through which he wanted to comment on the post-war developments in Czech music.³⁹ Nevertheless, the opera’s traditionalism was met largely with negative reactions or complete disinterest from the musical sphere (and not merely its younger members). One of the many reflections of the work was Otakar Šourek’s aforementioned analysis which shares many similarities with his review in the newspaper *Venkov*. In it, lauded *Lucerna* [The Lantern] as a “decisive upswing” not only for its creator but for Czech opera more broadly. Otakar Šourek, invoking the majority opinion of those who saw the premiere, was convinced that the musicalisation improved upon Alois Jirásek’s original. Although he is generally positive, his article is critical in parts – Šourek considered the final act to be the weakest one, not only due to the protracted and fragmentary libretto, but also because “the composer’s imagination did not take full advantage of the opportunities.”⁴⁰

37 Ibid., p. 191.

38 Ibid., pp. 198 – 199.

39 LÉBL, V. *Vítězslav Novák: Život a dílo* [Vítězslav Novák: His Life and Work], p. 207.

40 O.Š. [Otakar Šourek]. Vítězslav Novák: *Lucerna* [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern]. In *Venkov*, 1923, Vol. 18, Issue 111, pp. 3 – 4, 15 May 1923.

Some of Vítězslav Novák's supporters claimed that he refused to be threatened by negative criticism. Although Jaroslav Borecký tried to defend Novák's approach to opera, he did admit some past deficiencies when he noted that Novák's style saw 'improvements' in the third opera: the declamation is more fluent and does not strictly adhere to stress patterns. He considered the closed numbers, which Novák abundantly employed throughout *Lucerna* [The Lantern], to be appropriate for the genre of fairy-tale opera. Jaroslav Borecký had nothing against references and "national themes" that aim to assert the "the music's Czechness". Although even in this case, the orchestra mainly plays an illustrative role, Jaroslav Borecký believed that "the composer did not get lost in the details and colours – as was sometimes the case in his two prior operas – and created unified scenes." The reviewer also saw progress in the dramaturgy of the opera, which continually escalated over the opera's performance.⁴¹

In response to Vítězslav Novák's third opera, as well as Otakar Ostrčil's *Legenda z Erinu* [The Legend of Erin] and the premiere of Leoš Janáček's *Káta Kabanová* [Katya Kabanova], Zdeněk Nejedlý published a lengthy analytical overview in the journal *Smetana*.⁴² He was boundlessly enthusiastic about Otakar Ostrčil's work, which was understandable considering the significant role that Ostrčil played in Nejedlý's conception of Czech music's developmental history.⁴³ Although Zdeněk Nejedlý never truly understood Leoš Janáček's oeuvre, he did describe *Káta Kabanová* [Katya Kabanova] as an "interesting document of late Czech verismo" and graciously found some examples of development in the musical aspect of the work.⁴⁴ Vítězslav Novák's opera received the least praise from Zdeněk Nejedlý. He referred to *Lucerna* [The Lantern] as naïve art that resembled the minor compositions for children that Vítězslav Novák was working on at the time. Zdeněk Nejedlý considered this "desired primitivism" and fairy-tale naïveté insufficiently authentic. *Lucerna* [The Lantern] exhibited all the dramatic weaknesses of the previous operas and, moreover, was very poor on a musical level – "artistically, it is a backwards turn to the art of yes-

41 Dr. J. B. [Jaroslav Borecký]. Vítězslav Novák: *Lucerna* [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern]. In *Národní politika*, 1923, Vol. 41, Issue 132, pp. 1 – 2, 15 May 1923.

42 NEJEDLÝ, Z. Letošní novinky Národního divadla v Praze [This Year's New Works at the Prague National Theatre]. In *Smetana*, Vol. 13, Issue 3 – 4, pp. 41 – 45 and Issue 5, pp. 70 – 72.

43 According to Zdeněk Nejedlý, this line of progress was comprised of Bedřich Smetana, Zdeněk Fibich, Josef Bohuslav Foerster and Otakar Ostrčil.

44 NEJEDLÝ, Z. Letošní novinky Národního divadla v Praze [This Year's New Works at the Prague National Theatre]. In *Smetana*, Vol.13, Issue 5, p. 72.

teryear.” “It is as if we could not even make out Novák in this work, not only because his composition is different (...). The music of ‘*Lucerna* [The Lantern]’ is extremely thin.” Zdeněk Nejedlý, who had been viewing Vítězslav Novák as an artist in an ever-deepening creative crisis ever since his *Svatební košile* [Wedding Shirt] cantata, believed that the opera was another failed attempt at escaping this crisis – “he capitulates to his own forward-thinking art and seeks redemption through looking back.”⁴⁵

Josef Bartoš, a disciple and close associate of Zdeněk Nejedlý, rejected *Lucerna* [The Lantern] in even more explicit terms in his review of the premiere, published in the Prague-based German-language newspaper *Prager Presse*. Similar to Zdeněk Nejedlý, Josef Bartoš considered Hanuš Jelínek’s adaptation of Alois Jirásek’s play (which, he also says, suffered as a result of being musicalised) as an ill-fated one. He also criticised Vítězslav Novák’s ‘illustrative’ method, in which he enveloped the words in music. Noting the apparent lack of a dramatic structure, Josef Bartoš asks: “Why does [Zdeněk Novák] musicalise plays when it goes against his abilities?” He also repeated Zdeněk Nejedlý’s earlier comparison to Antonín Dvořák, who, although he was no music dramatist, had a ‘major’ gift for the dramatic. Like Zdeněk Nejedlý, Josef Bartoš also emphasised Zdeněk Novák’s attempt to compose very simple music – creating popular melodies to fit a popular text. His music is bland and inexpressive, and he was unable to musicalise even the most favourable scenes in a way that would “move the heart.” Josef Bartoš calls *Lucerna* [The Lantern] a “stillborn child” and a “music-school work,” a description that clearly offended Zdeněk Novák, since he noted it down in his memoirs.⁴⁶

Otakar Šourek was dissatisfied with the National Theatre’s performance of *Lucerna* [The Lantern], saying that they did not give it enough attention and respect, considering the significance of the work and its creator for Czech art. He mainly criticised the orchestra, the direction and performances of some of the singers.⁴⁷ One of the main roles – that of the Miller – had to be recast at the last minute because the original actor, Václav Novák, got into a fight with one member of the National Theatre ensemble and, despite Vítězslav Novák’s loud protest, was stripped of the role as punishment. The vocally weaker baritone

45 Ibid., p. 44.

46 BARTOŠ, J. Eine neue tschechische Oper. In *Prager Presse*, 15 May 1923 (there is only a newspaper clipping available in Zdeněk Novák’s inheritance).

47 O.Š. [Otakar Šourek]. Vítězslav Novák: *Lucerna* [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern]. In *Venkov*, pp. 3 – 4.

Štěpán Chodounský, who had to quickly prepare for the role, was indisposed for three weeks, however, after the premiere. This meant that the opera could not be immediately reprised, which, according to Vítězslav Novák, led to the public perception that it flopped.⁴⁸ Vítězslav Novák put the blame squarely on the musical director of the National Theatre's opera, Otakar Ostrčil, who was unable to assert his authority at the theatre and ensure a smooth production. To add to this, Vítězslav Novák had been convinced for a while that Otakar Ostrčil was biased against his operas, a theory that had supposedly been confirmed to him by two 'higher-ups' from the National Theatre who gave him the option of selecting a different musical director for the opera. Vítězslav Novák rejected, however, the offer out of respect for Otakar Ostrčil, supposedly because he did not want to threaten his then-precious position at the theatre.⁴⁹ This affair further deepened the conflict between Vítězslav Novák and Otakar Ostrčil, which came to a head in 1930, during celebrations of Novák's 60th birthday.⁵⁰ In contrast to Otakar Šourek, Jaroslav Borecký rated Otakar Ostrčil's rendition of the opera positively. Čeněk Kvíčala's set design was in accordance with both "the necessity for progress and the unchangeable laws of true taste," and he also praised the "fortunate" direction of Vladimír Wuršer and some of the singers' performances. In Jaroslav Borecký's view, the Prague premiere was a "resounding" success.⁵¹ Josef Bartoš – who, according to Novák, was a "very close acquaintance of Otakar Ostrčil"⁵² – attributed the audience's positive re-

48 NOVÁK, V. *O sobě a o jiných* [About Myself and Others]. Praha : Supraphon, 1970, p. 24.

49 Ibid., p. 239.

50 For this occasion, the National Theatre prepared a cycle of Zdeněk Novák's dramatic works, which ended up getting moved to December to make space for a different birthday cycle – that of Zdeněk Fibich. As such, there was very little time to prepare the individual productions and Novák thought it made no sense to show all of his stage works in the span of three short weeks. He told Otakar Ostrčil and the entire National Theatre Company that he would be distancing himself from the project – he attended neither the preparations nor the performances. Using his own money, Zdeněk Novák eventually published a text called *Vítězslav Novák contra Otakar Ostrčil*, in which he detailed the entire history of his conflict with Otakar Ostrčil, from the unsuccessful production of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] to the cycle of productions of his stage works that was planned in honour of his 60th birthday. For more details, see KŘUPKOVÁ, L. The Consequences of Conflict in the Czech Musical World: Zdeněk Fibich as a Point of Contention in Novák's Polemics with Nejedlý. In KOPECKÝ, J. – KŘUPKOVÁ, L. (eds.). *Czech Music around 1900*. Hillsdale, NY : Boydell & Brewer, Pendragon Press, 2017, p. 283.

51 Dr. J. B. [Jaroslav Borecký]. *Vítězslav Novák: Lucerna* [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern], pp. 1 – 2.

52 NOVÁK, V. *O sobě a o jiných* [About Myself and Others], p. 243.

ception of the opera during its premiere to the chief musical director, under whose leadership the orchestra and the singers gave an excellent performance. Nevertheless, the reviewer provided an even simpler explanation for the loud praise: "We know our theatre-goers: they always demand to see the author on stage."⁵³

The composer, however, had trust in the favour of the public and was convinced that Otakar Ostrčil and Zdeněk Nejedlý (and those around them) were conspiring against him. Even years later, he recounted in his memoirs that *Lucerna* [The Lantern] had six reruns in its first year, only four in the second, "after which it was deposited into my opera's mausoleum until the next decade of my life (...). No work of mine ever brought me such hopeful joy and such bitter disappointment."⁵⁴ Despite the composer's great expectations, *Lucerna* [The Lantern] did not become a mainstay.⁵⁵

The Productions of Vítězslav Novák's Operas at the Slovak National Theatre

Although Vítězslav Novák had a strong personal and artistic connection to Slovakia, it took a relatively long time before his operas were performed at the Slovak National Theatre, established in 1920. Novák's first opera was preceded in Bratislava by a production of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] in March 1928, led by Oskar Nedbal, directed by Zdeněk Ruth-Markov and with set design from Ján Ladvenica. According to Antonín Hořejš, the resident critic at *Slovenský denník*, the Bratislava premiere "was overall much more heartfelt in its mood and performances than the Prague one, which seemed cold by comparison" and the opera was received by the audience "with unprecedented enthusiasm." The composer, who enjoyed great popularity in Slovakia during his lifetime, attended the rehearsals and the premiere in person and, a day before the premiere, even gave a lecture about *Lucerna* [The Lantern] at the university.⁵⁶ Antonín Hořejš thought that the simpler the means Vítězslav Novák

53 BARTOŠ, J. Eine neue tschechische Oper. In *Prager Presse*, 15 May 1923 [there is only a newspaper clipping available in Zdeněk Novák's inheritance].

54 NOVÁK, V. *O sobě a o jiných* [About Myself and Others], p. 243.

55 Looking at the statistics, the state of the productions of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] during the composer's lifetime is not as dire as it may seem from Vítězslav Novák's descriptions. At the Czech National Theatre, there were productions of *The Lantern* in the years 1923 – 1924, 1930 – 1933, 1940 – 1941 and 1945 – 1951.

56 Anonymous. In *Slovenský denník*, 1928, Vol. 11, Issue 51, p. 2, 1 March 1928.

used in his opera, the more effective it was. He tried to understand why the composer, whose prior work was “often focused on metaphysical issues,” picked this simple and folksy theme. His explanation was that Novák’s deep romanticism found inspiration mainly in natural imagery, which intrinsically includes the world of fairy tales. Antonín Hořejš called Vítězslav Novák both a European who “understood several Western cultures” and a Slav “who was breathing the air between the Bohemian Forest and the Tatra Mountains.” In calling Novák a fusion of the two worlds – the Western/intellectual world and the Slavic/emotional world – he employed a common cliché. This was supposedly what differentiated him from other Czech composers. He admired Novák for his art of characterisation, musical wit, motivic work and the rich diversity of his melodies. The reviewer also left some space for criticism, however, noting that the composer focused too much on individual scenes at the expense of the whole – “some scenes do not logically fit into the overall work and are dramatically lagging behind others.” As soon as he says this, however, he walks back his critical tone and talks about “Novák’s marvellous compositional technique.” He explained that the “threads of the whole” are tearing due to the abundance of beautiful music and the work that was put into the minute details. He also admired the orchestra’s “exquisite sound.” Alongside this, he also noted the opera’s simplicity and the inspiration it took from older models, which reveals that the reviewer is not entirely consistent in his opinions.⁵⁷ Antonín Hořejš mostly praised the singing and acting performances, for which the composer was to be applauded, as he was the one responsible for melodically and vocally “adapting the characters for the human voice.” Although Oskar Nedbal’s rendition did not contain detailed subtleties, it was generally good, according to the critic. The only aspect he found lacking was the set design and he chastised the theatre for being overly spendthrift when it came to such an excellent piece of work.⁵⁸

57 On the critical work of Antonín Hořejš (1901 – 1969) in Bratislava, the style of his opera reviews and his activities in the art industry, see the analyses of Jana Laslavíková. LA-SLAVÍKOVÁ, J. Antonín Hořejš – jeho umeleckopriemyselné aktivity na Slovensku v 20. a 30. rokoch 20. storočia a ich odraz v autorových operných kritikách [Antonín Hořejš – His Activities in the Slovak Art Industry in the 1920s and 1930s and Reflections in the Author’s Opera Criticism]. In *Opus Musicum*, 2017, Vol. 49, Issue 3, pp. 42 – 57; LA-SLAVÍKOVÁ, J. Reflexia opery v medzivojnovom období v Bratislave v referátoch Antonína Hořejša [Interwar Reflections on Operas in Bratislava in the Essays of Antonín Hořejš]. In *Slovenské divadlo*, 2017, Vol. 65, Issue 2, pp. 142 – 157.

58 -ah- [Antonín Hořejš]. Vítězslav Novák: Lucerna [Vítězslav Novák: The Lantern]. In *Slovenský denník*, 1928, Vol. 11, Issue 60, pp. 1 – 2, 11 March 1928.

In February 1929, *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] arrived on the stage of the Slovak National Theatre (14 years after its Prague premiere) in the rendition of Karel Nedbal, directed by Bohuš Vilím and with set design from Ján Ladvenica. Judging by his review, Antonín Hořejš was aware of how the opera was received in Prague, where it did not receive unanimous praise. Namely, he was familiar with the ideas of Zdeněk Nejedlý, although he was unwilling to be as negative towards Vítězslav Novák in an environment that was much more supportive of his work than that of Prague. Nevertheless, Hořejš's review is more reserved compared to that of *Lucerna* [The Lantern]. Although he mentions the positive reception of the work by local audiences, he nevertheless emphasises that the success belongs primarily to Ladislav Stroupežnický's original play: "For all the interesting features of Novák's music, it seems that the real playwright here was Stroupežnický, while Novák acted merely as a colourist and illustrator (...)." Somewhat aphoristically and without any explanation, the reviewer exclaims: "Conversational opera! Lacking ariosity!" Although there is a certain absence of operatic drama, the reviewer does admit that Vítězslav Novák is greatly aided by the sound-rich orchestral stream. And, as if the reviewer became suddenly shocked by his own negativity, he adds that the work has "great musical value, which I must show my respect for, despite the dramatic shortcomings." Hořejš ended up focusing primarily on the Slovak National Theatre's production of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp]. He lauded Karl Nedbal's rendition and only expressed some reservations towards the comedic acting performances of some of the singers.⁵⁹

Responses to Vítězslav Novák's Operas Abroad

In 1924, the young ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre received a great opportunity to present itself internationally thanks to Oskar Nedbal, under whose direction they performed Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride] and Antonín Dvořák's *Rusalka* in Barcelona and Madrid. Five years later, he made his first artistic tour to Vienna and presented himself in the Wiener Stadttheater with two drama plays (*Morálka paní Dulské* [The Morality of Mrs. Dulská] by Gabriela Zapolska and Gerhart Hauptmann's *Bobří kožich* [The Beaver Coat]), Pyotr Tchai-

59 -ah- [Antonín Hořejš]. Z bratislavskej opery. Vítězslav Novák: Zvíkovský rarášek. In *Slovenský denník*, 1929, Vol. 12, Issue 62, p. 2, 14 March 1929.

kovsky's ballet *Louskáček* [The Nutcracker] and eight opera performances. Alongside Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Zlatý kohoutek* [The Golden Cockerel], the Bratislava opera presented a number of Czech opera productions: Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa*, Antonín Dvořák's *Jakobín Jakobín* [The Jacobin] and *Dimitrij*, Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* [The Bartered Bride], Karel Boleslav Jirák's *Žena a Bůh* [The Woman and the God] and the two Vítězslav Novák operas that were already part of the Slovak National Theatre's repertory – *Lucerna* [The Lantern] and *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] – which closed off the guest performances in Vienna. The Slovak National Theatre was presented to the Viennese audience as a “prominent” stage⁶⁰ with a “highly-disciplined” ensemble, akin to those found in the national theatres in Prague and Brno.⁶¹ The main ‘draw’ was supposed to be the name of Oskar Nedbal, whose successful work as the head of the Tonkünstler-Orchester had not been forgotten even 11 years after the fall of the monarchy. Oskar Nedbal, who was talked about as a skilled and well-travelled artist perfectly aware of the requirements for good theatre, was mainly given credit for the ensemble's ability to develop and promote national art at an advanced level and its rich repertoire, which was on the level of much larger theatres. According to local critics, the Bratislava theatre brought talented singers who were able to cooperate and work out all the small nuances of their parts. The choir and the orchestra also did not lag far behind, although the strings were rather weak and, given the conditions, the direction was “making the best of it.” “The smooth and cool routine is replaced by the enthusiasm of ambitious youth,” one reviewer wrote while lamenting that the performances that feature both well-known and obscure works of Slavic composers – and which were, moreover, performed by such a prospective ensemble – had such low attendance.⁶²

While the Viennese performance of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] went unnoticed by Viennese critics, the performance of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] received some reviews. Vítězslav Novák was not an unknown composer in Vienna – his works were performed in the Austro-Hungarian metropolis prior to the war, and in 1912, he received an offer to teach at the presti-

60 Anonymous. Das Gastspiel des slowakischen Nationaltheaters in Wien. In *Der Tag*, 1929, Vol. 8, Issue 2266, p. 6, 18 April 1929.

61 Anonymous. Gastspiel des slowakischen Nationaltheater aus Bratislava in Wien. In *Die Stunde*, 1929, Vol. 7, Issue 1831, p. 7, 18 April 1929.

62 L. Die Preßburger Slowakische Oper in Stadttheater. In *Neue Freie Presse*, 1929, Vol. 66, Issue 23219, pp. 1 – 2, 6 May 1929.

gious Vienna Academy of Music. In a review of the Viennese performance of *Lucerna* [The Lantern] by the Slovak National Theatre ensemble from 1929, Vítězslav Novák is referred to as a leading figure of modern Czech music – this was at a time, however, when not even his loyal Czech admirers would refer to him in such a way. The review also mentions his older works, in which he combined the “melodies of his people with German precision” and compositional techniques inspired either by Johannes Brahms or Max Reger.⁶³ The Viennese critic was also surprised by the apparent lightness of Vítězslav Novák’s musical expression in the first opera and the simple direction of voices and fluent parlendo – features he also found in *Lucerna* [The Lantern]. The reviewer, who appears to have been more of a conservative persuasion, praised the facts that the flexible and logically conducted sung melody was carried over the motivic structures of the orchestra and that the dramatic personae were largely characterised through their singing voice, which, according to him, is something modern opera does not value particularly highly.⁶⁴ The reception of the opera suffered from the fact that it was performed one day after Leoš Janáček’s *Jenůfa*, which naturally led to comparisons between the two. The author of the *Neue Freie Presse* review described Vítězslav Novák’s pre-war chamber works, song cycles and symphonic poems as “powerful art of free and passionate individuality,” while also noting that the most appealing of the composer’s works were the ones inspired by the melodies and rhythms of Slovak and Moravian folk songs. In this, the reviewer observed some similarities between Vítězslav Novák and Leoš Janáček, although he noted that, in *Lucerna* [The Lantern], Novák lacks some of Janáček’s dramatical skills. Novák’s opera is similar to Janáček’s in how the declamatory principle conflicts with the melodiousness of the orchestra, which the reviewer praises for its impressionistic colouring, subtle background nuances and occasional witty twists. Unfortunately, Vítězslav Novák stays bound within this lyrical space even in the parts of the fairy tale that demand a more powerful dramatic escalation or some sort of a theatrical effect. The reviewer described the musical aspect of the opera as the music of a well-educated composer who combined national elements with those of Richard Wagner and remained closely tied to Romanticism. Although the reviewer was not able to fully comprehend the convoluted plot of the opera

63 H.E.H. Die Laterne. Oper von Vítězslav Novák. In *Wiener Zeitung*, 1929, Vol. 226, Issue 106, p. 7, 7 May 1929.

64 Ibid.

due to it being performed in Czech, he was able to understand some of its broader strokes.⁶⁵

The Viennese critic correctly described Vítězslav Novák's operatic work, which, despite its good composition and a number of musically-appealing segments, stylistically remained in the nineteenth century. This fact was also apparent to the publisher Universal Edition Wien, which had an exclusive contract for publishing Novák's works between 1910 and 1920. After this initial contract expired, the publisher expressed no interest in further renewing it. Their decision was likely largely influenced by Vítězslav Novák's opera work, which did not fit their focus. After Emil Hertzka became the director in 1907, they began to focus primarily on the works of contemporary progressive authors, with Leoš Janáček as their main Czech composer after the First World War. *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] was published by Universal Edition in 1915, but only in a piano reduction and with Czech lyrics. The composer wanted *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] to be performed in Germany, which is why he repeatedly asked director Emil Hertzka to help him promote the opera in Vienna and Germany.⁶⁶ A major obstacle to this was the lack of a score with German lyrics, which Universal Edition refused to put money into, despite Vítězslav Novák offering to secure the high-quality services of Max Brod. Towards the end of the 1920s, Novák asked Emil Hertzka to put out the orchestral materials for *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp]. He explained that there was only a single manuscript, which had to be sent from Prague to Brno and Bratislava so that the opera could be performed. In the upcoming season, there were planned productions of the opera in Ostrava and Olomouc and Novák doubted that the directorate of the National Theatre would make the orchestral material available to these smaller theatres, as the damage the manuscript would very likely sustain could put their future productions at risk. He therefore believed it necessary that Universal Edition (the copyright holder) publish the orchestral material. He suggested that the existing manuscript be sent from Bratislava to Vienna, where it could be copied over the summer and subsequently brought back to Prague by Oskar Nedbal.⁶⁷ Vítězslav Novák, perhaps intentionally, wrote this

65 L. Die Preßburger Slowakische Oper in Stadttheater. In *Neue Freie Presse*, 1929, Vol. 66, Issue 23219, p. 2, 6 May 1929.

66 See, for example, Vítězslav Novák's letter to Emil Hertzka from 4 February 1917. See KŘUPKOVÁ, L. *Vítězslav Novák – Universal Edition Wien. Korespondence 1910 – 1935 / Die Korrespondenz 1910 – 1935*. Olomouc : VUP, 2007, p. 189.

67 Vítězslav Novák's letter to Emil Hertzka from 8 June 1929. See *ibid.*, pp. 239 – 240.

letter soon after the opera's introduction in Vienna, although it is not known whether members of the publishing house even attended the performance. In his reply to Novák, Hertzka admits that if the opera is performed this frequently, it should definitely have new orchestral material produced for it and that they will try and confirm whether the theatres do, indeed, plan on producing it. Subsequent correspondence between Vítězslav Novák and Universal Edition does not discuss this matter further. We do know, however, what the result of the negotiations was, as to this day, the score of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] has not been published in print.

Universal Edition never ended up showing any interest in *Lucerna* [The Lantern]. Emil Hertzka did not attend the Prague premiere and Vítězslav Novák's assurance that *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was a great success (which seems to not have been entirely the case, given what we have described above) was not enough to convince him to attend the repeat performances. Novák later sent Hertzka the piano reduction published in *Hudební matice Umělecké besedy* along with some clippings of reviews of the opera – although it is somewhat safe to assume that these did not include the reviews from Zdeněk Nejedlý and Josef Bartoš. He again expressed his regrets that Emil Hertzka did not attend the premiere, because he wanted to talk to him about publishing the orchestral material of the opera, because the opera was poised to be a success. In November 1923, Vítězslav Novák tried to invite Emil Hertzka to the Brno premiere.⁶⁸ Two years later, he once again asked him to come see the opera: “It would be so nice if you would finally be willing to listen to my *Lantern* – perhaps in May, as it is going to be performed at the National Theatre with three recast roles.”⁶⁹ The score for *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was also never published.

Conclusion

During the 1930 National Theatre production of Vítězslav Novák's dramatical works (which was meant to celebrate the occasion of his 60th birthday), the aforementioned long-term conflict between Vítězslav Novák and the director of the opera, Otakar Ostrčil, came to a head. This conflict eventually grew to include Zdeněk Nejedlý (along with his supporters),⁷⁰ to whom Novák ad-

68 Vítězslav Novák's letter to Emil Hertzka from 9 November 1923. See *ibid.*, p. 222.

69 Vítězslav Novák's letter to Emil Hertzka from 20 April 1925. See *ibid.*, p. 224.

70 On this, see note No. 50.

dressed his book *Zdeněk Nejedlý v zrcadle své vědecké kritiky* [Zdeněk Nejedlý in the Light of His Scientific Criticism].⁷¹ The book is a reaction to Nejedlý's 1921 analysis of the Novák oeuvre published in the journal *Smetana*.⁷² It is clear that the composer was frustrated with Zdeněk Nejedlý's criticism and the middling success of his operas. With the exception of revising his final opera, *Dědův odkaz* [The Grandfather's Legacy], for a 1943 production at the National Theatre, Vítězslav Novák gave up on the genre. In 1931, he began working on *Podzimní symfonie* [Autumn Symphony], which he completed three years later. This was followed both by new large orchestral works and new chamber compositions. Novák therefore returned to the things for which he received the most acclaim early on in his career. Following his death in 1949, his operas were produced only sporadically. *Lucerna* [The Lantern] was performed in the Slovak National Theatre as late as 1947. The last time it was performed in the Prague National Theatre was in 1964 and, in 2004, there was a production of it in the Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre in Pilsen. *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] received even fewer performances. The opera has not been performed at the Prague National Theatre since 1958. The last professional production was at the František Xaver Šalda Theatre in Liberec in 1982. There was a student performance of *Zvíkovský rarášek* [The Zvíkov Imp] at the Bratislava Conservatory in 1984 and a recent one (in 2015) at the Prague Conservatory. The Slovak National Theatre has not brought the opera back since its 1929 introduction. Although Zdeněk Nejedlý definitely had a negative impact on Vítězslav Novák's operas and their later reception, it is difficult to know whether their fate would have been different were it not for Nejedlý's influence – Leoš Janáček's operas, after all, achieved success despite Nejedlý's scathing critique. After the introduction of *Jenůfa* at the National Theatre in Prague, Leoš Janáček became serious competition not only to Vítězslav Novák, but also to Otakar Ostrčil and Josef Bohuslav Foerster. Apart from their apparent dramatic imperfections and unfortunate librettos, Novák's operas also became stylistically and thematically outdated during the interwar period. Nevertheless, Vítězslav Novák's operas do not deserve to be forgotten – modern approaches to staging could perhaps find a way around these issues and help uncover the excellent music found even within these parts of Vítězslav Novák's oeuvre.

71 NOVÁK, V. *Zdeněk Nejedlý v zrcadle své vědecké kritiky* [Zdeněk Nejedlý in the Light of His Scientific Criticism]. Praha : A. Neubert, 1931.

72 NEJEDLÝ, Z. *Vítězslav Novák. Studie a kritiky* [Vítězslav Novák: Studies and Reviews]. Praha : Melantrich, 1921).

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*The costume design for the production of *The Zvíkov Imp* at the Slovak National Theatre in 1929. The Theatre Institute Bratislava, 850/KN, 851/KN.*



*The scene design for the production of *The Zvíkov Imp* at the Slovak National Theatre in 1929. The Theatre Institute Bratislava, 903/SCN.*