

ANTONIN TUCAPSKY

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In 2008, the Czech Republic honoured Antonin Tucapsky as the composer of the year which pleased him, but he is still a neglected composer.

He was born in Vyskov-Opatovice a small village in Moravia on 27 March 1928. His father, Vaclav, was a shoemaker and his mother, born Josefa, was a housewife. They married in 1925. Vaclav was an amateur singer with a good tenor voice and he was also an actor. They had two other children, Anna, born 1 October 1926 who became a cook, and Marie, born 31 July 1929 who was a confectioner. Neither had any musical abilities.

Antonin's schooling was interrupted several times due to the Second World War. He studied both the violin and the clarinet and, later, the piano. He studied at the Brno Conservatoire which was partly closed during the war and it had a limited number of students. He was accepted at the Teachers Training College where he was until 1947. But just before Christmas 1944, the College was closed completely until the end of the war and Antonin trained as a carpenter for six months.

His studies continued in Brno and he studied musicology and musical education at Masaryk University and conducting at the Janacek Academy of Music. Composition was studied privately with Jan Kunc who had been a pupil both of Novak and Janacek. Tucapsky graduated in 1951.

As a young man, he played the clarinet in a band and also in a folk ensemble. Folk music was an inspiration for him and his knowledge of composers was somewhat limited although he enjoyed Smetana and Dvorak.

He was also an avid reader of Czech, German and French fiction and all kinds of poetry. He had no clear direction as to a career, but wanted to be involved with music. His first compositions were of songs and arrangements of folk songs. His first public performance was in 1943 playing the Fibich Violin Sonata.

His musical taste is catholic enjoying Monteverdi as a great innovator and appreciating the Viennese classics. Beethoven is a majestic giant, Brahms is a master builder and he believes Britten to be clever whereas Tippett is too clever. Janacek is a very powerful and individual composer, Martinu was very prolific and skilful but his music is uneven and Lutoslawski is one of the best composers of the 20th century.

He married Beryl Musgrave in Prague in 1972. She is English, originally from Yorkshire, and was studying singing at the Prague Academy of Arts. They moved to London in 1975. There are no children.

He taught music in the Czech Republic from 1955, first as a secondary school teacher and then as a lecturer in Opatovice from 1959 to 1973 and, from 1975 to 1997, he was a lecturer at Trinity College of Music in London. In Czechoslovakia, he had built up a fine reputation as a choral conductor particularly with the local children's choir and the Moravian Teachers' Male Voice Choir which had been founded in 1903.

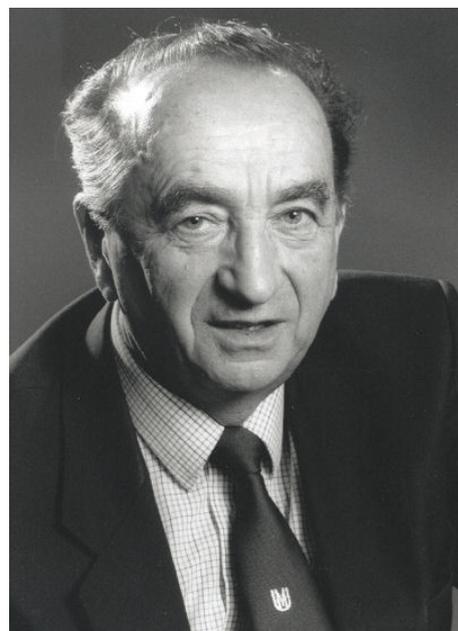
In 1971 Tucapsky published a book in Prague: *Male Choruses* by Leos Janacek.

In his younger days, Tucapsky was a good swimmer and skier. He is neither a smoker nor a drinker. He has no political views and has the courage to dismiss the Big Bang theory and Darwinism as pure speculation which means nothing to him.

He has written a great deal of music particularly vocal and choral music which may total 600 items. He believes that a composer must be in close contact with his audience and that composing contributes to a social and public life. His works which may have won the most acclaim are the *Stabat Mater* and the *Violin Concerto*.

The *Stabat Mater* of 1989 is a truly splendid work, sublime, profound and immediate. It is one of those works which falls into Frank Martin's definition, "There are some fine works which are beyond words." This leads me to recommend his choral music, beautifully written, and most of which is within the capabilities of good choirs. Yet his music is not banal

The *Violin Concerto* was written in 1993 merely for the composer's pleasure. He had played the violin in his younger days. It is a three movement work scored for a Beethoven size orchestra and the work is without



timpani. The music is very personal and often introspective having a rare beauty. It is a work in a free form and not a virtuoso work with fireworks and gratuitous showmanship. The slow movement, Adagio serio, was given before the complete work was premiered. The work is a very human and personal document and, on repeated hearing, will find many admirers.

I rate the Viola Concerto of 1996 even higher. It was written for Martin Outram of the Maggini Quartet. As with the Violin Concerto, the work is very personal and many reflect the composer's sorrow at the splitting of Czechoslovakia into two countries, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. There are three movements, the second being a profound and satisfying Nocturne. The nostalgia in this piece is not of the sickly wallowing type as in one famous British composer, but an unexaggerated musical statement.. The Slovak folk song, Goodnight, my beloved, goodnight, is introduced discreetly. The orchestration is very refined and the beauty of the music is obvious and very telling.

His philosophy about music is both honest and refreshing. He does not speculate about tonality, methods and systems. He does not believe that tonality is exhausted but that tonality, like gravity, is a natural law. He observes that some composers who have experimented with tonality have usually reverted to tonality. He mentions Penderecki and Arvo Part. Tucapsky explains that what is important is that a composer finds his own style, his own expression and his own language which is probably the most difficult thing to do.

He puts it simply. There is good music and there is bad music. It is either one or the other.

There are people who will not accept this but have to go along with both the crowd and public opinion and finding themselves having to admire some music because that is a general opinion. There is a lot of very poor music which is inexplicably admired but, obviously, for reasons other than the value of the music itself. I should add that Tucapsky has not said this, but it is a fact all the same.

In July 2009 at Walshaw Lodge in Yorkshire his Piano Trio was premiered by the young Japanese violinist Yoko Muraoka. She is a graduate from RAM and has recorded the Beethoven Concerto with the Janacek Philharmonic for the IMC label. The cellist was the Hungarian Moshe Friedman and the pianist was the Canadian Margaret Bruce for whom Tucapsky has written his Concertino, his Fantasia quasi una sonata, this Piano Trio and a miniature trio for her triplets sons when they were five years old.

The Piano trio is entitled Eclogues and is five movements all headed allegro.

In 2009 Tucapsky composed four songs for soprano and contralto with piano and two songs for soprano and piano to words by W H Davies which he dedicated to the fine mezzo Judith Buckle and myself.

Works include:

- In Honorem Vitae(1975)
- The Time of Christemas (1975)
- Suite for clarinet and piano (1976)
- Lauds for unaccompanied mixed choir (1976)
- The beginning of the end (1976)
- The Sacrifice for baritone, mixed choir and organ (1977)
- Five Lenten Motets, a cappella (1977)
- Pocket Music, wind quintet (1978)
- Missa serena (1979)
- Marriage of Psyche (1981)
- Fantasia quasi una sonata for piano (1982)
- Sonata for flute and piano (1982)
- Love and sorrow (1983)
- Suite for oboe and piano (1985)
- Sonata for violin (Homage a Bach) (1985)
- Meditation upon an old Czech chorale for piano trio (1987)
- Floreat Patria for orchestra (1988)
- Opera: The Undertaker (1988)
- Stabat Mater for contralto, baritone, mixed choir and orchestra (1989)
- The Seven Sorrows for mixed choir and violin (1989)
- Triptychon for orchestra (1991)
- Mary Magdelene (1991)
- Piano Concertino (1992)

String Quartet no. 1 in A (1993)
Violin Concerto (1993)
Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) (1994)
Viola Concerto (1996)
Suite Caprice (1997)
Sonata rhapsody for violin and piano (1998)
Quintet for oboe, violin, viola, cello and piano (1998)
Clarinet Concerto (1999)
Te Deum (1999)
String Quartet no. 2 in C (2002)
Trio for oboe, clarinet and bassoon (2003)
Sonoramente for trumpet and piano (2004)
Concerto Semplice, for cimbalom and orchestra (2004)
Sonata for viola and piano (2005)
Concerto for guitar and orchestra (2006)
Jubilate laudate (2006)
Twenty four preludes for piano (2006)
Eclogues, piano trio (2008)
Music for strings (2008)
Four songs for soprano, contralto and piano (2009)
Two Songs of W H Davies for soprano and piano (2009)

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