

**Jiří Sehnal, Adam Michna of Otradovice – Composer.
Perspectives on seventeenth-century sacred music in
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Adam Michna z Otradovic (Adam Michna of Otradovice, 1600–1676) was the most important figure of Bohemian music history of the mid-17th century. He lived in the time of the deep political and ecclesiastical changes, an aftermath, in the Bohemian Lands, of the 1620 White Mountain Battle. The events of the Thirty Years' War have influenced the whole of the early 17th century; nevertheless, music development did not stop. The forcible re-Catholicisation, instigated by the Habsburgs aided in the arrival of new music trends from Italy to Bohemia.

The repertoire performed during that time in the Bohemian Lands is known from the lists of music belonging mainly to church institutions; the music itself has not survived. Up to the 1630s, the old style of writing prevailed here, represented by the late 16th and early 17th century composers, especially those who were close to the Emperor Rudolf II's court band. A special type of repertoire is present here: the sacred music of the Bohemian Protestants, performed by school choirs and the so-called literary brotherhoods. The first works in this new style were written by the composers in the services of Cardinal František Dietrichstein (d. 1636) and members of his family in Moravia. The most important of them was the Franciscan Minorite monk Giovanni Battista Alouisi, who died in 1664 in Brno. In Bohemia, Italian culture was supported mainly by the Prague Archbishop and Cardinal Arnošt Vojtěch Harrach (1598–1667). His travel notes offer a rather realistic view of the music life of Bohemia and Moravia between 1640 and 1660.

Adam Michna was probably born in 1600 in Jindřichův Hradec (Neuhaus, South Bohemia) as a son of the burgrave of the local stately home. Between 1611–1613, and 1615–1617 he studied at the local Jesuit college. During the years of the anti-Habsburg revolt of the Bohemian Estates, between 1618 and 1620, he lived in his town of birth; his later whereabouts remain unknown. It is possible that after 1620 he continued his studies, receiving his music education somewhere else than in Jindřichův Hradec, with the

financial support of his lord, Count Vilém Slavata. From 1628 up to his death he was the organist of the Jindřichův Hradec parish church. In 1634 he married Zuzana Cimrmon, from a wine-trading family; himself, he also started trading in wine, consequently becoming very rich. It was obviously his wealth which enabled him to self-publish his own compositions. In the 1660, he was even able to lend his lord large sums of money; the interest was higher than his organist's salary. He was a member of two church brotherhoods and also of a literary brotherhood which organised, in Jindřichův Hradec, performances of sacred music written not only to Latin, but also Czech texts. Michna's wife Zuzana died in 1671. In that same year, the composer married Terezie Kateřina Epenauer, also from a wine-trading family. In 1670 he gave 1000 guildens towards the clothing of three musicians from the St Wenceslas Jesuit Seminary whose duty was to help music making in the parish church, and he also left 1000 guildens to the same church in his last will. In the autumn of 1675 he suddenly became seriously ill and one year later he died. Michna was the only 17th century Bohemian composer to have most of his works published. In addition to vocal compositions to Latin texts with instrumental accompaniment, he also wrote sacred hymns to his own Czech texts, which belong to the sum of the best Czech Baroque poetry.

Michna's first opus, the *Obsequium Marianum* (Vienna 1642) was his first and only work dedicated to Count Vilém Slavata. The preface suggests indirectly that the composer saw Slavata as his benefactor. The work consists of sixteen compositions to the texts dedicated to Our Lady, including one Mass and one Litaniae Lauretanae, for five to thirteen vocal and instrumental parts, in concertante style. The instruments (trombones and strings) were used here also in the individual sonatas. The Dixit Dominus psalm is set here as a variation upon a ten bar ostinato motive. Out of a total of nine parts, only three have been found up to now; therefore, it is neither possible to reconstruct the score of the work nor to judge the whole in an objective way. However, it seems that the composer wished to present here various compositional techniques he had learned.

Česká mariánská muzika (Czech Music to honour Our Lady, Prague 1647) consists of sixty-four sacred songs to the Czech texts, most of them concerning Virgin Mary, in a homophonic four to five part setting. The work is dedicated to Cardinal Harrach. The dedication is undersigned by Prague's St Wenceslas Seminary, attached to the Clementinum Jesuit College. Originally, Michna intended this work to be used by the literary

brotherhood choirs as well as by the small town school choirs. With regard to style, this work differs strongly from the *Obsequium Marianum*. Its main attraction is the beautiful, lyrical, largely still modal melodies and harmonies. Michna's hymns differ from the earlier Czech sacred hymns by their strict alternating of accented and unaccented beats in a regular time, and by the frequent usage of hemiolas in the cadences. Of interest are here the songs in which the odd and even meters alternate three to four times. Here anacrusis is discussed in detail as something unusual for Czech music, but which very often appears in Michna's hymns. Michna's harmony and his ways of part writing, which still follow the old style of compositional rules, are also described.

Officium Vespertinum (Prague 1648) consists of fourteen Psalms, two Magnificat, one Virgin Mary antiphon and a *Litaniae Lauretanae*. Michna composed this work after the Battle at Jankov, Central Bohemia (1645), where the Austrian Emperor's army was crushingly defeated by the Swedish army; he dedicated it to the town council of České Budějovice (Budweis), South Bohemia. All compositions are written for a solo voice, frequently soprano, and a four-part choir with basso continuo accompaniment. The solo part has a concertante character, using rhetoric figures copiously. The choir is more passive, and most of all homophonic. It seems that this compositional method was quite characteristic for Michna. A similar treatment of the Psalms occurs only by Pietro Verdina (c. 1600–1643). All the compositions, included into the *Officium*, are very careful in their attempt to express the text, and are a model example of usage of musical rhetoric figures. In several compositions, the Psalm form is united by the repeating of the motive or a choral refrain. The miscellany concludes by a set of interesting *falsi bordoni* in eight church modes, for a solo voice and four-part chorus, accompanied by basso continuo and trombones *ad libitum*. These pieces show that in Michna's time, this way of performing the psalms was popular.

Loutna česká (Bohemian Lute, Prague 1643) is a collection of sacred hymns to Czech texts for one to two sopranos accompanied by basso continuo and two to three string instruments which play the *ritornellos* between the individual stanzas. Michna dedicated his *Loutna česká* to the town council of Prague's Old Town. *Loutna česká* was intended for performances in the homes of the bourgeoisie. It deals with a sacred bond as a mystic parallel to marriage. Recently it has been discovered that the texts of the first two songs are Czech poetic translations of texts taken

from *Epithalamium Marianum oder Tafel Music* (München 1638), written by the German Jesuit Johann Khuen. The other song texts are all by Michna himself. All the music, however, is Michna's own; its melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and harmonic style corresponds with the *Česká mariánská muzika* hymns.

Sacra et Litaniae (Prague 1654) is the most extensive collection of Michna's sacred vocal music written to Latin texts, and accompanied by instruments. It consists of five Masses, one Requiem, one Litaniae de Sanctissimo Nomine Jesu, one Litaniae Lauretanae, and one Te Deum. Michna dedicated it as a half-centenary birthday present to a friend of his youth, Nikolaus Reiter of Hornberg, from 1644 the High Administrator of the Olomouc episcopal estates. The collection is intended for four to six vocal parts, two violins, three violas, three trombones and basso continuo. The instruments are also used in the opening and inserted sinfonias. The Benedictus of all Masses is short; it can be guessed that it was sung together with Sanctus, not only after transubstantiation. The Agnus is also very short. It is in two parts, because the second Agnus is not repeated. The style of the individual compositions differs considerably. Polyphony is used predominantly in the first Mass and in the Requiem. The second Mass is composed as a parody; it is based on the 15th century Christmas hymn „Již Slunce z hvězdy vyšlo“ (The Sun already has emerged from the Star), the melody of which is used at the beginning as well as inside the individual mass movements. The mass structure is based on alternating the solo and choral, mainly homophonic, passages in the same way as in the „Officium vespertinum“ psalms. The structures of Masses nos. 3, 4 and 5 are composed in the same way. The whole of the Mass no. 3 is based on an eight-bar harmonically rich ostinato bass motive, which is repeated fifty times throughout the Mass. In the Credo movements of all Masses, Michna uses rhetoric figures. In Crucifixus he sometimes employs expressive chromatic harmonies, supported by third-based chords without a common tone. In Mass no. 3, Crucifixus is marked Tremulo, most possibly meaning vibrato. Of all the compositions included in this collection, the best is the Requiem. It alternates solo and choral passages, simple polyphony and homophony. The expressive, balanced mournful quality of this composition gives the impression of the composer having a personal relation to the dead person. Hypothetically it could be believed that the Requiem might have been written for the 1652 Vilém Slavata's funeral. Both Litanies are composed in the usual way – they alternate solo and choral passages, and use short

imitations. The invocations are sung by the soloists, the answers by the choir. *Te Deum* is polychoral, with one choir consisting of soloists and the other one of ripieno singers. *Sacra et Litaniae* document Michna's broad knowledge of the sacred music compositional techniques.

Svatoroční muzika (The Saints' Days Music, Prague 1661) is a collection of one hundred and eighteen sacred hymns, to the texts concerning saints, to be used during the whole of the ecclesiastical year. It is written for a four part choir, in the same way as the *Česká mariánská muzika*. It was again dedicated by Michna to the town council of Prague's Old Town. Regarding its music, the *Svatoroční muzika* is rather close to *Česká mariánská muzika*. There are, however, some new features too, such as the three-four time, used here by Michna for the first time. Even if some of its motives are already well known, *Svatoroční muzika* also contains a number of musical jewels.

The songs from all three of Michna's hymn collections were gradually transferred into the Czech sacred hymnals for the common people. The author of the most popular Catholic songbook, Václav Matěj Šteyer (first edition Prague 1683) used one hundred and forty-two of Michna's songs. They were treated in the same way by the other hymn book publishers. Some of the hymns were arranged according to the period's taste. There were small rhythmical and larger melodic changes because the later time had no interest in old meters and modality. Modal melodies were transferred into major or minor tonalities. In the 19th century, Michna's hymns enjoyed their revival in the St Wenceslas hymn book (Prague 1863–1864), influenced by the ecclesiastical reforms of the period. Even more recently, ten of Michna's hymns were included in the *Kancionál českých a moravských diecézí* (The Bohemian and Moravian Dioceses Hymn Book, Prague 1994). Of interest is the fact that the German inhabitants of the Bohemian Lands did not adopt any of Michna's hymns, while the most popular hymn of the *Česká mariánská muzika*, „Chtíc, aby spal“ (She wished him to sleep), became popular in Slovakia and even in Hungary.

From the compositions in manuscript, only three have survived. The first of them, *Missa sancti Wenceslai*, was written around 1670. In 1670 or later it was copied in Olomouc by the head of the Bishop's Kroměříž (Kremsier) band Pavel Vejvanovský (d. 1693), perhaps from to the composer's original score. There could have been two motives for copying. The first is the fact that the Olomouc diocese Cathedral was consecrated to St Wenceslas. The second might have been the fact that the Pope proclaimed St Wenceslas

Day an obligatory feast, to be celebrated by the whole Church from 1670. It is also possible that the Mass might have been ordered for the Olomouc Chapter by Michna's aforementioned friend, Nikolaus Reiter of Hornberg. The St Wenceslas Mass is more modern in its style than the *Sacra et Litaniae Masses* – a testament to the fact that Michna followed music development and adapted to it. The most conspicuous additions here are two concertante trumpets, which Michna had never before used in his work. He obviously knew that the Olomouc Bishop had excellent trumpeters. The Kyrie of the Mass is monumental, based on imitations of a short motive, also used in the Agnus. All the elements, typical for the third fourth of the 17th century sacred vocal music with instrumental accompaniment can be found here. The second composition in manuscript is the sixteen vocal and instrumental part *Magnificat*. It is an arrangement, made around the 1680s by an unknown Wroclaw (Breslau) musician. Michna's original version was twelve part. The surviving arrangement was extended into sixteen parts, and, in contrast with the original, the even verses were omitted; it seems that in Wroclaw, *Magnificat* was to be performed alternatim: odd verses with instruments, even verses by voices only. The whole concept is polychoral, composed in the same way as the above-mentioned *Te Deum*. One piece of a curious character is the *Missa Michniana*, included in the Franciscan codex from Dačice. It is a typical Franciscan Mass, based on a single, repeated melody. In contrast with the other Franciscan Masses, Michna's Mass melody is written in unmeasured choral notation. Michna's probably-published *Cantiones Sacrae*, mentioned by the 18th century music encyclopedias and listed by the old music inventories, have not as yet been found.

With the exception of Pavel Vejvanovský, Adam Michna was the most important Bohemian 17th century composer. With regard to their compositional style, his works still belong to the early 17th century, while Vejvanovský's compositions are written in the spirit of the late 17th century. While Vejvanovský was a self-taught composer, Michna received in his youth a thorough music education, including, perhaps, also knowledge of composition. While Vejvanovský's works were intended for the episcopal court and church, Michna's compositions were aimed at the town churches and corresponded with their needs. These differences show most of all in the instrumentation. From Vejvanovsky's compositional output, his instrumental works are the most important, while the importance of Michna's artistic legacy lies in his sacred music. Michna was a genius of writing

melodies, something which shows above all in his Czech sacred hymns. This is why his hymns written to Czech texts should be seen as artistically more important than his compositions to Latin texts.